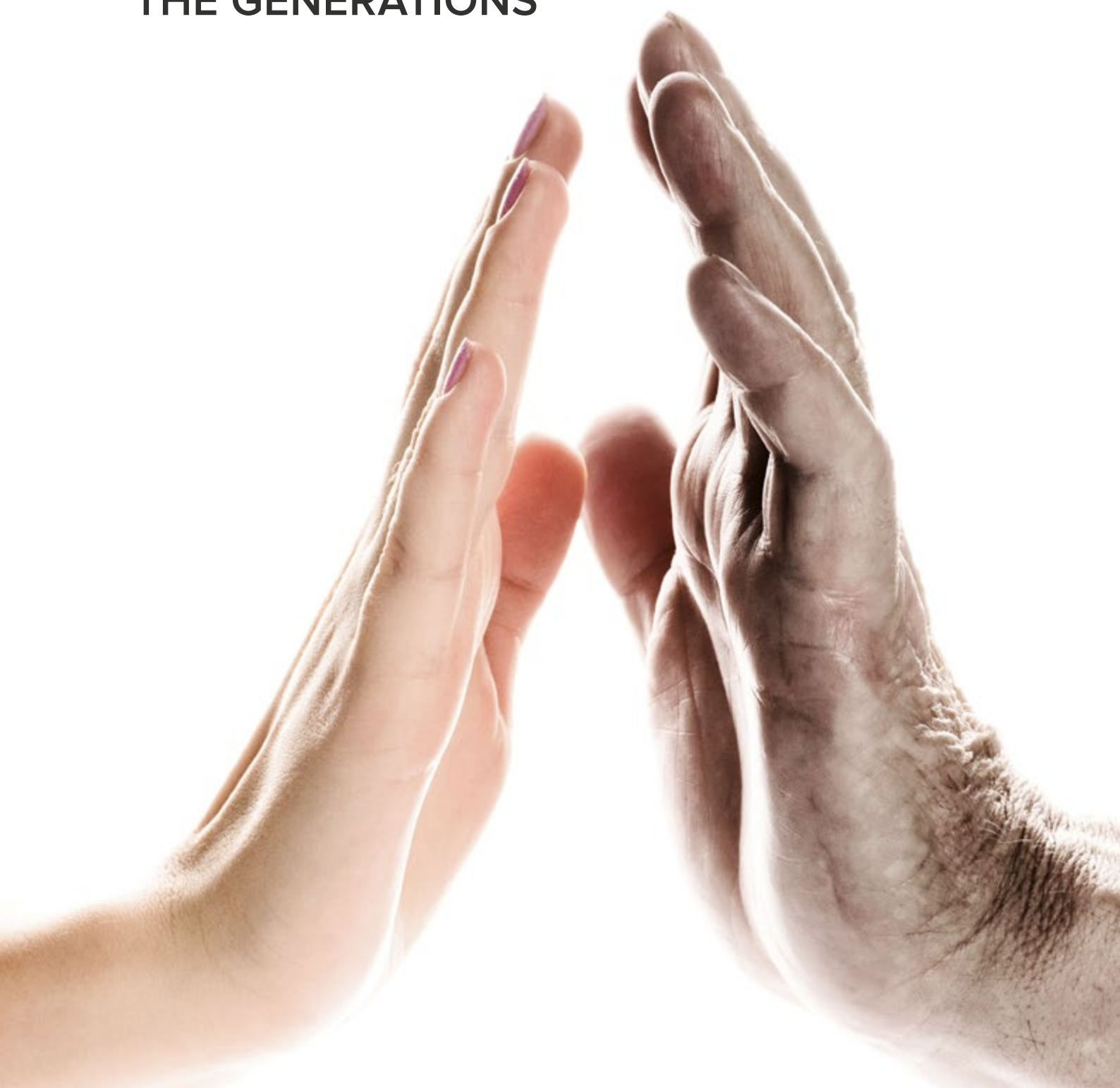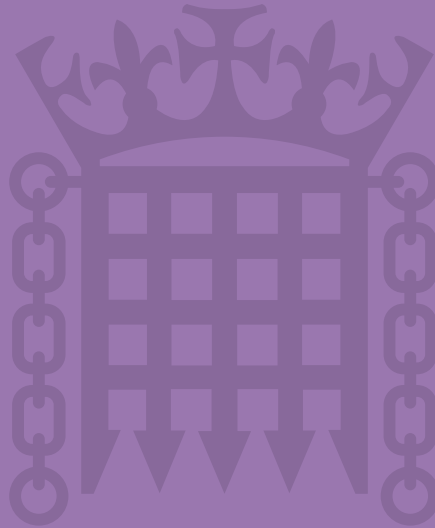**appg**

All Party Parliamentary Group on
Social Integration

INQUIRY INTO INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTION

AGES APART?
TIES AND DIVIDES ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

The Challenge provides the Secretariat to the APPG on Social Integration. Details of the Secretariat and the registrable benefits received by the group can be found on the official Register Of All-Party Parliamentary Groups: *www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/Parliamentarycommissioner-for-standards/registers-of-interests/register-of-all-party-party-Parliamentary-groups/*

The APPG brings together Parliamentarians from all political parties with an interest in social integration. The group's mission is to drive forward a cross-party conversation on policy solutions to break down barriers to integration and create opportunities for people from all walks of life to build bonds of trust.

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FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR

Chuka Umunna MP
Chair of the APPG on Social Integration

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration, which I Chair, exists to explore how well our communities are living together, and what we might do to strengthen the ties that bind us – especially in an increasing globalised UK full of people from different cultures and backgrounds. The publication of this essay collection marks the launch of a new inquiry by the APPG into the topic of intergenerational connection.

Before determining the questions and themes which we will pursue and examine through this inquiry, the APPG's members wanted to gather the views and insights of experts on various dimensions of intergenerational relations. This publication will serve as the first formal submission of evidence to our new inquiry. I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the pollsters, policy thinkers and practitioners who have contributed essays to this collection, as well as to The Challenge for their continued support as secretariat to the APPG.

As the essays contained within this collection attest, the relationship between different age groups in our country has changed fundamentally in a number of ways during the lifetime of the Baby Boomer generation (those born from the early-to-mid 1940s up to the early-to-mid 1960s). These changes have, in turn, wrought significant consequences for our politics, collective wellbeing and shared future. We are now a nation wrestling with the questions of how we might better promote intergenerational fairness and tackle an epidemic of elderly loneliness. If you are in your mid forties, the odds are that you did not vote for the government of the day[1] or side with the majority on the defining issue of our time at last year's Brexit referendum.[2] Simply put, we are now more divided by age than at any time in modern history.

Place, community, family

People from different generations are less likely to live in the same place in 2017 compared to years gone by. Research by the Intergenerational Foundation shows that children now have a mere 5% chance of having someone aged over 65 living in their area compared to a 15% chance in 1991, while the level of segregation between retirees and young adults has roughly doubled during the same period.[3] This pattern of increasing age segregation has almost certainly been driven in part by rising housing costs and supply, as younger people have made rental properties in town and city centres their homes, rather than migrating to the suburbs as their parents and grandparents did.[4]

The changing structure of our economy has fuelled demographic polarisation as well, as young adults have left rural areas and towns for cities in search of jobs and opportunity. A recent report by the Localis think tank found that those parts of England which had populations older than the national average in 2007 have, in the decade since then, aged faster than the country as a whole – whereas younger, mainly urban, areas have grown younger still.[5]

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1   Curtis, C ,2017, 'How Briatin voted at the 2017 general election', *YouGov*, 13 June 2017
    (***yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/13/how-britain-voted-2017-general-election/***)
2   Skinner, G and Gottfried, G, 2016, 'How Britain voted in the 2016 EU referendum', *Ipsos MORI*, 5 September 2016
    (***www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2016-eu-referendum***)
3   Intergenerational Foundation, 2016, *Generations Apart: The growth of age segregation in England and Wales*
4   Ibid.
5   Booth-Smith, L and Fyans, J, 2017, *In Place of Work: Influence local labour markets*, London: Localis

Furthermore, the economic decline of some parts of our country has led to a loss of emotional as well as physical points of connection across generations. As more and more of us have moved away from the areas where we grew up and that our families live in, our sense of attachment to one place has waned.[6] The industries around which whole towns and neighbourhoods once organised have collapsed and, as a consequence, the strong social ties which previously bound the young and old within tight-knit communities have been eroded.

In short, what it means to be a member of a community has changed. Even when we do live in the same area as a substantial number of people from different age groups, we tend not to meet and mix socially – but live parallel and separate lives.[7]

In addition, the social gap between generations is partially a by-product of changing norms and values. People in modern Britain are able to chart their own course in life to a greater extent than ever before. As a result of scientific and social progress, we are living longer, having children later in life and forming families of all shapes and sizes. These trends have made life more fulfilling, but it's undoubtedly true that they have redefined the ways in which different generations relate to one another.

This gap matters. Studies show that meeting and mixing with people of different age groups makes us less susceptible to ageist attitudes and more trusting of others.[8] The net effect of these changes to the composition and character of place, communities and families is that we are leaning on one another less than we once did[9] – making us more prone to anxiety, isolation and loneliness, and putting strain on our health and social care services. This crisis of social solidarity is often felt most keenly by older people who are less able to manage daily living away from strong networks of support. But it's a universal truth that a full life is one shared and these issues touch the lives of younger people too. Emma Jenkins' contribution to this essay collection, on the mental health of Generation Z (those born during and after the late 1990s), starkly highlights this reality.

Our intergenerational social contract

We should not discount the possibility that these changes may be exacerbating the attitudinal and political differences between the generations which we have heard so much about in the wake of this year's general election 'youthquake',[10] the causes and implications of which are dissected in an essay by Ipsos Mori's Bobby Duffy.

It's only natural that each generation should view the world slightly differently, but there are worrying signs that the political gap between people of different ages may be growing into a gulf. Not only did age overtake income as an indicator of voting intention for the first time in modern political history at this year's election, but political arguments pinning the blame for society's ills on one generation or another have been picking up steam for some years.

6   Livingston, M et al, 2008, *People's attachment to place – the influence of neighbourhood deprivation*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
7   The Challenge, 2016, *British Integration Survey* 2016 (**the-challenge.org/uploads/documents/TCN-British-Integration-Study.pdf**)
8   Drury, L, Abrams, D, & Swift, H J, 2017, *Making intergenerational connections: What are they, why do they matter and how to make more of them*. London: Age UK
9   Campbell, D, 2008, 'Generation gap "could undermine society"', *The Observer*, 21 September 2008
10 Jackson-Preece, J, and Dunin-Wąsowicz, R, 2017,'Introducing the Generation Brexit project – a chance for millennials to shape Brexit', *LSE Brexit*, 23 June 2017 (**blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/06/23/youth-dont-vote-is-the-brexit-generation-changing-that/**)

Perhaps, as our lives have grown more and more separate, Baby Boomers, Generation X (those born from the early-to-mid 1960s up to the early 1980s) and Millennials have come to understand the perspectives of one another less and less. Certainly, against this backdrop it seems particularly notable that a recent study produced by the Resolution Foundation's Intergenerational Commission suggests that frequent social contact with people of different age groups is associated with a greater sense of optimism regarding the life chances of the young.[11]

Ever since the 2010 publication of David Willets's *The Pinch*, a growing number of voices in our national debate have expressed concern that the unwritten covenant which promises that each generation will enjoy a higher standard of living and more opportunity than the last is at breaking point. This ideal, described by the Prime Minister as 'the British Dream',[12] has animated Britain's post-war political life. However, we seem to be increasingly viewing people of other generations not as partners but as a problem.

Setting aside valid concerns as to whether this intergenerational social contract will endure,[13] it is striking that mixing with people of different generations appears to make us more hopeful for its future. After all, this hope is surely inspired, at least in part, by a conviction that we are ultimately seeking to act in one another's interests across generational faultlines. When we encounter one another, we see that we are on the same side.

It is in that spirit that we must now act to reaffirm and strengthen this social contract. It's now incumbent on our country's political and civic leaders to craft a political conversation and policy programme which—rather than pitting the interests of one generation against the other—speak to all that we have in common and foster feelings of national unity and intergenerational solidarity.

Common ground, growing cracks

We might begin by recognising that common ground between the generations is—when it comes to our politics—not actually in short supply. Ralph Scott's contribution to this collection demonstrates that, despite our increasing tendency to counterpose the views and interests of different generations, older and younger voters agree much more than they disagree on most of the big issues facing our country, including welfare, taxation and investment in public services. We are not as opposed to one another's world views as some would lead us to believe – a point which Common Vision's Caroline Macfarland makes powerfully through her essay on the evolving leadership role of Millennials within our society. Peeking under the bonnet of our national life, the component parts of a unifying politics and a shared desire to fix the problems which have given rise to narratives of intergenerational unfairness are plain to see.

That's not to say that the engine hasn't begun to sputter and stall of late. As Scott points out, Millennials and Baby Boomers do hold divergent views on issues such as climate change, and see eye-to-eye less often on gay marriage, transgender rights and our nation's approach to immigration.

Certainly, this latter split was expressed forcefully in the verdict offered by each generation at last year's referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. There can be no denying that Brexit is something of an intergenerational sore spot. Many

11   Shrimpton, H, Skinner, and G, Hall, S, 2017, *The Millennial Bug: Public attitudes on the living standards of different generations*, London: Localis
12   Conservative Home, 2017, 'Renewing the British dream: May's speech in full', *Conservative Home*, 4 October 2017 (*www.conservativehome.com/parliament/2017/10/renewing-the-british-dream-mays-speech-in-full.html*)
13   Elliott, L, 2017, 'Millennials may be first to earn less than previous generation – study', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2016 (*www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/18/millennials-earn-8000-pounds-less-in-their-20s-than-predecessors*)

younger Remain supporters feel that their futures have been sold down the river by their Leave-voting elders. They are not wrong to believe that large numbers of Baby Boomers and members of the Greatest Generation (those born from the early 1900s up to the mid-1920s) are inclined to prioritise Brexiting above all else.[14] New research conducted by YouGov and The Challenge on behalf of the APPG on Social Integration shows that 28% of Leave voters of retirement age believe that lower wages for the next generation would for be a price worth paying for Britain's departure from the European Union.[15] In fact, more Leave voters aged 65 and over agree with this proposition than disagree.[16] Equally strikingly, a similar number (28%) of Remain-backers aged 18 to 34 would be willing to see pensions for older people reduced if it meant a stop to Brexit.[17]

Belonging, trust, connection

The question is why.

Last year, whilst the APPG was conducting its inquiry into the integration of immigrants, I spent some time in Boston in Lincolnshire, the local authority area which voted to leave the EU by the greatest margin. In Boston, I met with a group of older residents as well as a number of local teenagers and young adults, and encountered the radically different views which the young and old hold on immigration, multiculturalism and Europe first-hand. I did not, however, come across a great number of stereotypically narrow-minded, ageing racists or many stereotypically zealous 'Remaniac' young people. We are more nuanced than our political debate often recognises.

Instead, the majority of the older Bostonians who I spoke with told me that they had voted for Brexit for a variety of reasons unrelated to race. Some voiced concerns about public services pushed to the brink by a growing population, whilst others spoke about national sovereignty. Many said they had backed the Leave campaign exactly because they were worried about the impact of economic migration on the earning power and futures of their children and grandchildren. Some felt that their town had changed beyond recognition in a short space of time and had 'stopped feeling like home'[18] – they remembered fondly a time during which they had known their neighbours, and felt that their community had been hollowed out.

Any meaningful attempt to bridge the generational schism embodied and expanded by Brexit must, therefore, include measures aimed at rejuvenating those parts of the UK left behind by deindustrialisation and globalisation, as well as community-building. We must empower to feel sense of belonging within and ownership of the place they call home even as it changes, and build bonds of trust across generations and cultures.

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14 Smith, M, 2017, 'The "extremists" on both sides of the Brexit debate', *YouGov*, 1 August 2017 (***yougov.co.uk/news/2017/08/01/britain-nation-brexit-extremists/?belboon=031b3908984b04d39d00589b,4711849,subid= 35871X1520432X515e329f6e861ff2478c8a7598fb0a4b&pdl.rlid=203577***)

15 Original polling commissioned by The Challenge and conducted by YouGov on behalf of the APPG on Social Integration. This is available to view on the APPG's website: ***www.socialintegrationappg.org.uk***

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 APPG on Social Integration, 2017, *Integration not Demonisation* (***http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/570513f1b504f500db000001/attachments/original/1504379228/ TC0016_AAPG_Integration_not_Demonisation_Report.pdf?1504379228***)

The final report of the APPG's first inquiry, titled *Integration not Demonisation*, explores how we might better support communities to manage—and come together in the wake of—the demographic and cultural change generated through immigration.[19] Through the inquiry which we are launching with this essay collection—our second—we will investigate how our relationships with people of different age groups shape our sense of community, and how we might strengthen these connections.

 As a starting point, we will carefully examine the bold measures proposed in essays by David Robinson and Alex Smith, both of whom have pioneered innovative and impactful programmes to bring people of different generations together within their own communities. Robinson and Smith share a vision of a good society in which reciprocal relationships between people of different ages underpin strong communities and inspire feelings of wellbeing, belonging and solidarity between the young and old. More than that, they have developed plans to make this vision a reality.

We will consider the example of organisations such as the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub and Bristol's St Monica Trust, which have both sought to adapt services for older people to better facilitate positive intergenerational encounters, and are the subject of essays by David Williams and Maia Beresford, and Paul McGarry, respectively. Throughout this inquiry, we hope to highlight many more examples of the innovative programmes and initiatives through which local authorities, charities, community groups and businesses are bringing people of all ages together to meet, mix and connect.

We hope too to gain a better understanding of how people from different generations relate to one another in modern Britain; the spaces in which intergenerational mixing take place and in which it could but doesn't; the implications of this for the health and strength of our communities; and the causes and effects of our increasing political polarisation by age group. Ultimately, our aim is to pinpoint a number of practical measures—large and small—through which policymakers and civic leaders might strengthen our intergenerational social contract.

Chuka Umunna MP
Chair of the APPG on Social Integration

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19 Ibid.

GENERATION STRAINS

by Bobby Duffy

Bobby Duffy is Managing Director of Public Affairs in the UK and Global Director of the Ipsos Social Research Institute. He leads a team of around 200 researchers in London, Manchester, Edinburgh and Brussels. He has worked across most public policy and public affairs areas in the 22 years he's been in research, and has been seconded to the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit. Bobby is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Policy Institute, King's College London, and sits on several advisory boards for think tanks and universities.

What do the turbulent political times we live in tell us about intergenerational relations? And to what extent can attitudes and behaviours be explained by age?

If a week is a long time in politics, why should we bother with generational analysis of political attitudes and behaviour? It may seem very retrospective and academic – but looking back to see how different generations vote and change their political views is actually one of the best ways of predicting the future.

This is because all changes we see in attitudes and behaviour have to be explained by only three effects: *period effects*, where something happens and people in general change their views in the same sort of way; *lifecycle effects* where our attitudes and behaviours shift because of key life events, like leaving home, having children or retiring; or *cohort effects*, where a group born at a particular time are shaped into having particular views or behaviours, and they stick with them to some extent throughout life.

Politics is a key part of that shaping environment, so it's no surprise we have generational monikers like 'Thatcher's Children' and 'Blair's Babies'.

Of course, it's never as simple as a change being explained by just one of these effects – there's always an interaction. But understanding which is dominant can help us separate short-term noise from long-term shifts.

Let's start with a snapshot from the 2017 General Election – because we have never measured a greater political division between age groups. As the chart below shows, the old and young are mirror opposites: only 27% of the youngest age group voted Tory, while 61% of the oldest did; only 25% of the oldest group voted Labour while 62% of the youngest did.

And voting in the EU Referendum was a very similar picture of opposites: around three-quarters of young people voted Remain, and two-thirds of older people voted Leave.

How Britain voted by age – the biggest age gap we've seen since our estimates started in 1979
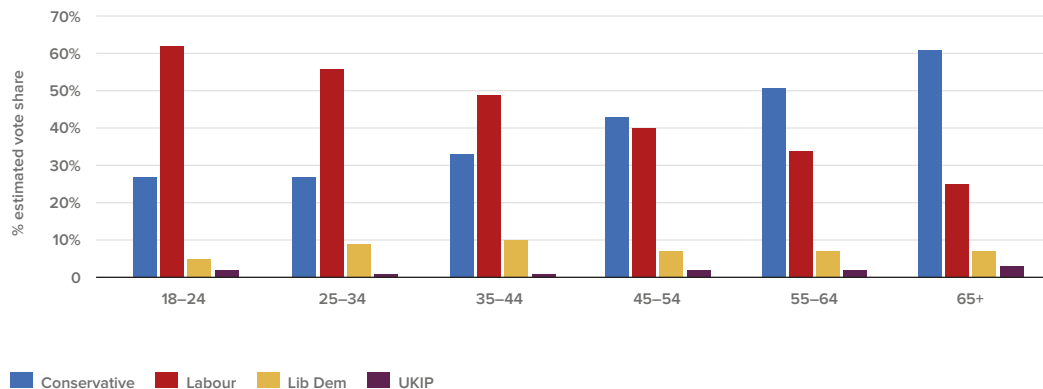
Base: 7,505 GB adults aged 18+ (5,255 classified as voters), interviewed telephone and online 21 April – 7 June 2017. Data has been weighted to the actual results by region and to the population profile of Great Britain.

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

But it's not just how people voted that has shifted, the turnout gap between the age groups is also smaller now than we or others have measured in decades: registered young people were around 20 percentage points more likely to vote in 2017 than in 2015, at 64% – while turnout among older people softened, to around 74%, down around 5 percentage points.

The democratic deficit between young and old has been massively reduced, and political parties are starting to take note.

This sort of shift in voting levels and party choice raises a number of questions – what caused it, will it last and what will the consequences be for political parties? There are a number of credible explanations, and they point to what's likely to come next.

First, the campaigns and leadership of the main parties will have played a part, and may be fleeting as circumstances and strategies change. Jeremy Corbyn mobilised the young in a way not seen in recent general elections, and the Conservative manifesto alienated their core older support, at least partly through uncertainty around their pensions and inheritance. These can be thought of as period effects, that can change again, just as quickly.

But Brexit may also have played an important longer-term role – more as a political event than an issue. Our turnout estimates for the different age groups in the General Election in 2017 are remarkably similar to the turnout patterns for the EU Referendum. The levels of voting by age in 2017 were much closer to that supposedly one-off event than they were to recent general elections. This is a key explanation for why most polls ahead of the election were too low on Labour – we expected people to turn out in a similar age profile to other elections, but they actually voted like it was the referendum.

This is something pollsters should have maybe picked up on more: we know from countless academic studies that voting is to some extent habitual – once you start, you are much more likely to continue. And while the young didn't quite turn out enough to be decisive in the referendum, the very fact it happened may well have changed the course of voting behaviour for many in that generation.

So does this mean an easy march to power for Labour in the future, given they have an energised youth massively more likely to support them? Not necessarily.

First, the old adage that people get more Conservative as they age is broadly true. As the chart below shows, Generation X (now mainly in their 40s) have become much more Conservative than the 18-34 age group they started out in. The current batch of 18-34 year olds are about as Tory as 18-34 year olds were back in 1996. But Generation X, now aged 38-51 are nearly twice as likely to be Tory. This is a clear-cut lifecyle effect.

Generation X vote preference – GB
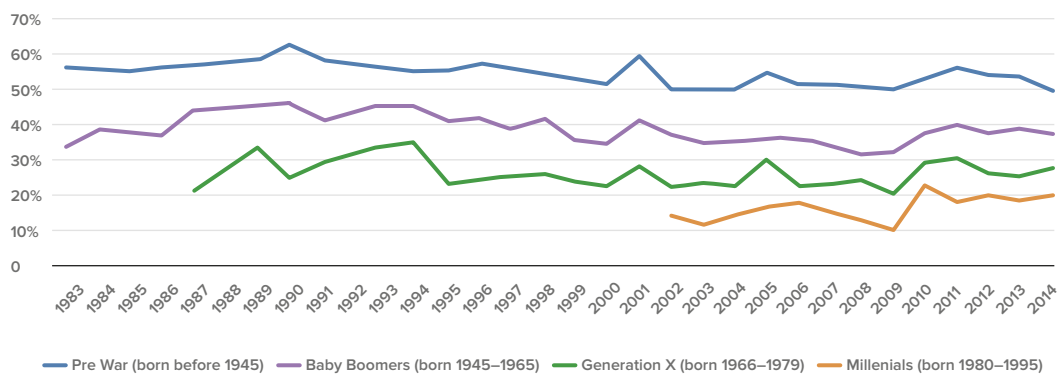**How would you vote if there was a General Election tomorrow?**
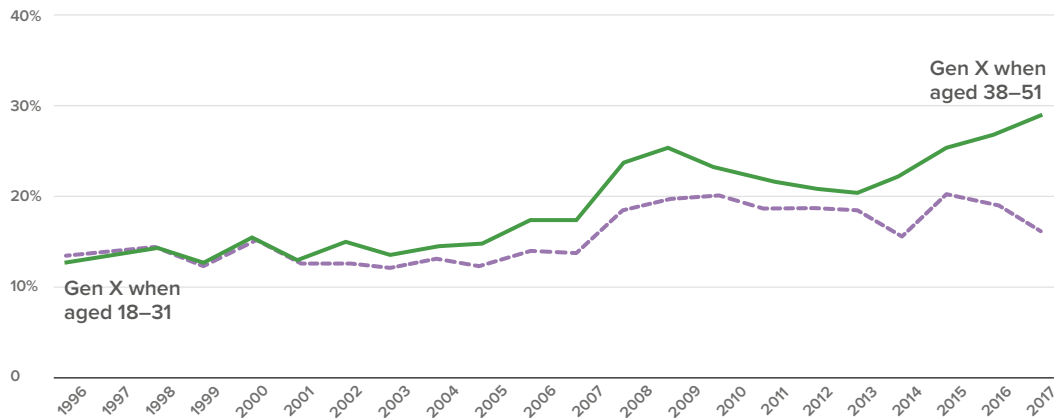
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

And, second, our analysis also shows that young people have no unquestioning party affiliation in the way previous generations did. Only 20% of Millennials feel they are closer to one particular political party, compared with around 60% of the oldest generation, as the chart below shows. The lines for the different generations are nearly flat over time: many more people used to be socialised into a connection to a political party than are now.

The generational decline of party attachment...
% supporter of any one political party

Pre War (born before 1945) Baby Boomers (born 1945–1965) Generation X (born 1966–1979) Millenials (born 1980–1995)

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey

This doesn't mean that younger groups are politically apathetic – as their turnout levels now attest. But it does mean that political parties are going to have to work harder to keep them. It's a more fluid attitude to politics – a challenge for parties, but also healthy, stopping parties taking bloc votes for granted. It means Labour has nothing like the guarantee that this young vote will stay with them that parties did only a few decades ago.

Third, there are some clearly identifiable generational trends in values that differ for this current cohort of young – that no parties seem to be quite matching as yet. Looking across studies, this outlook can be characterised as socially liberal and caring, but more individualistic and focused on personal responsibility. They look less naturally to further state-driven redistribution to solve problems than other age groups or previous cohorts of young, and do not feel the same attachment and pride in the 'welfare state' as older generations. This doesn't mean they don't care or are selfish. It's just that big institutional responses are not seen as automatically the best approach.

And you can understand why that might be the case: when so much of the rest of your life can be filtered and tailored, when you can organise yourself into groups to deal with issues, dissolve and move on to the next issue in a much more fluid way, why would lumbering bureaucracies be that attractive?

And young people can also be justifiably angry about how these political and economic systems have worked against them in recent years. Countless analyses show how they've lost out on income, social welfare support, wealth accumulation, debt burden, stability of employment and housing.

And they do see how they've been disadvantaged: as our recent work with the Intergenerational Commission[1] shows, nearly half (48%) think Millennials will have a worse life than their parents, which is a massive shift from the assumption of an automatically better future for each new generation.

But our research shows that, despite this, there's virtually no sign of intergenerational resentment or conflict. The blame for the relatively poor circumstances of younger cohorts is placed on wider economic factors such as rising house prices and lack of stable employment opportunities – not on older groups themselves.

Around three in ten young people say making jobs more stable and secure, supporting growth in the economy as a whole and increasing the number of houses available to rent or buy are the key areas for the government to focus on to start fixing the problem. In contrast, policies that imply intergenerational redistribution – including shifting the balance of taxation from young to old or reducing spending on pensions – are much less popular. Again, this is understandable: we don't live in cohorts, we live in families where our connections go up and down between age groups, cutting across generational lines. It was clear from our focus groups that concern and support flowed just as much from grandchildren to grandparents as the other way round.

The current generation of young are among the most derided we've ever measured opinion on but the trope young people as overly-precious 'snowflakes' or 'moaning Millennials' is doubly unfair. Their circumstances have been tough, but this hasn't turned them into the selfish cohort they're often seen as – and political parties are finally starting to see that, now they've flexed their political muscle.

The short-term impact of the 2017 general election may be more uncertainty but the long-term effects of having three major political events in the last couple of years may be a better balance of political power across the generations, which can only be a good thing.

1   Shrimpton, H, Skinner, G and Hall, S (2017), *The Millennial Bug: Public attitudes on the living standards of different generations*, London: Intergenerational Commission (*www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/09/The-Millennial-Bug.pdf*)

THE KIDS AREN'T ALL LEFT: UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL ATTITUDES

by Ralph Scott

Ralph Scott leads on research at The Challenge, where he conducts original research and forges partnerships to develop the evidence base on social integration. He was previously Head of the Citizenship programme at the think-tank Demos, where he led its work on populism, political participation and young people's development, including projects supported by the Department for Education and the Home Office. His research has been published in peer-reviewed journals and the BBC, the Sunday Times, TES, the Telegraph, the Guardian, the LA Times and the Economist.

Are young people more left wing than older generations? And how divided are we when it comes to social attitudes and beliefs?

The thorough overturning of the conventional political wisdom that was the 2017 General Election has been subject to a great deal of analysis and introspection since June. While not the only one, perhaps the biggest surprise of the election was the voting behaviour of young people, both in terms of turnout and the strength of their support for Labour, as is discussed by Bobby Duffy in the previous essay. This polarisation was matched at the other end of the age spectrum, with older people being far more likely than previously to vote Conservative.[1]

But the question of how attitudes differ between generations is not one which is as straightforward as the vote in 2017 would suggest. Despite the apparent success of *#grime4corbyn*, or more seriously, Momentum's efforts to engage young people with radical left politics, it wasn't too long ago that pundits were discussing how millennials should be understood as 'Generation Right', due to their individualistic outlook and preference for entrepreneurship over state intervention.[2]

This contention had a solid grounding in social attitudes research. Ipsos MORI, and my former employer Demos, have found that young people were less solidaristic, especially as regards the welfare system which they saw as too often providing a disincentive to work.[3] And a fascinating longitudinal study of the British Social Attitudes study entitled 'Thatcher's Children, Blair's Babies', found that the attitudes of those who came of age under Blair were even more right-authoritarian than the generation that preceded them, not just in terms of welfare but also economic redistribution and crime.[4]

1   Curtis C, 2017, 'How Britain voted at the 2017 general election', available at:
    yougov.co.uk/news/2017/06/13/how-britain-voted-2017-general-election
2   Harvey, D, 2014, 'Is this Generation Right?', available at: *www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-27865991*
3   Duffy, B et al, 2013, *Generation Strains: a Demos and Ipsos MORI report on changing attitudes to welfare*, London: Demos
    (*www.demos.co.uk/files/Demos_Ipsos_Generation_Strains_web.pdf*)
4   Grasso, M et al, 2017, 'Thatcher's Children, Blair's Babies, Political Socialization and Trickle-down Value Change: An Age,
    Period and Cohort Analysis', *British Journal of Political Science*, 26 January 2017, page. 1-20

So what, if anything, has changed? Are young people more left-wing than previously thought? It is possible to investigate this question through analysis of the most recent British Social Attitudes survey, which published its underlying data earlier in 2017. Fieldwork was carried out towards the end of 2016, before the election was called but after the EU referendum, so if there was a sea change in opinion then it should be apparent in this data.[5]

The BSA is a treasure trove of attitudes data, asking respondents about all manner of issues. However, for this essay, we're interested in exploring the differences between the generations in terms of values, and then what this means in practice, for policies. The BSA includes three values scales, which place respondents somewhere on the following axes:

→ the left–right axis, which generally relates to economic and fiscal policy, testing support for redistribution and intervention;

→ the welfarism axis, which evaluates the degree to which a respondent is sympathetic to those claiming benefits and the principles underpinning the welfare system more generally;

→ and the libertarian–authoritarian axis, which is about issues such as censorship, the death penalty and respect for authority.[6]

Based on original analysis, I'll explore each of these in turn to understand exactly where the different generations disagree, or as we shall see, agree, with one another.

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5   For more technical information, see the User Guide:
    doc.ukdataservice.ac.uk/doc/8252/mrdoc/pdf/8252_bsa_2016_user_guide.pdf
6   Ibid.

Left–right axis

So, to start: are young people more economically left-wing than the old? Our analysis of the BSA data suggests not. On this scale, 5 is the maximum right-wing score and 1 the maximum left-wing score – making a score of 2.5 economically and fiscally 'centrist'. For example, someone with a low score on this scale would agree with such statements as 'Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth' and 'Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off.'

The means for each age group displayed in figure 1 demonstrate that the younger age groups are more or less in the middle, if anything with a slight tendency towards the right.[7] The same is true of the 65+ age group, with only those 55-64 leaning towards the left.

This picture is elaborated once we get into some more detailed questions on public spending. Figure 2 presents the age groups' results when asked their preferences in terms of tax and spend. While there is a clear pattern of increased support for public spending supported by taxation among the older groups, and the younger expressing a preference to keep both as they are, this obscures a consensus that reducing taxes and cutting spending is unpopular across all age groups (so low the entry does not feature in the graph).

Figure 1: Mean score on Left-Right values axis by age group
(1 = left and 5 = right, error bars represent 95% confidence interval)
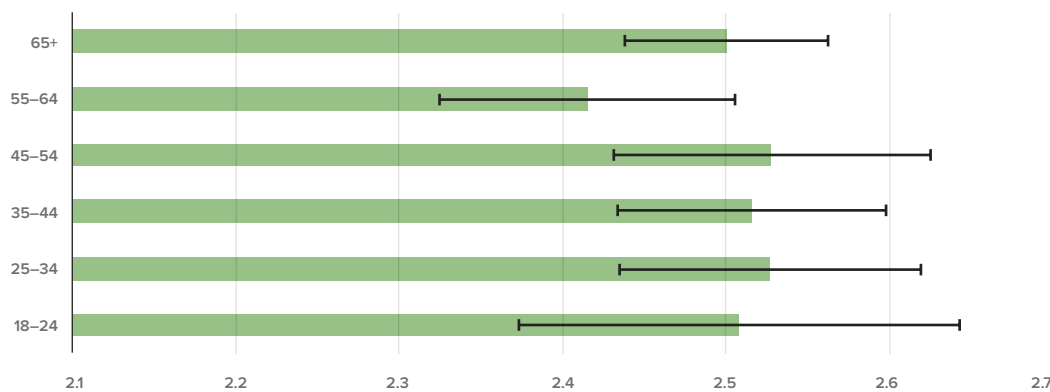
Figure 2: preferences on taxation and public spending by age group

Keep taxes and spending on these services at the same level as now

Increase taxes and spend more on health, education and social benefits

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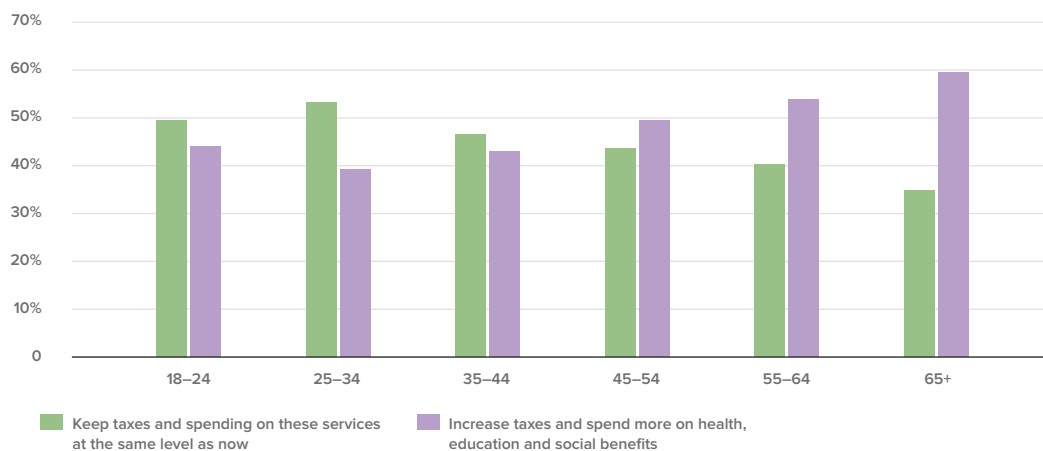
7   Note that all results presented in this essay are based on weighted analysis of BSA 2016 data, available through the UK Data Service. The R code used to derive these findings is available on request.

Once we get into the detail of what areas of policy people prioritise for extra spending, we find yet more agreement across the generations. Respondents were asked their first and second priorities for public spending, and the top three results are combined in figure 3. All age groups consider health, education and housing to be the biggest priorities, in that order, although among the 65+ group defence spending also enjoys significant support.

The emphasis does shift between these groups – with the 18-24s being keenest on housing, 25-44s on education, and 45+ on health, but it doesn't especially subtract from the overall consensus. That the generations differ in emphasis somewhat is perhaps unsurprising, given their differing concerns over the course of the lifespan – with health dominating older people's worries, and money, work and housing those of young people (Table 1).

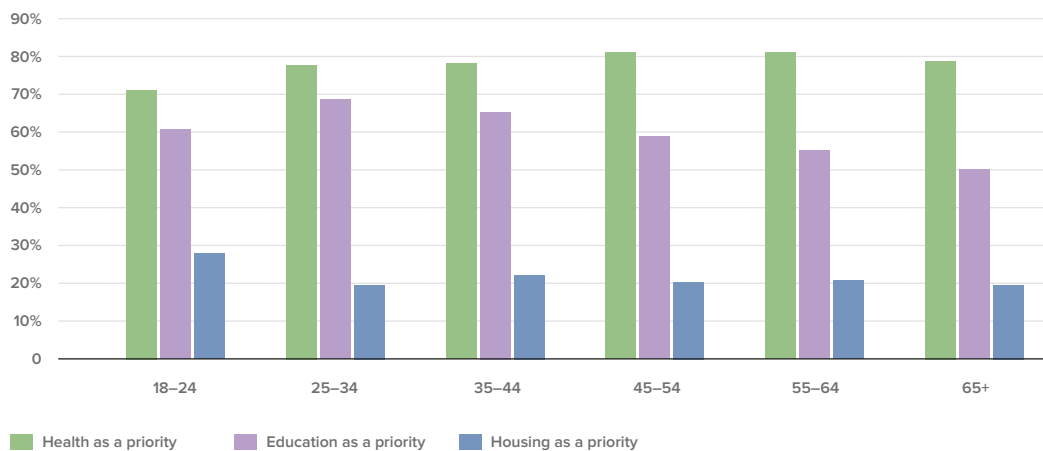**Figure 3: top three priorities for increased public spending, by age group**

Table 1: Biggest concern at the moment as reported by respondents, by age group

Biggest concern at the moment	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Mean
Your physical health	1.1%	8.2%	10.8%	16.2%	22.6%	34.2%	16.6%
Money or debt	25.8%	22.6%	17.1%	14.2%	8.1%	3.4%	14.5%
Immigration	6.5%	10.2%	7.2%	11.7%	19.8%	19.2%	12.7%
Your family or partner	8.3%	10.6%	11.1%	11.7%	13.1%	14.3%	11.7%
Caring for your family, or another person	1.1%	8.0%	12.7%	15.0%	16.7%	13.4%	11.7%
Work or finding a job	23.9%	10.0%	9.9%	6.1%	6.6%	0.0%	8.5%
Housing or your home	8.6%	12.1%	8.5%	5.4%	1.8%	1.6%	6.1%
Education (for yourself or your family)	11.8%	3.9%	9.5%	9.4%	1.5%	1.8%	6.0%
Crime in your local area	1.4%	6.0%	5.5%	5.1%	6.1%	5.1%	5.0%
Your mental health	7.7%	4.2%	4.5%	2.7%	2.1%	3.9%	4.1%
Your friend(s)	1.5%	0.4%	1.1%	1.2%	0.6%	1.5%	1.1%

If we look in more detail at housing policy, we can see yet more evidence of a broad consensus, as people of all ages support homebuilding in their local area, and the state providing financial support for people struggling to afford rents. Support for both is more strongly felt by young people—especially those aged 25-34—while older people's support for building more houses is less emphatic. However, there are not the strong divides here that might be expected if the generations were purely self-interested, as the current narrative sometimes portrays it. This suggests that, while young people are not more economically left-wing than older people, there is a great deal of agreement on the size of the state and what public money should be spent on.

Figure 4: net support (support minus oppose) for homebuilding in local area
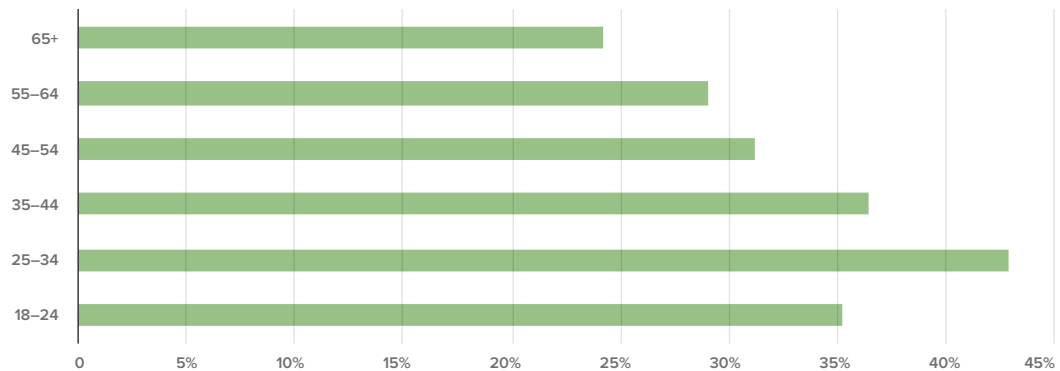
Figure 5: net support (support minus oppose) for financial support for those on low income to pay rent
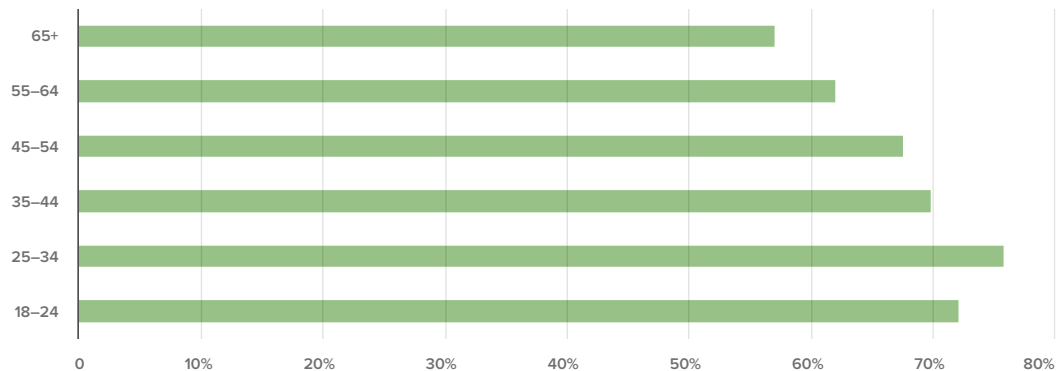
Attitudes to Welfare

The British Social Attitudes survey also enables us to look into people's feelings on welfare policy in more detail. So to pose our question again: are young people more left-wing on welfare? The answer, in accordance with the previous research, is an emphatic no.

On this scale, 5 is the maximum anti-welfare score and 1 the maximum 'sympathy for welfare recipients' score – making a score of 2.5 again the middle value. Someone with a high score on this scale would agree with the statement 'If welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet', whereas someone with a low score would agree that 'The government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes.'

The means for each age group displayed in figure 6 show that while all age groups lean towards being anti-welfare, it is the young who feel this most strongly. The older age groups are more sympathetic, with the 55-64 year olds again being the group with the most left-wing attitudes.

This generational gap can also be detected when asking people whether they think unemployment benefits are too high or too low, with all ages believing the former, but the young doing so more strongly (Figure 7). However, there are interesting differences by age when asking what form of welfare spending should be prioritised. When approaching retirement age, pensions become increasingly important to respondents, just as child benefits are valued by respondents aged between 25 and 44. Disability benefits are given a high priority by all ages, and particularly by young people (Figure 8), which could be attributed to the latter's perception that those in receipt of disability benefits are in this position through no fault of their own, in contrast to the perception of unemployment benefit recipients (as suggested by the Demos and Ipsos MORI study).[8]

Therefore, again, we can see here that, if anything, young people are more conservative than their elders on welfare policy. However, when it comes to policy priorities, it is clear that the generations do not differ greatly, with pensions and disability benefits always being the top two main priorities.

Figure 6: Mean score on welfare scale by age group
(1 = sympathetic and 5 = anti-welfare, error bars represent 95% confidence interval)

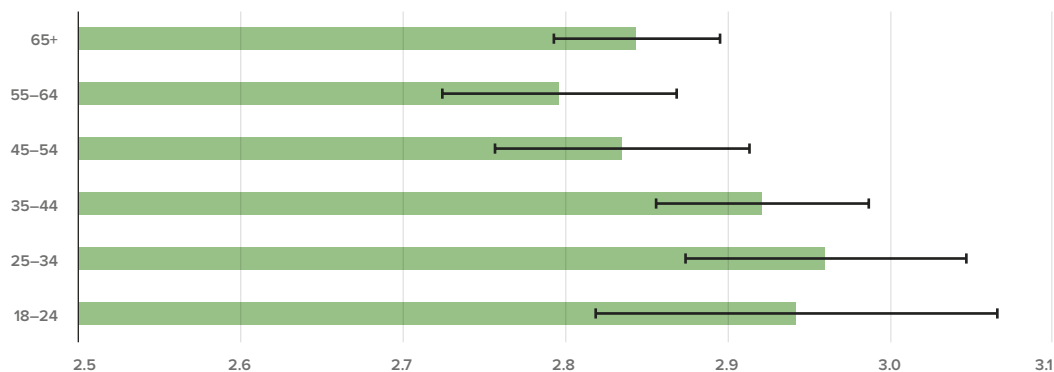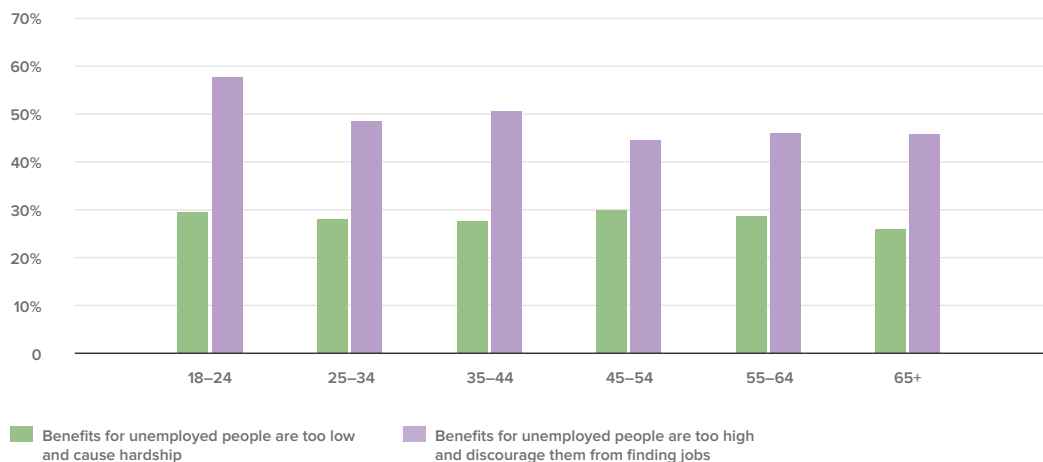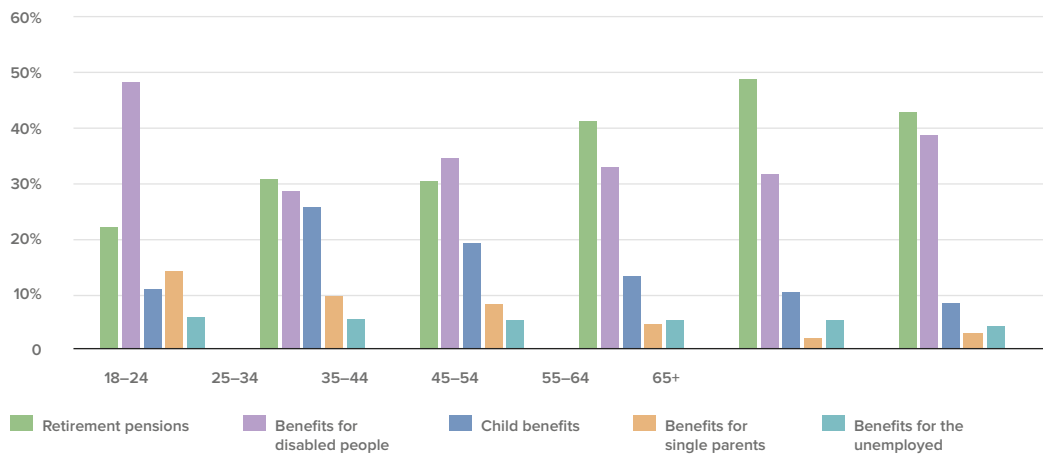**Figure 7: whether unemployment benefits are too high or low, by age group**

Benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship

Benefits for unemployed people are too high and discourage them from finding jobs

8   Duffy, B et al, 2013, Generation Strains

**Figure 8: top priority for welfare spending by age group**

Libertarian–Authoritarian axis

Finally, the BSA also includes a values scale that measures authoritarian sentiment. On this scale, 5 is the maximum authoritarian score and 1 the maximum libertarian, or socially liberal, score – making a score of 2.5 again the middle value. Someone with a high score on this scale would agree with the statement 'Censorship of films and magazines is necessary to uphold moral standards', whereas someone with a low score would disagree with the death penalty, or stiffer sentences for criminals.

So to pose our question one final time: are young people more left-wing, or liberal, on cultural values? Here, the answer is a clear yes. As Figure 9 shows, while the whole population is relatively authoritarian, it appears to be the case that as someone gets older, they also get more authoritarian, with the 18-24 age group far less so than those 65 plus.

Figure 9: Mean score on libertarian–authoritarian scale by age group
(1 = libertarian and 5 = authoritarian, error bars represent 95% confidence interval)
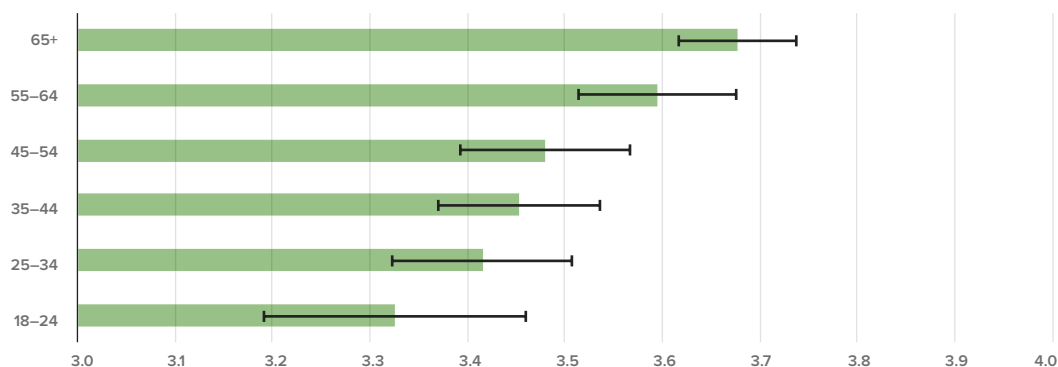
We can see how this plays out in attitudes to a variety of sexual equality and LGBT-related questions included in the survey. For example, there is a 35 percentage point gap between the proportions of the oldest and youngest age groups who believe that pre-marital sex is not at all wrong (Figure 10) and 9 times as many of those aged 65 and over believe that same-sex relationships are 'always wrong' than 18-24 year olds (Figure 11). This difference is also clear in terms of attitudes to transgender people, with the oldest age group being almost three times as likely as the youngest to admit to being prejudiced against them (Figure 12).

Figure 10: proportion of age group reporting that pre-marital sex is 'not wrong at all'
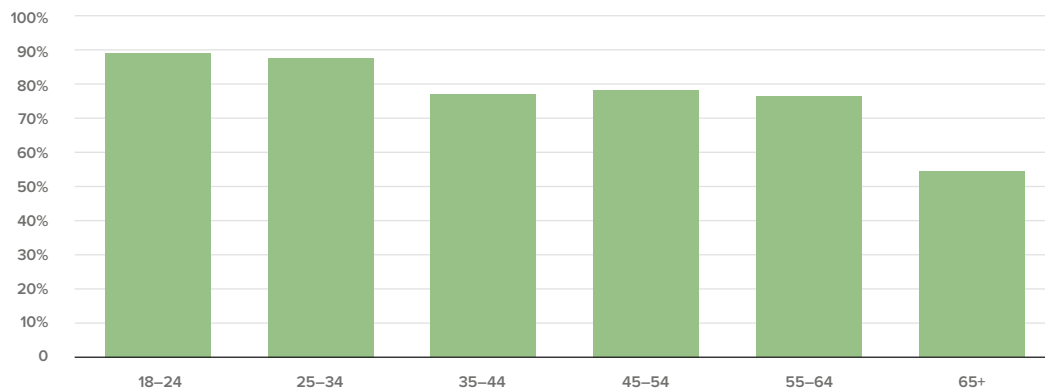

Figure 11: proportion of age group reporting that sexual relations between two people of the same sex is 'always wrong'
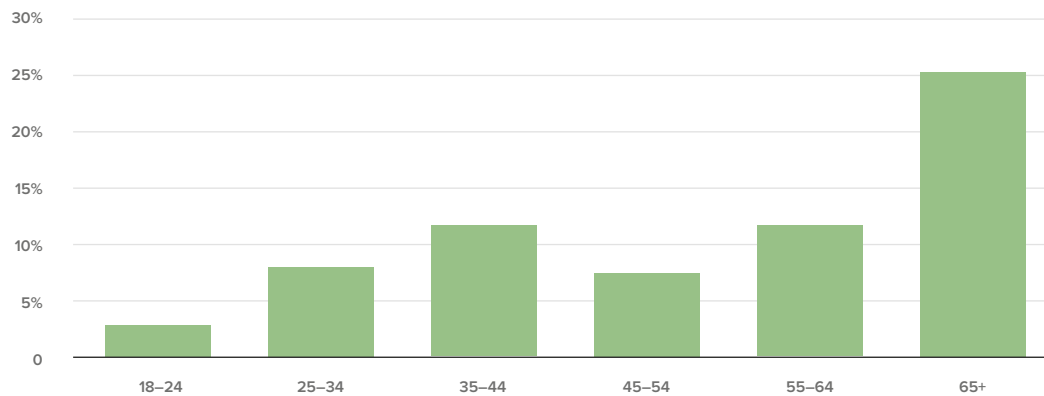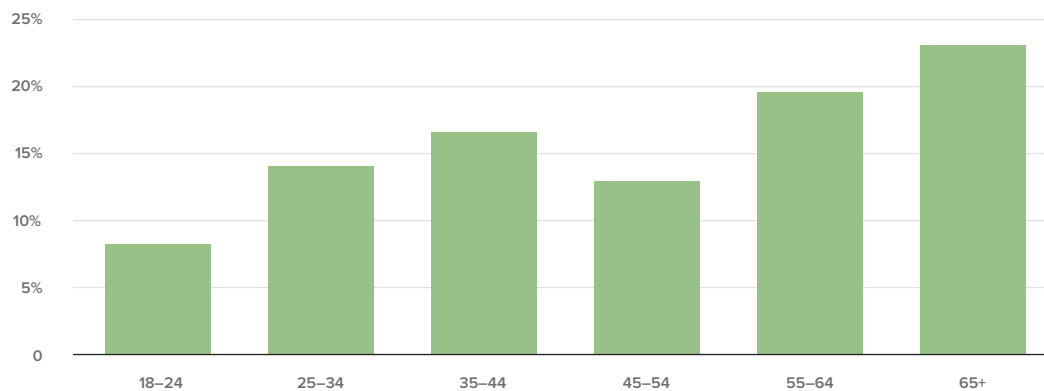

Figure 12: proportion of age group reporting they are 'very' or 'a little' prejudiced against transgender people

Conclusion

If young people are not particularly economically left-wing, or supportive of the welfare system, this does leave open the question as to why they swung so significantly towards the Labour Party in June.

While this is a question that invites further analysis, the deciding factors could be those that were true of the population at large – first that, increasingly, British politics appears to be contested on the cultural values, libertarian–authoritarian axis, rather than the economic, left–right axis.[9] At the election, the Conservatives aimed to secure the support of working class social conservatives but only managed to achieve limited gains amongst this group, whilst alienating socially liberal voters (including the young) in the process and thereby losing seats in London and the South East.[10]

Second, and relatedly, this dynamic was encapsulated in the defining election issue: Brexit. While on other policy issues there is not a lot to divide the generations, younger and older voters feel very differently about the EU, with large majorities of younger people keen to remain a member despite the referendum (Figure 13). Despite a lack of clarity in their position, Labour did well among Remainers, as the Conservatives had more demonstrably positioned themselves as the party of Brexit.

Yet the analysis presented in this essay also finds a surprising degree of consensus on public spending—no age group supports austerity—and priority policy areas, including a substantial degree of selflessness as regards welfare and housing policy. So while there are significant generational differences in attitude when it comes to social liberalism there is significantly more common ground between baby boomers and millennials than the current political and media narrative would suggest. This is both a positive finding for British society, which can too often feel polarised beyond repair, and something that all parties can learn from when engaging with young and older over the long-term.

Figure 13: proportion wanting to leave or stay in the EU, by age group

Leave Stay
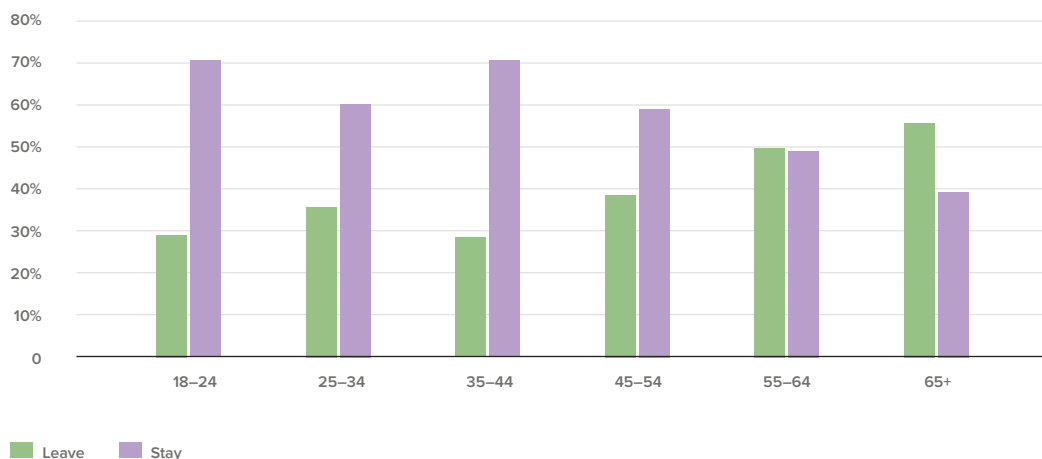
9   E Kaufmann, 2016, 'It's NOT the economy, stupid: Brexit as a story of personal values', *British Politics and Policy Blog*, LSE, 7 Jul 2016, (*blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/personal-values-brexit-vote/*); Jennings W and Stoker G (2017) 'Tilting Towards the Cosmopolitan Axis? Political Change in England and the 2017 General Election', *The Political Quarterly*, 88:3, pp 359–369
10 Heath, O and Goodwin, M, 2017, 'The 2017 General Election, Brexit and the Return to Two-Party Politics: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result', *The Political Quarterly*, 88:3, pp 345 - 358

MILLENNIALS CAN LEAD A NEW INTERGENERATIONAL SETTLEMENT

by Caroline Macfarland

Caroline Macfarland is the founder and Director of Common Vision (CoVi), an independent, not-for-profit think tank with a mission to inspire civic engagement and policy understanding, in particular amongst the millennial generation. Caroline was previously a special advisor to the Big Lottery Fund, one of the founding team members of the foundation Power to Change, and Managing Director at the think tank ResPublica.

Who are the 'millennials'? Do they matter? Do they vote? And if they do, what does this mean for politics?

These were some of the questions following the June 2017 general election, when record turnout was boosted by younger voters. It was as if that mythical beast, the 'youth vote', had finally surfaced on the waters of the Thames. But will the growing interest in the political capital of younger people change anything – and if so, what does that new political settlement look like?

The commercial sector, employers and management consultancies have long recognised the importance of reaching the 'millennials' – a term coined by market researchers and demographic analysts broadly describing people born between the early 1980s and late 1990s, currently aged around 18 to 36 years old. This is a cohort which is fast becoming the largest generation in British society, making up one in four adults in the UK and forecast to number 17 million in 2019. They represent a 'high value audience' not least because they are at a life stage of forming habits and brand loyalties during their transitions into established adulthood, and have an increasing prevalence in the workforce. And while this generation is often described as 'the leaders of tomorrow', they are increasingly taking up leadership positions—in business, politics and civil society—today.

This is why it felt like the politicians and press commentators who suddenly started talking about 'the younger generation' in the wake of the election (and the EU referendum the previous year) were not just late to the party – they'd turned up to the wrong address.

Instead of 'othering' younger people, that is, seeing them as a strange new breed that is set apart from other generations, we need to understand millennials' attitudes, behaviours and preferences in order to gain a valuable insight into the future.

Social ideals

In reality there is no binary battle of the old versus the young. People of all ages want a better future for the young, and a system which cares for people in their old age. Millennials are a generation representing the children of the generation entering and experiencing retirement, and the parents of young children and those yet to be born. We have a key linking role to play in shaping and maintaining an intergenerational settlement that works for everyone.

And yet, there are a number of trends that make the millennial generation distinct from older cohorts. For example, millennials are more likely to hold socially liberal, 'progressive' outlooks, and to regard globalisation, multiculturalism, feminism, the gay rights movement and the green movement as positive forces. This is not a new phenomenon in itself, but an extension of attitudes that are less prevalent in older cohorts.

Of course one generation is not a homogeneous group. In the UK the life experiences of younger millennials aged 18–24 will inevitably be different to older 25–35 year olds, not to mention the intra-generational differences in social-economic background, education, ethnicity, gender and other personal characteristics.

But understanding the social attitudes and behaviours that are unlikely to change over time —an indeed may be even more prevalent in subsequent generations—helps understand what society will look like in future, and therefore how to advocate and champion that society in a positive way.

For example, research Common Vision conducted in 2016 on the drivers of millennial voting behaviours in the EU referendum found that globalist, pro-immigration outlooks were key reasons behind both leave and remain votes from millennials – many young Leave voters told us 'I voted leave because I think Britain has a role on the global stage' or 'because I want the UK to develop more ambitious policies about immigration and international aid' – while many young Remainers applied the same rationale to their decision.[1]

And yet, a year and a half after the referendum, the public debate still forces people to fall into one of just two camps and identify as pro- or anti-Brexit – the issues on which we are divided rather than the perspectives which unite us.

Understanding the similarities and attitudinal coherence within the millennial generation does not need to result in a narrative which is negative about the perspectives of other generations, declaring 'generational warfare' or seeking to devalue the interests and priorities of other age groups. Rather, it is an opportunity for public leadership: to embrace the opportunities to talk about the unity and solidarity that exists between a vast number of people, and design public solutions around that common vision for the future.

This vision for the future could then encourage long term thinking, beyond the short termist, often knee-jerk political cycles and policymaking we have today. It could convert the feeling that younger people have been 'screwed over', into a policy narrative that emphasises the need to steward and invest resources—whether economic, natural or social—wisely for future generations.

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1   Owen, K, and Macfarland, C (2016), *A Generation Apart: Were younger people left behind by the EU Referendum?*, London: Common Vision (*www.covi.org.uk/eu-referendum-a-generation-apart/*)

Experiential communities

As well as the differences in attitudes used as a lens to compare generations, the other primary focus of analysis and commentary has been on the economic circumstances of millennials. An ever-familiar description of the millennial generation is that they are 'poorer than their parents' – in terms of average real-time earnings, asset ownership and access to the housing market.

But again, the national debate has been framed around the negative challenges and problems, rather than the opportunities which exist to unite around common goals for the future. It has also led to piecemeal promises from politicians seeking to court the 'youth vote', mostly centred on tuition fees and housing costs.

Another commonly cited description of millennials is that, in the absence of possessing assets, they value experiences. So how could national politics start to frame a more holistic and ambitious narrative around improving the lived experiences of younger people. What does 'feeling poorer' actually mean in relation to having a sense of community, financial and social stability, and being able to plan for the future? Alongside thinking about how we split the 'economic pie', policymakers could regain the trust of younger people by exploring ideas and solutions that would have direct impact on the lived experiences of a cohort undergoing important life transitions which include becoming financially independent, transitioning in the workplace, renting and owning a home for the first time, and starting a family.

The value of these experiences is dependent on forming and sustaining healthy relationships. Alongside the decline of the traditional town centre and with new forms of technology facilitating social interaction, family life, social and leisure activities and the ways we experience our local places and neighbourhoods are very different. High street shops are no longer 'places to buy things', libraries are no longer repositories for books, museums for artefacts, or town halls for public records. This gives rise to what Common Vision has termed the 'experiential community'[2] – the opportunities for refreshed thinking about the value of public space and community assets. Local institutions and government have an important role to facilitate opportunities to bring people together and achieve a sense of social belonging that is not just dependent on individual economic assets.

This would also have clear benefits for intergenerational mixing and cohesion – a positive experience for younger people doesn't mean living in a permanent, student halls-style bubble with other people of the same age. With as much, if not more, to gain from creative thinking about the ways we use, signpost and share public and private resources, millennials could lead this forward to improve the experiences of all generations.

Civic engagement

The way that generational differences have played out on the political stage in recent years is through one 'side' being heavily backed by a majority of the younger generation – whether in the case of the EU referendum, the U.S. Presidential elections, the Scottish referendum or the general election in June this year. In many of these cases, the lower propensity to vote of younger age groups has led to their being on the 'losing side', causing frustration, sadness disillusionment and anger amongst many.

These events have led to what could be described as a political 'awakening' amongst many millennials, evidenced by the turnout in force of younger people in the June 2017 elections. But on the other hand, too much of the debate about political and civic engagement of millennials and younger age groups has focused on participation in elections.

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2   Macfarland, C, and Owen, K, 2017, *The Experiential Library: The future of family learning*, London: Common Vision (available here: *www.covi.org.uk/family-learning-local-communities/*)

Of course, elections are significant in determining who holds political influence. It is a long-standing observation that political parties have often chosen to focus their attention and energies on older generations who are more likely to turn up to the election booth.

But the real question to ask about the millennials is how their attitudes, preferences and behaviours *already* shape civic life – and how politicians and decision makers should respond. Citizenship goes far beyond the act of voting for a generation who have grown up empowered to make choices about the kind of citizens we want to be through an online world of information and knowledge at our fingertips. In many ways, the millennial generation has more 'everyday' political agency than generations before us. We are more educated and socially mobile than previous generations, we vote with our feet through informed spending decisions, and we are hyperconnected with communities of shared interest, often spanning across national borders. Of course other age groups can also do these things, but millennials are the 'natives' of this new world of everyday politics.

In short, we need a new narrative about what it means to be a citizen in Britain today. How does national identity relate to our identities as global and local citizens? And how do we reconcile the multitude of ways in which we exert everyday agency, power and influence, with the ways in which we talk about democracy and citizenship? However, if debates on citizenship and national identity are left to the realms of conventional politics then younger people may be left out. Politicians—and others—must think much more creatively about how we create and construct these discussions, something Common Vision is doing in a new project[3] with Sky Arts, to crowdsource and co-create a new visual identity for Britain based on the positive things which millennials are proud of.

Conclusion

In the various analyses of whether the differences in voting patterns and behaviours between older and younger age cohorts represent a new dividing line in society, there seems to be the immediate assumption that younger people's interests are polarised or competing with those of older generations.

Perhaps this is because generational analysis has taken the place of more traditional groupings used to study differences and inequalities in society – such as socio-economic class, gender, or party political affiliation – that were more binary. But the increasing public spotlight on generational issues does not have to replicate the way these other debates have been constructed over the course of history.

Instead, there is an alternative narrative, whereby an intergenerational consensus is developed around the positive social, economic and political trends that already exist and look set to shape our common future in the long term. Building a future around positive social ideals, creating stronger community experiences, and reframing a more ambitious definition of political and civic participation will undoubtedly benefit all generations but can be led by millennials – who, with the oldest aged 36, are no longer the 'leaders of the future' but increasingly the leaders of today.

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3   Brand Identities for Millennial Britain by Common Vision: *www.skyartsart50.tv/projects/*

GENERATION Z: DIGITALLY CONNECTED, SOCIALLY ISOLATED?

by Emma Jenkins

Emma Jenkins is responsible for the strategic development and operational management of The Challenge's HeadStart programme, having co-designed and developed the programme as a way to get more young people active in their communities. Prior to this, Emma managed a team of fundraising consultants at Generate Fundraising, and also worked as Head of Strategy and Business Development for DHA, a legal advice and homelessness charity.

Our young people face unique challenges growing up in an increasingly digital world. We must do more to create initiatives which draw them into community life.

Many of the other fascinating essays in this collection focus on the benefit which intergenerational connection provides to older generations. In an ageing society, in which loneliness amongst older people is arguably at epidemic levels[1], it is clear that a considerable amount of work to bring people together from different ages will rightly have the explicit aim of tackling the challenges our older citizens face. However, as someone who spends much of my time working with 16–19 year olds, I want to talk about the other side of the double benefit provided by intergenerational connection.

Our political debate, when speaking about 'young people', is often fixated on Millennials and what makes them tick – whether it's their supposed obsession with avocado on toast and what this says about their spending habits or their pessimism about the prospect of ever owning their own home. On the other hand, Generation Z—roughly defined as those born during or after the year 2000—is often overlooked in our public conversation. I imagine this is partially because they aren't yet voting en masse and for the most part haven't entered the workplace, but it's also because their ambitions and priorities aren't well understood. This essay will aim to draw out some of these priorities and speak explicitly about my experience of bringing Generation Z into contact with older generations.

Polling by Ipsos MORI earlier this year shows a clear disconnect between the way older generations expect our youngest generation to think and behave, and the way they actually do. The (in some cases, only slightly) older generations quizzed by Ipsos—Millennials, Generation X and Baby Boomers—all thought social media accounts or mobile phones were one of the most important concerns for Generation Z. In fact, the results show that this group's top concerns are family, relationships and education[2] – issues which are consistently prioritised across the ages.

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1   Polling carried out by the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission earlier this year found that almost three-quarters of older people in the UK are lonely and more than half of those have never spoken to anyone about how they feel
(*www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/21/three-quarters-of-older-people-in-the-uk-are-lonely-survey-finds*)
2   BBC Newsbeat Survey Tables on Generation Z - September 2017
(*www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2017-10/bbc-newsbeat-survey-tables-2017.pdf*)

As Ralph Scott also argues in his essay, there are considerable values overlaps between the generations. Creating a society in which intergenerational connection is commonplace is about emphasising these overlaps.

At HeadStart—the incentivised volunteering programme I run in London, Greater Manchester and Birmingham—this is central to our approach. Young people volunteer for sixteen hours in their community, and in exchange, are provided access to a guaranteed job interview with one of our corporate partners. Through their social action placement we ensure they spend time interacting with people from older generations, whether that's working on the shop floor of a charity shop or volunteering at a local care home. To date, over 8,000 young people have taken part and volunteered more than 130,000 hours to their communities. I'll speak more about the impact of HeadStart below, but first, I want to provide some more context as to why it's important that we have initiatives which draw our young people into our community life.

Whilst social isolation is most acute in the older generations, it is also increasingly a problem amongst Generation Z. In the US, rates of teen depression and suicide have soared since 2011[3] and there is a similar story in the UK – rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers have increased by 70 per cent in the past 25 years.[4] This is doubtless partially as a result of the courage of celebrities like Prince Harry, Stormzy and Zoella who, through speaking about their mental health challenges, have in turn reduced the stigma young people face when speaking up and seeking help. However, ONS data shows that the suicide rate among 15-19 year olds in the UK is also on the rise,[5] and NHS data reveals that the number of teenage girls admitted to hospital in England as a result of self-harm has jumped by 68% over the past decade.[6] Both of these statistics highlight a hugely worrying trend which demonstrates that this problem is much more than simply a rise in the numbers of people reporting mental health issues.

Some have attributed this rise in mental health problems to increased smartphone and social media use[7] – the reality is inevitably more complex. There is, though, emerging evidence that increasing digital connectivity and decreased social activity are to an extent connected. Child psychologist Betsy de Thierry, in a *Guardian* piece from last year argued that '[digital] connectivity is actually disconnecting people from real friendships and the opportunity to enjoy the world together',[8] and that this was driving the increased levels of social isolation reported by today's teenagers.

Above, I noted that neither their smartphone nor social media rank highly on Generation Z's list of concerns. However this generation, whilst not consciously attaching a great deal of importance to these things, are much more likely to spend their free time on social media than their older counterparts.[9] There is evidence from the US to suggest that teens who spend more time than average 'on screen activities' are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on 'non-screen activities' are more likely to be happy. There is of course a question of causality here – do unhappy teens spend more time in virtual spaces or do virtual spaces make their users unhappy?

3   Twenge, J, 2017, 'Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?', *The Atlantic*, September 2017
     (*www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/*)
4   Bedell G, 2016, 'Teenage Mental-Health Crisis: Rates of depression have soared in past 25 years', *The Independent*, 27
     February 2016 (*www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/teenage-mental-health-crisis-rates-of-
     depression-have-soared-in-the-past-25-years-a6894676.html*)
5   Samaritans, 2017, *Suicide statistics* report 2017 (*www.samaritans.org/sites/default/files/kcfinder/files/Suicide_statistics_
     report_2017_Final.pdf*)
6   Campbell, D, 2017, 'Stress and social media fuel mental health crisis among girls', *The Guardian*, 23 September 2017
     (*www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/23/stress-anxiety-fuel-mental-health-crisis-girls-young-women*)
7   Such as author of the Atlantic piece above, Jean M. Twenge (2017), who has written a book entitled, IGen: *Why Today's
     Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy - and Completely Unprepared for
     Adulthood - and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, New York: Arita Books
8   Barr, C, 2016, 'Who are Generation Z? The latest data on today's teens', *The Guardian*, 10 December 2016
     (*www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/dec/10/generation-z-latest-data-teens*)
9   BBC Newsbeat Survey Tables on Generation Z - September 2017

What's clear, though, is that there is a growing crisis of connection in our society, and that this is felt most acutely by our oldest and youngest citizens. This, combined with emerging evidence that there are a number of attitudinal faultlines rarely crossed by those of different age groups, makes the need for interventions to bring our younger generation into contact with those older than them more important than ever.

HeadStart, like other youth social action initiatives such as National Citizen Service and programmes run by City Year and the Prince's Trust, plays a vital role in ensuring today's young people do have ties across the generations and routes into the life of their community. Research by the Social Integration Commission demonstrates that when people from different walks of life meet, mix and connect, trust grows and communities flourish[10] – this belief in social connection as a tool to tackle some of the issues our youngsters face is at the very heart of HeadStart.

Not only this, but the skill of connecting with others from different walks of life is increasingly valued by employers. Starbucks, one of HeadStart's founding corporate partners, have said that they are four times more likely to employ a young person who had been through HeadStart than one who hadn't. Matthew Simmons, Starbucks Talent and Business Partner for London, commented that 'time and time again, my store managers tell me that HeadStart graduates are visibly more confident at interview and that this in turn translates to the way they easily engage with customers of all ages on the shop floor'.

Sana, one of our volunteers, commented that prior to participating in the programme she found it difficult to build up the confidence to speak with people she didn't know, especially those older than her. After volunteering over a sustained period of time at the Abbey Centre—a charity which provides activities and services for the local community—and being pushed out of her comfort zone, Sana came to feel much more comfortable interacting with people of all ages.

Along with the personal and professional skills which participants such as Sana gain, more than eighty five percent of HeadStart volunteers reported that the programme also helped them gain a better understanding of people from different backgrounds – a fact which speaks powerfully to the double benefit of cross-generational connection. David Robinson, who has also contributed to this essay collection, has written elsewhere about the manner in which small scale interventions to promote community feeling can catalyse wider change – a phenomenon he describes as 'social acupuncture'.[11] I believe HeadStart is one of the 'modest pin pricks' to which he refers, and that, through investing in more interventions and programmes which create meaningful incentives for Generation Z to get stuck into their local communities, we might ensure that the Instagram feeds of today's teenagers are filled with the faces of people of all ages, smiling as they connect with one another in ways that matter.

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10 Social Integration Commission, 2015, *Social Integration: a wake-up call*
11 Robinson, D, 2017, *Humbug or Hallelujah? Part six of Connecting Well*,
    (*medium.com/@david.robinson_1204/humbug-or-hallelujah-part-six-of-connecting-well-3784c8f1ed2c*)

ISLANDS OF THE ELDERLY? HOW RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES ARE BRIDGING GENERATIONAL DIVIDES

by David Williams and Maia Beresford

David joined the St Monica Trust from the Accord Group, where he was Executive Director for Health Care and Support. David has many years of experience in the delivery of care and his previous appointments include Head of Strategy and Service Development for Housing 21, as well as working for a number of leading charities. David is currently a Non- Executive Director for the National Care Forum.

Maia Beresford is Policy & Communications Manager at ARCO, the trade association for operators of retirement communities in the UK. Prior to working at ARCO, Maia was Senior Researcher at the local government think tank the New Local Government Network (NLGN). Before that she worked in a public sector consultancy and at charities including Stonewall and 4Children.

It's increasingly well known that retirement communities are good for older people. What's less well known is that they foster relationships between older and younger generations, and benefit both.

Retirement communities are a relatively new kid on the block in the UK. Only around 0.6% of over-65s currently live in a retirement community in this country (compared to 5% in countries like USA, Australia and New Zealand), where historically housing options for older people have not been high on the political agenda. What has been built has mostly been of the traditional sheltered court variety – gated flats with a call system and perhaps a visiting warden, with limited activities and communal facilities.

Increasingly, however, retirement communities are gaining traction in the UK owing to their unique ability to reduce loneliness while at the same time meeting older people's social care needs and promoting independence. Unlike in other forms of retirement housing, integral to the concept of a retirement community is that there are a wide range of on-site facilities which promote wellbeing, and enable residents to live independently in them for as long as possible. This usually means staff on-site 24 hours a day, fitness suites, restaurants where people can eat and socialise, activity coordinators, accessible design, and—importantly—carers available as and when they're needed. Owing to this mix of services and facilities, recent research has found that for older people living in a retirement community NHS costs are reduced by 38%, social care costs are lower, and rates of loneliness and depression are significantly reduced.[1]

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1   Holland, C, 2015, 'Collaborative Research between Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing (ARCHA) and The ExtraCare Charitable Trust'. Aston University. *www.aston.ac.uk/lhs/research/centres-facilities/archa/extracare-project/* p.7; Beach, B, 2015, 'Village Life, Independence, Loneliness, and Quality of Life in Retirement Villages with Extra Care' ILC UK, London *www.ilcuk.org.uk/index.php/publications/publication_details/village_life_independence_loneliness_and_quality_of_life_in_retirement_vill*

Social communities

These benefits to older people's health and wellbeing are increasingly being recognised. However, an anxiety sometimes raised by policymakers is that retirement communities create ghettoes for the elderly. Yes, they facilitate interaction between residents, but what do they do to support residents to access the wider world? Are retirement communities widening generational divides?

These are valid concerns but taking a look at emerging practice in the UK suggests we need not be worried. Far from creating ghettoes for the elderly, in the UK retirement community operators are designing innovative places which foster intergenerational exchanges. For a start, events and trips abound. In many retirement communities, resident-run and operator facilitated groups hold sessions on everything from local history to yoga, and often hold fun-days and fairs, which routinely draw those from the wider local community into the scheme itself. The schemes also support residents to get out and about on trips, and in more rural areas schemes often run regular car-pools or mini-bus services to local town centres.

Furthermore, in most retirement communities, the communal facilities such as libraries, restaurants and swimming pools are open to residents' families, and often to the public – and provide a platform for intergenerational mixing. We know from research we've done with retirement community residents that they report seeing family members far more than they used to when they lived in their old family homes, and the communal facilities are often noted as an important reason for this.

Whilst appealing to younger family members might have started as a happy accident, it's now a goal that operators are aiming for. A growing portion of grandparents regularly look after their grandchildren, and having family-friendly activities is something customers want. Accordingly, operators are programming Pixar movies for afternoon film screenings, and building children's play-areas – carefully balancing residents' requirements for privacy and peace with their desire to host friends and relatives.

Meaningful intergenerational exchange

Most importantly, innovative retirement community operators are going out of their way to create opportunities for meaningful intergenerational exchange, including between residents and members of the public outside of residents' family networks.

This is something aspired to by St Monica Trust. Building on the success of four previous mixed-tenure retirement communities, St Monica Trust purchased the old Fry's Chocolate Factory in Keynsham near Bristol in 2015, and redeveloped it into the recently opened Chocolate Quarter. When planning the development, the Trust attempted to 'design in' intergenerational contact. In addition to a domiciliary care agency, 136 supported housing units, and a 93-bed care home, the Quarter includes commercial office space, a swimming pool, pottery, dance studio, 50 seat cinema, restaurant and bar – all of which are open to both residents and the public, and designed to appeal to all ages. Take for example the café bar; rather than sticking to 'what older people want', the Trust put the design out to the commercial sector. It is now distinctly modern, featuring wood-fired pizzas and craft beers. It's a hit with older residents and the wider public – leading to a refreshing social mix of customers.

But the aim is for older residents and the public not only to co-exist and make contact at The Chocolate Quarter but also to develop meaningful mutual exchanges. There's a GP centre on-site, and the Trust and local NHS are exploring social prescribing, whereby GP patients will be referred to various activity groups, such as art therapy. These will comprise members of the public and retirement community residents – with the idea that this sort of shared participation will lead to mutual benefit.

This focus on creating co-dependent relationships comes off the back of St Monica Trust's participation in the LinkAge scheme which partners university student befrienders with older residents, and their participation in the heart warming Channel 4 Documentary 'Old People's Homes for 4 Year Olds'. In this, for six weeks a group of nursery children were brought into one of St Monica Trust's retirement communities, where they shared daily activities with a group of older adult residents. In both the LinkAge and the nursery experiment, both parties benefited. As a result of the nursery experiment, older people experienced improved mobility, strength and reduced depression, feeling joy, encouragement and a renewed sense of purpose – and the children learnt new skills and formed loving bonds with their older friends. Similarly, through participation in the LinkAge initiative, both students and older participants gain practical and emotional support – new skills, perspectives, and improved self-esteem. These programmes back up a growing body of research expounding the benefits of intergenerational contact for both the young and old.[2] Unsurprisingly St Monica Trust are now building a permanent nursery into one of their retirement communities, and are interested in student co-housing.

Forging an intergenerational compact

Housing is often considered to be at the crux of current intergenerational strife. But specialist older people's housing provides an opportunity to benefit both generations, and to forge new connections between them. From a purely rational point of view, by providing an attractive place for older people to 'rightsize' into, and enabling them to live healthier lives, retirement communities benefit younger generations looking for family homes and conscious of mounting social care bills.

Perhaps more importantly, when they provide opportunities for intergenerational exchanges, retirement communities benefit both generations in far more fundamental and diverse ways – providing places for social contact, friendships, and shared-enjoyment in *living*.

They also help change preconceptions. From seeing older people as destined for the 'loony bin', children in the TV programme saw all older people as potential playmates, and from seeing children as a nuisance, older people saw them as potential loving friends. In a media storm full of generational stereotyping, it is this sort of myth busting which we need.

Of course, retirement community living is not for everyone, and they are not the sole answer to our intergenerational divides. But it is important to note that far from creating island of the elderly, innovative retirement communities are busy creating intergenerational bridges which benefit us all.

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2   Drury, L, Hutchinson, P & Abrams, D, 2016, 'Direct and extended intergenerational contact and young people's attitudes towards older adults' in *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55, 522–543; Allan, L. J., & Johnson, J. A. , 2009, 'Undergraduate attitudes toward the elderly: The role of knowledge, contact and aging anxiety', *Educational Gerontology*, 35, 1–14; 4. 'Intergenerational Safer Communities Project Report, Linking Generations Northern Ireland (2015) 'Evaluation of the Intergenerational Safer Communities Project (2013-2015)' Available at: *linkinggenerationsni.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Intergenerational-Safer-Communities-Evaluation-2015.pdf*; Stanford Center on Longevity (2016) 'Hidden in Plain Sight: How intergenerational relationships can transform our future' Available at: *longevity3.stanford.edu/hidden-in-plain-sight-how-intergenerational-relationships-can-transform-our-future/*

PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION IN LATER LIFE AND INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY: A VIEW FROM GREATER MANCHESTER

by Paul McGarry

From 2003, Paul led Manchester's multi-agency urban ageing partnership, now known as Age-Friendly Manchester. The partnership works across public, private and community sectors, and with local residents, to improve the quality of life of Mancunians in mid and later life. Paul worked with a range of partners to launch the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub in 2016, which aims for Greater Manchester to be the first age-friendly city region in the UK.

Older people face a great number of socioeconomic challenges. For them to truly have the opportunity to engage in cross-generational connection we must do more to remove these barriers.

In Brexitland, young people can feel aggrieved – the baby boomers have stolen the best houses, colonised the welfare state and hoarded the best music (a personal view!), leaving behind in their wake unending austerity, unaffordable higher education and an uncertain future.

There is also evidence that modern life is pushing generations apart: a paper by researchers at St Andrew's University[3] describes how young and old are experiencing increased spatial separation, i.e. that generations are increasingly living separate lives. On the other hand there appears to be more kinship-based generational contact. We know too that the large workplaces and community and social spaces, along with churches and trade unions - often the key agencies of intergenerational bonding - have been in decline since the 1980s.

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3   Sabater, A, Graham, E & Finney, N, 2017, 'The spatialities of ageing: evidencing increasing spatial polarisation between older and younger adults in England and Wales' *Demographic Research*, vol 36, 25, pp. 731-744.

So it is understandable that we hear regular calls to reimagine and reforge—or rebalance—generational ties and commitments. This can be at its sharpest on the political frontline, where current concerns about student debt and access to housing for young people can overshadow the squeeze on social care for the most vulnerable older people and the lack of choice in appropriate, good quality housing for those in later life.

Whilst some young people do face challenges that their elders didn't, the real story is the inequalities within generations, not between them. We need to understand these dimensions of inequality and social exclusion in order to effectively create a narrative that reflects the realities of intergenerational relationships and create programmes that further relationships between generations.

Consider the following three issues:

➜ Ageism is the last acceptable 'ism. We know that older people are routinely the victims of ageist language, stereotyping in the press and media, and overlooked for jobs and training: there are one million older workers unemployed who want to work but have been forced out of the workforce.

➜ There are worrying findings from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing highlighted in a new report from the University of Manchester[4], which argues firstly that since the mid-2000s a gap has opened between the poorest fifth of the over 50 population and the other four-fifths. Secondly, and most worryingly, it describes how younger members of the poorest fifth of over-50s are more likely to be ill than those immediately older than them were at the same age.

➜ There are around 2 million pensioners in poverty, typically living in the same neighbourhoods as young and working aged people who experience low incomes and precarious employment.

The Greater Manchester Ageing Hub has been formed to coordinate a strategic response to the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population in our city region. A key goal is to make Greater Manchester (GM) the UK's first age-friendly city region, with a focus on improving the quality of later life of our residents and co-designing with older people. In doing so we acknowledge the diversity within our older population, with significant inequalities experienced by specific populations (such as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups and the LGBT community) and across our region. We promote the concept of social inclusion as central to our work, given the GM challenge of implementing an age-friendly model in neighbourhoods with high levels of economic disadvantage. Social inclusion is a response to structural barriers that deny individuals and groups the ability to participate fully in society, which pays particular attention to access to various resources, such as goods, services, power and control.

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4 Nazroo, J, 2017, *The Golden Generation? Wellbeing and inequalities in later life*, Manchester: Manchester University Press

Let me set out the challenges facing older people in both Greater Manchester and at a national level:

➔ Significant concentrations of income deprivation affecting older people can be found across GM. Almost half of GM areas are within the 30% most income deprived areas in England.

➔ Amongst older people, 50,000 people experience pensioner poverty in GM, reflecting experiences of long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health.

➔ Just under a fifth of people (19%) living in the most deprived areas of England have a severe lack of social support.

➔ In the age-group 61-70 34% of white English people report bad health, compared with 63-69% of Indian, Pakistani and Caribbean and 86% of Bangladeshi people

➔ Healthy life expectancy at birth ends on average as early as age 60 for both men and women in Greater Manchester.

➔ The majority of GM's residents aged 50-64 are economically inactive (nearly 60%), while 38.3% are in employment (some 344,000 people) and 4.5% are unemployed and actively seeking work (16,400 people).

➔ Nearly 63,000 people aged 55-64 in GM were claiming DWP benefits in May 2016, accounting for over a quarter of all benefit claimants.

➔ Employment rates of people aged 50-64 are lower in GM than the UK average, with forecasts suggesting this performance gap will not close over time. An additional 19,000 over 50s would need to be in work to meet the current national employment rate.

At the same time as recognising the challenges of ageing Greater Manchester is committed to pioneering a new positive vision of later life. Our bold ambition is to rewrite the story of old age from a narrative of loss or deficit to one of aspiration and growth. Older people are a key asset for our city region, presenting significant opportunities to us all as a society and economically.

With the establishment of the Hub, and the recent election of Greater Manchester's first elected Mayor, we are now in a position to plan for the next three years. Ageing Hub work is divided into six key themes, which link both the priorities and main issues that have arisen through research we have commissioned. This research is published in key reports including '*The Future of Ageing in Greater Manchester*', '*Developing a Strategy for Age-Friendly Greater Manchester*' and '*Some Things Can't Be Confined To A Box: Age-Friendly Culture*'.

A fundamental principle of the Ageing Hub has been to bring research, policy and practice together so that public services are delivered, and commissioning decisions made on the best possible research and evidence. Greater Manchester is fortunate to have some of the world's leading experts on ageing working in its universities, and the Ageing Hub will benefit from their academic excellence. We will also draw on our strategic partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better, an independent Big Lottery-funded What Works Centre, to develop and share innovative approaches to tackling social, economic and health inequalities in later life.

We are setting our ambitious plans in the New Year which will include:

➜ Creating a work and skills system that supports older workers

➜ Establishing 50 age-friendly communities across GM promoting volunteering and bringing generations together

➜ Building an age-friendly health and social care system

➜ Increasing housing choice that promotes social connections and wellbeing in later life

➜ Supporting 250 age-friendly businesses

➜ Creating a transport system that supports social inclusion and active and healthy ageing

➜ Setting up a Centre for Age Friendly Culture – a world first – and culture champions across GM

➜ Establish GM as a world leader in ageing research and innovation

➜ Campaign for positive images of ageing to tackle age-discrimination

➜ Improve access to services including entitlements and benefits which promote social inclusion

Taking a social inclusion approach, the goal of age-friendly work must be to promote GM as a 'social city', one which is organised in ways which promotes connections across different minority ethnic groups, communities, and generations. We recognise the importance of bringing together people from different generations, and that promoting greater understanding and respect between these generations contributes to building stronger communities. Evidence shows both young and old benefit from intergenerational activities, including a greater sense of wellbeing and confidence, a reduction in fear of other age groups and a greater sense of belonging in their neighbourhood.

REVERSING THE TIDE: BUILDING INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

by David Robinson

David Robinson is a community worker in east London, who co-founded Community Links and Changing London. He is currently exploring new work on social isolation at the Marshall Institute at the LSE where he is honorary Practitioner in Residence. David blogs about social isolation at medium.com/@david.robinson_1204

How can policy makers harness digital technology and design spaces that encourage social connections and stronger relationships between different generations?

We need each other. As a community worker I have seen that every day for many years. But I think we are moving in the wrong direction and so do many others. Our work on Changing London[1] showed that social connection, and the lack of it, was the top concern for our largest single group of Londoners. Higher than housing or health or crime although, as many pointed out, it is not unrelated to any of these other issues.

Our work was small scale but the facts are clear: about one in five people, of all ages, say they are lonely, at least one in ten are severely isolated. We know that strong relationships keep us all mentally and physically healthy, they make us feel more confident and more capable. They keep our communities safe, help us to cope and enable us to flourish. Our instinctive understanding, however, runs counter to the trends in our behaviour. Meaningful time together is diminishing, systematically displaced by fast and shallow connections. We are becoming more atomised and automated, more familiar with technology but less close to one another.

Our organisations, public and private, are bigger, more remote, less human. Everything is online. We have hollowed out the heart of our business with call centres, our high streets with cash points and self-service checkouts, our neighbourhoods with design that strips out interaction and our public services with carers commissioned for seven minute visits, retendered every three months.

Here in the inner city, close and stable relationships across the generations have particularly suffered. Traditional mixing places like pubs and social clubs have changed in role and character and multi-generational activities like shared worship or community events have declined in their importance. Increasingly we are dwelling in age groups hermetically sealed and ever more tightly defined.

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1   Changing London independently gathered the views and ideas of Londoners before the mayoral election in 2016. We debated them, developed them and promoted them and eventually published Robinson, D and Horwitz W, 2015, *Changing London – a rough guide for the next London Mayor*, London: London Publishing Partnership

The young know very little of the old. The old know very little of the young. Suspicion, fear and ultimately resentments thrive in the vacuum. Everyone is missing out. The quality of life is impoverished at both ends of the spectrum but the divide is particularly brutal for the old who become increasingly ill at ease and unable to cope in their own community, isolated and lonely at home. The trends are gathering pace yet receiving very little public attention. There are no screaming headlines and there won't be blood on the streets but more and more are living lives of quiet desperation.

We need a coordinated and emphatic policy response. Here are three sets of suggestions:

Having fun together builds strong relationships.

Real relationships are more likely to flourish around a shared interest and communal participation than an act of charity. Formal and informal associations like the allotment group, the choir, the church or the sports club may not explicitly prioritise the building of relationships but they do. Driving down social isolation through investment in this community infrastructure isn't an alternative to a big vision about reducing crime or improving health or revitalising the economy. It is the making of it.

What might change?

➜ Simple though it is, support for and investment in local and communal leisure time activity should be a priority for independent sponsors and state funding. This could be ambitious and intensive like the Participatory City programme planned for Barking and Dagenham or a simple grant aid scheme. Three £5k awards in every one of the 649 small wards in London would cost less than a third of the annual price of mental ill health in the city.

➜ The sport and art sectors are potentially important but sometimes regarded as closed and elitist. Some of this new money might focus on opening up the organisations and the infrastructure that already exists in much the same way as access training provides a pathway into further education.

➜ A new 'Right to Space' should require local authorities to provide, or pay for, space for any community activity where members can demonstrate a level of interest and an open door. A right, not a gift, would signal the importance of strong communities by fundamentally rebalancing the relationship between communities and the state.

Some places enable relationships to thrive, some don't

Most parents know that their local networks improve when they join the school gate fraternity but some improve more than others. A welcoming playground, a covered waiting area, seats all make a difference. Just as the playground brings together people with common interest and concerns so too do the other formal and informal bumping places: allotments, places of worship, shops, markets, cul de sacs, even shared dustbins. We can design social interaction into the places where we live or we can design it out.

What might change?

→ Planning regulations should include a 'Common Ground Test' requiring planners to design for effective social connection in every development. Similar emphasis on the social plumbing works well in many other countries. Ignoring it here should be just as unthinkable, and just as illegal, as ignoring the need for water pipes and sewage mains.

→ It needn't be elaborate. As the Young Foundation have shown, the humble bench, the most basic bumping place, strategically positioned facilitates connection but is rapidly disappearing from the urban landscape.

→ Public services should be located in one neighbourhood building serving everyone – library, council services, police, children's centre, GPs, dentist etc. We may not need them often but we would get to know the staff and our neighbours far better if they were located together around a café and a meeting place.

Digital connections shouldn't be the enemy of real relationships. They should be the beginning.

If there is one behaviour change which most clearly divides the generations it would be around the use of technology. As a digitally savvy younger generation have found it easier to network more and more the least technologically literate have become increasingly isolated. This isn't just about the skills of the individual, it also about the nature and purpose of technology which is almost always designed for the young. We have to fathom out how the digital world can better serve us all.

What might change?

Every pound spent on driving the technologies should be matched by another reimagining our world in the light of our new capacities. This wouldn't be about mitigating the downside but about expanding and connecting the thinking behind WhatsApp, Airbnb, TaskRabbit, Future Learn, Facebook, and the rest. How do we use the insight and the application for *everybody?* Tinder is a good example – a marginally amended app with alternative branding could be connecting all sorts of interests across the generations. Redesigning commercial products is not a job for government or even for All Party Parliamentary Groups but identifying a social divide and marshalling the forces to address it most certainly is.

Our goal

Throughout his teenage years my son belonged to an athletics club. His volunteer coach had been training young people in east London for more than 50 years. Some had won international honours. Most had just learnt to love the sport, the team and running together. Watching one night as a big, boisterous squad of muscular adolescents greet him in accents from around the world I asked him how today's kids compared with those of his pre-war youth. Foolishly I expected nostalgia. His answer was entirely positive. 'They know so much more than we did, more mature, smarter, more sociable, more fun.' The regard was mutual. This wasn't a forced act of charity. It was a microcosm of a very diverse community that didn't just respect the differences between the old and the young but thrived on them. It can be done, indeed It's second nature, but at the moment we are moving in the wrong direction. My suggestions may be ambitious but they are not unrealistic. It is time for bold and fundamental change.

A PLAN TO CONNECT THE GENERATIONS

by Alex Smith

Alex Smith is founder and Chief Executive of North London Cares, South London Cares and Manchester Cares – community networks of young professionals and older neighbours hanging out and helping one another in our rapidly changing cities. He was previously an aide to former Labour Party leader Ed Miliband, and editor of the website LabourList.

We need to move beyond a narrative of a battle of young versus old, and stereotypes about millennials and baby boomers, to explore ambitious new policy approaches which can help foster intergenerational connection.

In the media, you often hear about the generational divide. From the Economist to Newsnight, every outlet seems to have a view. Most are informed by hard stats. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, young people between 22 and 30 were left on average 7% worse off as a result of the 2008 financial crash while the over-60s were 11% better off. On housing, the proportion of 25-year-olds in the UK owning their own home has almost halved over the past 20 years, according to the Local Government Association, while people over 55 have more wealth locked in homes than the entire annual GDP of Italy. This perceived inequity is often distilled to present a zero-sum chasm: it's 'Baby boomers' versus 'Millennials'.

Disconnection

With real life so often reduced to seven basic plots – overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy and rebirth – this narrative ticks many boxes for a media searching for a story. Statistics make headlines, and headlines sell news. But the way in which these insights are distilled and presented is also a choice. Last year, I was invited by a well-known media organisation to write about what the generations have in common. When my piece was published online, it was illustrated by a photo of a curmudgeonly older woman, looking meanly down the barrel of the lens from a position of isolation and iciness. The message was clear: our readers are young, and this is the enemy. I asked for the photo to be changed, and when the editor refused, I pulled the article and published it myself.[1]

But it's not just the media that reduce our interactions with others to a battle. Our wider culture, too, engenders opposing stereotypes about the generations that need challenging. Millennials are compulsive, entitled, techno-maniacs permanently glued to their phones. Older people are wise and resourceful but insular, unconnected, and a burden on public services. It's easy to have those stereotypes underscored by an occasional negative interaction, or our own fear of 'the other'. But the reality, as I've found over six years bringing younger and older people together, can be that these generations —with such different life experiences—in fact have so much in common and so much to gain from one another.

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1   Smith, A, 2017, *We can all combat loneliness by stepping outside our generation*
     (*medium.com/@alexsmith1982/brexit-britain-will-be-a-lonely-place-unless-we-step-outside-our-generation-9b0ba9f7f7fe*)

Connection

89% of young people and 84% of older people say they rely on the internet – but both groups feel overwhelmed by the dominance of new technology. Almost eight in 10 people between 18 and 24 and the over-65s want life to slow down. A similar proportion want to mix with people of different age groups and backgrounds. Young and old all see good relationships, health, learning and independence as amongst their highest aspirations. Social care for older people remains the second highest concern for 18 to 34 year olds. And if I had a tenner for every time I'd heard older people feel sympathy—*empathy*—for how tough younger people have it these days, well, I'd almost be able to afford a deposit.

The difficulty, then, is not just in diverging attitudes – that is a symptom of our apparent disparity, rather than a cause. In fact, the challenge to overcome in the first instance is to enable people to interact with others from different backgrounds, ages and life experiences and to be exposed to the richness in difference – rather than to retreat to the comfort zones and filter bubbles of sharing time with people who are 'like us'.

This is something we've achieved on a local level through the creation of North London Cares, South London Cares and Manchester Cares. In bringing older and younger neighbours together across social, generational and attitudinal divides to share time, laughter and new experiences through group activities and one-to-one friendships, we have seen some amazing results. 77% of older people involved regularly say their relations with young people have improved, rising to 84% for those whose relations were previously negative. Meanwhile, 97% of the younger people participating feel more able to appreciate older people. A majority of both groups feel a closer connection to their community as a result of being part of The Cares Family.

Civil Society

We need more of this type of interaction across our regions. Civil society can lead the way by being innovative and responsive to the changing demands—and language—of the world around them. This means moving beyond the traditional 'service' model defined by the provision of 'help' given by staff or volunteers to 'clients' – in favour of a more mutual approach.

Good Gym is a wonderful organisation that enables young people to get fit while simultaneously building relationships with older neighbours who live alone. Their model is now in 38 communities around the UK, and growing. Meanwhile, organisations like Homeshare UK enable unrelated people – often from different generations – to share their homes for mutual benefit. And, as outlined earlier in this collection by David Williams and Maia Beresford, after the recent success of the Channel 4 documentary 'Old People's Home for Four Year Olds', crèches and day centres for older people should be inspired to formally merge. The best civil society funders see themselves as early adopters of these types of mutual models – guiding and supporting them to achieve scale.

Government

But across wider society, and in particular through government, we have so many other levers that could bring the generations together in a new social compact – and save the state money in return. On planning, welfare, health, education, transport, taxation and democracy and across local and national government as a whole, it's time for a radical new approach to how we bring people from different backgrounds and generations together to unleash a new era of solidarity and to show that we truly have more in common than that which divides us.

Planning

An obvious place to start is with planning. It's universally acknowledged that Britain needs a massive investment in new affordable homes. But just as important as the numbers of new units built and their cost is how that stock is designed and put to use. In his essay, David Robinson argues that we need to 'design in' opportunities for social connection. We need homes in the public as well as the private sector that enable communities to mix openly and freely. That means more amenable mixed use public spaces, with areas in new developments for younger and older people to interact. The proliferation of benches and recreational areas would be a start. And, when it comes to assisted living, people need the space to interact beyond their own worlds.

Brilliant, forward-thinking organisations like United St Saviour's in south London are already building modern day alms houses with interaction in mind, with activities and spaces designed to appeal to external parties as well as residents and to encourage mixing. Organisations with huge purchasing power – from the Greater Manchester Housing Fund to London's City Hall – could commit to this sort of approach, building shared office spaces, barber shops, coffee shops, libraries and other cultural venues into their schemes.

And as well as quotas for affordable housing in new builds, councils should also build requirements for mixed use space and mixed age tenancies into their development contracts. Alongside this, they should trial schemes to reserve a small proportion of housing for people who went to school in the area, so that those who are already part of communities can deepen their roots and feel better connected.

Welfare

If government is willing to be bold, it could also take a radical new approach to welfare – through a Connecting State[2] which unleashes the power of and participation in networks over the reliance on payments alone and which in turn could correct the imbalance of welfare expenditure on one generation over another.

This new approach would curtail the growth of universal benefits for certain age groups at the perceived expense of others and target investments where society tells us they are needed – dismantling the poverty of opportunity and inequality of connection for the long term. For those who can, locally devolved individual allowances could replace universal pensions and allow older people to more easily contribute by being brought into schools, colleges and corporations to inspire and mentor the next generation.

Simultaneously, the national pensionable age could be raised more quickly with incentives written into the system that reward participation in business and community over age alone. Benefits like the Winter Fuel Allowance would still be a mainstay for those who need them, but the money freed up by targeting resources more effectively could be put into new programmes to reduce youth unemployment. And ending the triple lock on pensions would free up money to build homes for younger and older people to share space so that people can look out for one another.

Meanwhile, tax breaks for companies hiring or retraining people over 70—and putting to work those years of experience—would make a start in reducing age discrimination at work.

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2   Smith, A, 2015, 'The Connecting State', *Demos Quarterly,* July 31 2015
     (*quarterly.demos.co.uk/article/issue-6/the-connecting-state/*)

Health

That same shift in public spending priorities for the long-term benefit of the country as a whole could also be applied to health. The National Health Service, if it is to thrive long into the future, should be realigned to do what it says on the tin: keep people healthy, as well as patching us up when we get sick. If we can shift some of the cost of healthcare from cure to prevention, through better physical and mental health enablement, we can even out expenditure on older and younger people and improve health for all. Now is the time to start, with the provision of accessible free exercise classes for all, universal free school meals and cradle-to-grave mental health support including through schools and businesses.

Transport

Just as with the metaphorical school gate, modes of transport can be places where people of different generations, backgrounds and life experiences already do mix. And yet, somehow, even as we ride the bus with the same people every day, we have cut ourselves off from others – through music consumed in solitude or the ubiquitous smart phone.

So we need to do more to make our transport more sociable. Big organisations like TFL and TfGM can make a start – for example through a 'No headphones day' to encourage people to look up and speak to co-travellers, or book exchange cubby holes on buses and trains. That would make us all realise that the public realm is for everyone, and that we all have a responsibility to engage with it.

And if those ideas are just a little *too* un-British, how about replacing segregated 'priority seats' with 'community seats' which encourage younger and older people to sit together and chat? More simply still, we could replace advertising at bus stops with images of local younger and older people happily interacting, to help people of all generations to feel familiar and to relate to the people around them and their wider community.

Meanwhile, subsidised travel for young and old alike should be made fairer – with the average lengths of eligibility for young people's and seniors' travel cards linked.

Taxation

With loneliness now shown to be a major public health crisis for young and old – with 17% of older people seeing friends or family just once a week and 11% just once a month, men under 40 now feeling more isolated than at any other time in their lives, one in five young mums feeling lonely 'always', and loneliness shown to be as bad for people's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day – now is also time to address the dual crisis of disconnection in our connected age.[3] To pay for more of those interactions across the generations enabled by civil society, government should consider a loneliness tax – levying 5p on each self-service checkout transaction, for instance.

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3   Smith, A, 2016, *Brexit, Trump—and disconnection in a connected age*
    (*medium.com/@alexsmith1982/brexit-trump-and-disconnection-in-a-connected-age-df863e5a8d7b*)

Education

All of these ideas depend on a culture change which may take a generation or more to truly bed in. Therefore, schools should be at the forefront of connecting the generations for the long term. Local social history—taught by the people who made it—should be compulsory up to 16. Older people should be inspired and incentivised through a huge national campaign and the creation of the Connecting State to act as mentors to children and teenagers, not just through brilliant organisations like The Challenge, but through the standard curriculum too. Schools should all be required to have members of staff over the age of 65 working on site, especially in those key pastoral roles that can help us to understand ourselves and one another.

And we should abandon the culture, perpetuated by our school system, that says that age is a determinant of ability or achievement – by bringing class groups together according to their levels and interests, rather than by age alone. To underpin this, what we teach in schools should be more holistic, focusing on the value of character and personality as much as skills and qualifications which can be overvalued according to the economic vagaries of the day – with more education on building and managing the relationships and networks which for a social species will always matter.

Democracy

Finally, when it comes to our democracy, government should do more to engage the voices of all its citizens, and in particular those whose are currently least heard, through a commitment to votes at 16 and more democratic education in schools – to achieve a better representation of younger people's votes alongside older people's.

Connecting the Generations

Politicians are clearly ready to engage with this agenda of how we help our generations—and our communities—to better connect. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration is a vanguard but there are many other positive initiatives too.

In 2016, the Work and Pensions Committee produced a report on intergenerational fairness before its findings were jettisoned by Brexit. The Jo Cox Foundation and Loneliness Commission are both doing important work. Some of that work could be integrated and coordinated across Westminster and Whitehall by a new social integration champion with a seat at the cabinet table.

Because if Theresa May's own social agenda, so powerfully articulated on the steps of Downing Street last summer, ever needed a shot in the arm – and a reminder that our generational togetherness along with our broader social cohesion requires deep and long-term attention – it arrived on June 9th when older and younger people alike called for a return to a social compact and a craving for community – and 'a country that works for everyone.'

All Party Parliamentary Group on
Social Integration

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The Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group
on Social Integration is provided by
The Challenge, the UK's leading social integration charity

THE CHALLENGE