Turnout, Voter Engagement and Young People in Britain

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Defining the problem

- Turnout
- Participation
- Social capital
- ‘The ever shrinking circle of concern’?
- ‘Hard to reach’ groups are hard to reach!
- The connection between electors and elected.

‘Hard to reach’ groups are hard to reach!
Getting Connected?

- *Politics but not party politics?*

- “Young people … are not switched off from the issues that form the foundations of political decision-making but they are less enamoured with the way we ‘do’ politics. (Edwards, IPPR, 2001: 6).

- *‘Naffness filter’*
Turnout: Secular Decline vs Trendless Fluctuation

- *Figure 1* – Percentage Turnout at General Elections as proportion of registered electorate 1929-2001
2001 – BLANDSLIDE?

- Lowest turnout since 1918
- Proportion of those of voting age?
- Differential impact
  - 100 seats with lowest turnout…
  - 1997 victories
  - Marginal seats
Why Vote?

- Resources (Parry et al., 1992).
- Motivation & Mobilisation.
  - Party Id.
  - Civic duty.
  - Having a say.
- Context.
  - Closeness & significance of election.
  - Ideological distance.
  - Marginality of seat.
Why Not Vote?

- Inconvenience.
- Structural factors.
  - Legal/registration.
  - Awareness.
- Apathy.
- Alienation or antipathy.
Lost for Good?

“What worries me is that no matter how hard we try, we cannot persuade these kids - youngsters, new voters – to support us in the ballot box. They won’t vote for anyone else, but they just can’t be bothered, (they) don’t see what it has to do with them. And once you’ve lost them, you’ve lost them for good... It’s a worry for the party, for all the parties really, not just the Lib Dems but Labour and the Tories as well. (Russell & Fieldhouse; 2001),"
Young people and reported Turnout

Reported Vote

- 25+ (n=1033)
- 18-24 (n=129)

Reported No Vote
Selected Reasons for Voting

- Civic Duty
- Have a say
- Ppl fought for right
- Prevent Cand

25+ (n=858)
18-4 (n=71)
Selected Reasons for Not Voting

- Away on day
- Not interested in politics
- Not Registered
- Didn’t like candidates

[Bar chart showing different reasons for not voting, with categories and corresponding counts for two age groups: 25+ (n=174) and 18-24 (n=54).]
Campaign Expectations? Too little information

- Candidates
- Policies
- Parties' campaigns
- Leader activities
- Leaders themselves

Graph showing comparison between 25+ (n=1033) and 18-24 (n=129) on various aspects of campaign expectations.
<table>
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<th>Civic duty</th>
<th>Distrust of politicians</th>
<th>Disillusion with politics</th>
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<td>People Like Me Have No Say</td>
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<td>Govt Treats People Like Me Fairly</td>
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<td>Gap btw expects &amp; actually get</td>
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<td>People Too Busy To Vote</td>
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Modelling Turnout 1

- Civic Duty
- Distrust
- Dissillusionment

25+
18-24
Non-Voters
Voters
Young People: Conclusions, solutions?

- Turnout = symptom not cause.
- Citizenship / Voter Education Programmes?
- Registration.
- Voting Changes?
- Compulsory Voting?
- Internet/Telephone etc.
- Electoral System?
- Campaigning?