

Increasing Electoral Turnout among the Young

Why democracy and the defence of liberty requires the rejection of compulsory voting and the adoption of financial incentives for young voters

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ABSTRACT

The low electoral turnout of young people raises serious concerns about intergenerational justice and representative democracy. A powerful method is needed to address this low electoral turnout: if young people can be encouraged to vote in greater numbers then this may lead to a virtuous circle for which politicians take young people's views and interests more seriously, and more young people vote as a result. I argue that a scheme of financial incentives for young voters between the ages of 18 and 28, paid only once a young person has attended an hour long information session and an hour long discussion session on the election, offers such a method. Section 1 of this paper outlines the extent of the problem of low voter turnout among young people, section 2 establishes that this is a problem for democracy, and section 3 analyses the reasons why young people choose not to vote. In section 4, I consider two prospective solutions to the low electoral turnout of young people, compulsory voting and financial incentives, and argue that while compulsory voting constitutes an unacceptable violation of our liberty, offering financial incentives to vote does not, and, in the form that I propose, such a scheme offers a powerful short-term and long-term solution to the low electoral turnout of young people. Finally, section 5 summarises the key arguments of sections 1-4, and argues that if academics and politicians are genuinely concerned about improving the political representation of young people and reducing the democratic deficit then they must seriously consider my proposed scheme of financial incentives for young voters.

Contents

Abstract..... 1

Introduction.....3

Section 1: The low electoral turnout of young people4

Section 2: Why a low electoral turnout among the youth is a problem for
democracy8

Section 3: Why young people do not vote 10

Section 4: How to increase electoral participation among the young 13

 Compulsory voting – an infringement upon our liberties? 15

 Encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement 18

Section 5: Conclusion23

Bibliography.....25

Introduction

In many different ways, young people today are underrepresented by politics. Berry (2012, pp. 44-65), for example, argues that the intergenerational democratic deficit needs to be tackled across six key areas: the composition of the electorate, the voting process, encouraging participation, democratic institutions, wider reforms to governance procedures, and the protection owed to future citizens. Although most of these will feature in this paper to some degree, I will focus on the third: encouraging participation.

However, I want to be clear that my choice to focus on ‘encouraging participation’ is not a tacit admission that the other areas mentioned by Berry do not need to be addressed: undoubtedly, the importance of increasing the electoral turnout of young people, which I establish in section 2 of this paper, merits much research into each of these categories; there is no simple solution that could boost youth engagement in a single stroke (Zukin, et al., 2006). Some strategies that Berry mentions for improving electoral turnout among young people, such as lowering the voting age and introducing youth quotas in parliament, undoubtedly merit serious consideration. However, in an attempt to limit the scope of this paper, I have chosen to focus on ‘encouraging participation’ due to my own interest and also because this paper is answering specifically the question of how the electoral turnout of young people could be increased: although all elements mentioned by Berry must be addressed in order to boost electoral turnout among the young, encouraging participation is especially important because it is the direct cause of high or low electoral turnout.

This paper begins by outlining the extent of the weak electoral turnout among the young, and establishing that although they lack interest in the formal mechanisms of democratic representation they are not politically apathetic, in section 1. Section 2 it establishes that this is a problem for democracy. In section 3 I analyse why it is that young people, who are not apathetic about politics, choose not to vote.

Section 4 is concerned with how we can boost the electoral turnout of young people. The methods available fall broadly into two categories: making voting compulsory, and enforcing this with a disincentive for not voting such as fining non-voters; or incentivizing people to vote by means of financial inducement. The first part of this section establishes that compulsory voting is unacceptable because it unnecessarily infringes upon our liberty, and the second part outlines a particular scheme of financial incentives for young voters between the ages of 18 and 28 and argues that this scheme would offer a powerful method for improving the electoral turnout of young people. I propose that, on the basis of having attended an hour's information session on the election and an hour's discussion session, young voters should receive a small payment, perhaps about £30, for voting.

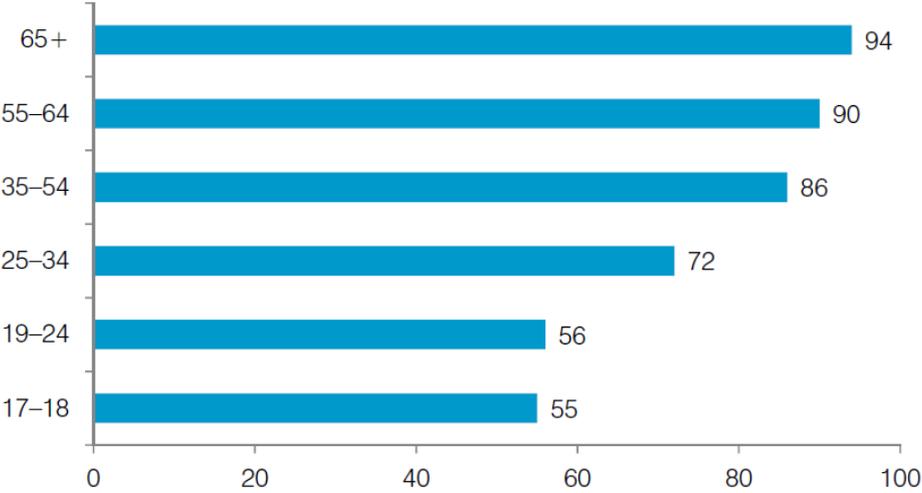
Finally, section 5 summarizes the arguments of the preceding four sections and implores academics and politicians to seriously consider the possibility of implementing this scheme. It will improve the electoral turnout of young people in the short-term, but it will also improve it in the long-term by, first, creating a virtuous circle of improved representation on the part of the voter and improved turnout on the part of young people; second, giving young people the opportunity to improve their understanding of and engagement with politics in the information and discussion sessions; and third, improving the voting habits of future generations due to the force of habit.

Section 1: The low electoral turnout of young people

Concerningly, the past decade has witnessed young people becoming increasingly disengaged with the political process and institutions, especially with formal politics such as voting (Ministry of Justice, 2007, pp. 44, 54-56). In the 2010 British general election, the average turnout was 65%; of those aged 65 or above, the turnout averaged 76%; but of those aged 18-24, the average turnout was just 44% (Ipsos MORI, 2010).

Part of the reason for the low electoral turnout among the young is clearly related to the failure on the part of many young people to register to vote: 90% of those aged 55-64 are registered, and the figure rises to 94% of those aged 65 and over, but, among people aged 18-24 the registration rate is just 55% (Berry, 2012, p. 7). The stark contrast in registration rates of the younger and older generations is demonstrated clearly by the graph:

Percentage of eligible voters registered in Great Britain, 2011¹



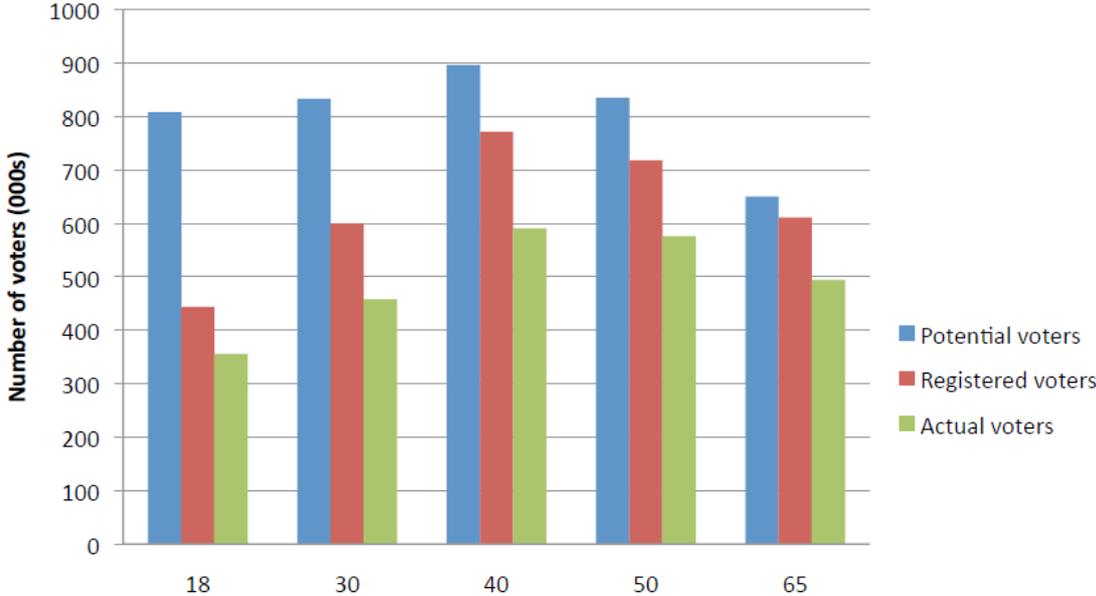
Of course, the problem of registration is both a symptom and a cause of the problem of low electoral turnout among the young. It is a cause of young people not being able to vote even if they had intended to—44 % of those not registered did not realise that they were not registered (Berry, 2012, pp. 34-35)—and also a symptom of not being interested in voting, and therefore having no reason to register. With respect to young people not registering being a *cause* of the low electoral turnout among the young, there is clearly a need for registration to be made easier and more straightforward for young people because the present system clearly disadvantages them by virtue of the fact that young people are more likely to have recently moved house than an older person (Berry, 2012, pp. 34-35). However, this paper is more interested in these low registration figures for their capacity as a *symptom* of a lack of interest in voting. After all, 44% of young people may not have realised that they were not registered, but this implies that 56% of young people *were* aware that they

¹ Source: The Electoral Commission (2011, p. 31)

had not registered and yet were not motivated to change this. Any attempt to address the low registration figures of the youth should therefore, for the majority of young people, be primarily concerned with encouraging young people to participate in the voting process.

A graph summarising the numbers of potential, registered, and actual voters of selected ages in the UK is below. Even though the number 18 year olds who are potentially able to vote is much higher than the number of potential 65 year old voters, the percentages of those in the latter age group who are registered and who actually voted are so much higher than the comparative figures for those aged 18 that their actual vote is much higher, as shown:

Potential, registered and actual voters at selected ages (2010)²



Sources: ONS population estimates; original calculations based on ONS population estimates; Electoral Commission

All figures to nearest 1000. Registration rates refer to 2011.

Young people are underrepresented in more ways than just their turnout at the polling booths. Referred to by Howker & Malik (2013) as the ‘jilted generation’, young people today are afflicted with poor housing and job prospects, and huge levels of debt: today’s undergraduates will leave

² This graph was taken from Berry (2012, p. 34)

University with debts of approximately £43,500 each (Howker & Malik, 2013, pp. 202, 240). Furthermore, although the average politician, aged 50 at the time of the 2010 general election (Rhodes, et al., 2011, p. 43), will not be around in 50 years' time, most young people will be and so a bleak future for the youth implies a bleak future for the future citizens of the world. It is therefore imperative that low electoral turnout among the young is seen to be part of a wider problem of underrepresentation that, as I mentioned in my introduction, should be addressed on a number of different fronts.

Yet a more nuanced analysis of the electoral engagement of young people yields more optimistic results. Studies reveal that although young people feel alienated by mainstream politics, which tends to neglect them and their issues, they are not apathetic and actually do wish to influence the democratic process (Berry, 2012, p. 37; Marsh, et al., 2007; Cammaerts, et al., 2014; Dermody, et al., 2010; Sloam, 2007). A study quoted by Henn & Foard (2012) of 1,025 British 18 year olds actually suggests that young people are highly politicised, but they do not like voting because it is not sufficiently participatory: young people prefer more participatory ways of expressing their political views, such as by protest or campaigns that are exogenous to the party system. Although it may be wrong to see such methods of political expression as more important than voting, young people generally seem to see unseating an incumbent government as of less importance than directly targeting the practices and organizations that go against their values (Henn & Foard, 2012).

Indeed, data from 1,000 qualitative interviews with potential first-time voters after the 2005 general election confirmed that young people are cynical about politics, but the data rebuffed the claim that young people are not interested in the electoral process. In fact, researchers found that many young people had declined to vote not out of apathy, but due to a more-or-less conscious decision to abstain (Dermody, et al., 2010; Russell, et al., 2002, pp. 27-28). Furthermore, today's young people seem not to feel a civic duty to vote: whereas 80% of the older people who were

surveyed said that they would feel guilty if they did not vote, only 50% of young people said this (Furlong & Cartmel, 2012).

This indicates that young people need to be persuaded of the value of voting in elections if their electoral turnout is to be improved. Of course, any attempt to raise the electoral turnout of young people is premised upon the proposition that voting is, indeed, a valuable act that is essential for democracy. Establishing that this is the case is the task of the next section.

Section 2: Why a low electoral turnout among the youth is a problem for democracy

Section 1 has already established that although young people are not very engaged with politics in terms of electoral turnout, in other ways they are very politically engaged. The task of this section is to establish that this is not enough: it is important that more young people vote. I argue that securing a high electoral turnout among young people is both intrinsically valuable, as an expression of popular control and popular equality, and instrumentally valuable for the way that it can begin to close the democratic deficit and ensure that our representatives are accountable to the groups that they represent.

Two defining principles of democracy are popular control and popular equality – a country's citizens should hold equal power in the determination of political affairs, and government is not only 'for the people', but also 'by the people' (Phillips, 1995, pp. 27-28). What is important, therefore, is not just that our representatives are chosen in accordance with the principles of popular control and popular equality, but also that the chosen representatives continue to represent the interests of the populace (Brown, 1950, p. 70). Furthermore, the principle of equality requires that every citizen is able to fulfil his or her right to participate in the political process (Anderson, 1999). And this is all embodied in the fundamental principle of democracy: one person, one vote – the 'ultimate expression of political equality' (Berry, 2012, p. 13). However, unequal

electoral participation implies unequal influence, contravening the democratic principle of popular control (Lijphart, 1997, p. 1). Voting is intrinsically valuable, therefore, as an expression of political control and equality.

Thus, the second reason that a low electoral turnout among young people is a problem for democracy is that voting is instrumentally valuable for the way that it helps to close the democratic deficit and ensure that representatives are accountable to the groups that they represent. Indeed, 'civic culture' and 'participation', defined by the qualities of the individual, are essential for healthy democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963). Low electoral turnout levels among the young are just one aspect of a more general failure to include the youngest sector of the electorate in politics; few young people voting will also impact electoral outcomes because self-interested politicians who are seeking election will not be motivated to represent the views of the youth if the youth vote will have only a very minimal impact on the politicians' election prospects (Russell, et al., 2002, p. 15).

Politicians are quite clearly more interested in the vote of young people's parents' generation than that of the young people themselves (Howker & Malik, 2013), and this seems to have become something of a vicious circle whereby young people do not vote, politicians thus ignore the interests of young people, young people feel alienated from the political process and so forth; young people not participating in electoral politics thus becomes self-reinforcing (Sloam, 2007, p. 565). The way to reverse this trend, and ensure that politicians do listen to the views of young people, is to encourage young people to vote. Then, it is possible that a virtuous circle will result: politicians will listen to the views of young people because their vote is significant; young people will be motivated to vote for the politician that best represents their views, politicians will jump to try to win over the now significant 'youth vote', and so forth.

Therefore, boosting the youth's electoral turnout is one fundamental way in which the democratic representation of the populace would be both intrinsically improved, by virtue of the way in which all sectors of the population would develop a voice of equal weight, and instrumentally improved by virtue of the way that increased electoral turnout among the young would help to bring about improved political outcomes for young people and for intergenerational justice. Having established the importance of increasing electoral turnout among the youth, this paper will now consider why it is that young people are voting less than other sectors of the population.

Section 3: Why young people do not vote

It has already been mentioned in section 1 that young people may not vote because they are not registered to vote, but that most of these non-registered young people were aware that they had not registered and so presumably made a conscious decision not to register. This implies a lack of enthusiasm for voting, which I argue is the principal reason for low electoral turnout among the young. The decision not to register, or to register but then not to vote, does not imply a feeling of political apathy – as was discussed in section 1, young people are not generally apathetic towards politics, but rather they feel neglected by politics and disengaged with the formal democratic mechanism of voting. In this section, I proffer four reasons why young people may not vote: disillusionment, a feeling of lacking political efficacy, a lack of knowledge about who to vote for and, finally, habit.

Typically, on the list of reasons why people do not vote you will find apathy and inconvenience, but in the case of young people neither of these are especially relevant. Young people are not apathetic, and they are much less likely to give inconvenience as a reason for not voting than older people (Russell, et al., 2002, pp. 27-28). Thus, the reasons that this section gives

for young people not voting are concerned principally with why they might actively choose *not* to vote, as opposed to their not voting due to not caring about voting or because it was inconvenient.³

Disillusionment implies a feeling that the outcome of an election does not matter. This might reflect a number of different sources of disillusionment such as a decline in partisanship (the voter feeling that no party represents her); a lack of attraction to any of the party leaders; or the voter feeling that the policies being addressed by politicians are not relevant to her life (Whitely, et al., 2001; Russell, et al., 2002, p. 6).

The second reason for not voting is a feeling of lacking political efficacy. A young person may care about the result of an election and yet believe that an individual vote will not make a difference (Russell, et al., 2002, p. 6). The problem with this reason for not voting is that, in one sense, the young person is absolutely right – public choice theory has struggled for a long time with the question of why people vote when the impact of voting on electoral outcomes is so profoundly negligible.⁴ In the study quoted by Henn & Foard (2012, p. 55) 61% of the young people surveyed felt that the influence they had on decisions made on their behalf by politicians was little or none.

Third, young people may not vote because they lack the knowledge to feel confident enough to vote (Russell, et al., 2002, p. 6). Quoting again from Henn & Foard (2012, pp. 54-55), 64% of the young people surveyed said that they did not believe they had enough knowledge to vote. Were they mistaken? Again, that is no easy question. On the one hand, a vote is of intrinsic value for its expression of political control and equality, as argued above. But on the other hand, there is surely no point in voting unless there is some degree of conscious decision-making behind the vote: otherwise, the very idea of representative democracy, that we choose representatives who can best represent our interests, is completely

³ The point is that apathy and inconvenience give rise to non-voting more as a result of a lack of interest in politics that is neither strongly against voting nor strongly for it. The factors that I list as reasons for not voting arise instead from an active decision not to vote rather than from a passive insouciance towards voting.

⁴ For cogent attempts to explain and resolve this ‘paradox of participation’ see (Downs, 1985 [1957]; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968; Verba, et al., 2000).

undermined. Mill (1991 [1861], p. 208) argued that in any political election ‘the voter is under an absolute moral obligation to consider the interest of the public, ... and give his vote, to the best of his judgement, exactly as he would be bound to do if he were the sole voter and the election depended upon him alone.’ But how much knowledge is enough for a decision to be able to count as properly informed? There is no straightforward answer.

Finally, but crucially, I argue that not voting is very often the result of habit. Of course, in the case of young people this may sound somewhat misleading: clearly, for first-time voters, not voting cannot be the result of habit. However, my point in giving ‘habit’ as a cause of young people not voting is to emphasise the importance of their voting now, so that they will continue to vote in the future – it is not actually a cause of their initial low electoral turnout. A study by Gerber, et al. (2003) involving 25,200 voters revealed that if considered in isolation, the effect of habit, *ceteris paribus*, meant that voting in one election would substantially increase the likelihood that that person would vote in the future. Abstention, too, was found to be habit-forming: a person’s tendency both to vote, and to not vote, is not merely the function of similar choices being made in similar circumstances. Thus, elections that do not stimulate high turnout among the young cause a ‘footprint’ of low turnout in the electorate’s age structure – many first-time voters who do not vote fail to vote at subsequent elections, too (Franklin, 2004). Indeed, voting, or not voting, is a habit that is learnt in one’s first few elections.

Because habit is so significant, and questions of knowledge and efficacy so difficult, I argue that powerful methods should be used to encourage young people to vote. If young people are persuaded to vote for their first two or three elections,⁵ the argument from habit suggests that that generation will continue to vote in large numbers. But if young people are not given sufficient reason to vote, they could well decide not to vote on the basis of the questions raised above about the efficacy of voting, and the knowledge

⁵ How many elections would be required in order that the young person has sufficient time to develop the habit of voting is an interesting question that undoubtedly merits further research. For now though, ‘at least two’ seems a reasonable number and I will continue to use this figure for the remainder of the paper.

required to vote. I do not believe that the solution to low electoral turnout among the youth is to try to persuade young people that their vote is efficacious, or that they should vote regardless of how much knowledge they have about the election in question, for this would be to mislead them – it seems to me that there is no clear answer to either of these questions. However, if young people simply develop the habit of voting then there is a great possibility that this will continue throughout their lives.⁶ Furthermore, by virtue of attending the information and discussion sessions, the problem of young people lacking the knowledge to vote will be partially addressed by my proposed incentive scheme.

To sum up, young people generally do not vote either because they are disillusioned with the political system in some way, they feel that their vote will make no difference, or because they feel that they lack the knowledge required to vote. All these factors cause young people not to turn up to vote, and this can create a habit of non-voting that may continue as that person gets older. In order to avoid this, young people should receive strong encouragement to vote in at least their first two elections, and this encouragement should also be of a type that gives young people greater knowledge about the election that they are voting in. What form this encouragement should take, and whether it should consist of incentives for voting or disincentives for not voting, are the questions with which the next section is concerned.

Section 4: How to increase electoral participation among the young

Encouraging young people to participate in elections is a huge task that can be addressed from both a long-term perspective and a short-term perspective. In the long-term, Berry (2012, pp. 51-52) is right to highlight the importance of civic education and even political training as methods to

⁶ This motivation for the scheme does not have to be in any way secretive: the government could explicitly tell young people that they are incentivizing them to vote because this will increase their likelihood of being represented in politics both now and, through the force of habit, in the future.

address the causes of young people's disengagement with formal politics. Also important is the need to change politics itself, to remake it in a way that energizes young people and makes politics 'fun', addressing questions such as 'how should we live together as a world?' (Farthing, 2010, p. 191). Indeed, as Lijphart (1997, pp. 9-10) argues, if all 'institutional variables are favourable—such as automatic registration, a highly proportional electoral system, infrequent elections, and weekend voting—and in a highly politicized environment, it may be possible to have near-universal turnout ...'⁷

In the shorter term, however, I argue that a more immediately impactful scheme is required to encourage young people to vote. This should be regarded as part of a wide attempt to address the low electoral turnout of young people also using the longer-term strategies mentioned above; the short-term and long-term approaches to reducing the democratic deficit should be viewed as mutually compatible, not as conflicting approaches.

Such a scheme would generally fall into one of two categories: an incentive scheme for voting, or a disincentive scheme for not voting. The latter is very common – this is the method of compulsory voting for which people are legally required to vote and a failure to do so will (in theory) result in some form of penalty, such as a fine. However, while compulsory voting is common and its drawbacks and merits have been widely discussed, the alternative, a scheme that encourages people to vote by means of financial incentives, has received much less academic attention and, as far as I am aware, has not been practiced anywhere in the world apart from Ancient Athens (Hasen, 1996, pp. 2135, 2169, 2172; Stavely, 1972, pp. 78-82). In this section I discuss the merits of compulsory voting and conclude that it infringes unacceptably upon our liberty. Conversely, I argue for a scheme of financial incentives for voting that does not violate our liberty and would be highly effective in increasing turnout.

⁷ An example of this, analysed by Hirczy (1995), is the case of Malta. Verba (1996, p. 7) advances a similar argument for the need of greater income and educational equality in order to boost political participation.

Compulsory voting – an infringement upon our liberties?

Compulsory voting is practiced in a number of countries all over the world including Cyprus, Belgium, Turkey, and Australia. The punishments for non-voters range from small fines to disenfranchisement, social sanctions and possible imprisonment, although the most common punishment is a small fine. In practice, however, enforcement is universally lax, despite the wide range of stated penalties; in Australia, perhaps 4% of non-voters incur a penalty of some type, and in Greece the penalty of jail time is apparently never imposed (IDEA, 2015; Hasen, 1996, pp. 2169-2170). Various studies have shown that compulsory voting is an effective way to raise voter turnout: on average it raises voting turnout by 7-16 percentage points, which is significant when we consider that the punishments for not voting are very rarely enforced and are usually minimal (Lijphart, 1997, pp. 8-10; Hasen, 1996, p. 2170). When the Netherlands withdrew compulsory voting in 1967, turnout dropped by 10%; it increased by 15% in Costa Rica when penalties for not voting were introduced (Hasen, 1996, p. 2172).

Compulsory voting is also considered beneficial because it reduces the role of money in politics since voters do not need to be goaded to the polls; it may become an incentive for people to become better informed about the political options available to them; it will force parties to take seriously the vote of the poor, weak and marginalized who may not otherwise have voted; it produces policies more closely aligned to citizen preferences when rational citizens may otherwise have chosen to abstain; and it enables every adult to become an autonomous agent who makes as many decisions about their own life as any other adult (Lijphart, 1997, p. 10; Feeley, 1974; Lacroix, 2007, pp. 192-193).

In practice, only the first of these benefits holds much weight – it is quite possible that the cost of elections for campaigning parties would reduce. However, it is hard to imagine that being forced to vote will motivate you to learn about politics more than if you chose to vote of your own volition; on the contrary, it may actually discourage people's interest in political education as they react against perceived oppression (IDEA, 2015). The

Australian case, where compulsory voting is long established and extremely popular, demonstrates that increasing turnout does not force parties to compete for the votes of the poor, weak and marginalized (Lever, 2008, p. 63). And forcing people to vote hardly seems a legitimate way to address the problem of rational abstention.

Moreover, far from supporting our autonomy, compulsory voting constitutes an infringement of our individual freedom. The great liberal writer Benjamin Constant (1988 [1820], p. 311) wrote that ‘it is everyone’s right to exercise some influence on the administration of the government, either by electing all or particular officials, or through representations, petitions, demands to which the authorities are more or less compelled to pay heed’. It is therefore crucial to our political liberty that we have the *right* to vote. However, it does not follow that we have a *duty* to vote (Jones, 1974). And even if we do have a duty to vote, it does not follow that this should be enforced by legal compulsion (Lever, 2008, pp. 62-63; Jones, 1974). Furthermore, Mill explained that in order to defend our liberty, society should not interfere with someone unless what he is doing will cause harm to others (Mill, 1974 [1859], pp. 141-163). Forcing someone to vote against his or her will seems to interfere with that person’s liberty, since the act of not voting is a perfectly innocuous act, and therefore forcing someone to vote violates what Berlin (1969, pp. 121-122) described as our ‘negative freedom’ – our freedom not to be interfered with.

Advocates of compulsory voting will no doubt respond that not voting *will* harm others: if no one votes then this will lead to the collapse of democracy. However, this is to stretch the defence of the right not to vote beyond reason: electoral turnout may be low in a number of countries, but it is nowhere near low enough that enforcing compulsory voting is required to prevent the collapse of democracy. Lijphart (1997, p. 11) also defends compulsory voting, which she regards as a very small infringement upon our liberty, on the basis that many other problems of collective action are solved by government using obligations: jury service, paying taxes, school attendance and so forth – so why not voting too,

which is far less burdensome than these? Yet the answer to this objection is precisely that it is *because* voting is less burdensome than these other actions that the majority of people choose to vote without it having to be made compulsory. If paying taxes were not compulsory then it is probable that very few people would pay them, and the country would incur serious problems as a result. Yet this is not the case with voting: it is because the cost of voting is very minimal that many people choose to vote – there is no reason that it be made compulsory in the way that taxation and jury service are.

Moreover, as John Rawls argued in his *Theory of Justice*, if a citizen is expected to vote then it is necessary for that citizen to first develop a willingness and aptitude for forming political opinions that will appeal to others, what he calls ‘education to public spirit’, before she can then ‘acquire an affirmative sense of political duty and obligation, that is, one that goes beyond the mere willingness to submit to law and government’ (Rawls, 1999, pp. 205-206). Therefore, affirmative political obligations cannot suffice as a justification for compulsory voting (Lever, 2008, p. 62). Rather, a sense of political duty arises from the act of voting and the way in which it requires a citizen to develop political opinions that accord with a public spirit – it cannot be imposed upon citizens who are unwilling to engage in this process.

One final defence of compulsory voting is that the ability to cast a blank vote—or indeed to be able to choose an option that denotes one’s dissatisfaction with the political system or its available options, which seems to me a sensible way to allow voters who are dissatisfied with their political options to express this opinion—implies that compulsory voting does not violate your autonomy in a strong paternalistic way (Lacroix, 2007, pp. 192-193). You are not being made to act in a way that will ‘protect’ you, or ‘benefit’ you from an informed choice of action. In fact, compulsory voting, according to Lacroix (2007, pp. 192-193), does not even impose a ‘very minor restriction’ on individual freedom as Lijphart (1997, p. 11) argued. Rather, it is actually legitimated by autonomy and

equal liberty – the very principles of political liberalism (Lacroix, 2007, p. 192).

That is a misleading diagnosis. The fact that compulsory voting violates our negative freedom not to be interfered if we choose not to vote, and the fact that it is not required in order to safeguard our democratic freedoms because these are safeguarded by sufficient numbers of people choosing to vote even without compulsory voting, clearly means that legally compelling people to vote constitutes at least a minor restriction on individual freedom. Furthermore, making voting a legal duty implies that people are necessarily required to develop well-informed political opinions, but this seems incompatible with the liberal perspective of respect for all attitudes in the world, attitudes that may value, perhaps, spontaneity, spiritual quest, or even a scepticism towards organized activity, all of which may lead someone to choose not to vote (Lever, 2008, p. 62). Clearly, I am not arguing that the choice not to vote should be encouraged, for that would be contrary to the motivation of this entire paper. Nonetheless, a liberal respect for different opinions surely implies that people should be free to think in ways that may lead them to not want to vote, or indeed to want not to vote. That there might occasionally be a moral duty to vote in order to *maintain* reasonable pluralism, for example to keep out a racist party, does not imply a general duty to vote (Lever, 2008, p. 62). And Lacroix's argument that the ability to cast a blank vote means that compulsory voting does not violate our autonomy is like saying that being forced to attend church but not to pray would not violate our conscience – this is clearly absurd (Lever, 2008, pp. 64, fn. 4). Therefore, being forced to vote, and hence being forced to develop well-informed political opinions, violates our basic liberty.

Encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement

It has been established that boosting electoral turnout by means of legal compulsion, which functions by giving people a disincentive for not voting, constitutes an unacceptable violation of our individual liberty. The

alternative approach to boosting electoral turnout among the young is instead to offer an incentive system for young voters. In this section I argue for an incentive scheme that will pay young people between the ages of 18 and 28 a small amount, perhaps about £30,⁸ if they attend an hour's information session on the election, partake in an hour's discussion session on the election, and then cast their vote.

The benefits of such a scheme are plain. Providing the selective benefit of financial payment to voters is much more pleasing than fining non-voters, but it also offers a powerful method by which to overcome rational abstention and reduce the democratic deficit, bringing government policies into closer alignment with citizen preferences (Feeley, 1974, p. 241). It could accomplish the same function as compulsory voting without infringing upon individual freedom (Feeley, 1974, p. 241). However, despite the clear benefits of such a scheme, it has received a surprisingly minimal amount of attention in the academic literature. I hope that this section will go some way towards filling this academic gap.

Historically, it seems that the only time that such a scheme has ever been tried was in Ancient Athens. In the 4th century BCE, payment was introduced in Ancient Athens in order to boost electoral turnout (Hasen, 1996, p. 2135; Stavely, 1972, pp. 78-82). Indeed, Aristotle specifically connected the introduction of state payment with the difficulties of attaining a reasonable level of attendance at the Assembly (Stavely, 1972, pp. 243, fn. 131).

The most common objection to such a system is that it will incur the cost of incentivizing people to vote who would have voted anyway, a deadweight loss. Conversely, so the argument goes, 'Fines for abstention would circumvent this problem and produce the same result—high turnout—more efficiently' because fines would only apply to those who

⁸ The precise figure would have to be arrived at after further research into the minimum payment sufficient to act as an effective incentive for young voters, making a trade-off between maximising the chance of incentivizing young people to vote while minimizing expense. I suggest £30 only as a rough guide because it is significantly more than the equivalent minimum wage payment for doing three hours of work (approximating the voting process to take about an hour), presumably making for an effective incentive for young people to vote, but it is less than double this figure and so does not make for a huge expense.

would not vote; rewarding people when turnout is already high will, for the most part, simply give rise to an unnecessary expense (Feeley, 1974, p. 241).

Although this is a legitimate objection to a scheme that pays people to vote, it does not hold in the case of the scheme that I propose because, for this scheme, the expense of paying people to vote is limited to young people between the ages of 18 and 28, and will only arise once every few years when there is a general election. Furthermore, by limiting the scope of payment to people aged 18-28, the cost of this scheme is significantly reduced – at £30 per voter, with this expense arising once every 5 years, the cost of such a scheme would make up approximately 0.003% of British government expenditure over those 5 years⁹ – a negligible price to pay for improving the electoral turnout of young people and reducing the democratic deficit.

The reason that I propose payment for people between the ages of 18 and 28 (ie, anyone below the age of 29 that is eligible to vote), is that with elections occurring once every 4 to 5 years, such a scheme guarantees that young people will be paid to vote in at least 2 elections. This, I hope, will be sufficient to generate in young people the *habit* of voting, thus ensuring that they will continue to vote from the age of 29 onwards even after this incentive system ceases for them, the importance of which I argued for in section 3.

Hasen (1996, p. 2172) argues in favour of compulsory voting over financial inducement as a method for raising electoral turnout because, so he suggests, a law implies moral authority or social consensus, as opposed to his analogous equivalent to financial incentives of half a dozen Yum-Yum doughnuts which ‘inspires an outcome-orientated calculus’, ie an election

⁹ Based on ONS (2014) figures, the population of people aged 18-28 in Britain could be very roughly approximated at 4 million. If all these young people were to accept the incentive scheme, this would therefore cost the government about £120 million – not an insubstantial amount. However, based on 2014 figures that give the government expenditure at £732 billion for that year (Inman & Arnett, 2014), £120 million would constitute approximately 0.016% of this expenditure, a 61th of a percentile, or one 6,100th of the entire expenditure. Furthermore, since elections occur only once every four or five years, over the course of an electoral term this expense would be much less again – it would constitute, in relation to government expenditure over a five year term, approximately 0.003% of government spending.

in which people vote because of the reward and not because they are actually electorally engaged. It might, Hasen could continue, make people even *less* likely to vote after the rewards cease, because the voter will never have developed an attitude of engagement but rather will have voted only due to the financial incentive on offer. This is similar to the objection that paying people to vote might increase votes but these votes will not be of value because young people will vote just in order to get money – they will not actually be electorally engaged and will not take the time to think seriously about who to vote for.

The answer to this objection is that, according to the scheme that I propose, in order to be paid young people must not only turn up to vote, they must also attend an hour-long information session and partake in an hour-long discussion session on the election. These sessions, I aver, should be arranged by an independent body with no political affiliations, and must aim to provide an effective summary of what is offered by each party of the election, and how the various parties differ in terms of the policies that they are espousing. The point of young people partaking in an hour-long discussion session after the information session is to ensure that they then reflect on their views, and actively engage with the questions of the election. It seems far more likely that young people will become politically engaged after such a session than as a result of being forced to vote. Even if young people initially attend the sessions only as a means of receiving payment, as a result of attending the sessions it is very likely that their political interest and understanding will increase. This increased level of interest and engagement, combined with the force of habit, will then motivate people to continue to vote even after they get older and this payment system ceases for them.

Of course, arranging these information and discussion sessions would also constitute a significant expense – I make no attempt to estimate how much that might be. However, when we remember that the elections occur just once every 4 or 5 years, and if we bear in mind the great value of these sessions for the civic education and engagement of the young populace, such an expense seems entirely worthwhile. It might also be possible that

this expense could be avoided, or at least significantly reduced, by finding volunteers to run these sessions.

How exactly these discussion sessions should be arranged, the size of the group that should attend, and so forth are questions that I make no attempt to address here. One important factor to mention, however, is that it should be at the discretion of the people who are running the discussion sessions as to whether the young people are sufficiently engaged in the discussion to earn the £30. The expectation of engagement should not be high, of course – I do not suggest this in order to reduce the number of people who qualify for payment. Rather, I suggest this simply to ensure that young people do not think that they can turn up and attempt to disrupt the session, or make no effort to engage with the discussion, and still get paid.

A further objection might be that encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement is effectively a bribe: it implies the wrong attitude on the part of the government. While more young people voting of their own volition may be a preferable solution, we need to be realistic about the situation we are in. Indeed, empirical tests that reveal the influence of financial incentives on voters suggest that we should reconsider our normative bias against an incentive system, realizing that the result will be a more politically engaged and democratically representative government (La Raja & Schaffner, 2013; Bassi, et al., 2011; Ornstein, 2012). As I argued in section 2, this may then lead to a virtuous circle whereby young people are better represented by politics and as a consequence become more electorally engaged, boosting electoral turnout and causing politicians to take their views and interests more seriously as a result. Therefore as well as building the foundation of a longer-term solution to low political engagement among the young by giving young people the opportunity to learn about and reflect upon politics in the information and discussion sessions, the short-term impact of more young people voting will also lead to long-term improvements in the way that parties represent young people. Perhaps there might come a time in the future when the political representation of the youth has improved, and the democratic deficit

reduced, to such an extent that that this scheme is no longer required in order to boost electoral turnout among the young. Be that as it may, in the present political environment with its concerning low levels of electoral engagement among young people, there is no doubt that, such a scheme would be of immense short-term and long-term value for improving the electoral turnout of the young and consequently, as I argued in section 2, improving democracy and intergenerational justice.

Thus, encouraging young people to vote by financial inducement offers a powerful way to boost electoral turnout among the young without infringing upon their liberty, as compulsory voting would do. Because it applies only to young people aged 18-28 at the time of the election, the expense of such a scheme will be negligible. The expense of arranging information and discussion sessions for young people might also require considerable cost, but this seems entirely worthwhile when we consider the effects it will have of boosting the political engagement levels of young people and reducing the democratic deficit – furthermore, it might be possible to avoid this cost by finding volunteers who can run the sessions. By virtue of the information and discussion sessions, as well as offering a short-term solution to the low level of young people's political engagement, it also offers a longer-term solution because young people's interest in, and engagement with, politics will undoubtedly increase as a result of these sessions.

Section 5: Conclusion

In sections 1-2 of this paper, I established the extent of the low electoral turnout among young people, and that this is a problem for democracy. Section 3 proffered an analysis of the cause of low electoral engagement among the young. Apathy and inconvenience are not common reasons for the low electoral turnout of the young because in general young people are politically engaged, but simply lack enthusiasm for the formal mechanisms of democracy. I suggested four reasons for low electoral turnout: disillusionment, a feeling of lacking political efficacy, a feeling of lacking

sufficient knowledge to vote, and finally habit. I explained, however, that habit is not actually a cause of young people not voting, but rather a cause of those young people voting or not voting as they get older, continuing the habit of their first few elections. Therefore, it is very important that young people are encouraged to vote in at least their first two elections in order to create a voting habit that will stay with them as they get older.

Section 4 then outlined two prospective methods for increasing electoral turnout among the young. The first is compulsory voting: a scheme whereby non-voters are punished by some disincentive for not voting, such as a fine. This, I argued, constitutes an unnecessary and therefore unacceptable violation of our liberty. The alternative that I proposed is to offer a financial incentive, perhaps of about £30, to young voters between the ages of 18 and 28, payable only if the young person also attends a compulsory hour-long information session, and an hour-long discussion session on the election, before he votes. This will ensure that young people can be paid to vote in at least their first two elections, and that they will develop their understanding and interest in the election by virtue of attending the information and discussion sessions.

Such a scheme violates no one's liberties and offers a powerful method for improving the electoral turnout among the young. It offers both a short-term boost to the turnout of young people, and a longer-term solution too, since the information and discussion sessions will raise the political engagement of the young, and lead to a virtuous circle whereby higher turnout among young people means that politicians are forced to listen more closely to their views, and young people become more electorally engaged as a result. This is also likely to improve policies intended at protecting future citizens, since young people have a greater stake in the future than ageing politicians. However, as I have argued throughout this paper, such a scheme should not be considered a 'silver bullet' for solving the low electoral turnout among young people: it should be used alongside long-term solutions to the causes of low electoral turnout among young people such as civic education and political training.

Nevertheless, encouraging young people by financial inducement, in accordance with the scheme that I outlined, should be seriously considered by academics and politicians as a radical but effective method by which to address the current concerningly low level of electoral engagement among young people. If politicians and academics are genuinely interested in improving the representation of young people, reducing the democratic deficit both now and in the future, and looking after the needs of future generations, then they must seriously consider the possibility of implementing this scheme.

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