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YOUTHQUAKE 2017

The Rise of Young Cosmopolitans in Britain

James Sloam and Matt Henn

Palgrave Studies in Young People and Politics

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James Sloam • Matt Henn

Youthquake 2017

The Rise of Young Cosmopolitans in Britain

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James Sloam
Royal Holloway
University of London
Egham, UK

Matt Henn
School of Social Sciences
Nottingham Trent University
Nottingham, UK

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Royal Holloway, University of London — James Sloam
Nottingham Trent University — Matt Henn
May 2018

Praise for *Youthquake 2017*

"The convincing combination of strong theoretical grounding, new datasets and an international comparative sweep allow Henn and Sloam to provide insightful analysis of the emerging phenomenon of the 'young cosmopolitan left'."

—Sarah Pickard, *Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, France*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In December 2017, the Oxford English Dictionary named 'youthquake' as its 'word of the year',[1] referring to the events at the UK General Election earlier that year. The OED (2017) described a youthquake as 'a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people'. Although this decision created some controversy – over the issue of voter turnout – we show in this book that 2017 was indeed a transformative election: one in which youth turnout returned to levels not seen since the early 1990s; one in which age replaced class as the most important predictor of voting intention; one in which we witnessed a resurgence in youth activism in (some) political parties; and, one in which the cultural values and economic priorities of Young Millennials dramatically altered the British political landscape.

For over twenty years, scholars have lamented the decline in youth turnout in British general elections. The same could be said for many other established democracies. Our own research has identified significant changes in youth political participation (Henn and Foard 2014; Sloam 2014). It has noted the disillusionment of young people with electoral politics, which is particularly acute in the UK. Yet, during the course of our research, we were always struck by the interest of young people in political *issues*. In each of our various research projects, we have been reminded that younger citizens are – in the words of Pippa Norris (2002) – 'reinventing political activism'. The 2017 *youthquake* in the UK is

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testament to our belief in the vibrancy of young people's politics and has led us to reflect more deeply on the manifestation of youth politics in an era of economic and political turbulence.

There has been a long-term generational trend away from electoral politics. Younger cohorts have turned away from political parties and elections, but have become more active in issue-based forms of participation, such as signing a petition, participating in a consumer boycott and joining in a demonstration. Since the turn of the new Millennium, new technologies have enabled a further proliferation of youth engagement into a vast array of non-institutionalized, online activities. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, young people in many countries have utilised social media to express their outrage at growing social and intergenerational inequalities in society.

The 2017 General Election demonstrated that young people will engage in electoral politics if the conditions are right. The turnout of 18–24 year olds surged from around 40% in the first decade of the new millennium to well over 50% in 2017 (Ipsos MORI 2017; Curtice and Simpson 2018). And, the generational differences in support for the two main parties were also the largest on record. Two thirds of 18–24 year olds voted for the Labour Party compared to just one third in 2010. Why did these dramatic changes take place? What was it about Labour under Jeremy Corbyn that proved so attractive to younger voters? And, what can this tell us about recent and future trends in political participation in the UK and beyond?

The book investigates the reasons behind the *youthquake* from both a comparative and a theoretical perspective. It compares youth turnout and party allegiance over time and traces changes in youth political participation in the UK since the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis – from austerity, to the 2016 EU referendum, to the rise of Corbyn – up until the election in June 2017. The situation in the UK is also contrasted with developments in youth participation in other established democracies, including the youthquakes inspired by Barack Obama in the United States (2008) and Justin Trudeau in Canada (2015).

We support the view that the individualisation of values and lifestyles means that today's young people see politics and politicians quite differently to previous generations. Part of the story lies in the growth of postmaterialist values and identity politics, which has led to the emergence of new cultural cleavages. Theoretically, we address the work of Norris and Inglehart (2018) and others on the increasing significance of cultural

issues since the financial crisis. We portray the young people in the UK who supported Remain in the EU referendum and Corbyn in 2017 as *young left-cosmopolitans*, who – despite their lack of trust in politicians and political parties – became engaged in electoral politics.

The book also examines differences in electoral participation *amongst* Young Millennials (those who were born between the early 1990s and the turn of the century). In particular, we look at how an individual's social class, level of educational attainment and educational status, gender and ethnicity can strongly influence their participation or non-participation in electoral politics. For example, young people with low levels of educational attainment were much more likely to vote for Brexit than their peers. Young women were considerably more supportive than young men of the Labour Party in 2017.

There is a significant body of work that explores the political participation of citizens of all ages in the wake of the ongoing global financial crisis. However, much of this work has focussed on the rise of populist parties and movements, as well as the decline of mainstream political parties. Despite the large volume of work that has been produced on youth protest movements (from the Arab Spring, to the Spanish indignados, to Occupy) and the intense scrutiny of the Obama youthquake in 2008, there are few existing studies of the electoral attitudes and behaviour of younger cohorts (or their underpinning values and policy preferences) during this period.

This book helps to fill this gap in the literature. It is partly a response to the dramatic events of June 2017 in the UK, but more precisely a longer-term study of youth political participation before and after the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis, and the emergence of new patterns of political participation in established democratic systems.

From Democratic Decline to Youthquake

Although the extent of the decline in electoral participation amongst younger generations varies widely across Europe and North America, the trend towards disillusionment and disengagement with political parties and politicians has been unmistakeable (Fig. 1.1). In the United States, the turnout of 18–24 year olds in presidential elections fell from 51% in the 1960s to an average of around 40% since the 1980s. In the UK, youth participation averaged around 65% between the 1960s and the early 1990s, but suffered a collapse in engagement thereafter. Elsewhere in Europe, the drop in youth turnout in established democracies was not as

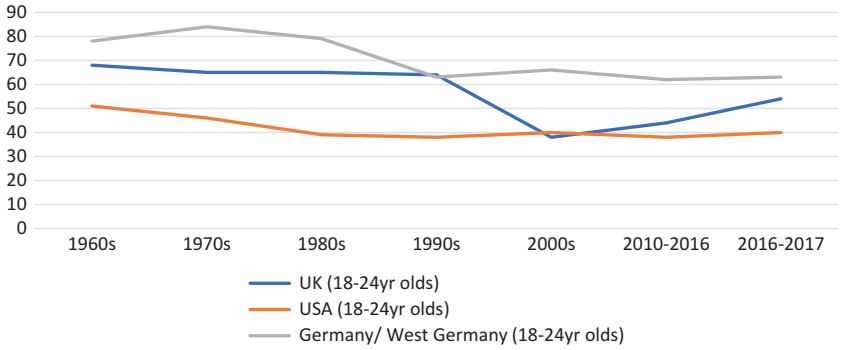

Fig. 1.1 Youth electoral turnout in the United States, the UK and Germany since the 1960s (%). (Sources: British Election Study, German Federal Returning Officer, Ipsos MORI, US Census Bureau)

steep. Germany is a typical case in point. The Federal Republic experienced only a gradual decline in youth electoral turnout despite the higher levels of voter apathy in its new Eastern states after re-unification. These mostly proportional systems nevertheless witnessed a serious ebbing away of support for *catch-all parties* amongst younger cohorts. In Germany, for instance, the share of 18–24 year olds voting for the Christian Democrat (CSU/CSU) and Social Democrat (SPD) parties fell from 90% in the 1970s (compared to 94% of all adults) to 74% (81% of all adults) in the last pre-unification election in 1987, to only 43% (53% of all adults) in the 2017 Federal Election (Federal Returning Officer 2017).[2]

The distancing of citizens from political parties was captured by Russell Dalton and Martin Wattenberg in their seminal text, 'Parties without Partisans' (2002), which recorded the process of voter dealignment in 20 OECD countries. In Europe, established political parties experienced a sharp decline in membership after the 1980s. According to Van Biezen et al. (2012), party membership fell by 68% in the UK, 53% in France, 47% in Sweden, 36% in Italy and 27% in Germany between 1980 and 2009.

The UK has been noticeable not just for its very low levels of youth turnout – which seem to be a particular feature of first-past-the-post electoral systems – but also the large gap between the participation of the youngest cohort of voters and that of the electorate as a whole between 2002 and 2012 (Fig. 1.2). The ratio of youth engagement (between 18–24 year olds and adults of all ages) is just 0.51, compared to an average

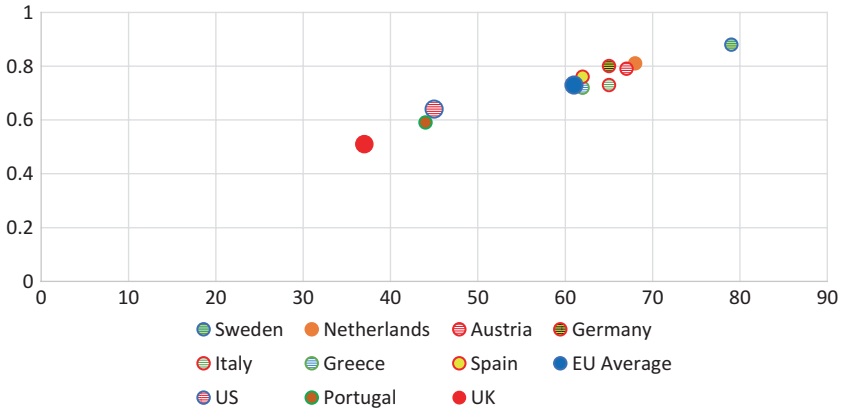

Fig. 1.2 Rates and ratios of youth participation in EU9 countries and the United States, 2002–2012. (Sources: European Social Survey, US Census)

of 0.73 in eight other European democracies and 0.64 in the United States. This suggests to us that the reduction in youth electoral participation in the UK cannot simply be attributed to long-term trends. It marked a generational rupture, or 'period effect', amongst those coming of age from the early 1990s onwards.

These negative trends in electoral participation spawned a number of *pessimistic* studies that expressed concern about the negative impact of youth disengagement on democratic citizenship. However, there are radical differences between academic authors in how they account for this disengagement. Robert Putnam, in 'Bowling Alone' (2000) and other work, linked the decrease in engagement amongst younger citizens to a broader fall in the membership of traditional associations, such as trade unions and churches, and a general decline in *social capital* and *trust*. This version of events is hotly contested, since it deals with changes in young people's attitudes and engagement (*demand-side factors*) but largely ignores changes to the supply of politics. In short, society has evolved, but political parties and party systems have struggled to adapt. Not all pessimists have laid the blame for low turnout on younger citizens. Several alternative explanations point to the changing nature of politics and policy-making over recent decades. These include claims about the effects of voter dealignment (see above) and the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 in the 1960s and 1970s (Franklin 2004). Other important factors

considered include the 'hollowing out' of political parties (Mair 2013) and the 'outsourcing' of policy-making from representative democracy to expert groups, international bodies and even financial markets (Fawcett et al. 2017).

These pessimistic accounts of (youth) political participation have been challenged by a second body of research that focuses on what young people do rather than on what they do not do. These studies adopt broader definitions of what qualifies as political action, and tend to look at trends in participation across several democracies (as opposed to single country case studies). Pippa Norris (2002, 2004) was amongst the first to provide a counter-narrative to Putnam's explanation of declining civic and political engagement. She depicted a 'Democratic Phoenix' wherein younger cohorts are rewriting the rules of the game through increasing participation in non-electoral forms of politics, such as petitions and boycotts. These changes are partly explained by the switch in citizens' political objectives *from politics to policy*. For instance, issues such as climate change, global poverty, or free higher education might be more easily pursued through pressure group membership (such as joining Greenpeace), consumer action (including buying fair trade products) or joining a demonstration (such as the British anti-tuition fees rallies, 2010/2011), rather than by long-term membership of traditional political organisations. In these accounts, *voting remains pivotal within the context of an increasing diversification of youth political participation*.

Whether existing studies are pessimistic or optimistic about the quantity and quality of young people's politics, they generally accept that young people's motivations for political engagement differ from those of older generations and previous generations of young people. We are particularly impressed by Amnå and Ekman's (2014) notion of the 'stand-by citizen' – that young people increasingly engage in politics on a case-by-case basis, when an issue is relevant to their everyday life. This may be an issue that challenges an individual's sense of collective identity (such as the opposition of young Muslims to Western foreign policy in the Middle East), or something that has a tangible bearing on one's economic future (perhaps the availability of low-cost housing), or on one's leisure pursuits in a local community (such as the threat of closure to a local park or youth centre). This conceptualization of a *stand-by citizen* adds a temporal component to political engagement, emphasizing the importance of the *timing and the duration of political action*. It is not that engagement in institutionalized and formal electoral politics does not take place, but that it has become increasingly contingent upon the resonance of an issue.

To our minds, the optimistic accounts of young people's politics have become even more persuasive in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The dominance of austerity politics and the rise of authoritarian-nationalist forms of populism (from the UK Independence Party to Donald Trump), has led to the politicization of Young Millennials. The day-to-day economic concerns of younger citizens have become more pressing in light of falling living standards. And cultural or postmaterial issues, such as environmental protection, national identity and immigration, have become more contentious and prominent. These dual crises resulted in a perfect storm of discontent amongst young people, many of whom participated in an international wave of political protest in both liberal and illiberal democracies: from demonstrations against rising university tuition fees in London, to Occupy Wall St. in Manhattan, to rallies against transport costs in Rio de Janeiro, to protests against the infringement of political freedoms in Istanbul, to occupations of public squares by the Spanish *Indignados* ('the outraged') to combat political corruption and youth unemployment across Europe.

This politicization of young people has manifested itself in greater scepticism about politicians and political parties in general, but also – on occasion – through greater engagement with the political process. In many countries, this has led to large increases in youth support for political parties that are socially liberal and economically 'left-wing' (offering, for instance, support for greater state intervention). In systems with proportional representation and in places that have been worst hit by the financial crisis, new parties have emerged from the margins to meet these challenges. This was the case for PoDemos in Spain, which was formed in 2014 off the back of the *Indignados* protest movement.[3] In first-past-the-post systems, the increase in cosmopolitan-left sentiment has led to challenges to the leadership of existing centre-left parties. Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders were both successful in attracting the youth vote (despite being old, white, men) to the British Labour Party and in the 2016 US Democratic primaries, respectively. In all three examples, they profited from the engagement of legions of enthusiastic young activists who were able to ignite grass-roots support for their parties or candidate.

It is also true that the radical nature of cosmopolitan-left parties and candidates can put off older voters, and might ultimately limit their support and chances of gaining power. Here, the cases of Barack Obama in the United States (2008) and Justin Trudeau in Canada (2015) are instructive. In economic terms, they both positioned themselves more to

the centre ground than the three previous examples. Although the first Obama administration injected huge sums into the economy in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis, and managed to introduce a (much watered-down) healthcare programme, OECD figures record that US public spending (as a proportion of GDP) barely altered between 2008 and 2016 (OECD 2017). Obama's achievements regarding cosmopolitan values and international outlook were more impressive. These included halting the deportation of young undocumented immigrants who met the criteria laid down in the Dream Act, and a commitment to international targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases at the 2015 Paris Climate Accord. Trudeau's Liberal-led Government has similarly paid more attention to injecting social liberalism into Canadian politics – for example, the welcoming of refugees from Syria and efforts to legalize marijuana – than to traditional left-wing objectives. The support of the Obama and Trudeau administrations for international free trade deals (such as those initiated with the European Union) is more akin to the Clinton-Blair brand of progressive politics than that of Sanders, Corbyn and PoDemos (who are naturally suspicious of the role of international markets and financial institutions).

Youthquakes and Young Cosmopolitans

Over the last two decades the word 'youthquake' has been used by political commentators, and more occasionally by academics,[4] to describe seismic political activity that seems to be inspired by younger citizens. But the term has never, to our knowledge, been adequately explained. We appreciate the broad nature of the OED definition (cited earlier in this chapter), which refers not only to significant changes in electoral politics, but also to the underlying social, economic and political forces that precipitate these changes. We would add that *'youthquake elections' are ones in which dramatic changes in how many young people vote, who they vote for and how active they are in the campaign have, quite literally, shaken up the status quo.*

To qualify as a youthquake, we therefore believe that an election must meet one or more of the following criteria: increased turnout amongst young people; a decisive shift in youth support for a political party or the emergence of a new party attracting widespread youth support; or, a significant increase in the volume or intensity of youth political activism. To explain why youthquake elections happen and what the consequences might be, we then have to look at the broader economic, social and political

dimensions identified in the OED definition. In this respect, we would stress the importance of value change amongst younger generations and the impact of the financial crisis on young people's everyday lives as being of primary importance. In our view, the spike in youth turnout in the 2017 UK General Election, the unprecedented levels of support of 18–24 year olds for the Labour Party, and the high levels of youth activism associated with the Labour Party's strong performance, provide one of the clearest recent examples of such a landmark vote.

In this study, we focus on 18–24 year olds. Although it could easily be argued that this age range is too narrow, it refers to a distinct cohort of young people who are (mostly) voting in their first national election. Our range of survey data (of 18–24 year olds from 2002 to 2017) maps on to the standard definition of the Millennial Generation – those born between 1981 and 2000. And, since young people are most open change at this point in their lives and electoral participation is known to be habit-forming (Franklin 2004), we consider this to be the most significant stage in an individual's formal political development. It is the point at which an individual's decision to vote and to support a particular political party are most likely to have a lasting impact. However, we recognize that age more generally plays a key role, as values and behaviours that are typical of 18–24 year olds are also likely to be found (if to a lesser extent) amongst 25–34 year olds and 35–44 year olds. Indeed, this ripple effect is a feature of both long-term generational change and short-term period effects.

It is important to remember, when examining these events, that young people are not all the same. In their book 'Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics', Sidney Verba et al. (1995) highlighted the role of *resources* in determining whether an individual became civically or politically engaged. In this respect, a citizen's level of educational attainment and educational status are the strongest predictors of whether they participate or not in the electoral process. Education is more than a proxy for social class. With respect to higher education, students accrue resources from *being in higher education* – through the density of social networks and opportunities for civic and political engagement on campuses – and from the likelihood that they will acquire more political knowledge than the average young person. In the United States, Sander and Putnam's (2010) revision of Putnam's earlier work recognizes the growing gap between highly engaged college students and relatively disengaged non-college-bound-youth. This effect is observable

(albeit to different degrees) in all established democracies. And, it leads to a broader question about the extent to which voting is affected by one's socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. So, however transformative a youthquake may be, there are always groups of young people that do not belong to these events. In this regard, the book also explores the extent to which authoritarian-nationalist forms of populism have become attractive to *young outsiders* – most commonly young men of low socio-economic status.

Despite these caveats, we contend that the emergence of cosmopolitan-left values and political engagement characterize recent developments in youth political participation, and include support for social liberalism and the redistribution of state resources, but also scepticism towards mainstream electoral politics. Young cosmopolitans are particularly prominent in the UK. Here, we emphasize the importance of tracing youth political trends across time – from Occupy to Corbyn, noting the temporal and cyclical nature of youth engagement.[5] We also stress the need to provide both youth-centred (demand-side) and system-level (supply-side) perspectives (Hay 2007) if we are to fully capture the dynamics of young people's politics.

Organisation of the Book

Chapter 2 begins with a review of existing theories of youth electoral participation and political participation more generally. We separate the literature into theories that deal with the implications of socio-economic change, those that emphasize changes in the nature of the political system, and those that pay greater attention to (youth) political activism.

The analysis of the existing literature highlights the central role of education (educational attainment, educational status and knowledge about politics), identity (including, gender, ethnicity, nationhood) and communication (for example, patterns of news consumption and the efforts of political actors to engage with young people). It also identifies the policy areas prioritised by younger cohorts, which (later in the book) are compared with and contrasted to policy programmes and campaign strategies of mainstream parties in general elections and the Remainers and Brexiteers in the 2016 EU referendum.

The chapter then sets out our conceptualisation of 'young left-cosmopolitans'. We argue that a combination of economic stagnation, high levels of educational attainment, and rapid social change, have

resulted in a historically distinct cocktail of political engagement and resentment, and the emergence of a large, young group of *cosmopolitan-left* citizens in the UK (and many other established democracies). These developments explain the widespread youth engagement at the 2016 EU referendum and the 2017 General Election, and youth support both for Britain remaining in the European Union and of Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. Building on the recent work of Norris and Inglehart (2018) we assert that young people's politics is defined both by material interests (which became more pressing in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis), but also by an outward-looking cosmopolitanism and acceptance of cultural diversity.

This conceptualization of young, cosmopolitan-left citizens applies to most, but not all, young people. Cosmopolitan-left individuals are likely to hold university degrees, to be in full-time education, female, and live in an urban environment. Conversely, young, white males with low levels of educational attainment are least likely to possess these views.

Chapter 3 investigates young people's attitudes towards, and engagement in, electoral politics before and after the onset of the 2008 global financial crisis. Drawing upon two representative surveys of 18 year olds conducted in 2002 and in 2011, it explores how youth perceptions of politics, participation rates and political preferences vary by age, gender, ethnicity, level of educational attainment and educational career trajectory. It also considers how political attitudes and engagement are shaped by political knowledge, trust and a sense of confidence in one's ability to act and in the effectiveness of this activism in achieving change.

Using the theoretical framework outlined above, the chapter also identifies the economic and cultural issues that are prominent in young people's politics, and explores how attitudes, engagement, policy preferences and political allegiances have been affected by the financial crisis. And, it looks at the extent to which British political parties have attempted (or neglected) to engage with young people through an analysis of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat manifestos and voter mobilisation strategies for the 2001 and 2010 general elections.

Chapter 4 begins by exploring the relationship between public attitudes towards European integration and the rise of authoritarian-nationalist populism and cosmopolitan ideals in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. Afterwards, it presents the results of a representative survey of youth attitudes and engagement in the 2016 British EU referendum. At the same time, we also examine the platforms of the Remain and Leave campaigns,

to evaluate the extent to which each were willing or able to articulate and address young people's concerns and interests. The analysis finds that three quarters of young people supported Remain in the referendum *despite* their lack of trust in the very political elites that fronted the Remain campaign. Chapter 4 also drills down into the composition of the youth vote according to demographic factors, knowledge, trust and efficacy. Young university students were particularly likely to engage in the referendum campaign and to vote Remain.

The chapter focuses on the interplay between economic and cultural reasons for supporting British membership of the EU. It finds that young people's support for EU membership was less to do with any sense of European identity, and much more do to with their relative acceptance of cultural diversity and European integration, and their fears of the negative economic consequences of a potential Brexit (in an era of austerity and falling living standards for younger cohorts).

Chapter 5 draws upon another of our surveys as well as freely available polling data, to explore youth attitudes to, and engagement in, the 2017 General Election, which led to a seismic change in youth participation: an increase in turnout and mass support for the Labour Party amongst Young Millennials, reaching up to all cohorts under 45, which denied the Conservative Party a majority in the new House of Commons. According to Ipsos MORI figures (2017), a remarkable 62% of 18–24 year olds voted for the Labour Party, contrasting with 27% for the Conservative Party. The highest levels of support for Labour came from young black minority ethnic citizens, young women, and young people of a low social grade.

Chapter 5 also examines the supply side of politics in more depth. It assesses the success of Corbyn's team in mobilizing young people – through the work of Momentum as well as the appeal of Corbyn himself. We also analyse the drawing-power of the 2017 General Election manifestos of the Conservative Party, Labour and the Liberal Democrats – and the extent to which each was able to communicate a substantive policy programme for younger citizens.

We conclude by again highlighting the emergence of *young cosmopolitan-left* citizens, and what this means for the future of British democracy and other established democracies. We account for the resurgence in youth activism in the following ways. First, the redistribution of resources away from younger citizens and youth-oriented public policy after 2010 has persuaded more young people to favour increased public spending in areas such as health and education. Second, cultural differences across

generations have deepened. Young people are much more approving of cultural diversity, more welcoming of European integration, and much less concerned about immigration than older generations.

Here, we reflect again upon the success of the Corbyn in appealing to younger voters, but also on the efforts by the Conservative Party (after the 2017 General Election) to widen their appeal amongst those cohorts. After decades of neglect by the political class, this has the potential to inspire a virtuous circle of engagement by political actors in youth-oriented policy and greater participation of younger voters in electoral politics. Nevertheless, it is far from certain whether mainstream political parties will be able to capitalize, beyond Corbyn, on this increase in youth engagement in electoral politics.

Notes

1. The Guardian, 9 June 2017, 'The Youth for Today: How the 2017 Election Changed the Political Landscape', https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/09/corbyn-may-young-voters-labour-surge
2. Whilst the new states of the united Germany certainly contributed to greater voter volatility, the trend away from the catch-all parties was already clearly observable in the 1980s.
3. PoDemos sprung from the *Indignados*' protests against austerity and political corruption (led by the 36 year-old politics lecturer, Pablo Iglesias) to become Spain's third largest party within 20 days of its formation.
4. Al-Momani (2011) uses 'youthquake' in relation to the Arab Spring, and Goodwin and Heath (2016) refer to its use in the media after the 2017 General Election. More interestingly, Stephen Mintz (2006) examines the phenomenon over time when analysing the impact of youth activism on post-1945 US politics.
5. Rather strangely, the cyclical nature of youth electoral participation (over time) is largely neglected in the electoral studies literature, but more developed in the study of protest movements and 'contentious politics' (Tilly and Wood 2015).

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CHAPTER 2

Rejuvenating Politics: Young Political Participation in a Changing World

In the introduction, we demonstrated that youth participation in electoral politics has declined in recent decades, albeit at different rates and at different times in different democracies. The large, mainstream catch-all parties, founded on cleavages of blue-collar and white-collar workers, do not reflect the reality of our postindustrial societies. This partly explains the process of 'voter dealignment' – the weakening of collective ties between citizens and political parties. Furthermore, the total share of the vote for catch-all parties, such as the Conservatives and Labour in the UK and Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in Germany, has eroded dramatically during this period.

One reason for optimism regarding youth participation, is that young people continue to engage in 'politics' (broadly understood) despite their relative lack of enthusiasm for politicians and political parties. European Social Survey data reveal that young people in the UK are as interested in politics as their peers elsewhere in Europe, despite the slump in youth voter turnout after the early 1990s (Sloam 2016). This suggests that the problem is less to do with a general lack of political engagement and more to do with the disconnection between young people and the political system.

Further evidence is provided by the growth in non-electoral and non-institutionalized forms of political engagement over several decades. Inglehart and Welzel (2005), for example, showed how levels of

J. Sloam, M. Henn, *Youthquake 2017*, Palgrave Studies in Young People and Politics, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97469-9_2

participation in petitions, boycotts and demonstrations doubled in the UK and the Federal Republic of Germany (and increased by around a third in the United States) between the 1970s and the 2000s. Dalton (2017: 93) similarly argues that, if we include other actions such as contacting local government, protest, petition signing, political consumerism and online participation, 'the contemporary US public displays a substantially higher level of activity than in the 1960s'.

Figure 2.1 illustrates how aggregate rates of youth participation in petitions, boycotts and demonstrations (just three of the many non-electoral forms of participation) today far exceed aggregate rates of voting in national elections and political party membership. This is the case in the United States, the UK and the six other established European democracies – France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden – included in Wave 5 of the World Values Survey. In the UK, 18–24 year olds were almost twice as likely to participate in these non-electoral forms of political action than they were to vote or be a member of a party. It is also worth adding that citizens do not have the opportunity to vote in parliamentary or presidential elections every year – indeed, they have taken place on average once every two or three years in the eight countries in Fig. 2.1.[1] By contrast, World Values Survey data shows that in 2011 around a third of young Americans, young Swedes and young Germans had signed a petition multiple times during the previous 12 months alone.

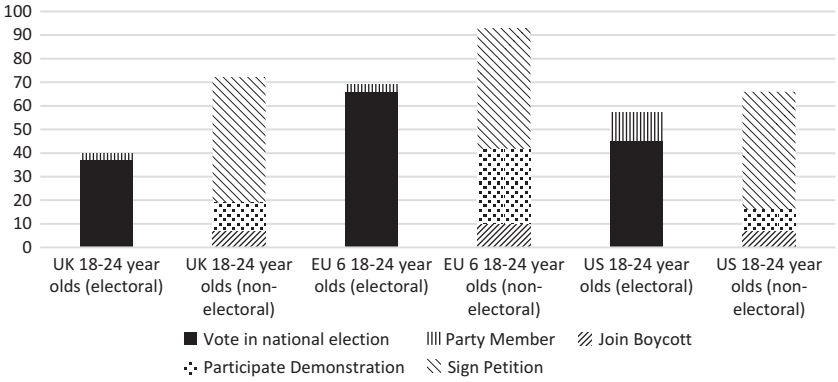

Fig. 2.1 Youth (18–24 year old) participation in electoral and non-electoral forms of politics in Europe and the United States (%). (Source: World Values Survey, Wave 5 (2005–2009))

When large, established political parties have prospered amongst young people in recent times, they have usually done so by electing a leader who is perceived to be more *authentic* or through the adoption of a radical policy programme. With regard to cosmopolitan-left politics, the Labour Party in New Zealand achieved a double-digit increase in its share of the vote in 2017, in an election that saw a 7% increase in youth turnout and about two thirds of 18–30 year olds voting for Labour (New Zealand Herald, 20 September 2017). This youth support for Labour, with its most interventionist agenda in decades, helped to propel 37-year-old Jacinda Ardern to the prime ministership at the head of a Labour-led coalition government. However, in the same year, the 31-year-old Sebastian Kurz (of the conservative People's Party) was elected as Chancellor of Austria. His anti-Islamic campaign was founded on the reassertion of 'Austrian values' and opposition to immigration. The People's Party, together with the far-right Freedom Party, captured the support of 58% of 18–30 year olds and two thirds of young men with low levels of educational attainment (SORA 2017). The unexpected success of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the 2016 US presidential race illustrated (even more starkly) the rise of radical, anti-establishment candidates. In all these cases, the resurgence of cultural politics, whether authoritarian-nationalist or cosmopolitan in character, has been evident. We would add to this list, the 2016 EU referendum and the 2017 General Election in the UK.

This chapter provides a theoretical account of young people's political engagement in the UK and other established democracies. It begins by outlining the changing social, economic and political conditions for engagement. These include the increasing prominence of identity politics, austerity in public spending since the start of the 2008 global financial crisis, and the role of new media in facilitating political engagement. Afterwards, it looks at *agent-centred* theories that account for Young Millennials' attitudes towards, and participation or non-participation in, various forms of politics. We proceed by highlighting the *cultural turn* – the emergence of postmaterialist politics and contentious cultural issues over recent decades. Finally, the chapter fleshes out the cosmopolitan character and leftward drift of youth politics in contemporary Britain and other democratic systems. Here, we present our own conceptualisation of *young cosmopolitans* in an era of economic and cultural conflict.

Fig. 2.2 Trends in young people's politics

Shifting Tectonic Plates

Over several decades, the tectonic plates that shape and sustain democratic participation have shifted. The changes have been economic, social, cultural and political in nature, and are all interlinked (see Fig. 2.2, below).

Between the 1960s and the 2000s, postindustrial democracies experienced a prolonged period of economic growth, increasing levels of educational attainment, a reconfiguration of the labour market, and the loosening of traditional norms regarding religion and family life. As a

result, transitions from youth to adulthood have become delayed and staggered (Arnett 2004; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Flanagan 2013). Young people stay in education longer, enter full-time employment later, and marry and have children at an older age than was the case in previous decades. In the European Union, the number of 15–24 year-olds still in education rose from 49% in 1987 to 58% in 1995 to 68% in 2007, and the median age for a young person entering the workforce rose from 18 to 20 during the same period (European Commission 2008). In the United States, the proportion of 20 year olds who were married fell from 79% to 22% between 1967 and 2014 while the proportion of young men in work by this age fell by half (Dalton 2017: 92). Smets (2012) shows that these changes have profound implications for political participation – countries with more heterogeneous maturity patterns have larger disparities in voting between older and younger citizens.

Young Millennials have more opportunities than previous generations, but also face greater *risks* than their predecessors (Beck 1992; Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Structural changes in the labour market mean that there is no longer any real prospect of a *job for life* (Goodwin et al. 2017; Bessant 2018), whilst the breakdown of traditional social mores has led to identities that are shaped by fluid categories of class, community, ethnicity and culture (Bauman 2000). These developments have led to the individualization of values and lifestyles and the growth of identity politics. Young people must constantly reinvent themselves economically and socially – from their CVs to their Facebook profiles – within a network society (Castells 2015). When citizens do engage, they increasingly participate in personally meaningful causes guided by their own lifestyles and shifting social networks (Norris 2002; Bennett and Segerberg 2013).

Another central dynamic in postindustrial economies and societies is *globalization*, which Held (2003: 516) describes as the 'growing interconnectedness and intensification of relations among states and societies'. This process has involved a sharp increase in the volume of international trade and financial transactions, and of multinational companies. In a globalized and globalizing world, individual outlooks, behaviours and feelings can transcend local and national boundaries (Held 2003). And, 'it is through engagements with various forms and representations of the global [from international markets to the European Union] that cosmopolitan, or anti-cosmopolitan values surface and find expression' (Woodward et al. 2008: 210). Indeed, cosmopolitanism is often defined as the acceptance of and adaptation to globalization, whilst religious fundamentalism,

nationalism, and ethnic and territorial identities are often depicted in opposition to this process (Beck 1996; Castells 1997).

Political action is increasingly centred around everyday issues that challenge citizens' identities, and can bubble-up with great speed and intensity. Black Lives Matter, for example, emerged as a national movement in the United States in 2014 in response to cases of police brutality against mainly black men (such as that of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri) and immediately struck a chord with civil rights groups across the country. In October 2017, #MeToo encouraged women to record their experiences of sexual assault in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal. Within two months, the #MeToo status had been posted on Facebook 100 million times across more than a hundred countries. In February 2018, a mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, led to the establishment of a survivors' group supporting tighter gun controls under the hashtag #NeverAgain. This grew into a nationwide movement pushing for gun controls and calling for action against politicians and companies associated with the National Rifle Association. The resulting 'March for Our Lives' rallies on 24 March 2018 attracted hundreds of thousands of young people across the country.

Physical location remains important for young people's politics: in fostering a sense of identity, in offering spaces to practice democratic skills, and in providing symbolic locations (such as city squares and university campuses) for political action (Weller 2003; Hopkins and Todd 2015). However, the sheer diversity of the Millennial Generation, coupled with the rise of new communication technologies has led to the reformation of communities across traditional territorial boundaries, so that political action has become increasingly channelled through social networks across 'hybrid public spaces' (Castells 2015). In this respect:

> A person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity, which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative. Thus, a cosmopolitan is precisely one that draws strength from being at home in a variety of contexts. (Giddens 1991: 88)

Conversely, greater diversity has also provoked an authoritarian-nationalist reaction, leading to the retreat of those who feel threatened by these changes into national, regional and religious identities.

As we have already noted, different democracies have quite different patterns of political participation. We can observe large variations even

across similar democratic systems. For example, youth voter turnout in the UK was approximately 40% for the four elections between 2001 and 2015, compared to 80% in Sweden during the same period (Sloam 2016). In France and Spain there is a strong tradition of youth participation in public demonstrations. In the UK, it is more common for a young person to sign a petition than in most other European countries. In the United States, young people are very active in community projects (Dalton 2017). However, as we pointed out in the introduction, there has been a worryingly large gap in the UK between the electoral participation of younger people and older generations.

Nevertheless, there are trends that are common to all these countries (Fig. 2.2, above). As we previously argued, the representative capacity of mainstream politicians and traditional political institutions has weakened significantly in recent decades. At the same time, the growth of issue-based lifestyle politics has supported a transition from politics to policy, whereby citizens, politicians and government officials have together shifted 'the emphasis from democratic participation to good governance' (Bang and Esmark 2009: 18). On the one hand, this can be viewed as a positive development, increasing opportunities for citizen interaction with policymakers through *small scale democracy* (Goul-Anderson and Roβteutscher 2007). On the other hand, the belief of many political representatives in the logic of deregulation of public services and the depoliticization of policy-making has led to the *outsourcing of policy* to expert bodies, international institutions and even international markets (Burnham 2001; Held 2003; Hay 2007). This, in turn, has helped fuel the rise of managerialism in politics.[2] Considering these developments, there is also a tendency to view citizens as customers rather than democratic citizens. As a result, public consultations can easily become instrumentalized. Chadwick and May (2003) show, for example, how e-democracy was transformed from being perceived (by politicians) as a tool of democratic participation to being viewed as an instrument for efficient government (providing cheap and convenient online services).

The economic *risks* for young people from all social groups have been exacerbated by the recent financial crisis (Fig. 2.2). In most countries, youth unemployment increased considerably in the five years after 2008, whilst jobs have also become more precarious (Verick 2009; Erk 2017). In those countries worst affected by the sovereign debt crisis, such as Greece and Spain, youth unemployment surpassed 50% (OECD 2015). Moreover, austerity in public spending has placed a disproportionate burden on the

young (Willetts 2011). The Intergenerational Foundation (2016) has demonstrated how intergenerational inequalities have increased in the UK due to the long-term pressures of an ageing population (such as the burgeoning of public sector pensions liabilities) and a further economic squeeze on Millennials since 2008: including, a 10% cut in real terms spending on education between 2010 and 2016, the stagnation of wages, the rising costs of housing, and the trebling of university tuition fees in 2012.

We should also remember that an individual's position and progress in society are not only determined by their cognitive and social skills (though they do play an important role), but also by their economic class, gender and ethnicity (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). These factors can affect whether a young person is invited to a job interview (Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003), how they are treated by official authorities, and the barriers or opportunities for their entry into representative politics. These intragenerational inequalities are particularly acute in the UK, Italy, France and the United States, which have the lowest levels of social mobility amongst advanced OECD economies (OECD 2015). This clearly matters for youth political participation given what we know about the key role of economic resources in determining whether or not an individual participates in politics (Verba et al. 1995).

Theories of Youth Participation

In the introduction we outlined competing claims regarding youth political participation. A number of authors have lamented the decline in youth voter turnout and engagement in key social and political institutions. Robert Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone* is perhaps the best-known example of this work. Another branch of the literature has pointed to the proliferation of youth participation across a vast array of alternative, non-electoral and non-institutionalized forms of engagement. Pippa Norris (2002) has, thus, conceived of political participation as a *Democratic Phoenix*, evolving to adapt to new political, economic and social realities.

What is certain is that young people's perceptions of politics and repertoires of engagement have changed. Political participation is increasingly viewed through the lens of individual action frameworks, whereby 'formal organizations are losing their grip on individuals, and group ties are being replaced by large-scale fluid social networks' (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 748). These networks form the basis of alternative modes of political

engagement that seem to better fit younger citizens' preferences for horizontal forms of engagement. For example, it is much more attractive to sign an online petition, forwarded by a friend, on online 'snooping' by the state, than to actively promote the broad programme of a top-down organisation like a political party.

Earlier in the chapter, we recognised the transition from politics to policy as a fundamental change in modern democratic politics. Amnå and Ekman (2014) make some important arguments about the temporal nature of issue-based participation. In their study of young people in Sweden, they identified 'four faces of political passivity': an 'active' group with high levels of interest and participation (6% of the sample); 'standby' citizens with high interest and average participation (45%); an 'unengaged' group with low levels of interest and average participation (27%); and, 'disillusioned' citizens with low participation and low interest (22%) (Amnå and Ekman 2014: 274). So, just under half of young Swedes can be described as *standby citizens*, who 'stay alert, keep themselves informed about politics by bringing up political issues in everyday life contexts, and are willing and able to participate if needed' (Amnå and Ekman 2014: 262). This has implications for our understandings of why young people turn out to vote in transformative elections. It suggests that many young people will turn out to vote when they can identify with the issues emphasized by a candidate or party – a point reinforced by evidence from Henn et al. (2017).

If the Millennial Generation is primarily concerned with issue-based engagement, the outsourcing of public policy (within the context of globalization) helps to explain why today's young people target a more diverse range of political, economic and social actors than previous generations. Individual (young) citizens might simultaneously support issues and causes across several geographical planes – for example, by campaigning for better recycling in schools and colleges, while at the same time being an active member of an international environmental organisation such as Greenpeace.[3]

Yet, within the context of globalization and the individualization of values and lifestyles, young citizens also wish to anchor themselves to ideological or values-based parties, movements and candidates. According to Spannring and her colleagues (2008: 73), 'the managerial approach shared by most politicians does not offer young people ideals and values with which to identify'. The preference for issue-based engagement and the desire for politicians and causes in which they can believe, together pose

an immense challenge for political parties. To connect with young people, these parties must emphasize and communicate policies that young people are interested in, whilst at the same time providing them with an *authentic* set of values or ideology with which they can identify (Henn and Foard 2014). Electoral *youthquakes* are the consequence of a political party or candidate meeting this challenge.

After the onset of the financial crisis, we experienced an initial surge in youth participation in non-electoral forms of politics, motivated by frustration and anger with the politicians and public policy and facilitated by recent advances in communications technologies. The Internet and social media have enabled a dramatic speeding up of political mobilisation by: acting as a real-time filter for alternative politics, where only the most resonant ideas – such as 'The outraged young' and 'We are the 99%!' – rise to the surface; and, radically reducing communication costs for participation (Bimber et al. 2005). During this wave of youth protest we have witnessed the emergence of a new 'logic of connective action… based on personalized content sharing across media networks' (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 739). This perfect storm of political outrage and readily available new technology facilitated the engagement of many young people into social movements, such as Occupy and the Spanish Indignados, with a cosmopolitan-left core. This, in turn, laid the seeds for their participation in the electoral process where and when the conditions were right.

Web 2.0 and social media have also become important features of electoral politics. First, they have dramatically altered how young people learn about politics. Comparative research across 36 countries by the Reuters Institute (2017) found that the proportion of adults using social media as a news source almost doubled (from 23% to 46%) between 2013 and 2017. Nearly two thirds (60%) of 18–24 year olds used online sources or social media as their main source of news (46% used Facebook to obtain political information) in 2017 compared to only 28% of over 55s.[4] The research also revealed that just under a quarter (24%) of young people used TV as their primary source of political news, compared to one half (51%) of over 55s. Interestingly, for our study of *young cosmopolitans*, the report also shows that, in certain countries (including the UK, the United States and Italy), new news media have a socially liberal and economically left-wing political orientation.

These new communication technologies are also increasingly utilised by political actors. The 2008 Obama campaign for the US presidency pioneered the use of the Web 2.0 and social media in elections. The Obama

team maximized the potential of email, text messaging and social networking sites to spread their message, raise money and mobilize supporters. In doing so, they established a nationwide virtual network of over three million contributors in less than 12 months (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez 2011). The campaign, thus, empowered mainly younger citizens to engage their friends and family in Obama's bid for the presidency. And, the organic growth of the 'Students for Barack Obama' Facebook group was 'so effective at energizing college-age voters that senior aides made it an official part of the campaign' (Vargas 2008: 2). As we shall see in Chap. 5, this bears a resemblance to the communication strategy of the Labour Party in the run-up to the 2017 General Election. The use of non-traditional media and horizontal forms of citizen-to-citizen engagement was a vital ingredient in attracting young people to the Labour cause – especially given the negative portrayal of Jeremy Corbyn in the mainstream media.

Whilst the existing literature on youth political participation does a good job in explaining new trends, it often neglects the social inequalities of participation.[5] There are many young people who are not politically engaged or active. And, these young people tend to come from poorer backgrounds, to not go on to higher education, and to leave school with few, if any, qualifications. This large segment of the youth population tends to be – in Amnå and Ekman's (2014) terms – *disillusioned* and *disengaged*. Schlozman et al. (2010), thus, depict the Internet as 'the weapon of the strong', noting the *digital divide* in online participation. And, evidence suggests that young people who engage in non-electoral forms of politics are usually the very same individuals who also engage in electoral politics. Those disengaged or disillusioned young people are, in direct opposition to young cosmopolitans, likely to react negatively to the perceived threats of cultural diversity and immigration. When they do, on occasion, become engaged in politics, these young outsiders are often attracted to authoritarian-nationalist values and causes. The National Front (FN) in France is an example of a far-right party that has been very successful at appealing to this demographic (Lubbers and Scheepers 2002). The FN gathered 6% of the youth (18–24 year old) vote in the first round of the presidential election in 2007, 18% in 2012 and 21% in 2017 (Martin 2017). In the second round run-off of the 2017 French Presidential Election, Marine Le Pen, the FN Leader, gained 44% of the youth vote compared to 20% of over 65s (The Independent, 1 May 2017).

The Rise of Postmaterialism

So far in this chapter, we have considered a range of debates and an array of empirical data that, when combined, point to the importance of economic, social and political changes in shaping young people's political values, engagement and participation across a range of contemporary postindustrial societies. We have also argued that these developments and processes have impacted on different groups of youth in different ways.

The underlying causes of these trends are much debated. One prominent theory which seeks to account for citizens' (of all ages) apparent disconnection with formal politics, their shifting values and their increasing rejection of mainstream parties and their concerns about the limitations of existing democratic processes, is Inglehart's *postmaterialist thesis* (Inglehart 1971; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). According to this theory, citizens' political values are profoundly impacted by their adolescent experiences, particularly by the material circumstances prevalent during any particular period – 'period effects' as opposed to long-term generational effects. Where pre-adult socialization occurs under conditions of relative economic austerity, people's values will tend to focus on immediate materialist concerns, emphasizing economic and physical security. Such citizens are likely to be attracted to policies geared towards low inflation, employment growth, immigration control and law and order. In contrast, where those socialization experiences are gained during times of relative economic prosperity, citizens will be pre-disposed towards postmaterialist preferences, valuing quality of life issues such as political and expressive freedoms, environmental sustainability and global social justice. They will also be increasingly disenchanted with the limits of existing democratic arrangements, and instead be drawn toward alternative and transformative politics (Inglehart 1997) including looser non-institutional forms of political participation created from below (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

The value of Inglehart's postmaterialist thesis has been the subject of significant debate, and its theoretical claims have been tested in numerous studies, including a small number that consider youth in Britain (Majima and Savage 2007; Sloam 2007; Theocharis 2011; Rheingans and Hollands 2013; Henn et al. 2017). Nonetheless, there is considerable evidence to suggest that postmaterial value change is gaining momentum, globally. Indeed, all eight of the EU15 countries studied by Inglehart and Welzel (2005) became much more postmaterialist between 1970 and 2000, and postmaterialist values are found to be particularly advanced within younger

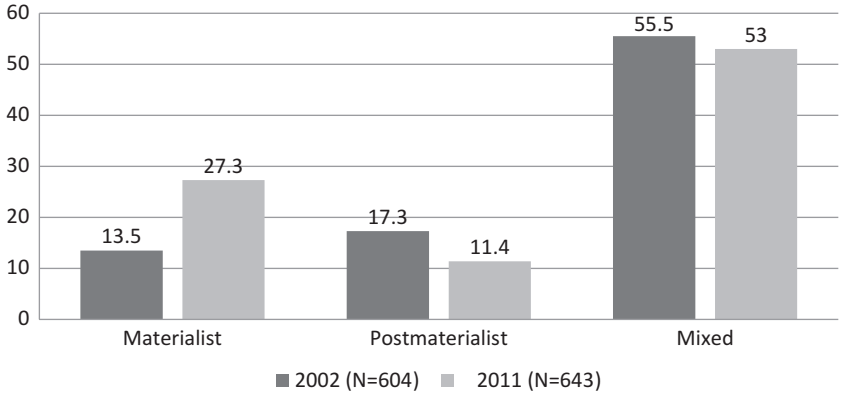

Fig. 2.3 Materialist, postmaterialist and 'mixed' value preferences of young Britons (19 year olds), 2002–2011 (%). (Source: Henn and Weinstein 2003; Henn and Foard 2012)

generations. Figure 2.3 indicates that even during the austerity conditions ushered in by the 2008 global financial crisis, postmaterialist values remained evident amongst a noticeable minority of young people in Britain – although as expected, numbers have fallen from the more economically secure environment of a decade earlier.

The endurance of postmaterialist values – even under current austerity conditions – is significant, because postmaterialists tend towards lifestyle politics, and are much more likely than materialists to engage in non-electoral forms of politics such as signing a petition, joining a boycott and participating in a demonstration (Copeland 2014; Stolle et al. 2005). What is more, the long-term spread of postmaterialist values has created new cultural cleavages to rival the old postindustrial (materialist-economic) ones. The emergence of new social movements and political parties from the libertarian left and the authoritarian right have made the political landscape more complex.

However, there are large variations across these postindustrial countries. In many, the increasing prominence of postmaterialist values has led to the rise of alternative political parties, resulting in the participation of Green parties in several European governments (Muller-Rommel and Poguntke 2013). In the United States, it has led to the rejuvenation of political campaigning for socially liberal candidates (as illustrated by youth

political activism in the Obama and Sanders campaigns) and a significant increase in collective political action for local causes (Dalton 2017). Young Britons, without the same opportunities for engagement, have become more involved with volunteering or charity work and direct action (Birdwell and Bani 2014).

Henn et al. (2017) use Inglehart's four-item materialist-postmaterialist scale to compare the values and political participation preferences of British young materialists, postmaterialists and those who hold intermediate or "mixed" views, during periods of relative economic prosperity and of economic insecurity. It supports Inglehart's claims (2016) that, even under the austerity conditions of the current global recession, the materialist-postmaterialist cleavage retains importance – this is evident in terms of young people's political values, and particularly so with respect to their political participation.

Henn et al.'s results (2017) indicate that during periods of both economic affluence and scarcity, postmaterialists are considerably more likely than other young people to feel dissatisfied with the way that democracy works in their country. Indeed, they are especially critical of the practice of electoral politics and are keen supporters of proposals to reform the first-past-the-post system to break the hegemony of the traditional mainstream parties, and to back emergent parties. Interestingly, although young postmaterialists in the UK seem particularly sceptical of the value of institutionalized electoral politics, they are significantly *more* likely than their contemporaries to consider voting in future elections, whether national, European or local. They are also the most likely youth group to engage in party politics by activities trying to convince someone else how to vote, donating money to a political party, or working for a political party during an election campaign. This seems somewhat contrary to Inglehart's thesis that postmaterialists would be especially frustrated by the limits of existing electoral methods. However, it might instead be argued that their willingness to vote perhaps reflects the fact that postmaterialist youth will turn to any form of political action available that offers them the means to challenge austerity politics in the UK.

Less surprising is that young postmaterialists are more interested in non-institutionalized and extra-parliamentary forms of action than materialist youth. This fits with the findings of other studies which suggest that young postmaterialists are attracted to political action that accords with their individuated life-styles and which they consider to be more expressive, less hierarchical, more flexible and ultimately more effective

(Beck 1992; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Busse et al. 2015; Soler-i-Marti 2014; Tormey 2015). These range from low impact activities such as discussing politics with family or friends through to more demanding activities such as involvement in community associations, charity groups or youth forums, participation in protests, rallies or demonstrations, or working with other people to address a public issue or tackle a particular social problem.

The data also indicate that young postmaterialists are particularly tolerant of others who engage in extra-parliamentary actions, and see the use of such methods of political participation as having potentially greater value and efficacy than voting in elections. For instance, they were much more likely than other young people to agree with the notion that people should be allowed to organise public meetings in protest against the government. Furthermore, they consider that getting involved with campaigning and single issue pressure groups (such as Greenpeace) provides a more effective means to influencing the government than being active in a political party. Interestingly, young postmaterialists also expressed support for people who use direct action *to change the political world*. Again, such styles of political participation are considered to have considerably more value than parliamentary-focussed activities.

In all of these areas, the distinctiveness of young postmaterialists is noticeably more evident for those socialised under conditions of 'austerity' (the 2011 cohort) than those who reached the age of attainment under the significantly more affluent circumstances in the early years of the new Millennium (the 2002 cohort). This would seem to run counter to Inglehart's thesis that postmaterialist values and outlooks would be most evident amongst young people socialised during periods of relative economic security, and support recent claims that young Britons have been radicalised by their experiences of austerity politics, and are choosing to embrace alternative styles of political action. We will develop this idea in the next section when we consider the rise of young cosmopolitans – a group of leftist-oriented youth who in many respects mirror Inglehart's postmaterialists in that they express particular dissatisfaction with existing democratic processes and institutions, and are increasingly drawn to new transformative agendas and visions for change.

Young Cosmopolitans

Our conception of young cosmopolitans builds upon the work of Norris and Inglehart (2018), emphasizing the *cultural turn*, which so distinguishes Millennials from older generations, but also the leftward drift that is particularly prevalent amongst many young people in countries which, like the UK, experienced a prolonged period of austerity after 2008.

Norris and Inglehart (2018) write of the increasing importance of a cultural axis in contemporary liberal democracies – from populism, conservatism and nationalism at one end, to cosmopolitan liberalism at the other end. Whilst the left-right economic axis remains significant, they argue that the emergence of this cultural cleavage has accelerated over the past ten years since the onset of the global financial crisis Norris and Inglehart (2018). In the UK context, Sanders and Twyman (2016) divide the electorate into four 'tribes': 'liberal left', 'liberal centre-right', 'centrist-moderate', and 'authoritarian-populist'.

The book focusses on these *cosmopolitan-liberal* and *liberal left* groups – referred to here as the 'cosmopolitan left' – who Sanders and Twyman (2016: 4) claim represent 37% of all British adults and 43% of 18–29 year olds. The *cosmopolitan-left* incorporates a leftist belief in state intervention to address economic inequalities and provide well-funded public services (including free education), and a cosmopolitan belief in human rights, outward-looking and inclusive societies, and a relatively relaxed attitude towards immigration (Young Cosmopolitans 2018; Sanders and Twyman 2016: 3). We would emphasize, in the UK context, this group's positive attitudes towards cultural diversity and European integration. In the following empirical chapters, we therefore investigate the existence of materialist and postmaterialist values amongst young people (before and after the onset of the financial crisis), and youth support for both social liberal and economically redistributive policy programmes.

Efforts to categorise emerging political and cultural cleavages are not without their critics (Bean and Papadakis 1994; Duch and Taylor 1994). The aggregation of individuals into broad groups may overlook important intra-group differences. Moreover, axes of political and cultural values may gloss over the nuanced realities of anti-establishment parties and movements. Young people may, for example, advocate protection of the environment, but favour tough action against terrorism. And, the cosmopolitan-left in Greece and Spain tends to be Eurosceptic – given the tough austerity measures imposed by the EU. But the same group in the

UK was overwhelmingly supportive of European Union membership in the 2016 referendum. So, national political and social contexts are crucial in determining how cosmopolitan-left values translate into political action. In the empirical sections of the book, we are sensitive to these structural factors.

The question of ethnic diversity and how countries should integrate different cultures and traditions has become a central feature of electoral politics. As our societies have become more open and diverse – and in response to terrorist attacks carried out by 'home-grown' Daesh-inspired individuals and groups – resistance to cosmopolitan values has also grown. Mainstream, usually centre-right, politicians have attempted to tap into this authoritarian-nationalist sentiment in order to outflank populist movements and parties. In late 2010 and early 2011, David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel (then, Prime Minister of the UK, President of France and Chancellor of Germany) all decried the *failure of multiculturalism* in their respective countries.[6] According to Sarkozy: 'We have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not concerned enough about the identity of the country that is receiving him' (Daily Telegraph, 11 May 2011). What these statements mean in practice is open to interpretation.

These political interventions on the subjects of immigration and national identity fuelled a public debate in many countries about the future of cosmopolitanism. Jeremy Cliffe (2015), in a paper for Policy Network, addressed this theme directly from a liberal perspective. He argued that Britain was becoming more like London: its citizens were increasingly diverse, highly educated, urban, socially liberal, and possessing an international outlook. Cliffe's point that greater ethnic diversity will inevitably bring about a greater preponderance of cosmopolitan values may appear naïve to some, given the rise of UKIP and the EU referendum result (Ford and Goodwin 2014) as well as the conservative values of some immigrant groups (Katwala 2015). He nevertheless captured the essence of many Young Millennials, who, though outnumbered by older citizens, have become increasingly prepared to defend these values in the political arena.

After the EU referendum and the decision for Brexit, it was widely assumed that anti-cosmopolitan or populist-nationalist rhetoric would be politically useful in gaining the support of Leave voters. Prime Minister Theresa May's address to the 2016 Conservative Party Conference attacked political and economic elites as 'citizens of nowhere' (Daily Telegraph, 5 October 2016). Although this strategy succeeded in attracting

back many voters to the Conservatives from UKIP, it also turned many socially liberal, pro-EU, younger voters towards Labour. Jeremy Corbyn was able to capitalize on this sentiment through his liberal credentials on cultural diversity and immigration, despite his ambivalent views on the EU expressed during the referendum campaign.

In many countries, young adults have proved to be more resistant to authoritarian forms of populism than older citizens. In these places, they are likely to possess socially liberal and economically left-wing attitudes and values, and favour movements that set themselves apart from the political mainstream and protest against what is perceived to be a neo-liberal or corrupt political establishment. Elsewhere, there is evidence to show that economically disadvantaged young people are particularly susceptible to authoritarian-nationalist values, candidates and parties (Foa and Mounk 2017).

In this book, we demonstrate that the cosmopolitan-left orientation of young people is particularly widespread in the UK, but also relevant to a large segment of the youth population in other European democracies and in North America. From an international perspective, we note that young cosmopolitans vary in their adherence to economically left-wing attitudes according to the economic circumstances of the country or region in which they live. For example, Justin Trudeau's success with younger voters in Canada was much more to do with his socially liberal persona than any radical economic policies.

In the UK, we account for the resurgence in youth activism and cosmopolitan-left orientations in the following ways. First, the redistribution of resources away from younger citizens and youth-oriented public policy over the past ten years has persuaded more young people to favour state intervention and increased public spending. Second, cultural differences across generations have deepened. Young people are more approving of cultural diversity, more welcoming of European integration, and less concerned about immigration than older generations.

Cosmopolitan values apply to many, but not all, young people. As we demonstrate later in the book, cosmopolitan-left individuals are very likely to hold university degrees, and to be students and women. Conversely, old, white males with low levels of educational attainment are least likely to possess these views. It is hardly new to state that young, highly-educated citizens are open to cosmopolitan values. Inglehart and colleagues have made this argument for several decades (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Our claim is that young cosmopolitans have crystalized into

a distinct and coherent political force, united by their common values and common positions on postmaterial issues such as Brexit, immigration and the environment, and material issues such as healthcare, housing and education, and in opposition to the authoritarian-nationalist forms of populism characterized by UKIP, Donald Trump and elements of the British Conservative Party. We also observe that the differences between younger and older voters are greater in cultural than in economic issues.

Summary

In this chapter we have considered the relationships between young citizens and democratic processes and institutions in a variety of postindustrial societies. In particular, we have noted that these relationships are beset by stresses that often result in young people withdrawing from parliamentary-oriented politics, as evidenced by reduced rates of voting and a generalised lack of appetite for engaging with mainstream political parties.

Pessimistic observers have concluded that such developments reflect an on-going and irreversible trend that is leaving representative democracies lacking broad societal support, and consequently in danger of losing their legitimacy. However, many have noticed that while today's youth seem to be abstaining from *formal* politics, they are increasingly attracted to alternative styles of politics such as petition signing, protesting, political consumerism and online activism. In large part this is because these methods appear to be especially valuable in helping them to actualise their political hopes and ambitions. Young people also seem to be increasingly open to the charms of new political candidates, parties and movements emerging from beyond the mainstream. These political outsiders often focus on issues of immediate relevance and concern to young people – and they also offer bottom-up and participative campaigning approaches that are particularly appealing to youth.

We have also examined various approaches and theories that seek to account for these patterns of youth political engagement and democratic participation. One approach considers a number of structural changes that have occurred since the 1960s and which have fused together to create opportunities, but also considerable risks and uncertainties, for young people. Extended and complex transitions into adulthood prompted by dramatic changes in the organisation of education and of labour markets, increasing levels of geographic mobility that reduce connections and

engagement within neighbourhoods, as well as powerful globalising forces. These processes have combined to problematize young people's life-courses and transform (or obstruct) their routes into democratic life.

More *youth-centred* approaches focus on the extent to which young people's experiences of politics – and of the professional political elite – shape their democratic values, orientations and participation. In particular, recent government austerity programmes have coincided with a deepening rift between young citizens and formal politics in many countries. Outraged at having to bear the brunt of these regressive social and economic policies, young people have increasingly embraced new technologies to mobilise opposition to these attacks on their living standards. However, the patterns of youth political engagement and political participation are socially uneven. Whereas many socially disadvantaged 'left-behind' youth are susceptible to the rhetoric of authoritarian-nationalist movements and parties, highly educated and middle-class youth are often attracted to cosmopolitan, anti-austerity and leftist forces. In many respects, these contemporary left-facing cosmopolitan youth were anticipated by Inglehart in his postmaterialist thesis. Characterised by a general dissatisfaction with the practice of democratic politics and a deep antipathy towards the political class, they are attracted to individualised, life-style and cultural politics and are interested in moral issues such as environmental sustainability and global social justice. In the next chapter we will consider the factors underpinning young people's patterns of political engagement and political participation in the early years of the new Millennium, and identify fundamental social, political and cultural shifts that have contributed to the shaping of the current *Youthquake*.

Notes

1. Over the ten years between January 2008 and December 2017, there were two national elections in Sweden, three in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and the UK, four in Spain and France (including two presidential elections), and eight in the US (including three presidential elections).
2. Schmidt (2006) argues that the transfer of powers to the European Union has led to a situation where we have *policy without politics* at the EU level, and *politics without policy* at the national level. Mair (2006) claims that this process has resulted in a 'hollowing out' of representative politics in Europe.
3. Charles Pattie et al. (2004) demonstrate how widespread micropolitical engagement with regard to policy on schools, the health service and in the

workplace. However, it has also been discovered that these contact activities are even more dominated by older, male and well-off citizens than is the case with voting (Sloam 2013).

4. In a few places, including Germany, traditional media – TV and newspapers – retain their strong position as trusted and well read news sources, and new news media have failed to make the same headway as in the UK and the United States.
5. Accounts of the social inequalities of political participation can nevertheless be found in studies of citizen participation amongst all age groups. Verba et al. (1995) published the seminal text on this topic. Russell Dalton's (2017) book, 'The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality', updates these arguments.
6. In early 2011, other notable centre-right politicians, including former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, and former Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Maria Aznar, made similar statements regarding the supposed failure of multiculturalism.

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CHAPTER 3

The Silent Revolution in Youth Political Engagement

The 2001 General Election marked a turning point in UK electoral politics. The dramatic decline in youth turnout led to the characterization of young people as, at best, apathetic abstainers, with little or no interest in democratic affairs. With respect to national elections, voter turnout prior to 2001 was a relatively stable affair; between 1945 and 1997, the mean turnout was 76% and varied on average by less than 4% between elections. However, in 2001, the landslide return of a Labour government was overshadowed by a collapse in electoral participation across the country. As Fig. 3.1 indicates, only 59% of the eligible electorate voted, down from 71% at the previous election in 1997 and falling to the lowest turnout rate since 1918 – an outcome interpreted by some as representing a 'crisis of democratic politics' (Harrop 2001; Whiteley et al. 2001). Although turnout increased in subsequent UK general elections, these changes were marginal, reaching only 61% in 2005 and 65% in 2010 – far short of the post-War average.

However, these headline turnout figures masked important patterns of electoral inequality. Many urban constituencies of high socio-economic deprivation, such as Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow, registered less than 45% turnout (UK Political Info 2018). Other social lines of difference were also apparent, as the unemployed, those from social classes C2 and DE, those living in the privately rented sector and those from British minority ethnic groups were each estimated to have voted in

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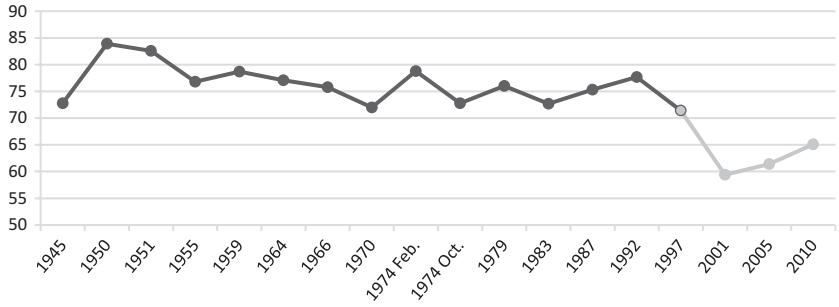

Fig. 3.1 UK general election turnout 1945–2010 (%). (Source: UK Political Info 2018)

considerably lower numbers than their contemporaries (Ipsos MORI 2001; Electoral Commission 2002). These patterns of electoral inequality were broadly repeated at the general elections of 2005 and 2010 (Ipsos MORI 2005, 2010).

Age was also one of the strongest predictors of voter turnout. The extent of youth abstention from the polls was particularly apparent in 2001, with only 39% of 18–24 year olds voting, falling further to 37% in 2005 (Henn and Foard 2012) (see Fig. 1.1, Chap. 1). Although there was a slight increase to 44% in 2010, by that time a discourse for youth politics of the new Millennium had become visible, largely centring on what young people were *not* doing – that they were failing to demonstrate an interest in *formal* politics (Park 2004) and were avoiding electoral politics (Russell et al. 2002).

However, a small number of studies published at that time challenged that analytical focus as well as the characterisation of youth political engagement and political participation that emerged from it. Authors claimed that such a representation of youth was based largely on a narrow conception of politics that failed to fully appreciate that young people were interested in matters that were essentially political in nature, even if they themselves did not articulate them as such (Henn et al. 2002; O'Toole et al. 2003). Furthermore, evidence suggested that young people were increasingly turning towards a variety of alternative political actions (Roker and Eden 2002), including 'cause-oriented' (Norris 2003) and 'micro-political' activities (Pattie et al. 2003). These new repertoires of political participation have been driven by underlying values change.

As we shall see, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) attributed these developments to the rise of postmaterialist values in postindustrial democracies.

In this chapter, we consider patterns of youth political engagement and political participation in Britain between the 2001 and the 2010 General Elections, and observe a relatively stable level of interest in politics and importantly, a support for democracy that has endured over the period as the global economy has moved into deep recession. Nonetheless, we also identify an ongoing and deep antipathy towards the political class which may have repercussions in terms of the future weakening of the connection between young citizens and formal democratic institutions and processes – and ultimately the long-term viability of representative politics in the UK. Whilst this anti-political sentiment is present in younger generations in many other established democracies, the level of youth engagement – in comparison to older citizens – is far lower in the UK (see Fig. 1.2, Chap. 1).

Using two unique datasets (Henn and Weinstein 2003; Henn and Foard 2012), we seek out explanations for why these young Britons seem on the one hand to be sceptical of the value of elections and of the motives and performance of elected representatives, while on the other hand they seem genuinely attracted to new 'issue-based' agendas and alternative styles of politics. We also reveal that patterns of youth political engagement and political participation are not uniform. There is a tendency in much of the research to treat young people as a homogenised group, and in many respects that practice reflects a lack of large-scale studies of this demographic (as small samples prohibit the use of many statistical tests when conducting sub-sample analyses). However, as we are able to draw upon large samples of youth, this allows us to examine the interplay of several underlying factors considered to be associated with, and shaping, young people's political opinions, preferences and behaviours, including social class, gender, ethnicity and educational career. We are also able to assess the extent to which alternative value systems may have a bearing on youth politics. In particular, we address how new cultural cleavages – specifically, Inglehart's materialist-postmaterialist cleavage – are replacing these socio-demographic variables as the key drivers of young people's political engagement, and if these help to explain the emergence of young cosmopolitans and the unfolding *youthquake*.

Youth Political (Dis-)Engagement: Parties Fail to Connect

Explanations advanced for the apparent decline in youth participation in electoral politics are varied, and there is considerable disagreement as to the underlying causes. Hay (2007) usefully articulates the sources of this ongoing youth disaffection by offering 'demand-side' and 'supply-side' explanations. According to this, the *demand* for politics is rooted in people's changing values and outlooks. In particular, the rise of a more informed and critical citizenry (Norris 2011) who are increasingly frustrated with the limits of contemporary representative politics (Tormey 2015) – especially the under-performance of professional politicians (Whiteley 2012) – and are often pre-disposed towards more postmaterialist or cosmopolitan outlooks (Norris and Inglehart 2018). We shall discuss this in the second part of this chapter.

In contrast, supply-side explanations suggest that formal politics has failed to attract successive youth cohorts, not least because the policy concerns of young people are given little priority by politicians. For instance, Hart and Henn (2017) have claimed that in recent decades, mainstream parties in Britain have tended to coalesce around a broadly neoliberal philosophy that is committed to economic freedom above political freedom, and this has translated into a privileging of laissez-faire economic policies and a reduction in state intervention in the economy by successive governments (Berry 2012; Furlong and Cartmel 2012). As a consequence, the discourse and programmes of these parties have converged, offering very little in their party manifestos designed to improve young people's economic and social well-being or to champion the policy priorities and aspirations of the country's youth (Côté 2014; Sloam 2014; Busse et al. 2015). Moreover, there have been very few opportunities afforded to young people to shape the policy agendas of these political parties (Mycock and Tonge 2012), and this has tended to exacerbate the on-going and deepening disconnect between young people and democratic politics in Britain.

Analyses of the content and rhetoric of election manifestos for the UK General Elections of 2001 and 2010 provide insights into the extent to which the main national political parties – Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats – reached out to young people as part of their campaigning. For both of these elections, we assessed the quantity of each party's content that attended to youth-related matters. For this purpose,

we counted the number of times that the term 'Youth' or youth-related synonyms were mentioned as a proportion of the party document.

Table 3.1 summarises the results from these content analyses. They indicate that, during the early years of the new Millennium, all parties failed to offer a comprehensive, positive and consistent message of reassurance to young people that their concerns, hopes and aspirations would be addressed through government policy in the event that they were elected to office. These manifestos offered little incentive for young people to engage with the elections or to vote. Although the Labour Party mentioned young people (or synonyms of that generation) considerably more often in their 2001 election manifesto than did the Conservatives, their document was significantly larger in word length. When we examine the frequency of youth-related terms as a proportion of each manifesto, the differences are insignificant. Only 0.11% of the Labour manifesto mentioned young people, virtually identical to the Conservatives (0.11%). By contrast, the Liberal Democrats referred to young people more than their main rivals (0.14%), but again, the extent of the appeal to the youth electorate was negligible. Interestingly, each of the parties gave prominence to students (or 'graduates') over other young people (Labour 6 out of 35 mentions, Conservatives 10 out of 15 and Liberal Democrats 10 out of 29) – a group that has a considerably more middle class base, and is relatively likely to vote compared to the wider youth population.

In addition to the extremely low number of positive references to youth, the parties failed to offer substantial sections focussing on youth in their respective 2001 manifestos. Labour, as the outgoing party of government presented only a single bespoke youth passage, '*How Labour helps young people*' that briefly listed six youth policy statements, including the New Deal and increased opportunities in higher education; however, this amounted to only 88 words and 0.29% of the manifesto. The Conservatives incorporated only a single equivalent youth-centred paragraph, focussing exclusively on '*Reducing barriers for students*' (111 words, 0.84%). The Liberal Democrats included a specific section devoted to higher education that represented a clear attempt to appeal to young people, '*Higher Education*'. However, this amounted to only 262 words and 1.25% of the entire document; while they offered other youth-centred policies (including introducing voting at sixteen, entitlements to study leave with pay for all 16–24 year olds, extending the full Minimum Wage to all those aged 16 and over), each were dealt with as short headlines without detailed discussions.

Table 3.1 Party general election manifestos 2001 and 2010: Connecting with young people

2001 General Election	Party (Wordcount)	Phrase frequency										
		Youth	Young people	Young adult(s)	Young person	(The) Young	Student(s)/ Graduate(s)	Young age	Specific age mentioned (e.g. 18 year old or 16 to 24)	–	Total mentions	Percentage of mentions of young people
	Labour (30672)	8	13	1	1	1	6	1	4	–	35	0.114
	Conservative (13189)	1	4	0	0	0	10	0	0	–	15	0.113
	Liberal Dem (20986)	4	6	0	0	0	10	0	9	–	29	0.138
2010 General Election		Youth	Young people	Young adult(s)	Young person(s)	(The) Young	Student(s)/ Graduate(s)	Young mothers	Specific age mentioned (e.g. 18 year old or 16 to 24)	Young artistic talent	Total mentions	Percentage of mentions of young people
	Labour (29923)	4	23	1	1	1	13	1	17	1	62	0.207
	Conservative (27747)	5	9	0	0	4	17	0	2	0	37	0.133
	Liberal Dem (21248)	5	11	1	0	2	4	0	6	0	29	0.136

Analyses of the manifestos presented by the main national parties at the 2010 General Election suggested that each had learned relatively little from their collective failures to mobilise the youth vote a decade previously. The number of mentions of 'young people' and related terms in the Liberal Democrats' document were exactly the same as for 2001 (29 mentions and 0.14% as a proportion of the full manifesto). Arguably, the references to British youth in the Labour and Conservative manifestos each doubled (35–62 and 15–37, respectively), but again the proportion of the overall word count in each was considerably less than half of one percent. This reflected a distinct and quantifiable absence of direct appeals to young people.

Further examination of the manifestos suggests that youth-targeted themes formed a relatively minor aspect of each party's plans for government. The 2010 Conservative manifesto offered a noticeable change in tone from 2001, and included several policy appeals to young people. These included commitments to tackling youth unemployment, 20,000 new young apprenticeships, workplace training, the introduction of a National Citizen Service, and creating 10,000 additional university places by incentivising voluntary early re-payment of student loans. As in 2001, the Liberal Democrats again committed to reducing the voting age to 16. They also offered two brief bespoke youth-centred passages, to introduce a new youth work placement and apprenticeship schemes, and investment in Foundation Degrees and Adult Learning Grants. Labour, as the outgoing party of government, also offered brief reference to a small number of specific youth-targeted policies such as guaranteed employment for those out of work for six months or more, the right to supported housing for 16 and 17 year olds, a free vote in parliament on reducing the voting age to 16, and improved citizenship education. They also included a detailed section on education, which included raising the education and training leaving age to 18, retaining the Education Maintenance Allowance and a commitment that 75% of people would go '*on to higher education, or completing an advanced apprenticeship or technician level training, by the age of 30*'.

Taken together, these manifesto analyses indicate a distinct lack of engagement with youth policy concerns at both the 2001 and 2010 UK General Elections and little effort to directly appeal to young people. This evidence lends support to Hay's (2007) 'supply-side' explanation of young people's ongoing withdrawal from electoral politics in general – and of voting in particular – in the early years of the new Millennium, as a failure

of the parties to connect with young people. Furthermore, young people felt frustrated and disenchanted following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010. In particular, the decision of Deputy Prime Minister Clegg to reverse his party's high-profile election campaign pledge to abolish university tuition fees and to vote instead for a three-fold rise, prompted a wave of anger amongst young people, including its manifestation in a nationwide wave of student protests in 2010 and 2011 (Hopkins et al. 2011). As a direct consequence of the Liberal Democrat U-turn on tuition fees and participation in the Coalition Government, its share of the youth vote collapsed from 30% in 2010 to just 5% in 2015 (Ipsos MORI 2010, 2015). The Coalition Government's implementation of a far-reaching austerity programme in 2010 in response to the unfolding global economic crisis had a disproportionately negative impact on young people, and served to intensify existing generationally-based social and economic inequalities (Birch 2013). The impact of these policies left many young people feeling ignored and marginalised, contributing to their deepening mistrust of, and antipathy toward the political class, and a continued withdrawal from electorally-oriented politics (Henn and Foard 2014), and pushed those young people who did turn out to vote to switch to the Labour Party in 2015 and 2017 (see Chap. 5).

Youth Political Apathy or Engaged Scepticism?

A recurring theme in the youth studies literature is how best to characterise this apparent disconnect between young people and *formal* democratic politics in Britain. One position holds that their lack of presence in elections is indicative of political apathy or even of an emerging anti-politics sentiment. On the other side of this debate are those who consider this to represent young people's deep-seated feelings of alienation from, and dissatisfaction with, mainstream electoral politics and (for some) of their turn toward alternative political interests and repertories (see, for instance: Stoker 2006; Hay 2007; Sloam 2007; Farthing 2010; Phelps 2012; Bastedo 2015; Busse et al. 2015; Henn and Oldfield 2016). In this book, we take the position that British youth feel frustrated with the practice of, and outcomes from, representative politics. For some, their abstention from the polls reflects this disillusionment. For others – particularly *young left-cosmopolitans* – there is an active search for the co-production of a new style of politics (electorally-orientated or otherwise) that is more accessible,

flexible and bottom-up and which offers them a route to actualise their ambitions and aspirations.

Using data from two unique and linked studies that focus on the views and priorities of separate cohorts of British youth, we can see that this youth scepticism of professional politicians and mainstream national political parties was an ongoing feature of the democratic landscape throughout the first decade of the new Millennium. The first study was conducted in 2002 (Henn and Weinstein 2003) during an era of relative global prosperity, whilst the second study was completed in 2011 at the height of the current financial crisis (Henn and Foard 2012).[1] Both were representative questionnaire surveys conducted across England, Scotland and Wales exactly a year after preceding General Elections in 2001 and 2010, and all participants were aged 18 at the time of each respective election. Consequently, survey respondents were newly-enfranchised adult citizens when taking part in our study, all with no prior experience of voting. They were therefore relatively politically inexperienced in comparison with their older contemporaries, and were consequently less likely to have formed deep-seated views about politics, parties and politicians. The 2002 sample included 705 young people, and the 2011 study involved 1,025 young respondents.

The results indicate that, contrary to expectations, both the 2002 and the 2011 youth samples expressed an interest both in politics in general (56% and 63% respectively) and in the previous General Election (48% and 64%), although the 2011 cohort were clearly more engaged. However, half of the participants in each of the two samples lacked confidence in their own understanding of government and politics (55% in 2002 and 50% in 2011), perhaps explaining the absence of many young people from the polls. Importantly, the young people in each of the studies felt politically powerless and considered that they had relatively little opportunity to intervene in the formal political process or to influence governmental decision- and policy-making (82% in 2002 and 61% in 2011). Although these findings represent a reduction in the sense of fatalism between the two elections, it offers a clear indication that British youth continued to feel alienated from the centres of political power.

It is therefore surprising that the data reveal that the larger group of young people in each of the two studies felt committed to elections (48% in 2002 and 56% in 2011), although a sizeable minority in each group were sceptical (35% and 37%). However, that broad support for the electoral process did not translate directly into positive views of the intrinsic

value of elections. Indeed, only about a third of young people in both groups (28% in 2002 and 36% in 2011) agreed with the statement that by voting they '*could really help to change the way that Britain is governed*'. And, noticeable majorities agreed with the sceptical statement that '*elections allow voters to express their opinions but don't really change anything*' (60% and 57%).

Most revealing within the data was the perception held by young people of the political elites elected to represent their interests in Parliament. Fig. 3.2 indicates that the young participants in the two studies disapproved of the political class for failing to champion their policy interests and aspirations. They considered parties and politicians to be cynical political operators, '*only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions*' and who '*soon lose touch with people*' once an election is over. Related to these findings are the overwhelming levels of scepticism expressed by the 2011 cohort[2] with respect to their lack of trust in the UK Government (only 15% trust), political parties (8% trust) and politicians (7% trust).

Taken together, the findings from the survey signal that young people's absence from elections and party-based politics is far from indicative of a generalised and inevitable political apathy – or that they are anti-democratic.

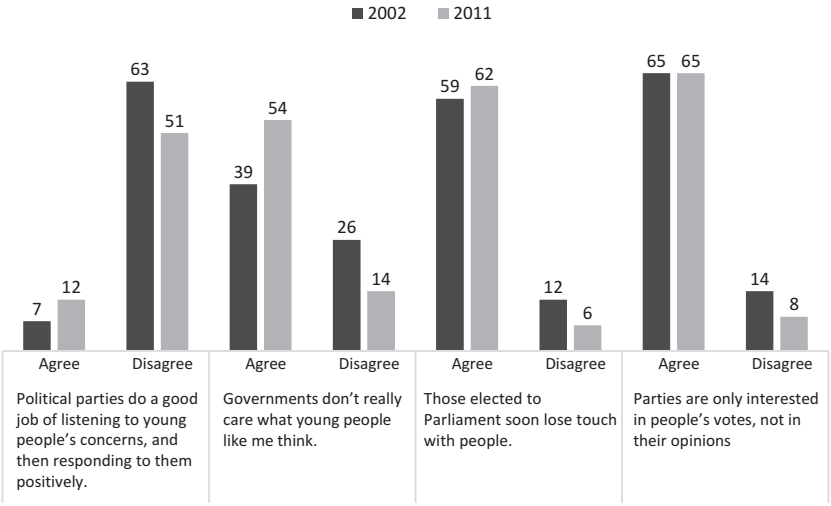

Fig. 3.2 Faith in political parties and professional politicians (%). (Source: Henn and Foard (2012). $N = 705$ (2002) and 1,025 (2011))

Instead, these data suggest that British youth are interested in politics but they feel relatively powerless to intervene in the political process. Furthermore, they find the practice of, and outcomes from, formal electorally-oriented politics deeply unsatisfactory, and feel that those political parties and professional politicians charged with conducting politics on their behalf are a remote, cynical and self-serving elite, paying little regard to the concerns and agendas of contemporary youth.

The Silent Revolution in Youth Political Engagement

In the first part of this chapter, we considered a 'supply-side' approach that seeks to explain young people's apparent disconnection from mainstream politics in terms of their broad alienation from, and rejection of party-dominated electoral politics that they perceive as consistently failing to represent the priorities and aspirations of their generation. We now turn to an alternative explanation (Hay 2007) that views young people's withdrawal from mainstream politics as a consequence of the interplay of a series of 'demand-side' factors which are rooted in changing values and the emergence of a critical youth citizenry. In particular, the changing nature of contemporary British society is such that young people's lives, perspectives and behaviour are increasingly complex, risky and uncertain (Giddens 1991). Reflecting these processes, they often adopt individualised values and lifestyles which result in them privileging issue-based and identity politics over grand narratives. They are also inclined to embrace alternative forms of non-institutionalised and extra-parliamentary modes of political action discussed above. In the remaining sections of this chapter, we consider such an explanation. This has its origins in Ronald Inglehart's *postmaterialist thesis*, and emphasizes a cultural values-based cleavage as an alternative to traditional economic/industrial-based cleavages.

Conventional explanations of political participation and engagement have tended to focus upon people's socio-demographic characteristics, such as their social class, gender, ethnicity, and educational attainment (Verba and Nie 1972; Parry et al. 1992). Additionally, the linked civic voluntarism model stresses the importance of resources that individuals have at their disposal, including the time, money, and the opportunities to participate in politics – resources that may be structured by their

socio-demographic background (Verba et al. 1995). In contemporary Britain, for instance, age when completed education (Whiteley 2012), educational qualifications (Tenn 2007), gender (Furlong and Cartmel 2012), social class (Pattie et al. 2004) and ethnicity (Heath et al. 2011) are all considered to impact upon political outlook and behaviour.

Inglehart's landmark study, '*The Silent Revolution in Europe*' published in 1971, represented a critical departure from such socio-demographic explanations, and in particular, challenged the primacy of social class in the study of contemporary politics and society. He charted a transformation in the political value preferences that had occurred across West Europe between 1945 and the end of the 1960s (1971). He claimed that whereas their older contemporaries had been socialized through their experiences of post-War austerity into adopting priorities that emphasised their material and physical security, the youth of the 1960s had been socialised under very different economic prosperity conditions. Freed from the urgency of material acquisition, following sharp rises in living standards, they were able to focus on higher-order postmaterial matters, such as the protection of the environment, social justice, political reforms, and freedom of expression (Inglehart 1997).

Whilst age was considered to be a critical factor underpinning the emergence of materialist-postmaterialist cleavages, Inglehart also identified other key structuring variables. In particular, it was claimed that those from the new affluent middle class and those with extended formal educational experiences tended to have significantly higher levels of existential security than their working class and less highly educated contemporaries. As a consequence, these socio-demographic groups were considerably more likely to express postmaterialist value preferences (1971). Inglehart claimed that such developments represented the emergence of profound and long-term generational differences in value priorities that would culminate in the eclipse of social class –based conflict by newer materialist and postmaterialist cultural cleavages (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Recently, Inglehart and Norris have reiterated this claim:

> Today, many of the most heated conflicts are cultural – based on issues such as immigration, the threat of terrorism, abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and more fluid gender identities and support for progressive change on these issues increasingly comes from well-educated younger generations of Post-materialists, largely of middle class origin. (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 24)

For Inglehart and his colleagues, the roots of this intergenerational cultural shift in political values lay deep in the changing economic conditions in which pre-adult socialization occurred (Inglehart 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). As these post-War western societies underwent a transformation from economic austerity to relative prosperity, citizens socialized under such conditions would embrace postmaterialism over materialism, and this pattern would persist over time. Importantly, there was an appreciation that in times of economic austerity and crisis, the general trend toward postmaterialism and cultural modernization might be arrested, as citizens' subjective sense of economic security was undermined (Inglehart and Abramson 1994; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Inglehart 2016). However, by the turn of the new millennium, he concluded that postmaterialism had grown in both stature and influence – even during periods of economic downturn, claiming that, '[t]he age-related differences examined … suggest that a process of intergenerational value change has been taking place during the past six decades and more' (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 95; Inglehart 2008). More recently, analyses of data from the *World Values Survey* conducted by Abramson (2011), indicate an overall shift toward postmaterialism across Europe during the period 1970–2006.

Postmaterialism and Contemporary Advanced Industrial Societies

The value of Inglehart's postmaterialist thesis has been the subject of significant debate. For instance, Flanagan et al. (2012) have presented recent evidence that intergenerational differences in patterns of political engagement are cyclical, and that when they enter later stages of adulthood, young people will participate in politics in ways that mirror the behaviour and preferences of their older contemporaries. Elsewhere, Grasso (2014) has rejected the postmaterial notion that young people's increasing withdrawal from mainstream electoral politics and their interest in alternative and transformative styles of politics is rooted within underlying economic prosperity or austerity conditions. Instead, she sees this as a reflection of the period effects in which they have been socialised, such as the ideological and volatile nature of contemporary societies.

Nonetheless, the thesis is widely considered to have offered a significant contribution to the field of social and political value change, and been

found to be in evidence in a range of different social, economic and temporal contexts (Barnes et al. 1979; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Taniguchi 2006; Marthaler 2008; Janmaat and Braun 2009; Copeland 2014; Henn et al. 2017). Dalton (2009) has found similar patterns in his observations of a transition in the US from an 'Old' politics rooted in material scarcity concerns towards a 'New' politics characterised by expressive quality of life priorities. These new citizens are generally considered to be critically engaged with politics – albeit disillusioned with the performance of the political class (Norris 2011) and seeking social change. As Hay contends,

> … the rise of post-material values has generated a better-educated, more savvy, less deferential and more critical electorate, less inclined to vote out of habit or out of simple respect for political authority, and less likely to be taken in by politics as a consequence. (Hay 2007: 154)

However, the current global economic crisis presents a considerable challenge to the growth of postmaterialist values in contemporary advanced industrial societies. Brym (2016: 195) claims that postmaterialism is not a universally advancing phenomenon, and in recent years has become 'a waning force among major world powers, giving way to increasing nationalism and xenophobia'. Similarly, Janmaat (2016) has recently concluded that there are no particular links between postmaterialist values and current austerity conditions across a range of European and western states. And, Cameron's (2013) analyses of data from the *World Values Survey* indicate a decline in postmaterialist values in several advanced democracies (though not in Britain) between 2005 and 2010.

Equally, patterns of materialist-postmaterialist value priorities within the youth population in Britain are not clear. Majima and Savage noted that throughout the 1990s, young people became progressively more materialist (2007). More recently, Theocharis (2011) claims that although there was a steady increase in young people's postmaterialist value preferences in Britain between 1981 and 2005, there has occurred a fall in such priorities since 2009 corresponding with the onset of the international financial crisis. Elsewhere, Rheingans and Hollands (2013) have even identified a merging of 'materialist' and 'postmaterialist' political values in the 2010 UK student movement. However, Henn et al. (2017) have recently concluded that the materialist-postmaterialist cleavage exerts a consistent and significant impact in terms of the shaping of young people's political participation preferences in austerity Britain.

In Chap. 2 of this book, we drew upon the work of Henn et al. (2017) and Inglehart and Norris (2016) to demonstrate that there has indeed been a turn towards postmaterialism and an embrace of cosmopolitan-left values and politics by many British youth that is founded on a progressive cultural change. In the final section of this particular chapter, we develop this idea and examine patterns of political engagement since the turn of the new Millennium by focusing on the views and priorities of separate cohorts of British youth – the first study conducted in 2002 during an era of relative global prosperity, and the second completed in 2011 at the height of the current financial crisis. In doing so, we consider the variety of youth groups as well as whether (and if so how) their political values are structured by key variables during these contrasting periods. Finally, we assess the currency of Inglehart's thesis and whether or not postmaterialism offers an alternative explanation for youth political (dis-)engagement, as well as whether this is contingent on the economic context of their pre-adult socialization.

Who Are the Young British Postmaterialists?

In Chap. 2, we identified that postmaterialist values continue to play an important role in shaping the political participation preferences of many young people in Britain. But who are these young postmaterialists? Table 3.2 allows us to consider whether young people's materialist-postmaterialist outlooks are structured by their social class, education, gender or ethnicity, and if the relative power of these variables is linked to whether they were socialized under conditions of economic prosperity or austerity. We compare materialists, postmaterialists as well as a 'mixed' group who express both materialist and postmaterialist values. The findings indicate that ethnicity has little impact on the holding of materialist-postmaterialist value priorities. The 2002 sample reveals that there is a statistically significant gender gap under conditions of relative economic security, with young men considerably more materialist than young women ($p = 0.044$). However, the findings from the 2011 study suggest that young men and women socialized under conditions of economic scarcity are equally as likely to prioritise materialist concerns, and to de-emphasise postmaterialist concerns ($p = 0.254$).

Inglehart's claims that social class and education are positively related to materialist-postmaterialist value priories are broadly reflected in Table 3.2. Under the relatively affluent economic conditions of 2002,

Table 3.2 The impact of economic context and socio-demographic factors on materialist/postmaterialist value preferences (%)

		2002			*2011*		
		Materialist	*Postmaterialist*	*Mixed*	*Materialist*	*Postmaterialist*	*Mixed*
Ethnicity	White	14.7	21.1	64.2	26.8	11.8	61.4
	Black & minority ethnic	16.7	16.7	66.7	33.9	12.2	53.9
	Post/materialist-ethnicity gap	−2.0	4.4	−2.5	−7.1	−0.4	7.5
		$N = 602$, $X^2 = 0.299$, $p = 0.861$			$N = 894$, $X^2 = 2.744$, $p = 0.254$		
Gender	Male	19.0	19.8	61.2	27.1	10.4	62.6
	Female	11.7	21.9	66.4	28.5	13.5	58.0
	Post/materialist-gender gap	7.3	−2.1	−5.2	−1.4	−3.1	4.6
		$N = 604$, $X^2 = 6.235$, $p = 0.044$			$N = 899$, $X^2 = 2.801$, $p = 0.246$		
Social class	Managerial/ professional	12.2	22.4	65.4	25.5	15.3	59.3
	Not managerial/ professional	16.5	19.2	64.2	29.5	9.4	61.1
	Post/materialist-social class gap	−4.3	3.2	1.2	−4.0	5.9	−1.8
		$N = 506$, $X^2 = 2.277$, $p = 0.320$			$N = 901$, $X^2 = 7.823$, $p = 0.020$		
Qualifications	Higher level qualifications	14.6	21.4	64.1	28.9	13.4	57.7
	Lower level qualifications	23.3	16.7	60.0	26.2	9.9	63.9
	Post/materialist-qualifications gap	−8.7	4.7	4.1	2.7	3.5	−6.2
		$N = 592$, $X^2 = 1.817$, $p = 0.403$			$N = 881$, $X^2 = 3.799$, $p = 0.130$		
Educational status	In full-time education	12.3	22.9	64.9	29.7	12.9	57.4
	Not in full-time education	18.5	18.1	63.4	23.2	10.1	66.7
	Post/materialist-education gap	−6.2	4.8	1.5	6.5	2.8	−9.3
		$N = 599$, $X^2 = 5.403$, $p = 0.067$			$N = 896$, $X^2 = 6.726$, $p = 0.035$		

those young people from middle class managerial or professional households were more likely to prioritise postmaterialist values than were their working class contemporaries (22.4–19.2%), and less likely to embrace materialist concerns (12.2–16.5%). As expected, the relative size of support for postmaterialist values decreased a decade later as the economy moved into deep recession. Interestingly, this decline in the levels of postmaterialism was less steep amongst the managerial/professional group than for working class youth, and there was a relative increase in the *Postmaterialist-social class gap* that is statistically significant ($p = 0.020$). This strengthening of the post/materialist-social class gap identified in the 2011 youth sample suggests an enduring sustainability in postmaterialist value priorities among these British youth – even for those socialized under conditions of relative economic austerity.

There is no evidence that level of educational attainment has a statistically significant impact for either the 2002 or the 2011 samples ($p = 0.403$ and $p = 0.130$, respectively). However, remaining in full-time education beyond the age of 18 exerts an influence on young people's materialist-postmaterialist outlooks. As anticipated, those with extended periods of formal full-time education were more likely to hold postmaterialist values than were those who had opted to leave at an earlier age. This pattern is evidenced in the 2002 sample, and even to a lesser extent in the 2011 'economic austerity' cohort. Interestingly, when it comes to *materialist* values, the pattern is not consistent. Those remaining in formal education and emphasising materialist concerns outnumbered those who have left by a margin of 29.7–23.2%. This particular finding might be explained by the concerns of those young people embarking on a university career following the 2010 announcement by the newly-elected Coalition Government to treble university tuition fees.

Explaining Youth Political Engagement: Socio-demographic and Postmaterialist Value Cleavages

So far, we have established that there is a degree of continuing commitment by many young people to broadly postmaterialist concerns. We have also identified which groups within the youth population are most predisposed to a postmaterialist agenda – young postmaterialists are more likely than young materialists to be middle class and to have opted to stay in education beyond the age of 18. This is the case regardless of whether they were socialized under conditions of relative material prosperity or during

times of economic austerity. In order to better understand contemporary and unfolding patterns of youth political engagement, it remains for us to consider the importance of the materialist-postmaterialist value cleavage compared to other socio-demographic cleavages associated with the civic voluntarism model, including gender, ethnicity social class and education-based differences.

Using hierarchical regression, Table 3.3 reveals that these socio-demographic variables display considerable predictive power for several aspects of political engagement, and for both of the time periods examined. In particular, there is evidence of statistically significant gaps with respect to gender, educational status and also social class location. However, the patterns between variables and across the time samples are not uniform.

As far as *Political interest* is concerned, young males, those who have opted to remain in full-time education, and those with a middle class background are considerably more interested than their counterparts. This is the case in both the 2002 and 2011 samples. Similar statistically significant gaps are present for gender, educational status and also social class factors at both time points for the *Internal efficacy* variable (which measures the degree of confidence that young people have in their own knowledge and understanding of politics). In addition, educational qualifications attained is also statistically significant for the 2011 cohort on this *Internal efficacy* variable. Those with higher level qualifications have more political self-confidence than other youth.

There are some important patterns of association in terms of the socio-demographic backgrounds of the two youth cohorts and the three dependent variables that consider elections and voting. The *Faith in the electoral process* variable considers the extent to which young people feel that elections provide both an opportunity to have their voices heard by the political class, and also for holding politicians to account for any election promises made. Under the relatively affluent conditions experienced by the 2002 cohort, gender and also social class are both statistically significant predictors, with young males and those from middle class backgrounds more positive than other young people. For the 2011 'austerity' youth group, all of the five socio-demographic predictors bar social class have a significant bearing over this *Faith in the electoral process* variable.

The variable *Value of elections*, addresses perceptions that young people have of the effectiveness and veracity of elections as mechanisms for achieving meaningful societal change. Gender (2002 cohort) and also educa-

Table 3.3 The impact of materialist/postmaterialist value preferences and socio-demographic factors on young people's political engagement

		2002			2011		
DependentVariable	*Independent variables*	*B*	*Beta*	*P*	*B*	*Beta*	*P*
Political interest	Materialism/Postmaterialism	**−0.539**	**−0.174**	**0.000***	**−0.331**	**−0.106**	**0.001***
	Gender	**0.628**	**0.170**	**0.000***	**0.487**	**0.127**	**0.000***
	Ethnicity	−0.454	−0.046	0.285	−0.048	−0.008	0.799
	Qualifications	−0.060	−0.007	0.870	−0.223	−0.055	0.089
	Educational status	**−0.643**	**−0.170**	**0.000***	**−0.980**	**−0.233**	**0.000***
	NS-SEC	**−0.550**	**−0.151**	**0.001***	**−0.434**	**−0.113**	**0.001***
		R^2 = 0.126, N = 488			**R^2 = 0.097, N = 868**		
Internal efficacy	Materialism/Postmaterialism	**−0.422**	**−0.095**	**0.031***	−0.208	−0.048	0.146
	Gender	**1.619**	**0.300**	**0.000***	**1.072**	**0.200**	**0.000***
	Ethnicity	−1.010	−0.071	0.101	0.246	0.031	0.353
	Qualifications	−0.282	−0.023	0.599	**−0.488**	**−0.087**	**0.008***
	Educational status	**−0.664**	**−0.120**	**0.008***	**−0.984**	**−0.168**	**0.000***
	NS-SEC	**−0.639**	**−0.120**	**0.007***	**−0.394**	**−0.073**	**0.026***
		R^2 = 0.137, N = 466			**R^2 = 0.080, N = 868**		
Faith in the electoral process	Materialism/Postmaterialism	−0.063	−0.015	0.742	0.078	0.018	0.597
	Gender	**0.525**	**0.107**	**0.021***	**0.551**	**0.103**	**0.002***
	Ethnicity	0.134	0.010	0.825	**−0.614**	**−0.076**	**0.025***
	Qualifications	0.998	0.088	0.059	**−0.487**	**−0.087**	**0.010***
	Educational status	−0.442	−0.087	0.068	**−0.438**	**−0.074**	**0.030***
	NS-SEC	**−0.574**	**−0.118**	**0.012***	−0.134	−0.025	0.465
		R^2 = 0.042, N = 460			**R^2 = 0.031, N = 868**		

(*continued*)

Table 3.3 (continued)

		2002			2011		
DependentVariable	*Independent variables*	*B*	*Beta*	*P*	*B*	*Beta*	*P*
Value of elections	Materialism/Postmaterialism	**−0.272**	**−0.089**	**0.039***	0.039	0.013	0.708
	Gender	**0.619**	**0.170**	**0.000***	−0.137	−0.036	0.285
	Ethnicity	−0.824	−0.083	0.052	0.118	0.020	0.541
	Qualifications	0.090	0.011	0.798	−0.197	−0.049	0.143
	Educational status	**−0.915**	**−0.242**	**0.000***	**−0.572**	**−0.136**	**0.000***
	NS-SEC	**−0.735**	**−0.204**	**0.000***	**−0.499**	**−0.130**	**0.000***
		R^2 = 0.164, N = 468			**R^2 = 0.046, N = 868**		
Support for the principle of voting	Materialism/Postmaterialism	**−0.521**	**−0.106**	**0.018***	−0.342	−0.065	0.055
	Gender	0.350	0.059	0.185	0.077	0.012	0.726
	Ethnicity	0.053	0.003	0.940	−0.101	−0.011	0.757
	Qualifications	0.482	0.035	0.429	**−0.704**	**−0.105**	**0.002***
	Educational status	**−0.687**	**−0.113**	**0.014***	**−0.734**	**−0.103**	**0.003***
	NS-SEC	**−0.960**	**−0.165**	**0.000***	**−0.491**	**−0.076**	**0.026***
		R^2 = 0.065, N = 482			**R^2 = 0.037, N = 868**		
Trust in political parties and politicians	Materialism/Postmaterialism	0.400	0.046	0.350	0.536	0.063	0.079
	Gender	0.673	0.064	0.187	0.281	0.027	0.452
	Ethnicity	−2.092	−0.074	0.131	**1.177**	**0.076**	**0.036***
	Qualifications	0.420	0.018	0.713	−0.617	−0.057	0.115
	Educational status	**−1.617**	**−0.149**	**0.003***	−0.642	−0.056	0.125
	NS-SEC	**−1.559**	**−0.151**	**0.002***	**−1.103**	**−0.106**	**0.003***
		R^2 = 0.022, N = 449			**R^2 = 0.020, N = 846**		

Note: Figures in Bold * are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

tional status and social class position (2002 and 2011) demonstrate statistically significant effects on this election variable, with young women, those from middle class backgrounds and those remaining in full-time education considerably more supportive than their contemporaries.

The third elections and voting variable, *Support for the principle of voting*, considers the extent to which young people feel that voting is satisfying, effective, and a duty of citizenship. Again, social class and educational status are statistically significant predictors, whether young people were socialized under conditions of relative economic affluence (2002) or of austerity (2011). Level of qualifications held is also a statistically significant predictor of this elections variable, but only in 2011.

Finally, there is evidence of socio-demographic background displaying some impact on youth perceptions of the political elite. Very few of the young people in our surveys expressed confidence in the political class. Nonetheless, there is a statistically-apparent social class gap on the question of their levels of *Trust in political parties and politicians,* with those from professional middle-class households considerably less critical than working class youth – this is the case for both the 'prosperity' and the 'austerity' samples. Elsewhere, the pattern is not uniform. Within the 2002 cohort, time spent in education exerts a statistically significant bearing on this trust variable, while there is also evidence of a significant ethnicity gap for the 2011 youth group. None of the other variables displayed a significant impact on young people's level of trust in the political class ($p > 0.05$).

Table 3.3 also reveals that the materialist-postmaterialist cleavage had a notable predictive impact on young people's political engagement for the 2002 youth sample. These young postmaterialists are considerably more interested in politics and elections than their materialist counterparts. Equally, their levels of internal efficacy, the value that they place on elections and also their support for the principle of elections are each also statistically impacted by their materialist-postmaterialist preferences. As we would expect, results for the 2011 'austerity' cohort indicate that the materialist-postmaterialist cleavage has less predictive power than for the earlier cohort, reflecting the importance of underlying economic conditions in which pre-adult socialization occurred. Despite this, the materialist-postmaterialist cleavage did have a statistically-predictive impact on levels of political interest, with young postmaterialists significantly more interested than their materialist counterparts.

Summary

There was a dramatic drop in electoral turnout at the 2001 UK General Election that persisted throughout the first decade of the new Millennium. Importantly, this pattern of voting was socially and generationally uneven. Those living in constituencies of relatively high socio-economic deprivation, as well as traditionally marginalised groups such as the unemployed, social classes C2 and DE, ethnic minorities, and people living in privately rented sector were particularly absent from the polls. However, the predominant electoral cleavage was generational, with young people considerably less likely than their older contemporaries to vote at the General Elections in 2001, 2005 and 2010.

This ongoing abstention from the polls fuelled a discourse within the media, academia and the corridors of Westminster that a politically uninterested and disengaged generation were withdrawing from the democratic process – and that they might carry their disenchantment with them into later life and in time replace older, more electorally-participative generations. Such concerns were succinctly summarised in a report from the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee in 2014 which, drawing particular attention to young people, concluded that, '[D]emocracy is working less well than it used to and we need to move swiftly to pre-empt a crisis. The scale of the response must be equal to the task' (2014: 6). The advent of the global economic crisis at the end of the decade and the 2010 Coalition Government's programme of austerity hit young people particularly hard, and served to exacerbate their withdrawal from the electoral arena. High-profile policy U-turns such as the tripling of university tuition fees intensified young people's collective sense that the political class could not be trusted to champion their interests in Parliament.

But young people are not a homogenous group with a fixed and uniform view of democracy or of those who are elected to positions of political power. In this chapter we have observed that young people's political values and behaviours vary dramatically in terms of factors such as gender, ethnicity, social class and educational career. In particular, we have noticed that there is a specific group of young people – who are typically female, middle class and highly educated – who retain a strong commitment to postmaterialist priorities such as internationalism, environmentalism and social justice, and who are especially well-informed about, and critical of,

British politics. These results are supported by our analyses of the 2016 EU referendum and the 2017 General Election in Chaps. 4 and 5.

As we would expect from Inglehart's thesis, the relative weight of support for postmaterialist preferences declined over the course of the first decade of the new Millennium, reflecting the transition from a youth socialization context of relative economic prosperity to one of economic insecurity following the onset of the global financial crisis. Nonetheless, even under austerity conditions, many young people continue to display a strong attachment to postmaterialist concerns and broadly cosmopolitan-left values and politics.

Notes

1. The 2002 data were derived from a postal questionnaire survey while the 2012 study involved an online survey.
2. These trust questions were only asked in the 2011 study.

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CHAPTER 4

Young Cosmopolitans Against Brexit

The June 2016 referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union provided a major shock to the political establishment. The decision to leave the EU, by a margin of 52–48%, represented a rejection of what the vast majority of political and business elites considered to be in the country's best economic interests, in preference to returning sovereignty over political decision-making to the United Kingdom and reducing net migration. The *Leave* campaign was characterized by populist appeals to national identity and the (perceived) cultural threat posed by European integration. It also sought to capitalize on strong anti-establishment sentiment towards the British political elite.

These events must be viewed within the broader context of the rise of authoritarian-nationalist forms of populism: from the success of far-right parties in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Freedom Party in Austria, the Law and Justice party in Poland, and Fidesz in Hungary, to the election of Donald Trump in the United States. Some commentators in America branded Trump's victory a 'cultural backlash' against the liberal social values of the Obama administration (Gusterson 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2018). The decision, in the UK, to leave the European Union, can be seen as a product of these same forces. It was no surprise, therefore, that Marine Le Pen in France applauded the referendum result, or that US Presidential candidate Trump was keen to associate himself with Nigel Farage. In a triumphant address to a Trump rally in Jackson, Mississippi on 24 August

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2016, Farage encouraged American voters to take the opportunity to 'beat the pollsters… the commentators… and Washington'.

These authoritarian-nationalist movements and parties, including the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), were characterised by an *economic-cultural* paradox. On the one hand, a large amount of support for Brexit and UKIP was drawn from economically disadvantaged communities and social groups (Ford and Goodwin 2014). And, those who were well-off or had high levels of educational attainment were very likely to support British membership of the EU. On the other hand, the fault lines between *Remainers* and *Leavers* were clearest on cultural issues such as immigration and national sovereignty, and attitudes towards ethnic and cultural diversity.

The EU referendum result was, therefore, defined by socio-economic cleavages *and* cultural conflict. But the decision to leave the European Union was more nuanced than this would suggest. For a start, referenda are always partly a plebiscite on the popularity of the incumbent government. Second, internal cultural dynamics within the UK were also at play: including, the assertion of 'Englishness' (and its conflation with Euroscepticism through UKIP); the rise of the Scottish National Party (and its support for European integration); and, the relative acceptance of immigration and diversity across London. There were also clear asymmetries on how important 'Europe' was viewed as an issue – it was ranked very highly and relatively lowly by Leavers and Remainers, respectively.

Age was another key variable in determining whether an individual voted for Remain or Leave. As we show in this chapter, the differences between the views of younger and older citizens over the question of European integration were stark. With regard to age, our survey showed that the vast majority of young people – 69% of 18–30 year olds and 76% of 18–21 year olds – voted for the UK to remain in the EU. But why did they do so? Which groups of young people were most likely to support EU membership? And, to what extent does the young Remain vote correspond with the cosmopolitan-left group of Young Millennials identified in this book?

This chapter begins by discussing the linkages between authoritarian-nationalist forms of populism (and socialist-internationalist ideology) and Euroscepticism, and outlines pre-existing attitudes towards the European Union in the UK in comparison to other established European democracies. Afterwards, it examines youth engagement in the referendum

campaign, before underlining the influence of age and socio-economic status on the referendum result. Drawing upon data from a representative survey of 1,351 young adults (18–30 year olds),[1] the chapter provides a detailed examination of the demographic profile of young Remain voters and the issues and values that drove them to vote Remain.

Our findings reveal that young *Remainers* were characterized by *cosmopolitan-left* values and attitudes, as illustrated by their concerns for the economic consequences of a potential Brexit *and* by their strong support for cultural diversity. Despite their overwhelming backing for the establishment position in the referendum, these young people harboured high levels of antipathy towards the Conservative Government (and Prime Minister, David Cameron), as well as low levels of trust in politicians in general.

We claim that the EU referendum, whilst acting as a lightning rod for resurgent nationalism amongst many older and less well-off citizens, also led to the crystallization of a common sense of political identity amongst Young Millennials in reaction to the negative impact of austerity upon their lives and what was perceived as an economically costly and inward-looking Brexit vote. The increase in political activism amongst these younger voters provided a springboard for the surge in support for the Labour Party in the 2017 UK General Election (explored in Chap. 5).

Populism, Cosmopolitanism and the Question of Europe

Public attitudes towards the European Union have been strongly influenced by citizens' cultural values (their social liberalism or social conservatism), by their views on the role of markets and the state, and also by national perspectives on European integration.

In Chap. 2, we considered the rise of nationalism and populist politics in the United States and Europe. In Europe, this resurgence has the added dimension of fuelling scepticism towards the EU (Mudde 2016). The existing literature establishes a clear link between Euroscepticism and the populist right, manifesting itself around the issues of immigration and national sovereignty (Hobolt 2016). Several studies have also shown that previous national referendums on various questions of European integration have provided fertile ground for populist parties and social movements (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005).

Although cosmopolitan values and left-of-centre politics are sometimes associated with pro-European views, it would be wrong to assume that this is always the case. From a radical cosmopolitan perspective, the European Union has been accused of becoming *Fortress Europe* – for example, advocating freedom of movement internally, while at the same time closing the door to immigrants from the developing world (Rumford 2005). And, many on the left of the political spectrum have criticized the EU's support for free markets, deregulation and fiscal conservatism at the expense of social policies and state-run public services (Scharpf 2002). This was laid bare during the recent sovereign debt crisis when the imposition of austerity (through the European Stability Mechanism) was vehemently opposed by left-wing parties in debtor countries, including Syriza in Greece and PoDemos in Spain. These reservations also account for the lukewarm attitude of Jeremy Corbyn to European integration. During the referendum campaign, the Labour leader expressed himself as only seven out of ten in favour of an EU that, in his view, was not doing enough on human rights and social cohesion (BBC Online, 11 June 2016). Even so, there are important, qualitative differences between authoritarian-nationalist and cosmopolitan-left forms of Euroscepticism. The former is fixed upon returning *sovereignty* to 'nation states'. The latter aims to establish tighter social and economic controls at the EU level, and allow greater scope for state involvement in the economy and growth-oriented fiscal policy.

Hobolt (2016: 1260) explains that the Brexit vote also reflected 'a lack of economic opportunities and anger with the political class'. However, anti-establishment sentiment has been a prominent feature of *both* authoritarian-nationalist *and* cosmopolitan-left politics. In the wake of the financial crisis, a wave of protest gathered against corporate greed, neo-liberal policies, and a lack of social investment. This manifested itself in support for Occupy, the Spanish Indignados and in the emergence of new electoral challengers, such as Corbyn, Sanders and PoDemos, and also illustrated the preference of young cosmopolitan-left citizens for political outsiders. Anti-establishment sentiment certainly helped to drive the Leave vote amongst the general adult population. However, we present evidence to show that young Remainers were actually less trusting of mainstream politicians than young Leavers and the average young person.

The UK has experienced a troubled relationship with the European Community (EC), now the EU, from the very beginning of the integration

project: from its initial reluctance to join, to Margaret Thatcher's intransigence on Britain's budgetary contribution, to the political crisis over the Maastricht Treaty (forming the EU), to David Cameron's decision to pull the British Conservatives out of the centre-right European People's Party. Even pro-European Prime Minister Tony Blair, found it hard to gain support for European integration against the backdrop of a divided political establishment, a hostile media, and a sceptical public. According to Eurobarometer (European Commission 2017) data, the proportion of British citizens who thought that membership of the European Union was a good thing versus a bad thing was only +17 percentage points in 2006, compared to an average score of +49 across nine other established European democracies.[2]

This relative indifference or antipathy towards the EU was exacerbated both *directly* by a rapid increase in immigration from new member states after Eastern enlargement in 2004 and the reputational damage caused by the Eurozone crisis (Curtice 2017), and *indirectly* by the anger and frustration of European citizens with all layers of politics in the aftermath of the financial crisis. By 2011, the proportion of British citizens believing that EU membership was a good thing versus a bad thing had plummeted to a score of −6, compared to an average of +33 in nine other old member states (European Commission 2017).[3]

Nevertheless, younger citizens have tended to be more trusting of the EU: in 2014, 42% of 15–24 year olds across all member states trusted the EU compared to 31% of all citizens and 28% of over 65s (European Commission 2014). In the UK, the age differential has become particularly large. Despite rising levels of Euroscepticism within the general population, the mainstream media and political elites, young people have remained very supportive of British membership. Thus, youth (18–24 year olds') support for the UKIP at its highpoint in the 2015 General Election reached only 8%, compared to 13% of all adults and 17% of over 65s (Ipsos MORI 2015).

Youth Engagement in the EU Referendum

Young Britons' support for membership was not matched – initially at least – by high levels of interest in the referendum. As we shall see later in the chapter, Europe and the EU were not high-priority issues for young people compared to older citizens. Our YouGov survey revealed that only 39% of 18–24 year olds (and 31% of 18–30 year olds) found the campaign

interesting six weeks prior to the vote. Unsurprisingly, this figure was higher for those young people who identified themselves as intending to vote for Remain or Leave. The initial lack of interest in the referendum was mirrored by younger citizens' intention to vote or abstain: only 50% of 18–24 year olds and 56% of 26–30 year olds declared that they were certain to vote on 23 June 2016.

However, we should be cautious about this interpretation of the data. It may be that the low prioritization of Europe as an issue reflected satisfaction with the status quo; that for most young people, the EU was not a controversial issue. As we shall see, there is evidence to show that, as the race tightened and the debate heated up, the referendum 'stimulated the political interest of Britain's young people' (Fox and Pearce 2016). And, after the vote, young people became deeply concerned about the prospect of Brexit (Sloam 2018).

Another explanation for the low prioritization of Europe as an issue by (young) Remain supporters is their lack of knowledge about the EU and how it works. UK citizens are known to have low levels of knowledge about the EU when compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, and this lack of political knowledge is particularly pronounced amongst younger cohorts (Hix 2015).

The Conservative Government believed that it would win the referendum comfortably by focussing on the economic risks of leaving the EU and securing the backing of political and economic elites – from the main party leaders, to Alan Sugar, to Mark Carney, to Barack Obama. On the other hand, both the official Vote Leave campaign and the more extreme UKIP-led operation emphasized the 'threat' of immigration, which was linked to the need to 'take back control' from Brussels and halt payments to the EU budget. Curtice (2017) demonstrates that both the Remain argument on the economy and the Leave argument on immigration were broadly accepted by public opinion. The crux of the matter was, therefore, which of these issues were perceived as being more important. As we demonstrate further on in the chapter, young people perceived the economy as far more important than immigration (in sharp contrast to citizens over 65 years of age).

The Vote Remain and Vote Leave campaigns were characterized by posters and slogans that highlighted these *winning issues*. Vote Remain posters read: 'For Every £1 We Put Into the EU We Get Almost £10 back' (through trade, investment, jobs, growth and low prices); 'Britain Out of Europe, Your Family Out of Pocket'; and, '3 Million UK Jobs are Linked

to Our Trade With the EU'. These messages appealed to young people's concerns about the negative economic consequences of Brexit, but little else. Less well advertised issues included the assertion that 'EU Laws Protect Women's Rights'.

The Vote Leave campaign opted for: 'Turkey (population 76 million) is Joining the EU', and 'Let's Give the NHS the £350 Million the EU Takes Every Week'. These claims were flanked by UKIP's infamous 'Breaking Point' poster with an image of a queue of immigrants at a border crossing and another which implied that schools were being 'over-run' by immigrants. These messages were most likely to appeal to older, less well-off, and less highly-educated social groups.

The simple, emotional appeals adopted by the Leave campaigns aroused greater passion than the economic and pragmatic arguments of the Remain camp. Vote Leave was, thus, able to dominate coverage in the (sympathetic) mainstream media. But the Leave campaign's dominance of social media was surprising. Even though most social media have a young, socially liberal demographic (that was very likely to vote Remain), 'the campaign to leave had routinely outmuscled its rival, with more vocal and active supporters across almost all social media platforms' (Polonski 2016).

Although our cosmopolitan-left group of young people distrusted and opposed the economic policies of the Cameron Government that fronted the Remain campaign, it is easy to see how the Leave campaign's use of nationalist and xenophobic tropes provoked the counter-mobilization of this group of socially liberal young people during and beyond the referendum.

The Role of Age and Social Status in the EU Referendum

Figure 4.1 shows the results of YouGov and Lord Ashcroft polls conducted on the day after the referendum (excluding those who said that they did not turn out to vote).[4] It shows that young people (18–30 year olds) were by far the most likely of any age group to support British membership of the EU. Nearly 7 in 10 (69%) of this cohort claimed to have voted Remain, compared to 51% of all adults,[5] and 36% of over 65s. Social class was also very important in determining voter choice: 59% of citizens with a higher than average social grade (ABC1) wanted to remain in the EU in contrast to 39% of those with a lower than average social grade

(C2DE voters). The results were even more striking with regard to levels of educational attainment. A very large majority (71%) of those with a university degree wanted Britain to stay in the Union, compared to just 34% of those with GCSEs or lower. A large majority of ethnic minority citizens (68%) voted in favour of Remain. And, there was also a regional dimension to the vote: Londoners (62%) and Scots (59%) both opted decisively for Remain (as did many large cities, including Manchester, Liverpool and Bristol). For adults of all ages, gender did not seem to be a major factor in influencing voter choice – although women were slightly more likely to report having voted to remain in the EU (by 52–48%), while men were marginally more likely to vote to leave (by 51–49%).

A great deal of research has been carried out on voting patterns in the EU referendum. These studies depict those who voted Leave as the 'losers of globalization' or the 'left behind', who are most likely to be over 50, male, working class, and have low levels of educational attainment (Goodwin and Heath 2016; Hobolt 2016; Jennings and Stoker 2016; Clarke et al. 2017). This can be contrasted with Remain voters, who have been characterized as 'winners of globalization', who are most likely to be young, female and highly educated. We emphasize the fact that there was also a strong cultural component to the referendum vote based on issues of regional identity and attitudes towards cultural diversity and immigration.

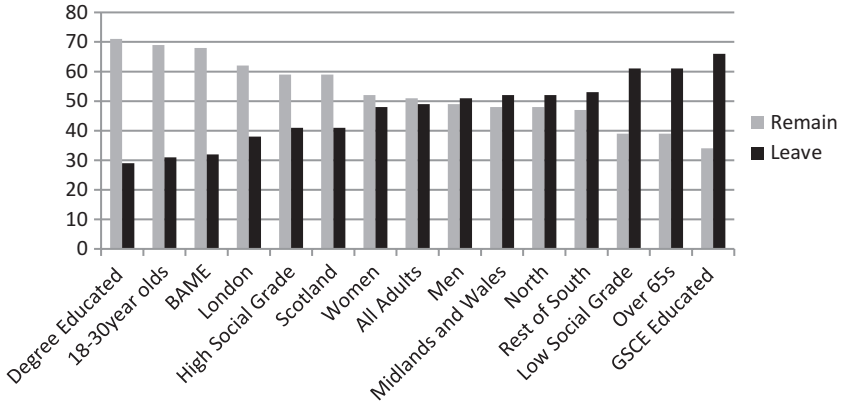

Fig. 4.1 Support for 'remain' and 'leave' in EU referendum by social group (excluding 'don't knows' and 'won't votes') (%). (Sources: YouGov 2016, Lord Ashcroft Polls 2016. YouGov $N = 1351$; Lord Ashcroft $N = 12{,}369$)

The existing literature has much to say about the importance of intergenerational differences in voting patterns but has little to say on intragenerational voter choice. This is important for young people, because youth political participation does not always reflect patterns of participation in the country as a whole. For instance, we show that young women were much more likely to vote Remain than young men, even though gender did not seem to influence voter choice amongst adults of all ages. The following section identifies more precisely the characteristics of those young Remainers, who were so diametrically opposed to the cultural politics of older generations.

Young Remainers as Young Cosmopolitans

In this section, we explore the role that demographic factors, identities, values, policy preferences and trust in politicians played in shaping the youth vote in the EU referendum focussing on those groups of Young Millennials that were more likely to vote Remain than the average young person.

Figure 4.2 displays the results for groups of young people voting Remain across a range of social and demographic measures. Supporting the conclusions of the post-referendum studies, we found that education was very strongly associated with voting Remain, with 82% of full-time students claiming that they did so.[6] Our own qualitative research suggests that this might be explained by the fact that full-time students were more

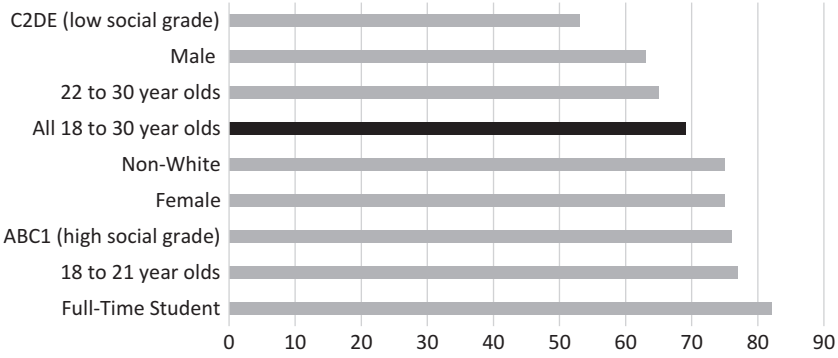

Fig. 4.2 Support for 'remain' amongst sub-groups of 18–30 year olds (excluding 'dont knows' & 'won't votes') (%). (Source: YouGov 2016. *N* = 1,351)

exposed to the campaign in colleges and on campuses (Sloam 2018). Being of a higher social grade (ABC1) was also associated with voting Remain – 76% of this group voted remain – but less so than being in education.

The findings regarding education and social grade lend support to the *winners and losers of globalisation* thesis. Younger people who were better off and possessed higher levels of educational attainment, were more supportive of EU membership – developing an image of the well-educated, economically successful Remain voter. Younger citizens who had lower levels of educational attainment, or who fell into the C2DE social category, were much more evenly split between Remain and Leave.

The socio-demographic results also revealed clear differences on the basis of age, gender and ethnicity. It was immediately apparent that, within our sample of young people, the very youngest group – 18–21 year olds – were more likely to support British membership of the EU than 22–30 year olds by 77–66%. To a large extent, this reflects the fact that 18–21 year olds are much more likely than 22–30 year olds to be in full-time education.

Young women were also more likely to vote Remain than their male counterparts by 75–63%. This latter finding correlates with the rate of young, female support for Corbyn's Labour Party in the 2017 General Election (see Chap. 5), demonstrating the ongoing existence of a female cosmopolitan-left political grouping. Ethnicity also played a role in determining voter choice. In spite of the fact that they were, as a group, less well-off and less highly-educated than their white counterparts, 75% of young ethnic minorities voted Remain. One explanation for this high score is that the negative portrayal of immigrants in the Leave campaign persuaded young ethnic minority citizens to vote Remain. Although the results for young women and minority groups do not confound the left behind thesis, they suggest that other, political and cultural factors were also at work.

With respect to identity and values, those who saw themselves primarily as British or Scottish were more likely to vote Remain than the average young person – by 74% and 75% to 69%, respectively (Fig. 4.3, below). Both primary English and Welsh identity were associated with a lower likelihood of voting Remain. The case of Scottish identity defies resource-based explanations of the EU referendum. In purely geographical terms, our poll recorded that 83% of young people living in Scotland favoured EU

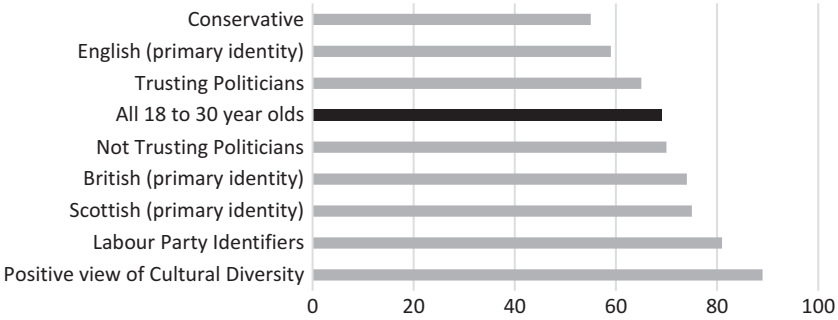

Fig. 4.3 Support for 'remain' amongst 18–30 year olds by values, identity, party allegiance and trust (excluding 'dont knows' & 'won't votes') (%). (Source: YouGov 2016. *N* = 1,351)

membership (compared to just 64% of 18–30 year olds from Wales and the Midlands). Other research has shown that a cosmopolitan, outward-looking sense of identity is also related to the urban-rural divide (Jennings and Stoker 2016). Even taking into account socio-economic status, city dwellers tend to have more positive views regarding cultural diversity and the European Union.

When it came to party identification, an overwhelming 81% of young Labour Party identifiers claimed that they would vote Remain (compared to the almost unanimous 94% of young Liberal Democrat identifiers). This provides further evidence of the linkages between voting Remain in 2016 and Labour in 2017. Young Conservative Party identifiers were marginally in favour of British membership of the European Union (55%), but significantly less likely to vote Remain than the average young person. So, support for an opposition party (Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green or SNP – though not, of course, UKIP) actually made it more likely that a young person would side with the official Government position in the referendum. In essence, young people voted for continued membership of the EU *despite* their opposition to the Government of the day.

On the subject of cultural diversity, those who responded positively to the question 'Do you think that having a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures is a positive or negative part of modern Britain?' were overwhelmingly supportive of membership of the EU. In fact, this issue was more strongly associated with voting Remain than any other demographic, value

or identity variable that we tested (with the exception of the small number of Liberal Democrat identifiers and the tiny proportion of those who saw themselves primarily as 'European'). A huge majority (89%) of young Remainers answered positively to this question. This paints a picture of young Remain voters as postmaterialist, cosmopolitan liberals, who were at ease with cultural heterogeneity.

Figure 4.4 compares various policy issues that were considered important by young Remain voters, young Leave voters and young people in general. Young Remainers believed that the most important issues facing the country were (in order) healthcare, the economy, housing, education, Europe, the environment, immigration and asylum, and defence and terrorism. Whilst material, economic issues were placed firmly at the top of young Remainers' policy agendas, they were closely followed by international and postmaterialist policy items associated with the cosmopolitan-left. Young Remainers were predominantly in favour of increased public spending on the NHS and education, greater state intervention in the housing market, retaining membership of the European Union, and more action to protect the environment. Immigration and security issues, associated with authoritarian-nationalist sentiment, were considered to be least important by young Remainers. The largest gaps between Remain and Leave were to be found on immigration and asylum (−44 percentage points), education (+22), health (+21), and the environment (+18).

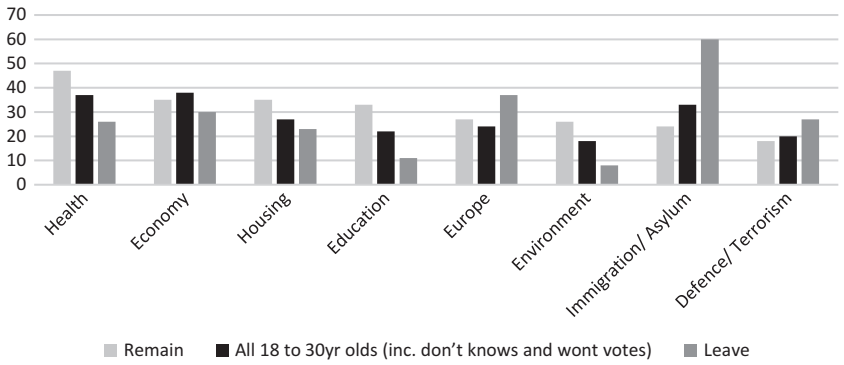

Fig. 4.4 Most important issues facing the country for all 18–30 year olds and by support for 'remain' and 'leave' (%). (Source: YouGov 2016. *N* = 1,351)

We found, earlier in the chapter, that young Leavers were more interested in the EU referendum than young Remainers. Figure 4.4 reveals that young Leavers also placed the question of Europe higher up on their list of political priorities for the UK. More than a third (37%) of those young people who supported Brexit believed it was one of the most important issues facing the country (second only to immigration), compared with 27% of those who supported British membership of the EU and 24% of all 18–30 year olds. Again, we would argue that this illustrates the relative contentment of young Remainers with the status quo.

Although voting Remain was the establishment choice (advocated by all the major parties with the exception of UKIP), we found that it was actually young Remain voters who were least likely to trust politicians. Figure 4.5 shows that young Remainers had a net trust score of −28 percentage points (those who trusted politicians a fair amount or a great deal minus those who had no trust at all in politicians), marginally below that of the average young person (−26) and young Leavers (−23). This lack of political trust, nevertheless, came hand-in-hand with greater social trust (something one would expect of a more prosperous, highly-educated group). A large majority (61%) of young Remain supporters trusted their fellow young people compared to 47% of those that favoured Leave. This last result suggests that young Leavers may have bought into the narrative of a 'broken Britain' – a country that was being undermined by "others" through immigration and multiculturalism.

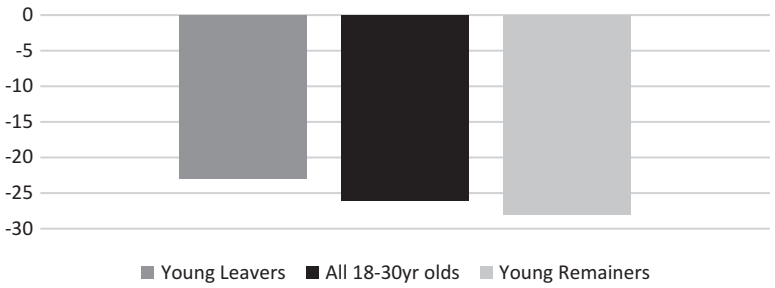

Fig. 4.5 Net trust of young people, young remainers and young leavers in politicians ('fair amount' and 'great deal' minus 'not at all'). (Source: YouGov 2016. *N* = 1,351)

Young People Politically Energised by Brexit

In the opening chapters, we explained how young people have increasingly been drawn to issue-based forms of political engagement – to causes that have a tangible meaning for their everyday lives. In this regard, the European Union initially appeared to many young people as a rather remote and abstract issue, which was much less important than pressing economic concerns regarding jobs, housing and healthcare.

We have already demonstrated that youth political interest in the referendum was very low despite the large amount of media coverage devoted to the EU before and after the 2015 General Election, through David Cameron's efforts to re-negotiate Britain's relationship with the European Union, to the start of the campaign proper. We have also alluded to the lack of self-proclaimed political knowledge amongst UK citizens, which was particularly the case for young people. In our survey, only 50% of 18–30 year olds claimed to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about the European Union and what it does. It is worth noting that levels of interest and knowledge were much lower amongst young women (who are more likely to be young cosmopolitan-left Remainers) than amongst young men. Only 39% of young women claimed to be knowledgeable about the EU.

These findings are supported by our qualitative analysis of '#Votebecause', an initiative to engage higher education students in the referendum, that took place across several university campuses during the campaign period (Sloam 2018). Through our student interviews and ethnographic observations of student behaviour, it became abundantly clear that Europe was not seen as a controversial subject. Since nine out of ten student interviewees in our sample were in favour of the status quo, it was hard to generate the sense of urgency witnessed on the Leave side.

However, we also witnessed that students became increasingly engaged as a result of the initiative and through their exposure to the campaign around campus (for example, through debates and lectures about the EU and the referendum), on TV, via online news feeds, and through their own social networks. Our analysis identified the key role of discussion and deliberation during the campaign. One student volunteer summed up how this worked with regard to #Votebecause: it encouraged 'people to tell you what they think… they just really open up about it. And, after doing the questionnaire, they were more engaged in what the campaign was about, and why we were asking the questions.' (Key Informant, male, aged 18).

In the end, youth voter turnout in the referendum was reported to be far higher than in the general election one year earlier. According to Ipsos MORI (2016) and British Social Attitudes (Curtice and Simpson 2018) data, the turnout of 18–24 year olds was 53% and 66%, respectively – an estimated 14 and 10 percentage points higher than at the 2015 General Election. We designed a survey before the 2017 General Election, which asked young people and adults of all ages how closely they were following the election and their views on Brexit.[7] A huge majority (81%) of 18–24 year olds in our sample claimed that they were following the general election closely, compared to an average of 80% for all age groups (and only topped by the interest of the over-65 age group). Moreover, 88% of 18–24 year olds stated that they were following Brexit negotiations closely – more than any other age group. So, young people were energised both by the EU referendum and in reaction to the referendum result.

Summary

The European Union referendum provided a unique test of British public opinion. On the one hand, young people were overwhelmingly in favour of the UK remaining in the EU – around three quarters of 18–24 year olds (and 70% of 18–30 year olds) voted Remain. On the other hand, the Remain campaign was championed by a Government and political establishment that was deeply unpopular amongst younger citizens. In this context, this chapter has attempted to draw the contours of a *cosmopolitan-left* group of citizens in the UK, characterized by young Remainers, which reflects a broader trend in youth political engagement across many established democracies.

From the findings, we are able to develop a profile of the typical young person who voted Remain in June 2016. The conventional socio-demographic characteristics most strongly associated with voting Remain were *being highly-educated* (and *being a full-time student*) and being of a higher (ABC1) social grade. In this regard, the chapter lends support to the *winners* and *losers of globalisation* thesis. Young people who were of a higher socio-economic status, were more likely to support continued EU membership. Having a lower level of educational attainment or being of a lower social grade (C2DE) was (as expected) associated with voting Leave. However, the above average support of young women, young ethnic minorities, young Scots and young city dwellers for Remain demonstrates that the left behind thesis can only explain part of the picture.

Young, well-educated, politically engaged individuals could be considered to be both winners and losers of globalisation. Whilst emphasizing the growing gap between the super-rich and everyone else, these young cosmopolitans tend to hold postmaterialist concerns over issues such as the environment and embrace the cultural diversity which defines their societies. These young people are the very antithesis of the contemporary wave of authoritarian-nationalist populism that has captured so much media attention. Conversely, the small proportion of young people who prioritised the issue of immigration, asylum, national defence and terrorism were much more likely to belong to the 30% of 18–30 year olds who voted for Brexit.

Contrary to expectations, young Remain voters were less likely to trust politicians than young Leavers. This defies much of the political commentary, which identified anti-establishment sentiment and a lack of trust in conventional politics as major drivers of the Brexit vote. Despite their relative lack of trust in the political class that led the campaign for continued EU membership, these voters opted for Remain. In fact, the demographic and attitudinal profile of Britain's young Remainers resembles that of social movement participants, such as those who supported Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish Indignados, whose momentum was converted into strong electoral performances for PoDemos in Spain and Bernie Sanders in US. In the UK, young cosmopolitan-left citizens were galvanized by the referendum into a coherent political force that – as we explain in Chap. 5 – was harnessed by the Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn, at the 2017 General Election.

Notes

1. The survey was designed by the authors, commissioned by Hope Not Hate and Bite the Ballot from YouGov, and fielded between 6 and 13 May 2016. It provided a representative sample of 18–30 year olds with regard to age, gender, geographical location (excluding Northern Ireland), ethnicity and occupational status.
2. The large, established democracies referred to here are Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.
3. It should be noted that public perceptions of the EU as 'a good thing' have diverged dramatically since the financial crisis, between those countries that were worst affected (the average score in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy fell to +20 in 2011) and the rest (the average score remained stable at +42 in the other five countries).

4. In Fig. 4.1., YouGov statistics were used for all groups except BAME citizens.
5. This survey estimate compares with the actual result, where 48% of UK voters supported Remain.
6. In this chapter we focus on 'being in education' rather than 'educational attainment' amongst 18–30 year olds, given the fact that those with high levels of educational attainment (university degrees) are an older sub-set within this sample (and differences in this age within this cohort are relatively large).
7. We designed a Populus poll (commissioned by Freud and Bite the Ballot) that was fielded from 10 May to 11 May 2017. The sample was comprised of 2,007 UK citizens, including 218 18–24 year olds.

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CHAPTER 5

Youthquake: Young People and the 2017 General Election

In Chap. 3, we highlighted the persistence of postmaterialist values in a hostile economic environment, which has led to the emergence of a cosmopolitan-left group of young people as a political force in the UK. In Chap. 4, we explained how this manifested itself in youth engagement in the referendum – in favour of British membership of the European Union. Here, we argue that the impact of the financial crisis and austerity politics, the continued existence of postmaterialist values and an increase in cultural conflict, the galvanizing effect of the EU referendum, and the anti-establishment credentials of the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn, combined to set off a *youthquake* in political participation at the 2017 General Election.

When Theresa May called a general election on 18 April 2017, the result was seen by many as a foregone conclusion. The polls predicted an emphatic victory for the Conservative Party, which would strengthen the Prime Minister's hand in the wake of the 2016 EU referendum vote for Brexit. In February 2017, an Ipsos MORI (2017a) poll recorded a 37–31% advantage for the Conservatives over Labour, and May enjoyed a +17 net satisfaction rating compared to −38 for Jeremy Corbyn. Interestingly, given the surge in youth support for the Labour Party, there was no significant difference in young adults' (18–24 year olds) satisfaction with the two leaders at this point in time: +2 for May, and +3 for Corbyn. This

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highlights the dramatic upturn in fortunes for Corbyn and the Labour Party during the campaign period.

The election result was a surprise. The Conservative Party improved its share of the vote to 42% (up 5.5 points from 2015), but the Labour Party increased its share of the vote to 40% (up 9.6 points from 2015). This led to a loss for the Conservatives of 13 seats in Parliament, forcing it into a fragile coalition with the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland. We argue that principal driving forces behind the result included the increase in youth engagement and activism during the campaign and the vote, as well as the switch in youth support to the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn as standard-bearers for cosmopolitan-left sentiment.

With regard to political interest, it is important to reiterate the fact that young people were relatively engaged in politics prior to the 2017 General Election (compared to the general election two years earlier). Although turnout estimates vary, it is generally accepted that a considerably larger proportion of 18–24 year olds had voted in the 2016 EU referendum than in the 2015 General Election (Bruter 2016). At the end of the previous chapter, we also reported the results of our 2017 Populus Poll that 81% of 18–24 year olds claimed to be following the election campaign closely (as much as the adult population as a whole).[1]

Ipsos MORI (2017b) and YouGov (2017a) estimated increases in youth turnout in 2017 of 15 percentage points and 16 percentage points, to 54% and 59% respectively. The Essex Continuous Monitoring Survey (Whiteley and Clarke 2017) estimated an increase of around 20 points. Although these figures have (in our view, unjustly) been challenged by a *British Election Study* report (Prosser et al. 2018), it is clear that 18–24 year olds voted at rates not seen since the early 1990s (Curtice and Simpson 2018). Given the weakening of party allegiances and decline in party membership over several decades, and the low levels of trust in politicians and political parties, the increase in youth turnout rates in 2017 was a seismic event.

The election also revealed a stark intergenerational divide in voter choice – so much so that YouGov (2017a) pronounced that age had replaced class as 'the new dividing line in British politics'. The gap in support for the two main parties amongst 18–24 year olds – 35 percentage points – was unprecedented in size. Nearly two thirds (62%) of this cohort voted Labour and only 27% voted Conservative, compared to 61% of over 65s who voted Conservative and just 25% who voted Labour (Ipsos MORI 2017b). Labour enjoyed a majority over the Conservative Party in

every age group under 45. The highest levels of support came from young women (73%), and young people of a low social grade (70%). The Labour Party also garnered the support of a large majority of Black and Minority Ethnic voters (73%), who have a younger age profile than the majority white population.[2]

Chapter 5 begins with an analysis of the 2017 UK General Election campaign. It examines young people's consumption of political news, as well as the extent to which the main political parties sought to appeal to younger citizens through their manifestos and communication strategies. We pay particular attention to efforts to appeal to young people through social media. Afterwards, we investigate the nature of youth turnout in 2017, and provide evidence to support the conclusion that there was a surge in youth participation. The next section explores the spectacular increase in youth support for the Labour Party in more detail, studying the intergenerational and intragenerational aspects of this sea-change in voter choice. Finally, we turn to the policy dimension of the election – identifying the key issues that were prioritised by younger citizens. Here, we illustrate the similarities between young Labour voters and those young people who voted Remain in the EU referendum.

Political Parties and the Mobilization of Young Voters

Election manifestos provide a unique insight into the electoral strategies and demographic target groups of political parties (Laver and Garry 2000). In 2017, it was clear from the outset that the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party made a concerted effort to engage with younger members of the electorate. The Labour Party (2017) manifesto articulated a vision for improving living standards through a number of key policy proposals. They included addressing the increasingly unaffordable costs of housing (for instance, through the introduction of rent controls for the private sector), reversing the abolition of housing benefit for 18–21 year olds, the abolition of university tuition fees, and the banning of zero-hour contracts.[3] The manifesto devoted 426 words (1.77% of its 24,019 word manifesto to specific pledges to young people, compared to just 88 words (or 0.29%) of the 2001 document (see Chap. 3). The Labour Party had taken tentative steps to addressing youth issues in the run-up to the 2015 General Election – promising to get rid of most unpaid

apprenticeships, abolish zero-hour contracts, deliver votes at 16, and reduce university tuition fees to £6,000 – but they did not play as central a role in the actual campaign.

The Liberal Democrats (2017) tied the future well-being of young people to the country's uncertain future surrounding Brexit and its relationship with the European Union. The Liberal Democrat manifesto also pledged to spend more on young people's mental health, to promote environmental protection, and to reverse housing benefit cuts for 18–21 year olds. However, other than on the subject of housing benefits, the Liberal Democrat manifesto remained vague on the details of its youth-oriented policies, providing only 54 words (0.233% of the document) – regarding retaining opportunities for young people to work, study and travel abroad – that were specifically dedicated to younger citizens. The Green Party's (2017) bespoke 'youth manifesto' promised to restore the Educational Maintenance Allowance, reinstate housing benefits for those aged under 21, scrap university tuition fees, tackle the nation's 'housing crisis' and protect the environment.[4] Despite making a pitch for the youth vote, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens were ultimately matched in the Labour Party's '*For The Many, Not The Few*' manifesto. Thus, the appeal of the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn to younger voters resulted in a lack of progress for the Liberal Democrat Party (preventing any rebound after the disintegration of their support amongst young people in 2015) and the Greens. For the Liberal Democrats, we would argue that the relative appeal (to young people) of their continued support of EU membership was effectively cancelled out by their perceived lack of credibility on issues such as public services, higher education, and austerity more generally (given their participation in the 2010–2015 Coalition Government).

The Conservative Party's (2017) prescriptions for young people were largely a restatement of existing policies, such as efforts to boost youth employment and apprenticeships. The manifesto only devoted 45 words (0.147%) to youth-oriented policies, referring only to 200,000 apprenticeship places already created, and a commitment to intergenerational justice through reforms to payments for social care for the elderly. There was hardly any direct engagement with the key youth issues mentioned above. The strategy was, instead, geared towards attracting older, Leave supporters, many of whom had voted for UKIP in 2015. And, in this aim, the party was very successful. As a consequence, the Conservative Party's efforts to improve intergenerational inequalities through the increased use

of means-testing of social care for the elderly – derided in the media as the 'dementia tax' – and the removal of the 'triple lock' on pensions were not articulated as policies that would benefit young people (even though they appeared to have the potential to re-balance resources in favour of younger citizens).[5] And, in the face of internal resistance and opposition from older voters and traditional allies in the media, the so-called dementia tax was jettisoned during the heat of the campaign. The Conservative Party's lack of focus on youth affairs was not inevitable. In 2015, the party addressed young people more directly through policies such as the help-to-buy scheme for young first-time buyers.

Labour's manifesto policy pledges managed to achieve two crucial objectives when it came to young people. They made the Conservatives appear out-of-touch with their main grievances and concerns, and they prevented the party from being outgunned by other progressive parties on youth issues. The Labour Party adopted policies that had clear appeal to younger voters: from university tuition fees, to the proposed public investment in social housing. And, since young people viewed healthcare as the most important issue facing the country, Labour's historic ownership of public services issues and Jeremy Corbyn's passionate anti-privatisation stance on the NHS also placed the party at a major advantage amongst this demographic.

Labour's success in attracting younger voters during the campaign was underlined by its increasing support in the opinion polls. Only four months before the 2017 General Election, the Labour Party's lead over the Conservatives amongst 18–24 year olds was only 41–23% (18 points) (Ipsos MORI 2017a), compared to 35 points in the actual result. And, for around a quarter of Labour supporters (of all ages) the party's manifesto as the most important reason for voting Labour (YouGov 2017b). This was not the case for older Labour supporters.

We know, therefore, that the Labour manifesto was successful in appealing to younger voters. But what role did their communications strategy play in reaching out to this demographic group? In our Populus poll, we explored how younger citizens consumed news about the election. It is well known that young people are increasingly using online and social media sources to gather news about politics, and to share this news and their own opinions with other young people. But the extent of the intergenerational differences was unexpected. We found that online news was the most popular source of information for young people: over half (56%) of 18–24 year olds consumed news through sources such as BBC Online

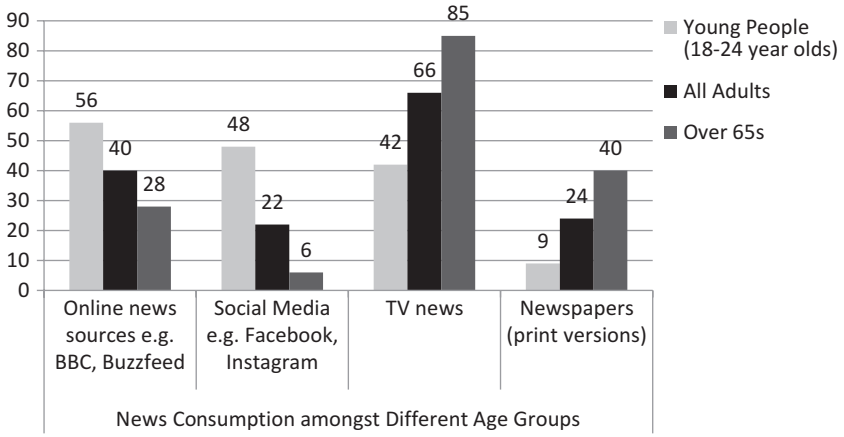

Fig. 5.1 News consumption during the 2017 UK General Election across age cohorts (%). (Source: Sloam and Ehsan 2017. $N = 2{,}007$)

or Buzzfeed, compared to 40% of all age groups, and 28% of over 65s (Fig. 5.1). Social media was the second most common way of gathering political news for nearly half (48%) of young people, compared to 22% of all age groups, and 6% of over 65s. TV news continues to be a common source of information, but this is much less the case for Young Millennials: 48% of 18–24 year olds watched TV news, compared to 66% of all age groups, and 85% of over 65s. Finally, it is now quite rare for young people to read the print versions of newspapers: only 9% of 18–24 year olds, compared to 24% of all age groups, and 40% of over 65s.

It is, therefore, clear that traditional forms of political communication are less likely to appeal to, or be heard by, younger voters. The continuing rise of new styles and methods of political communication and news consumption had important implications for political parties and their campaign strategies in 2017.

The Labour Party was more effective at communicating its messages to younger voters in 2017. We might have expected Labour to dominate in the digital sphere, given the young, left-leaning profile of social media users. But, as we explained in the previous chapter, it was actually the Leave campaigns that dominated this sphere during the referendum campaign in 2016. Boosted by his celebrity endorsements and the emergence of left-leaning, online news platforms such as The Canary, Jeremy Corbyn

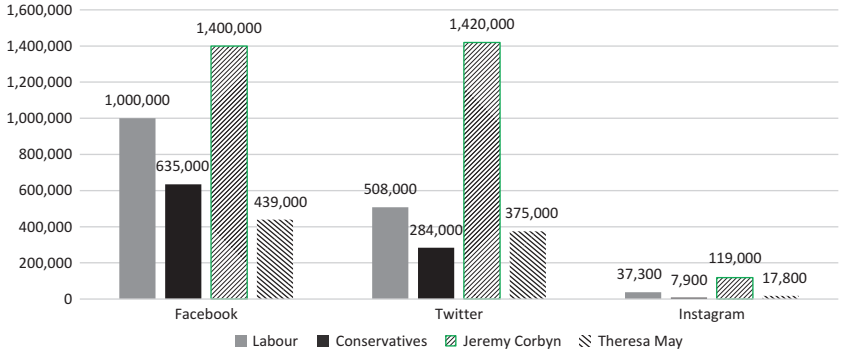

Fig. 5.2 Social media following of Labour, Conservative, Jeremy Corbyn, Theresa May during the 2017 UK General Election campaign. (Source: Sloam and Ehsan 2017)

achieved about three times as many Facebook likes (1.4 million) and Twitter followers (1.42 million) as Theresa May (Fig. 5.2). Moreover, Corbyn, unlike May, was more popular than his party (by 400,000 Facebook likes and almost a million Twitter followers). This was made possible by Corbyn's personal appeal to young Labour supporters. A quarter (24%) of young Labour supporters (compared to only 10% of Labour supporters aged over 25) cited his leadership as their main reason for voting for the party (YouGov 2017b). Conversely, Theresa May's leadership was cited by just 4% of young party supporters (and 5% of those over 25) as their main reason for voting Conservative.

The Labour social media strategy – pioneered during Corbyn's party leadership bid by the grass-roots campaign group, Momentum – provided an effective means of reaching out to younger voters through attractive, interactive content (Fletcher 2017; Lilleker 2017; Pickard 2018). Subsequent Buzzfeed analysis found that only one of the top twenty "liked" election stories on Facebook was negative about Labour or Corbyn (Waterson 2017). The top two stories were 'How many of Jeremy Corbyn's Policies do You Actually Disagree With?' and 'A Guide to Anti-Conservative Tactical Voting'.

Momentum utilised cutting-edge knowledge of political mobilization – some of this learnt from the Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic Party Nomination for the US presidency in 2016, including through the direct involvement of Sanders activists (BBC, 7 August, 2017) – to engage with young people. One example was the use of texts rather than emails to

mobilise voters. Momentum claimed that it had contacted an estimated 400,000 people through WhatsApp, the messaging service, on election day. This emphasizes the fact that the Momentum and the Labour campaign strategies involved a combination of both online and offline engagement, including online contacts and information sharing alongside offline meetups or activism. The existing literature shows that online interactions are most effective when coupled with engagement in the real world (Chadwick 2017).

Labour's ability to appeal to younger voters was in large part enabled by the structural changes to the party that had been put in place under the leadership of Ed Miliband (2010–2015). The Miliband team, through their '*Refounding Labour: A Party for the New Generation*' reform programme explicitly sought to appeal to new, younger members. These reforms and the entry into the party of new £3 'registered supporters' swelled the membership, and encouraged the 'horizontal social movement' style of mobilisation (attractive to younger citizens) utilized by Momentum in the 2015 Corbyn leadership bid and the 2017 General Election (Pickard 2018). With regard to communicating Labour's message to young voters, Corbyn proved to be an adept performer both in person and through social media. The perception of the Labour leader as *authentic* and *principled* allowed him to tap into social networks, and channels of communication not open to other leaders. Which other politician (in 2017 or in earlier decades) would have been greeted with cheers at the Glastonbury music festival or could have drawn support from the *Grime* music scene? The brave decision of Corbyn and his campaign team to appear at Glastonbury also demonstrated that actively courting the youth vote had become a central plank of Labour's election strategy.

In 2015, Ed Miliband had attempted to engage more actively (than previous Labour leaders) with a younger audience – notably through his broadcast interview and discussion with actor and comedian, Russell Brand – but lacked the ability to connect with younger voters when compared to his successor. It should nevertheless be noted that Corbyn's efforts to appeal to young people, whilst addressing youth issues, also contained elements of a populist appeal to emotions and simplistic notions of 'right' and 'wrong' and 'them' (political and economic elites) and 'us' (Flinders 2018). This was something that Miliband, with his more intellectual brand of social democracy could never have achieved.

Turning Out

We explained in the introduction and Chap. 2 how youth participation in elections in the UK declined dramatically after the late 1990s, falling to the lowest levels in Western Europe – an average of around 20 percentage points below the turnout rate for 18–24 year olds in France, 30 percentage points below Germany, and over 40 points below Sweden.

In 2017, the situation changed radically. According to Ipsos MORI (2017b) data, the participation of 18–24 year olds rose 15 percentage points to 54% – from 39% in 2015 and a low of 37% in 2005 (Fig. 5.3). Although, as we will discuss later in the chapter, there was some controversy over the youth turnout figures, there is general agreement – as argued in the British Social Attitudes study – that youth turnout had returned to the levels of the early 1990s (Curtice and Simpson 2018). Ipsos MORI data (2017b) suggest that 2017 witnessed a youth surge rather than a general increase in electoral participation. Figure 5.3 shows that the increase in turnout was confined to younger cohorts – 18–24 year olds and 25–34 year olds. By contrast, electoral participation in all other

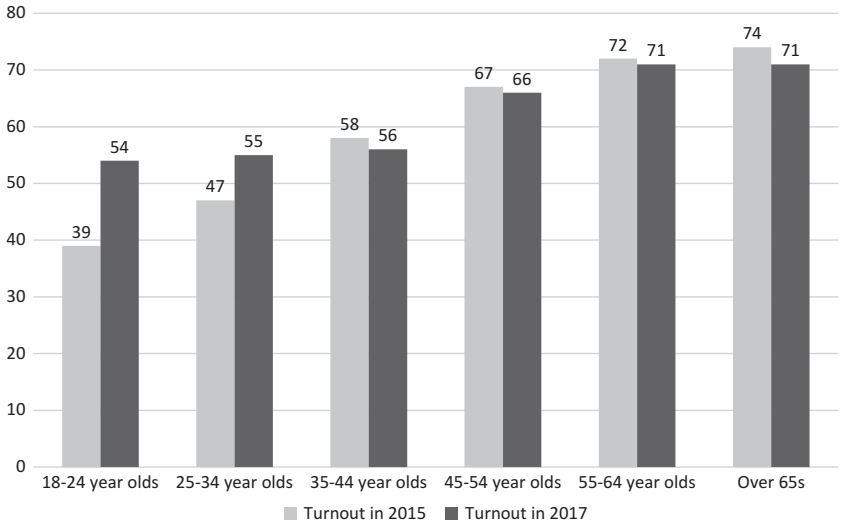

Fig. 5.3 Voter turnout by age group in 2015 and 2017 (%). (Source: Ipsos MORI 2017b and Sloam et al. 2018. $N = 7{,}505$ (5,255 classified as voters))

age groups showed no significant change. So, the difference between the estimated participation of 18–24 year olds and the estimated participation of all citizens shrank from 22 points in 2015 to 9 points in 2017. And, the ratio of participation (of younger to older voters) returned to a similar level to those found in other established democracies (Fig. 1.2, Chap. 1). Youth turnout in 2017 remained 17 percentage points below the turnout rates for over 55s, but is almost identical to the rate of participation for those aged 25–44 and 35–44.

It should not be forgotten that there are some important intra-generational differences in voting patterns. Socio-economic status had a major bearing on levels of electoral participation amongst Young Millennials. Youth turnout was dependent upon a young person's social grade and educational status (Fig. 5.4). A large majority (61%) of 18–34 year olds of a high social grade (AB) and 64% of 18–34 year olds of an above average social grade (C1) voted, compared to only 49% of 18–34 year olds of a below average social grade (C2) and just 35% of those of a low social grade (DE). As expected, full-time students (67%) were also

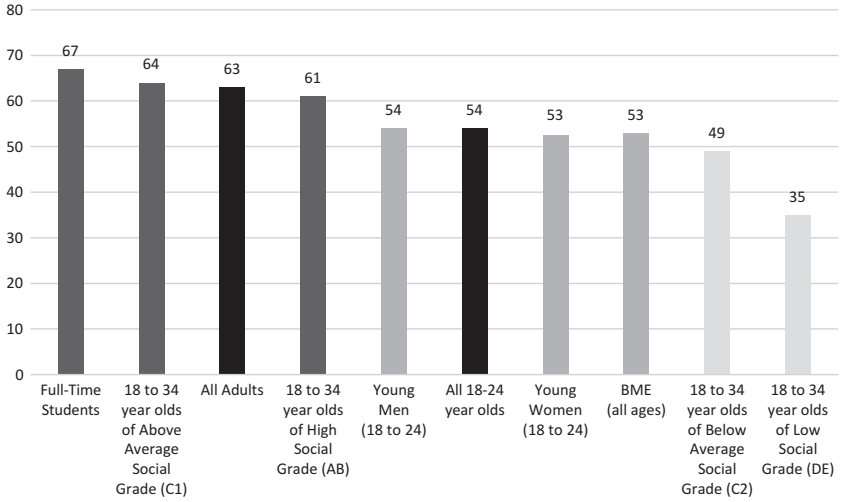

Fig. 5.4 Turnout (estimated) of groups of young people in the 2017 UK General Election (%). (Source: Ipsos MORI 2017b and YouGov 2017a. $N = 7{,}505$ (Ipsos Mori), $N = 52{,}615$ (YouGov))

much more likely (by 13 percentage points) to turn out to vote than the average young person. Black minority ethnic citizens of all ages were significantly less likely to vote than the average UK citizen. However, this can largely be explained by the composition of BME citizens, who are generally younger and less well-off than the general population (Sanders et al. 2014). Gender appeared to have no discernible effect on electoral participation in 2017.

So, the estimated turnout gap between young people and all citizens is very small or reversed with respect to young people of an above average or high social grade and full-time students. The problem, more precisely defined, is the non-participation of young people from poorer backgrounds.

It is, obviously, too early to say whether 2017 was a watershed, where a new generation of young people became engaged in electoral politics or simply a one-off. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Labour Party was considerably more successful in mobilizing young people in 2017 than in previous polls.

Turning Left

One of the most prominent features of the 2017 General Election was the importance of age in predicting which party an individual voted for. A remarkable 62% of 18–24 year olds voted for the Labour Party, contrasting with only 27% for the Conservative Party (Ipsos MORI 2017b). During the period from October 1974 to 2017, the gap in support for the two parties amongst young people recorded at the 2017 General Election – 35 percentage points – was unprecedented in size (Fig. 5.5). The next largest gap during this period was 22 points in 1997. The swing to Labour in 2017 reverberated down the generations. The Labour Party's 2017 lead over the Conservatives was 29 points amongst 25–34 year olds and 16 points amongst 35–44 year olds. Thus, the youthquake extended beyond the *youngest* cohort of voters.

It is common to assume that the Labour Party is always more popular amongst younger voters, but this is not the case. In 2015, 18–24 year olds supported Labour over the Conservatives by 42–28%, a gap of only 14 points. In 2010, the two large parties were locked together with the Liberal Democrats on approximately 30% support from the youngest electoral cohort. We would highlight the significance of the 2015 General Election in that the Labour Party managed to improve its performance amongst

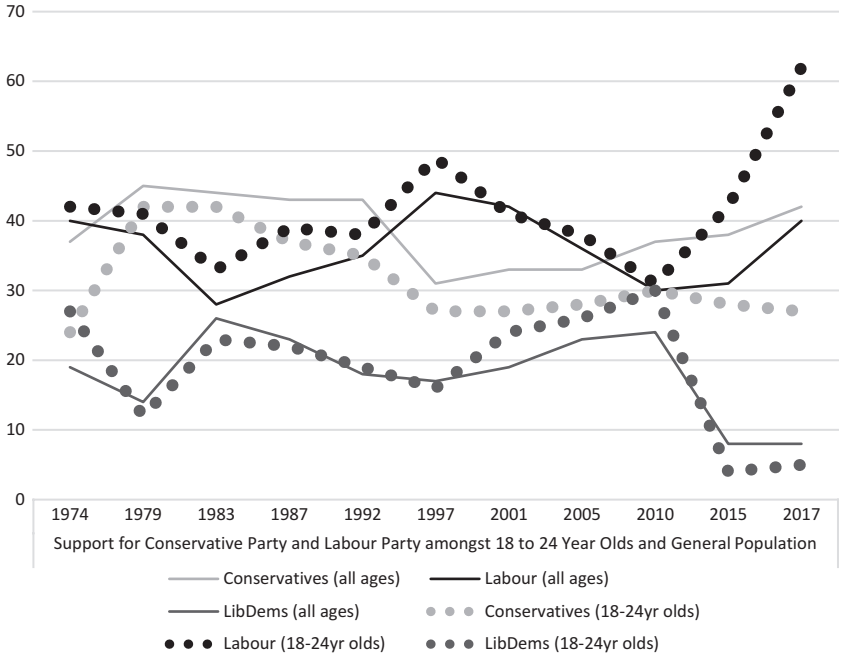

Fig. 5.5 Party support amongst 18–24 year olds and general population, October 1974 to June 2017 (%). (Source: Sloam et al. 2018)

18–24 year olds by 11 percentage points, thanks largely to the implosion of the Liberal Democrat youth vote (from 30% to 4% as a result of the party's participation in the Coalition Government and U-turn on university tuition fees). It should also be noted that, in 2015, the Green Party also benefitted considerably from the decline in Liberal Democrat support amongst this demographic.

Labour's astonishing success in 2017 amongst younger citizens was achieved through small gains from the Conservative Party, the large-scale capture of voters from third parties, and by mobilising more young people to vote. The Liberal Democrat Party failed to improve on its disastrous performance in 2015. Although it did not suffer any further decline in its share of the 18–24 year old vote in 2017, the fact that it was not able to regain some of its losses in this age group was a major disappointment given the strong pro-European theme of its manifesto. What is more,

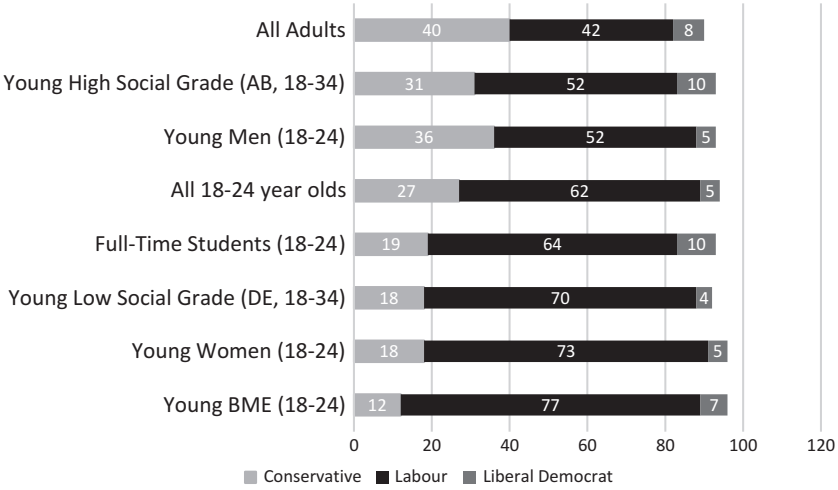

Fig. 5.6 Support for Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats amongst groups of young people (%). (Source: Sloam et al. 2018)

tactical voting and a surge in student support for Labour, led to damaging defeats for Liberal Democrat incumbents in the university constituencies of Sheffield Hallam (Nick Clegg), and Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland). An underreported feature of the youth vote was the large gain in Labour support from the Green Party, whose share of the youth vote fell from 8% in 2015 to just 2% in 2017. The emergence of Corbyn as an anti-establishment figure with cosmopolitan-left credentials, and the perceived lack of importance of the environment as an issue (as discussed below) squeezed support for the environmental party.

The Labour Party's emphatic lead amongst 18–24 year olds varied across different groups of young people (Fig. 5.6). It gained greatest support from young women (73%), and young people of a low social grade (70%). Labour also secured the backing of 73% of Black and Ethnic Minority citizens, who have a younger age profile that the average UK citizen.[6] Whilst we might expect, from previous elections, social grade and student status to have a large impact on party support, the scale of the Labour Party's appeal amongst young women was surprising given that there was no difference between men and women's support for Labour and the Conservatives amongst adults of all ages. These results might be attributed to the Brexit effect – 75% of young Remainers

voted Labour in 2017 (ICM 2017b) – and to the Corbyn effect. Young women, students and BME citizens were all very likely to vote Remain, and to sympathise with the Labour leader's views on economic inequality, immigration and British foreign policy. On the other hand, the weaker support for Labour (52%) and stronger support for the Conservatives (36%) amongst young men may in part be attributed to their higher than average levels of Euroscepticism.

The influence of socio-economic status on voting intention has become more complex. In 2017, young people of a high social grade were more likely to support Labour than the Conservatives (by 52–31%), but to a smaller degree than the average 18–24 year old (a Labour lead of 35 percentage points). However, full-time students were considerably more likely to vote Labour than Conservative (by 64–19%). Attention should be drawn to some notable differences between young Remain voters in 2016 and young Labour voters in 2017. Labour scored better than the Remain campaign amongst young people of a low social grade (by 70–54%), but worse amongst young students (by 64–82%).

Despite the overwhelming extent of youth support for Labour in 2017, the narrative of the party's appeal to young voters must be treated with some caution. Youth support for Labour appeared to be highly dependent upon Corbyn's leadership, and as such might be viewed as a protest vote against: the political establishment in general, the economically precarious position of the Millennial generation, and the authoritarian-nationalist populism of Nigel Farage, Donald Trump and elements of the Leave campaign. It is very uncertain as to whether this youth support for Labour would transfer to a less anti-establishment party leader, or whether youth support for Labour might ebb away the further removed we become from the trauma of the financial crisis and the memory of the Brexit referendum.

The Policy Priorities of Young Millennials

To better understand why young people overwhelmingly voted for Labour, we need to take a closer look at party policy and the issues prioritised by younger cohorts. Figure 5.7 indicates the policy preferences of young people (18–24 year olds) compared to the average UK citizen, and those aged over 65. According to Lord Ashcroft polling, the '*most important single issue*' for young people during the election campaign was

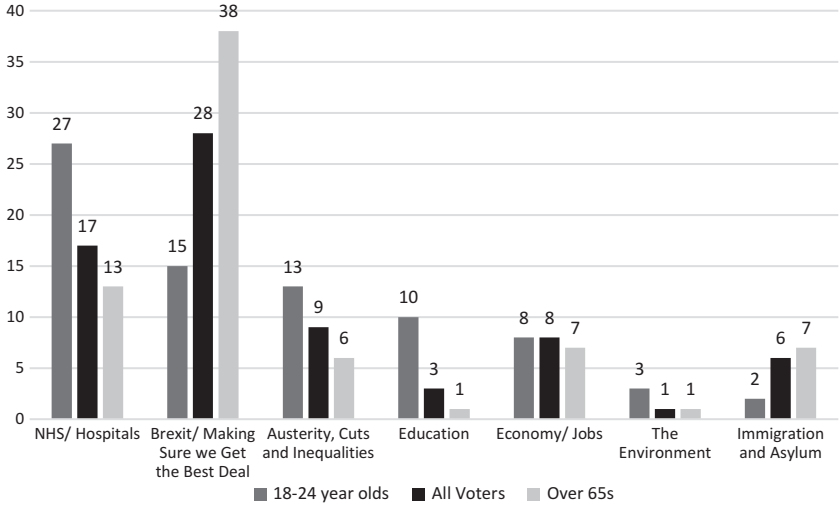

Fig. 5.7 'Most important political issue' during the 2017 General Election campaign (%). (Source: Lord Ashcroft Polling 2017. *N* = 14.384 (734 18–24 year olds))

healthcare, which was chosen by 27% of this cohort. The NHS, a traditional strength for the Labour Party, was earmarked for extra funding in its 2017 manifesto. The next priority for young people was *Brexit* (15% of younger citizens prioritized this policy area). Here, younger voters were also more closely aligned to the official Labour position, which – though lacking in detail – advocated a 'soft Brexit' through the maintenance of close relations with the Single Market. Though Brexit was a key issue for young people, it was viewed as similarly important to a number of materialist issues.

The third most important area for 18–24 year olds was that of austerity, poverty and economic inequalities (13%). This was followed by education (10%), and the economy and jobs (8%). In our Populus poll, 'housing' also emerged as a key theme for young people.[7] Whilst many of these issues may be long-term problems that have persisted for several decades, the polls suggested that young people associated austerity, economic inequalities and the increasingly unaffordable costs of housing with seven years of Conservative-led government.

Perceptions of the importance of different issues varied greatly across generations. The differences between young and old were largest on the

subjects of Brexit (−23 percentage points), the NHS (+14 points), education (+9 points), austerity, cuts and inequalities (+7 points), and immigration and asylum (−5 points). Adults of all ages considered Brexit (alongside the NHS) to be the top issue facing the country, and it was easily the most important issue for those over 65. The cosmopolitan-left attitudes and sentiments of Young Millennials, thus, diverged remarkably from those of the over 65s. This related not just to their policy priorities, but also to the positions adopted on the issues. This was particularly the case with regard to the political-cultural issues of Brexit and immigration, where young people were much more supportive of membership of the European Union and were much less concerned about immigration to the UK (see Chap. 4).

Using an ICM (2017c) poll of 1,002 18–24 year olds fielded a week before the election, we were able to examine the policy priorities of young people in more depth, with respect to age within the cohort, gender, social grade, student status, support for Labour or Conservatives in 2017, and support for Remain or Leave in the 2016 referendum. Figure 5.8 illustrates the large differences that existed between young women and young men on the relative importance of the NHS (prioritised by 66% of young women and only 44% of young men) and Brexit (prioritised by 31% of young men and only 21% of young women). This, again, illustrates why young women were much more likely to vote Labour than young men. The differences between 18–21 year olds and all 18–24 year olds over their prioritization of *materialist* issues were less surprising; for instance, the younger group were more concerned about university tuition fees whilst the older group were more focused upon jobs and housing.

The similarities between the policy priorities of young Labour supporters and young Remainers (and between young Conservatives and young Leavers) was remarkable. This provides further evidence for claims about the emergence of a distinct, cosmopolitan-left political constituency. The divide between young Labour and young Conservative supporters (and young Remainers and young Leavers) was unambiguous on a number of issues. The NHS was viewed as one of the most important issues by 58% of young Labour supporters and 60% of young Remainers, and by only 40% of young Conservatives and 38% of young Leavers (a gap of around 20 percentage points for both). Tuition fees were prioritised by 31% of young Labour and 23% of the pro-EU young Remainers, and only 4% of young Conservatives and 16% of young Leavers. On the other hand, young Conservatives and young Leavers were much more likely to stress

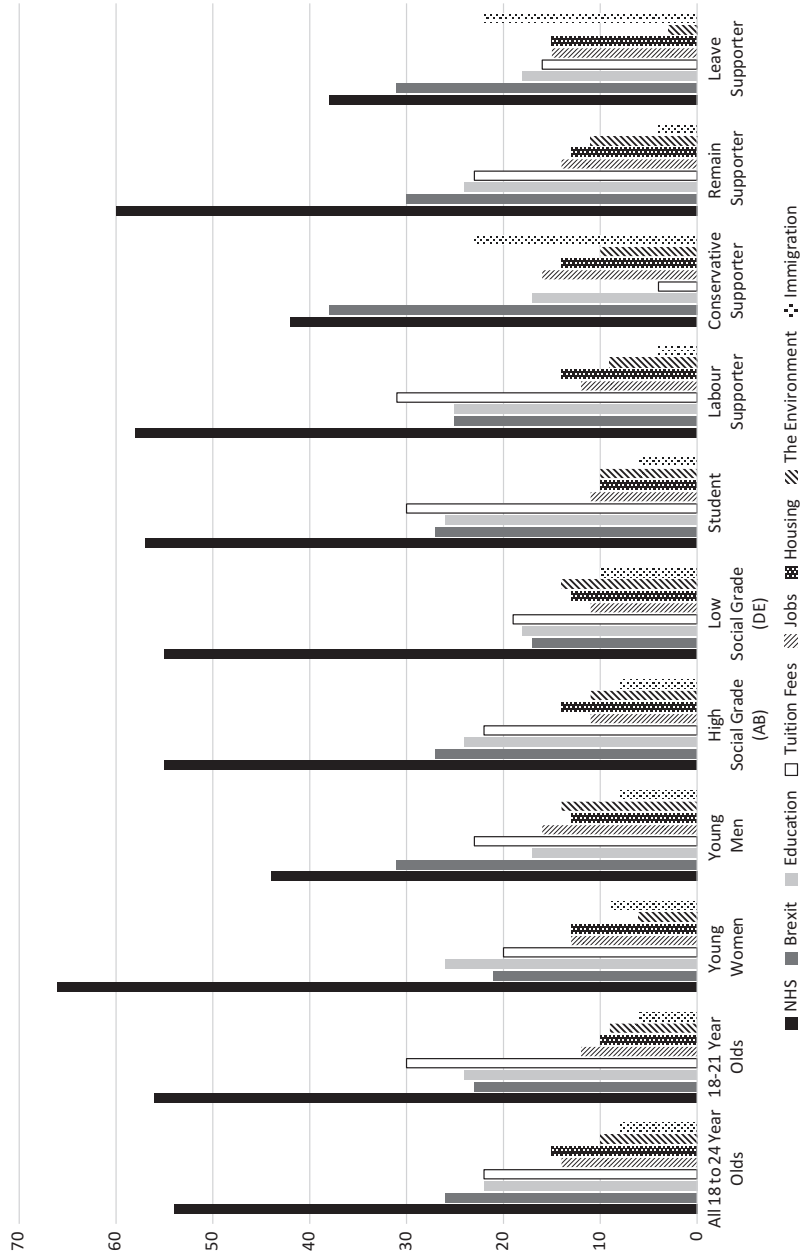

Fig. 5.8 Policy priorities (three most important issues) for sub-groups of 18–24 year olds. (Source: ICM 2017c. N = 1,002 (all 18–24 year olds))

the importance of immigration (23% and 22%, respectively) than young Labour and young Remainers (4% for both).

It is also important to point out, again, that the prioritisation of particular issues by different sub-groups of young people does not mean that they were supportive of the same policy solutions. For example, there was little difference between the policy priorities of the highest and the lowest social grades and between these social grades and full-time students, but this masked large differences in support for or opposition to cultural diversity and European integration (see Chap. 4).

The Youthquake Debate

Estimating voter turnout amongst sub-groups of the population is fraught with difficulties. It can be measured as a proportion of the population and as a percentage of registered voters. The former is preferred by most political scientists. However, citizens are often reluctant to admit (in opinion polls) that they did not participate in an election due to the perceived social desirability of voting. So, we have to rely on best estimates of turnout.

With regard to youth turnout in 2017, the British Election Study (BES) reported that there was no significant increase in the electoral participation of 18–24 year olds in 2017. And, on this basis, described the youthquake as a 'myth' or a mere 'tremor' (Prosser et al. 2018).[8] We disagree with this characterisation of the youthquake for a number of reasons. Despite its highly regarded methodology, the BES results were based on a very small sample of young people, which makes the weighting of the data all the more important.[9] We agree with Stewart et al. (2018), who raise concerns about the large differences between the BES unweighted and weighted data of 18–24 year olds (63% and 49.6%, respectively).

Other pollsters, using much larger samples of young people, estimated considerable increases in youth turnout in 2017. Ipsos MORI (2017b), sampling 890 18–24 year olds, recorded an increase in youth turnout of 15 points to 54%.[10] YouGov (2017a), sampling 3,756 18–24 year olds, estimated an increase of 16 points to 59%. The New Musical Express (9 June, 2017) poll, sampling 1,354 18–24 year olds, recorded an increase of 12 points to 56%. And, if we look at the differences in estimates of support for the Conservative and Labour parties between polling companies, they were largely founded on different estimates of youth turnout. As ICM (5 June 2017a) argued: 'those pollsters who, like us, show higher Tory leads

are implicitly sceptical about the extent of this self-reported turnout' amongst young people. Yet it was those pollsters like ICM, who predicted a lower youth turnout, that *underestimated* the vote for Labour on 8 June. Meanwhile pollsters such as YouGov, who predicted a higher youth turnout, proved to be more accurate in forecasting the actual result.

More generally, to dismiss the so-called youthquake as a myth is to take a very narrow view about what constitutes political engagement and political change. Even if we presume that turnout amongst 18–24 year olds did not increase (which is disputed by much of the polling data), we would point to several other changes that have reshaped the political landscape. These include the unprecedented rate of youth support for the Labour Party, high levels of youth activism in the campaign (Pickard 2018), and the distinctive cosmopolitan values of young Labour supporters. To argue that young people did not significantly influence the election result (Prosser et al. 2018), by focussing exclusively on 18–24 year olds, misunderstands how generational change influences politics. The dramatic events we discuss above were most evident with the youngest cohort of voters, but – as we explain – were to a lesser extent present in all cohorts aged below 45.

The 2017 General Election marked both a long-term *generational effect* and a short-term *period effect* on the values and political habits of Young Millennials growing up in the aftermath of the financial crisis and through their experiences of the 2016 EU referendum. When one looks into the *intragenerational* dimensions of the youth vote, the changes in 2017 were remarkable. The cosmopolitan-left attitudes and orientations of young people are particularly present amongst young students and young women.

Clearly not all young people could be considered as participants or fellow travellers in this cosmopolitan-left movement, and it is much less reflective of young white men from poorer backgrounds with low levels of educational attainment. Indeed, our research identifies a significant minority of young people who were likely to vote for Brexit in 2016 and the Conservative Party in 2017, and who harboured deep reservations about immigration and ethnic diversity.

We argue that a youthquake equates to much more than voter turnout, and should be seen as a multi-faceted phenomenon involving fundamental social, political and cultural shifts. It is worth re-stating that the OED defined a youthquake as 'a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people'.

Finally, the narrative effects of the youthquake should not be dismissed out of hand. We would argue that the widespread acceptance that a youthquake happened had a tangible impact on the behaviour of the national political parties. Corbyn's deliberate targeting of the youth vote, Labour's unusually high dependency upon youth activists, and the unexpectedly strong performance of Labour in the election, encouraged the Conservative Party to rethink its approach to younger voters. This shaped a review of – amongst other things – the role of young people within the party as well as policy on tuition fees and housing benefits for 18–21 year olds.

Summary

In 2017, younger voters were politically energised by Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party. In an echo of the 1960s, they expressed themselves as left-of-centre cosmopolitans, reacting both to austerity politics and to the cultural conservatism found in older generations and embodied by the Leave campaign in the EU referendum.

In 2017, age replaced class as the key predictor of party choice. This emanated from the emergence of cosmopolitan-left attitudes amongst many Young Millennials, and the sense of collective political identity established within this group through their experiences of protest (for example, Occupy and the student tuition fee demonstrations), the 2016 EU referendum, and the 2017 General Election. The large intergenerational differences in political attitudes have been driven by the redistribution of resources away from younger citizens and youth-oriented public policy since the advent of the global financial crisis in 2008, and in opposition to the cultural backlash of older generations against the issues of diversity, European integration, and immigration. Despite his lukewarm approach to the European Union, Corbyn's opposition to austerity appealed to many younger voters, as did his internationalist outlook and his acceptance of immigration and cultural diversity. In the 2017 General Election and the 2016 EU referendum, support for the Labour Party and Remain was therefore particularly strong amongst citizens who were young, highly educated, female and supportive of cultural diversity.

Young people were attracted to Corbyn's perceived authenticity and policy program, but this was a two-way street. The Labour Party appealed directly to this demographic through proposed investments in education

and housing, and by guaranteeing workers' rights. By contrast, there was little for young people in the Conservative Party manifesto beyond vague references to intergenerational justice. Conversely, we can conclude that the (successful) pursuit of UKIP voters by the Conservative Party (with regard to positions in favour of a 'hard Brexit' and reducing immigration) were naturally repellent to many younger voters.

After the election, the Conservative Party recognised 'the need to win over young voters' (Damian Green, BBC Online, 1 July 2017), and in 2018 appointed two vice-chairs of the party with the specific task of improving its standing amongst younger citizens. In spring 2018, the Conservatives also launched *Onward*, a think-tank to be spearheaded by (amongst others) Ruth Davidson, the young, socially liberal and pro-EU Scottish Conservative leader with the express intention of 'enticing younger voters away from Jeremy Corbyn to the Conservatives' (The Times, 18 April 2018).

It is clear that the Labour Party – particularly its leader Jeremy Corbyn – dominated a social media space where political information is well-trusted and relatively highly consumed by Britain's young people. The party certainly enjoyed a comfortable advantage over the Conservative Party on this front. This led to Conservatives, such as Robert Halfon, a former Minister for Education, to argue for a Tory-affiliated version of Momentum, to counter Labour's ownership of the digital sphere. Speaking to City AM, Halfon dismissed Tory grassroots infrastructure as 'either ageing or non-existent' (Sloam and Ehsan 2017).

The higher youth turnout in 2017 showed that young people can be mobilised if politicians address the issues they care about with concrete policy proposals. On the other hand, the engagement also reflected disillusionment and anger with the impact of public policy on younger generations in the aftermath of the financial crisis and actualised in government austerity programmes during the 2010–2015 and the 2015–2017 Parliaments. Furthermore, our findings show that we should also continue to pay attention to low electoral participation amongst certain groups of young people – particularly those of a low social grade, not in education or with low levels of educational attainment. In the UK, there is also the additional issue of voter registration. With the introduction of Individual Voter Registration in 2014, over a million citizens (disproportionately young people) fell off the electoral roll (James and Sidorcsuk 2016).

Notes

1. We disagree with the claims of Curtice and Simpson (2018) and others that political interest did not increase amongst young people during and after the referendum. If one asks questions about political interest per se that might be true (reflecting a continued dissatisfaction with politics and politicians amongst young people). But if one asks questions about interest in the campaign, that is not the case.
2. Unfortunately, in our polling data, the sample size for young BME citizens was not large enough to be reliable – particularly when separated out into different ethnic minority sub-groups (such as social class and so on).
3. Other youth-oriented policies set out in the Labour Party manifesto included: greater investment in *early stage intervention* in young people's mental health, and the creation of a justice system to help re-integrate youth offenders back into society
4. Due to the separate Green manifestos produced for different groups of citizens, it was impossible to compare their focus on young people to the three main parties.
5. It should be noted that, in what many considered to be a populist move, the Labour Party positioned itself as opposing these Conservative proposals for the reform of social care for the relatively well-off elderly, whilst at the same time advocating increased spending on youth-oriented issues, including the abolition of university tuition fees.
6. We were not able to acquire large enough samples of young BME voters to include them in this study. However, we would have expected to find considerable support for the Labour Party from this group, given Jeremy Corbyn's active engagement with ethnic minority groups (for example, Grime4Corbyn), and his critical views of British foreign policy in the Middle East, the Prevent de-radicalisation programme, and police targeting of young ethnic minority citizens for stop-and-search (The Independent, 30 May 2017).
7. 'Housing' was not classified as a separate category in the Lord Ashcroft Polling (2017) data.
8. The authors of the BES report claimed that there was no surge in electoral turnout amongst 18–24 year olds and that the youth vote (due to its numerical size if nothing else) did not swing the election (Prosser et al. 2018).
9. We would note that the small BES sample size of 18–24 year olds did not (or could not) address the voting patterns of distinct sub-groups of young people (such as young women, young people in full-time education or geographical variations in youth voting patterns).

10. It is worth noting that, under Ipsos MORI's pre-2017 'percent of all resident adults' methodology, the increase in turnout was even higher – over 20 percentage points. The figures we use for 2010 and 2015 draw upon this old methodology, whilst the figures we use for 2017 are based on the new methodology ('percent of all registered voters'). So, if anything, we believe that we are presenting a conservative estimate of the increase in youth turnout.

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Recent trends across a wide range of contemporary advanced post-industrial societies suggest that there is an ongoing – and deepening – disconnect between citizens and democratic politics and institutions (Norris 2011). This plays itself out in different ways in different contexts, but what is common to many is that this disaffection is epitomised by declining electoral participation rates, with people voting in far fewer numbers than was the case in previous decades. This was particularly evident at the 2014 European Assembly elections. There, nearly 400 million Europeans in 28 countries were eligible to vote, yet only 43% opted to do so. This represented the lowest turnout rate since direct elections to the Assembly were first held in 1979 when 62 per cent of the electorate voted (European Parliament 2014).

Furthermore, where they do vote, significant numbers of people in many such countries are rejecting traditional and mainstream parties and elites, and choosing instead to vote for populist and anti-system parties, often of the emerging left or of the authoritarian-nationalist right (Della Porta 2006; Grimm and Pilkington 2015; Mudde 2010). For instance, in Britain, the anti-EU UKIP achieved first place at the 2014 European Assembly elections, scoring a notable victory over traditional Westminster parties; the Green Party (8%) pushed the Liberal Democrats – the traditional "third" party – into fifth place. Elsewhere, populist anti-immigration, nationalist and far-right parties made significant advances in countries like

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Denmark (Danish People's Party, first-place and 27%), France (Front National, first-place and 25%), Hungary (Jobbik, third-place and 20%), Greece (Golden Dawn, third-place and 9%). Meanwhile, relatively new leftist anti-system parties rejecting austerity and neoliberalism, scored impressive results in countries such as Greece (Syriza, first with 27%) and in Spain where PoDemos, which was founded just 6 months earlier, came fourth (8%). Many of these and other insurgent parties (such as "Pirate" parties in Iceland and elsewhere, the Five Star Movement in Italy) have repeated or even bettered these performances in national Parliamentary elections since, suggesting that the traditional political parties are vulnerable to challenges from newer anti-establishment left, right and populist parties.

The strong performance of the Labour Party amongst younger voters in the 2017 UK General Election in one sense appeared to buck these trends. Young people had been drawn in droves to a mainstream political party of the centre-left. On the other hand, the success of Labour with this demographic also illustrated the continuing disillusionment of many young citizens with politicians and political parties. After all, this success was driven by the perception of Jeremy Corbyn as *principled* and *authentic* in contrast to the existing political establishment. And, Labour had been re-invented by Corbyn, with a youth-friendly and anti-austerity election manifesto and a mass-campaigning style that welcomed participation by grass-roots party members and the general public – especially young people.

Youth and Political Action

These trends of non-voting and of alternative voting are more a feature of the advanced post-industrial world now than was the case in earlier decades, and young people are not immune from the processes undermining citizens' engagement with democratic institutions. This is the case across Europe but also in countries like Russia, Japan, Canada and the US (Dalton 2013; Sloam 2014; Stetsenko 2002). Indeed, as we have seen in this book, the disenchantment with the practice of contemporary politics and the distrust of political elites who are invested with the powers to conduct politics on behalf of the public, is particularly evident amongst young people – nowhere more so than in Britain. Throughout the years of the new Millennium, young Britons have, until very recently, been

noticeable by their absence from the polls. Their electoral turnout rates at UK Parliamentary elections in 2001, 2005, 2010 and 2015 were considerably lower than was the case for older age groups within the electorate. Just as importantly, their abstention rate at these contests was significantly higher than it was for previous youth generations throughout the post-War decades.

However, it is not only their rate of electoral participation that distinguishes young people from other citizens. There is a significant body of evidence suggesting that when compared with older adults, young people in the UK and in similar countries have a distinct lack of interest in parliamentary and electoral politics and considerably lower levels of political knowledge. They also appear to be less satisfied with democracy, more critical of politicians, less likely to be politically active, have comparatively weaker commitments to political parties, and are less likely to be members of political organisations (Henn and Oldfield 2016).

A number of recent studies have suggested that young people's relationship with politics is a complex one. Whilst many may have little interest in 'formal' parliamentary politics, this does not signal a disengagement from all forms of politics. Instead, research indicates that contemporary youth often take part in many differing forms of political action such as demonstrations, boycotts, and direct action (Hooghe and Oser 2015; Melo and Stockemer 2014). These unconventional forms of youth political action tend to be focused on single issue campaigns such as environmental concerns, women's rights, anti-war, as well as broader anti-capitalist movements such as the global Occupy phenomenon. They also pertain to issues that affect young people's everyday lives, such as the youth movement for tighter gun controls in the United States that was inspired by the survivors of the Parkland school shooting.

In many respects, such alternative styles of political action represent a rejection of traditional and 'formal' methods of parliamentary politics, which tend to be overly reliant on political parties which are considered to be too regimented and restrictive, and led by politicians who can't always be trusted to do the right thing. Instead, these newer forms of politics tend to attract youth because they are grass-roots organisations which are more open to influence by individuals, and which have agendas which seem to young people to be much more relevant and achievable (Tormey 2015).

Explaining Intragenerational Inequalities in Youth Politics

Importantly, in this book we have used original data from our own research that indicates quite clearly that these patterns of political engagement and political participation are not uniform. Just as we have observed *inter*generational differences, we have also identified *intra*generational variations. British youth are not a homogenous mass; their political behaviours, values, sentiments and aspirations differ and are often structured by such factors as their gender, ethnicity, social class and educational trajectory. Our analyses reveal that there exists a large group that includes especially young women, students and the highly educated who are particularly predisposed to postmaterialist values and are often drawn towards anti-austerity cosmopolitan-left politics. These particular young people can be contrasted with a smaller group of youth who are more likely to be male and of low socio-economic status and education level, and who are susceptible to an anti-establishment, right-wing and xenophobic discourse and who incline towards authoritarian-nationalist populism.

Explanations offered for these differing and unequal patterns of political (dis-)engagement and political participation are varied. A useful way to conceptualise these is offered by Hay (2007) who distinguishes Supply and Demand explanations. Supply-side accounts emphasise the failure of mainstream political parties and political elites to inspire and mobilise young people. Instead, today's youth feel at best ignored by the political class and at worst victimised by Government austerity policies which have progressively favoured older citizens and impacted disproportionately harshly on the nation's youth (Birch et al. 2013). These experiences have left young Britons feeling alienated by the actions of politicians in office (Henn and Foard 2014).

Demand–side explanations focus on the changing nature of contemporary society such as there has been a shift in values and culture which means that young people are increasingly critical of the practice of democracy and the behaviour and performance of those elected to office. This disenchantment is reinforced by a convergence of party programmes around neoliberal imperatives that fail to offer alternatives to austerity conditions and worsening prospects for today's youth (Côté 2014). Frustrated by the practice and outcomes of mainstream democratic politics and the record of successive governments in office, many young people have become increasingly attracted to new – often

postmaterialist – political agendas and new styles of politics in a search for alternative ways to actualise their political aspirations.

The withdrawal of many young people from formal institutionalized politics and abstention from elections in 2001, 2005, 2010 and 2015 is not therefore indicative of a generalised youth apathy. On the contrary, it is our contention – empirically verified by the results of our recent studies – that for many young people, such elections held little appeal as they were considered to lack value in terms of providing meaningful solutions to the social and economic challenges faced by themselves and their peers.

The Youthquake

Young people are neither anti-democratic nor are they innately anti-election, and recent developments give grounds for optimism, suggesting that young people will engage with electoral politics and will vote if they feel that there is value in doing so. This is evidenced by the recent surge in young voters' turnout at a number of recent electoral contests. For instance, the Electoral Commission estimates that 75% of newly enfranchised 16 and 17 year olds turned out to vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, and as we have seen in Chap. 4, youth were particularly prominent at the 2016 UK Referendum on EU membership (Ipsos MORI 2016). While the level of turnout of young people at the 2017 UK General Election is contested, we have presented a case in Chap. 5 that there was indeed a "youthquake". This was evident in several respects, and particularly in terms of the overwhelming support of young people for Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party, with its youth-oriented agenda and its new style of open and bottom-up politics that has given greater opportunities for the grass-roots to shape the party's destiny. In some respects, this was made possible by the decision of former party leader Ed Miliband to open-up Labour to new members. Although this was viewed by many in the Parliamentary Labour Party as a mistake which ultimately propelled Corbyn to the leadership of the party and enabled his followers to gain ascendancy and a significant degree of power and control, it has also provided a democratic channel for youth politics.

What we have encountered in the data that informs the various chapters of this book is that the youthquake is not limited to this most recent 2017 electoral contest. Instead, it is the culmination of processes that we have been gaining momentum since the landmark General Election of 2001 when observers of electoral studies turned their gaze and attention to the

issue of electoral turnout rather than to the performance of the parties and the formal outcome in terms of composition of the new Government and balance of power in the House of Commons.

These processes include a change in outlook and culture of young people. We have argued throughout this book that young Millennials are not a passive and apathetic generation of disinterested bystanders. On the contrary, even though they often abstained in large numbers at local, national and European Assembly elections between 2001 and 2015, our own data and the findings from studies published elsewhere indicate an ongoing interest in politics in general and in elections in particular (Henn and Foard 2014; O'Toole 2015). They are also strong supporters of democracy (Cammaerts et al. 2014), but remain anxious that there exist only relatively few available opportunities for them to meaningfully participate in formal politics. Moreover, they consider that those who have been elected to public office on their behalf have failed to champion their issue-interests. As a consequence of this, today's generation of young people are engaged sceptics.

However, we have seen throughout the years of the new Millennium that there is a sizeable group of young people who have been attracted to a new style of politics and who prioritise an alternative politics agenda that is broadly postmaterialist in nature. They represent a new cosmopolitan-left group. We have identified these young people as having a solidaristic outlook and a deep concern for social justice. They emphasise the tackling of domestic and global inequalities as well as support for wealth redistribution. They are internationalist with a pro-European outlook and a tolerance of others from difference backgrounds. These young people are also critical of mainstream politics – and supporters of reforms that might rejuvenate democratic processes and institutions so that these become more open and accommodating to young citizens.

Youthquake and a Cultural Backlash?

The future and momentum of the youthquake remains uncertain. The emergence of the new left-cosmopolitan group of young people has a mirror-image in the appearance of an economically-insecure left-behind group of young people who don't share the same progressive values. Inglehart and Norris (2016: 29) have characterised these two groups as having potentially diametrically opposed outlooks – reflecting a new cultural cleavage – so that the forward thrust of the youthquake that we have witnessed in recent years is by no means guaranteed:

> *[T]he spread of progressive values has also stimulated a cultural backlash among people who feel threatened by this development. Less educated… citizens, especially white men, who were once the privileged majority culture in Western societies, resent being told that traditional values are 'politically incorrect' if they have come to feel that they are being marginalized within their own countries. As cultures have shifted, a tipping point appears to have occurred.*

Indeed, the current economic, social, cultural and political environment is none too conducive for the advance of left-cosmopolitanism, and in some respects may be considered somewhat hostile. Inglehart's thesis suggests that the spread of postmaterialist values is in large part contingent on the underlying economic circumstances in which young people are socialised; the ongoing global recession, austerity politics and rising economic inequality and insecurity potentially, therefore, present a major challenge to the proliferation of cosmopolitan, multicultural and progressive values. Furthermore, the continued absence of many young people from the polls, a first-past-the-post electoral system that works to the disadvantage of small progressive left-libertarian parties such as the Greens, and the prospect of Brexit, each contribute to these uncertainties and to the heightening of opportunities for a cultural backlash.

Nonetheless, the recent upturn in youth engagement witnessed in Britain at the 2016 EU referendum and the support for Corbyn's Labour party at the 2017 General Election share common features with trends elsewhere internationally, and lend cause for optimism regarding the prospect of further advances for left-cosmopolitanism in the future. These include young people's participation in protest movements such as Occupy, the emergence of high profile and credible anti-establishment candidates and parties such as Sanders in the US and PoDemos in Spain, and the election to power of socially liberal leaders including Justin Trudeau in Canada and Jacinda Arden in New Zealand. Together, these developments offer young people alternative means and opportunities to address their fears and hopes in times of economic, political and social upheaval.

Democracy at a Crossroads

Contemporary advanced post-industrial democracies are at a crossroads. In Britain, we have seen a youthquake in which young people have emerged on the electoral stage as key players exercising a collective power

that has demonstrated the capacity to shape the outcomes of electoral contests and the balance of power within the UK parliament. The Labour party did not win the 2017 General Election, but the mobilization of young people and their mass support for Corbyn's Labour helped to deny the Conservatives the majority at Westminster that was expected, and which Prime Minister Theresa May considered necessary to achieve a strong and stable Government and a successful transition to Brexit.

However, the continued engagement of young people in British electoral politics is not guaranteed, and neither is the spread of progressive democratic values. The natural process of generational replacement begs the question of which sentiments are carried on into later life by today's youth? Will older cohorts be succeeded by a youth population instilled with authoritarian-nationalist values that promote division and conflict? Or will more positive values and sentiments associated with left-cosmopolitanism prevail, values that are typified by open-ness, tolerance, solidarity, social justice, and cooperation – where the goal is to extend and deepen democratic institutions, practices and processes?

These trajectories are critical. Brexit opens a new and uncertain chapter in the direction of UK democracy. The extent to which young people feel that their voice will be heard and that there will be meaningful opportunities for them to assert that voice and play an active role will shape whether, and how, they choose to engage with democracy and participate in democratic life. One of the rallying calls of those advocating a permanent Brexit was the notion that it would offer the opportunity for enhanced political sovereignty by the taking back of control from Europe to return political power to the public and provide the opportunity to rejuvenate UK democracy. The Government and political parties have a role to play in harnessing the energies of youth in this process, of developing methods to reach out to young people and to work with them to help shape the renewal of UK democratic institutions and processes. If the political class is committed to this endeavour and successful in doing so, then the youthquake may be sustained and may progress in a positive direction that enhances and strengthens democracy and the spread of democratic values. If the political class fails to act in this decisive way, that will place a question mark over the course, stability and future of democracy, post-Brexit.

In this respect, education and political literacy are also pivotal in determining whether young people have the knowledge, skills and resources necessary to engage in democracy. We know that younger citizens claim to know less about how politics works than older generations. And, this is

particularly the case for young people from poorer backgrounds. And, the inequalities of participation within the generation of Young Millennials are disturbingly large. Clearly, political and social institutions need to do more to provide young people from these social groups with a reason to vote and the skills to do so. Here, we believe that schools and universities can play a central role – through the provision of citizenship education and opportunities for the practice of democratic skills – in scaffolding the transition of young people into adulthood.

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