

Voice of a Generation

What do 2015's first-time voters think?

How many young people will vote?

On 7 May 2015, around 3.3 million young people will have their first opportunity to vote in a British general election. Yet according to new research by YouGov for British Future, more than two million will not vote. Only 41 per cent – around 1,350,000 people – say they'll definitely cast their ballot next year, which leaves two million young people who will not vote at all.

This contrasts markedly with their elders: 60 per cent of the overall population say they will definitely vote, rising to 75 per cent amongst the over-60s. If young people were as likely to vote as the rest of us and 60 per cent of them turned up on polling day, the additional 650,000 votes could have a very significant impact on what is shaping up to be a very close election.

For the European elections in May 2014 engagement is even lower, with only 30 per cent of 17-21 year-olds saying they're certain to vote (rising slightly to 32 per cent when 17-year-olds are excluded), compared to 48 per cent for the population and 61 per cent amongst the over-60s.

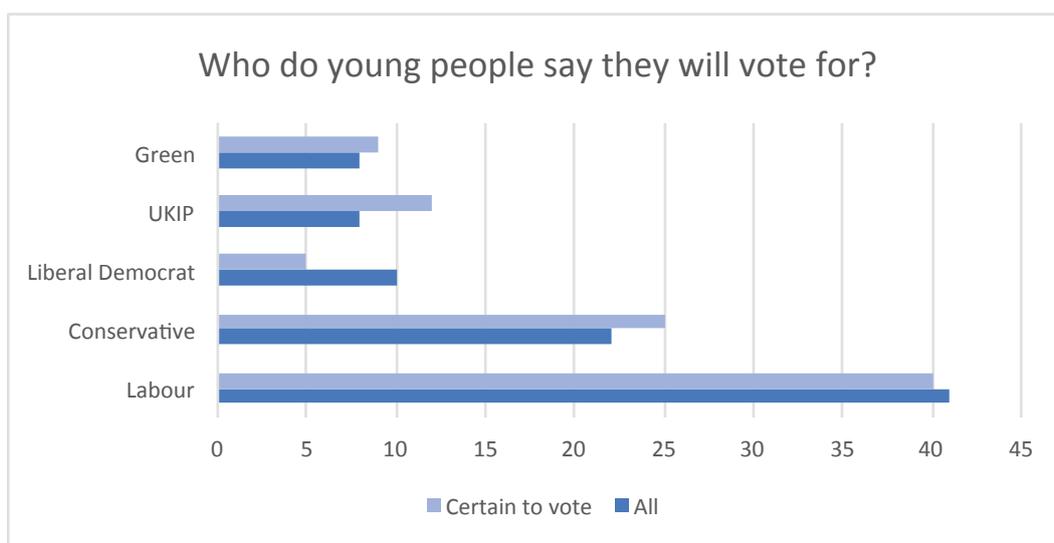
Only in Scotland, where political engagement among young people is highest, are they more likely to vote than the national average. Sixty-two per cent of young Scots say they will definitely vote in 2015 (against 33 per cent in London). This may well be due to a 'referendum effect' – not only does politics matter more when it will determine which country you live in, but the one-off decision to expand the franchise to 16 year olds and the string of referendums being held in secondary schools may also have heightened young peoples' political awareness north of the border.

Who will they vote for?

Despite low levels of engagement, overall first-time voters are almost twice as likely to support Labour as Conservative: 41 per cent said they would be voting for Labour against only 22 per cent for the Tories. UKIP are in third place with 10 per cent support, with the Liberal Democrats and Greens trailing with 8 per cent each.

Amongst those certain to vote the Conservatives narrow the gap a little, with 25 per cent to Labour's 40 per cent, but the Liberal Democrats languish on 5 per cent behind both the Greens (9 per cent) and UKIP (12 per cent). This could indicate that the legacy of the tuition fees U-turn hurts them most among the most engaged young people.

Translate this into votes and Labour's 40 per cent adds up to 540,000 voters – 200,000 more than the Conservatives on 340,000. UKIP muster 160,000 whilst the Liberal Democrats attract only 70,000 first-time voters.



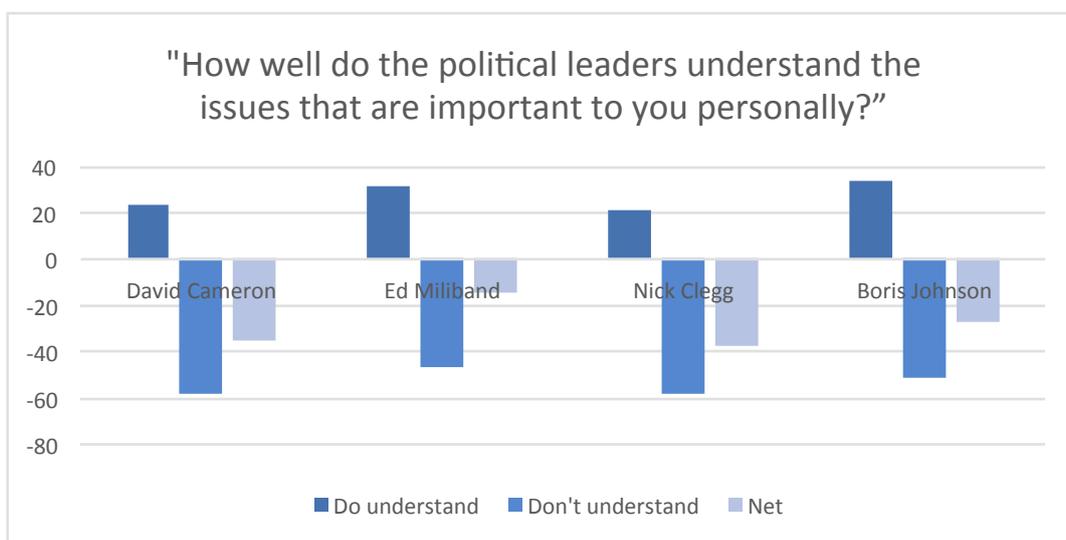
Young people think politicians don't understand the issues that matter most to them

Young people don't believe that any of the main political leaders understand the issues most important to them. When asked "How well do the political leaders understand the issues that are important to you personally?" none received a positive score nationwide.

Fifty-eight per cent of respondents feel that Prime Minister David Cameron doesn't understand them well (including 34 per cent who say 'not at all'), against 17 per cent who say fairly well and 6 per cent very well. This is slightly better than Nick Clegg, for whom 58 per cent say he doesn't understand their issues well (29 per cent 'not at all') against 21 per cent who think he understands them fairly or very well.

By far the leader perceived to connect best with young peoples' issues is Ed Miliband. While 46 per cent of respondents claim he does not understand them well (23 per cent 'not at all'), 32 per cent think otherwise. He's therefore more popular than Boris Johnson, who only manages a net -27 score (51 per cent net negative, 24 per cent positive).

Ed Miliband is also the only one to get a net positive score in any part of the country: 41 per cent of young people in the north say Miliband understands either fairly well (33 per cent) or very well (8 per cent), while 39 per cent say he doesn't understand very well (20 per cent) or at all (19 per cent), yielding an overall positive score of +2. Conversely, David Cameron's scores drop the farther north (and removed from London) you get: -17 in London, -30 in the Midlands, -40 in the north of England and -50 in Scotland.

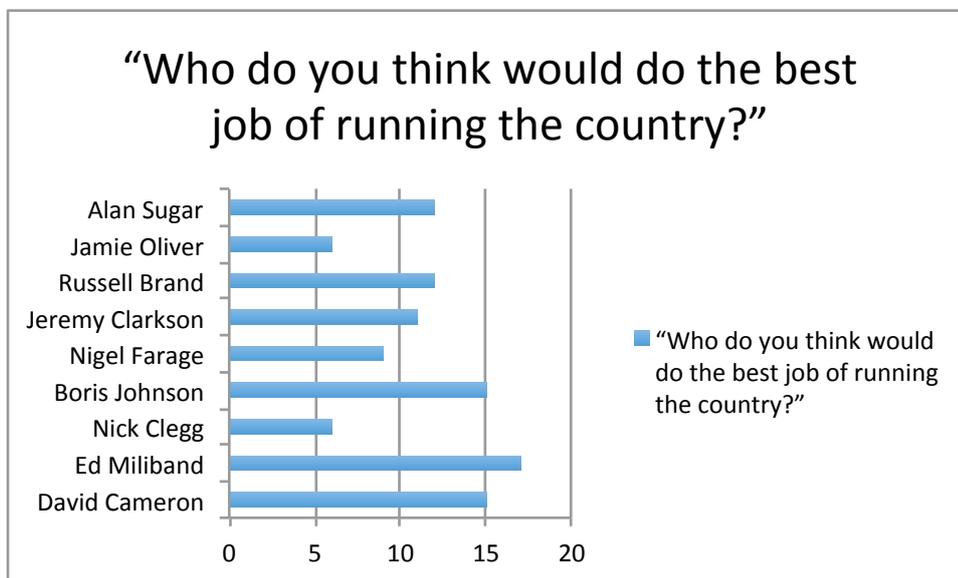


Young people have little faith in those who want to run the country

Perhaps unsurprisingly in light of the poor numbers above, first-time voters don't put much stock in any of the would-be Prime Ministers.

When respondents were asked "Who do you think would do the best job of running the country?" Ed Miliband still leads the pack with 17 per cent, but both David Cameron and Boris Johnson are close behind with 15 per cent each. Meanwhile young people prefer figures like Alan Sugar, Russell Brand (12% apiece) or even Jeremy Clarkson (11%) over Nigel Farage (9%), and Nick Clegg languishes on only 6 per cent, tied with TV chef and public health activist Jamie Oliver.

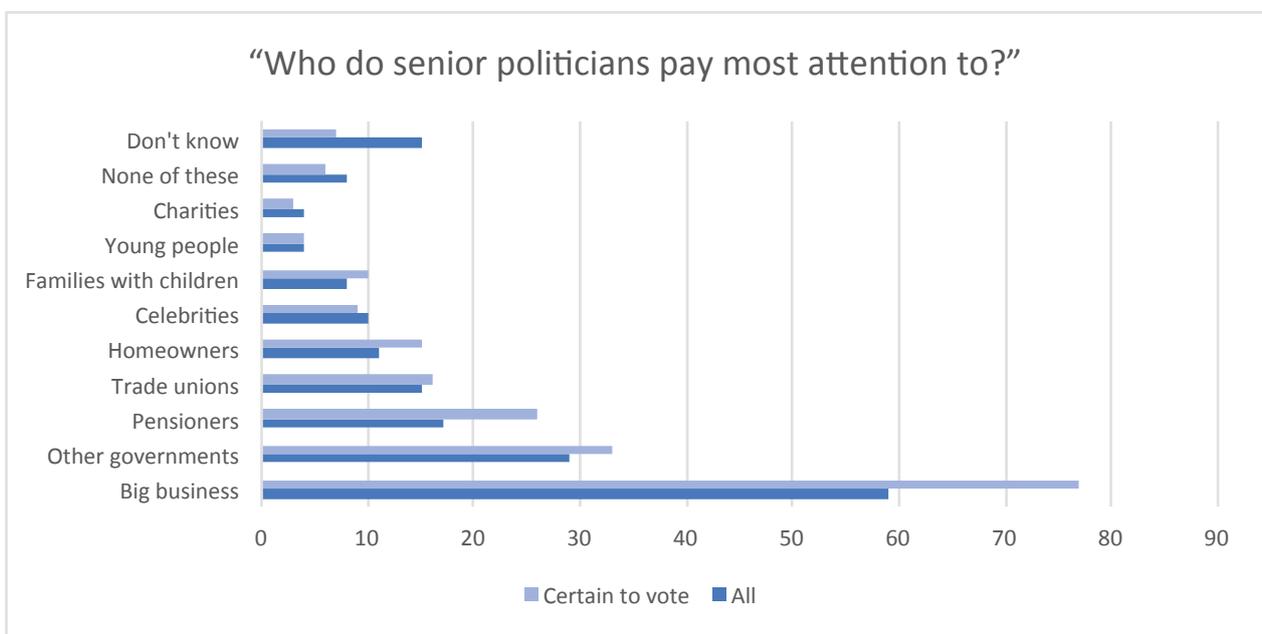
Yet among those who say they're certain to vote, 24 per cent choose Miliband and 21 per cent Cameron. The closeness of these scores, relative to how the two leaders are ranked on youth issues specifically, suggests that young voters are taking a broad view of the leaders and their offers to the country rather than focusing on the issues most relevant to them personally. Despite this they still take a very dim view of the Liberal Democrats – only 7 per cent choose Nick Clegg, behind both Boris Johnson (17%) and Nigel Farage (14%).



Another factor that helps to explain the sense of disillusion among potential first-time voters is that they feel like they're the last people politicians want to talk to. In fact they feel that politicians would rather listen to celebrities than to young people they are supposed to represent.

Posed the question "Who do senior politicians pay most attention to?", 'big business' topped the poll by a huge margin with 59 per cent, followed by 'other governments' (29), pensioners (17), trade unions (15), homeowners (11), celebrities (10), and families with children (8). Young people place themselves last – just 4 per cent saying they are the people politicians pay most attention to.

Among those certain to vote, the gulf grows even wider, with big business on 77 per cent and pensioners on 26, while young people still score just four per cent.



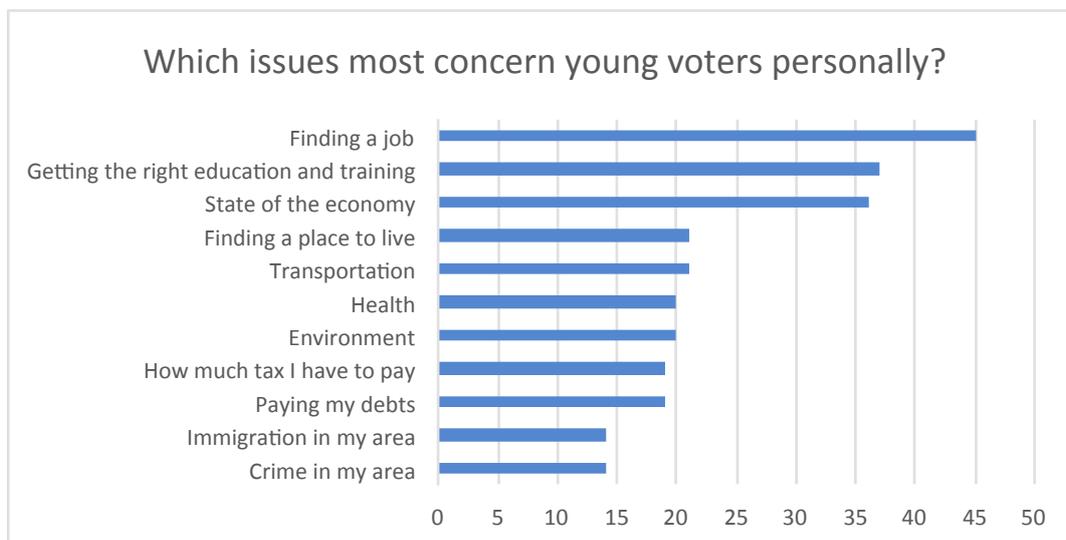
Which issues matter most to first-time voters?

The next generation of first-time voters feel that politicians don't understand the issues that matter most to them. We asked what those issues are and found that politics does matter a lot to young people, even if mainstream politicians don't seem to have the answers.

When it comes to personal priorities, 45 per cent list finding a job as the most important issue to them. Probably as a result of this, getting the right education and training ranks second at 37 per cent, followed by the state of the economy (36%). Next came finding the right place to live and transport (21% apiece), health and environment (each on 20%), 'amount of tax I have to pay' and 'paying my debts' (19% each). 'Immigration in my area' and 'crime in my area' both scored 14 per cent.

Geography also plays a role – concern over unemployment is significantly higher in the north and Scotland than it is in the rest of the country.

On national issues, the economy topped our poll with 44 per cent, closely followed by unemployment one point down at 43 per cent. After this came education (31%), immigration/asylum (28%), welfare (27%), health (24%), debt (24%) and finally housing (22%). This is a markedly different priority profile to the over-sixties. They rank immigration top at 66 per cent, followed by the economy (49%), health (41%), welfare (40%), unemployment (33%), debt (27%), and finally housing, education and pensions on 19 per cent apiece.



Tuition fees and debts are putting people off university

The new higher rate of university tuition fees, which has done so much harm to the Liberal Democrats' standing among new voters, is putting people off going to university.

Thirteen per cent say they would have gone to university had they not been deterred by the fees, rising to a quarter (24%) among those currently in work. A further quarter (24%) of all potential first-time voters say the prospect of the debts involved did make them think twice about going to university.

Almost one in three (28%) 17-21 year olds report that they are already more than £5,000 in debt.

A fifth (20%) say they owe between £5-25,000 and a further 8 per cent already have more than £25,000 in debt. Debt is most prevalent in the north of England, where 36 per cent of respondents are over £5,000 in debt and 12 per cent over £25,000.

Unsurprisingly debt levels are highest among those still in education (many of which will be paying the new fees): 37 per cent are over £5,000 in debt, compared to only 21 per cent of those in work.

Work is scarce, and secure jobs even more so

More than a quarter (26%) of 17-21-year-olds report having been employed on a 'zero hours contract', including a third (33%) of 21-year-olds.

Zero hours contracts are most prevalent in the North of England, where 33 per cent of all 17-21-year-olds have been employed on such a basis.

Those are just the ones who actually found work, which has proved for many first-time voters a long and arduous process. On leaving education 12 per cent of first-time voters had to apply for over fifty jobs before they found one and six per cent had to apply for more than a hundred before finding work.

Many young people feel priced out of the housing market - even to rent

Independent living appears a long way out of reach for today's first-time voters. More than two thirds (66 per cent) of 17-21-year-olds currently live with their parents, with a further 26 per cent renting and only 4 per cent owning their own home.

More than a third (36%) of those still living with their parents think it will take them five years or longer before they're able to move out, with six-in-ten (59%) thinking it will take more than three years. Even amongst 21-year-olds a fifth think it will take five years before they can move out and rent or buy their own place.

The worst results are in London – 56 per cent of potential first-time voters in the capital think it will take more than five years to move out.

Twelve per cent of Londoners think they will never afford to leave their parents' home to rent or buy a place of their own.

Pessimism is even more pronounced when it comes to the prospect of owning a home, something that their parents' generation may have taken as a given. More than one in ten (11%) believe that they will never be able to afford to buy a home of their own, with the figure rising to over a fifth (21%) among those who are currently unemployed. Fully 30 per cent of respondents feel that home ownership would take them over a decade or would not happen at all, with a fifth (19%) believing they will manage it but only after a decade or more.

In London the figures are even starker: 18 per cent of 17-21s think they will never own their own place, even if they manage to move out into rented accommodation. More than a quarter (27%) think it will take at least a decade to own their own place, and 45 per cent combined say it will take more than ten years or never happen (versus a 30% average nationwide).

Methodology

1. “First time voters”, for the purposes of this report, refers to 17-21 year olds eligible to vote for the first time in the May 2015 general election.

2. All polling figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,005 adults aged 17-21. Fieldwork was undertaken between 17-23 April 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the GB population between 17 and 21. YouGov is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by their rules.

3. The total number of first time voters is estimated from 2011 census data. Age groups available in the Census are: 10-14; 15; 16-17; 18-19. The group of people who will be eligible to vote for the first time in the 2015 General Election are those who were 14-18 in 2011. To best project this figure we have taken the entirety of the 15-19 age group to calculate the above predictions. This will provide the best available comparable results to the 14-18 age group: a total figure of approximately 3,500,000.

4. We have controlled for non-British citizens, who will not be eligible to vote, by excluding the approximately 200,000 15-19 year olds who only have a non-UK passport. This gives a total figure of 3,300,000.

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About British Future:

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, opportunity and identity, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.

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