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**NO (political) Identity, NO (political) Information, NO
VOTE: The decline of electoral turnout among young voters
in Britain**

Thesis submitted by Edward Phelps for the degree of DPhil

University of Sussex

January 2010

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

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NO (political) Identity, NO (political) Information, NO VOTE: The decline of electoral turnout among young voters in Britain

Edward Phelps

Abstract

This thesis examines the extent of turnout decline at general elections since 1992. Its first contribution is to reveal that turnout decline amongst the youngest age groups was significantly more pronounced in the period 1992-2001 than for other age groups. The central argument is that there are sufficient grounds for suspecting that life-cycle factors cannot alone account for the unprecedented decline in turnout between 1992 and 2001, and that generational factors may be at work. The second contribution of the thesis is to test a variety of explanatory models of political participation on these youngest groups to ascertain if the results provide any insights of the dynamics of a suspected generational change. The thesis argues that a weakening of the psychological anchors to social and political life have left recent generations exposed and more susceptible than their older counterparts to factors that have been shown to decrease the likelihood of voting such as weakness of electoral competition; little perceived difference between political parties and an environment of negative images of politics and politicians.

Introduction

1.1 Why research political participation?

In the twenty first century with democratic systems triumphing over all others, all over the globe, rather than questioning which political system is best or which mostly adequately addresses or represents the needs of its citizens, attention has turned to the adequacies or inadequacies of democracies themselves. One of the most appealing features of 'democracy' is its quintessential popular definition: 'Government by the people'. The extent to which this is actually the case is therefore naturally likely to be of interest to its proponents who seek ways in which to facilitate the effective functioning of democracy, whether this is to strengthen government by the people and widen citizen participation, or whether from those who recognise there are limits to the extent to which citizens can and should be involved and who therefore seek to ensure representative democracy functions properly. But the extent to which democracy comes close to being government by the people may also be of great interest to groups such as anti-capitalists whose agenda is to highlight the degree to which modern variants of democracy deviate from the ideal of government by the people. This contemporary snapshot of why political participation might be important to different groups of people is encapsulated in one of the great historical debates about politics which I will return to in Section 1.3.

1.2 Elections and democracy

These types of concerns are perhaps best exemplified by what is for many the defining feature of democracy: elections. Elections are critical to a functioning democracy because

they confer legitimacy on the political system in which they are held. This in turn provides a degree of stability via citizen's perceptions of system legitimacy. Given that elections confer legitimacy it follows that participation in elections and voter turnout are an important measure of how well a democracy functions. This is the underlying reason that people all over the world study election and electoral behaviour – because elections are the prime measure of the health of a democracy.

Table 1.1 shows that in Britain turnout at general elections has tended to be high and stable with around 70 per cent of British electors casting a vote at each general election since 1964.

Table 1.1 Turnout at British general elections 1964-2001

1964	77.1
1966	75.8
1970	72
1974Feb	78.8
1974Oct	72.8
1979	76
1983	72.7
1987	75.3
1992	77.7
1997	71.4
2001	59.4

Source: Rallings and Thrasher 2007

Young adults have tended to vote at lower levels than their older counterparts and this has tended to be attributed, as will be discussed in Chapter two, to their age, or position in the political life-cycle. But as Table 1.2 shows, after 1992 turnout amongst this age group began to plummet. In 1997 only 59.7 per cent of 18-24 year olds reported having voted,

compared to 75.4 per cent at the previous election in 1992. In 2001 the proportion reporting having voted dropped even further to 49.4 per cent.

Table 1.2 **Reported turnout at British General Elections among 18-24 year olds**
1964-2001

Year	18-24
1964	88.6
1966	67.1
1970	73.6
1974	78.2
1979	70.1
1983	73.1
1987	76.2
1992	75.4
1997	59.7
2001	49.4

Source: British Election Survey data

The central questions this thesis will address are: how can we best explain this pronounced decline in turnout post 1992 amongst the youngest age groups; to what extent do life-cycle explanations of electoral turnout account for these declines; and, is it possible to identify a generational effect in electoral turnout on the basis of these declines? In attempting to answer these questions this thesis makes important contributions to our understanding of contemporary political participation in Britain and the extent to which it may be changing. It will also identify directions for future research in the area of youth politics and engagement.

1.3 Participatory democratic theory

The origins of the participatory theory of democracy can be traced back to ancient Greece and most commonly to the work of Aristotle, although its later proponents include Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and the Guild Socialist thinker G.D.H. Cole (Pateman 1970). In this broad theory, the health of democracy is measured by the extent of citizen involvement. Civic virtue was an underlying principle of Athenian democracy – a dedication to the republican state and the subordination of private life to public affairs and the common good (Held 1996). In this view it is only possible for individuals to truly fulfil themselves through the polis as ethics and politics were merged in the life of the political community. This view was based on a very different understanding of the individual and his or her rights and obligations. These were not defended or enforced by the state as a means of protecting the private rights of individuals, but were upheld as public rights and duties (Held 1996). This was very different to the distinction between the people and government, individuals and the state in the work of other political theorists such as Machiavelli or Hobbes.

Even at this early stage in the evolution of the participationist theory, thinkers recognised that differences in ability meant that citizens were not equally able to fill all roles. But this was not seen as a fundamental problem as the educative role of democracy meant that citizens could develop and realise their potentials and skills through participation. This pre-empted to some degree the criticisms of the second broad set of theorists whose assumption tends to see the individual rather than the polis or community as the fundamental unit of political activity. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau attempted to address this problem by arguing that in their original state of nature, before the development of civil governments, humans were fundamentally equal. For Rousseau human weakness, egoistic desires and natural disasters drive humans to the creation of a ‘social contract’ (Rousseau 2003). This contrasts with the assumption of the realist or elitist theory of democracy that the human traits identified by Rousseau are inherent to human life as are the differences between individuals, both of which make the ‘social contract’, or state, a necessary tool for organising and managing individuals.

The participationist model at the very least implies a direct form of democracy, but in the context of large modern states there are serious limitations to this which primarily stem from the difficulty of organising huge numbers of people taking part in a decision making process at once. But this criticism of the participationist ideal of maximum citizen involvement is now far less convincing than ever before. The continual rise of the internet and online methods of citizen engagement makes mass direct participation a far more realistic prospect.

1.4 The 'realist' response

The second broad theory of democracy which one might argue is more firmly rooted on the actual experience of political systems commonly described as democracies is the elitist or realist conception of democracy. The 'realist' school is sceptical about widespread and 'deep' participation. Perhaps the two most important early proponents of this view are Max Weber (1864-1920) and Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950). Weber agreed with many aspects of Marx's critique of capitalism, including that class was fundamental to the understanding of political conflict. Marx and many Marxists viewed the state and bureaucratic organisations as 'parasitic' entities. But Weber's subtle understanding of bureaucracy was reached partly through his appraisal of the organisational impracticalities of direct democracy (Held 1996).

Where the group grows beyond a certain size or where the administrative function becomes too difficult to be satisfactorily taken care of by anyone whom rotation, the lot, or election may happen to designate. The conditions of mass structures are radically different from those obtaining in small associations resting upon neighbourly or personal relationships...The growing complexity of the administrative task and the sheer expansion of their scope increasingly result in the technical superiority of those who have had training and experience, and will thus inevitably favour the continuity of at least some of the functionaries. Hence, there always exists the probability of the rise of special, perennial structure for administrative purposes, which of necessity means for the exercise of rule. (Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 11, pp. 951-2 cited in Held 1996: 162).

Weber clearly understood that whilst there were examples of direct democracy among the aristocracies in late medieval Italian city republics, town-ships in the United States and among selected occupational groupings – the ‘size, complexity and sheer diversity of modern societies make direct democracy simply inappropriate as a general model of political regulation and control’ (Held 1996: 163).

Schumpeter’s critique of the classical theory of mass democracy adds a second dimension to the critique of high levels of citizen involvement in politics, one which is less about the practicalities of citizen involvement and more about the capacities of citizens themselves. For Schumpeter democracy was a political method – a set of institutional arrangements for arriving at political, legislative and administrative decisions (Schumpeter 1943: 24). Citizens for Schumpeter were ‘incapable of action other than stampede’ (Ibid: 283) and their role in democracy should be limited to being able to change governments at elections. Democracy is distinguished by competition between leaders for the support of the mass population, which is expressed at periodic elections (Parry et al 1992). Between elections citizens should refrain from ‘back seat driving’ (Schumpeter 1943: 295).

His most important contribution as far as setting up the research questions for this thesis was to argue that citizens are only capable of a limited form of participation. In his eyes citizens are weak and prone to strong emotional impulses. To encourage participation by such persons would be to introduce into government ignorance and indifference in place of expertise, however cynically motivated, of the professional politician (Held 1996). So, whilst the participatory theorists measure the health of a democracy by the extent of citizen involvement, realist or elitist theorists emphasise the stability of the system and its capacity to permit checks and balances (See also Berelson 1954; Dahl 1956 and Sartori 1962).

1.5 Contemporary expression

These broad frameworks of democratic participation provide a useful entry point to the contemporary debate on citizen engagement. Whilst much of the literature on disengagement reviewed in the following chapter precedes *The Power Report* (2006) – it is particularly relevant here as it embodies the populist version of the participationist critique of representative democracy in its diagnosis of the problem of political disconnect in

Britain. In her foreword to the report, Helena Kennedy, the chair of the Commission, states that the evidence presented to the inquiry suggests that voting itself 'seems irrelevant to increasing numbers of people' and that there is a feeling 'that there is no choice, despite our living in the era when choice is the dominant political mantra'. Commenting that the world has changed enormously during the past fifty years and that lives are being lived in very different ways she suggests that 'the political institutions and the main political parties have failed to keep up.' Drawing attention to the way in which people continue to volunteer to raise money for charity, join protest marches, undertake voluntary work within their communities and sign petitions, Helena Kennedy comments that political apathy is a myth. Accordingly, people 'no longer want to join a party or get involved in formal politics' and the solution is to download power by 'rebalancing the system towards the people'. Later in the report the Commission identifies a 'democratic malaise' which is not just manifested in the recent downturn in general elections. Apart from a decline in party membership the Commission found that there was a 'well-ingrained popular view across the country that our political institutions and their politicians are failing, untrustworthy, and disconnected from the great mass of the British people' (Power 2006: 28).

The executive summary to the report says it presents 'a detailed analysis of why this disengagement has occurred and a series of recommendations to address the problem. This is a broad agenda for major political reform' (Ibid: 15). There are thirty recommendations; the first group addresses the rebalancing of power between the Executive and Parliament and between central and local government to 'allow the freedom for our elected representatives to be the eyes, ears and mouths of British citizens at the heart of government. (Ibid: 21). The second group of recommendations includes measures designed to develop an electoral and party system which is 'responsive to the changing values and demands of today's population.' (Ibid: 21-2). That the report follows a populist-participationist vein of thinking is evident in some of its recommendations as well as in the response from academic specialists and media commentators. The recommendation to lower the voting age to 16 is perhaps the best example of this which is at best contentious and for many fundamentally flawed as a means of increasing voter turnout and therefore

reversing democratic discontent.¹ Peter Riddell took specific issue with the Report's demand to more direct democracy, saying:

This is treacherous ground. Direct democracy risks giving too much influence to unrepresentative groups of activists - like phone-in programmes. A march by lots of people, even the one million against the Iraq war in February 2003, captures attention but does not of itself convey legitimacy. Government and Parliament have to decide, as they did over Iraq, and it is up to voters to respond, as they did. (Riddell 2006).

Bale et al (2006) put it succinctly, noting that the Report overstates the extent to which most citizens are active and identifies the causes of disconnect as lying with the system rather than with people. This embodiment of participationist thinking tends to see a so called democratic deficit from the citizens point of view as being the fault of the state, its institutions and processes and its actors. Rather than to ask another question underlying this thesis, if democratic disconnect is caused by the system and its actors – the elite – how have these changed in the period in which citizens have disconnected? Is it possible to identify changes that could account for this disconnect? Underlying the research questions posed in this thesis is a critique of the assumption that these types of changes have occurred and an evidence based suspicion that citizens have changed in ways that might accurately help account for their political behaviour. An important contribution to the contemporary debate is made by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), skeptical of the will of people to engage en masse with politics, who argue that:

The last thing people want is to be more involved in political decision-making: They do not want to make political decisions themselves; they do not want to provide much input to those who are assigned to make these decisions; and they would rather not know the details of the decision-making process... This does not mean that people think no mechanism for government accountability is necessary; they just do not want the mechanism to come into play except in unusual circumstances...

¹ See Cowley and Denver (2004) for an examination of the arguments for and against.

Participation in politics is low not because of the difficulty in registration requirements or the dearth of places for citizens to discuss politics, not because of the unseemly nature of debate in Congress or displeasure with a particular public policy. Participation is low because people do not like politics even in the best circumstances; in other words, they simply do not like the process of openly arriving at a decision in the face of diverse opinions. They do not like politics when they view it from afar and they certainly do not like politics when they participate in it themselves. (Hibbings and Theiss-Morse 2002: 1-3).

Thus Hibbings and Theiss-Morse place the emphasis back on people, arguing that ‘deliberation will not work in the real world of politics where people are different and where tough, zero-sum decisions must be made...real deliberation is quite likely to make them hopping mad or encourage them to suffer silently because of a reluctance to voice their own opinions in the discussion.’ (Ibid: 207). The American public, on whom, Hibbings and Theiss-Morse focus their research does not want a stronger, or more direct voice as most do not care about politics and would therefore much rather hand over the decision making authority to someone else. What citizens do want, however, is to see that their system is being run by non-self interested politicians. In fact, ‘their strongest and most earnest political goal is to get power away from self-serving politicians’ (Ibid: 130).

People appear to want to be more active and involved in politics only because it is one of the few ways they can see (or the only option presented to them) of stopping decisions from being made by those who directly benefit from those decisions. People often view their political involvement as medicine they must take in order to keep the disease of greedy politicians and special interests from getting further out of hand. (Ibid: 131).

If it is the case that citizens have changed more than politics, institutions, processes and actors then have *perceptions* of politics changed more than politics itself? And if so, why?

One of the most recent embodiments of the realist criticism can be found in Meg Russell’s Fabian Society contribution, where she asks ‘Must Politics Disappoint?’ (Russell 2005). For Russell, at the heart of the problem lies the inability of politicians and the media to communicate the essence of politics which is about negotiation and compromise,

difficult choices and taking decisions together' (Ibid: 4). Instead, 'it is now seen as something largely divorced from everyday life, where politicians are expected to "deliver", and increasingly talk their profession down rather than up, within a media environment that is hostile rather than supportive' (Ibid: 4). Of the causes, Russell identifies consumerism as one of the main culprits.

The development of mass politics has been accompanied by – and indeed has actively facilitated – mass consumerism...It is difficult to find anything more antithetical to the culture of politics than the contemporary culture of consumerism. While politics is about balancing diverse needs to benefit the public interest, consumerism is about meeting the immediate desires of the individual. While politics requires us to compromise and collaborate as citizens, consumerism emphasizes unrestrained individual freedom of choice. While politics recognises that there are always resource constraints, modern consumerism increasingly encourages us to believe that we can have it all now. (Ibid: 10).

But she also goes on to recognise a variety of other factors including the media coverage of politics, ideological convergence between the major political parties, and the growing mutual autonomy of leaders and the parties that should sustain them (Webb 2007). Russell's solutions contain some elements of enhanced participation (e.g., within political parties) and are mainly concerned with the need to construct a new, franker, more open and positive culture which emphasises the value of politics and its central institutions. 'Politics should come to be regarded as a source of pride, 'a cause not for despair, but for celebration'(Webb 2007: 19). Of her proposals for reconnecting, three of seven relate to the way in which politics is mediated and in which the public receive their information about politics. Emphasis on greater participation is downplayed.

This brief discussion provides a sense of the context in which this thesis is set. It enables the consideration of a variety of questions that rest a level beneath the research questions specified in the next chapter such as; is political participation desirable? If so, to what extent? I will return to discuss these two broad themes in the concluding chapter.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter two reviews the existing literature on political participation and situates the work on youth engagement more firmly within the broader, established studies of electoral change and partisan identification. I argue that understanding how the political behaviour of young people is changing needs to be grounded in the well documented literature on electoral change and partisan dealignment. These relatively long-term changes are the lens through which the impact of short-term changes should be viewed. It is argued that there is currently insufficient evidence on the relationship between the new forms of social and political participation that young people are involved in to suggest that these may be replacing formal participatory norms such as voting and party membership. Moreover, Chapter two suggests that, even if this is the case it is necessary to understand *why* this is the case and what explanatory factors are involved. The chapter identifies a number of major gaps in the existing research and questions a number of assumptions that run through it. It concludes by outlining the key research questions to be addressed in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter three provides a detailed rationale for the methods selected to address the proposed questions and sets out in detail the methods and data to be used in the investigation. It argues that given the primary concern of the thesis is over-time changes in electoral turnout, a quantitative methodological approach is most appropriate. It outlines some of the key methodological concerns and problems that the research design was forced to face and details how these were overcome, or the extent to which the conclusions are limited. The chapter also introduces the main source data for the investigation, the British Election Survey.

Chapter four investigates turnout amongst young people at British General Elections since 1964 and reveals strong, though not conclusive evidence of a generational change in electoral turnout, witnessed through the electoral characteristics of the two youngest age groups voting in 1997 and 2001. It argues that whilst conclusions as to the existence and extent of a possible generational effect in electoral turnout are limited by the difficulties associated with separating life-cycle, period and generational effects, it is at least possible to conclude that young voters enfranchised since 1992 are unique and their

electoral turnout characteristics have not been witnessed before. Chapter five introduces a series of explanatory models of electoral turnout from the existing literature on political participation. In Chapter six these models are operationalised and subjected to rigorous multivariate analysis to ascertain which, if any, explanations best account for declining turnout amongst today's young people. It concludes that the general incentives model fares best amongst the models tested, mirroring the findings of Clarke et al (2004). However, the analysis shows that there are a number of unique explanatory factors of the disinclination of young people to vote in 2001. Social capital, social class, political knowledge and political recruitment were influential factors in determining whether or not this group voted. The second section of Chapter six advances a theory of youth disengagement from voting based on these results. The results of the data analysis support the interpretation of the literature advanced in Chapter two and I argue that the political socialisation of those young people who came of voting age in 2001 meant that they were uniquely affected by a combination of long-term and short-term factors for declining voter turnout. This theory is tested in Chapter seven using evidence from the existing literature combined with additional data analysis and concludes by testing a multivariate model of youth turnout. The chapter argues that the decline in partisanship and working class social networks in the Thatcher era meant that working class young people became particularly susceptible to other influences on their voting behaviour. Exposure to a unique array of short-term factors during their formative political socialisation impacted on their decision to vote in 2001. In Chapter eight I conclude by returning to the research questions specified at the end of Chapter two, outlining the contributions made by the thesis as well as discussing future areas of research that need addressing as a result of the findings.

Political Participation in Transition?

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the key theoretical and empirically based literature underpinning the present research. Firstly, the discussion examines some of the key literature on the sociological underpinnings of political participation in Britain and explores how the early research examining how citizens became anchored to political parties is crucial to our understanding of contemporary political participation. I argue that explanations for youth disengagement tend to emanate from two schools of thought: the traditional political science understanding of youth turnout based on life-cycle explanations (eg, Verba and Nie 1972), or the anti-apathy approach, which has tended not to situate young people's political activity within its context of their political life-cycle. The increasing dominance of rational choice models of political participation in the wider literature of political participation has meant that explanations for voter turnout among young people have tended to focus on short-term factors. I argue that crucial gaps in our understanding of youth participation in politics are rooted in this shift away from sociological understandings of participation. Furthermore, the rational choice explanations have greater explanatory power than ever because of the changes to the social structure that have occurred, particularly since the 1950s. These changes mean that voters are socialised into a political world that is different to that of their predecessors and these differences are critical to understanding emerging patterns of political behaviour. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in understanding about young people's participation in politics and how it has changed over time and formulates a number of research questions that the subsequent chapters will seek to answer.

2.2 The social basis of political support

One of the aims of this thesis will be to situate the research on youth participation in politics into the context of the broader literature on political change in Britain and Europe. The central research question lying at the heart of this thesis and which will underpin the more defined specific research questions that I will develop is *why do young citizens abstain from voting at general elections at a greater rate than previous generations?* The thesis is concerned with understanding the political behaviour of young citizens in Britain, but as will become explicit throughout the chapters, my approach is to view changing youth behaviour in the context of broader social and political changes, rather than to concentrate on ‘young people’ as separate from the rest of the electorate. Before we can understand political change it is necessary to understand the underlying social reasons for change and to understand what were the traditional social bases of political support prior to any change. At the core of this thesis is the investigation of voters, as stipulated above. However, as voters vote through political parties and parties have traditionally reflected the social composition or cleavages of a polity, considerable attention will be paid to the way parties have come into being, how they adapt to changes in the electorate and their success in doing so. Finally party competition will be a crucial factor in understanding political support.

One of the fundamental ideas for understanding the social basis of political support has been that of social ‘cleavages’. These divisions in society have played a critical role in the development of political parties in Europe. What we might term the orthodox sociological model of electoral stability and party formation consolidated around the classic work of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) who I will return to shortly. But the ground for understanding cleavages and particularly the class cleavage was laid by Marx who placed emphasis on class as the key antagonism in capitalist societies. Class became particularly relevant in a relatively homogenous British society that experienced industrialisation earlier than other European countries and where the class division between owners on the one hand, and workers on the other, became most distinct. For Lipset and Rokkan (1967) social cleavages were produced by complex historical processes, most notably the national and industrial revolutions experienced by European societies from the Seventeenth century on. These cleavages became the basis of political support in western European countries, according to Lipset and Rokkan, and one which the party systems of these countries would be built on.

Four lines of cleavage opened up in the development of modern industrial societies, according to Lipset and Rokkan. Centre-periphery issues were the first of these sources of division to develop in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, centring on the reformation and counter-reformation and were part of the process of 'national revolution'. The first issue to be reconciled was whether the society's religion was to be national or international. But in Britain, there was the absence of any significant dispute with an alien church for the loyalties of its citizens (Ware 1996). The second centre-periphery issue was the conflict between Latin as an international unifying language and indigenous languages. In the British case as a single language was spoken by the majority, it became possible to impose its use on the peripheries. The second cleavage to arise out of national revolutions was that between state and church. This was a conflict between the standardising nation state and the historically established corporate privileges of the church. This was a particularly salient cleavage in countries with large Catholic populations such as Italy or France, but remained relatively minor in Britain. The remaining two cleavages, arising out of the industrial revolution are particularly salient to the British case. Firstly, the land-industry cleavage emerged out of the industrial revolution between agricultural and industrial issues. In Britain a mid nineteenth century conflict over the tariff on corn production produced a crisis for the governing Conservative party, but in the longer term it paved the way for the coming together of landed and industrial elites (Ware 1996). These durable social cleavages meant that the party systems of Europe were characterised by a remarkable degree of stability. Deeply rooted and prolonged cleavages led to voters strongly anchored to the social segment resulting from these historical developments and in turn to strong associations with the political parties who represented these social segments.

Until 1918 the dominant cleavage in British politics had been religious. Established national churches in England and Scotland provided a support base for the Conservative Party, whilst support for the Liberal Party came mainly from non-conformist Protestant sects (Franklin 1992). But by 1964 earlier cleavages had almost completely lost their political salience. The crucial cleavage, particularly for understanding the development of the British party system was that between owner and worker. The Russian revolution in 1917 crystallised the division between workers and owner, although not as Marx had envisaged it. It produced two conflicting claims: those of a commitment to an international revolutionary movement and those of the national polity (Ware 1996).

Lipset and Rokkan argued that after these European party systems were established they froze as parties consolidated their support bases, absorbed new social cleavages and developed long standing party images (Norris 1997):

The party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structure of the 1920s. This is a crucial characteristic of Western competitive politics in the age of 'high mass consumption': the party alternatives, and in remarkably many cases the party organisations, are older than the majorities of the national electorates (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 50).

Essential to Lipset and Rokkan's theory was the idea that in order to survive political parties needed to reflect older divisions in society. This will become important when we consider the debate around class dealignment and partisan dealignment. Implicit in the idea that parties formed to express the functions of cleavages with society is that where cleavages began to wane, so did support for political parties.

Party group linkages, founded on the dominant cleavage in each society, permeated all aspects of electoral politics stabilising and 'freezing' these party systems. Some organisations were mobilised into politics and once well entrenched, it proved difficult for new parties to challenge the status quo. Lipset and Rokkan provided important insights into the stability of western European party systems. Mass parties insulated and captured their supporters, developing political sub-cultures which gave supporters a psychological sense of belonging (Norris 1997). Writing shortly after Lipset and Rokkan, Rose and Urwin's study of nineteen western nations between 1945-1969 showed that except in countries with a regime change, 'the electoral strength of most parties has changed very little from election to election, from decade to decade, or within the lifespan of a generation' (Rose and Urwin 1970). Lipset and Rokkan's work provide the socio-structural context in which studies of voting behaviour can be understood. As Lipset (1960) noted, the key cleavage in many European countries meant that lower income groups came to vote mainly for parties on the left, while higher income groups vote mainly for parties on the right'. It is clear that these cleavages detailed by Lipset and Rokkan were the social basis for political support. But what did the early studies of voting behaviour have to say about the strength of these cleavages in forming political support and how far can we understand electoral change based on the waning of political cleavages?

The notion that a ‘frozen’ party system gave rise to stable patterns of political support was strengthened by the earlier work on the social basis of voting which came to be very influential in British voting studies. The proponents of sociological models of voting argued that it was possible to predict with some accuracy how an individual or individuals would vote on the basis of a few social characteristics (Lazarsfeld 1944). In their later work Berelson et al (1954) paved the way for those who later focused on the salience of the psychological aspects of group membership for voting. They argued that social group differences are reinforced through these groups having differing material or symbolic interests which are affected by government policy. They also argued that conditions of physical and social proximity meant that these differences were transmitted across generations.

The solid foundations of American political parties are in distinctive social groups that not only have “interests” involved but have sufficient social differentiation from other groups, sufficient continuity between generations, and sufficient closed or in group contact in successive generations to transform these initial political interests into persistent and durable social traditions. (Berelson et al 1954: 147)

These early writings were influential in the development of social deterministic and socialisation models of political behaviour in subsequent years.

2.3 Electoral alignments

Within this framework of historical cleavages we can understand how the electorate in Britain and in other west European countries became aligned around specific issues and how the party system came to reflect that of these cleavages. The impression of a ‘frozen’ party system based on stable patterns of electoral alignment was reinforced in the 1960s by the work of Angus Campbell and colleagues (Campbell et al 1960). The Michigan model of partisan identification became one of the central models in electoral research.

Campbell et al argued that many Americans voters lacked sufficient information about politics as well as political sophistication. For Americans to vote on the basis of issues, Campbell et al argued that firstly, people had to be familiar with the issue; secondly, the issue needed to arouse some feelings, and; thirdly, people had to see a

party difference on the issue (p. 170). These insights are important for understanding modern voting. The authors point to ways in which we might understand declining turnout since 1992 in Britain. As we shall see, for voters (particularly young ones) unshackled from political parties to make choices, they need information/knowledge of issues (*familiarity* in Campbell et al's terminology) and they need to be able ascertain differences between parties which give them choice.

According to Campbell et al, in addition to voters lacking the information and sophistication about politics to vote on the basis of 'issues', they also lacked a coherent set of beliefs, or an ideology, to order their political attitudes. Even in the absence of these factors Campbell et al found that American voters, despite being faced with a range of complex electoral choices for candidates at American elections, did vote, and consistently so. The central finding of Campbell et al's study was that 'most Americans have an enduring partisan orientation, a sense of party identification, which has wide effects on their attitudes toward the things that are visible in the political world.' (Campbell et al 1960: 529). This sense of partisan identification, according to Campbell et al, became a guide through which voters structured their understandings of complex political issues, candidates and campaign events. This work also offered the measurement of partisan identification still used by political scientists today; measuring both the direction of and strength of partisan identification.

Crucial to this social psychological conception of partisanship is that individual party identification developed before an individual had their formative participative experiences. They were learnt within an individual's immediate social environment and particularly from one's family: 'It is apparent from his presentation that an orientation towards political affairs typically begins before the individual attains voting age and that his orientation strongly reflects his immediate social milieu, in particular his family' (Campbell et al 1960: 146-7). This is interesting in itself, although I will discuss this in relation in the British context shortly and return to it both explicitly and more implicitly at various points in the thesis. One of the changes to the political socialisation of young people in Britain is that the social group points of identification have weakened. As a result, rather than these familial social group reference points being crucial to political socialisation, it would appear, in their absence, that formative *political* experiences have a stronger effect in the absence of other factors (see for example Franklin 2004). In most cases this is likely to be either an election (the experience of voting itself) or an election campaign (context).

Changing political socialisation is one of the key underlying themes of this thesis and I will argue throughout the course of the later chapters that in order to understand the changing British electorate we need to understand changes in the political socialisation received by different cohorts. Social change naturally means that the environment and contexts in which voters receive their early political experiences are different. In their influential work on *Political Change in Britain* (1969, 1974) Butler and Stokes similarly emphasised the role of social groups in fostering a sense of party identity. In particular they argued that the family had a crucial role in transmitting parental political loyalties to the sibling. This process was seen to be particularly strong where both parents shared the same party loyalty

A child is very likely indeed to share the parent's party preference. Partisanship over the individual's lifetime has some of the quality of a photographic reproduction that deteriorates with time: it is a fairly sharp copy of the parent's original at the beginning of political awareness, but over the years it becomes somewhat blurred, although remaining easily recognisable (Butler and Stokes 1974: 50).

Perhaps critically, this identity with a political party was founded on the rock of class identities. As discussed in Lipset and Rokkan's model of stable party alignments, class became the pre-eminent influence on party identification. For Butler and Stokes 'The individual, identifying with a particular class, forms a positive bond to the party which looks after the interests of the class' (1974: 88). Butler and Stokes were also aware of the significance of groups within the individual's 'social milieu' such as neighbourhood, workplace and community. These social groups served to reinforce and strengthen existing attitudes. As we will see later in this chapter and in subsequent substantive chapters, one of the contributions of this research to the literature on political participation will be to place the recent work on youth participation firmly within the wider literature on political and particularly electoral change in Britain. In addition it is argued that attempting to understand how social group involvement has changed and how the identities associated with these changes have declined is key to the investigation of youth politics.

Butler and Stokes identified what has become known as the 'paradox of voting'. Using British Election survey data from 1963 to 1970 they showed that the majority of the electorate has little involvement in political life outside voting:

only one in two voted in local elections and only one in ten went to an election meeting. Only one in fifty took an active part in the campaign and the number engaged in party activities between campaigns was altogether negligible (Butler and Stokes 1974: 21).

In the context of this research, I will argue that one of Butler and Stokes most important arguments was that: 'the limits of the public's overt political activity are matched by the limits of its political information' (Ibid: p.22). The argument was based on their survey of the existing literature which found a range of evidence showing how limited the electorates' knowledge of political issues was. One of the central models of electoral turnout this thesis will come to discuss, test and evaluate is the *cognitive mobilisation* model and it will be fully detailed and operationalised in Chapter six. The thesis will suggest that there is at least some evidence that the huge increase in education and the availability of mass media resources since the 1950s has not had purely positive effects on civic engagement.

Butler and Stokes found that most British citizens were not well informed about politics and did not have consistent opinions or deep rooted positions on particular policies. However, despite seemingly not being engaged with politics, the paradox emerged that around three quarters of the electorate turned out to vote at general elections in Britain. They argued that, as found in the United States by Campbell et al (1960), voters in Britain were rooted to one of the major political parties for long periods of time, or even for the duration of their lifetime:

It is clear that millions of British electors remain anchored to one of the parties for very long periods of time. Indeed many electors have had the same party loyalties from the dawn of their political consciousness and have reinforced these loyalties by participating in successive elections (Ibid: 47).

Butler and Stokes used the idea of class and partisan 'self image' to understand how voters became attached to political parties for long periods of time. Party attachments provided a frame of references which allowed voters to process new problems into an established pattern (Norris 1999).

I will argue that the decline in this informational function of partisan identity and of wider social group identity has meant that young people in Britain are now

without one of the basic tools for their psychological engagement with politics. In the second edition of their book, Butler and Stokes (1974) reported on changes in these enduring patterns of political support that characterised the British electorate. We can see these changes in the electorate as being the foundations for understanding political support amongst young people today. One thing we can observe from the above passage is that Butler and Stokes argue that party loyalties were reinforced by participating in successive elections. This is confirmed in more recent cross-national research (Franklin 2002). As these identities have weakened, firstly people have become less likely to participate in elections, and, second the election context itself has become a stronger factor in nurturing future participation.

For Butler and Stokes, given the class based nature of British politics and the existence of homogenous class groups, long-term political change was only likely to be the result of generational changes in the distribution of partisanship. They argued that there were two possible reasons for inter-generational change. Having found evidence of a long-term drift to Labour in the distribution of partisanship they sought to explain this. Firstly, older voters leaving the electorate were more likely to have a Conservative partisanship than younger voters. This was not because people became more Conservative as they got older, but because when older voters had entered the electorate - in some cases before 1914 - Labour was not an established major political party and in consequence they were much less likely to have been socialised in childhood into a Labour vote.

The second reason was that partisanship was most subject to change during early adulthood. As a consequence new voters were particularly likely to be influenced by the political climate of the day. Butler and Stokes argued that if there was a major change in that climate then voters entering the electorate at that time may well drop the partisan cues learnt in childhood in favour of those received at their first voting experience. Butler and Stokes argued that 1945 was one such occasion as this happened with the election of the first majority Labour government. A particularly large cohort of new voters (there had not been an election since 1935) exhibited unusually strong pro-Labour sympathies and this further bolstered Labour's partisan strength.

Later in the chapter I will review in detail the contemporary literature which focuses on the importance of the political period, but here Butler and Stokes provide an important impetus for this research – showing that long-term change can be triggered, or accelerated by factors associated with the political period. This will become one of

the central arguments developed in the course of the thesis. One thing that will become clear is that these shorter-term aspects of the political period have become more important to young people's political socialisation as the long-term anchors to political support have declined. Butler and Stokes, in the second edition of their book, were amongst the first to notice that important changes were taking place. They argued that there had been a weakening of class alignment, finding that while the level of Labour partisanship was weaker amongst the working class in Britain in 1970 than it had been in 1963, it was stronger amongst the middle class. They also found the classes to be less polarised in their subjective class identities.

2.4 Electoral change: the decline of traditional cleavages

Central to the more specific research questions I will be formulating is how and why traditional social cleavages have changed in recent decades and how is this reflected in the political support of modern British voters? We know that the social structure of Britain and Europe has undergone changes in the period since the 1950s when the empirical connection between social position and party choice was first found (Oskarson 2005). The thawing of cleavages is made all the more plausible because of the magnitude of technological, social and economic change in this period. Today, Britain is what we might call a post-industrial society and this implies that group solidarities and stratifications derived from previous industrial relations are, today, largely obsolete (Dogan 2001). But few areas have been contested as rigorously as social cleavage voting (eg Dalton 1984; Franklin 1992; Clark and Lipset 1991, 2001; Evans 1999).

We can identify three distinct schools of thought in the debate surrounding the persistence of social cleavage voting (Kreisi 1997). Much of the literature in the area takes a comparative European focus. One set of arguments examines carefully the original conceptualisation of Lipset and Rokkan's freezing hypothesis and argues that political cleavages in party systems endure and thus party systems themselves show few significant signs of increased instability (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995; Mair, 1993, 1997). The second groups of scholars argue that in many advanced west European democracies there has been an important decline in the ability of social divisions to structure individual voting choice. This school of thought, which is now widely accepted, argues that there is a universal process of decline in cleavage

politics, which has gone more or less far in the different Western European and Northern American countries (e.g., Franklin et al 1992). A third vein of thought, one which we can describe as the ‘new politics’ approach agrees with the notion that traditional cleavages are weakening, argues that alongside this weakening has been the emergence of a new ‘value cleavage’ rooted in the opposition between materialist and post-materialist orientations (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997). Whilst there has been a significant surge of academic interest in the politics of recent generations of young people, there is a lack of understanding as to how the politics of today’s youth might fit reflect these models. Is it possible to understand the changing politics of youth through the lens of one of these broad models? Or is there another model, as yet unspecified, that accounts more accurately for youth turnout?

Franklin (1992) argues that the decline in the structuring capacities of traditional cleavages is nowhere balanced by increases in the structuring properties of new cleavages. For the second group of scholars, mentioned above, the origins of this long drawn out process of decline are to be sought in the successful resolution of the social conflicts which had been embodied in the traditional cleavages (Franklin et al 1992). The above is an important point for the research to be carried out in this thesis as it gets to the core of the much of the literature on youth participation, which at least implies that ‘new’ types of politics – those we might associate with this ‘new politics’ cleavage have replaced conventional political activity (e.g., Henn et al 2002, 2005). One of the contributions of this research to the literature on electoral change will be to place the youth literature and its findings, along with the methodological issues which dominate, within the wider picture of social and political change, rather than understanding youth just as a moment in the life-cycle.

We might best understand the decline in cleavage politics by saying that cleavages have become less relevant to voting behaviour, rather than irrelevant. I will argue later in the thesis that social cues are still likely to be a potent influence on political choice for people who are integrated into traditional class networks and who share the values of the milieu (Dalton 1999). This is particularly relevant to segments of young people from less advantaged backgrounds who have not met, as many have, their basic economic needs and accordingly have not had the luxury of becoming ‘post-materialist’ in their political attitudes and behavioural characteristics. These, I will argue, are socially excluded young people and their social and political exclusion is exacerbated by their lack of cognitive engagement with conventional politics as

traditional anchors have declined. Today there are fewer people who fit into the clearly defined social groups and citizens tend to be more fragmented and individualised. This will become more evident in later chapters when I discuss young people's involvement in associational activity. Again, we see the crucial underlying theme of this thesis that social change has weakened the structure of political cleavages that traditionally framed party competition and provided voters with a simple framework for making their electoral decision (Dalton 1999). In the absence of these frameworks, the costs of positive engagement with conventional politics are higher, simply in terms of acquiring the information and the benefits may seem less as they are individual rather than group ones.

2.5 Electoral change: partisan dealignment

Changes in the way the electorate are engaged with politics and political parties has perhaps most often been measured, following the seminal studies of voting behaviour discussed above, by *partisanship*. Following Butler and Stokes realisation that the nature of political support was changing in Britain and research by Norman Nie, Sidney Verba and colleagues (1979), there was a plethora of research investigating the extent of what became known as 'partisan dealignment' (Crewe et al 1977). Dealignment meant that citizens are no longer attached to political parties. As traditional affective loyalties have weakened, short-term influences have become more salient in voting choice; and as a result voters are more willing to desert the major parties (Norris 1997). Ivor Crewe argued that since 1974 there had been a decline in both the number of party identifiers and, more especially, in the strength of party identifiers' identification. For example, the percentage of very strong identifiers fell from 44 per cent in 1964 to 19 per cent by 1987. It was argued that this meant that voters were less likely to be loyal to one party, producing higher levels of electoral volatility and a greater willingness to vote for third parties. In another important critique of the Butler and Stokes model of intergenerational change, Crewe et al (1977) noted that the decline in partisanship in 1974 was not confined to new voters but actually was greatest amongst those who had entered the electorate in the 1930s - that is amongst voters who first came of age at the height of the depression and for whom the class-based appeal of the two main parties might have been expected to have had most resonance. These findings were echoed later by Richard Rose and Ian McAllister (1986) who argued that the majority of the

electorate in Britain is no longer anchored to a stable partisan loyalty determined by class and family socialisation. Other commentators argued that party identities have become more fluid over time, producing a major change in the social psychology of political choices (Crewe and Denver (eds.) 1985; Dalton et al 1984). Whilst class dealignment was fiercely contested there was less debate over partisan dealignment. As the analysis in subsequent chapters shows, the electorate retains a party identity but they tend to do so less strongly than before. These arguments led to the suggestion that, if voters were less influenced by these longer-term structural factors, they are more open to short-term effects such as images of political leaders; government record in office and campaign events.

To summarise these theories of electoral support: Butler and Stokes (1969, 1974) attempted to explain the two party dominance of the electorate in Britain by arguing that its basis was to be found in long-term stable patterns of political support. This support rested on long-term structural historical factors as argued by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). However, in the 1970s support for third parties in general elections and in by-elections served to undermine this explanation. A large literature developed seeking to explain these changes. Three types of explanations became commonplace. Firstly, revisionist theories argued that the link between class and party was as strong as ever but what was required was a reconceptualisation, classification and measurement of social class to take account of more complex social inequalities. Whilst during the 1980s the view that there was an ongoing process of class dealignment occurring was the orthodoxy amongst most electoral analysts, an important debate emerged centring around definitions of class and how best to measure class voting. Heath et al (1985) argued two central points: firstly they rejected the frequently used measures of social class, proposing a new class schema which divided manual workers across three separate groups. Secondly, they rejected absolute measures of class voting in favour of a relative measure based on odd ratios (Heath et al 1991). Whilst the ensuing argument represented a major challenge to the orthodoxy that there had been a class dealignment (see Crewe et al 1985, Dunleavy 1987), there is now considerable evidence to support the dealignment thesis and it is widely accepted (Denver 2003). However, although there is now widespread agreement that a process of class dealignment has taken place, subsequent research has begun to cast doubt on the strength of class alignments in the first place (see Clarke et al 2004).

Another set of arguments argued that the traditional class cleavages discussed above have been replaced by new forms of social identities based on region, generation and gender. The most important of these cleavages as far as young voters are concerned is what has become known as the ‘new politics’ cleavage, associated with the work of Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997).

A final set of arguments suggest that today’s citizens have become more rational and less likely to vote habitually, instead supporting parties based on short-term factors. This process can be attributed to a process of cognitive mobilisation whereby a huge increase in educational standards and an increase in information sources has meant citizens are more sophisticated. Political parties have, according to this view, become increasingly defunct as citizens become less dependent on political parties for bundling issues into coherent policy packages. In the absence of parties providing this function we might wonder the extent to which citizens are able to do this for themselves, or whether the outcome is the separation of issues from one another. There is not scope within this thesis to address this question fully, but it will be possible to make some *prima facie* and speculative conclusions on the basis of the findings in the later chapters. These suggest that as voters and issues have become increasingly atomised – so social and political issues are equally considered in isolation from each other by citizens. This change, I argue, could represent a threat to democratic politics as citizens develop unrealistic single issue priorities.

There remains an ongoing debate, despite a common consensus amongst most political scientists that the importance of structural factors and partisanship in determining political choice has declined, as to the extent of change since the 1970s. One of the central arguments of those who posit the decline in partisan identities is that any such decline will be have a strong generational element. As partisanship and social group identification are typically learnt during early socialisation they tend to be habitual meaning that older generations are likely to retain their psychological attachments. In contrast younger generations, socialised in the modern era of politics are more likely to display patterns of weak social group identity and partisanship. Whilst these group identities remain essentially independent variables during the course of my analysis of factors influencing turnout change, later chapters in the thesis will focus on the context young voters were socialised in and provide insights into generational change in social groups identities. Cross-national work compiled in an edited volume by Dalton and Wattenberg (2000) provides the most complete inventory of data on

partisanship compiled for the advanced industrial democracies. They confirm that there is a broad pattern across these nations of weakening partisanship. In seventeen of the nineteen countries surveyed, including Britain, the percentage of party identifiers has decreased and the strength of party ties decreased (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). They found this decrease to be as much as 26 per cent in Britain between 1960 and the 1990s.

Charting the key literature on social and political change has been an essential exercise in situating young voters' participatory behaviour in the context of the key traditional explanations for voting in Britain. Critical to understanding today's young voters is that they have grown up in an era when the influence of structural forces shaping voting behaviour, particularly social class, have declined. Whilst we know this to be the case there is very little in the way of research which looks in detail at long and short-term factors in explaining youth participation. Whilst structural factors traditionally tied voters to parties, their decline meant that the academic literature began to focus more on party's policies, political events and issues and later on political leaders. We can describe the explanations for voting behaviour discussed so far as being sociological as they are based on the idea that social contexts and socialisation determine political behaviour. Issue voting on the other hand derives from rational choice accounts of political behaviour which involves voters making calculated decisions about how to vote or whether they vote at all.

Butler and Stokes (1969: 236, 1974: 292) make an important distinction between two types of issue voting. 'Position issues' are ones where the electorate may well have different opinions or positions on issues such as taxation, tuition fees. Whereas 'valence issues' are those where there tends to be a broad agreement in what is best for the country, such as law and order, economic stability and improved health care. On these issues the electorate judges the competence or performance of political parties in achieving their goals. As we shall see this distinction is crucial in understanding modern politics. Butler and Stokes suggest there are four conditions for a position issue to affect a voter's choice. Firstly, the voter must be aware (information) of the issue. Secondly, the voter must have a position on the issue in question. Third, the voter must perceive the parties to have distinct choices on the issue from which he or she can choose. Lastly, the voter must vote rationally according to the party whose position on the issue most closely reflects that of the voter. This distinction between valence and position issues will provide a useful framework through which to discuss and critique the youth literature.

Butler and Stokes had been sceptical of issue voting in the 1960s and seemed to indicate that the cognitive development of the electorate was too limited to take seriously the notion that citizens were increasingly rational in their political decisions (1974: 320). However in an influential article, James Alt, Bo Sarlvik and Ivor Crewe (1976: 284) argued:

Most people appear to display a considerable grasp of the issues and where the parties stand on each....it appears that, the conventional wisdom notwithstanding, the great majority of the British electorate have both partisan preferences and realistic perceptions of the parties' policies.

Crewe (1981, 1985, 1992a, 1992b) followed this up with a distinctive account of issue voting which argued that the outcomes of elections from October 1974 to 1992 could largely be explained by a combination of changes in the salience of issues and changes in the electorates' judgements about the party having the best policy on the issues together with voters' assessments of the credibility of party policies.

Others such as Himmelweit et al (1981) proposed a 'consumer' model whereby individuals approached each election in search of the party with the best products to meet their preferences. This assumed that the voter was rational enough to understand the range of policy options provided by each political party. But whilst issue voting quickly became the orthodoxy of the 1970s and 1980s it was criticised on a number of grounds. Heath et al (1985: 91-6) argued that the Conservative party – the winner of the 1987 general election, actually had no clear lead over the Labour party on any one of the five issues that electors felt were important during the election campaign. Similarly, Sanders (1993) argued that during the 1992 election campaign Labour was strongly favoured on three key issues (the NHS, unemployment and education), and that, had people voted purely on the basis of their issue preferences, Labour would have polled around 44 per cent of the vote. But perhaps most importantly for this research, Heath et al (1991) demonstrated that while rational issue assessments do make an impact, it is doubtful that their importance has grown over time. Heath et al attributed the statistically significant stronger connection between voting and issue attitudes in the 1980s as more to do with the changing political and social circumstances of the period than as a result of the changing psychology of voters (Heath et al 1991). It appears then,

that the rationality of the British electorate was seriously underestimated in some of the earlier studies.

2.6 The 1992 general election and after: from ‘position’ to ‘valence’ issues

Butler and Stokes had pointed to the difference between ‘position issues’ and ‘valence issues’ which was later elaborated by Stokes (1992). In the most important work on political participation or on voting in Britain to be published in recent years, Clarke et al (2004) defined a full model of valence politics and applied it not only to recent elections but to British elections since the 1960s. For Clarke et al:

..the most important factor underlying electoral choice is valence—people’s judgements of the overall competence of the rival political parties. These judgements, in turn, are arrived at through two principal and related shortcuts: leadership evaluations and party identification (Clarke et al 2004: 9)

The model always has been as, or more, compelling statistically as either models in the sociological framework or the issue proximity model (Ibid: 63).

Two particularly controversial claims result from Clarke et al’s work. Firstly, they dispute the sociological explanations of voting based on the ‘twin notions’ of stable long-term class-linked partisan identities and class-based voting. They argue that BES data shows that since the 1960s approximately one half of the electorate do not think of themselves in class terms. They also argue that ‘partisanship is not as deeply embedded and highly stable as the sociological approach claims’ (Ibid: 316). Instead, following Fiorina (1981), they suggest that party identification is ‘a storehouse of accumulated party and party leader performance evaluations’ (Ibid: 211). Moreover, ‘they are potentially mutable, being influenced by assessments of economic conditions and by perceptions of the competence of rival parties and their leaders’ (Ibid: 316). At first this seems at odds with what is a long tradition of electoral analysis in Britain, going back to Butler and Stokes that has generally downplayed the influence of party leaders on voting choices. This tradition is upheld in a recent piece by John Bartle and Ivor Crewe (2002: 93), who conclude that ‘leaders have not had much of an impact on election outcomes net of prior variables’. But Clarke et al provide a perfectly plausible

explanation for this in that politics in Britain has become more leader-centred and party leaders are increasingly the focus of the media. This is reflected in the growing body of research examining the ‘presidentialisation’ of politics (see, for example Poguntke and Webb (eds.) (2005). Perhaps more contentious is their argument that class has had less of a role in electoral politics than we previously thought.

Clarke et al arrive at their conclusions through a systematic and statistically advanced testing of competing model of electoral turnout from sociological and rational choice frameworks. The civic voluntarism model focuses on the utility of social contexts in acquiring individuals their politically relevant resources (Clarke et al 2004). The social capital model emphasises social trust and voluntary participation, whereas the equity-fairness model focuses on individual judgements of relative deprivation. Three variants of the rational choice model are tested. The cognitive mobilisation model argues that individuals are likely to become more dissatisfied with government as they become more educated, media reliant and knowledgeable about politics. The minimal rational choice model focuses on the costs and benefits of voting whilst the general incentives model adds to this by specifying a range of incentives to participation that individuals need in order to vote. Each theory is rigorously tested, first by itself and then with the others in a ‘tournament’. Variables from the cognitive mobilisation and general incentives model dominate. Clarke et al argue that ‘turnout is basically about incentives and mobilisation, with demographics – apart from age – playing only a modest role’ (p. 261). Variables associated with rational choice, that is, costs and benefits are important, but the most important *incentive* is a sense of obligation to the political community at large. The most important *mobilisation* variables were related to political information: those who pay attention to the political campaign, who were informed and who evaluate government performance are most likely to vote.

The fact that young people have tended to be less likely to vote at elections has usually been attributed to a ‘life-cycle’ effect. This effect simply stipulates that young voters are less likely to participate in politics because of the stage in the life-cycle they occupy. Commentators have pointed out that young people suffer from early life-cycle start-up problems and are less likely to participate in conventional politics than their elders (Verba and Nie 1972; Nie et al 1974; Crewe et al 1974; Swaddle and Heath 1989; Parry et al 1992; Denver 1997; Norris 2003). The life-cycle approach emphasises that young people have more pressing ‘life-tasks’ associated with the transition from youth to adulthood (Nie et al 1974). As recently as 1997 commentators still argued that these

life-cycle interpretations remain key to low youth participation:

Young people today are certainly less active and involved citizens than their elders and, as far as I can tell, they always have been. For the average 18 year old, politics trails well behind keeping up with the latest fads in music, dancing, fashion, playing and watching sport and chasing members of the opposite sex (Denver 1997: 31).

However, there are good reasons, both short-term and longer term to suspect that life-cycle factors alone do not adequately account for young people's politics. The decline in young people's party political involvement is one example of a generational change. Both Labour and Conservative parties have seen a dramatic decline in their respective youth sections since the 1950s. In 1949 the Conservative youth section, the junior Imperial and Constitutional League, boasted 160,000 members. By 1997 this figure has fallen to around 7,500 and the young Conservatives have since been officially wound up and reconstituted. A detailed analysis of life-cycle, period and generational effects on voter turnout will be conducted in Chapter three as it relates to the examination of trends in turnout.

Clarke et al explore age effects which they find to be statistically significant in all of their models outlined above. Their analysis shows that there are clear indications in the data that generational effects may be taking place. After defining a series of 'political generations' Clarke et al argue that:

...the available evidence is quite consistent with the idea that the Thatcher era- a period characterised by insistent advocacy of market rather than government solutions to societal problems, and a more general emphasis on individual rather than collective goods-had important negative effects on public attitudes towards electoral participation. It also appears these effects have not abated since New Labour came to power in 1997. This suggests that turnout in future elections may continue to be relatively low. It is likely that there will be closer contests and the parties' policies may become more distinct but, especially if there is no life-cycle effect, it is not easy to see how the post-1979 generation could develop an increased sense of civic duty (Clarke et al: 270).

Clarke et al found significant generational effects with 'the decline in turnout across political generations starting with people who entered the electorate during the Thatcher era. This pattern continued in the 'Blair years'. Whilst being cautious to note that only

with panel data can conclusive evidence be supplied, they argue that their evidence is consistent with the idea that the Thatcher era produced distinctive negative effects on its citizens. The advanced statistical techniques used enables the authors to draw reliable general conclusions about generational effects but they do not provide detailed information about the variables specific to young people's political choice in 2001. This is perhaps somewhat surprising given that turnout fell most dramatically more amongst this group in 2001. Other scholars have pointed to the impact of the Thatcher era on young people's formative socialisation (e.g., Russell 1992).

Clarke et al (2004) consider the notion that 'the Thatcher and Blair generations are less civic minded than their predecessors by considering the relationship between age and civic duty' (Clarke et al 2004: 271). Their findings confirm their earlier conclusions that the Thatcher and Blair cohorts constitute a distinct generation and argue that their low levels of civic mindedness help explain their reluctance to go to the polls. The net contribution Clarke et al make to the debate over age effects is to provide additional and probably the most statistically advanced evidence to date of a generational effect in electoral turnout. But aside from a brief discussion of the period as one characterised by 'market rather than government solutions to societal problems', and a more general emphasis on 'individual rather than collective goods' (Ibid: 270), they provide little evidence or discussion as to why these important generational differences might be occurring. One of the aims of this research will to build on Clarke et al's findings to provide more detail on young people's voting behaviour which I argue is missing from their work. By using a similar set of models to Clarke et al it will be possible to elucidate further their findings and measure in a different way the dynamics of youth turnout.

2.7 Declining electoral turnout: 1992-2001

After the 1992 general election there was growing evidence that young people were beginning to abstain in greater numbers than had previously been witnessed. Given that both reported turnout and actual turnout rose slightly for the whole population at the 1992 election; from 86.1 per cent to 87 per cent and from 75.3 per cent to 77.7 per cent respectively (Phelps 2004, Rallings and Thrasher 2007), the decline in the youth vote in the same period from 76.2 per cent to 75.4 per cent (Rallings and Thrasher 2007)) and from 66 per cent to 61 per cent (Butler and Kavanagh 1997) respectively, represented

the beginning of a worrying trend for some who saw this as constituting ‘the largest number of dormant voters awaiting political reawakening since the suffragettes’ (British Youth Council 1993: 3). These concerns were heightened by research showing the widespread non-registration of young adults. In 1995 M-Power estimated that four times as many young people were not registered to vote than amongst the adult population (British Youth Council 1995). Despite high profile media campaigns by M-Power and ‘Rock the Vote’ aimed at encouraging young peoples’ registration before election day, registration levels fell further between 1992 and 1997 (Leonard and Katwala 1997).

Interest in falling turnout and concern and comment on youth apathy increased markedly after the 1997 and 2001 general elections where turnout fell dramatically. For the youngest age groups, the 18-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds, reported turnout fell from 59.7 per cent to 49.4 per cent and 68.6 per cent to 55.1 per cent, respectively, between 1997 and 2001. The election marked the lowest turnout at a British general election since the ‘Khaki election’ of 1918. The obvious question in the aftermath of the election was *why* had so few people turned out to vote in 1997 and 2001? Many commentators argued that the results of the 1997 and 2001 elections could be understood by looking at the closeness of electoral competition between the two main rival parties and the amount of perceived policy difference between them in the run up to the election (e.g., Pattie and Johnston 2001). Clarke et al (2004) argue that, ‘the precipitous decline in voting in Britain between 1997 and 2001 serves to undermine purely sociological account of turnout, since the variables at the centre of such accounts like social class, education, ethnicity and gender do not change enough in four years to provide an adequate explanation of what occurred’ (2004: 87). Whilst we would not expect these types of changes on their own to explain a decline in turnout such as occurred amongst the youngest age groups after 1992, when combined with the impact of short-term factors, the likelihood of an effect is more plausible. It is my contention that gradually changing sociological factors, such as changes in partisan identification may have affected young people’s socialisation, but only became apparent at their first opportunity to vote. If those who became eligible to vote for the first time in 1997 were relatively devoid of traditional ties to social and political participation they are likely to have been more susceptible to and affected by the impact of short-term period factors.

Others began to question whether a whole generation of young people were becoming disconnected from politics:

For young people in Britain today politics has become a dirty word.....The overwhelming story to emerge from our research, both qualitative and quantitative, is of an historic disconnection. In effect, an entire generation has opted out of party politics (Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995: 98-99).

Plainly this is a generation which does not look to the political parties to solve problems and improve their lives. With well over two out of every three young voters sceptical of political activity, we could be witnessing the emergence of an apolitical generation (Pirie and Worcester 1998: 11).

Concern with the apparent disaffection of a generation was evident in the media's portrayal of young people as politically alienated, apathetic and self-interested (Harrison 2002, Russell 2004). It was common to hear media commentators arguing that young people who choose not to vote 'should be treated with contempt' (Lawson 1997); that they are 'political know-nothings' and 'airheads' (Toynbee 1997). Others suspecting the possibility of a generational change argued that young people in Britain have often been regarded as a 'social barometer' whose behaviours and beliefs are used as a measure of social change (Jones and Wallace 1992). In the following years there emerged some debate and tentative evidence as to whether young people's apparent lack of interest in politics represents a generational shift (Park 2000, Blais 2003), but the debate tended to revolve around an unclear distinction as to exactly what was meant by apathy.

Others began to argue that to infer political apathy solely on the basis of the non-participation in conventional politics was to oversimplify the equation (Bhavnani 1994). Marsh (1990) drawing on the work of Easton (1975) observed that, more important than regular mass participation in formal politics is a level of 'diffuse support' for the political system which is the mainstay of conventional politics. Marsh thus raises the question as to whether disengagement with conventional politics represents a deep rooted negative view of the value of formal politics. This leaves us with an interesting paradox: participation in formal politics, from party membership to electoral turnout has declined but citizens still widely support democracy and elections.

2.8 The consolidation of a new politics cleavage?

As discussed above, Inglehart and others differentiated between an old politics, based on material needs and a new politics based on citizens post-materialist needs. Recently the literature on youth participation has taken a new focus. Whilst, traditionally, the focus was on young people's non-participation in formal politics, there has been the recognition amongst the academic community of a qualitative shift in political participation (e.g., Marsh 2007; Norris 2002, 2003, 2005; Pattie et al 2004; Russell et al 2002, 2007) and that this is most evident in young people's politics (Dalton 2008). Whilst the idea that there is a difference between conventional and unconventional politics is not a new one (see for example Barnes and Kaase 1979), the general elections of 1997 and 2001 and the ensuing debate about electoral turnout and political apathy, crystallized the conceptual distinction between conventional or formal politics on the one hand and unconventional/ informal politics on the other.

It has often been argued that young people do care about matters that are essentially political in nature but tend to be outside the boundaries of traditional conventional politics (Banks 1992; Parry et al 1992; Bennie and Rudig 1993; Mulgan and Wilkinson 1997). But since the 1997 and 2001 elections, what I term the 'anti-apathy' school have produced a significant body of research focusing specifically on what different types of political participation people are involved in as well as attitudes to different types of political activity. For example, Bentley et al (1999) found that despite negative and cynical views about politicians many young people are motivated by and knowledgeable about the forms of political engagement that do not fit into the formal systems of electoral politics. White et al (2000) also found that young people had negative views of politicians but that they had engaged with a wide range of activities related to politics.

Two groups of authors typify the anti-apathy school. Henn et al (1999, 2002) are broadly critical of the traditional understandings of youth political participation arguing that they 'have tended to contribute an understanding of politics that is tied far too narrowly to the domain of elections and parliamentary activity' (2002: 168). Henn et al used a longitudinal research design, conducting a regional panel survey of 1,597 'attainers' over two years (1998-1999), drawn from Nottinghamshire with the intention of providing an indicative picture of youth orientations to politics. Their focus group research found a level of apathy amongst certain groups of young people, who

considered politicians to blame for this (Ibid: 175). Political parties were also cited by many in focus groups as failing to encourage young people to participate. Data from both the panel survey and the focus groups indicated a specific lack of confidence in politicians and scepticism of the idea that political parties genuinely seek to further the interest of young people (Ibid: 176-8). Henn *et al* argue that 'if young people appear to exhibit a lack of engagement with politics, it is because they perceive the world of formal politics to be distant from their lives and broadly irrelevant-that politics has little meaning to them' (Ibid).

Henn et al provide a range of positive information about young people's political orientations and attitudes. Their research found young people to have a considerable interest in political matters with seven in ten respondents claiming to have 'some' or more interest in national politics. They found young people to have a clear understanding and awareness of events and affairs occurring in their local communities as well as of particular issues such as Europe, education, war, militarism and the environment (Ibid: 176). Interestingly, their focus groups also showed a high degree of support for elections. In other work, Henn et al (2005) conducts a postal questionnaire of 705 young people with a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. They draw similar conclusions to their earlier work with regard to young people's eschewal of formal politics and continue to argue that their evidence dispels the myth of youth apathy. But their findings here seem to contradict the implications of their earlier findings that young people, although disengaged from formal politics, are involved in a variety of other activities that constitute political activity. They find limited evidence for the 'alternative value' position and conclude that 'young people's apparent disengagement with formal politics and the established parties' does not appear to be 'a consequence of a uniform shift towards a 'new politics' value systems and orientation' (Henn et al 2005: 573). This indicates that whilst young people have become increasingly critical of politics and the political process in the UK, there is still not enough evidence to conclude that they are as engaged as ever, but simply in new forms of activity.

The second group of authors that I characterise as epitomising the anti-apathy school have consistently argued that in order to understand why young people are relatively disengaged from conventional politics, we need a fuller understanding of how young people themselves conceptualise politics (O'Toole et al 2003a, 2003b; Marsh et al 2007). In the most comprehensive exposition of this argument Marsh et al (2007)

provide a detailed critique of the existing literature, arguing that a key problem with much of the literature to date is its restricted conception of the ‘political’; ‘where the focus has been on an arena definition of politics and political participation....equated with a narrow range of activities, centred on contacting public officials, voting and membership of political parties (Marsh et al 2007: 59). They argue that the failure of the existing literature to understand the way young people conceive political activity has meant that it has tended to exaggerate youth apathy. The problem with this assertion is that whilst Marsh et al rightly identify, on the basis of strong empirical evidence, that young people today do appear to be involved in a range of activities outside the realms of formal political activity we cannot be clear from their work the extent to which these kinds of activity replace voting and formal political participation. The point made by the political science research, that Marsh et al (2007) critique, is that young people *are* increasingly uninterested and apathetic towards *conventional* political activity such as voting and party membership. This change is of interest because we can accurately quantify how electoral turnout changes over time. Whilst Marsh et al criticise this kind of research on the basis of its narrow conception of the political, it tends to imply that an understanding of the way in which young people conceptualise politics today and their political ‘repertoires’ are adequate on their own as a means of understanding the decline in electoral participation.

Marsh et al’s methodology seeks to ‘establish a much clearer idea of how young people understand and relate to politics’ (Ibid: 59). By using focus groups and a ‘respondent-led’ methodology the aim was to provide a purposive, rather than a representative sample. The results of their focus groups tend to confirm what previous studies have shown, that their respondents were not active in formal politics and saw politicians as remote and uninterested in them. They also felt that they had no chance of influencing politics whilst recognising that it affected them. Few of Marsh et al’s respondents perceived there to be any opportunity for their involvement and felt they were seen as political ‘apprentices’ rather than agents. Interestingly, the contextual approach of their study revealed that whilst class was rarely talked about by young people, it was ‘lived’. Those groups with limited access to economic capital knew they had little and understood that it impacted on their life chances (Ibid: 213).

Following Bang (2003), Marsh et al agree that the decline in formal political participation is not a ‘free rider’ problem, but rather a problem of political exclusion. They argue that ‘although some young people may be politically apathetic, in our view,

the more serious problem is that many are alienated from the existing political system' (Marsh et al 2007: 211). Marsh et al provide useful insights into how young people conceptualise politics. These insights tend to reflect much of their earlier work and work by other anti-apathy scholars (Henn et al 2002, 2005, 2007; O'Toole et al 2003a, 2003b), but further bolster the case that young people are interested in politics as broadly conceived, but are simply apathetic and uninvolved when it comes to formal politics. They argue the case for a variety of participatory initiatives, particularly at the local level, whilst noting that many existing initiatives have not received sufficient investment.

Marsh et al (2007) devote almost half of their book to a critique of quantitative methods and the argument that young people are 'apathetic'. But their methodology is unable to answer the substantive questions relating to political change. To what extent do their findings represent a shift away from conventional politics to other types of political activity? If this group are alienated from formal political activity and from political parties, is this a new phenomenon, and, if so, what explains this? Even if we accept the proposition that interest and involvement in broader forms of political participation are the result of a disenchantment with traditional political activity, Marsh et al provide no evidence that politics itself has changed in such a way as to account for these qualitative shifts. Whilst the book provides useful insights into youth conceptions of politics today, it is largely descriptive. To address change over time it is necessary to have data over time, whether quantitative or qualitative. Unfortunately no such qualitative data exists which allows a comparison of the explanatory factors for electoral turnout decline. The following chapter outlines the methodological challenges faced by this research project and detail how the subsequent chapters will address these using the appropriate quantitative methods and data.

Whilst these studies have made an invaluable contribution to the literature and our wider understanding of the ways in which today's young people are becoming 'political', one which I will return to shortly; there remains a significant gap in our understanding as to the extent of change in youth voting behaviour and why it has occurred? It may be misleading to argue from the fact that young people are disengaged from elections and political parties that they are equally disengaged with the democratic process and other social and political activity. But it is equally misleading to suggest that new forms of social and political activity are the result of politics, political processes and politicians failing to engage young people. In fact, one thing would

appear to be self evident, although difficult to prove; that politicians and political processes have not changed in such a fundamental way to adequately account on their own for changing patterns of political behaviour. This is not to argue that there is nothing that politicians can do to boost political engagement or that there is little that they have done to reduce it.

In general the literature on young people's politics has tended to be rather divorced from the mainstream political science literature. Until recently, as many recent studies have highlighted (e.g. Fahmy 2005; Henn et al 2002; Marsh et al 2007), life-cycle interpretations have dominated the political science understanding of youth and it has received relatively little attention. The sociological literature has tended to provide more depth to the study of youth, but tends to be descriptive, showing what kinds of political activity young people are involved in. The question whether recent generations of young people are different in their political participation has seldom been adequately addressed. Where it has been addressed, the emphasis has tended to be on how *politics* has changed rather than on changes in the *electorate* in the last 30-40 (see, for example, The Power Report). The argument underpinning this thesis is that changes in young people's political behaviour are rooted in long-term social and political changes, possibly triggered, reinforced and consolidated by short-term factors.

The general picture to emerge from what I characterize as the 'anti-apathy' qualitative school of thought is that whilst young people or young adults have relatively low levels of participation in politics; low levels of trust in politicians and are generally disengaged from conventional politics; this only paints a fragment of the picture of young people's politics. Many have high levels of interest and are engaged in a variety of activities which lie outside the traditional sphere of politics but which have clear political motivations (Bentley 1999; Bhavnani 1994; Eden and Roker 2000; Furlong and Cartmell 1997, 2007; Henn et al 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007; Marsh et al 2007; O'Toole et al 2003a, 2003b; Roker 1999; White et al 2000). But whilst providing much in the way of contextual understanding of attitudes and behavior the central question; why the change in electoral participation, remains? This thesis will be concerned purely with voter turnout, examining in detail trends in turnout and explanations for these trends. It concludes by analysing some of the broader issues around youth participation.

Whilst Clarke et al's (2004) focus is primarily on voting behaviour and party support since the 1960s, others have sought to examine the dimensions of a wider range of political activity. Norris' (2002) important comparative work on political activism

utilises data from countries across the globe. Norris confirms the evidence that there has been a widespread erosion of the conventional channels of political engagement, including electoral turnout, party membership and civic activism. Secondly, Norris argues, following Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997), that long-term processes of modernisation and the cognitive development of citizens have been the primary drivers in shaping these changes. Norris argues convincingly that ‘rather than eroding, political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification in the agencies (the collective organisations structuring political activity), the repertoires (the actions commonly used for political expression), and the targets (the political actors that participants seek to influence)’ (2002: 216). Whilst this trend is notable across age groups, younger generations have become particularly likely to disengage from ‘traditional agencies’ in favour of ‘ad hoc, contextual, and specific activities of choice, increasingly via new social movements, internet activism and transnational policy networks’ (Ibid: 222).

Contrary to popular assumptions, the traditional electoral agencies linking citizens and the state are far from dead. And, like a phoenix, the reinvention of civic activism allows political energies to flow through diverse alternative avenues as well as conventional channels (Norris 2002: 223).

But critical questions remain from the idea that new forms of political activity are replacing traditional forms. Firstly, to what extent can these new types of political activity compensate for the decline of traditional forms of participation? There is little research to show how or whether these new types of participation have firm social roots that the party identification showed that formal political participation did/does, according to Butler and Stokes (1969) and The Michigan School. We might suspect that as they age, because these new political repertoires are not rooted in firm social psychological ground, young people will shed these types of activity.

Norris (2003) addresses the question of life-cycle, period and generational effects in a variety of different types of political participation. Using comparative panel data from the European Social Survey (ESS), the findings of her analysis reveal that there are differences of age: ‘even after including all relevant controls....age remained one of the strongest predictors of citizen’s action’ (Norris 2003: 12). In relation to citizen-oriented activism, she finds a life-cycle rather than a generational effect:

‘although there is a large age gap in turnout, nevertheless this can be attributed more to life-cycle patterns, so that the younger groups can be gradually expected to vote more often as they enter middle age’ (Ibid:13). However, in relation to cause-oriented repertoires, Norris (2003) found that young people are significantly more likely to take part than their parents were. Whilst this suggests a generational change, in the same way that declining electoral turnout does, some caution needs to be exercised as to whether these characteristics will adhere to young people as they age. Norris (2003, 2005) provides strong evidence that young people are not in fact apathetic and are involved in a wide range of new forms of political activity. However, it also seems clear that if declines in turnout may simply be the result of life-cycle or period effects, this may also be the case for the rise in new forms of political activity. A prudent judgment, on the basis of the available evidence is that recent declines in turnout may not be as serious as they appear and that some recovery will occur as cohorts age. But at the same time, these cohorts are likely to shed some of the new types of political activity they are engaged in as they age. Clearly more evidence is needed to show the extent of turnout decline amongst recent cohorts of young people.

The literature on youth engagement details participation in the new types of informal political behavior such as environmental movements, anti-war marches and demonstrations - but very rarely asks whether these types of participation have previously existed side by side with formal types, or whether they are new and specific to a generation. It therefore doesn't question whether these new forms of political participation are simply more visible in the absence of formal participation. Secondly, the majority of the literature on new forms of youth engagement tends not to ask whether the new types of participation are undertaken by the same demographic groups as formal participation and are as class based as formal participation was. Whilst Norris' (2002, 2003, 2005) comparative studies are broadly supportive of the argument of the 'anti-apathy' school there remains a need to understand why today's youth participation is different to previous generation? If it is because of a general discontent with modern politics, can we identify specific factors to do with the particular period in which this generation were socialized which help explain this?

Pattie et al's (2004), research, conducted under the auspices of the ESRC's Democracy and Participation programme had a wider remit than voter turnout and conventional participation. It represented a significant advance on the previous equivalent work on the UK published by Parry et al (1992). It also represented a

confirmation of the above recognition that political participation is changing and the need to provide some detail on exactly what kinds of political activity citizens are now involved in.

Pattie et al (2004) contend that citizenship has become a central concern not only of academics but also of politicians and policymakers. First, citizenship has always raised basic questions about the relationship between the individual and the state, leading normative theorists to re-examine it whenever there are transformations in that relationship, as are now occurring. Second, real or perceived changes in the values, attitudes, and forms of participation that underpin civil society provoke interest because democracy cannot function effectively without participation. The paradoxical decline in electoral participation accompanying the spread of democracy around the world implies that 'there is something happening to contemporary citizenship' that causes declining voter turnout (Pattie et al 2004: 3). The authors look at a wide range of political activities, focusing on seventeen elements of 'macro politics' which are attempts to 'influence rules, laws or policies', such as: attending a political meeting or rally; signing a petition; or taking part in a strike, and 'micro politics' such as influencing their children's education; their or their families medical treatment; or their working conditions. In relation to 'macro-politics' the authors found that citizens are 'engaged in a multiplicity of political activities beyond the traditional' (Ibid: 107). The most common of these being individualistic actions such as giving money or signing a petition. Pattie et al also found that British citizens have an 'extensive network of associational life. In terms of 'micro-politics' they find that many are engaged in ways that we might not traditionally recognise. Participating in 'micro-politics' people often feel a greater sense of efficacy and are generally satisfied with the outcomes.

However, Pattie et al also reveal important differences between demographic groups. Firstly, much of the 'diverse and rich associational activity' they find is 'dominated by the rich, the well-educated, and those from professional and managerial background' and this is echoed in informal networks (Ibid: 109). The same is found in relation to 'micro' political activity with only 'one in four of those who abstain from macro engagement become (ing) involved in micro politics' (Ibid: 126). The authors also find that good citizenship matters: the more active local people are in politics and in associational life, the more trusting they feel, and the more affluent they are, the better their lives are. The authors conclude that citizenship is not stable but rather is 'malleable as individuals make choices about their participation and their perceptions of

rights and obligations' (Ibid: 184). Pattie et al continue to examine the consequences of these findings, but if political participation is changing, as Pattie et al confirm, we might ask whether inequalities in participation have simply transferred from the 'old' politics to the 'new' politics or whether there is a new set of dynamics?

Pattie et al confirm the established knowledge that youth inhibits participation (Ibid: 173), that younger people, together with the poor and the working class, are the least political knowledgeable and interested (Ibid: 90, 92). They also found that the sense that voting is a duty is lowest among young people (Ibid: 70). Young people are more likely to be involved in informal and friendship networks. The picture to emerge is that even when a wider conception of politics is used, young people are still relatively disengaged compared to their older counterparts. But we would expect this given what we know about the impact of the life-cycle on political participation.

Given the insights provided by Campbell et al (1960) and Butler and Stokes (1974) on the importance of partisan attachments as informational shortcuts to political activity, we might suspect that the low levels of knowledge found by Pattie et al are generational in nature. If young people are amongst the least knowledgeable in society this raises the question: are today's young citizens less knowledgeable than their predecessors? How does this impact on their likelihood of voting?

There is a growing literature on the importance of political knowledge to young participation. Russell et al (2002: 37) suggest that "a case is beginning to emerge that young people were less resourced in terms of political information and less able to make informed decisions about politics due to a lack of knowledge about politics in general." The relationship between age and political knowledge is confirmed by The Electoral Commission's Audits of Political Engagement carried out yearly since 2004 (The Electoral Commission 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). There is also some evidence that these levels of knowledge may adhere to them as they age (Park 2000). At least as far back as 1996 scholars have provided evidence to the contrary of the central argument of the cognitive mobilisation model – that a better educated citizenry should be a more knowledgeable and active one (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). It is becoming clearer that whilst: "young people tend to be the most sophisticated consumers of media, being more likely to use new forms of media, especially the most technologically advanced media of all electors...they are not especially disposed to using these new media for the digestions of politics." (Russell et al 2002: 24). Wattenberg (2002), identifies the possibility that media consumption habits are playing a role in disengagement and in his

later book makes the case that young people have become insulated from politics in a post-print environment (Wattenberg 2007). Others such as Prior (2007) reveal strong evidence surrounding the political consequences of changing communication technologies on citizen knowledge, voter turnout and other features of American politics.

Milner (2002) argues that it is 'civic literacy' rather than social capital as Putnam (e.g., 2000) suggested that makes democracy work. For Milner it is the knowledge and skills necessary for citizenship in the local community that are important rather than interpersonal trust and associative activity. This is an important insight for this research as it is plausible to suggest as a reason for declining voter turnout that as voters have become less psychologically attached to political parties and their affiliations have loosened, these kinds of skills have also diminished. However, we might argue that it is intuitive to suspect that if this is the case political knowledge derives in part from associative activity as Putnam suggests. Clearly it may well be the case that these factors are closely related in the causal chain to explaining declining turnout. I will return to discuss these factors in more detail in Chapter seven.

So far we have seen that the literature on youth politics in Britain has tended to be somewhat divorced from the mainstream literature on electoral change. There have been few comprehensive studies of youth voter engagement. This has meant that few studies have investigated how recent generations of young people have experienced the formative political experiences in a political environment devoid of the traditional social psychological anchors to voting. This is despite a wider literature on generation change and the importance of formative influences on the young (e.g., Mannheim 1928).

The most comprehensive study of youth engagement in Britain was carried out by Russell et al (2002) for The Electoral Commission. The report provides a broad, but detailed review of the most important literature on youth engagement examining reasons for not voting such as disillusion and alienation, inconvenience and impact, noting that the factors they identify all affect disproportionately young people. The context of youth engagement is set by Russell et al in their introduction where they argue that young people are particularly lacking in social capital. They make the important point, which I will return to in Chapter seven and my conclusions, that the 'connection between young people and the democratic state is more fragile than in the rest of the electorate' (Russell et al 2002:11). As I argue above, for this reason which may be due at least in part to the decline in traditional attachments to politics and

political parties, ‘a person’s very first electoral experience might colour their career as a vote (or indeed a non-voter) (Ibid:11). Pointing to the importance of understanding both long and short-term effects, Russell et al note that longer-term effects are difficult to measure, particularly because it is difficult to ‘determine whether the attitudes of the young are age related or specific to some form socialisation that will ‘stick’ through the ageing process’ (Ibid:11). These difficulties are related to the problems of separating what Russell et al call ‘generational’ and ‘cohort’ effects, the former being those type of effect that dissipate with time, the latter being a more enduring type that can affect attitudinal outlook permanently. They continue to make the point that scholars have examined the experiences of particular periods in time on people – such as growing up after the Second World War and experiencing rationing and the new health service. Importantly for the underlying argument I advance in this thesis, they also point out that the impact of the Thatcher period on young voters, which gave them a ‘distinctly neo-liberal economic outlook compared to the usual age-related attitudinal structure’ (Russell et al 2002: 11). More recently Fieldhouse et al’s (2007) research examining trends across Europe using national election results and evidence from the 2002-3 European Social Survey, concurs with the broad arguments outlined in this chapter of the importance of short-term factors such as election context as well as partisanship on turnout rates of young people across Europe.

Clearly there is a need for research that examines in more detail the extent to which recent trends in youth turnout may represent a generational decline. In Chapter four I examine in detail the turnout characteristics of different cohorts of young people who came of age between 1960 and 2001. But there is also a need to examine the reasons why young voters are different when compared to their predecessors from previous generations. If it is possible to identify turnout characteristics specific to this generation, what reasons might we advance to explain this?

To date generational explanations have tended to be somewhat tentative in their conclusions, largely due to it being impossible until young people age to know if they will shed their attitudinal and participatory characteristics. Park (2000), using British Social Attitudes data argues that there does appear to be a qualitative shift in young people’s attitudes. She shows that whilst in 1986, over one-fifth of 18-24 year olds claimed that they were ‘quite’ or ‘very’ interested in politics; by 1999 this figure had halved to one tenth (Park 2000: 9). Park also shows that the gap between the generations has also grown in this period from a 10-point to a 25-point gap (Ibid: 11).

She concludes that ‘generational replacement may have a role in explaining overall societal change because the average change within each of our cohorts is smaller than the overall societal change (Ibid: 11).

Russell et al (2002) alluding to the possibility of these types of generational changes argue that if young people are lacking in social capital – education should be a ‘precondition for reinvigorating democracy.’ Any citizenship programme should involve the whole range of participatory democracy. Whilst citizenship education is no doubt an important piece of the jigsaw of re-engaging young people – we might question the extent to which these kinds of education can foster in young people, or replace, those early ties with politics associated with partisanship and social capital. I will return to these as explanatory factors of generational turnout decline in Chapter seven. Russell et al (2002: 51) point to the lack of longitudinal data through which to test the generational hypothesis. This consideration will be at the forefront of the quantitative research design detailed in Chapter three. Russell et al continue to point to the fact that young people did report a willingness to be better informed and research is required on the consequences of little election coverage in young people’s media. As discussed earlier, if Wattenberg’s (2007) diagnoses of youth disengagement that today’s young people have become insulated from politics from the types of media they are consuming holds true in the British case, we might ask what, if any, motivations do they now have to vote? We might also reasonably suspect, given what we know about the impact of class and other demographic factors such as ethnicity and race that there are significant differences in the types of engagement that young people are involved in and the types of information available to them dependent on their demographics. We know for example that levels of voter registration vary significantly between different ethnic groups. Saggart (2000) shows that those most likely to be un-registered are black Caribbeans, with over a quarter of 18-24 year olds in this group not registered at the 1997 election. This compares to only 6.8 per cent of young Indians. There are also important differences in the reasons reported for non-turnout at elections between groups. Saggart (2000) found that a much higher proportion of Black non-voters than Asians or White reported to have deliberately opted not to vote. This raises important questions about social exclusion and within groups of young people there is clearly a need for more information on differences in voter engagement in relation to ethnicity.

In one of the most recent book length studies of youth participation: *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation Is Reshaping American Politics*, Dalton (2008)

argues that while it is both true and problematic that today's youth do not vote in the same numbers as earlier birth cohorts, this does not, in and of itself, constitute the dissolution of our democracy. He insists that we must stop focusing only on negative changes and see that, in fact, our public and our politics are changing, and many of these changes are producing positive outcomes. Dalton also provides a comparative angle allowing him to make conclusions with regard to participation in other advanced industrial democracies. In a similar way to Marsh et al (2007) and other scholars of what I have earlier termed the 'anti-apathy' school, Dalton asks 'What does it mean to be a good citizen' and argues from the start that once we realise that what has changed are the norms of citizenship we will realise that "the good news is that the bad news is wrong". The conclusion Dalton arrives at goes a step beyond that of the UK based work reviewed in the above in that it suggests we should not worry about the decline in voting and the types of political participation that we have become used to because young people are inventing their own types of engagement and these are an indication of the health of participatory democracy. The question remains, however, given what we know about the political life-cycle, how will these types of participation adhere to young people as they age, have more at stake in society, have to pay taxes, work and have families. If the traditionally understood explanation for youth voting behavior, based on the political life-cycle; that is that young people don't vote because they are young and will become more likely to do so as they age is true, we might equally suspect the reverse to be true for the new types of participation we see emerging. Here lies a separate research question. If we are to understand these new types of youth engagement it would be logical to first understand the extent to which young people from previous generations have been involved in informal political activity and whether as they have aged these have been shed in place of more formal activity such as voting. If these new types of engagement do reflect a set of changing norms around democratic participation we still might suspect that those involved come from the 'usual suspects' – those well educated, middle class sections of society. In a postscript to the second edition of his book Wattenberg (2007) addresses some of the points made by Dalton (2007) presenting data of the percentage of young people reporting activity in these other forms of participation, from volunteering to community problem solving. He argues that despite increases in these types of activity patterns of generational inequality still mirror those of voting behavior.

There is strong evidence to suggest that political participation is changing. But the changes we are witnessing are not, as yet, adequately explained. Young people particularly are involved in new forms of political activity and cannot be characterised as being simply apathetic. But, they are, it appears apathetic towards conventional political participation. As argued above, the anti-apathy school provide a useful picture of the types of social and political activity that young people are involved in, but whilst showing the young people now conceive of politics in broader terms than was once the case, there remains a relative dearth of information about what has changed to make young people today different to previous generations. The implication from these studies tends to be that it is politics that has changed rather than the electorate. This research in subsequent chapters will attempt to understand how young people themselves might have changed, with the intuitive suspicion that part of the reason for their changing attitudes and participation is because they are different from their predecessors.

2.9 Summary and conclusions

There are two important conclusions to come out of the review of the existing literature. Firstly, there is now a large body of work commenting and investigating declining electoral turnout in Britain and in Western Europe in recent years. There is also a growing number of studies looking specifically at youth participation, but, when this research was carried out there was a relative dearth of research investigating why turnout at recent British general elections declined to the extent it did among the youngest eligible to vote. There was also a lack of detail as to whether turnout decline should be attributed to period, generational, or, in the case of young people – life-cycle effects. Secondly, there is a relative dearth of information as to why recent cohorts may have quantitatively or qualitatively different participation characteristics. There are few examples of research which seeks to understand youth politics within the framework of long-term social and political change. The consensus amongst political scientists has tended to be that short-term factors such as a lack of electoral competition are the most accurate predictors of electoral turnout. Whilst this may be the case for most demographic groups, this research seeks to investigate the possibility that the Thatcher generation received a unique political socialisation which meant their participatory characteristics are distinct from previous cohorts.

In this chapter I have sought to critically review the key literature on youth political participation and argue that it is possible to identify clear gaps in the research that needs to be addressed. The argument I have developed and sustained through the chapter is that an understanding of young people's political behaviour must be rooted in the well documented, broad structural changes that have occurred since the 1950s. These changes have had a huge impact on citizens in Britain; which have then in turn had similarly huge impacts on traditional alignments with political parties. There is no question that the generation of young people to have grown up in the Thatcher and post-Thatcher eras have experienced a very different set of social circumstances to their predecessors. This thesis will examine in detail one aspect of this generation's unique characteristics. Building on the critique of the existing literature – the thesis will seek to answer some key research questions that this review of the literature has revealed and highlighted.

1. To what extent is the 2001 cohort of young people's turnout at British General Election different from that of previous generations?
2. Is the life-cycle explanation for youth turnout adequate when looking at this cohort?
3. Is there any evidence of a generational effect in relation to the turnout of recent cohorts?
4. If so, how can this best be explained?

It would appear then that there is some justification for calling today's young people 'apathetic'. They seem apathetic when it comes to conventional politics. Disinterested in politics and politicians as traditionally conceived and disengaged from the political process despite there being more opportunities to participate now than there ever has been. Instead they have opted to become involved in different types of political activity. What is missing is what lies between the two. The *why*. Young people socialised after 1979 and who came to vote for the first time between 1992-2001 appear to have distinctive participatory characteristics and it is reasonable to suggest that these are related to the political period they were socialised in. One of the contributions of this thesis will be to test the predictive power of models developed in the recent works of political participation (Clarke et al 2004) and citizenship (Pattie et al 2004) on young people in Britain.

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed rationale for the methodology supporting the empirical research presented in this thesis. The first chapter introduced a framework through which the literature on political participation can be understood. The two broad positions equate to what can be viewed as different motivations for researching political participation based on the core assumptions of either participatory or realist understandings of democracy. The previous chapter situated a significant portion of the youth-specific research in the participationist mould – which takes on a somewhat defensive view of young citizens. One might argue that this defensive approach is ingrained in and reinforced by a methodological approach based on understanding the way in which young people themselves conceive of political activity. As noted in the previous chapter, this approach clearly has its merits given the need to identify politics as more broadly defined than voter turnout or formal political activity. However, it is equally the case that we need to understand what has happened to youth turnout and identify how we can best explain this.

3.2 Methodological considerations

The previous chapter identified some general research problems that arose from a critical review of the political participation and voter turnout literature. The most important general problem to emerge reflects the methodological approach of much of the literature on young people's voting behaviour and the specific methods adopted in this thesis. The specific research questions the thesis will attempt to address are:

- To what extent is the voting behaviour of the 2001 cohort of young citizens different to that of previous generations?

- Does the life-cycle explanation of youth turnout remain an adequate explanation for low turnout amongst this cohort?
- Is there any evidence of a generational effect in relation to youth turnout and, if so, how can this be explained?

As shown in the preceding chapters, there is a lack of previous research into young people's electoral turnout that situates young people's political participation within wider electoral change. The dearth of over-time information on young people's participation thus dictated the use of large-scale time series data which enabled me to investigate trends in participation over time. In choosing this data, it was essential to reflect on a series of methodological considerations. These ranged from technical issues involving the reliability and validity of data, to logistical concerns over how much time and money was available for the research. This section provides a detailed account of the decision-making process that resulted in the chosen methodology.

First of all, it was important that the methodology would focus on gauging the participatory and attitudinal characteristics of young voters over time. Secondly, once the crucial time period in which a change in political participation was identified, a strategy, bearing in mind the feasibility constraints imposed on this project would need to be ascertained. The methodology would need to capture data fulfilling the following criteria:

- Representative of the general population of young people, including those of various demographic groups.
- A detailed representation of individuals' participatory, attitudinal and demographic characteristics.

Various practical issues remained at the fore of the decision making process as to which methodology to choose. The following considerations were taken into account:

- There was a six year time limit on this research, imposed by the conditions of the authors' University registration'.¹

¹ Whilst the author moved to part-time status due to financial considerations after year one, the affective time constraints remained the same.

- The author would be the sole researcher undertaking all tasks associated with the project.
- The research was funded by an internal fee waiver and a McDougall Trust bursary of £3000 per academic year, rising to £3300 for the final two years. This meant the author working part-time to fund his living expenses. The financial and time constraints meant it was crucial to choose a feasible methodology for the research project.

It was decided that the data requirements could most effectively be met by focusing on the re-analysis of existing survey data. This was justified by the fact that the data used is trusted, representative and freely available to the academic community and is therefore the most cost efficient way of obtaining reliable data. This approach would provide data amenable to the statistical analysis required to explore any relationships between voter turnout, as a key dependent variable, and various attitudinal and demographic variables. Another advantage of this approach is that it would not involve any ethical considerations as there was no direct contact with individuals. There were, however, some potential weaknesses in the data that would result from this approach.

Whilst survey data may provide a wide coverage of the variables needed for statistical analysis of the factors related to electoral turnout and a key concern was the depth explored by that data. Assessing youth participation in politics is particularly challenging as there is growing evidence to suggest that young people are conceiving of politics in far broader terms than was traditionally thought (e.g. Russell et al 2002, Marsh et al 2007). Survey methods have been criticised for their inability to tap the in-depth conceptualisations of politics that young people have (e.g. Henn et al 2002; Kimberlee 2002; O'Toole et al 2003a, 2003b). This concern opened up the possibility of including a qualitative element to the research to allow for deeper analysis of the key issues surrounding political participation which young people have. It was also recognised that a qualitative element may help pick out some of the contextual detail in the variations in individuals' specific situations that would be present in the results of the data analysis.

These technical considerations ultimately related to the reliability and validity problems that quantitative social research data presents. A major validity issue concerned the recognition that attitudinal factors are not directly 'measurable' in individuals, but usually inferred from the responses to certain stimuli (e.g. questions in a

questionnaire presented by a researcher. This leads to a problem that is especially transparent in quantitative research. Quantitative methods arguably produce a certain vagueness in trying to ‘measure’ attitudes according to the researcher’s (qualitative) construction of the variables, quantitatively analysing them, and then presenting them as (again, qualitative) interpretations of what people are believing or thinking. Conversely, while qualitative methods may draw the researcher into a more methodologically valid understanding of individuals’ motives for thought or action (in this case, voting), they would not allow the necessary statistical analysis of attitudinal differences or relationships. This is principally due to the length of time it would take to gather enough data from enough individuals to produce statistically significant results. But also because the thesis is concerned with over-time change and qualitative data of this nature is not available.

As the first stage of the research aimed to investigate differences in voter turnout over time, a quantitative survey-based strategy was employed because turnout is a numerical variable and no additional contextual information is needed to measure it. Moreover, there is, to the author’s knowledge, no existing qualitative data that examines political participation over time. Once the findings of the first stage were examined, it became clear that the crucial question for the remainder of the thesis was *why had voter turnout fallen so markedly among young people between 1992 and 2001?* It was decided, give the time and financial constraints outlined above, that a continuation of quantitative methods was appropriate. As discussed in the previous chapter this decision was made after reflecting on the existing research on youth participation and the dearth of quantitative information specific to young people and electoral change. However, at the final conclusions of this research it became apparent that further investigation based on qualitative methods would be valuable. This is further elaborated in the concluding chapter.

3.3 Methodological problems and how they were overcome

A number of distinct methodological issues were identified at an early stage of the project. These problems and how they were overcome are detailed below. I return to these in the concluding chapter to discuss how these impacted in the research findings and the implications for future research.

Issue 1

The difference between reported and actual electoral turnout is a problem for survey based research since respondents tend to report doing something, in this case voting, which they have not actually done. However, as explained in Chapter four, this is not perceived to be a major problem for this research design as at an early stage an investigation of the actual and reported turnout over time, revealed that the trajectories of both are very similar. As this research is primarily concerned with change rather than actual turnout at one period in time this renders the over-reporting of turnout at elections un-problematic.

Issue 2

A considerable difficulty faced by this research was the absence of sufficient panel data through which to trace cohorts of voters as they age. The British Election Panel surveys provide this kind of data, but this does not enable the analysis of cohorts of voters entering the electorate at different times, in different contexts which would offer the opportunity to compare fully their participatory and attitudinal characteristics. A panel is a group of people who are surveyed periodically over time. Panel data, also sometimes known as longitudinal data or cross-sectional time series data, provide multiple observations on each individual in the panel over time. Two fundamental types of information can be derived from panel data: cross-sectional information that inform us about the differences between subjects or groups of subjects at a particular moment in time, and time series information that inform us about changes within subjects or groups of subjects over time. Longitudinal studies enable the study of the dynamics of change across the life course and the effects of earlier characteristics on later outcomes.

Recognising this major limitation, it was necessary to weigh up whether a research design based on quantitative data was appropriate given that this limitation would affect both the analysis of trends in voter turnout over time, as discussed below, but also restrict the investigation of the adequacy of the competing explanations of turnout change. Due to the absence of panel data sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, at the first stage of the research investigating trends in turnout over time, the decision was made to create a series of pseudo cohorts using cross-sectional data. By identifying an age group at one election and calculating how old this group would be at

the next election it was possible to follow electoral generations as they aged, although these cohorts were not comprised of the same individuals, as in a panel survey. The advantage of this approach is that it enabled the author to illustrate for the first time the uniqueness of the generation of young people who voted for their first time in 2001, when compared to their predecessors from previous cohorts. One of the first pieces of research to use this design to highlight this generational uniqueness was published in a peer reviewed journal in 2004 (Phelps 2004).

Issue 3

How does one differentiate between life-cycle, period and generational effects? Chapter four establishes that separating these effects reliably is likely to be impossible and conclusions as to the extent of any 'generational effect' found are limited. But this is compounded by the fact that regardless of the type of data available, the subject of this research, 'young people', have only reached the early stages of their political life-cycles. Therefore it is perfectly possible that the characteristics of the generation may dissolve as they age. This would indicate that what we have witnessed is in fact a period effect. What is possible is to show whether or not a generation is unique in its participatory and attitudinal characteristics and that as no cohort has ever experienced such a decline in turnout, nor has one recovered from anywhere near such a decline to participate at normal levels later in the life-cycle, it is reasonable to conclude that cohort replacement is likely to decrease turnout.

Issue 4

Attempting to investigate turnout at British general elections prior to 2001 is problematic. Until relatively recently electoral turnout was not a major area of concern for political science and many of the explanatory variables required to test explanations for variations in turnout were not included in the 1997 or in early BES surveys. This presents the obvious problem that data from surveys prior to 2001 cannot be used in conjunction with those gathered in 2001 to measure over-time changes in the values of the most significant predictor variables (Clarke et al 2004). This means it is not strictly possible to compare the strength of different explanations/models at different points in time. This presented the methodology with a significant limitation as the explanatory

models were restricted to one moment in time which rendered conclusions about change somewhat speculative. The thesis attempts to investigate turnout change between 1992 and 2001. The most significant change in this period occurred at the 2001 election. We would expect therefore that a multivariate analysis of the variables in the 2001 data would reveal differences in the sample that reflect this particularly low level of turnout. It is impossible to be sure that these differences are those that explain why the turnout of this cohort is so different to previous cohorts, but by looking at the result of the data analysis in the context of electoral change, as outlined in Chapter two, it is possible to make a strong prima-facia case and point to the need for further research in the area.

A number of options were identified to overcome this barrier. Firstly, the models of participation could be specified to include only those variables available in each of the election year data sets. This method was discounted because of the lack of comparable variables in most of the data sets and because given the issues of validity surrounding the use and interpretations of quantitative data mentioned above, it was decided that it would further reduce the validity to attempt to change the specified models. A second option was to revert to a consideration of a qualitative explanatory methodology. This could have involved the use of interviews of focus groups to elicit information. However, this would not generate statistically representative findings. Ultimately, it was decided to conduct an in-depth quantitative analysis of the most critical data set for turnout decline, BES 2001, with the aim of using contemporaneous and recall data in order to generate a plausible explanation of the change in turnout at this time. While it is accepted that such analysis cannot offer an irrefutable interpretation, I believe that it can propose a convincing model that is consistent with the data available. To that extent, it pushes forward our knowledge and understanding of the subject of inquiry.

3.4 The Data

British Election Survey data

It was decided to use of The British Election Studies (BES) that have been conducted at every General Election since 1964. The main aims of these studies are (1) to collect data with a view to describing and explaining the outcome of general elections, (2) to analyse long-term changes in political attitudes and behaviour from the early 1960s to

the present, and (3) to organise and make available these data in a form suitable for a wide range of research. For this reason the data was clearly ideal for the purposes of the thesis – to understand electoral change amongst young people. It is the main data on which this thesis draws.

Young People's Social Attitudes data

The Young People's Social Attitudes (YPSA) survey is conducted by the National Centre for Social Research as part of the British Social Attitudes Survey. The YPSA survey began in 1994 and was conceived and designed in collaboration with Barnardos. Around 600 twelve to nineteen year olds who lived in the households of British Social Attitudes (BSA) respondents were interviewed. The study was carried out for the second time on the 1998 British Social Attitudes survey as a multi-funded project, independent of Barnardos. About half of the questions asked in the YPSA are identical to those asked of adults, allowing comparisons not only across generations but also between parents and children in the same household.

Television: The Public's View

The Independent Television Commission (ITC) audience research provides a systematic measurement of public opinion based on statistically representative samples of the viewing population and complements the feedback which the ITC receives from advisers and correspondents. Since 1970 a major annual survey, currently entitled Television: the public's view, has been carried out to track public attitudes. In addition to core questions, repeated annually, thus providing valuable opinion trends, the survey is also adapted each year to cover topical issues. The survey relates mainly to the ITC's responsibilities under the Broadcasting Act 1990 for consumer protection (e.g. taste, decency, offence and impartiality) and programme standards. At the end of 1998, the ITC published Television Across the Years: the British Public's View, the findings over 27 years.

3.5 Methods of data analysis and data considerations

Cross-sectional data and the creation of pseudo panels

As discussed above and detailed in Chapter four, in the absence of adequate panel data stretching over the period of the BES which would have facilitated the accurate tracing of each age cohort as they aged, a number of pseudo cohorts were identified making the data amenable to logistic regression.

Logistic regression

Logistic regression was employed instead of Ordinary Least Squares or regression as this is the recognised procedure for analysing the relative importance of predictor variables on a dichotomous variable, in this case voter turnout. With dichotomous variables there are only two categories such as male / female or 'vote' / 'non vote' in this case. These are usually thought of as nominal data as they are categories and cannot be ordered qualitatively in any meaningful way. However as with the case of turnout / verified vote there is an inherent ordering in the dichotomy: one has either not voted or one has voted and there is a sense that the characteristics of an ordinal variable are present as to have voted is positive whereas not to have voted is often seen as negative – hence an order. The logistic regression procedure is detailed in Chapter six along with a consideration of multicollinearity, residual diagnostics and others issues relating to its correct application and interpretation of the results.

Recoding

In order to conduct the logistic regression analysis it was necessary to check that all of the measured statements ran in the same direction. In its raw form some of the data was coded so that 1 equalled strong agreement on a statement, and on others it indicated strong disagreement. This is a deliberate aspect of the original questionnaire design, as it is essential when using attitude questions to vary them so that respondents are not influenced by a presumption on the part of the interviewer. Each variable used in the analysis was recoded to ensure that the 'lowest' number denotes the lowest answer to a question such as least agreement, lowest social class, lowest educational attainment or lowest amount of electoral turnout.

Weighting

There are a various weighting variables included in the main BES datasets. These variables offer the possibilities of weighting by region, by gender or by age within gender. The recommended option is to use the overall weighting variables, thereby weighting by region, gender and age within gender simultaneously. The labels given to these weighting variable alternatives differ according to different waves of the survey; specific labels are set out below. To ensure the correct weighting techniques were used, the author contacted the BES team and had correspondence with Harold Clarke, Paul Whiteley and David Sanders.

3.6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has set out the rationale for using a quantitative research design to examine changing electoral turnout over time. Employing a quantitative methodology will enable identification of a series of electoral cohorts through which to conduct the cohort analysis in Chapter four. The findings of the analysis will provide the justification for using the BES 2001 to examine the predictive power of a variety of existing models of voter turnout, outlined in Chapter five and operationalised and tested in Chapter six. The findings of this explanatory analysis will lead to the building of a detailed model of turnout amongst young voters in Chapter seven.

Youth turnout in decline?

4.1 Introduction

Chapter two set out the detailed rationale for the need to investigate declining electoral turnout among young people. This was based on a review of the existing literature, where I argue that to understand young citizens' participatory characteristics it is necessary to consider how their behaviour fits with widely accepted accounts of social, political and specifically electoral change. A literature has emerged on young people's politics in defence of this age group which argues that young people, far from being apathetic and disinterested, have high levels of social and political engagement when politics is more broadly conceived than when the focus of their engagement is on a narrower definition of formal politics.

Whilst the existing literature provides a growing wealth of information on the results of change; the contextual and descriptive evidence of the types of activities young people are involved in and the extent of this activity, as well as of their attitudes to politics, there remains a large gap in our understanding. Crucial questions remain to be answered: what exact changes have there been in youth participation? How do this generation differ from previous ones? What is the relationship between declining formal participation and informal participation? These are just some of the questions that need to be addressed before being satisfied that the evidence of informal political activity provides an answer to declining levels of formal participation. It is well beyond the scope of this thesis to address all of these questions, but it will aim to provide a valuable contribution to our understanding of how and why electoral participation has changed for this group which should provide insights into the wider research in the area.

The first section of this chapter details one of the methodological problems associated with using survey data to examine electoral turnout; the difference between reported and actual turnout. I argue that this problem is largely overcome as the analysis is focused on changing turnout, rather than actual turnout. The second section introduces a series of age groups in the BES data sets between 1964 and 2001 and examines differences in turnout between them. This is followed by an important discussion and illustration of another central methodological problem associated with looking at over-time changes in the life-cycle; differentiating between life-cycle, period and generational effects. It is argued that with these considerations taken into account there is a strong prima-facie case to suspect a generational change is taking place in political participation. I go on to argue that using the age group data alone restricts the analysis to making points about difference between cohorts at stages in the life-cycle and does not make possible any conclusions about what the political life-cycle looks like and how recent cohorts have deviated from the norm. After tracing a series of electoral cohorts using the BES data, I conclude that the cohort analysis strengthens the case that there is a generational change taking place in electoral turnout in Britain. The chapter concludes by making the case for a detailed multivariate investigation of the reasons for generational change.

4.2 Changing electoral turnout in Britain 1964-2001

As Table 1 shows, electoral turnout in Britain has tended to be reasonably high and stable. Some commentators have argued that a more pertinent question than why does turnout decline, is why do voters vote at all? (e.g., Denver 2007). This raises the well known paradox of voting which I will return to in subsequent chapters. The paradox which stems from rational choice understandings of voting, argues that if voters view political activity rationally, we would expect fewer to vote, as the chances of any one individual vote being pivotal to an election outcome are minimal. In subsequent chapters it is argued that one explanation for this paradox is revealed in the voting characteristics of modern young people. It seems plausible to suggest that if young voters are abstaining in growing numbers, it may be because recent generations are no longer anchored, or are less anchored, by social cleavages and partisan identification, to political parties and have less reason to vote habitually. The logical extension and answer to the paradox being that previous generations of voters, even if rational enough

to understand that their individual vote was/is unlikely to effect the election outcome at any given election, vote/voted because of a deep rooted identification with a political party.

Table 4.1 details reported turnout at general elections between 1964 and 2001. Perhaps the most striking feature of the table is the stability of reported turnout between 1964 and 1992, with the percentage of those voting never falling below 80 per cent in this period. The table also reveals, as has been widely reported, that turnout declined markedly after 1992, falling by almost 10 per cent between 1992 and 1997 and by a further 5 per cent between 1997 and 2001.

Table 4.1 Reported turnout at British General Elections 1964–2001

1964	88.6
1966	83.4
1970	81
1974	87.8
1979	84.8
1983	83.1
1987	86.1
1992	87
1997	78.7
2001	72.6

Source: BES data 1964-2001

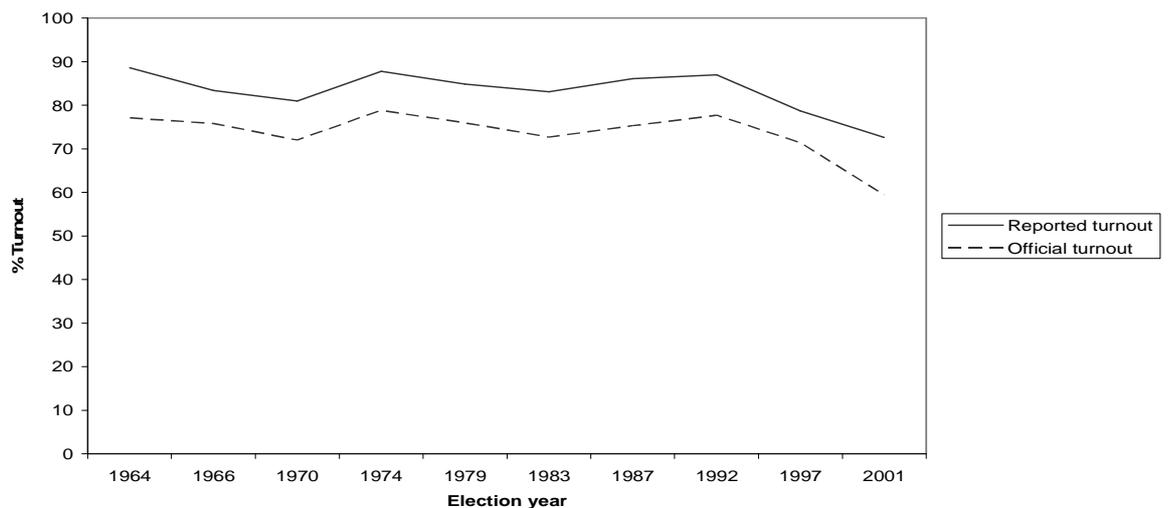
A criticism levelled at the use of British Election Survey data is that it under-estimates the number of abstainers at elections as there is always a discrepancy between reported turnout in surveys and actual turnout figures (see, for example, Kimberlee 2002). In order to ascertain whether this criticism will be one pertinent to this research methodology, it is possible to compare actual and reported turnout at British general elections. Table 4.2 shows that the difference between reported and actual turnout is around ten percent at elections since 1960, but in 2001 the difference rose slightly to just over 13 per cent. We might expect the difference to increase with such a decline in actual turnout as the number of those who decline to report abstinence grows with actual abstinence.

Table 4.2 Reported and official turnout at British general elections 1964-2001

Year	Reported	Actual	Difference
1964	88.6	77.1	11.5
1966	83.4	75.8	7.6
1970	81	72	9
1974	87.8	78.8	9
1979	84.8	76	8.8
1983	83.1	72.7	10.4
1987	86.1	75.3	10.8
1992	87	77.7	9.3
1997	78.7	71.4	7.3
2001	72.6	59.4	13.2

Source: BES data 1964-2001; Rallings and Thrasher 2007

With the above criticism of BES data in mind it is important to ensure the difference between reported and actual turnout do not impact on the reliability of the results of the data analysis in the subsequent sections. Figure 4.1, illustrates the trajectories of actual and reported turnout between 1964 and 2001.

Figure 4.1 Actual and reported turnout at British General Elections 1964-2001

The figure shows that whilst there is a considerable difference between reported and actual turnout at every general election since 1960, the trajectories are very similar.

Therefore the problem of discrepancy between reported and actual turnout is largely overcome and it is possible to make reliable conclusions about levels of turnout over time, as it is not *actual* turnout this research is interested in but *change* over time.

4.3 Age groups and changing turnout

As discussed in previous chapters, there is a growing body of work on young people's politics (eg. Henn et al 2002, 2005, 2007; Marsh et al 2007). There have been some attempts to look at how different generations of young people vote (Park 1999, 2005, Russell et al 2002), but there is a relative dearth of detailed information as to exactly how young people's electoral participation has changed; how their levels of participation compare to older age groups; and the extent to which any differences between cohorts represent life-cycle, period or generational differences. As discussed in Chapter two, Clarke et al (2004) demonstrate a cohort effect with regard to electoral turnout, showing that the Thatcher and Blair generations are distinct from older generations. But they do not provide any detailed information on their turnout characteristics or why this might be the case. The following analysis looks in detail at how the turnout characteristics of today's young people compare to previous generations.

The age variable in each BES data set 1964-2001 was identified and recoded to produce the six age categories in Table 4.3. One of the difficulties of opting for 6 age categories is that this inevitably leads to a relatively small number of respondents in each age category. But, whilst the multivariate analysis in the next chapter will seek to address this problem; it is crucial here to be able to detect differences in turnout between age groups. One way of dealing with the relatively small number of respondents would be to combine two or more age groups. However, doing so would prevent the thesis from examining in detail the group of people most commonly identified as being disengaged – 18-24 year olds. In addition, it would mask any differences between the youngest two age groups and limit conclusions about age effects on the life-cycle. Lastly, it would prevent the analysis from focusing on how the effects of youth on the turnout life-cycle have changed, if at all, over time. Given that we would expect the 25-34 year old group to represent a key period in the life-cycle – one of transition from youth to political maturity - these groups are kept separate with the appropriate caveat made about the number of respondents.

Table 4.3 Reported turnout at British General Elections 1964-2001 by Age Grouping

Year	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	>64	Highest - lowest age groups
1964	88.6	81	91.7	90.5	89.9	88.2	-0.4
1966	67.1	78.5	88.4	88	86	83.8	16.7
1970	73.6	75.4	82.5	84.9	84	87.5	13.9
1974	78.2	86	87.7	91.4	91.6	88.3	10.1
1979	70.1	81.2	85.5	91	91.3	87.1	17
1983	73.1	77.5	87.4	88.8	88.6	83.8	10.7
1987	76.2	84.7	85.6	91.6	90.2	86.9	10.7
1992	75.4	86.6	87.7	91.6	87.4	89.4	14
1997	59.7	68.6	77.5	84.3	88.2	85.4	25.7
2001	49.4	55.1	68.2	77.4	78.3	85.8	36.4
Mean 1964-1992	75.3	81.3	87	89.7	88.6	86.8	
Change 1992-2001	26	31.5	19.5	14.2	9.1	3.6	

Table 4.3 details reported turnout at British general elections between 1964 and 2001 for the six age groups. The table is not a cohort table so does not allow the analysis of the turnout characteristics of difference cohorts over time. However, it provides evidence of the relative stability of turnout across the life cycle until 1997. It shows clearly that something occurred between 1992 and 1997 that affected people's inclination to vote and this increased between 1997 and 2001. Whilst Table 4.2 shows that reported turnout fell by 15 per cent amongst all age groups between 1992 and 2001, it is clear that this masks important differences between age groups.

The first indication of a generational change in turnout is the significant difference between the mean turnout for the youngest age group, the 18-24 year olds, between 1964 and 1992 and the figure for 2001. The figure dropped by around 26 per cent from the mean. The next section will discuss in detail difference between life-cycle, period and generation effects, but these figures at least show that young people from this generation are different from young people in earlier generations in their youth. What is crucial is whether these turnout characteristics, once the impact of the

life-cycle is taken into account, adhere to this group it ages. Table 4.3 also shows that the most pronounced decline in turnout between 1992 and 2001 was among the 25-34 year old group. Mean reported turnout amongst this age group was 81 per cent between 1964 and 1992, but among those who fell into this age bracket in 2001, turnout fell by a substantial 31.5 per cent, almost 5 per cent more than for the 18-24 year olds.

Given that life-cycle explanations of political participation posit that older people have higher turnout rates because they have more at stake in society (Jowell and Park 1998; Denver 1998), we might reasonably expect that turnout would begin to rise as individuals reach their mid 20s to mid 30s. Table 4.3 confirms this, showing that at every election since 1966 turnout has been higher among 25-34 year olds than 18-24 year olds. Whilst this was also the case in 1997 and 2001, the size of the drop in turnout among 25-34 year olds between 1992 and 2001 strongly suggest that something is happening that is not only affecting the youngest voters. But interpreting these figures is problematic because we cannot reliably infer from one stage of the life-cycle something about a later stage. It is impossible to conclude whether these differences are ‘age-effects;’ that is, the result of the stage in the life-cycle that these groups occupy, or ‘period effects;’ that is, the result of a particular political period. But if these figures *do* simply represent age effects, the 1997-2001 cohort will be the first to have turned out at such a low level in the forty years and eleven election studies conducted between 1964 and 2001.¹ A turnout recovery of the kind needed for these figures to represent merely age effects is entirely possible, but it would be unprecedented. These young citizens are at least unique in their youth – that is they are very different in their turnout characteristics to previous generations. If the data represent ‘period effects’ we might expect that the effects of the period would be relatively uniform across age groups. I will show below there is little evidence that low turnout elections affect young people disproportionately. Lastly, and perhaps most pertinent is the fact that the 25-34 year old age group was most affected in this period. After an examination of differences between life-cycle, period and generational effects, I will return to this point, examining in detail the political life-cycle by identifying a series of age cohorts through which it is possible to trace the political life-cycle more accurately.

¹ The analysis includes only one of the two elections held in 1974. There was no major recovery experienced by these cohorts in 2005. See Phelps (2005).

4.4 Defining and differentiating between life cycle, period and generational effects

One of the key difficulties in understanding the political behaviour of young voters is that separating the effects of life-cycle, period and generation is virtually impossible. The definitions I use are based on the commonly understood definitions as discussed by Jowell and Park (1998) and which are detailed below.

Life-cycle differences are those that may distinguish one generation from another at a particular point in their lives. For example, one might argue that young people spend more of their time on activities such as watching television, and playing computer games, compared to other age groups and are less interested in gardening and DIY. But this is making a point about a particular age group or stage of life rather than comparing the same age groups at different moments in time. The point is that as people age, they tend to change their leisure activities to reflect new positions they occupy in the life-cycle. These are chronological differences rather than generational ones, and tell us something about the way in which age changes one's leisure activities or political activities, but tell us nothing about whether and how these differences have changed over time (Jowell and Park 1998).

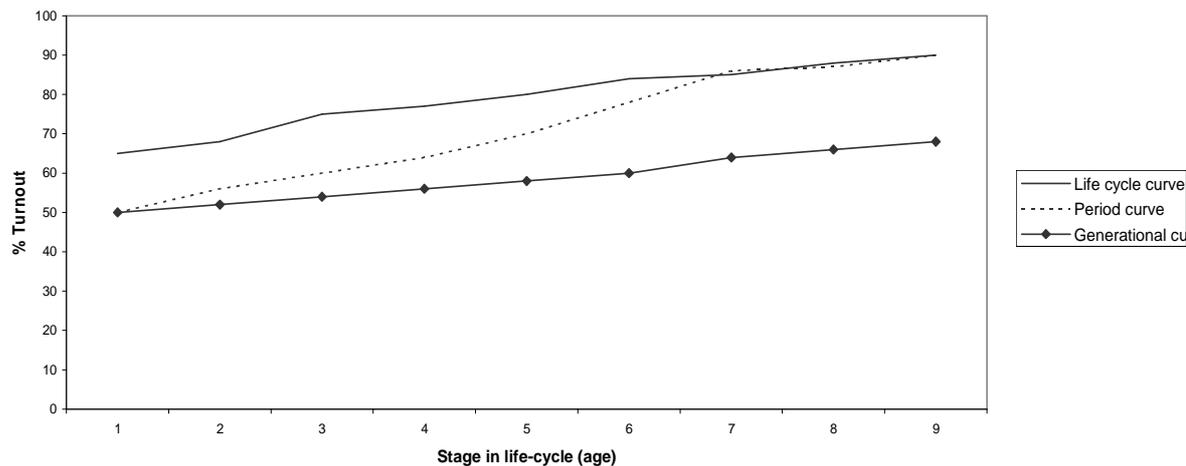
A period effect is the effect of a particular period of time; this may be the result of significant political or social contexts such as the effect of war on the electorate, or the impact of a political administration. The essential point is that the effect of a period is one which all age groups experience. Political periods may not affect the young and old in the same way, but the impact of a period across age groups is significant. The essential difference between generational and period effects as far as declining turnout is concerned is that the impact of a particular period will fade as a cohort ages. If the turnout characteristics of young people, detailed above, are the result of period effects they will eventually return to follow a similar trajectory of turnout to that had the period not affected them and one which reflects their position in the political life-cycle.

A generational effect refers to a more profound change or changes. These changes may be caused by a political period – but the essential point is that the behaviour or attitudes developed as a result, rather than fading over time, adhere and follow an age group or cohort as it ages. In the context of this research some kinds of societal or political change may foster a temporary set of attitudes or behaviour, whereas other more profound changes create a permanent set of values and behaviours

amongst voters. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, gradual, but profound social changes such as the structural changes that have fundamentally altered the social basis of political support since the 1950s, but particularly since the 1970s, may have a more sudden impact on voting behaviour than we might expect as a generation of young people, socialised in this era, but previously ineligible to vote, reach voting age.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the key differences that the thesis is concerned with between life-cycle, period and generational effects. The life-cycle curve illustrates what we might term a standard political life-cycle with a cohort beginning its electoral activity at a low level, but rising steadily as it ages in line with a typical ‘life-cycle’ explanation of voter turnout. The period curve illustrates the effect of a particular political period. It represents a cohort commencing its political life, deviating away from the life-cycle curve, during the first few stages of the life-cycle, as it is affected by the political period, returning to follow the standard trajectory as it ages. The gap between the life-cycle and period curves in Figure 4.2 is the ‘period’ effect. The generational curve represents a cohort which enters the political life cycle at a lower point but in contrast to the period curve cohort, its low levels of turnout adhere as it ages and the trajectory of the curve shows little sign of recovery.

Figure 4.2 Differentiating between life-cycle, period and generational effects



The life-cycle, period, generational conundrum is a special case of the ‘identification problem’. This simply means that it is not possible to identify the three processes simultaneously. The problem occurs whenever there are three or more

independent variables that may affect a dependent variable and when each of these variables is a perfect linear function of the other ones (Blalock 1967). The ‘identification problem’ is essentially the most extreme form of collinearity. It is not possible to simultaneously estimate the effects of all the variables by any standard method such as in a regression model.

Until the later decades of the twentieth century the majority of studies examining the effects on people of growing older utilised cross-sectional data. Whilst some scholars were aware of the hazards of inferring age effects from cross-sectional data many neglected the problem that cross-sectional age differences in a variable may reflect generational effects, that is, being born at a different time, rather than, or in addition to the effects of ageing alone (Glenn 2003). This point is illustrated in Table 4.3. If we were to assume that the youngest age group in 2001 (the 18-24 year olds) turned out to vote at 49.4 per cent (reported turnout) due to age effects alone, we would be neglecting the influence of period effects as we can see clearly that previous generations of 18-24 year olds had higher rates of turnout. So any future conclusion about the 2001 cohort’s political life-cycle would be confounded by possible period effects.

The limitations of cross-sectional data led later scholars to advocate the use of panel surveys in order to provide data on specific individuals over time. But panel surveys are not necessarily better than cross-sectional data for inferring the effects of ageing as individuals age in changing dynamic societies rather than stable, static ones. So, even with a set of panel surveys the conclusions we could make about the political life-cycle would be limited to a certain extent by period effects. For example, if we find that turnout rises amongst those who were aged 18-24 in 2001 at the next general election, this increase may be the result of a general change, that is, a period effect, rather than simply a result of them ageing.

Looking again at Table 4.3 it is possible to illustrate these difficulties. We can identify trends within cohorts by starting with any but the oldest age category and tracing the cohort through the table, reading diagonally down and to the right. For example, looking at the cohort aged between 18 and 24 in 1979, reported turnout rose from 70.1 per cent in 1979, to 77.5 per cent in 1983, to 85.6 per cent in 1987. This change could be the result of a life-cycle effect, a period effect, or a combination of the two. The two effects can be confounded in any of the trends shown in any of the diagonal cohorts. Period and generational effects may be confounded in each column of

Table 4.3 and life-cycle and generational effects in each row. An additional problem with this method of tracing cohorts is that due the fact that British elections takes place at irregular intervals, it is not possible to trace exactly the same age groups over time. The cohort analysis in the subsequent sections will attempt to address this second problem.

Various statistical modelling techniques have been used to separate life-cycle, period and generational effects. The dummy variable method makes simplifying assumptions by entering age, period and cohort as dummy variables (e.g. Mason et al 1973). Another method, which requires no extra information, based on Bayesian statistics, uses a simplifying assumption – selecting the simplest combination of age, period and cohort effects that could explain the data (Sasaki and Suzuki 1987). More recently APCC modelling has involved dropping the cohort variable for a set of cohort characteristic variables. This method enables the controlling of age and period whilst a set of cohort characteristics vary. However, all of these techniques are not true age – period – generation models and the results are easily misinterpreted (Glenn 2003). Whilst advanced statistical methods are useful in estimating cohort characteristics, it is argued that they do not adequately solve the life-cycle, period, generation effect identification problem (Glenn 1977, 2003).

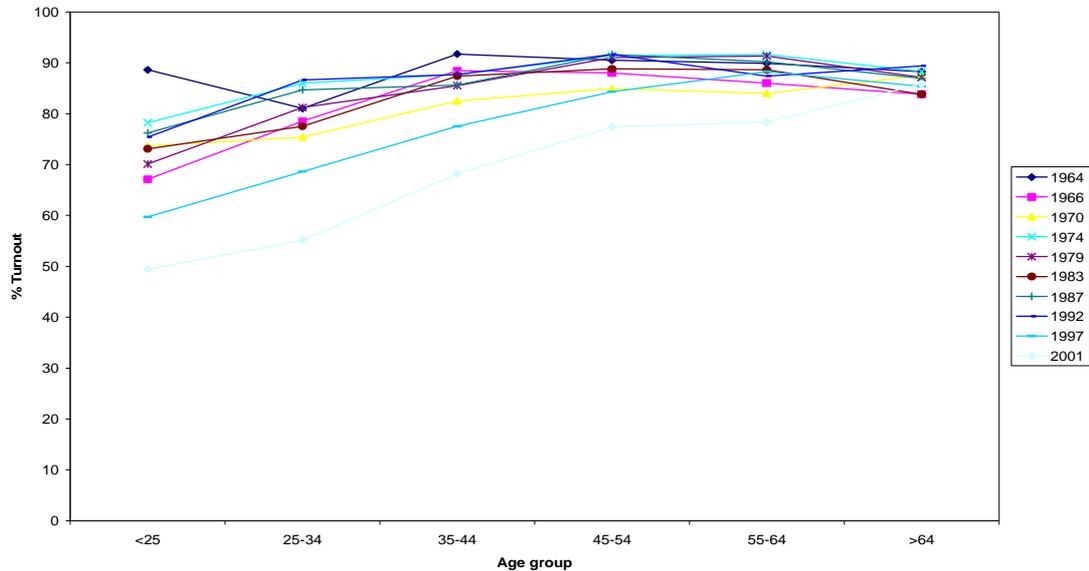
Clarke et al (2004) utilise advanced statistical methods to demonstrate a cohort effect in voter turnout, but this research will seek to utilise alternative methods as described in detail in the methodology.² Other studies looking at the differences between political generations, noting the difficulties associated with separating life-cycle, period and generational effects have argued in favour of using external theory and evidence (Heath et al 1997) and it has been shown that informal methods such as these, with their recognised limitations can lead to at least as reliable conclusions as accepting the results of advanced statistical models (Glenn 2003).

This chapter takes a closer look at the simple cross-tabulations of age and turnout, adding to Clarke et al's findings. The following chapters then assess the impact of a range of predictors of the youth vote in 2001. In Chapter six the analysis uses these predictor variables to develop, in the context of 'side information' an account of changing youth political behaviour. With these critical issues discussed it is useful to reflect on exactly on what the age group data can tell us. We can say two things reliably

² My cohort analysis below, published in 2004 (Phelps 2004) is similar to Clarke et al's (2004) more sophisticated techniques.

from Table 4.3, illustrated in Figure 4.3 below. The 18-24 years olds in the sample are unique in their youth turnout characteristics when compared to previous generations. Secondly, the cohort who reached 25-34 in 2001 is also unique.

Figure 4.3 Age and turnout over time 1964-2001



There are then three distinct, although difficult to separate, ways of looking at the age group data presented above. One way of viewing this is that the effect of youth on the life-cycle is now extended. There are several reasons we might expect this. Firstly, the number of young people who now remain in education during their twenties has increased substantially in the recent years. We would expect that this may increase the period of low turnout associated with youth as it is likely to defer the taking up of responsibilities associated with adulthood such as home ownership and parenthood. Secondly, as Table 4.4 illustrates, we also know that the proportion of people getting married has declined dramatically in the past thirty years.

Table 4.4 Marriage rates in the UK 1978-2007

	All marriages	Number per 1,000 population aged 16+	
		Men	Women
1978	368,258	59.7	47.6
1979	368,853	58.0	46.6
1980	370,022	60.4	48.1

1981	351,973	55.7	44.7
1982	342,166	52.5	42.5
1983	344,334	51.2	41.8
1984	349,186	50.5	41.6
1985	346,389	48.7	40.5
1986	347,924	47.7	39.9
1987	351,761	47.1	39.6
1988	348,492	45.8	38.8
1989	346,697	44.8	38.1
1990	331,150	42.1	36.1
1991	306,756	39.3	33.2
1992	311,564	39.6	33.4
1993	299,197	37.7	31.8
1994	291,069	36.3	30.6
1995	283,012	34.7	29.3
1996	278,975	33.6	28.5
1997	272,536	32.3	27.5
1998	267,303	31.1	26.6
1999	263,515	30.1	25.8
2000	267,961	30.1	25.9
2001	249,227	27.4	23.7
2002	255,596	27.3	23.9
2003	270,109	28.2	24.8
2004	273,069	27.7	24.6
2005	247,805	24.5	21.9
2006	239,450	23.0	20.7
2007	231,450	21.6	19.7

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2008

We would expect marriage to be one aspect of the transition from youth to adulthood and there is robust evidence to show that married people vote more than single or cohabiting people (Denver 2008).

One retort to these arguments might be that whilst the above are undoubtedly true, they are long-term changes, rather than short-term ones and therefore they are unable to account for changing electoral turnout over a period of one or two elections. But as I have discussed above, one of the central veins of argument to run through this thesis is that long-term factors can play a role in relatively sudden changes in turnout,

when they interact with medium and short-term factors. It is quite plausible that the effects of the results of long-term changes could be masked by the mitigating effect of short- and medium-term factors on them, and the effects only manifested once the short-term factors involved have dissipated.

Whilst we might expect these characteristics to be revealed over a longer period of time amongst older voters, the situation is different for those entering the electorate at any given election. A social or political period may affect younger people differently to older people. Younger people, because they have not experienced as many earlier periods or formed habits, attitudes or values associated with these earlier periods, are more susceptible to the prevailing social circumstances. These young people, not yet eligible to vote, could be forming habits at a crucial stage of their life – in their formative years, that are not revealed until they first come to vote. When these attitudinal habits are revealed, they may present themselves in quite different patterns of electoral behaviour to the norms of previous cohorts. This argument is significantly strengthened by recent research carried out by Mark Franklin. Franklin's (2004) comparative research found that voting is to a large extent habitual. Voters socialised during high turnout political periods are likely to acquire the habit of voting, whereas those socialised during low turnout periods are equally likely to acquire the habit of non-voting. Crucially, Franklin provides evidence of relative immobility in turnout after the third election experienced. This is critical for our understanding of the turnout figures presented above, as many of those who experienced their first election in 1997 have subsequently experienced two further low turnout elections in 2001 and 2005, are likely to have established a habit of abstention as a result. We can explain the electoral turnout of the 25-34 year olds in 2001 in this way. Whilst Franklin focuses on the character of elections themselves, in the later chapters of the thesis I put forward a case for the influence or character of the political period as a whole, not just the character of elections, on the voting behaviour of recent young people. In practice it is impossible to say from the turnout figures alone whether this is the case. But, in subsequent chapters, the thesis will seek to investigate what factors influenced the decision not to vote of so many of this generation and to examine the plausibility of a generational explanation by looking at their socialisation experiences.

It may be that the problems associated with separating life-cycle, period and generational difference, as well as the dominance of the life-cycle explanations have disinclined social scientists to investigate whether young people are different today than

they were, say, twenty or thirty years ago. In practice it may be impossible to say we have definitively disentangled life cycle, generational and period effects. However, it is evident we can go some way towards understanding these phenomenon using survey data to test to see how a range of variables are associated with them.

4.5 Cohort analysis of turnout decline

So far this chapter has established that there has been a significant decline in turnout between 1992 and 2001. The difference in change between the youngest two sections of the population and the other age groups, particularly the older ones, suggests that there is something about the period 1992-2001 that is affecting young people more than the rest of the population. We can detect from this strong evidence of a period effect across age groups, but most significantly some evidence that a generational effect may be in progress. But using age group data the chapter has only been able to compare different age groupings at elections.

To facilitate a wider understanding of how turnout is changing over time and to overcome the difficulty of tracing age groups over time; ten age cohorts have been identified according to when they reach the age of 18 between the elections of 1964 – 2001.³ By calculating their age at their first opportunity to vote and then at each subsequent general election, it is possible to trace their turnout characteristics as they age. This enables the analyses to look in some detail at the political life-cycles of individual cohorts and to establish what the political life cycle of British voters looks like. It will also allow some tentative observations to be made about the life-cycle to date of the most recent generations of young voters and some conclusions made about the dissipation of youth effects on the life-cycle.

Table 4.5 details eleven age cohorts. The oldest of these cohorts was aged 21-25 in 1964 and the youngest, 18-22 in 1997 and 22-26 in 2001. It is not possible to chart the early life course of the youngest age cohort as it has only experienced one general election in 2001. By reading across the rows we can see the ages of the cohorts at each general election since 1964. Using the cross-tabulation procedure in SPSS it is possible to produce turnout figures for each cohort and trace its electoral activity through the political life-cycle.

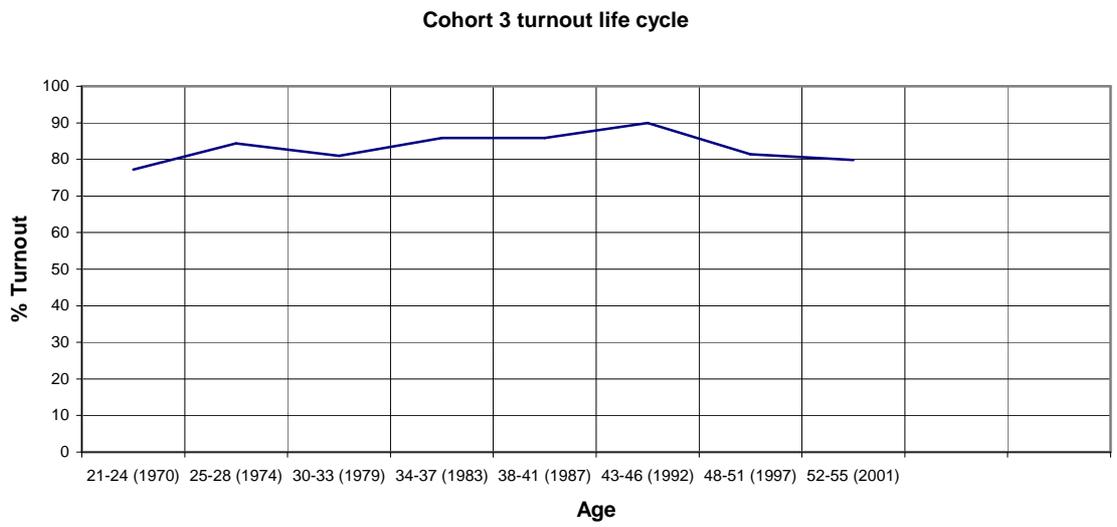
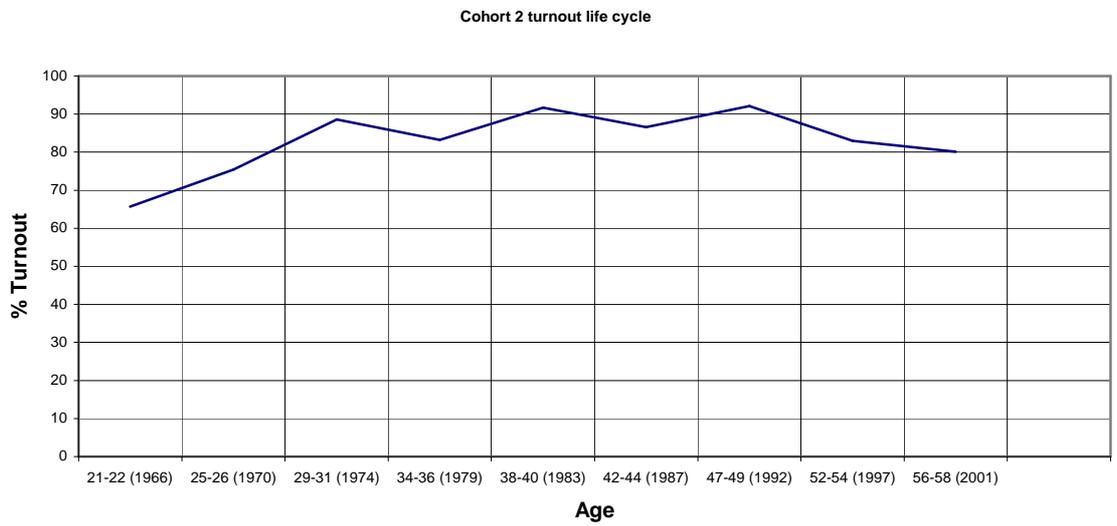
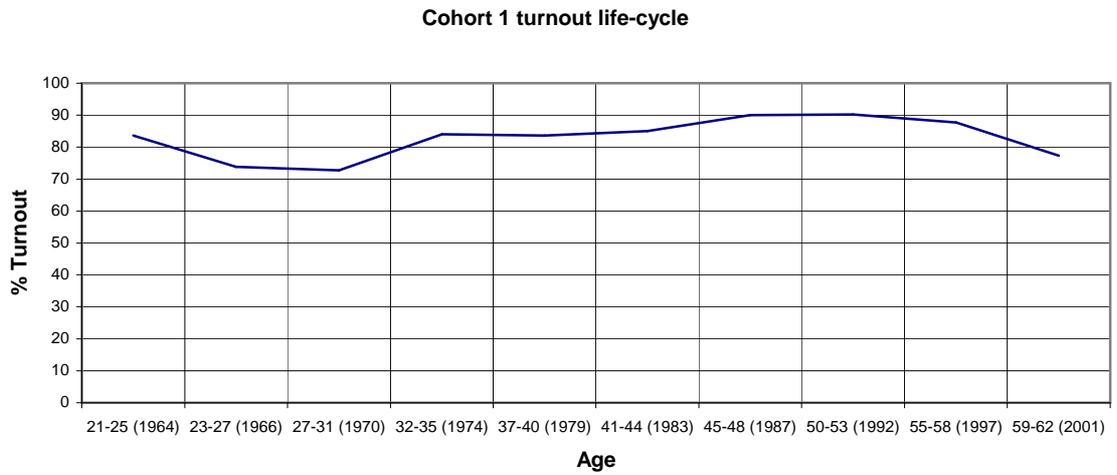
³ We are able to first detect the activities of age cohorts 1, 2 and 3 at age 21, as prior to 1970, when the franchise was extended, the minimum voting age was 21.

For each of the above age groups a cross-tabulation of age and turnout was performed. The results of the cross-tabulations for each of the eleven age cohorts are shown in Table 4.6 below. For each cohort, the table shows; from left to right: age group and election year, per cent turnout and number of respondents in each age category. Figure 4.4 also illustrates the turnout life-cycles of ten of the cohorts on standard line graphs.

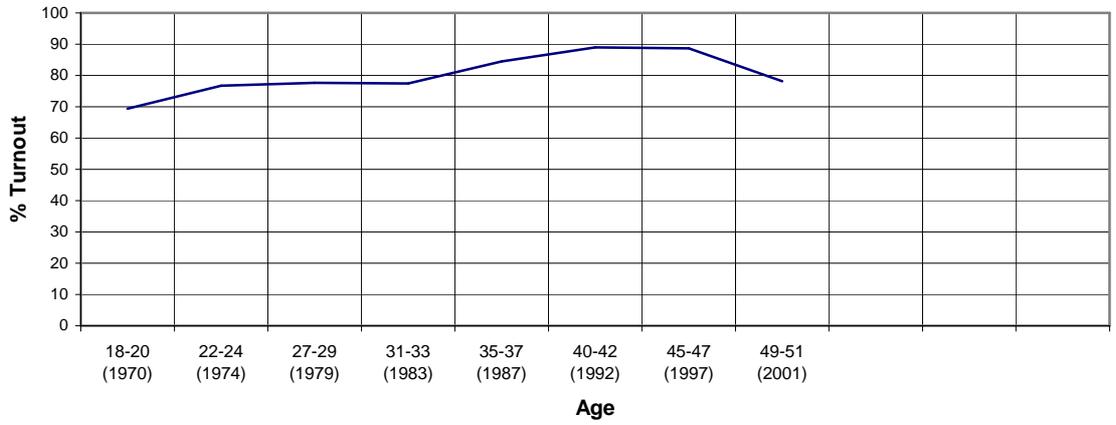
Table 4.6 Turnout at British general elections amongst ten age cohorts

Cohort 1			Cohort 2			Cohort 3		
<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
21-25 (1964)	83.6	146	21-22 (1966)	65.7	87	21-24 (1970)	77.2	145
23-27 (1966)	73.9	188	25-26 (1970)	75.4	98	25-28 (1974)	84.4	199
27-31 (1970)	72.8	183	29-31 (1974)	88.6	140	30-33 (1979)	81	195
32-35 (1974)	84	156	34-36 (1979)	83.2	123	34-37 (1983)	85.9	334
37-40 (1979)	83.6	134	38-40 (1983)	91.7	216	38-41 (1987)	85.9	340
41-44 (1983)	85	247	42-44 (1987)	86.6	179	43-46 (1992)	90	311
45-48 (1987)	90	229	47-49 (1992)	92.1	177	48-51 (1997)	81.4	237
50-53 (1992)	90.2	214	52-54 (1997)	83	159	52-55 (2001)	79.8	208
55-58 (1997)	87.7	197	56-58 (2001)	80.1	141			
59-62 (2001)	77.3	186						
Cohort 4			Cohort 5			Cohort 6		
<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
18-20 (1970)	69.4	124	18-21 (1974)	79.7	128	18-22 (1979)	72.5	69
22-24 (1974)	76.7	120	23-26 (1979)	78.2	110	22-26 (1983)	72.9	391
27-29 (1979)	77.7	121	27-30 (1983)	77.7	273	26-30 (1987)	83.4	355
31-33 (1983)	77.4	248	31-34 (1987)	87.5	255	31-35 (1992)	85.9	361
35-37 (1987)	84.5	238	36-39 (1992)	86.9	222	36-40 (1997)	74.3	350
40-42 (1992)	89	200	41-44 (1997)	82.7	254	40-44 (2001)	71.7	269
45-47 (1997)	88.7	203	45-48 (2001)	74.3	206			
49-51 (2001)	78.2	142						
Cohort 7			Cohort 8			Cohort 9		
<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>
18-21 (1983)	74.1	309	18-21 (1987)	72.8	272	18-22 (1992)	75.3	263
22-25 (1987)	80.7	290	23-26 (1992)	79.7	226	23-27 (1997)	63.2	261
27-30 (1992)	87.4	278	28-31 (1997)	70	307	27-31 (2001)	54.3	230
32-35 (1997)	70.6	313	32-35 (2001)	62.9	248			
36-39 (2001)	65.5	252						
Cohort 10			Cohort 11					
<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Age/year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>			
18-22 (1997)	59.4	197	18-21	52.2	115			
22-26 (2001)	42	143						

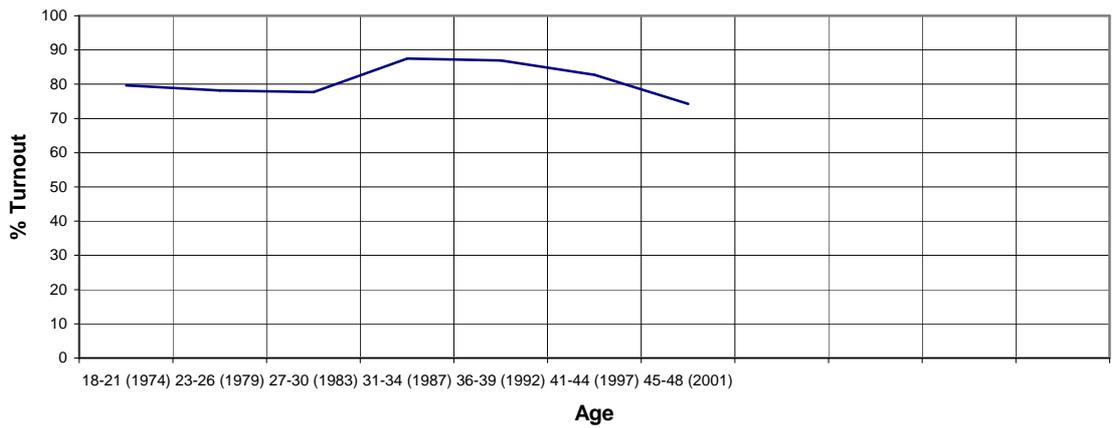
Figure 4.4 Turnout life-cycles of ten age cohorts 1964-2001



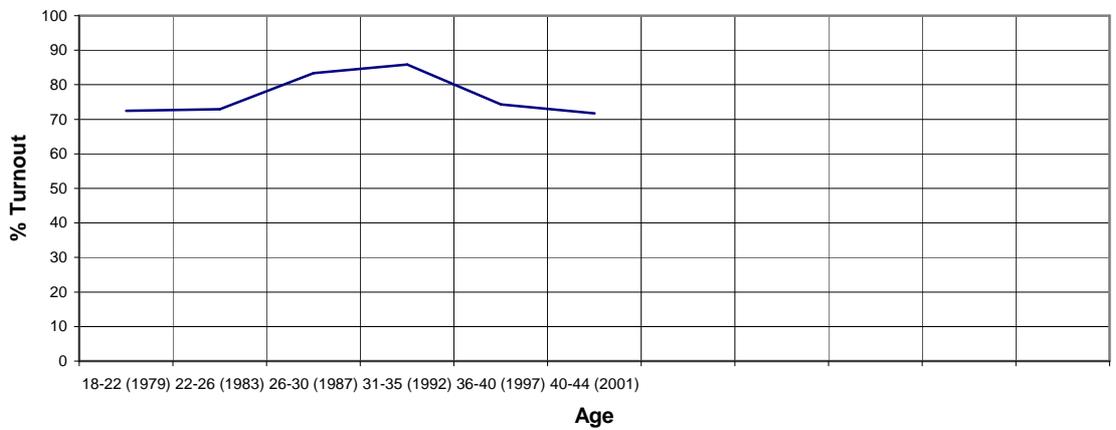
Cohort 4 turnout life cycle



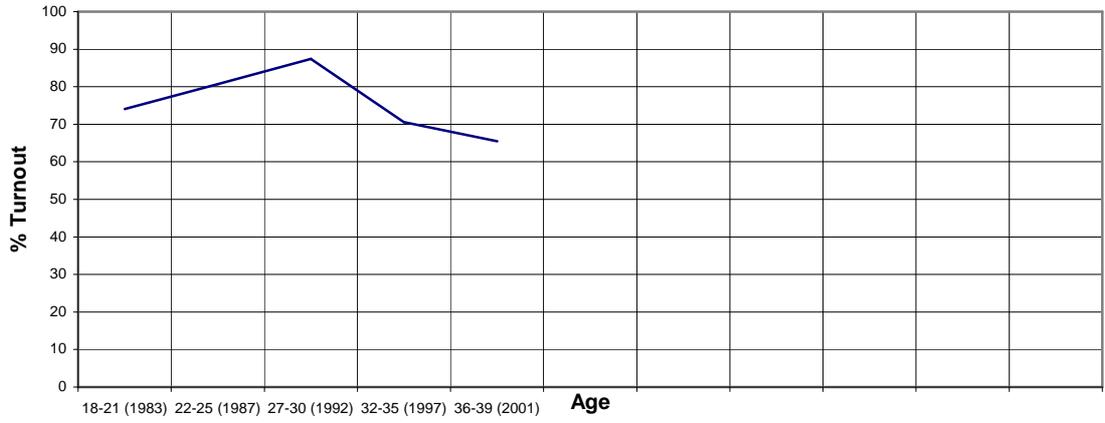
Cohort 5 turnout life cycle



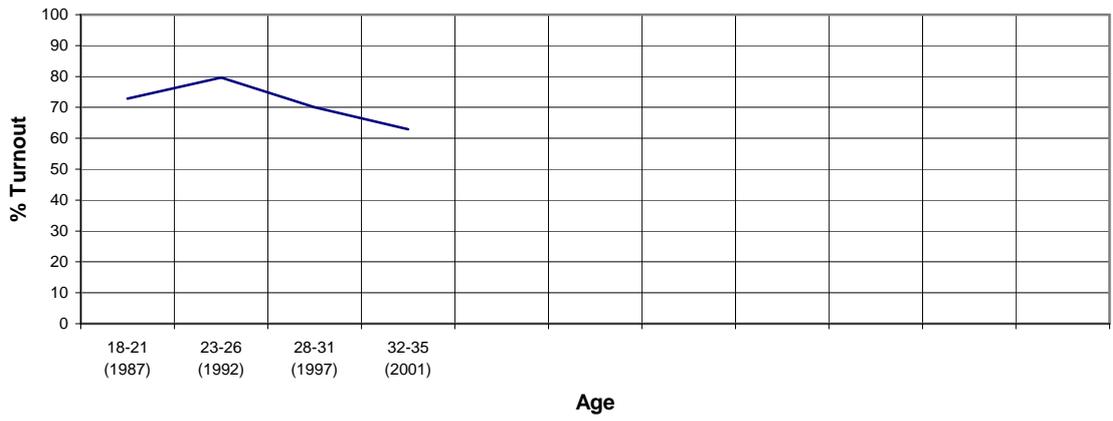
Cohort 6 turnout life cycle



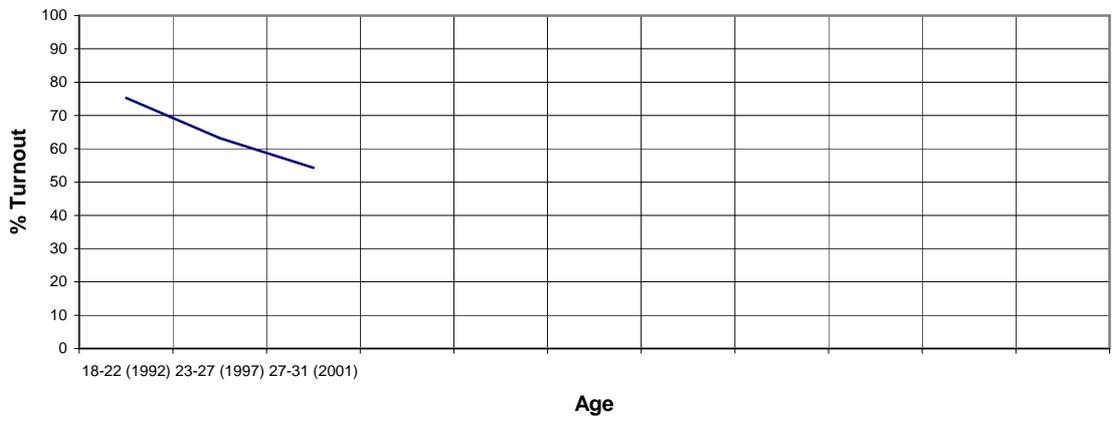
Cohort 7 turnout life cycle



Cohort 8 turnout life cycle



Cohort 9 turnout life cycle



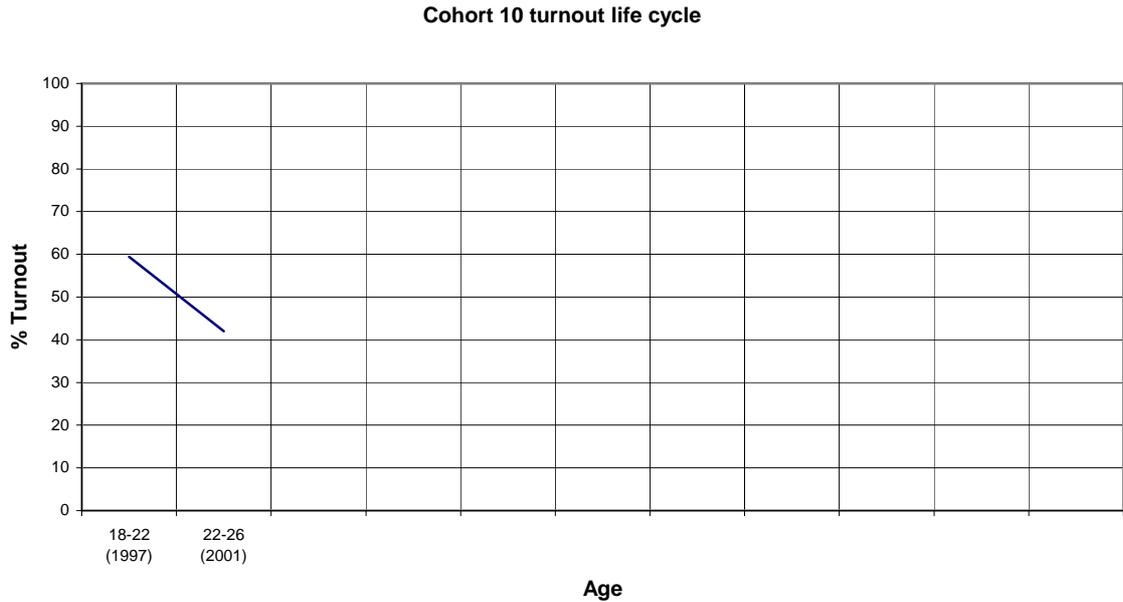


Table 4.6 and Figure 4.4 enable some initial observations about the political life-cycles of each cohort. As discussed at various stages, the research on political participation has consistently argued that young people vote less than older people. As a result one of the central tasks of any analysis of youth turnout is to attempt to differentiate between life-cycle effects, period effects and generational effects. Looking at Figure 4.4 above it is clear that the life-cycle model of political participation holds as a general rule for most of the cohorts. Looking at cohorts 1 through 8; each of these cohorts had become electorally active at a fairly low level but a higher proportion vote as they age, as we might expect. However, there are considerable differences: Cohort 4 for example follows what we may think of as a fairly predictable life-cycle pattern, first casting their ballot in 1970 aged 18-20 at a rate of 69.4 per cent and then turning out in greater numbers as they age: at 22-24 in 1974 turning out at 76.7 per cent; at 27-29 in 1979 at 77.7, rising to 89 per cent as they reach their forties. In contrast to this: cohort 5 enters the electorate in 1974 aged 18-21 turning out to vote at 79.7 per cent, but this declines slightly to 78.2 per cent in 1979 as the cohort reaches age 23-26, and again to 77.7 per cent in 1983 as they reach age 27-30. It is only at the next general election in 1987 when the cohort reaches the age of between 31 and 34 that it 'comes of age' turning out at a rate of 87.5 per cent. But these are fairly minor differences and given that period effects are always likely to intervene we might expect some variation in the life-cycle.

One way of calculating an age of political maturity would be to plot a standard political life-cycle curve based on data from all the cohorts. From this it would be

possible to measure the individual cohorts to see how their life-cycles deviate from the standard curve. But this is problematic as we cannot reliably calculate an average figure for the different ages because the age groups of the ten cohorts differ as a result of irregular elections years in Britain. As far as we are concerned here, the essential point about a life-cycle effect is whether it can explain low levels of turnout among young voters. The difficulty is that there is considerable evidence of a period effect at work on all age cohorts between 1992 and 2001 as we can see the declines amongst all cohorts.

With Franklin's theory of habitual voting in mind, we might suspect the information provided by the cohort data is indicative of a generational change for a number of reasons. We can see from Figure 4.4 that, of the older cohorts, those who are likely to have developed the habit of voting prior to 1997, cohorts 6 and 7 experienced particularly sharp declines in 1997 and 2001. We might expect their rates of turnout to recover consistent with the habitual voting thesis.

Cohort 7 is particularly interesting because it came of voting age at the last low turnout election prior to 1997, in 1983. Whilst it is impossible to separate age, period and cohort effects, this cohort's life-cycle trajectory recovered from the low of 1983 at the 1987 and 1992 elections before being affected by the 1992-1997 period. This is illustrative of the problems discussed above as it is impossible to tell with certainty whether age or period factors were prominent.

Young people have nearly always voted at lower levels than older people. We might therefore expect this to continue at low turnout elections and for declines in turnout amongst these age groups to be more pronounced than amongst older age groups. This explanation might be used to understand the disproportionate decline in the youth vote in 1997 and 2001. However, there are two reasons to suspect that age alone cannot account on its own for these lows in youth turnout. Again, Cohort 7 is particularly interesting. This group came of voting age at the last low turnout general election before 1997, in 1983. Whilst overall turnout fell considerably less between 1979 and 1983 (3 per cent) than between 1992 and 1997 (6 per cent) or between 1997 and 2001 (12 per cent), we can see from Table 3 that reported turnout *rose* for 18-24 year olds between 1979 and 1983, compared to the declines between 1992 and 1997 and 1997 and 2001. Whilst this is only evidence from one election it is indicative of the general picture starting to emerge.

To provide additional information on the political life-cycle of these cohorts, Table 4.7 and Figure 4.5 show how the effects of youth on the political life-cycle

dissipate as the cohorts' age. We might expect that turnout levels will increase through each stage of the life cycle. As expected, for most cohorts turnout increases through these early stages; or when this is not the case, it rises by the time each cohort reaches its fourth election (around the mid-thirties), illustrated by the blue/green final bar for each cohort in Figure 5.

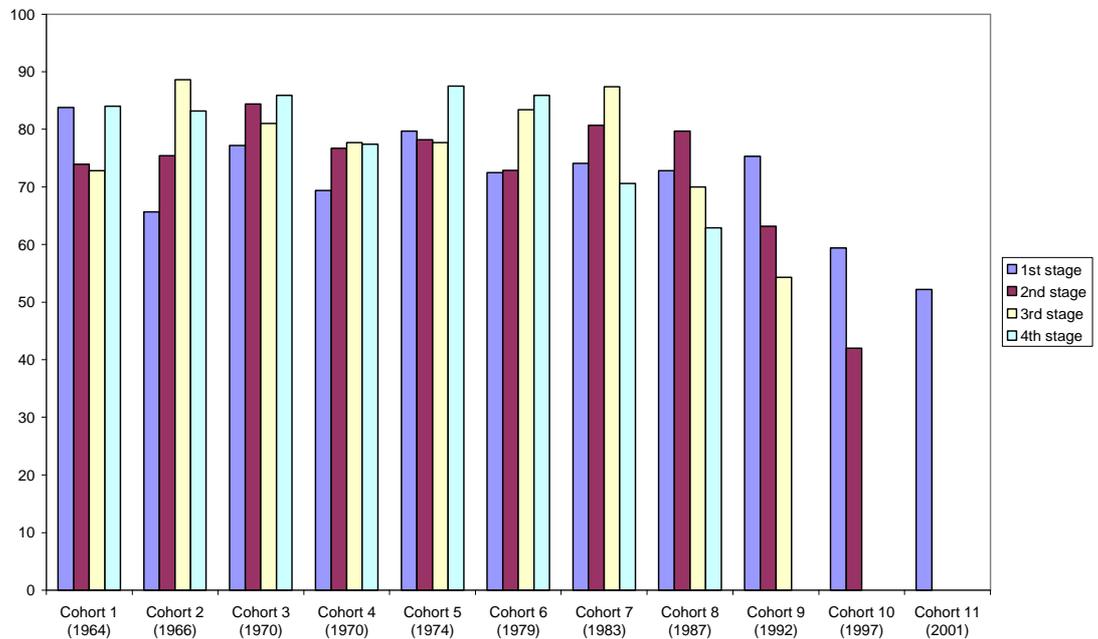
Table 4.7 Dissipation of youth effects on the turnout life-cycle

	1st election	2nd election	3rd election	4th election
Cohort 1 (1964)	83.8	73.9	72.8	84
Cohort 2 (1966)	65.7	75.4	88.6	83.2
Cohort 3 (1970)	77.2	84.4	81	85.9
Cohort 4 (1970)	69.4	76.7	77.7	77.4
Cohort 5 (1974)	79.7	78.2	77.7	87.5
Cohort 6 (1979)	72.5	72.9	83.4	85.9
Cohort 7 (1983)	74.1	80.7	87.4	70.6
Cohort 8 (1987)	72.8	79.7	70	62.9
Cohort 9 (1992)	75.3	63.2	54.3	
Cohort 10 (1997)	59.4	42		
Cohort 11 (2001)	52.2			

However, starting with cohort 7 we can see that things start to change. Cohorts 7 and 8 are the last two cohorts we can calculate the same four stages of the turnout life-cycle for. At first glance it appears that levels of turnout for cohorts 1 to 6 are similarly high at the fourth stage of the life-cycle, when cohorts are aged in their mid thirties. This would tend to support the idea that the effect of youth on the life-cycle dissipates at around this age. But looking at cohort 7 and 8 the rate of turnout at this stage of the life-cycle is considerably lower. Here it is impossible to separate period and generational differences although there is evidence of both. Figure 4.5 shows that cohort 7 followed a typical life-cycle course, with its rate of turnout increasing at stage 2 and stage 3 of the life-cycle, but then falling at stage 4, in 1997. For cohort 8, the same picture: turnout rose as it reached the second stage of the life-cycle in 1992, but then fell as it reached its third stage, in 1997 and fourth stage in 2001. This would suggest a period effect at work

where voters were less inclined to vote at the 1997 election at which New Labour was widely anticipated to win.

Figure 4.5 Dissipation of youth effects on the turnout life-cycle



Looking at cohort 9, we can see that this cohort has now experienced its second low turnout election in succession. Table 4.7 and Figure 4.5 show that as this cohort enters the third stage of its life-cycle it has the lowest level of turnout of any previous cohort at this stage. It is quite possible that its turnout will be boosted to a new high as it reaches its fourth stage, either as a result of ageing, or period effects or a combination of both. But it is equally possible, given that it has now experienced two low turnout elections, that, especially if the next election is also a low turnout election, these habits will become consolidated, even if moderated by the effects of ageing.

Figure 4.4 and Table 4.6 show that cohort 10, the youngest cohort to have experienced two elections shows the most pronounced decline. If we factor out the impact of the political period, we can see that only two out of the remaining eight cohorts in Table 4.7 experience a decline in turnout between stage one and two of the life-cycle. It appears that we can identify a distinct set of turnout characteristics amongst those who received their political socialisation during the Thatcher-Major and Blair years. This suggests that life-cycle explanations alone are unable to adequately account for the declines in turnout discussed as their characteristics are so distinct from previous generations.

It is evident from Table 4.2 that turnout in Britain had never before dropped to the lows of 1997 and 2001. We can see from Table 4.3, consistent with Franklin's 'habitual voting' thesis, that the effects of these two elections fell with age. It appears that the older age groups may have been less affected, having acquired the habit of voting at earlier higher turnout elections. In subsequent chapters I argue that just as high turnout and competitive elections induce certain habits in people, so it is plausible to suggest that other aspects of political periods also shape their participatory characteristics. The habitual voting thesis strongly suggests that those who came of voting age since 1992 are less likely to complete a recovery from the effects of youth on the turnout life-cycle. The fact that they have experienced one or two low turnout elections and that these elections were unique in terms of turnout makes them more likely to have picked up non-voting habit than previous cohorts.

4.6 Conclusion

Although the life-cycles of the youngest cohorts do not enable us to draw solid conclusions as to whether we are witnessing a generational effect or not, the level of the decline in turnout is unprecedented when compared to the other cohorts. It is difficult to imagine, looking at the trajectories of the 10 age cohorts that these recent cohorts, whose turnout at the last two elections has been far lower than that of their predecessors at comparable stages of the electoral life-cycle could entirely recover from such a downturn in electoral participation (see also Park 2000). We can see from Figure 4.4 that cohorts have recovered from downturns in turnout in the past, but never has a cohort turned out at such a low rate as the recent cohorts in this analysis show.

We simply cannot yet tell definitively whether generational or period effects have occurred (as per Figure. 2) because not enough time has passed. But, whatever the limitations of the conclusions we can make here, one thing we can say with confidence is that these young people are unique in their turnout characteristics. There patterns of electoral turnout have never been witnessed before.

In order to probe further into the experiences of these cohorts it is necessary to discover what it was about the period 1992-2001 that affected young voters so dramatically. This will shed light on the importance of periods. It seems likely that the particularly low levels of turnout amongst the youngest age cohorts are likely to partially recover as they age and become politically mature, but if periods do affect

voters then it may take a particularly positive political period for these voters' levels of turnout to recover. There is some fairly strong indicative evidence to suggest that a generational effect may be occurring. In subsequent chapters we will test a set of alternative explanatory hypotheses to see whether or not these support a generational change explanation. Firstly it is necessary to discover how certain social characteristics are related to turnout change. Previous research has shown that young citizens should not be treated as a homogenous group as is often the case; they are divided as are other sections of the population on various social lines. It is necessary to provide a fuller picture of this issue to understand how these social differences impact on young voters.

Theories and Models of Voter Turnout

5.1 Introduction

With some conclusions made on how turnout at British general elections appears to be changing, the next stage is to introduce theories of change from the recent literature and to discuss how these might help explain the trends revealed in the previous chapter. In the subsequent chapter these theories are operationalised to facilitate their testing in the empirical analysis of BES data.

5.2 The sociological framework¹

We saw in chapter two that the early studies of voting behaviour, prior to the existence of large scale survey data were dominated by what we might term sociological explanations. In Chapter two I made the case that today's young people are distinct from their counterparts from previous generations. Whilst the decline in cleavage based politics and in partisanship also led to the relative decline in focus on sociological variables in explaining political behaviour, it is clear that social environments, characteristics and socialisation are still likely to play a role in individual's behaviour.

Sociological explanations of voting behaviour are based on the idea that social characteristics such as class, ethnicity, gender and race condition political preferences. But is it possible that these types of characteristics could explain turnout decline over a short period? We might expect the answer to this to be no given that these things are

¹ The models discussed here are based on those used by Clarke et al (2004) and Pattie et al (2004). Clarke et al provide an additional model in the rational voter framework, but as its variables are 'nested' in the general incentives model it is omitted here.

unlikely to change enough in a short period to be able to explain a significant change in voting behaviour. But it is plausible that one or more of these factors make up at least a small part of the explanation for change. As I discussed previously, long-term changes may have a sudden impact on voting behaviour where a cohort of young voters with distinctive attitudinal and behavioural characteristics emerge out of their political socialisation to vote for the first time. In addition to social characteristics, social contexts influence these characteristics and the experiences, environments and interests of members of the same social group become matched to policies and programmes advanced by a particular political party (Clarke et al 2004). In the sociological framework this social characteristics-contexts approach is supplemented by the social psychology explanation. These types of explanations posit that formative socialisation experiences imprint political psychological attachments, most notably party identifications. Identifications once formed tend to serve as starting point which continually influence individual's political beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. In the sociological framework then, social characteristics and environments are important aspects of socialisation which play a crucial part in the development of skills and resources which in turn impact on political interest and involvement. Whilst the importance of sociological variables in explaining voting behaviour in recent years has been relatively low as rational choice account have developed sophisticated explanations of how modern citizens are coming to make choices, evidence of the emergence of a qualitatively distinct cohort of citizens suggests the need to re-engage with sociological models of participation. We might suspect that the emphasis placed on political socialisation, in particular, is likely to be of critical importance given that the interpretation of the literature in Chapter two and the argument that the socialisation of recent cohorts was unique - specifically the unique context of the 1997 and 2001 and elections.

The civic voluntarism model

The first model in the sociological framework and perhaps the most well-known and widely applied model in political science is the civic voluntarism model. The model has its origins in the work of Sidney Verba and Norman Nie (1972) in America but the model has also been used to explain participation in a number of other countries including Britain (Parry et al 1992). The idea at the centre of the civic voluntarism

model is that resources facilitate participation. But psychological engagement and recruitment are also important. Essentially the model states that ‘people may be inactive because they lack resources, because they lack psychological engagement with politics, or because they are outside of the recruitment networks that bring people into politics’ (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995: 269). People with educational resources are more likely to vote as education increases access to and inability to process information. Social class correlates with skills which are useful political resources. Recruitment by political parties or by other agents will also increase the likelihood of voting. Political interest, strength of partisanship and political efficacy are seen as aspect of psychological engagement in politics (Clarke et al 2004).

How would we expect this model to fare given that we know that the British electorate has, as a whole, become considerably more affluent since the 1950s and that there has been a huge increase in the number of those in higher education? It would seem that if this theory of participation is correct, participation should have increased, rather than decreased. If we first consider physical resources – it seems unlikely that these types of resources could have changed enough in the period in question to account for the changes in electoral participation witnessed since 1992. Even when we consider the idea that sudden changes in electoral behaviour are possible as a cohort with distinctive attitudes and behavioural characteristics enters the electorate for the first time; it seems totally implausible that a downturn in physical resources in this period – one of economic growth - could have played a part. However, the model also emphasises the importance of psychological engagement with politics and sees these as crucial resources to participation. Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter two, it would seem more plausible to suggest that these types of resources have declined amongst recent cohorts of young people. As discussed in Chapter two, we know that partisanship – one crucial measure of psychological engagement with politics has declined since the 1970s. The empirical analysis and subsequent chapters will reveal whether this impacted on today’s youth and Chapter seven will discuss the findings in detail. We also know that another psychological resource emphasised in the civic voluntarism model, political efficacy, has featured prominently in the youth literature. It is evident that the first of the sociological models, whilst dated, has some important features which alone justify its inclusion in the empirical analysis in the next chapter.

A key criticism of the civic voluntarism model is that it does not take into account incentives to political participation. The equity-fairness model or relative

deprivation model provides an alternative perspective on participation but one which is still centred in the sociological tradition of analysis. At its centre is the idea of incentives. According to this model individuals react to and are motivated by a sense of disadvantage. Here resources inhibit rather than promote participation. The core idea in this model is that peer group comparison influences political participation. Individuals compare themselves with different types of peer groups and where these comparisons reflect negatively on themselves this can produce frustration or aggression which may manifest as various types of political participation (Dalton 2003). Relative deprivation is based on individuals' comparisons of their real life situations with their life expectations which are commonly defined in reference to their peer groups. If a significant gap exists between the two relative deprivation is likely to result, which will in turn have political consequences (Clarke et al 2004).

The core ideas in the perceived equity-fairness model are a sense of general deprivation which is an individual's sense that he or she has not received a fair share in life, or that political or social arrangements are unfair. Economic deprivation refers to a person's judgement as to his or her prospective or retrospective household financial situation, and attribution of government responsibility for this. Emotional responses are negative reactions to personal economic conditions. Policy dissatisfaction refers to negative evaluations of the government's policy performance. We might expect this model to fare well when tested and the model would appear to be highly relevant to the context of modern youth politics. There is considerable evidence of an increase in involvement in unconventional activity, including protest activity (e.g. Henn et al 2002, 2005; Norris 2003; O'Toole 2003a, 2003b; Marsh et al 2007), although there is also evidence that this kind of activity represents a replacement for conventional politics rather than representing anti-state disaffection (Norris 2005).

The Social Capital model

Another model which has become popular in recent years as researchers have realised the significance of social bonds to civic life is the social capital model. The model has instant intuitive appeal considering the social, political and economic changes that took place in Britain since 1979 associated with the Thatcher governments. The period was one marked by the decline of the 'social' and the rise of the 'individual' and for this reason alone we might suspect that changing social relationships may have impacted on

the young people socialised in the period since 1979. Chapter seven will elaborate an argument for the prominence of social capital explanations of youth disengagement with conventional politics.

The social capital model is based on the idea of social trust. The key idea in the socio-cultural variant is that ‘people who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often...participate more often in politics and community organisations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue’ (Putnam 2000: 137). In its rational cost-benefit variant social trust is generated by institutions and groups producing desired outcomes (Becker 1975; Coleman 1988). The core concepts in the social capital model are social trust; a person’s sense that other people are trustworthy and fair, and voluntary participation; whether individuals offer to become active in community or public matters or were asked to do so.

5.3 The rational voter framework

Rational choice explanations derived from economic theory have sought to explain political behaviour by viewing individuals as rational decision makers who are capable of weighing up the options available to them and making political decisions in accordance with their judgements. Individuals assess the costs associated with voting and if they outweigh the perceived benefits of voting they do not vote. The decision to vote according to rational choice accounts has three key elements. *Pivotality* is the calculated probability of casting a deciding vote that enables a preferred party to win and prevent a less preferred party or parties from doing so (Clarke et al 2004). With regard to turnout this can be simplified as the calculation of whether casting his or her vote will make a difference. If voting is unlikely to achieve anything or result in any benefits to the voter, why should he or she vote? The voter is interested, according to rational choice theory, in making a decision based on ‘utility’ and therefore seeks to determine which party has implemented or proposed policies that will be of perceived *benefit* to him or her. Pivotality interacts with benefits as any benefits are discounted by the probability that that an individual can exert a crucial or pivotal effect on the outcome. The voter must also assess the *costs* associated with voting; the time needed to vote and to acquire the information to make an informed choice (Clarke et al 2004).

Various options are available to the prospective voter when making these assessments. If the voter feels that parties differ in the benefits they offer, he or she will opt for the party that offers the most utility. But pivotality and costs are taken into account and the individual may decide not to vote. The voter may think that all parties are equal in the benefits they offer. As the benefits derived from voting are equal he or she may decide not to vote. Secondly, if the individual thinks that the probability of casting a vote that makes a difference, a pivotal vote, is small, even if the benefits are large, then the cost associated with voting may prevent the individual from voting. This is crucial for rational choice models of turnout as the probability of casting a pivotal ballot at an election will usually be very small (Clarke et al 2004). This raises the interesting paradox; if the expected utility of abstaining is greater than the expected utility of voting, why do so many people vote?

Developments in rational choice accounts of voter turnout have attempted to address its critics who argue for example that the typical voter is not a ‘supercitizen’ (Dalton 2003). Not all citizens are interested in and knowledgeable about politics and public affairs. Neither are they capable of processing large amounts of information or making calculated unbiased decisions. Two models derived from the rational voter framework are particularly useful for our understanding of the modern voter.

The cognitive mobilisation model

The first of these is based on a wide improvement in the political skills and resources of western citizens in the second half of the twentieth century. Education, media exposure and political awareness have vastly expanded since the 1950s contributing to a ‘growth in the public’s overall level of political sophistication through a process of *cognitive mobilisation*’ (Dalton 2003: 19). Firstly citizens are now capable of processing large amounts of politically relevant information due to enhanced access to higher education resources. Secondly, it is now easier and less costly for citizens to find information through print and electronic forms. These developments have meant that people are now more interested and knowledgeable about social and political issues and are more aware and concerned about politics and a functioning democracy. As a result of these developments citizens are more likely to be critical of governments and their policies and are more likely to be dissatisfied. Crucially, dissatisfaction may lead to abstention from electoral politics. The core ideas of the cognitive mobilisation model are

education, media use, political interest, political knowledge and policy (dis)satisfaction (Clarke et al 2004). These variables overlap considerably with those in the civic voluntarism model, but the key difference is that the latter implies that more resources will be associated with a greater propensity to vote, whereas the cognitive mobilisation model implies the opposite.

The general incentives model

The general incentives model addresses the paradox discussed above by incorporating ideas about why rational actors might engage in collective action. The theory is a synthesis of rational choice and psychological accounts of voter turnout. The core idea is that individuals need incentives and cues in order to vote. It supplements rational choice accounts of political behaviour by arguing that individuals take into account a wide range of incentives when they are considering when to vote and who to vote for rather than simply considering the individual incentives discussed above.

The incentives in this decision are individual, group, system and expressive benefits. Group benefits are not just those that flow to one's family but to people who are viewed as similar to oneself or those in need of help. System benefits are benefits that accrue to a political system when citizens vote. The recognition that a healthy democracy requires citizen involvement makes people vote. Expressive benefits are the sense of satisfaction that people receive when they demonstrate their support for political actors, institutions or processes. Social norms are also included in the model. The model suggests that social norms are parts of the socio-political context in which people make choices about whether to vote, or not to vote (Clarke et al 2004). If other people in one's social environment think that voting is important then you are also more likely to.

5.4 Summary and conclusions

This chapter has set out four commonly used models of voter turnout with the broad frameworks of political participation identified in Chapter one. These have recently been used to explain voting behaviour and citizenship in Britain in two of the most prominent works in the field (Clarke et al 2004; Pattie et al 2004). Chapter six will operationalise these models in a similar way to Clarke et al (2004), testing how each model fares

among different age groups. The preliminary conclusions of Chapter six will form the basis of the building of a theory of generational change to be tested in more detail in Chapter seven.

Why abstain? Explaining declining youth turnout in Britain between 1992 and 2001

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter four of the thesis I used two approaches to investigating whether recent cohorts of young citizens are displaying distinctly different voting patterns to previous generations. I argued that there is a strong indication that a marked decline in the typical first and second stages of the electoral turnout life-cycle is indicative of a generational change in voting behaviour. I detail the central methodological problem that life-cycle effects, period effects and generational effects are so difficult to separate that it is impossible to conclude the patterns of turnout amongst recent cohorts of young people represent anything more than a change in the characteristics of young people at that given stage in the life-cycle. This is the key problem – not enough time has passed to know definitively whether period or generational forces are at play. However, I also argue that it is possible to say for sure that those who came of age in 1997 and 2001 are unique. Their levels of participation have never been witnessed before. The case for their uniqueness is strengthened by the secondary literature relating to changes in the social basis of political supports and the way in which young people conceive political activity.

In the Chapter three I detail the rationale for the use of BES data to look at change over time. I discuss one of the limitations of this methodological approach. Using BES data to compare behaviour and attitudinal changes of different generations is made problematic due to the fact that the explanatory variables included in the 2001 data set are not available in previous data sets. This means that it is in practice

impossible to accurately trace most of the variables which operationalise the models introduced in the previous chapter, before 1997 and in many cases before 2001. This posed an important methodological decision for this research. The first option was to attempt to operationalise the models through a reconsideration of their theoretical frameworks, by omitting a number of the variables, or by replacing them with others. Whilst this approach would have provided some evidence on the factors specific to the turnout decision amongst previous cohorts, comparison between it and the 2001 cohorts would have been problematic. The approach taken in the remainder of the thesis is to focus on the variables and models which most accurately predict voter turnout in the year 2001 when changes in turnout were the most evident. This is done by, focusing on the analysis of BES 2001 data. It is acknowledged that the results will not provide a conclusive explanation of change, but if we are to understand which model best predicts young voters turnout in the key period of 1997-2001, we are in a good position to infer what factors might lie behind the collapse in voting among young citizens at this time.

Chapter four shows that between 1992 and 2001 something happened which affected turnout among the youngest age groups in a way not witnessed among any other cohort since the first BES survey in 1964. I also detailed that this change was far more pronounced amongst 18-34 year olds. This could be the result of a period effect, but we might suspect that this is not the case simply because the period has clearly affected age groups differently. But clearly this could be down to a combination of age and period effects. Whilst a period effect can affect age groups differently, there must be a point, where if the effect of the period endures beyond a certain stage in the life-cycle, it becomes generational, in the sense that it shows a significantly different trajectory of turnout over the whole life-cycle; one that couldn't simply be characterised as a minor deviation from the standard life-cycle curve of low turnout at youth, rising with age, peaking at mid-age and declining thereafter. It is reasonable to suspect that the reasons for such markedly different electoral behaviour will be evident in the attitudinal characteristics of the cohorts measurable at one period of time. Whilst this information on its own is not enough to tell us much about change, adding this cohort specific information to what we already know about change and to the emerging literature on contemporary social and political change provides additional knowledge. Again, whilst adding sets of evidence to one another doesn't provide quantitatively reliable conclusions, the *prima facie* conclusions reached have a strong intuitive and

common sense appeal and point to the need for further research in the area, outside the scope of the thesis.

6.2 Model Specification

6.2.1 The Social Capital Model

As discussed in Chapter five, the social capital model emphasises the role of trust between and among individuals in collective decision making. The model has some intuitive appeal given that we might suspect individuals having grown up in the Thatcher era to have experienced a more individualised youth. Whilst social capital is not a new concept and was evident in the works of de Tocqueville (2001), Bourdeau (1976), Coleman (1988) and others – its most contemporary application has been the result of the work of Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). The central feature of the model is that trust derives directly from interactions among individuals participating in voluntary activities. The relationship is circular as trust fosters cooperation and cooperation in turn fosters trust. One important point to mention vis-à-vis young people's trust is that we might expect, given that much of the research shows that young people are involved in many voluntary and informal kinds of political activity (e.g. Henn et al 2002; Marsh et al 2007) that their levels of trust are high. But, in the following analysis I operationalise and run the model to ascertain if social capital is an influential predictor of voting – a formal political activity – not just informal types of activity. So one of the key questions might be whether social capital engendered by informal political activity or voluntary activity has any effect on a propensity to engage in formal types of activity. It may be the two are so divorced from one another that participants in the former simply do not link the two and for this reason simply remain in the informal sphere of action. I specify the model as follows¹:

Voting = a function of (TRUST + FAIRNESS + VOLUNTEERING + RECRUITMENT)

Voting is turnout at the 2001 British general election

¹ As mentioned above, the operationalisations are based on those of Clarke et al (2004).

TRUST=the extent to which individuals think that other people are trust-worthy.

FAIRNESS=the extent to which individuals think that other people will treat them fairly.

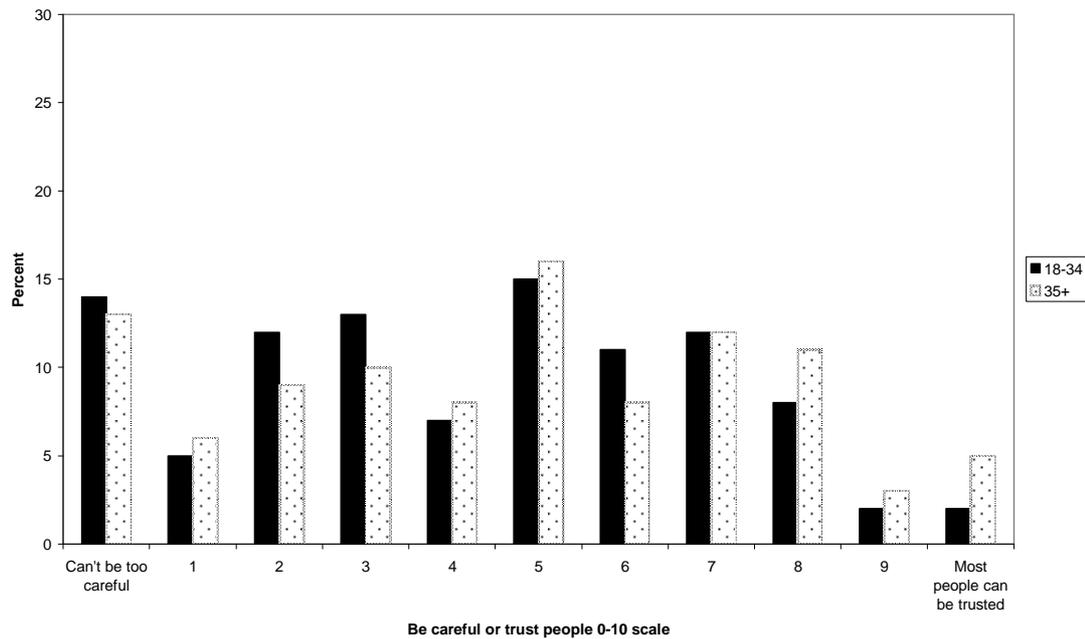
VOLUNTEERING=whether individuals have volunteered to participate in politics or community affairs.

RECRUITMENT=whether an individual has been asked to become active in a voluntary organisation

It is recognised that this operationalisation may be restrictive. Recent studies have identified the limitations of imposing a narrow definition of social capital on young people (Harper 2001; Morrow 2002). However, given time and resource limitations, this is justified by the need to test quantitatively how this standard model fares as an explanation of change. But it is recognised that the results of the data analysis are likely to indicate the need to probe the findings in more depth using qualitative methods to elicit further insights.

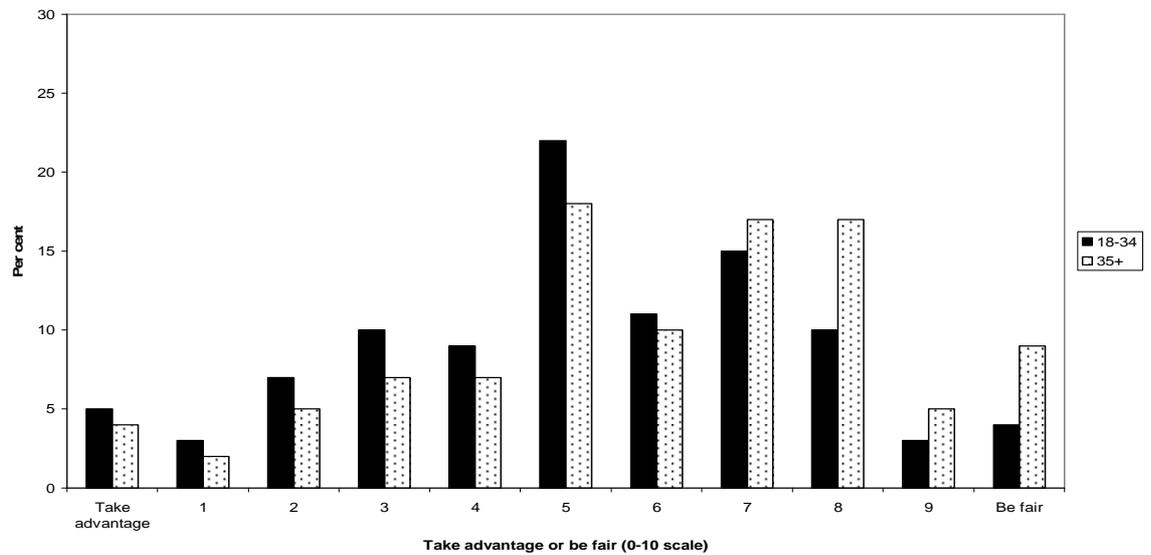
Social trust and perceived fairness of others are measured using responses to two questions in the BES:

- 1. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful dealing with people? Please use a 0-10 scale to indicate your view, where 0 means 'cant be too careful' and 10 means 'most people can be trusted'.*
- 2. Do you think that most people you come into contact with would try to take advantage of you if they had the chance or would they try to be fair? Please use the 0-10 scale again where 0 means 'would try to take advantage' and 10 means 'would try to be fair'.*

Figure 6.1 Social trust: perceived trustworthiness of those aged 18-34 and 35+

Note: Mean 18-34: 4.2; 35+: 4.6 , Standard deviation 18-34: 2.6; 35+: 2.8.

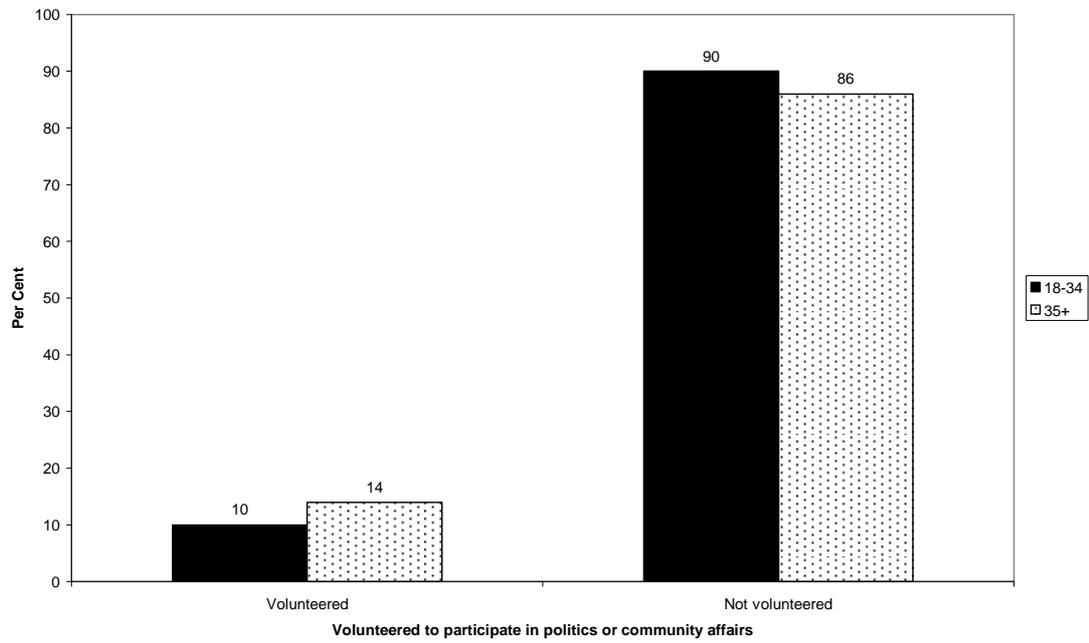
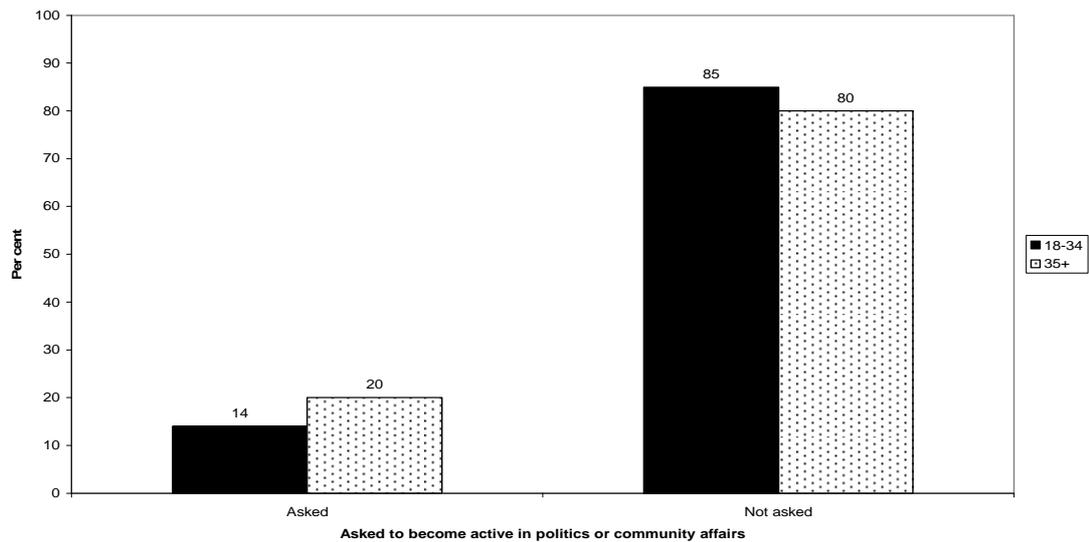
Figures 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate responses to the two questions on social trust in the BES. Whilst the majority of responses for both age groups appear on the middle of the 11 point scales; the average figure for the 18-34 year olds on both scales is lower than for the 35+ age group. Considerably more of those over 35 appear to feel most people can be trusted than the 18-34 group. In Figure 6.2 considerably larger numbers of 18-34 year olds appear at the negative end of the scale; whilst the opposite is true of the over 35 year old group, with considerably larger minorities appearing on the positive side of the scale. Whilst it is important not to read too much into these figures, it would appear that there are differences in social trust between the two age groups that need to be considered further.

Figure 6.2 Social Trust: perceived fairness of those aged 18-34 and 35+

Note: Mean 18-34: 5; 35+: 5.8, Standard deviation 18-34: 2.5; 35+: 2.6.

The social capital model also includes two indicators of civic engagement. Volunteering and having been asked to participate in politics or community affairs are measured using the following two questions:

1. *Over the past few years, have you volunteered to get involved in politics or community affairs?* Affirmative answers are scored 1 and other answers are scored 0.
2. *Over the past few years has anyone asked you to get involved in politics or community affairs?* Affirmative answers are scored 1 and other answers are scored 0.

Figure 6.3 Volunteering to participate in politics or community affairs**Figure 6.4 Recruitment to participation in politics or community affairs**

As we might expect Figures 6.3 and 6.4 show that the younger group were less likely to have volunteered or to have been asked to participate than the older group. Given that the BES is a representative sample of the British population these findings are significant in light of recent research on young people. Clarke et al (2004) report that much of the voluntary activity reported ‘does not take place in parties or other political organizations, but, rather occurs in sports clubs, charities and various other groups’ (Clarke et al 2004: 242). These types of activities appear to be very similar to those that some recent studies, keen to dispel the myth of youth apathy, report that young people are very active in (e.g. Henn et al 2002; Marsh et al 2007; O’Toole et al 2003a, 2003b). But, ninety per cent of those aged between 18-34 reported not having volunteered to participate in politics or community affairs as broadly defined. This clearly suggests that there is a significant majority of the 2001 cohort who are not engaged in these types of activities.

Clearly this is only saying something about the propensity of today’s youth to engage in voluntary and community activity and not about change, but given the BES sample is representative it is an indication that the majority of young people do not appear to be active in this way. This contrasts with the impression given by the anti-apathy school that once politics is more broadly conceived young people are more involved. But, given that this conclusion is based on one question and it is perfectly possible that if the question had been framed differently or if a broader set of questions had been asked and considered then a different conclusion would have been reached.

6.2.2 The Civic voluntarism model

The second model is the widely used civic voluntarism model. The model emphasises the importance of different types of resources to political participation not simply physical ones. It includes a set of psychological resources: partisanship; interest in the election and efficacy; that is the perception that one is influential in the political process. Whilst rational choice models of political behaviour have become more popular in recent years to explain voting behaviour, there is a need to test whether crucial variables such as education and social class have an effect on voting and whether there is a differential effect with regard to age groups. It is also important, given the literature reviewed in Chapter two, to assess the impact of declining partisanship on the British electorate since the 1970s. The model is specified as follows:

Voting=a function of

RESOURCES+RECRUITMENT+VOLACT+EFFICACY+INTEREST+STRENGTH
OF PARTISANSHIP

RESOURCES=educational attainment, social class and the amount of time available to individuals.

RECRUITMENT=a set of measures of recruitment by others and party mobilisation

VOLACT=the extent of voluntary activity

EFFICACY=the sense of being able to influence politics or community affairs

INTEREST=interest in the 2001 election campaign

STRENGTH OF PARTISANSHIP

The resources mentioned above are measured using three variables in the BES.

Education measures whether or not respondents have any post-secondary school qualifications; social class measures whether individuals come from working or middle class backgrounds. The standard Market Research scale is recoded for this measure to give two categories, middle and working class. Available time is measured by asking respondents how much time they have remaining after work and family commitments are taken into account. Table 6.1 shows that more of the younger age group have post 16 education qualifications, than the older age group, as we might expect given the expansion of education in recent years. There is little difference between the two groups in terms of their social class; the younger group reports having less available time than the older group. Given that the older group will include those who have reached retirement we might have expected this to be the case.

Table 6.1 Indicators in the civic voluntarism model by age group

	18-34	35+
Resources		
<i>Educational qualifications</i>		
Yes	86	62
<i>Social class</i>		

Middle	57	59
Working	42	48
<i>Available time</i>		
A great deal	11	19
A fair amount	20	25
Some	53	45
None	16	12
Political Mobilisation		
Over the past few years has anyone asked you to get involved in politics or community affairs?	14	20
Did anyone, for example, a friend or family try to convince you how to vote in the recent election?	12	6
Did a canvasser from any political party call at your home during the election campaign?	20	22
Did anyone from a political party telephone you during the election campaign?	5	10
Psychological engagement with politics		
<i>Interest in the 2001 election</i>		
Very interested	15	24
Somewhat interested	40	38
Not very interested	26	25
Not at all interested	19	12
<i>Strength of partisan identification</i>		
Very strong	7	17
Fairly strong	42	48
Not very strong	50	35

A second set of resource variables measure psychological resources to political participation and their impact on participation through an individual's sense of political efficacy and interest in politics. Efficacy and interest are suggested to have direct effects on participation, but this is encouraged by an individual's psychological engagement with politics; the strength of their partisan identification, as well as the efforts of others to influence an individual.

Figure 6.5 Psychological resources to participation: interest in the 2001 election

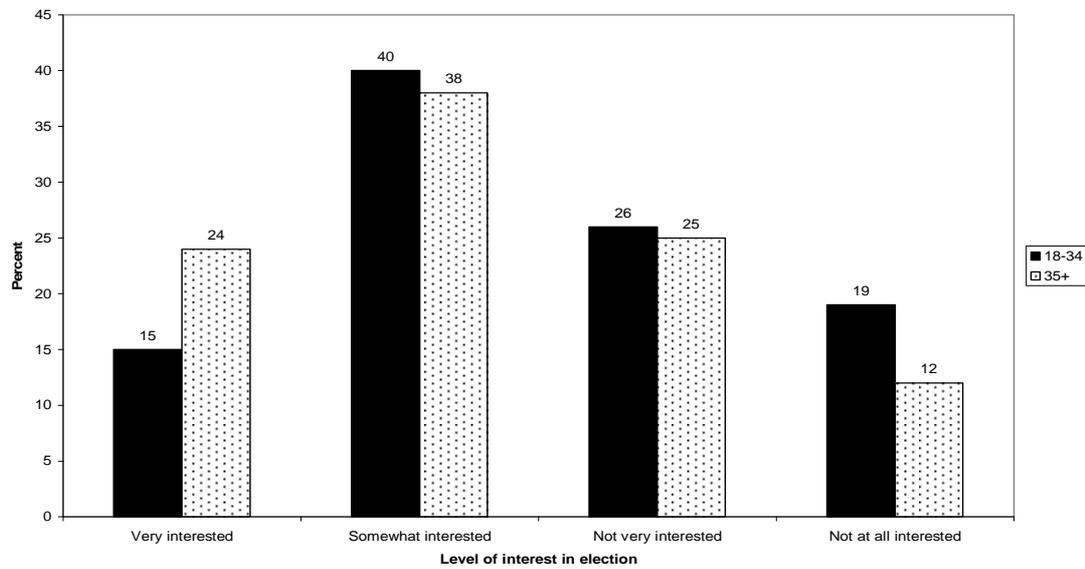
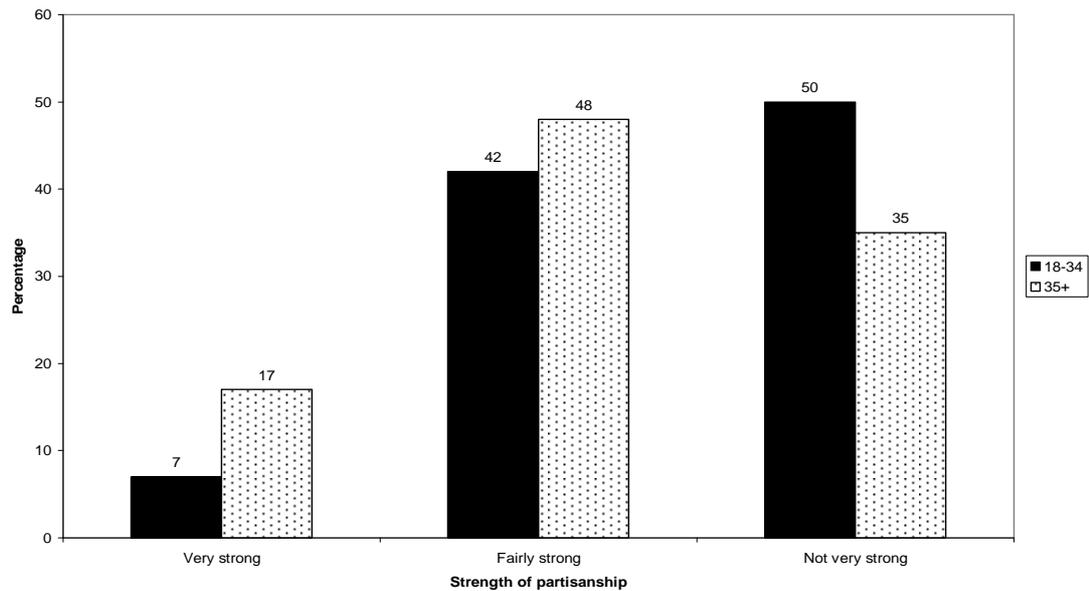
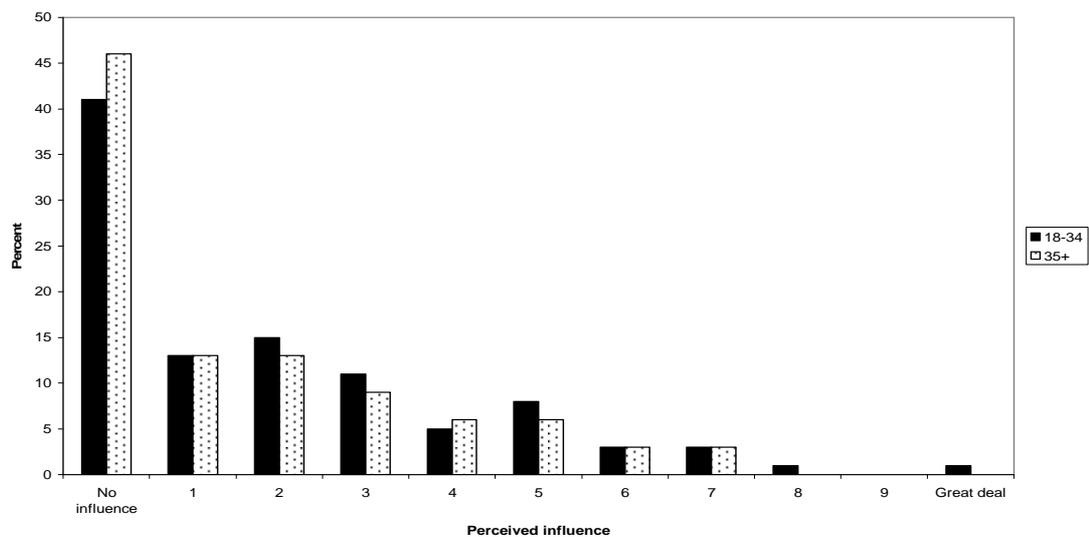


Figure 6.5 shows that just under a quarter of those aged over 35 reported being ‘very interested’ in the election, whilst only 15 per cent of those aged under 35 did. The figures for those ‘somewhat’ and those ‘not very interested’ in the election were similar for both age groups; but a greater proportion (19 per cent) of 18-34 year olds were ‘uninterested’, when compared to the over 35 group (12 per cent). Figure 6.6 shows there is a significant difference between age groups with a ‘very strong’ sense of partisanship and those with ‘not very strong’ level of partisanship. As mentioned above, this is consistent with what we know about declining partisanship in Britain since the 1970s (e.g., Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

Figure 6.6 Strength of partisan identification by age group

The third variable measuring the sense of psychological engagement an individual has with politics is political efficacy – that is the extent to which he or she feels that they can make a difference in the political world. This has consistently appeared as one of the common explanations for youth disinterest in conventional politics as many feel that they have no say (White et al 2000; Bentley et al 2002; Henn et al 2002; Russell et al 2002; Marsh et al 2007).

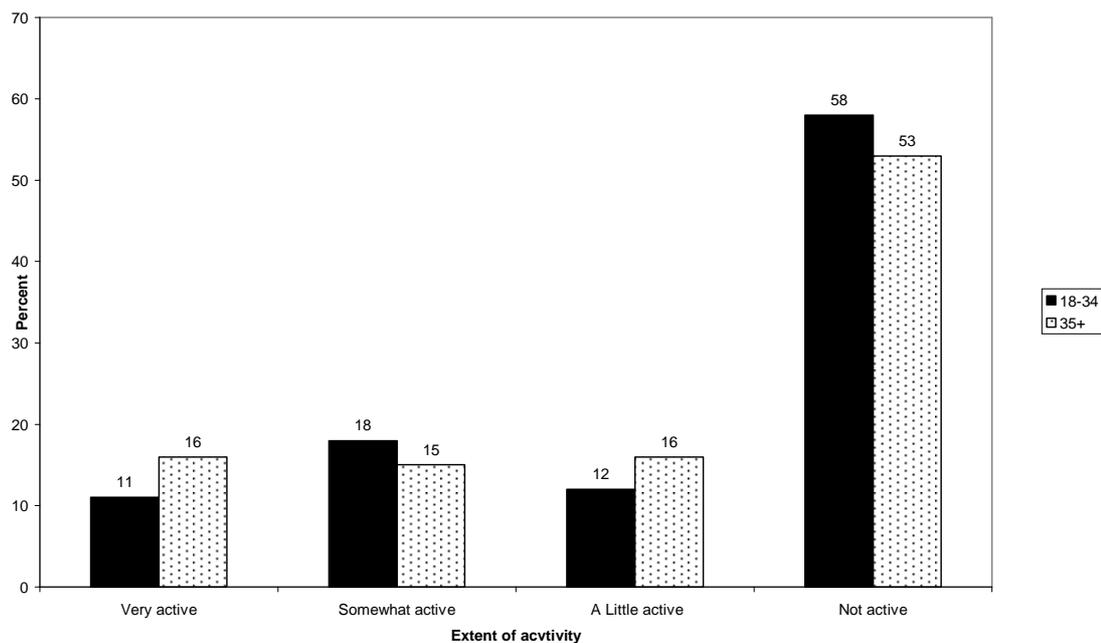
Figure 6.7 Perceived political efficacy (influence on politics) by age

Somewhat contrary to what we might have expected, given the research mentioned above, the difference between the age groups is relatively small and the over 35 age group are more likely to have reported having ‘no influence’.

The second set of variables in the model measure political recruitment or mobilisation. Recruitment measures two types of effects in Table 6.1. First whether anyone has attempted to either involve an individual in community affairs of politics, or whether a member of their family has tried to convince them how to vote. The second set of variables relate to recruitment by political parties. On most of the measures the younger age group experience less political mobilisation. They experience less contact from political parties than the older age group. This is likely to be, at least in part, the result of a rational calculation by political parties to concentrate their efforts on those most likely to vote and therefore put fewer resources into mobilising younger people. Multivariate analysis will be able to assess whether party mobilisation is an effective method of enticing young people to the polls. Table 6.1 also reveals that younger people are considerably more likely to have a friend or family member try to convince them how to vote.

According to Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) voluntary activity is important because it aids the acquisition of the skills necessary for political participation.

Figure 6.8 Extent of voluntary activity by age group



Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) use the example of the ‘church youth group’ or the chair of a committee organisation, or a ‘rummage’ sale. These types of activities serve to develop skills relevant to politics and ‘skill endowing opportunities can serve a compensatory function, enhancing political resources’ amongst those whose ‘educational and occupational levels might otherwise predispose them to quiescence’ (Ibid: 4). Figure 6.8 shows that whilst more people in the younger age group report being ‘somewhat active’ and ‘a little active’, the general picture to emerge is that few are ‘very active’ and most ‘not active’ at all. Whether this general lack of voluntary activity amongst younger people revealed both here and in Figure 6.3 (the social capital model) has been an important factor in their voting abstention or not is something that is returned to the next section of this chapter.

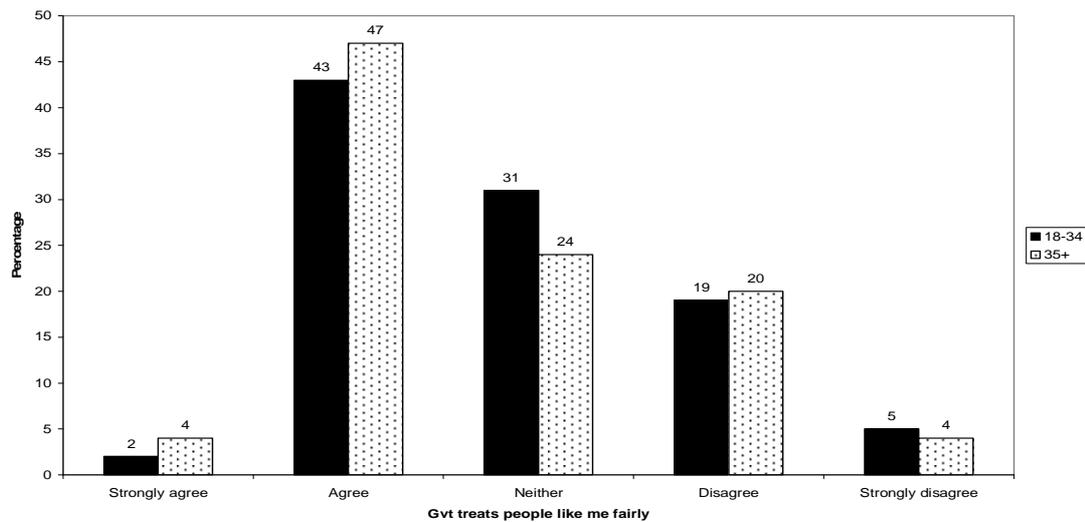
6.2.3 The equity fairness / relative deprivation model

The last of the models in the sociological framework is the equity fairness or relative deprivation model. The central idea in the model is that people from particular socio-demographic groups compare themselves to other people in other social groups as an idealised standard. Where they see a significant discrepancy between their circumstances and the comparison group they react negatively to this. The gap between expectations and what these people actually get has two consequences, as far as political participation is concerned. Firstly, these individuals are more likely to protest, showing their frustration at their circumstances. Clarke et al (2004) also specify that we might also expect the impact on electoral participation ‘to take the form of voting against the incumbent government if it is seen as the source of the deprivation’ (Clarke et al 2004: 237). But, it also seems likely, especially in the case of younger age groups who we know are less likely to vote anyway, that they will abstain from voting in protest, especially if they see the cause of their frustration not coming from one party but from the political system itself. The model is specified below:

Voting=a function of: a generalised sense of relative deprivation+retrospective and prospective deprivation attributed to government+negative emotional reactions to personal economic circumstances+extent of dissatisfaction with the government’s policy performance+being a member of a deprived group.

Relative deprivation is measured using two likert scale statements in the BES designed to tap people's feelings of how their expectations and experiences match, and whether the government treats them fairly or not. Figure 6.9 shows that a large proportion of both age groups feel that the government treats them fairly, with the next largest group in the 'neither' category.

Figure 6.9 Perceptions of relative deprivation: government fairness



A similar picture occurs from the likert scale measuring differences between expectations and what individuals actually receive (Table 6.2). A second set of measures look at individual's sense of economic deprivation. The first of these looks at an individual's retrospective judgement of the financial situation in their household and the second looks at a prospective judgement of the year to come. Figures 6.10 and 6.11, respectively, illustrate the responses shown in Table 6.2.

Figure 6.10 Retrospective evaluations of financial situation of respondents households by age group

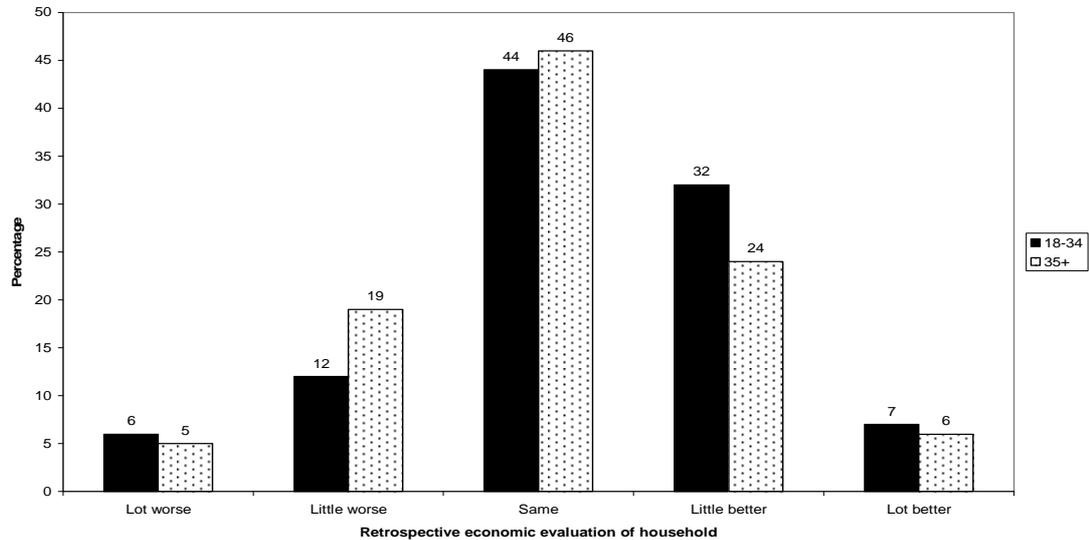
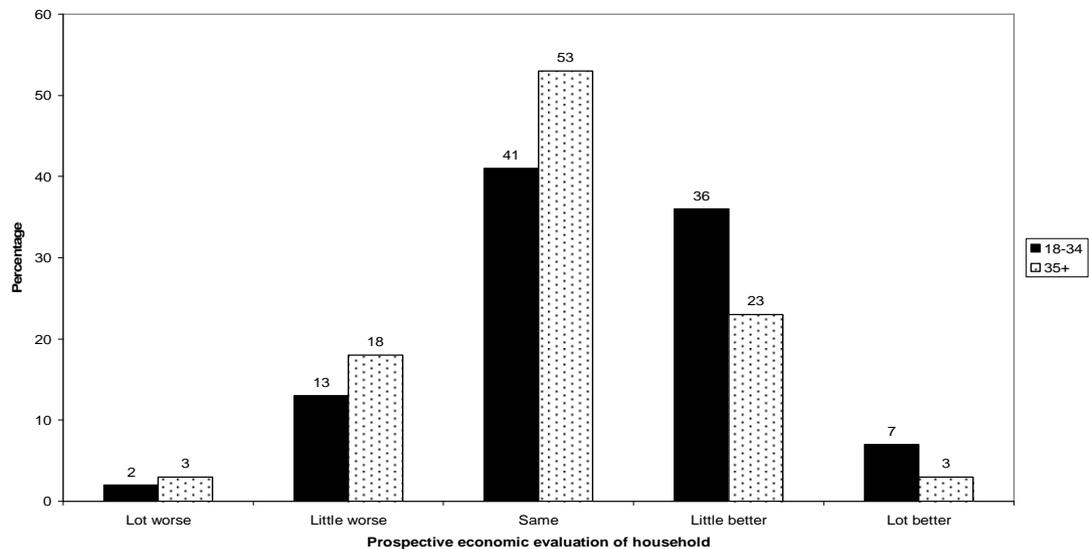


Figure 6.11 Prospective evaluations of financial situation of respondents households by age group



As we can see, for both measures most responses fall in the middle of the scale, but it appears that the younger age group perceives their financial situation to be improving since the previous year and likely to improve in the following year. This may be the result of the fact that many in this group are likely to be emerging from full-time education with the associated debts, to find employment and a salary.

Table 6.2 Indicators in the equity-fairness model by age group

	18-34	35+
Perceptions of relative deprivation		
<i>The government generally treats people like me fairly</i>		
Strongly agree	2	4
Agree	43	47
Neither	31	24
Disagree	19	20
Strongly disagree	5	4
<i>There is often big gap between what people expect out of life and what they get</i>		
Strongly agree	11	11
Agree	41	42
Neither	27	22
Disagree	18	22
Strongly disagree	2	2
Perceptions of economic deprivation		
<i>How does the financial situation in your household compare to 12 months ago?</i>		
Lot worse	6	5
Little worse	12	19
Same	44	46
Little better	32	24
Lot better	7	6
<i>How do you think the financial situation of your household will change over the next 12 months?</i>		
Lot worse	2	3
Little worse	13	18
Same	41	53
Little better	36	23
Lot better	7	3
Emotional reactions to personal economic conditions		
Which, if any, of the following words describe your feelings about the financial situation of your household?		
Angry	17	15

Disgusted	11	11
Uneasy	32	30
Afraid	82	85
	18-34	35+
Policy satisfaction		
<i>How well do you think the present government has handled each of the following issues?</i>		
Crime		
Very well	2	3
Fairly well	27	26
Neither	35	29
Fairly badly	22	24
Very badly	8	15
Education		
Very well	3	5
Fairly well	42	37
Neither	22	26
Fairly badly	20	20
Very badly	6	7
The NHS		
Very well	2	3
Fairly well	26	27
Neither	22	23
Fairly badly	31	27
Very badly	16	18
Transport		
Very well	2	2
Fairly well	14	18
Neither	25	24
Fairly badly	37	31
Very badly	18	21

Another indicator of economic (dis) satisfaction included in the equity-fairness model attempts to elicit from individuals their positive and negative emotional responses to their personal economic circumstances. The idea behind this measure is that emotional reactions to personal circumstances might outweigh any more rational calculations of an individual's economic circumstances and encourage them to vote or to abstain as a result. As we can see from Table 6.2, however, the results are very similar for both age groups. Interestingly, a substantial proportion (over 80 per cent) of both age groups reported being afraid of their economic circumstances.

Another way of measuring (dis) satisfaction was to include some indicators of satisfaction with government performance in key policy areas such as health, education, crime and transport. Again, there is no significant differences here between the two age

groups, although a significant number said that the government has performed 'fairly badly' or 'very badly' on transport and on the NHS.

6.2.4 The cognitive mobilisation model

The cognitive mobilisation model hypothesises that individuals endowed with the knowledge of politics derived from a modern high quality education and from an information environment that provides them with copious amounts of political information are less likely to need to rely on social-group and partisan cues as a basis for voting (Dalton 2003). Whilst this model overlaps with the civic voluntarism model the key difference is that the civic voluntarism model implies that more resources will be associated with a greater propensity to vote, whereas the cognitive mobilisation model implies the opposite.

Voting=a function of

EDUCATION+MEDIA

COVERAGE+INTEREST+KNOWLEDGE+DISSATISFACTION

EDUCATION is measured as above in the civic voluntarism model

MEDIA COVERAGE is measured by asking respondents whether they regularly read a daily morning newspaper and how much attention they paid to the television coverage of the election.²

KNOWLEDGE is measured using respondent's answers to a series of political knowledge questions.

INTEREST is measured as in the civic voluntarism model

DISSATISFACTION is measured as in the equity fairness model above.

² The variable asking whether a respondent reads a daily newspaper was omitted from the multivariate model because it was found to significantly reduce the number of cases included in the analysis. Media consumption is addressed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Table 6.3 Indicators in the cognitive mobilisation model by age group

	18-34	35+
Educational qualifications post GCSE		
Yes	86	62
Political knowledge		
<i>Polling stations close at 10pm on election day</i>		
Correct	78	87
Incorrect	22	14
<i>It is official Conservative party policy that Britain should never join the single European currency</i>		
Correct	41	45
Incorrect	59	54
<i>The Liberal Democrats favour a system of proportional representation for Westminster elections</i>		
Correct	46	62
Incorrect	55	38
<i>The Minimum voting age is 16</i>		
Correct	80	86
Incorrect	20	14
<i>Unemployment has fallen since Labour was elected in 1997</i>		
Correct	75	76
Incorrect	25	24
<i>Only taxpayers are allowed to vote in a general election</i>		
Correct	91	95
Incorrect	9	5
Exposure to political information		
<i>Does the respondent regularly read a daily morning newspaper?</i>		
Yes	58	64
<i>Amount of attention respondent paid to television coverage of the 2001 general election</i>		
A great deal	8	10
A fair amount	19	23
Some attention	42	41
No attention	32	27

Table 6.3 shows that unsurprisingly the older age group did better on all the political knowledge questions than the younger people. The final two variables in the cognitive

mobilisation model tap respondent's information. Interest in the election and dissatisfaction with government performance measure these.

In terms of the amount of political information consumed, unsurprisingly – older people were more likely to read a daily morning newspaper and were also more likely to report watching television coverage of the election. It would have been interesting to measure television viewing more generally rather than just focusing on the election campaign as young people are less likely to be engaged with the campaign itself, but, receive most of their information about politics from television (e.g., Russell 2002; Hyland 2007). As I will argue in the concluding section of the thesis this operationslisation maybe adequate in terms of the model specified, but there is an important and growing literature showing the effects of the type and content of media exposure on voters (e.g., Prior 2007). As discussed in Chapter two, Wattenberg (2007) focuses specifically on the impact of a new media environment on young people's inclination to participate.

6.2.5 The General Incentives model

The final model I specify here is the general incentives model which combines aspects of individual rationality: political efficacy, collective benefits and costs of participation with four incentives variables that constitute alternative benefits as well as specific norms. 'These benefits and norms reflect the idea that an individual's sense of 'being implicated' in the political system is fundamental to the determination of the costs and benefits of participation' (Clarke et al 2004: 232). The general incentives model also employs predictor variables taken from social-psychological accounts of political participation.

Voting is a function of:

EFFICACY+BENEFITS+COSTS+INDIVIDUAL BENEFITS+GROUP
BENEFITS+SYSTEM BENEFITS+SOCIAL NORMS+SATISFACTION

Table 6.4 details responses to the variables included in the general incentives model. We can see that roughly the same proportion of 18-34 year olds felt it was too much time and effort to get involved in politics or community affairs; whereas, a substantially larger proportion of this group said that they were too busy to vote. The wording of the

first question as compared to the second might indicate that younger people feel they have less time for voting than for other forms of political or community activity when compared to the older group. This would be consistent with what we know about younger people's participation in diverse forms of activity not always recognised as 'political'. Regarding the benefits of voting that accrue to the individual: we can see that young people are considerably less likely to feel a sense of satisfaction when they vote, or to feel guilty if they don't vote, when compared to the older age group. They are also less likely to feel it is their duty to vote than the older group. We can see that there is less difference between the two groups in terms of the perception of group benefits accrued for voting – with over 60 per cent of both groups agreeing with that voting is a good way of getting benefits for vulnerable groups in society.

Regarding social norms, it appears that whilst young people do not necessarily see the benefits that accrue from voting, or feel that they should vote, the people around them tend to have generally positive attitudes towards voting, although, if these were the same people, the perception is that not all of them voted.

Table 6.4 Indicators in the general incentives model by age group

	18-34	35+
Costs of political participation		
<i>It takes too much time and effort to be active in politics and public affairs</i>		
Strongly agree	7	8
Agree	42	47
Neither	25	21
Disagree	22	19
Strongly disagree	1	2
<i>People are so busy that they do not have time to vote</i>		
Strongly agree	5	3
Agree	35	23
Neither	15	10
Disagree	37	45
Strongly disagree	9	18
Benefits of political participation		
<i>Individual benefits</i>		

I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote

Strongly agree	9	19
Agree	35	47
Neither	23	15
Disagree	20	15
Strongly disagree	6	2

I would feel guilty if I did not vote in a general election

Strongly agree	10	29
Agree	30	40
Neither	12	8
Disagree	32	18
Strongly disagree	15	6

Group benefits

Being active in politics is a good way to get benefits for groups that people care about like pensioners or the disabled

Strongly agree	7	11
Agree	55	59
Neither	19	15
Disagree	15	10
Strongly disagree	2	1

System benefits

It is every citizen's duty to vote in an election

Strongly agree	12	31
Agree	32	43
Neither	16	7
Disagree	29	14
Strongly disagree	10	5

Democracy only works properly when people vote

Strongly agree	17	26
Agree	60	60
Neither	12	5
Disagree	8	6
Strongly disagree	0	0

Social norms

Most of my family and friends think voting is a waste of time

Strongly agree	5	3
Agree	22	17
Neither	13	10
Disagree	45	49
Strongly disagree	14	19

Most people around here voted in the general election

Strongly agree	5	3
Agree	35	23
Neither	15	10
Disagree	37	45
Strongly disagree	9	18

6.3 Logistic Regression

In the next section of the chapter the aim is to use multivariate analysis, specifically logistic regression to test the relative impact of a number of variables on young people's decision to vote. Logistic regression is used here instead of linear regression as the dependent variable, turnout, is dichotomous. The main advantage of regression techniques over bivariate contingency tables and correlation is that it enables us to examine the combined impact of a large number of variables on the decision to vote (or not), and to assess the effect of specific variables while controlling for a large number of others. This will give us a reliable indication of the key factors that affected the pronounced declines among the youngest two age groups revealed in previous chapters.

6.3.1 Data and methodological considerations

a. Missing data

The analysis began by using BES cross section data for 2001 which aims to provide a representative cross-section of the British population. One of the difficulties of using this data that this research has to address was the number of missing cases in the logistic regression procedure. The 2001 survey consisted of a pre-election and a post-election wave which together form the cross section data set. Unfortunately some questions were not asked in the post-election wave. This meant that detailed questions on educational attainment were missing for all post-election wave respondents in the cross-section data set. There is no procedure in logistic regression for dealing with missing cases as in

linear regression whereby it is possible to continue the analysis of the remaining variables whilst ignoring those with missing cases. In logistic regression it is only possible to analyse cases where codes for all variables are present. Table 6.5 below shows the number of cases included in the models and the number of missing cases in brackets.

Table 6.5 Missing cases in logistic regression models

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
The civic voluntarism model	28 (150)	85 (409)	82 (503)	55 (454)	42 (419)	32 (775)
The social capital model	173 (5)	477 (17)	558 (27)	498 (11)	433 (28)	719 (88)
The equity fairness model	151 (27)	414 (80)	503 (82)	439 (70)	366 (95)	588 (219)
The cognitive mobilisation model	10 (168)	49 (445)	46 (539)	28 (481)	29 (432)	12 (795)
The general Incentives model	91 (87)	223 (271)	249 (336)	233 (276)	182 (279)	284 (523)

Note: figures in brackets indicate missing cases

Looking at the cognitive mobilisation model we can see that for the 18-24 year olds only 10 cases were included in the analysis with 168 missing. This problem was addressed, after discussion with the BES team by using the combined pre and post election data file which includes a summary variable for educational attainment. This meant that the number of missing cases dropped significantly. The disadvantage of using this summary variable to measure education is that it provides a more limited definition of educational attainment, restricted to a dichotomous yes/no answer: whether respondents had GCSE qualifications yes/no. But this concern was largely justified by the significant increase in the number of cases included in the analysis, as included in the tables below.

b. Multicollinearity

As in linear regression it is important in logistic regression to check for high-inter-correlations among the predictor variables in each model. Unfortunately the current version of SPSS (Version 11) does not have a procedure for obtaining collinearity diagnostics in logistic regression, but by using linear regression it is possible to obtain

diagnostics for each set of variables to check for inter-correlation. Menard (1995) suggests that a tolerance value of less than 0.1 indicates that there is a serious collinearity problem with the variables and that any VIF values of over 10 may also be cause for concern. I will return to detail an example of how this issue was addressed when examining the first model – the social capital model.

c. Residual diagnostics

Another issue this method of data analysis faced was the problem of outlying cases in the data. Outlying cases are those cases for which the model fits particularly badly and which can exert an undue influence on the model. One option is to remove outlying cases from the analysis at risk of biasing the sample. Another way of considering outliers is that they provide useful information since they may point to the need to incorporate additional variables in a model or to change its specification in some way. SPSS produces a case-wise listing of residuals which enables us to see if there are any outlying cases that we should be concerned with. The case-wise list gives information about all cases for which the model does not fit well. Cases with Zresid values of above 2.5 or below –2.5 are considered to be a problem and should be examined more carefully (Menard 1995). Case-wise lists were examined carefully and where Zresid values of over 2.5 or under –2.5 were discovered a close examination of the data was undertaken to ascertain if there were any additional factors that should be considered in each model specification. No common characteristics were found in these cases and as the number of these cases was small we can reasonably conclude that these cases are simply those that deviate from the majority in a random way.

6.3.2 Results

Below I run the social capital model for 18-24 year olds, detailing the logistic regression procedure. SPSS output from the procedure is detailed here in order to show the basis on which subsequent analysis and conclusions are made. The subsequent discussion will use summary tables for the remaining models.

The first section of the logistic regression output is the case processing summary which shows that of a total of 178 cases falling into this age group, 163 are included in the analysis, 91.6 per cent. The table also shows that there are 15 missing cases.

Case Processing Summary

Unweighted Cases ^a		N	Percent
Selected Cases	Included in Analysis	163	91.6
	Missing Cases	15	8.4
	Total	178	100.0
Unselected Cases		0	.0
Total		178	100.0

a. If weight is in effect, see classification table for the total number of cases.

Note: data is weighted by region, gender and age within gender

Below SPSS tells us that the dependent variable has been coded: 0= Did not vote and 1=Voted.

Dependent Variable Encoding

Original Value	Internal Value
Didnt vote	0
Voted	1

Logistic regression produces a section of the output headed 'Block 0' which reports the results of the most basic attempt to predict the outcome – one in which all cases are predicted to result in the most common outcome.

Classification Table^{a,b}

Observed			Predicted		
			VerifiedVote		Percentage Correct
			Didnt vote	Voted	
Step 0	VerifiedVote	Didnt vote	223	0	100.0
		Voted	174	0	.0
Overall Percentage					56.2

a. Constant is included in the model.

b. The cut value is .500

The classification table above simply shows that as most respondents in this age group did not vote in 2001, the predicted outcome for all has been set to 'not voted'. This results in an accurate prediction for 56.2 per cent of cases. This initial prediction

becomes useful later once the predictor (independent) variables are included in the analysis. It enables us to see whether the logistic regression with predictor variables included is able to predict the outcome variable more accurately than this basic model.

The next section of the output is entitled 'Block 1'. The first section of this output is the iteration history. Logistic regression employs an iterative process attempting to arrive at the best answer to the problem through a series of approximations. Each iteration results in a slightly more accurate approximation. The following table reports this iterative process.

Iteration History^{a,b,c,d}

Iteration	-2 Log likelihood	Coefficients				
		Constant	BQ48	BQ49	BQ43	BQ42
Step 1	449.912	-1.521	.235	-.015	1.619	.997
1 2	443.137	-1.839	.286	-.012	2.591	1.182
3	441.984	-1.874	.292	-.011	3.340	1.194
4	441.827	-1.876	.293	-.011	3.749	1.193
5	441.821	-1.876	.293	-.011	3.851	1.193

a. Method: Enter

b. Constant is included in the model.

c. Initial -2 Log Likelihood: 544.715

d. Estimation terminated at iteration number 5 because log-likelihood decreased by less than .010 percent.

The statistic -2 log likelihood is used in logistic regression to measure the success of the model. A high value indicates that the model poorly predicts the outcome. With each iteration we can see the value falling; however, the benefit derived at each iteration decreases until after four iterations SPSS terminates the process. We can also see how the coefficients of each of the predictor variables are adjusted at each iteration.

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

	Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1 Step	102.894	4	.000
Block	102.894	4	.000
Model	102.894	4	.000

Omnibus tests are general tests of how well the model performs. Using the Enter method there is only one step and so the Step, Block and Model rows in this table are

identical. The test shows that the full model was statistically significant (chi-square = 102.894, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$). The Hosmer and Lemeshow test below is a measure of the observed outcomes and the predicted outcomes. It is a test of the null hypothesis that the model is good, Unlike the Omnibus test a p value of higher than 0.05 indicates how well the model fits the data. This test is amongst the least reliable where the number of cases is relatively small and for this reason will not be used as the primary test for assessing the goodness of fit of the models, below. This is because the sample was split into age groups giving a relatively small number of cases for each group, although not too small to conduct logistic regression.

Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	53.267	8	.000

In this case the p value is 0.000 indicating that the model does not adequately fit the data.

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	441.821	.228	.306

In logistic regression it is not possible to compute an exact R squared value as in linear regression, but Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke are useful approximations. We can see here that for the 18-24 age group, the variables in the social capital model accounts for between 22.8 and 30.6 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable.

Classification Table^a

Observed		Predicted			
		VerifiedVote		Percentage Correct	
		Didnt vote	Voted		
Step 1	VerifiedVote	Didnt vote	207	16	92.7
		Voted	74	100	57.4
	Overall Percentage				77.2

a. The cut value is .500

The classification table above summarises the results of the prediction. Comparing this to the equivalent table in block 0 above, the model with the predictor variables added correctly predicts 77.2 per cent of cases, compared to 56.2 per cent without the predictors, an increase of 21 per cent. We can see from the classification table that the predictors in the model will be useful to our understanding of why 18-24 year olds choose not to vote, with 92.7 per cent of non-voters and 57.4 per cent of voters successfully predicted.

The variables in the equation table gives us information about the importance of individual variables in the model. The first column gives the coefficients for each predictor. A negative coefficient indicates that the odds of voting in 2001 amongst this age group declines with a unit change in the predictor variable. A positive coefficient indicates that these odds increase with a unit change in the predictor variable.

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Step 1 ^a								
BQ48	.293	.058	25.088	1	.000	1.340	1.195	1.502
BQ49	-.011	.055	.040	1	.842	.989	.889	1.101
BQ43	3.851	1.397	7.603	1	.006	47.029	3.045	726.339
BQ42	1.193	.362	10.857	1	.001	3.298	1.622	6.706
Constant	-1.876	.336	31.104	1	.000	.153		

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: BQ48, BQ49, BQ43, BQ42.

The Wald statistic indicates how useful each predictor variable is. The Sig column provides the key to interpreting this. Values of less than 0.05 indicate a significant effect ($p < 0.05$).³ We can see that three of the four variables in the social capital model have a significant effect in predicting turnout for 18-24 year olds in 2001. Trust in others (bq48), volunteering in politics or community affairs (bq43) and being asked to participate in politics or community affairs (bq42) all have positive beta coefficients indicating that higher levels of trust in others, having volunteered and having been asked to participate all increased the likelihood of 18-24 year olds in this sample deciding to vote. Trust and being asked to participate are both highly significant here ($p < 0.001$ ***), whilst having volunteered is significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$ **).

³ The discussion will use the commonly used format for statistical significance with $p < 0.05$ given *, $p < 0.01$ given ** and $p < 0.001$ given *** to indicate the degree of statistical significance.

The Wald test allows us to see which variables are statistically significant and tells us the direction of the relationship. It is also useful to know how an increase in the predictor value changes the likelihood of voting. The Exp (B) column in the output gives an indication of the change in the predicted *odds* of voting for each unit change in the predictor variable. Values of less than 1 indicate an increase in the value of the predictor variable is associated with a decrease in the odds of voting, whereas a value of more than 1 indicates an increase in the odds of voting. We can see that the odds of a person in the 18-24 age group having voted is 1.34 times higher for each increase in the trust scale (bq48). It is also 3.29 times higher for those reporting having been asked to participate in politics or community affairs (bq42). However, we need to be cautious in interpreting these odds. Each of the odds ratios displayed in the table has a 95 per cent confidence interval (95 per cent C.I. for Exp(B)) giving a lower and upper value. This is the range of values that we can be 95 per cent sure encompasses the true value of the odds ratio. The value of Exp (B) should fall within the lower and upper confidence intervals for us to be confident that it is a true representation of the population. As the confidence intervals for having volunteered in politics (bq43) are so wide we cannot be sure that the Exp(B) figure itself is particularly reliable.

One of the difficulties with regression analysis is that predictor (independent) variables often have high inter-correlations among them. Table 6.6 below provides collinearity diagnostics for the social capital model. As no procedure for producing collinearity diagnostics exists in logistic regression, linear regression was used to produce these. Menard (1995) suggests that a tolerance value of less than 0.1 indicates that there is a serious collinearity problem with the variables and that any VIF values of over 10 may also be cause for concern. We can see from Table 6.6 that the values for the predictor variables in the social capital model fall comfortably within these figures. The same procedure was carried out for the remaining four models and no significant collinearity problems were found.

Table 6.6 Collinearity diagnostics for the social capital model

Coefficients^a

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Volunteered-Politics /Community Affairs	.753	1.329
	People-Take Advantage/Be Fair	.987	1.013
	Recruited-Politics/Community Affairs	.758	1.319

a. Dependent Variable: VerifiedVote

The final section of the output is the casewise list discussed above. It lists all cases with Zresid values of above 2 or below -2. Cases with values above 2.5 or below -2.5 are considered to be a problem (Menard 1995), that is to say they may be exerting an undue influence on the sample. Below we can see that three cases are listed but none have values above or below these figures.

Casewise List^b

Case	Selected Status ^a	Observed	Predicted	Predicted Group	Temporary Variable	
		VerifiedVote			Resid	ZResid
1950	S	D**	.861	V	-.861	-2.490
2355	S	D	.279	D	-.279	-.622
3740	S	D**	.862	V	-.862	-2.497

a. S = Selected, U = Unselected cases, and ** = Misclassified cases.

b. Cases with studentized residuals greater than 2.000 are listed.

We can see that three of the four variables in the social capital model have statistically significant effects. These findings indicate that trust in others, being asked to participate in politics and community affairs and having volunteered in politics and community affairs all had strong positive effects on 18-24 year olds in 2001. But how does the social capital model fare when predicting the voting behaviour of the other age groups?

Table 6.7 below shows that a total of 457 respondents aged between 25 and 34 were included in the analysis. For this age group the model was also significantly better than the model with no predictor variables included (chi square = 24.611, df = 4, $p < 0.001$). However, the model has a weaker fit for this age group than for the 18-24 group with only one statistically significant variable. Table 6.7 shows that 46.2 per cent of non-voters and 70.7 per cent of voters are correctly classified an overall figure of 58.7 per cent, compared to 77.7 per cent for the 18-24 group. The model accounts for

between 3.4 and 5.6 per cent of the variance in the decision to vote for this second youngest age group with only perceived fairness of others statistically significant. The values of the coefficients reveal an increase in the perceived fairness scale (0-10) is associated with an increase in the probability of voting of .141. The remaining 3 variables are shown not to be statistically significant for this group.

Table 6.7 Comparison of the performance of the social capital model by age group

<u>Model fit</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Correctly classified %	77.7	58.7	65.5	74.5	75.4	80.9
Non voters correctly classified	92.7	46.2	22.8	1.0	0.0	0.0
Voters correctly classified	57.4	70.7	90.1	99.6	100.0	100.0
Cox and Snell R square	.228	.034	.069	.017	.016	.023
Nagelkerke R square	.306	.056	.094	.026	.023	.037
<u>Predictors</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Trust in others	.293***	-.001	.110**	.053	-.033	.051
SE	.058	.032	.036	.043	.051	.045
Perceived fairness	-.011	.141***	.051	.060	.093	.049
SE	.055	.034	.040	.048	.056	.050
Asked to participate	3.851**	-.372	.475	-.561	.441	.335
SE	1.397	.290	.333	.343	.467	.503
Volunteering	1.193**	.337	.667*	.339	.190	.684
SE	.362	.235	.283	.310	.366	.423
N	163	457	537	482	419	678

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

For 35-44 year olds the model also has a weaker fit than for the youngest age group. Trust in others and volunteering are significant and the odds of voting associated with these two variables increase by a factor of .110 and .667 respectively for each increase in the predictor variable. None of the variables are significant for the remaining three age groups.

The results show that social capital was an important indicator of whether the youngest group voted or not in 2001. The model provides a more accurate prediction of the 18-24 year olds decision to vote than it does for any of the other age groups. Involvement in social networks and trusting others had a positive impact on turnout for 18-24 year olds in 2001. This suggests that today's youth may have lower levels of trust, are less likely to have been mobilised to vote and are less likely to have been involved in politics and community affairs than their counterparts in previous generations, although we are unable to confirm this directly for lack of relevant comparable data in earlier datasets.

The civic voluntarism model

Table 6.8 shows that the civic voluntarism model performs less well than the social capital model for the two youngest age groups. The model only accounts for 18.8 per cent and 25.1 per cent of the variance in voting decision. Looking at Table 6.8, being asked to participate remains statistically significant, as in the social capital model, with the probability of voting increasing by 2.174 if the respondent reported that s/he had been asked to participate in politics. Only one additional variable in the model is significant for 18-24 year olds. Social class has a positive beta coefficient; the probability of voting increased by .635 for those respondents reporting to be 'middle or upper class' rather than 'working class'.

Among the 25-34 year olds, the model fares even less well. Only the amount of leisure time available to respondents and having been contacted by telephone by a political party during the campaign are significant predictors. For the remaining 4 age groups social class is highly significant for 35-44 year olds suggesting that an increase in social class from working to middle class increases the probability of voting by .979. Only one other variable in the civic voluntarism model is significant for the remaining age groups. For 25-34; 35-44; 45-54 and 55-64 year olds in 2001 interest in the election campaign was a significant predictor in whether they voted.

Table 6.8 Comparison of the performance of the civic voluntarism model by age group

<u>Model fit</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Correctly classified	70.6	67.8	73.5	82.1	78.9	85.1
Non voters correctly classified	79.2	41	18.1	0	0	0
Voters correctly classified	62.2	84.4	94.6	100	100	100
Cox and Snell R square	.188	.101	.094	.061	.053	.072
Nagelkerke R square	.251	.137	.136	.10	.083	.127
<u>Predictors</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Educational qualifications	.672	-.441	-.696***	.261	-.369	.157
SE	.415	.345	.332	0.363	.351	.35
Social class	.635*	-.032	.979***	.979***	-.024	-.018
SE	.298	.212	0.266	0.342	.338	.32
Leisure time	.286	.265*	.047	-.323	-.669	-0.15
SE	.163	.129	0.154	.181	.174	.162
Asked to participate	2.174***	-.253	.586	.158	.179	.166
SE	.528	0.26	0.353	.396	.406	.483
Anyone convince to vote	.544	-.479	.128	.771	-.191	.308
SE	.376	.27	.382	.833	.564	.861
Party mobilisation: home	-.315	.359	-.028	.305	-.021	.058
SE	.343	.242	.27	.36	.352	.354
Party mobilisation: telephone	-.923	1.386	.5	-.276	.134	2.7
SE	.683	.676	.455	.485	0.562	1.522
Voluntary activity	-.136	-.159	-.35	.217	.084	-.149
SE	.137	.095	.114	.131	.139	.166
Political efficacy	-.044	.2	.07***	.043***	.089***	.42***
SE	.076	.045	.06	.078	.087	.076
Interest in campaign	.202	-.712	-.525***	-.568*	-.568*	-.292
SE	.246	.163	.196	.226	.225	.208
Strength of partisanship	.403	.226	-.015	.311	-0.56	.446*
SE	.27	.172	.192	.246	.232	.22
N	185	333	389	366	340	571

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 6.8 shows that the civic voluntarism model tells us little about the low turnout amongst the youngest two age groups. It suggests that this set of resources and psychological engagement in politics were not crucial factors, although social class played a role for the youngest group and interest in the election campaign for the 25-34 year olds. However, controlling for these variables, the model confirms the importance of political mobilisation. Where young people were asked to participate in political activity they were more likely to vote.

The equity fairness/relative deprivation model

The equity fairness model fares less well than the civic voluntarism and social capital models. Table 6.9 shows that three of the twelve variables had a significant predictive ability for the 18-24 group. Overall the model accounts for between 12.1 per cent and 16.3 per cent of the variance, although it correctly predicts 71.4 per cent of non-voters. A set of variables in the equity fairness model tap into feelings respondents have about the financial situation in their household. Table 6.9 shows that two of these variables indicate that those who are more positive about the financial situation in their household are more likely to vote. The first of these *prospective perceptions of economic deprivation*, that is the feeling respondents have about how the financial situation in their house will change over the next twelve months, has a positive beta coefficient indicating that each increase in respondents prospective economic situation is associated with an increased probability of voting of .373. The second, respondents who report being 'angry' about the financial situation of their household is also statistically significant. The negative coefficient indicating that those reporting themselves to be angry are less likely to vote and have a highly significant decreased probability of voting of 1.656. The significance of these two variables together suggests that younger citizens are more likely to vote if they feel their future is financially stable. Table 6.9 shows that one other variable is significant for this age group. Satisfaction with transport policy is highly significant ($p < 0.001$ ***). Each increase in positive feelings respondents have of how the government is handling transport policy is associated with an increased probability of .480.

Table 6.9 Comparison of the performance of the equity fairness model by age group

<u>Model fit</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Percentage correctly classified	62.6	61.8	69.0	76.8	77.6	82.4
% of non voters correctly classified	71.4	44.2	17.9	9.5	10.3	0.0
% of voters correctly classified	51.7	76.5	94.9	98.7	99.0	99.0
Omnibus test	.000	.001	.001	.280	.070	.062
Hosmer and Lemeshow test	.000	.014	.134	.087	.091	.740
Cox and Snell R square	.121	.055	.064	.060	.070	.051
Nagelkerke R square	.163	.073	.089	.089	.105	.084
Predictor variables	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Government treats people like me fairly	-.039	.429***	.129	.108	-.082	-.039
SE	.146	.108	.126	.164	.188	.175
Gap between expectations and reality	-.066	.090	-.261*	-.011	.089	-.269
SE	.130	.090	.102	.129	.186	.142
Perceptions of economic deprivation (retrospective)	-.082	-.238*	.001	-.207	.012	.021
SE	.159	.105	.113	.165	.201	.183
Perceptions of economic deprivation (Prospective)	.373*	-.079	-.054	-.158	.059	-.129
SE	.156	.110	.130	.164	.236	.236
-						
Financial feelings (angry)	1.656***	.029	-.184	-.929	-.165	.411
SE	.407	.353	.439	.482	.594	.533
Financial feelings (disgusted)	1.038*	-.045	.082	.562	-.731	-.216
SE	.512	.407	.431	.558	.719	.559
Financial feelings (uneasy)	.583	-.421	-.102	-.462	.654	-0.25
SE	.320	.221	.271	.300	.398	.377
Financial feelings (afraid)	.159	.167	-.262	.168	-.049	.136
SE	.332	.306	.316	.401	.350	.295
Policy satisfaction (crime)	.214	.047	-.048	.259	-.142	.462
SE	.136	.105	.119	.135	.171	.151
Policy satisfaction (education)	-.240	.008	-.081	-.290	.320	-.308
SE	.131	.107	.120	.145	.177	.163
Policy satisfaction (NHS)	-.079	.087	.349**	.276	.462*	.154

SE	.147	.100	.117	.157	.189	.158
Policy satisfaction (transport)	.480	-.327**	-.368	-.063	-.368*	.002
SE	.141**	.099	.115	.149	.181	.145
N	140	391	472	418	344	533

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Looking at the 25-34 age group only one variable in the equity fairness model, *perceptions of fair treatment by the government*, is statistically significant ($p < 0.000$ ***). For each increase in perceived governmental fairness likelihood of voting increased by .429. The model is only able to predict between 5.5 per cent and 7.3 per cent of the variance in the outcome and successfully classifies only 44.2 per cent of non-voters. Clearly this model tells us little about the reasons the two youngest groups stayed away from the polls in 2001 and also has a weak fit for the remaining age groups. It appears that feelings of economic deprivation have some impact on young people's propensity to vote but this does not appear to be attributed to government by the youngest group. Overall the negative incentives in this model do not fit the data well and it appears that other incentives to participation need to be examined.

We can see from Table 6.10 that the models in the sociological framework and their predictor variables have greater explanatory power for our youngest age group, the 18-24 year olds than for the 25-34 year old group. Variables in the social capital model are important for the youngest group but less so for the 25-34 year olds. Three predictor variables in the social capital model suggest that, consistent with the literature on young people's political participation, those who are involved in political or community affairs or have been asked to be involved are significantly more likely to vote. Trust in others is also important for this age group. The significance of these variables supports the idea that where younger people have higher levels of interpersonal trust in cooperation with others they are more likely to feel involved in politics and are more likely to vote. It also suggests that declining or lower levels of social capital among young and first time voters might be an important factor in explaining why fewer young people have turned out to vote since 1992. For the 25-34 year olds in 2001, the civic voluntarism model fares best and resources, psychological engagement and political mobilisation all impact on their decision, but far from conclusively.

Table 6.10 Summary of significant variables in the sociological framework for 18-24 and 25-34 year olds

18-24

SC model	Trust in others	***
SC model	Asked to participate	**
SC model	Volunteering	***
CV model	Social class	*
CV model	Asked to participate	**
EF model	Perceptions of economic deprivation (Prospective)	*
EF model	Financial feelings (angry)	***
EF model	Policy satisfaction (transport)	***

25-34

SC model	Perceived fairness	***
CV model	Leisure time	*
CV model	Party mobilisation: telephone call	*
CV model	Interest in campaign	***
EF model	Government treats people like me fairly	***

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The rational voter framework

The cognitive mobilisation model

Table 6.11 Comparison of the performance of the cognitive mobilisation model by age group

<u>Model fit</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Correctly classified %	68.8	72.2	75.4	79.5	80.5	85.1
Non voters correctly classified	60.8	47.1	21.5	5.6	14	0
Voters correctly classified	75	86.7	96.1	98.5	97.7	100
Cox and Snell R square	.159	.174	.105	.078	.116	.055
Nagelkerke R square	.212	.238	.151	.122	.182	.096
<u>Predictors</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Education qualifications	.209	-.082*	-.740*	.232	-.633	.237
SE	.572	.399	0.372	0.319	0.383	.334
Political knowledge Q1	1.263**	.736*	.433	-.286	.245	.262
SE	.465	.373	.459	.669	.59	.52

Political Knowledge Q2	.946*	-1.124*	-.971*	.642	-.116	.264
SE	.456	.327	.412	.753	.685	.557
Political knowledge Q3	.823***	-.893	1.413	1.81	-.344	.007
SE	.683	.535	1.666	1.904	1.1	.805
Television coverage	-.227	.542***	.284	.083	-.012	.205
SE	.225	.015	.167	.201	.21	.193
Interest in election	-1.144***	-.766***	-.641***	-.720**	-.894	-.428
SE	.303	.19	.2	.225	.27	.22
gvt handle crime	-.26	-.038	.064	.044	-.329	.428
SE	.177	.142	.151	.157	.204	.167
gvt handle education	.133	.008	-.065	-.318	.23	-.352
SE	.159	.139	.159	.176	.202	.189
gvt handle the NHS	-.04	.247	.362***	.388*	.444*	.84
SE	0.202	.132	.149	.176	.216	.173
gvt handle transport	.027	-.144	-.266	.098	-.127	.41
SE	.182	.132	.154	.172	.212	.165
N	168	298	382	369	308	489

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 6.11 shows that the cognitive mobilisation model does not fare substantially well for either of the two youngest groups. However, for both groups, consistent with the literature on youth turnout, political knowledge was a significant predictor with two of the three political knowledge quiz variables statistically significant. For the 18-24 year olds only one other variable, *interest in the election* was significant, but this was also significant for most of the other age groups. Education and the amount of television coverage of the election viewed were also significant for the 25-34 year olds. Those young people who are more interested and more knowledgeable about politics are more likely to vote. In the case of the 25-34 year olds education and media use may also have had its theoretical impact on knowledge and interest. Whilst these factors overlap to a degree with those in the civic voluntarism model, the results do suggest that it would be wrong to argue that the cognitively mobilised are so frustrated with the political system that they return to vote as a sign of protest or disaffection.

The general incentives model

Table 6.12 shows that nine of the fourteen variables in the model are statistically significant for 18-24 year olds and six for the 25-34 year olds. Five of these are also significant for the 35-44 year olds, but importantly the model has greater explanatory power for the youngest age groups than it does for any of the older groups. This indicates that many of the variables in the model are specific to our understanding of why the youngest groups decision to vote or not.

Table 6.12 shows that the model correctly classifies 86 per cent of non voters and 85 per cent of voters, an overall figure of 85.5 per cent of those in the 18-24 age group. Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke R square tests show that the model accounts for between 46.4 per cent and 62 per cent of the variance. Political efficacy, the feeling that respondents can influence politics, is not significant. The two variables measuring perceived cost, the feeling that people are too busy to vote and the feeling that political activity is too much time and effort are both highly significant. The negative beta coefficient for the later indicates that as the perceived costs of voting increase the likelihood of voting decreased. The three party like/dislike scale variables show that feelings about the Liberal Democrats are significant. Both of the two variables testing the importance of individual benefits received from voting are statistically significant at the 0.000 level. Where individuals in this age group feel satisfaction when they vote or say they would feel guilty if they did not vote their likelihood of voting increases by 1.259 and 1.249 for each increase on the respective scales. Where they perceive that voting can make a difference to the way Britain is governed the probability of their voting rises by .582 for each increase in the scale. The second group benefits variable, the idea that being active in politics equals group benefits, has a negative coefficient suggesting that each increase in agreement is associated with a decrease in the odds of voting. Two variables test the impact of the perceived benefits to democracy, or system benefits of voting. The notion that it is one's duty to vote did not have a significant impact on this age group, but where they felt that democracy only works properly if people vote, the probability of voting rose by .920 for each increase in the scale. The final two variables in the model look at voting as a social norm. The positive beta coefficient for the statement that *most of my family and friends think that voting is a waste of time* indicates that where respondents agree with this statement they are more likely to vote than not to.

Table 6.12 Comparison of the performance of the general incentives model by age group

<u>Model fit</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Percentage correctly classified	85.5	72.7	78.8	80.1	78.6	85.3
% of non voters correctly classified	86.0	63.6	38.9	35.3	38.3	12.6
% of voters correctly classified	85.0	80.0	93.2	93.9	91.5	97.3
Omnibus test	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05
Hosmer and Lemeshow test	.005	.042	.023	.609	.548	.380
Cox and Snell R square	.464	.251	.257	.227	.217	.114
Nagelkerke R square	.620	.336	.375	.342	.324	.204
<u>Predictor variables</u>	<u>18-24</u>	<u>25-34</u>	<u>35-44</u>	<u>45-54</u>	<u>55-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
Efficacy	-.164	.227**	.251	-.018	.144	.039
SE	.132	.075	.099	.108	.123	.109
Political activity too much time and effort	.653**	.513**	-.010	.031	.017	-.058
SE	.242	.165	.191	.237	.240	.256
People are too busy to vote	-1.027***	-.451**	-.470**	-.401*	.846***	-.106
SE	.188	.151	.167	.190	.240	.218
How do you feel about the Labour party?	.173	-.081	-.074	.002	.164	-.110
SE	.138	.089	.103	.098	.107	.111
How do you feel about the Conservative party?	.089	.079	-.029	.053	.198	-.045
SE	.131	.075	.103	.102	.117	.123
How do you feel about the Liberal Democrats?	.341**	.415***	.137	.142	.155	-.027
SE	.116	.089	.105	.114	.118	.114
I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote	1.259***	.265	.096	-.324	-.068	.519
SE	.355	.160	.107	.250	.301	.345
I would feel very guilty if I did not vote in a general election	1.249***	-.358**	-.610**	-.424*	-.447	-.398
SE	.268	.136	.183	.207	.238	.268
Being active in politics equals group benefits	-.759*	-.410*	-.528	.231	-.503	-.672*
SE	.307	.176	.262	.310	.299	.324
Voting makes a difference	.582*	-.050	-.108	-.469*	.233	.029
SE	.267	.166	.191	.227	.261	.256

Duty to vote	-.284	.033	.303	.920**	.210	.511
SE	.284	.153	.228	.292	.278	.315
Democracy only works properly if most people vote	.920*	.155	-.049	-.395	.354	.474
SE	.377	.204	.207	.298	.404	.362
Most of my family and friends think that voting is a waste of time	.667**	.107	-.038	-.427*	.255	.137
SE	.251	.136	.183	.203	.232	.278
Most people around here voted in the general election	-.009	-.147	.532	-.071	.269	.219
SE	.253	.148	.202	.223	.261	.242
N	155	214	244	230	281	268

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

The general incentives model also predicts the voting behaviour of the 25-34 group with some accuracy. Unlike their younger counterparts, efficacy is important to this age group along with costs. Individual and groups benefits are also significant, but interestingly system benefits and social norms are less important. Efficacy and costs were also important for 35-44 year olds in 2001 as were social norms, but benefits had a lesser impact.

6.3.3 Modelling interaction effects

The analysis so far reveals that clearly the general incentives model has the strongest fit, confirming Clarke et al's (2004) findings, but three of the models of voter turnout, the civic voluntarism, the social capital and the cognitive mobilisation models, provide important additional information on the factors specific to electoral turnout amongst today's young adults. Before discussing the implications of these results it is necessary to perform a test to verify the statistical significance of the difference between the age groups in the models. Tables 6.13-6.15 use the whole 2001 BES data set to interact age with each of the significant variables in the above models. Age is coded 18-24: 1, 25+: 0. Table 6.13 interacts the significant variables in the civic voluntarism model and confirms that social class and political recruitment have a greater effect on the 18-24 groups than on the other age group. Table 6.14 does the same for the social capital

model, confirming that for 18-24 year olds social trust was a more important factor in their decision to vote than for other age groups. The interactions for the remaining variables in the social capital model do not fully support the separate age group analysis. Volunteering is not significant when interacted with age, whilst perceived fairness of others is a more important factor here than in the age group models. Table 6.15 interacts the political knowledge variables included in the cognitive mobilisation model, showing that one of the three knowledge variables is significant. In summary, whilst the results of the interactions do not confirm the statistical significance of all the difference in the age group models, they still support the conclusion that social class, social capital and political knowledge were key predictors important to the youngest groups of adult's decision to vote in 2001 and 2005.

Table 6.13 Interaction terms in the civic voluntarism model

<u>Base Model</u>	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>
Educational qualifications	-.494***	-.455***	-.487***	-.478***
Social class	.309**	.318**	-.244	-.355
Leisure time	.140*	.175**	.171**	.173**
Asked to participate	.464**	.437**	.444**	1.567**
Anyone convince to vote	-.201	-.164	-.17	-.16
Party mobilisation: home	.157	.148	.143	.129
Party mobilisation: telephone	.486*	.450*	.463*	.487*
Voluntary activity	-.045	-.056	-.055	-.053
Political efficacy	.034	.043	.041	.042
Interest in campaign	-.483***	-.455***	-.448***	-.434***
Strength of partisanship	.216**	.247**	.249**	.253**
<u>Control variables</u>				
Age		.456***	.456***	.456***
Gender		-.14		
Ethnicity		.004		
<u>Interacted variables</u>				
Social class*Age			.282***	.282***
Asked to participate*Age				1.549*

Table 6.14 Interaction terms in the social capital model

<u>Base model</u>	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>
Trust in others	.289	.289**	.275**	.275**	.275**
Perceived fairness of others	.42	.420***	.425***	.425***	.425***

Recruited to politics/com affairs	.071	.071***	-.040***	-.040***	-.040***
Volunteered	.088	.088***	.089***	.089***	.089***
<hr/>					
Control variables					
<hr/>					
Age	.286***	.286***	.248***	.248***	.248***
Gender (0 female, 1 male)	-.113				
Ethnicity (0 other, 1 white British)	-.03				
<hr/>					
Interacted variables					
<hr/>					
Trust*Age		.058**	.058**	.058**	.058**
Perceived fairness*Age			.058**	.058**	.058**
Recruited*Age				-.443	-.443
Volunteered*Age					-.403

Table 6.15 Interaction terms in the cognitive mobilisation model

<u>Base model</u>	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>
Education qualifications	-.552***	-.176	-.172	-.182	-.182
Political knowledge Q1	.601***	.581***	.654	.578	.623*
Political Knowledge Q2	.549***	.439	.439*	.306	.405
Political knowledge Q3	-.316	-.177	-.18	-.167	1.304
Television coverage	.175*	.206	.208	.206*	.215*
Interest in election	-.807***	-.733***	-.734***	-.731***	-.739***
gvt handle crime	-.114	-.082	-.081	-.082	-.084
gvt handle education	-.093	-.101	-.1	-.103	-.091
gvt handle the NHS	.226***	.278*	.277**	.277*	.266**
gvt handle transport	-.047	-.059	-.062	-.053	-.076
<hr/>					
Control variables					
<hr/>					
Age		.184***	.184***	.184***	.184***
Gender		-.580***	-.580***	-.580***	-.580***
Ethnicity		-.101			
<hr/>					
Interacted variables					
<hr/>					
knowledge 1 * Age			-.036		
knowledge 2 * Age				.067	
knowledge 3 * Age					-.674*

6.3.4 Preliminary conclusions

The data analysis confirms the conclusions presented by Clarke et al (2004) that the general incentives model provides a range of variables that are critical to our understanding of the decision to vote in Britain. The model performs particularly well

for the youngest age group, the 18-24 years olds. These young citizens appear to have assessed the costs and benefits of voting in 2001 and influenced by others around them, most decided not to vote. The similarity of the finding that the general incentives models is strongest in its predictive power, to that of the BES team at Essex is positive and it would suggest the analysis is procedurally and technically robust. The method of splitting the data into separate age groups for the analysis provides additional information which would not have been available had the alternative methods of including a dummy variable for age in each model been used. This method would not have enabled me to address the uniqueness of a generation of young people as adequately. The results of the data analysis suggest the need to build a model of youth turnout which incorporates a range of other predictors. The following discussion outlines how these variables may come together to form a new model, which I will aim to test in Chapter seven.

We might have expected a pivotality calculation (efficacy), to have played a key role in the 18-24 year olds decision to vote, given that, as discussed in Chapter two, one of the most frequently cited reasons by young people for their lack of engagement in formal politics is that they feel unable to ‘make a difference’, that is, influence, formal politics. However, it appears that the youngest group of voters in 2001 were not motivated by whether or not their vote was pivotal. One of the most cited explanations for low levels of electoral turnout is based on closeness of electoral competition (e.g., Pattie and Johnston 2001; Curtice 2005). When an election is seen as a foregone conclusion many voters decide not to vote as their vote is unlikely to influence the outcome. The 2001 British general election was widely seen as a foregone conclusion. Whilst this explanation appears to hold for the 25-34 year olds, for whom efficacy is significant the youngest group do not appear to have been influenced by the lack of electoral competition. This is interesting as it shows that there are likely to be different factors affecting the decisions of the two youngest groups. It suggests that a more competitive election is likely to increase turnout in this age group. It also appears that there is a life-cycle component to rational choice calculations. The 18-24 year olds appear to be concerned with a range of somewhat more ideological group and system benefits, but looking at the 25-34 year olds these considerations are dropped and replaced by a purer rational choice calculation that focuses on *individual* benefits and a pivotality calculation.

Consistent with rational choice accounts of political behaviour the youngest group of enfranchised citizens in 2001 did make an assessment of the costs and benefits of voting. Those who felt that they would acquire individual benefits from voting were more likely to vote, as long as the costs did not outweigh these benefits. It appears that 25-34 year olds were less concerned with 'system' and 'group benefits. They were concerned primarily with purely individual rational cost-benefits calculations including a judgement of whether their vote was significant. Whilst the general incentives model was strongest in its overall predictive power, one of the advantages of the selected method of logistic regression is that it enables the identification of variables which are uniquely significant for young people from all the other models outlined. These can then be pooled to draw out a set of hypotheses and model these using similar regression methods.

Table 6.16 Summary of significant variables in sociological and rational voter models

18-24

SC model	Trust in others	.000***
SC model	Asked to participate	.006**
SC model	Volunteering	.001***
CV model	Social class	.033*
CV model	Asked to participate	.006**
EF model	Perceptions of economic deprivation (Prospective)	.017*
EF model	Financial feelings (angry)	.000***
EF model	Policy satisfaction (transport)	.001***
CM model	Political knowledge 1	.007**
CM model	Political knowledge 2	.037*
CM model	Interest in election	.000***
GI model	Political activity too much time and effort	.007**
GI model	People are too busy to vote	.000***
GI model	How do you feel about the Liberal Democrats?	.03*
GI model	I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote	.000***
GI model	I would feel very guilty if I did not vote in a general election	.000***
GI model	Being active in politics equals group benefits	.014*
GI model	Voting makes a difference	.030*
GI model	Democracy only works properly if most people vote	.015*
GI model	Most of my family and friends think that voting is a waste of time	.008**

25-34

SC model	Perceived fairness	.000***
CV model	Leisure time	.041*
CV model	Party mobilisation: telephone call	.040*

CV model	Interest in campaign	.000***
EF model	Government treats people like me fairly	.000***
CM model	Education	.041*
CM model	Political knowledge 1	.048*
CM model	Political knowledge 2	-.001***
CM model	Television coverage of the election	.000***
CM model	Interest in the election	.000***
GI model	Efficacy	.003**
GI model	Political activity too much time and effort	.002**
GI model	People are too busy to vote	.001***
GI model	How do you feel about the Liberal Democrats?	.000***
GI model	I would feel very guilty if I did not vote in a general election	.008**
GI model	Being active in politics equals group benefits	.020*

Overall the models in the sociological framework perform less well than those in the rational voter framework. We might expect sociological explanations for declines in the youth vote to fare relatively badly given that the sociological factors tend to change gradually over time rather than from election to election. However, given that turnout has declined among the youngest age groups at the last three elections it is reasonable to conclude that long-term factors might also be at work. Other research has confirmed the importance of considering variables in rational choice, social capital and civic voluntarism model (Fieldhouse et al 2007).

It is clear that whilst the rational choice focused models fare better than the sociologically focused ones; the latter have something very important to add to the conclusions. Of particular importance is the social capital model which fares uniquely well amongst the 18-24 year old age group when compared to the other five groups. The model manages to classify 92.7 per cent of non-voters in this age group, and three of its four composite variables are significant at least to the 0.01** level. This is a strong indication of the need to build a testable hypothesis of generational change which incorporates ideas of increased individual rationality, the key finding of Clarke et al's (2004) analysis, but which also takes into account the significance of norms of reciprocity and trust which the social capital model aims to operationalise.

The socio-cultural version of the social capital model briefly outlined at the beginning of this chapter, works on the basis that 'civic engagement and social trust form a mutually reinforcing syndrome' (Putnam 2000). The data analysis suggests that today's young people are less likely to be recruited into politics or community affairs and have lower levels of trust in others than previous generations did. An important feature in the rational cost-benefit version of the social capital model is the ability of

groups and institutions to produce desired outputs and, by doing so generate trust (Becker 1975, 2001; Coleman 1988). Trust in this sense is based on the extent to which individuals receive particular benefits from institutions and is reliant on the ability of institutions to deliver policies that address multiple needs. The data analysis suggests the need to look more closely at levels of social capital amongst young people and understand if, how and why these different forms of capital are declining.

A key feature of the social capital thesis is that citizens make informed choices to participate and become active in community politics on the basis of political knowledge. Research has shown that levels political knowledge among young people have fallen in the last ten years or so (e.g., Park 2000). The data analysis appears to confirm that political knowledge is an important determinant of the decision to vote for young citizens. The significance of the political knowledge variables in the cognitive mobilisation model suggest that one of the key questions for future research to address is where young people receive their political information from and how this has changed in the last ten years. Norris et al (1999) found that 17-24 year olds were the least likely of all groups to report the regular watching of television news or to regularly read a newspaper. Research has also found that television was the main source of political information for most first-time voters (Harrison and Diecke 2000; Russell et al 2002). If young people do not watch television news, but get most of their information about politics from television – what kinds of information are they exposed to and how does this affect their political orientations?

Of the other variables especially significant to the youngest groups, social class is amongst the most striking, and perhaps most important to consider in more detail, given its importance traditionally as a predictor of political behaviour. As discussed in Chapter two, it is generally accepted that social class has had a declining influence on political participation as class secularism and partisan dealignment weakened and blurred the distinctions and anchors to voting behaviour. We also might expect class to figure as a more prominent predictor of turnout amongst those older generations who were socialised in an era before traditional class divisions declined. Two variables in the equity fairness model add to the case for investigating social class. Where young people perceive themselves to be likely to experience economic hardship, which we might expect to be a proxy for social class, they were less likely to vote as were those who reported themselves to be ‘angry’ about their economic situation.

The empirical evidence presented points to the need to test explanations which take into account the impact of social and political change. Social psychology explanations of political participation argue that early life experiences imprint political psychological attachments on voters, most notably partisan attachments. These types of explanation point to the need to understand the political socialisation of this generation of young non-voters. Those aged between 18 and 35 in 2001 were socialised in a unique social and political environment of accelerated individualisation and the marketisation of society and by the increasingly negative reporting of politics by the media. If early socialisation experiences imprint political psychological attachments on voters, it is reasonable to conclude that negative early experiences could similarly condition political participation.

If the early political socialisation of a generation of young people, those who came of age in the Thatcher era and after, and who were first eligible to vote in 2001, was comparable to previous generations, lacking in the traditional cues to political participation, then this group are likely to have been affected disproportionately by shorter-term 'period' factors. These factors, I suggest, may have in the past been reduced or mitigated by psychological attachments. But in the absence of these and in a unique political period – an era of hegemonic politics, with one party dominating electoral politics for long periods – this generation experienced no examples of elections changing governments and little to persuade them it was worthwhile voting. To compound this situation, many of this generation, reached their teens towards the end of the Thatcher administration and during the Major years in government. This was a period dominated by the negative reporting of politics by the media, as the conservative government struggled to deal with the highest rate of ministerial resignation of any previous parliament that century. Between 1992 and 1996, fifteen MPs and Ministers resigned, only three of them on policy related grounds, the remainder over personal conduct. These problems were compounded by persistent divisive splits in the government over Europe and, even after John Major's victory in the 1995 leadership election, the continual battle for succession (Butler and Kavanagh 1997).

Towards a theory of modern youth turnout

On the basis of this elaboration of the findings of the data analysis presented in this Chapter, it is possible to outline some hypotheses through which to explain a

generational change in voter turnout which aim to account for the disproportionate decline in the youth vote since 1992.

1. Today's young people are not endowed with as strong a partisan framework through which to understand and engage in formal politics.
2. This is a generation who were socialised in a significantly less participatory, reciprocal and social trust-forming environment than their predecessors.

These changes have meant that:

3. In the absence of an environment conducive to forming traditional psychological attachments to political parties and politics and through which to understand political issues; and in the absence of an environment conducive to forming close social networks to achieve common collective aims; young people are more susceptible to the factors associated with their early political socialisation.
4. Two aspects of the period of their socialisation are particularly important in understanding their participatory and attitudinal characteristics; firstly, the hegemonic political period they experienced, where elections were seen to make little difference to governments.
Secondly, they are exposed to, and are more susceptible to less valuable political information to form their political knowledge and engagement, than previous generations were.

Lastly, given the significance of social class and economic related variables to the prediction of turnout amongst the youngest generation, these factors are particularly evident amongst young working class citizens, who are less likely to have alternative mechanisms for political engagement, social capital and are less likely to be exposed to high value information sources. Chapter seven expands on this broad theory and the findings of the data analysis conducted in this chapter and attempts to test a theoretical explanation of low turnout amongst young people derived from these as well as the secondary literature.

Towards a generational model of youth disengagement in Britain

7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters the thesis has sought to outline the uniqueness of recent cohorts of British citizens voting behaviour. The data analysis identifies a decline in turnout at British General Elections since 1992 amongst all age groups. But it finds that the decline has been disproportionately located amongst the youngest sections of the population. Looking at the life-cycles of previous age cohorts, these declines are unprecedented and it would appear, although this cannot be demonstrated conclusively, that generational changes are at least part of the explanation. Whilst it is entirely possible that this cohort could return to follow a similar life-cycle turnout trajectory to previous generations, it would be unprecedented in modern British electoral history for a cohort to make such a significant change. What we can conclude is that these cohorts are unique in the sense that their participatory characteristics have never been witnessed before. Chapter six built on the result of the bivariate analysis a set of logistic regression models using 2001 BES survey data, revealing that for the youngest two age groups – those whose turnout fell most dramatically in 2001- the key predictors of their decision to vote were social capital, social class and political knowledge. This chapter establishes an evidence based link between these variables in the context of electoral change.

Investigating political change by focusing on a society's youngest citizens is always prone to problems associated with separating life-cycle, period and cohort effects. It is acknowledged that it is impossible to conclusively demonstrate that these variables are linked in such a way as to comprehensively account for the sharp drops in

turnout in 1997 and 2001. These limitations are largely the result of a lack of panel data needed to track individuals over time. However, having recognised these limitations, there is a strong *prima facie* case which will be elaborated in this chapter, given the evidence available, that recent cohorts have experienced a unique combination of long and short-term social and political changes that help explain their recent participatory characteristics.

We can trace the origins of electoral change in Britain to the movement away from a frozen electoral arena, towards a more open market for votes. The evidence suggests that broad changes in how citizens identify with politics and political parties are likely to have played a critical role in shaping a generation of modern voters. By the 1970s stable attachment between social groups and political parties came into question. Butler and Stokes had argued that socialisation played a crucial role in forming party attachments. Those growing up in the mid to late 1970s and after, who came of voting age in the 1990s, experienced an altogether different political socialisation to their predecessors. The dynamics of modern political participation in this era need to be understood through the move from a stable aligned era of political support to a dealigned modern era. The findings of the data analysis can be understood through a nuanced approach to three prominent explanations for class and partisan dealignment since the 1970s. Firstly, the idea of class secularisation, according to which voters class identities and values are weakening as classes lose their cohesion; secondly, that factors deriving from the performance of political parties are generating partisan dealignment; and lastly, the idea associated with the work of Russell Dalton and Ronald Inglehart that electorates have undergone a period of ‘cognitive mobilisation’ and their levels of political sophistication have rendered political parties functionally obsolete (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997 and Dalton 2003).

Class secularisation is usually held to derive from various types of social mobility. The main source of this mobility in Britain has been the declining manufacturing sector and the replacement of manual jobs associated with this sector with non-manual positions in the service sector. Social mobility has had two important consequences. Firstly, it has weakened the relationship between class and voting. The 1992 British Election Survey shows that, while 58 per cent of the static working class supported Labour, and only 17 per cent of the static middle class did so, 31 per cent of those who experienced upward mobility from manual to non-manual status voted for the party (Webb 2000: 73). This social mobility increased steadily from the 1960s – with

the vast majority experiencing upward mobility (Ibid). Thatcher era reforms accelerated class secularisation by ending many traditional working class sources of employment and by creating a new generation of entrepreneurs with totally different values to the solidaristic class based values held by their predecessors. I will argue that the period also had a dramatic impact on working class social cohesion as the Thatcher government weakened the power of the trade unions and their membership declined.

The second explanation for partisan dealignment relates the performance of political parties. One school of thought argues that as countries became more complex and more difficult to govern, trust amongst the electorate for politics, politicians and political institutions was undermined (e.g., Birch 1984). Another argument about the performance of political parties argues that party strategies have been a source of dealignment (Webb 2000). The extent to which young adults have remained aligned to political parties and the factors that could further influence their dealignment are relatively rarely discussed by political scientists. I will contend that the failure of political parties since 1979 to respond to electoral defeat and provide effective competition in subsequent elections seems likely to have weakened voter's sense of political efficacy. I will also argue that whilst we might understand the transformation of political parties to 'catch-all' organisations as a rational response by parties to a dealigning electorate, it may have had the effect of further undermining any identification young people have with political parties. To understand this we can examine the 'paradox of voting'. If voters act rationally, the paradox is that they vote at all given that their individual vote is unlikely to influence the outcome of any election. But the majority of voters do. We can perhaps best understand this paradox by suggesting that voters probably were not, and probably still are not, (completely) rational. At least part of the reason they voted was because of their political socialisation and enduring party attachments. But in a dealigned era, many younger citizens have little or no experience of voting and have no psychological attachments to political parties. In these circumstances their sense of political efficacy is likely to be weakened if they are offered little choice between the political parties and the nature of the electoral contest, revealed through pre-election polls and the media indicates that their vote is unlikely to have any impact. It may be rational not to vote. Thus the interaction of long-term (class and partisan dealignment) and short-term (lack of clear difference between parties and lack of electoral competition, political hegemony) would appear to be plausible reasons for disproportionate youth turnout.

A third explanation for partisan dealignment is that citizens are more sophisticated consumers of politics today than ever before and that they no longer need political parties to provide cues in evaluating political issues. This leaves them particularly exposed to other sources of political information. Scholars widely concur that the most important of all these sources of information is television (Dalton 2003). Cognitive mobilisation theory implies the need to investigate the increase or decrease in political information and its quality, as well as important distributional issues. There is an increasing body of research investigating the role of the mass media and its informational function (e.g., Norris 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Semetko 1999). Whilst it is beyond the scope of the thesis to investigate in detail the influence of a changing media environment, I will outline a case, based on the existing literature and the available evidence, for future research which investigates changing media consumption habits and their impact on political participation and wider civic engagement.

There is good evidence that the types of politics that young people are involved in are changing (e.g., Marsh et al 2007 and Dalton 2008) and from Chapters four and six of this thesis that young people appear to be unique in their attitudinal and participatory characteristics. This would suggest that a further explanation for continued class and partisan alignment might lie in the formative socialisation experiences of young people. One of the central arguments in electoral research is that between the partisan identification and issue voting schools. Issue-voting models were seen to be more appropriate in accounting for the voting behaviour of an increasingly sophisticated and rational electorate. Childhood socialisation and habitual group and party ties were seen as less important on this basis. Clarke et al (2004) argue that modern partisanship conforms more to the accumulation of party performance assessments than it does to the social-psychological concept of an enduring affective attachment. They argue that a 'valence model' of political participation best accounts for patterns of turnout and party support in recent elections. Although Clarke et al (2004) are critical of the social-psychological conception of partisanship from the early British Election Studies, their conclusions point to an important way in which we might distinguish between today's young voters from their older predecessors. Partisan or anti-partisan identity may now be conditioned by party and leadership evaluations rather than long-term social psychological attachments. This might be one reason why the operationalisation of Partisan Identification in the BES does not appear to be a predictor of youth turnout in the previous chapter.

At least since the work of Mannheim (1928) social scientists have been interested in the idea that youth is a critical period for the development of attitudes, values and beliefs. During these impressionable years, young people are particularly receptive to political ideas but also to the prevailing social climate and philosophy. Once established, these beliefs and values will tend to crystallise and stabilise and will often persist through an individual's life. If recent cohorts of young people have been exposed to a unique social and political environment then this might help explain why they are unique in terms of their political behaviour and attitudes. Moreover, a strong reason for suspecting that we might be witnessing a generational change in political participation stems from the work of Franklin (2004) whose cross-national research shows that there is a strong habitual element to voting behaviour. Those who vote at their first few elections are likely to acquire the habit of voting and continue doing so at subsequent elections, but, those who abstain are likely to acquire the habit of abstaining. The impact of being raised during a period of class and partisan dealignment may have meant that recent generations were particularly susceptible to the context of their first electoral experience. If the psychological engagement with politics derived from partisanship and social group identity has a strong informational function, which we might suspect given research showing the politically relevant information available from daily life experiences (Fiorina 1990; Popkin 1991), then it may be that today's youth are simply not endowed with the same kinds of information and impetus towards political engagement. With this in mind one task of this thesis is to use the available evidence to try and understand how particular long and short-term social and political circumstances have impacted on a generation of young citizens. How do the earlier findings of the data analysis - the importance of social capital, social class and political knowledge help us to understand what was specific about the political socialisation of young adults in the late 1970s and 1980s that impacted on their turnout characteristics in such a dramatic way? The data analysis revealed that it was amongst those aged between 18-34 at the 2001 general election that turnout declined most dramatically. This age group can be described as 'Thatcher's children'. The oldest of this group experienced their political socialisation firmly in the Thatcher era and had already had the opportunity to vote at three previous elections in 1987, 1992 and 1997.

One of the most significant aspects of this period was the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher's battle with the trade unions. The decline of the unions signified a decline in the key linkage between working class voters and politics

and meant that future generations of working class people were significantly less exposed to traditional working class social networks through which partisan attachments and social group reciprocity are likely to have been reinforced, and channels of participation embedded. Some of the younger portion of the 18-34 year olds in 2001 had their first opportunity to vote in 1997, after New Labour, under Tony Blair, had moved to the right, closing in on the centre – centre/right ground previously occupied by the Conservative Party. This would have undoubtedly presented first time voters with a less clear distinction between the parties, although many are likely to have voted for New Labour as a means of unseating the beleaguered Conservative's. One question, given the idea that this generation were susceptible to the experiences of their formative political period, is whether their attitudes and participatory characteristics were affected most by the final years of the Major government, or by the period between 1997 and 2001, when many voted for the first time. We might suspect the former because of the nature of the Conservative Party's demise between 1992 and 1997, but there may be reasons why Tony Blair's first term in office had a particular impact, given its media managed and highly centralised tendencies.

With these questions and explanations in mind and based on the evidence of the data analysis in Chapters four and six, we can return to the theoretical ideas developed at the end of Chapter six to specify some research question for examination in the remainder of the chapter. The general idea behind the theory is that a combination of long-term factors rooted in class and partisan dealignment, combined with the factors associated with the political period a generation of young voters were socialised in have had profound consequences for their voting behaviour. Whilst we cannot yet be sure whether these characteristics are 'habits', it is reasonable to suspect this may be the case, and to test these evidence based assumptions.

7.2 Theoretical explanations for low youth turnout

1. Today's young people are not endowed with as strong a partisan framework through which to understand and engage in formal politics as their predecessors.
2. This is a generation who were socialised in a significantly less participatory, reciprocal and social trust forming environment than their predecessors.

These changes have meant that:

3. In the absence of an environment conducive to forming traditional psychological attachments to political parties and politics and through which to understand political issues; as well as one of close social networks; young people are more susceptible to the factors associated with their political socialisation.
4. Three aspects of the period of their socialisation are particularly important in understanding their participatory and attitudinal characteristics; a hegemonic political period; the ideological convergence of the main political parties; and the political information environment through which their political knowledge and engagement was conditioned.
5. Working class citizens, who are less likely to have alternative mechanisms for political engagement, social capital and are less likely to be exposed to alternative high value information sources are most likely to be negatively affected.

The theory argues that the forces of change at work between 1979 and the early 1990s hit those socialised during the Thatcher era and becoming eligible to vote after 1992 most acutely. These young adults were socialised outside the reach of the traditional mobilisation forces associated with partisan identification and social capital, but this has been particularly significant for working class young people who rely on a narrower set of alternative networks through which they receive and consolidate their political cues. Two key features of the political period in which they were socialised turned them off from politics. Firstly, they came of age in a hegemonic period where The Conservative Party (1979-1997) and New Labour (1997-2001) had virtually unchallenged political tenures. For this generation, yet to acquire the habit of voting, there seemed little point in voting, as their vote was perceived to make no difference to electoral outcomes. Secondly, during the later part of this period, post-1992, as the cohorts became eligible to vote for the first time in 1997 or 2001, the two main parties converged on the centre ground. New Labour's apparent shift right under Tony Blair left young people, particularly those from working class backgrounds, unsure about the differences between the major parties. This shift affected young people most as they had yet to establish habitual patterns of political allegiance. The idea that young people are not endowed with a strong framework through which to condition their understanding and engagement in politics is tested in research question two, below. The second element of

the theory of change – that this generation were socialised in a less participatory and social trust forming environment is also examined in question two, which also looks at class differences. Question 4 probes the idea that this cohort may have been particularly affected by factors associated with the political period during which they came of age. The notion that these young adults are not exposed to a valuable political information environment is examined in question 5, whilst the idea that these effects are most pronounced amongst working class groups is addressed through all five questions.

The most difficult aspect of the theory to test is the idea that as a result of the changes outlined young people are more ‘susceptible’ to the factors associated with their early political socialisation. One way of addressing this is to look at the relationship between social networks, partisanship and levels of political knowledge (question 2).

Research questions:

1. What evidence is there that working class people rely on a narrower set of social networks than middle class people?
2. Have traditional social networks, partisanship and levels of political knowledge declined more among working class people than middle class people since 1979?
3. What evidence is there that working class social networks and partisan identity were important to levels of political knowledge?
4. What evidence is there that factors associated with the political period 1979-2001 exacerbated the disinclination of young people, particularly those from working class backgrounds, to vote?
5. If young people are increasingly reliant on the media for political information how has the media environment they are exposed to and the media they are consuming changed?

7.3 Question 1: *What evidence is there that working class people rely on a narrower set of social networks than middle class people?*

One of the problems with researching social capital is the conceptual vagueness which

surrounds the concept. This gives rise to obvious measurement and comparability problems. These problems, in part, stem from the differing origins of the term. Social capital's theoretical precursors can be found in the works of many of the early social and political theorists from Aristotle, de Tocqueville and Adam Smith. However, recent conceptions can largely be traced to the work of three key authors – Bourdieu and Passeron (1976), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000) – who take quite different approaches to its measurement. Bourdieu used social capital as a way to explain how economic forces create and maintain capitalist culture. He proposed that economic, cultural, and social capital were convertible. For example, the upper classes convert economic capital into cultural and social capital by sending their children to private schools. Social and cultural capital gain their value because people with status recognise the value of each other's capital, so even though these capitals are utilised by individuals (and individual families) they have collective effects.

Coleman's view of social capital placed more emphasis on the collective aspects of social capital, and less on it as a tool of social control. He argued that 'social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors' (Coleman 1988: 98). This functionalist view of social capital rings true on many levels, but raises substantial questions about what the concept includes and what it does not. Coleman outlines three aspects of social capital: obligations and expectations, information flow capability, and norms accompanied by sanctions. The most obvious common ground between Coleman and Bourdieu is the notion that social capital can be converted into other forms of capital.

However, it was Putnam's work on social capital in Italy and his later book on America that became most influential in the social sciences. Putnam (1993) argued that the differential success of the regional governments in Italy resulted from stable differences in social capital between the regions. For Putnam the regions in the North of Italy tended to have the most successful governments and these areas also had high levels of social capital as measured by membership or participation in associational organisations and high levels of reported social trust between strangers. Regional governments in the south of the country were typically less effective and were characterised by high levels of distrust between strangers, with people turning to their families for trust and support. Putnam found that in these regions membership in voluntary organisations was very much lower and that the predominant social

organisation was hierarchical in nature, with relationships often based on patronage and power. However, it was Putnam's (1995b) Ithiel de Sola Pool lecture which caused much controversy and sparked debate in the academic literature. Here Putnam argued that the USA was witnessing a dramatic decline in social capital. Social capital was defined by Putnam as 'features of social life-networks, norms, and trust-that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives' (Putnam 1995b: 664). He concluded in his lecture that:

The concept of 'civil society' has played a central role in the recent global debate about the preconditions for democracy and democratization. In the newer democracies this phrase has properly focused attention on the need to foster a vibrant civic life in soils traditionally inhospitable to self-government. In the established democracies, ironically, growing numbers of citizens are questioning the effectiveness of their public institutions at the very moment when liberal democracy has swept the battlefield, both ideologically and geopolitically. In America, at least, there is reason to suspect that this democratic disarray may be linked to a broad and continuing erosion of civic engagement that began a quarter-century ago. High on our scholarly agenda should be the question of whether a comparable erosion of social capital may be under way in other advanced democracies, perhaps in different institutional and behavioral guises. High on America's agenda should be the question of how to reverse these adverse trends in social connectedness, thus restoring civic engagement and civic trust (Putnam 1995: 77).

Here Putnam raised the question of whether the decline of social capital he found in America was mirrored in other democracies. In *Bowling Alone* (2000) Putnam provides the most detailed exposition of his arguments. His data demonstrates that in America voting, political knowledge, political trust, and grassroots political activism are all down. His research revealed that Americans sign 30 per cent fewer petitions and are 40 per cent less likely to join a consumer boycott, as compared to the decades prior to his research. He also found that these declines were equally visible in non-political community life: membership and activity in all sorts of local clubs and civic and religious organisations fell at an accelerating pace. In the mid-1970s the average American attended some sort of club meeting every month, but by 1998 that rate of

attendance had been cut by nearly 60 per cent.

Putnam's second set of findings revealed changes in informal social activity. Putnam found that in 1975 the average American entertained friends at home 15 times per year; but the equivalent figure in 1998 was half that. He found that virtually all leisure activities that involve doing something with someone else, from playing volleyball to playing chamber music, are declining. But here Putnam distinguishes between what he calls 'machers', those who are involved in more formal types of activity and 'schmoozers' who spend more time in informal friendship and family groups. The distinction is important because 'machers' for Putnam tend to be better educated, have higher incomes and are disproportionately home-owners, whereas informal social involvement is common at all levels of the social hierarchy. Formal community involvement, Putnam argues is relatively modest early in life, peaking in middle age and declining with retirement according to what we understand as a life-cycle effect of social participation. But, 'informal social involvement follows the opposite path over the life-cycle, peaking among young adults, entering a long decline as family and community obligations press in, the rising again with retirement..' (Putnam 2000: 94). This point, which I will return to later, has important ramifications for research into youth participation in politics. The third set of findings Putnam revealed relate to social trust. Putnam is careful to distinguish between social trust and trust in government or other social institutions (Ibid: 137). He found that Americans are more tolerant of one another than were previous generations, but they trust one another less.

These three foundational views of social capital have significant areas of overlap, but there are also some very important incompatibilities. Bourdieu's conception of social capital is relatively dark. Putnam's language is far friendlier, and seems to regard association between people as positive in its own right. Coleman's perspective, while viewing social capital as more neutral, emphasises the use of social capital as a precursor of human capital. While these differences are subtle, they make the task of measuring or assessing social capital far more challenging. This is further complicated because there is a lack of data sets with sufficient political and social capital variables to test the relationship between political factors and social capital over time. This is a particular issue for a longitudinal research design that seeks to understand the explanatory role of social capital in the investigation of changing electoral turnout.

Social capital and youth research

Conceptualising and measuring social capital is further complicated when focusing on young people by research showing that standard approaches to measurement and conceptualisation are inappropriate to the lives of young people (Harper 2001; Whiting and Harper 2003). Standard measures of social capital indicate that young people are less likely to participate in social and civic activities, but these quantitative indicators may under-estimate the kinds of activities young people are involved in (Ibid). Morrow (2002) argues that existing work on social capital does not tend to take into account of the ways that young people socialise in friendship networks, participate in local activities, generate their own connections and make links for their parents.

The idea that young people's social activity is under-represented is not a new one and is echoed in the literature on political participation. As discussed in Chapter two, survey based research has frequently been criticised for its narrow definition of what constitutes political activity. Qualitative research has found that young people are engaged in a broad spectrum of activities that are often not seen as political (Kimberlee 2002; Henn et al 2002, 2005; Marsh et al 2007). These studies have provided important evidence to counter claims of youth apathy. Moreover, recent large scale survey based research confirms that citizens in Britain have not contracted out of politics but are engaged in a number of non-traditional forms of political participation (Pattie et al 2004). Pattie et al found that collectivist forms of participation have decreased whilst individualistic ones have increased. The study found that all forms of political participation from voting to associational activity are related to age, education and socio-economic status, but not to gender or ethnicity. The young were least likely of all to belong to formal organisations, but are most likely to be involved in informal networks or friendship groups (2004:104-5).

Implicit in the traditional life-cycle understanding of political participation is that youth is a transitional stage before adulthood. But mounting evidence of generational change or the underlying assumption that it is taking place has led to a focus on youth participation which tends not to consider the social and political life-cycle. I would argue that whilst this approach has its value, as discussed at various stages in the thesis, it often fails to take into account the political life-cycle as a fundamental element in our understanding of youth politics. Simply because we know

that participation changes over the life-cycle (e.g., Verba and Nie 1972, Barnes and Kaase 1979; Parry 1992; Verba et al 1995) indicates that we should be wary about making conclusions, implicit or explicit from one stage of the life-cycle to another. Throughout the thesis I have attempted to root the findings of change in electoral turnout amongst recent generations in the context of wider social changes as well as in the short-term political context.

Implicit in the concern that young people are not voting is the understanding that if these habits adhere to them as they age, the proportion of the electorate voting could fall significantly. But there appears little evidence as to whether engagement in unconventional activity will adhere to today's cohorts as they age, or whether they are likely to engage in formal types of activity later in life. Barnes and Kaase (1979) suggested that young people are more likely to be involved in protest politics because it provides an ideal medium for them to challenge the power concentrated in the hand of 'old men'. It is my contention that unconventional types of social and political involvement such as those undertaken by younger people may have, to a significant extent, the opposite life-cycle trajectory to conventional participation; that is a downward one. Putnam (2000: 94) argues that for both men and women, marriage increases the amount of time spent at home and in formal community organisations, whilst reducing the time spent with friends. Having children further cuts into informal social connections (Putnam 2000). Whilst there are fewer people marrying and having children in Britain now than ever before, we would still expect the effect of middle age and marriage to push down informal social connections.

One of the problems with social capital as a predictor of electoral turnout is that many measures of social capital, including Putnam's (2000: 16), include turnout at elections. This seems oddly tautologous. But if we believe Franklin (2004) that voting is habitual, this can be seen as less problematic as the experience of voting itself may well be an important influence on future voting. However, we are primarily concerned with how other forms of associational activity might influence electoral turnout so will exclude turnout as a measure of social capital. The measures of social capital used in the previous chapter follow those used in the wide literature on social capital and political participation. It is acknowledged that these measures are not comprehensive, in that they do not measure all possible conceptualisations of social capital, but their usage is justified as they are the most commonly used and comparable measures across data sets and across time. This approach is consistent with the way turnout has been treated in the

thesis. I acknowledge that other definitions and measurements of social capital may reveal different trends, as different measurements and definitions of political participation do. But it remains important to understand what has *changed* according to existing measures. These changes can then be the basis for understanding what new measures are needed.

There is strong and consistent evidence from existing literature that working class social networks tend to be narrower than middle class ones. In a major study of the impact of class on social mobility in Britain, Goldthorpe et al (1987) found that 'kin', that is family, played a greater role in the associational pattern of working class life than in the service class. Typically Goldthorpe et al found that amongst the service class 'voluntary associations are joined at relatively frequent intervals, so that, over the course of his life, the individual steadily accumulates memberships.' (Ibid:185). Whereas the working class pattern was for associations to be joined far less regularly, but to be held for longer period of time (Ibid). Goldthorpe et al found that amongst the working classes, working men's clubs and 'overwhelmingly' trade unions accounted for well over half of all memberships. However, amongst the service classes associational involvements were clearly more diversified (Ibid).

More recently, studies have confirmed the idea that there are important distributional issues in relation to social capital (Johnston and Jowell 1999). Li et al (2003) utilise Social Mobility Inquiry and British Household Panel Survey data to consider the types of social capital specific to class groups. They confirm the established knowledge that working class groups draw their organisational affiliations disproportionately from trade unions and working men's clubs. Li et al show that there are two broad types of association: trade unions and working men's clubs which are working class dominated and all other types of organisations which are 'service class' dominated.

7.4 Question 2: *Have traditional working class social networks, partisanship and levels of political knowledge declined more among working class people than middle class people since 1979?*

(a) Social networks

There is a considerable body of work that shows that differences in social networks are

transmitted across generations (Goldthorpe et al 1987; Kiernan 1996; Aldridge 2001). This might be one reason we might expect working class associational activity not to have grown in the same way as middle class activity. Peter Hall argues in his influential articles on social capital, that whilst we might expect differences in social capital between social groups to have diminished over time, as social convergence theories might predict, they have actually grown since the 1950s (Hall 1999, 2002). According to Hall 'the two groups who face marginalization from civil society are the working class and the young' (Hall 2002: 53). In 1959, the average person in the working class belonged to almost two thirds as many associations as someone from the middle classes. By 1990, he belonged to less than half as many. In 1959 the average Briton under the age of 30 belonged to 84 per cent as many associations as an older person. By 1990, he belonged to only 75 per cent as many (Hall 2002: 53).

The evidence from the data analysis, confirmed by recent research, suggests that there is something particular that has changed amongst working class groups, something that has had an impact on their rate of electoral participation. I have suggested that long-term factors such as class dealignment may have impacted on working class partisanship and participation. But whilst class dealignment hints at a set of social changes we need to be more specific as to how long and short-term factors have influenced the electorate. Much of the recent literature on social capital has explored trends in voluntary organisations, but there is relatively little robust evidence on how participation accentuates or bridge social divisions. However, two important studies in the recent literature on social capital reveal important trends. Li et al (2003: 508) show that memberships of the 'Labour' type organisations experienced a significant decline from 1992 to 1999 whereas the decline in the other types of associations was much smaller and non-significant. They also found that 'the civic type of membership is more diffused, less related to the work-place and more likely to engender a generalized source of social capital (Ibid: 511).

The trend of declining working class associational membership is confirmed by Warde et al (2003) who also used the British Household Panel Survey to consider the changing volume and distribution of associational membership in Britain. Investigating the period between 1991 and 1997, Warde et al found increasing differences in levels of participation between the service classes and all other classes. They conclude that the trend in the later 1990s increase the plausibility of Hall's concern that the working class might become increasingly marginalized and that the decline in trade-union

membership may be one of the key reasons for declining involvement of lower class groups in formal associations. These results provide further evidence of the relationship between social class and social capital. But they also reveal that there was an important change in participatory dynamics in the 1990s. Although it is very difficult to attribute cause, it is reasonable to suspect, given the evidence of the data analysis, that the decline in trade unionism, the main source of working class associative activity, played a crucial role in declining working class identification with political parties and participation in politics.

When Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 it was made clear that the new government's key priority was to reduce and control inflation, not to try and recover full employment. One of the main reasons for the decline in unions was the impact of recession on Britain, aggravated by the government's insistence on reducing the rate of inflation. The recession aided the governments curbing of union power as the increase in unemployment in the period was largely concentrated in the heavily unionised manufacturing industries. Between 1979 and 1986 membership of the National Union of Miners fell by 72 per cent, the Transport and General Workers Union by 34 per cent, the Amalgamated Engineers Union by 34 per cent, the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union by 24 per cent and the General Municipal and Boilermakers Union by 16 per cent (Roberts 1989). The Conservative manifesto had promised action on picketing as they sought to avoid a repeat of the humiliation of the last Conservative government by the miners. The following decade saw a raft of legislation curbing the powers of the unions.

Beside the political changes often associated with Thatcher's governments, the period saw drastic changes in attitudes towards the trade unions. Employers began moving away from building collaborative relationships with the unions in favour of bypassing them in favour of direct links between management and employees. Another factor was the changing technical and product market environment of the 1980s. Employers hit by a sharp increase in competition responded by accelerating the introduction of new technology. With new technology came increased automation which cut across conventional skill demarcations in the workforce and demanded employers to seek more flexibility in their use of labour (Atkinson and Meager 1985). Confronted with a trade union movement still profoundly influenced by historic craft traditions, the achievement of the necessary flexibility required a marked reduction in union influence. In addition to these factors there was a significant move away from

collective bargaining to a more individualised model of industrial relations which emphasised direct communications between employers and individual employees and closer evaluation of performance. This meant that the unions were increasingly seen as a constraint on the possibilities of effective management.

The percentage of employees who were union members fell by over a third between 1983 and 2001, from half (49 per cent) to just under a third (31 per cent). But as Bryson and Gomez (2003), utilising British Social Attitudes data, show, there was also a significant decline in union density in the 1990s relative to the 1980s. Bryson and Gomez cite two main possibilities to explain the decline in union density in this period: either the desire for unionisation has fallen, or the costs of membership have risen relative to the benefits. Given that we know voters are increasingly inclined to decide whether to cast their vote on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation, we might expect this to be the case for other types of participation. With unions less able to provide tangible benefits, their power weakened, prospective members were less likely to see any benefit in membership. The changes associated with Thatcher's policies on the trade unions were set within broad changes to the occupational structure of Britain. The decline in manufacturing and the increase in service sector employment accompanied by broad cultural changes emphasised individualist rather than collectivist values. The relative decline of manual work and the expansion of non-manual occupations meant that the proportion of the workforce in manual occupations fell from 80 per cent in the period immediately prior to the first world war to 52 per cent in 1987 (Routh 1987).

(b) Partisanship

Since the 1970s and particularly since the publication of a seminal article by Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt (1977), partisan dealignment has been identified by political scientists as a key process underlying changing political behaviour. The data analysis suggests that political knowledge is an important predictor of the youngest group's decision to vote. This indicates a need to understand what sources of political information are available to young voters today and how the traditional sources of information have changed. The Michigan election studies demonstrated the significance of partisanship in forming political identities (Campbell et al 1960, 1966) and this was recognised in seminal works of political change in Britain (e.g. Butler and Stokes 1969). One of the key functions of partisanship has been an informational one. Partisan ties help orient the

individual to the complexities of politics, and provide a framework for assimilating political information, understanding political issues, and making political judgements (Dalton 2000). But partisanship also mobilises citizens to vote at elections given that they have a psychological bond to a political party. The functional importance of partisan identification means that it is crucial to understand how it has changed over recent years and what impact this might have on younger voters at recent general elections.

We can see from Table 7.1 that the percentage of both middle class and working class respondents with a sense of partisan identity remained stable until 1992-1997 when it began to fall. Unsurprisingly, the percentage of those identifying with the conservative party began to drop after 1992 and the drop is particularly pronounced between 1992 and 1997 among both middle class and working class respondents during a period of widespread allegations of sleaze and political corruption. Equally unsurprising is the increase in those identifying with Labour post 1992 as the New Labour machine gathered momentum. Looking at those working class respondents identifying with Labour between 1979 and 1983, there is some indication that Thatcher's early union reforms may have led to the decrease in partisanship in this period. But the main change in partisanship appears to have been related to the period 1992-2001.

Table 7.1 Direction of partisanship in Britain 1964-2001¹

	1964	1966	1974F	1974O	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001
% with partisan identification MC	98	97	95	95	94	95	95	95	92	86
% with partisan identification WC	95	97	94	93	92	93	93	94	92	87
% identifying with Conservatives MC	59	56	53	50	56	54	53	54	35	30
% identifying with Conservatives WC	27	27	29	27	31	31	32	31	19	18
% identifying with Labour MC	20	27	25	25	23	19	21	22	37	37
% identifying with Labour WC	53	54	52	54	48	42	44	46	55	55
Total Cons+										

¹ Class is measured using the Goldthorpe-Heath 5 point schema and recoded: Salaried; Routine non-manual and Petty bourgeoisie as middle class (MC), Manual Foreman and Supervisors and Working class as working class (WC).

Labour identifiers MC	79	84	78	75	79	73	74	74	71	67
Total Cons+										
Labour identifiers WC	80	81	81	81	79	73	74	77	75	73

Source: British Election Survey data

Table 7.2 shows that it appears to be a different story for strength of partisanship in the same period. Whilst the percentage of ‘very strong’ identifiers declined throughout the period, it is among the ‘fairly strong’ and ‘not very strong’ identifiers that there is most change. Unsurprisingly, relating to recent elections, there was a significant jump in middle class respondents reporting a ‘not very strong’ identification 1992 and 1997 as their traditional party lost its footing on its way to electoral defeat in 1997. But the most significant differences occur among working class respondents, with an 8 per cent decrease in those with reporting a ‘fairly strong’ identification between 1979 and 1987 and a 7 per cent increase in those with a ‘not very strong’ identification between 1979 and 1983. This supports the tentative conclusions from Table 7.1 that working class partisan identity was affected by the Thatcher era reforms and plausibly by the union reforms in particular.

Table 7.2 Strength of partisanship in Britain 1964-2001

	1964	1966	1974F	1974O	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001
% Very strong identifiers MC	44	49	29	24	24	25	22	19	16	14
% Very strong identifiers WC	44	50	34	32	26	27	24	23	22	19
% Fairly strong identifiers MC	42	42	51	53	53	50	50	50	47	47
% Fairly strong identifiers WC	46	43	43	54	53	44	45	48	44	47
% Not very strong identifiers MC	15	9	17	22	26	25	28	30	37	39
% Not very strong identifiers WC	10	7	23	14	21	28	30	30	33	34

Source: British Election Survey data

Table 7.3 reports the percentage of those with no party identification for the youngest age group, compared to the whole BES sample. The percentage of those reporting no party attachment in Britain rose from 5.1 per cent in 1992 to 16.1 per cent in 2005

amongst all age groups. A rise of over ten percent since 1992. But we can see that this trend is much more pronounced amongst the 18-24 year olds groups, 24.8 per cent of whom reported no identification in 2005 compared to 6.5 per cent in 1992, a rise of almost 20 per cent in the same period.

Table 7.3 Respondents reporting no party identification 1964-2005 by age

	1964	1966	1970	1974F	1974O	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001	2005
Aged 18-24	4	0	8	4	5	11	8	9	7	13	19	25
All Adults	3	3	5	4	4	6	5	5	5	7	11	16

Source: British Election Survey data

Clearly those with a strong sense of partisanship have become fewer since 1970. The evidence supports the theory advanced at the beginning of the chapter that working class respondent's partisanship was particularly damaged during the Thatcher years. It also supports the idea that the period between 1992 and 2001, had a damaging effect and that this was particularly pronounced among younger people yet to acquire a sense of partisanship.

(C) Political Knowledge

Of the three variables supporting the hypotheses; political knowledge is perhaps the most difficult to measure. This in part stems from the reluctance of those designing social surveys to include questions which respondents may not want to answer and which might make them increasingly reluctant to answer further questions. Another difficulty is that in surveys such as the BES knowledge questions have varied from year to year making a comparison of scores over time unreliable. It is possible to calculate, for example, the number of respondents in a demographic category who scored over 50 per cent in the political knowledge quiz and compare this between 1992 and 2001, but this is problematic as it would mean comparing answers to different questions.

The *Young People's Social Attitudes Surveys* carried out in 1994, 1998 and 2003 charts the attitudes of teenagers between the ages of 12 and 19 and includes a small battery of political knowledge questions. Table 7.4 reports the findings of the

knowledge quiz. The results are not conclusive. The differences between 1994 and 1998 on the question on European elections almost certainly stem from there having been European elections during the fieldwork for the 1994 survey (Park 2000), and the question is not included in the 2003 survey. We also might have expected a rise in knowledge scores in 1998 given the proximity of the fieldwork to the 1997 election. In addition, with regard to the question on women sitting in the House of Lords: we may attribute the low score here in 2003 to a general awareness of lords reform, but a lack of knowledge of the detail causing more wrong answers. These issues highlight the problems of measuring political knowledge.

Table 7.4 Political knowledge amongst teenagers 1994-1998

% who gave correct answer	1994	1998	2003
Great Britain is a member of the EU (true)	84	81	79
Northern Ireland is part of the UK (true)	76	75	71
Women are not allowed to sit in the Lords (false)	66	67	12
Britain has separate elections for the European and British parliaments (true)	65	50	
The longest time allowed between general elections is four years (false)	19	21	54
% of correct answers			
4 or 5 answers	43	30	-
3 answers	30	38	-
2 answers	16	22	-
0 or 1 answer correct	11	10	-

Source: Park (2000:28) and Young People's Social Attitudes Survey 2003.

Park's (2000) analysis, limited to the 1994 and 1998 data shows that in 1994 older teenagers were significantly more knowledgeable than younger ones, but by 1998 this difference had all but vanished. Park puts this down to a substantial fall in knowledge among the older age group – those approaching voting age. This difference was evident even after excluding the question about the difference between European and British elections (Park 2000). But perhaps the most important finding of Park's analysis was that she was able to identify a cohort of teenagers whose knowledge had not increased with age. Significantly, this group were all born between 1979 and 1982. Amongst this cohort; the proportion of 12-15 year olds who gave three or more correct answers in 1994 actually dropped as they were asked for a second time, aged 16-19. After four

years and one general election, according to these measures, there was no growth in political knowledge amongst this cohort (Park 2000). The pattern is similar if we follow those 12-15 year olds in 1998. We find that there was also a small drop in knowledge scores as they were asked for a second time, aged 16-19, in 2003. Park's regression analysis of the social characteristics predicting political knowledge shows that class was the most significant factor.

Whilst the evidence is somewhat inconclusive we can add to the evidence we have by asking a slightly different question to the one originally posed. We know that information and knowledge are part of the same equation. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) define political knowledge as '...the range of factual information about political that is stored in the long-term memory'. By focusing on political information rather than political knowledge we are simply bypassing 'knowing' what is actually stored, and supplanting it with what is available to be stored, and by observing the habits which enable us to make conclusions about which information individuals are likely to be storing.² One might argue that there is no way of knowing for sure what a person decides, consciously or unconsciously, to store, but by observing how media environments and consumption habits have changed we can make reasonably reliable conclusions. I shall return to this in question five where the focus will be on the changing media environment young people are exposed to.

7.5 Question 3: *What evidence is there that partisan identification and trade union membership (working class social capital) are predictors of political knowledge?*

I have so far shown that there is strong, if not conclusive evidence that working class social networks; levels of partisanship; as well as levels of political knowledge have declined in the period between 1979 and 2001. If we can demonstrate that partisanship and associational activity are good predictors of political knowledge this will increase an understanding of how these variables are linked. It seems intuitive to suspect that those with a psychological tie to a political party have that tie at least partly based on some sense that their political values are reflected by a party. This implies a degree of knowledge of these values. In the same sense involvement in associational activity implies a sense of what that activity means, the value of being involved as well as a

² Delli Carpini and Keeter go into much more detail about what can accurately be described as political knowledge.

level of knowledge about the other people involved in that activity. All of which points to a wider civic knowledge than I am able to test here. But using the available political knowledge questions we can at least examine part of the wider picture.

To establish whether partisanship and trade union membership / activity have influenced levels of political knowledge I create a political knowledge scale from the political questions asked in the BES 2001. This is the main dependent variable in the regression model below. One difficulty is that, as mentioned earlier, the absence of political knowledge questions in the datasets prior to 1992 means that we are unable to test the theory prior to this time. The theory suggests that partisan identity and group membership *have been* key linkages between working class people and their politics, so testing this over a longer period would have been ideal. However, as the key changes in turnout occurred in the period between 1992 and 2001, and the most notable changes in 2001, we are justified in conducting an analysis using the 2001 data. In order to test the relative importance of a range of explanatory variables, the model includes education, which we would expect to have an impact on political knowledge, as well as other demographic control variables. The model then includes the main types of media usage through which voters are known to acquire their information about politics: newspapers and television. In stage three I include, to address the research question, partisan identification and strength of partisan identification to estimate the additional benefits these bring to the predictive ability of the model. In stage four I add trade union membership and being active in a voluntary association. The model is specified as follows:

Political knowledge = education+gender+ethnicity+marital status+newspaper readership+tv news+partisanship+trade union activity

Dependent variable: political knowledge is a derived variable from the BES 2001 political knowledge quiz. The quiz consists of five true/false questions. A political knowledge scale was created by coding correct answers as 1 and incorrect answers as 0 and computing the variables to form one political knowledge scale with a minimum value of 0 and a maximum of 5.

Independent variables:

Education summary: recoded as 0=no educational qualifications, 1= educational

qualifications

Gender: recoded as 1=female, 2=male

Ethnicity: recoded as 1=other, 2=white British

Marital status: recoded as 0=other, 1=married or cohabiting

Read a daily morning newspaper: recoded as 0=no, 1=yes

Number of days a week watches TV news: recoded scale 1-7 days

Partisan identification: recoded as 0=no, 1=yes

Strength of partisan identity: recoded 0=none, 1=not very strong, 2=fairly strong, 3=very strong.

Trade union membership: recoded 0=no, 1=yes

Active in a voluntary association: recoded 0=no, 1=a little, 2=fairly, 3=very

Table 7.5 Predictors of political knowledge in 2001 by class

Working class	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>
	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Education	0.041	0.091	0.109	0.067
Gender	0.21*	0.21**	0.212**	0.231**
Ethnicity	0.164	0.185	0.198	0.172*
Marital status	-0.020	-0.057	-0.052	-0.021
Read Morning newspaper		0.082	0.112	0.319
Days a week watch TV news		.397***	.347***	0.134***
Party Identification			0.247**	.249**
Strength of PID			-0.020	-0.052
Trade union membership				-0.054
Active in voluntary association				2.271*
R square	0.07	0.243	0.299	0.351
N	750	750	750	750
Middle class	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>
	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Education	0.069	0.086	0.087	0.033
Gender	0.239**	0.254***	0.251**	0.212**
Ethnicity	0.145*	0.156*	0.162*	0.184
Marital status	-0.018	-0.040	-0.042	-0.046
Read Morning newspaper		-0.096	-0.089	0.156

Days a week watch TV news	0.157*	0.157*	-0.099*
Party Identification		-0.062	-0.071
Strength of PID		0.023	-0.018
Trade union membership			0.091
Active in voluntary association			0.078
R square	0.094	0.121	0.125
N	1024	1024	1024

Table 7.5 summarises the results of the regression analysis. For both middle class and working class groups men were more likely to have high levels of political knowledge than women, perhaps reflecting the male oriented British political environment. Being white British was also associated with higher levels of political knowledge than the ‘all other groups’ category, but this was only significant among the middle class respondents. Marital status and education had no significant predictive impact on either group. Perhaps surprisingly, reading a morning newspaper has no significant effect for either group. As question five will address, below, newspaper readership has traditionally been associated with high levels of political knowledge. We might in part explain this by noting the trend of declining newspaper readership and the increasing reliance on television for information. This is supported by the coefficients for the number of days a weeks respondents reporting watching television news. The coefficient suggests that whilst significant for both class groups, television is more important as a source of political information to working class people than to middle class people. This is a significant finding in itself and will be an important part of the discussion about changing media habits in question five.

In relation to the research question: *what evidence is there that partisan identification and trade union membership are good predictors of working class political knowledge?*, Table 5 suggests that partisan identification is an important predictor as theorised. We can see that the coefficient indicates that there is an increase in political knowledge for working class respondents who report identifying with a political party. This is strengthened by the absence of a significant effect in the middle class group. Given that we know that the proportion of the population with very strong partisan identity has declined (see Table 7.2) we might have expected strength of party identity to be stronger in the model. However, we can see that identifying with a party is significant. This is important as we can see that whilst overall levels of partisanship have remained stable, at least until 1992, for younger adults there has been a significant

rise in those reporting no partisan identity. The model also tells us that membership alone of a trade union does not appear to have an impact on political knowledge for either class group. However, being *active* in a voluntary association does have a significant effect and whilst this does not measure activity in trade unions, specifically, we have already established that trade unions are a central form of working class associational activity and can therefore reasonably assume that it measure this. We can also see that controlling for a basic set of demographic variables as well as media variables, the model fares better for the working class group than for the middle class group. When fully specified it predicts around 35 per cents of the variance in political knowledge scores for working class respondents, but around half of this for the middle class respondents. This evidence shows that, at least in 2001, partisanship and trade union activity were good predictors of political knowledge. Although care is needed when making conclusions based on this limited evidence, given that we know that partisanship and political knowledge have declined and television usage has increased, it is not a huge jump to conclude that television has an increasingly important influence on working class levels of political o knowledge.

7.6 Question 4: *What evidence is there that factors (lack of electoral competition, valence judgements and ideological convergence) associated with the political period 1979-2001 exacerbated the civic disengagement of working class young people?*

The aim of answering this research question is to understand the political period young people socialised in the 1980s and 1990s were exposed to and how it might have impacted on their political characteristics. Butler and Stokes (1969) emphasised the importance of socialisation processes by arguing that in the ‘impressionable years’, when young, voters are influenced by the party loyalties of their families. In this period the decision to vote and who to vote for was, at least to some extent, removed from the election context. But as we have seen partisan dealignment has meant that the generation of young people who came of voting age around 1990 or after were among the first not to have received a strong sense of partisan identification from their parents. I argue that this left them particularly susceptible in their ‘impressionable years’ to the impact of the political period and their formative electoral experiences.

If parental values and loyalties were crucial long-term influences on voting behaviour in the era of aligned politics, then in the era of dealigned politics, the crucial

influences are those associated with the political period. Franklin (2004) argues that in order to understand turnout we need to understand the character of elections not just the characteristics of voters. In an era of dealignment the argument that voters are increasingly affected by elections has an intuitive appeal, particularly, as I will discuss below, when we consider the specifics of the elections in question between 1992 and 2001. Perhaps the main reason we should be concerned with the character of elections is Franklin (2004) provides strong evidence that voting is a habit. Voters either acquire the habit of voting or of non-voting based on their experience of their first few elections. Elections that fail to stimulate a high turnout such as 1997 and 2001 threaten, according to Franklin, to leave a ‘footprint’ of low turnout as individuals who have their first electoral experiences at these elections, fail to vote in subsequent elections.

With this in mind it is reasonable to argue that it is particularly important to understand the period in which recent generations were socialised. I have examined some of the long-term changes that appear to be particularly relevant, but it is also crucial to investigate how the character of the elections between 1979 and 2001 may have shaped voters characteristics. One of the critical aspects of the period between 1979 and 2001 is that it was one of political hegemony, where one political party remained in power for a considerable period. Between 1979 and 2001 there was only one change of party in government, despite there having been five opportunities for change. The cumulative effect of the five elections between 1979 and 2001 may have been that voters, particularly young voters, saw little point in turning out to vote. As

Table 7.6 Average Lead in Final Polls 1945-2001

1945	6
1950	1
1951	5
1955	4
1959	3
1964	2
1966	10
1970	3
1974Feb	4
1974Oct	9
1979	5

1983	20
1987	8
1992	1
1997	16
2001	14

Table 7.6 shows, prior to 1979, an average final poll lead of over 10 per cent had not been witnessed. But the period between 1979 and 2001 produced three elections with an average poll lead of over 14 per cent. And of the remaining two, the 1992 election failed to produce the Labour victory that many, particularly working class voters had hoped for after the hugely unpopular poll tax. These figures suggest one reason that it would be unsurprising to find negative attitudes towards voting amongst those who came of age in this period and is supported by research showing the one of the key reasons young people are apathetic about conventional politics is that it is seen as ‘unresponsive’ (e.g., Bentley et al 1999; White et al 2000).

Valence politics and the youth of the 1990s

A second set of factors to emerge from this period relate to the role of what has been termed ‘valence politics’ – that is the ability of a given government to perform in the areas most valued by the electorate. In Britain the valence issue par excellence is the economy, but central to the valence model is the notion that evaluations of party leaders provide voters with a shortcut to a political party’s policy competence. Butler and Stokes (1969) distinguished between ‘valence issues’ and ‘position issues’, the former being those where voters identify with leaders dependent of the goals or symbols they uphold or represent. Clarke et al (2004) developed a valence model of political choice to explain modern voting behaviour. Their analysis found that whilst these valence judgements were important to the modern voter, partisanship remained highly significant. In order to encompass partisanship and valence considerations which at first seem at odds, Clarke et al (2004: 211) argue that partisanship can be reconceptualised as a ‘storehouse of accumulated party and party leader performance evaluations’. Deep rooted psychological identifications are replaced by judgements of how parties appear to be performing.

Given the decline in traditional voter loyalties and the context of the political period, a valence model of political choice certainly seems consistent with what we know about youth attitudes and participation in the 1990s. There are at least two types of evaluations prospective young voters were likely to have made in this period. The first concerns Margaret Thatcher's distinctive style of political leadership. In 1979 Thatcher replaced negotiation and compromise with direction and leadership and reasserted the authority of the core executive over organised interests and the public sector (Crewe 1992c). This was at least in part a reflection of the views held by many Conservatives at the time as to the way previous governments had been held to account by the trade unions. In policy making Thatcher bypassed cabinet and worked through small groups of personal staff. It was the breakdown of relations with senior cabinet ministers in 1989 and 1990 which eventually precipitated her downfall in November 1990. One image of politicians voters socialised in the 1980s and 1990s seem to have received was of unresponsive leaders who make decisions without consultation. As mentioned above, a common explanation given for young people for their disengagement from formal politics is that politicians don't care what they think and are unresponsive to their needs (e.g., Bentley 1999; White et al 2000). A second image these voters may have been exposed to was one of opposition arrogance. Neil Kinnock epitomised this at the Labour Party's Sheffield rally, proclaiming that 'in nine days Britain is going to have a Labour government' (Butler and Kavanagh 1992: 126). But Labour went on to lose the election, despite the Conservatives being hugely unpopular.

Another image may have been taken from the contrasting styles of leadership of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The country went from having a leader who, by the time of her downfall, was hugely unpopular, particularly for the poll tax which she had been seen to push through without regard for widespread opposition. In contrast John Major was perceived by many as a non-dynamic and old fashioned looking prime minister who many saw to be a weak leader (Butler and Kavanagh 1992). If the Major government was evaluated on policy grounds, electors had a number of examples through which their negative perceptions of politicians may have been fuelled in this period, perhaps the most prominent of these being 'Black Wednesday' when in September 1992 the Conservative government was forced to withdraw the Pound Sterling from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) after they were unable to keep sterling above its agreed lower limit.

In terms of the evaluation of leaders and leading figures in the government, it is reasonable to suspect that the 1990s could have had a crucial impact on the public's perceptions of politicians and political parties. Firstly, in the period between 1992 and 1997 there were a number of incidents of reported sleaze and policy incompetence and there were more ministerial resignations than in any previous parliament that century (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). These resignations were all the more likely to have been damaging to the government and to voters perceptions because only three of the fifteen were policy related, the remainder were over personal conduct. Moreover, few of these were seen to resign with much dignity and most resigned only after pressure from public opinion and the 1922 committee (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). Given the importance of television as a source of information, the fact that the televising of parliament began in 1990, meant that those receiving their formative impressions of politics and politicians were far more likely than any previous generation to have been exposed to these political events.

What then were the attitudes of young adults growing up in the period towards political parties, but particularly to political leaders and is there any evidence that valence evaluations may have an important component in the shaping of a generation's attitudes towards politics? A common theme to emerge from White, Bruce and Ritchie's (1999) research based on a series of focus groups and interviews of young people aged between 14 and 24 in the 1990s was the belief amongst young people that politicians are untrustworthy. One of the most recurrent statements in their focus groups was that politicians lied and failed to keep their promises. In addition, media reporting of political scandals left the impression that politicians were hypocritical: on the one hand advocating good behaviour, but on the other behaving badly themselves. They consistently referred to sleaze and scandals reported in the media as evidence of politician's bad characters. This image of sleaze and dishonesty also featured strongly in Marsh et al's (2007) more recent focus groups. A common theme running through the groups that young people perceive politicians to be dishonest and remote from their interests.

I think young people are very suspicious of MPs...I mean, we've grown up in the era of sleaze.....Credibility is the real problem for politicians

Female, University student, 20, white (Source: Marsh et al 2007: 103)

This contextual evidence from focus groups supports the notion that young people were negatively affected by a period of political sleaze. Whilst it is impossible to assign cause to a particular political period, and clearly we cannot be sure that these types of views pass the ‘reliability’ test, being representative of British young people, but this evidence supports my contention that this generation may have been particularly affected by the political period in which they received their first images of politics and politicians. The focus group examples above are also supported by more representative survey studies that all find negative attitudes towards politicians amongst young people socialised in this era (e.g. Harrison and Diecke 2002; Henn et al 2002, 2005; Park 2005). But, of course it is hardly surprising to find negative attitudes towards politicians amongst the young. We know that young people tend to have lower participation rates and are less interested in politics than older people. We would need reliable time series data to make conclusions about changing attitudes as the result of a political period. But there is a strong prima-facie case, given what we know about the political period and the long-term decline in traditional loyalties that it has impacted on a generation’s politics.

Ideological convergence and perceived differences between the political parties

A third factor commonly cited in the youth literature as a reason that young people tend not to vote, which is supportive of theoretical position advanced at the beginning of the chapter, is that they are unable to see any meaningful difference between the political parties. Of course, somewhat ironically changes in the ideological positions of political parties are to a large extent a rational response by political parties trying to catch the median voter in an era where traditional loyalties to parties have been eroded. Political parties have had to adapt to the decline in class and partisan voting by becoming more ‘catch-all’ in their electoral strategies. Both of the main political parties in Britain learnt from their respective positions in relation to the media voter since the 1970s. Firstly, Labour under pressure from its activists shifted left in the 1980s and were punished by the electorate in 1983. In the late 1990s the Conservatives moved to the right of the median voter limiting their appeal.

In more recent elections Budge and Bara (2001) using party manifesto data show that after Labour’s shift right in the mid 1990s the ideological distance between the two parties was very narrow. This is reflected in the specific party positions of Labour and Conservatives in the 2001 general election. Budge and Bara (2001) show

that all the parties had a common focus on government effectiveness as well as education, social services and law and order. Whilst we might expect these to be key issues in any party manifesto, the finding that the emphasis in all party manifestos was so similar underlines the point that the main parties have converged since the mid 1990s.

British elections survey data analysis confirms what we might expect that voter's perceptions of the differences between political parties have moved in tandem with these changes. Table 7.7 below shows that the number of people who were able to see a great deal of difference between the political parties fell after 1992 and those who saw not much difference between them rose. Two age groups were merged here in order to increase the number of respondents in each category. Perhaps the most important difference, at least as far as age is concerned, appears when we split the 18-24 year olds from the 25-34 year olds in 2001. This reduces the number of cases, but shows the difference between the ages. Only 17 per cent of 18-24 year olds were able to see *any* difference between the parties in 2001.

Table 7.7 Perceived difference between the Conservative and Labour parties 1979-2001 by age

	<u>1979</u>			<u>1983</u>			<u>1987</u>		
	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
Great deal	40	47	50	78	87	82	80	86	84
Some	33	27	25	14	8	9	14	9	9
Not much	23	29	22	6	4	8	5	4	5
N	600	674	603	1303	1349	1283	1167	1340	1288
	<u>1992</u>			<u>1997</u>			<u>2001</u>		
	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
Great deal	48	57	55	24	34	37	22 ³	26	26
Some	37	29	26	51	41	38	52	43	43
Not much	11	12	15	21	22	23	18	27	29
N	1055	1304	1183	1001	1280	978	400	818	716

Source: British Election Survey data

³ Any aggregation of age groups is likely to mask some important differences between them. Here, the figure for 18-24 year olds is significantly lower (17 per cent) than for the combined 18-24, 25-34 group.

Whilst the traditional anchors to political support have declined and forced parties towards ‘catch-all’ policy programmes and professionalisation, these responses appear to have alienated new voters, who, in the absence of traditional motivations to vote, require the incentives provided by differences in ideology, policy and by competitive elections to encourage them to vote.

Earlier I discussed the paradox of voting, arguing that the paradox could perhaps best be answered by arguing that voters never made purely rational decisions. Whilst the lack of any pivotal influence for each individual vote makes the act of voting somewhat irrational; this can be explained by understanding long-term party attachments which anchored voters and increased their likelihood of voting, whether rational or not. I previously suggested that in the absence of these traditional anchors it has become increasingly rational for voters, particularly those young people who have not acquired the ‘habit’ of voting, not to vote. The argument is strengthened if we add to the equation what we know about the political period. As discussed earlier, in these circumstances, if young people are offered no discernible choice between the political parties and when elections are seen as foregone conclusions, there appears to be little reason for them to vote. In addition, they were exposed, in their formative years to a period of alleged unprecedented level of ministerial incompetence and personal misconduct (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). Perhaps most crucially, however, is that this period saw dramatic changes in the way politics was reported. Parliament was first televised in 1990 which meant that these negative images were for the first time witnessed through the medium of television.

Question 5: *If young people are increasingly reliant on the media for political information how has the media environment they are exposed to and the media they are consuming changed?*

Earlier in the chapter I provided evidence that both partisanship and associational activity have declined most among working class young people in Britain. I also provided some evidence that one reason for falling levels of political knowledge among working class young people is that they are less endowed with the civic knowledge integral to group membership and partisanship. Whilst it is probably impossible to establish exactly what kinds of civic knowledge, partisanship and associational activity

previous generations were bestowed with, I contend that in the relative absence of these civic orienting stimuli – young people are increasingly susceptible to other influences. Moreover, these ‘other’ sources have become their main sources of information. This being the case it is important to understand the media environment young people are exposed to today. Denver (2003) argues that the decline in partisan identification was mirrored by a changing media environment. This is crucial because we know that at least until the 1950s there was a close configuration between the party system and the media system (Ibid).

A starting point for investigating this research question is to look at trends in newspaper readership as there is good evidence that those who regularly read a daily newspaper tend to have higher levels of political knowledge (e.g., Norris et al 1999). The massive growth in television since the 1950s followed by an even more sophisticated electronic media environment has led to the slow death of newspaper readership in Britain. Table 7.5 illustrates the decline in newspaper readership in Britain. We can see that twenty years ago over three quarters of people regularly read a daily morning newspaper, whereas in 2002 the figure had dropped to just over half. The figures are similar for 18-24 year olds.

Table 7.8 Percentage reading a daily morning newspaper at least 3 times a week 1983-2002

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994
All age groups	77	73	73	73	71	70	68	65	62	61
18-24 year olds	70	73	73	75	68	67	64	56	52	50
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	
All age groups	62	59	61	60	56	57	53	54	53	
18-24 year olds	51	51	49	49	47	51	47	55	46	

Source: British Social Attitudes data

Declining newspaper readership has caused widespread concern because in a democratic society it is assumed that the news media can best fulfil their functions if there is a rich and pluralistic information environment that is easily accessible to all citizens (Norris 2000). Wattenberg (2007) examines United States trends in newspaper

readership, demonstrating that over recent decades, each new cohort of young people entering the electorate has been less and less likely to have developed the habit of reading a daily newspaper. This emphasis on acquiring a ‘habit’ of newspaper readership is crucial and consistent with the general vein of argument through the thesis. I have argued elsewhere that, if as Franklin (2004) contends, voting has a strong habitual element, we might reasonably suspect that other activities also have this ‘learnt’ element. And this is the key point that Wattenberg (2007) argues in his chapter on newspaper readership: ‘reading a newspaper every day is a habit that, once acquired, is generally continued throughout one’s lifetime, and for most people such a routine either is, or is not developed by the time a person reaches voting age. What has happened in recent years is that relatively few young adults have picked up this habit.’ (Wattenberg 2007:10).

Wattenberg’s analysis of American trends reveals a clear generational dimension to the decline in daily newspaper readership. Since the beginning of the television age, new generations have been less and less likely to report reading a newspaper everyday. If increasing competition from television is the principal reason for declining newspaper readership in America, then we might, as Wattenberg suggests, expect similar trends throughout much of the world. Looking back at Table 7.8 above, the evidence suggests that recent cohorts of 18-24 year olds have been significantly less likely than their older counterparts to report reading a daily newspaper. Whilst it is impossible to account for all the intervening factors that may accelerate or decelerate the trend of declining newspaper readership, the evidence suggest that, as in America, if this trend continues unabated, comparatively few people will be reading newspapers on a daily basis in fifty years time.

Why then does this matter? If new generations of young people are simply receiving their political information from alternative sources then what reasons should we be concerned? We know that despite the continuing advance of the internet, television remains the principal source of political information for most people in Britain (Semetko 2000: Pattie et al 2004: Hyland 2007). Moreover, we know that *young people* get most of their information about politics from television (Harrison and Diecke 2000; Russell 2002). We also know that there were significant changes in the structure of the television environment during the Thatcher era; the result of which the cohorts socialised in the 1980s and 1990s were the first to be exposed to.

Broadcast signals were first relayed though cable to improve radio reception in

the 1920s. By the 1950s, nearly 1 million homes across Britain received their radio on programmes by wire. The first British cable television system was installed in Gloucester in 1951 and the following two decades saw massive rises in subscription to cable television, jumping tenfold between 1956 and 1961 to 554,700 and to over 2.5 million by 1973 (13.8 per cent of those with a television) (Tracey 1998). But whilst the Heath government of the early 1970s was keen to push ahead with the development of cable television, the new Labour government of 1974 was far less enthusiastic, setting up the Annan Committee to look at the future of broadcasting. But in the following decade the Thatcher government, motivated by technological advancement and modernisation set up the Information Technology Unit within the cabinet office to promote the use of IT within government as well as the Information Technology Advisory Panel (ITAP) consisting of leading members of IT industries. Its first report laid the path for the development of cable and satellite technology in Britain (Tracey 1998). The Broadcasting Act of 1990 represented the most significant transformation of the character of British broadcasting since the 1920s. In more recent years there has been a huge jump in the proportion of households that receive a digital television and who as a result have access to a wider range of television channels. Digital television usage increased, from 19 per cent in 1996/97 to 65 per cent in 2005/06 (ONS 2007).

The replacement of public broadcasting channels with private commercial channels fuelled widespread concern that the tradition of broadcasting for the public good and combining entertainment with informational programmes would disappear. Concern about the commercialisation of the media is hardly new and as far back as the 1940s authors were expressing concern about the “social effects” of different types of ownership (Lazersfeld and Merton 1948: 108). One of the key concerns about a changing television environment is the move away from a broad appeal programming environment, where viewers would be exposed, in their period of television viewing, to political news; to one where they are able to avoid politics altogether. The plethora of ‘narrow appeal’ channels mean that audiences are more likely to tune in to programmes they are interested in and tune out from ones they are not. This is of particular concern if we take Wattenberg’s (2007) argument that media usage is ‘habitual’ because it strongly implies that young people who have not developed the habit of reading newspapers or watching political news, now have the choice to avoid it altogether. Such an insulation from politics, although difficult to prove with any reliability here, would be consistent with the findings of the data analysis that low levels of political

knowledge have played a critical role in shaping an electorally disengaged generation. It is also consistent in time; trends in turnout, declining political knowledge and social capital would all appear to be consistent with what we have found about the political period.

The first television related argument is the ‘time argument’ which posits that television competes for scarce time resources and draws people away from more meaningful and socially constructive activity. The argument centres on the amount of time that people spend watching television. Putnam (1995, 2000) placed a large portion of the blame for the decline in civic life in America on television. He identifies three ways in which television watching is likely to inhibit civic engagement. It competes for scarce time; it has psychological effects that inhibit social participation and specific programmatic content on television undermines civic motivations (Putnam 2000: 237). Critics of the video-malaise thesis have argued that empirical evidence about the alleged negative effects of the *amount* of television watching reveal only weak significant effects (Uslaner 1998; Newton 1999; Bennett et al. 1999; Norris 2000a, 2000b).

The second argument focuses on the *changing* television environment argues that the shift from the broad appeal television associated with the broadcasting era of television (roughly 1950-1990 in Britain) to a narrow appeal commercialised television (post 1990), has meant that people are no longer exposed to a diet of programmes which include news and good quality information shows. Instead, ‘narrow appeal’ channels focus on specific interest for example music, sport, cartoons and when the particular type of programme that the viewer has chosen is interrupted, he or she is able simply to choose from a multitude of other channels of interest. What this means for a generation of young people who are not used to consuming news, is that they are the most likely group to avoid exposure to news altogether. Norris (2001) found that there are significant differences in levels of political knowledge between those watching commercial television when compared to public television. Whilst public broadcasting is said to stimulate civic attitudes, the proliferation of commercial channels show a tendency to broadcast totally different kinds of programs resulting in less civic minded value patterns among its audience (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; Tracey 1998; Holtz-Bacha and Norris 2001) and marked differences in value patterns when compared to those of people preferring public broadcasting stations (Holmberg 1999; Elchardus, Huyse and Hooghe 2001).

Wattenberg (2007) found that young Europeans are now much less likely than

their elders to watch television news. With cable/satellite news included there is an overall bias towards an older audience for television news in Europe. As the number of channels to choose from has increased, younger people have been the ones least likely to choose the news (Ibid). Research by Ofcom, the government watchdog in Britain has echoed these findings showing that 16 to 24 year olds now watch less than 40 hours of television news a year, compared with around 90 hours a year for the wider population (Ofcom 2007).

Table 7.9 Sources of news for 18-24 year olds

Source of News 1st mention (18-24 year olds)	1991	2001
TV	66	80
Radio	10	5
Newspapers	22	12
Internet	n/a	1.2
N	202	234

Source: Television: the public's view data: 1991 and 2001.

But as Table 7.9 shows, those reporting TV as their first source of news is rising, the clear implication being that young people are simply not getting much information. This presents an interesting and important research question. We know from the data analysis and from the preceding discussion that knowledge is an important predictor of voter turnout. It is reasonable to suspect it is likely to be linked to wider civic engagement.

A multivariate model of turnout, 2001

If young people are receiving a greater proportion of their political information from television but are watching less television news; what types of programmes do they receive their political information from? The evidence presented above strongly supports the contention in the theoretical model advanced in Chapter six and elaborated in the introduction to this chapter. In order to subject the theory to a more rigorous examination, below I re-operationalise the general incentives model specified in

Chapter six, which had the strongest predictive power of the set of models tested. In order to tease out the effects of partisanship and political knowledge on propensity to vote of this generation I combine 18-24 and 25-34 year olds in the 2001 data set. There are two good reasons for doing this, one theoretical and one methodological. Firstly this group constitute 'Thatcher's children' and 'Blair's Babies', but who might more aptly be defined as the 'post-partisan generation'. Whilst it is possible that there are significant differences between the groups not explored in detail in this thesis, the theory advanced clearly views them as having more common characteristics in terms of their attitudinal and participatory traits, than they have significant differences, as far as the antecedents of voting are concerned. The second reason for this decision is that the general incentives model is already composed of a relatively large number of variables and with each increase in the number of variables included in the model, the number of missing cases rises.

For the pooled group of 18-34 year olds, the general incentives model correctly predicts the voting behaviour of 81.2 per cent in 2001. The psuedo R square statistics tell us that between 37 and 50 per cent of the variance in whether respondents voted or not can be explained by this set of variables. A number of variables relating to time pressures felt by respondents and consideration of the importance of voting both for individuals themselves and for democracy as a whole were important predictors, as in the model specified and tested in Chapter six with the two age groups separated.

At the next block of the regression procedure the hypothesised central importance of strength of partisanship and political knowledge is tested by adding to the general incentives model the strength of partisanship variable included in the civic voluntarism model and the six political knowledge variables included in the cognitive mobilisation model in Chapter six. The summary statistics of the predictive power of the model in Table 9, below, show that adding these variables significantly increases the models predictive power, boosting the percentage of those correctly classified to almost 85 per cent. The Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke psuedo R square statistics show that the proportion of the variance in the decision to vote improves, increasing to between almost 46 to 62 per cent. Three of the six questions measuring political knowledge remain statistically significant when controlling for the battery of variables included in the general incentives model. Two are significant at the 0.01** level, increasing the likelihood that respondents will vote by up to two times if they answered the knowledge questions correctly.

Table 7.10 Generational model of political participation

<u>Model</u>	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>
Overall classification	81.2	84.9	87.5	88.3
Classification of non voters	75.3	81.5	81	82.5
Classification of voters	85.7	87.1	91.7	92
Cox and Snell R Square	.373	.459	50.9	.510
Nagelkerke R Square	.506	.621	68.9	.690
<u>Predictor variables</u>				
Political efficacy (perceived influence)	.075	.125	.186	.185
Pol activity too much time and effort	.210	.559*	.942**	.946**
People too busy to vote	-.553**	-.647**	-.702**	-.714**
How do you feel about Labour	.239	.273	.417*	.414*
How do you feel about Conservatives	.098	.158	.166	.171
How to you feel about LD	.505***	.679***	.866***	.876***
Sense of satisfaction when vote	.175	.109	.271	.278
Feel guilty if do not vote	-.836***	-.782***	-.736***	-.745***
Being active=group benefits	-.214	-.250	-.122	-.104
Voting can change Britain	.085	.114	.216	.190
It is duty to vote	-.270	-.251	-.062	-.061
Democracy works only if vote	.776**	.547	.364	.379
Family/friends think voting waste of time	.253	.201	.180	.150
Most people around here voted	-.258	-.319	-.836**	-.821*
<u>Additional variables</u>				
<i>Political Knowledge</i>				
Polling stations close at 10pm		2.149*	2.770**	2.570*
Conservative policy never to join Euro		1.733***	2.413**	2.426***
Liberal Democrats favour PR		-.806	-.737	-.807
Minimum voting age is 16		-1.350*	-1.430*	-1.511*
Unemployment fallen under Labour		.708	1.054	1.104
Only taxpayers allowed to vote		-.087	-.310	-.320
Strength of partisanship		.846*	1.364**	1.325**
<i>Social Capital</i>				
Trust in others			-.242*	-.235*
Perceived Fairness			.383**	.378**
Asked to participate			1.665**	1.744**
Volunteering			-3.432**	-3.402**

The model is also stronger with the variable measuring respondent's strength of partisanship included, indicating that whilst partisan identification has declined markedly in recent years, it remains an important factor in understanding why today's generation of young people are the least of all likely to vote at general elections. Each increase in the scale from 'no identification'; 'not very strong'; 'fairly strong'; and 'very strong' boosts the chances that an individual will vote, with all other factors in the model controlled for.

At the next block, the model is further strengthened as the four variables operationalised to measure social capital are added. All four of these variables; perceived trust (0.05*); perceived fairness (0.001**); having been recruited into politics or community affairs (0.001**); and volunteering in politics or community affairs (0.001**) are statistically significant, providing strong support for the hypothesised effect of social capital. The power of the model in predicting turnout increases with it classifying 87.5 per cent of respondent's decisions to vote, and accounting for almost 51 and 69 per cent of the variance in turnout at this stage.

Finally, social class – the market research definition, as used in Chapter six – is added to the model to ascertain whether or not the importance of class to the generational, political knowledge, social capital theory is confirmed. Although the class variable itself is not statistically significant at the 0.05* level or better, its inclusion does improve the predictive power of the model which now correctly classifies 88.3 per cent of respondents and accounts for between 51 and 69 per cent in the variance in the decision to vote.

7.8 Conclusions

As I have argued at various points throughout the chapter, class and partisan dealignment are the lenses through which changing youth turnout and wider political participation are perhaps best viewed. Butler and Stokes model of voting identified how long-term attachments were formed during the 'impressionable years' – but as we have seen, these enduring attachments have been in decline since the 1970s. This chapter has sought to understand the salience of class, political knowledge and social capital as determinants of younger adults' political decisions, within the context of partisan and

class dealignment.

In answering the research questions the chapter has sought to demonstrate the waning of class and partisanship as predictors of party choice has far from rendered class as defunct as a variable for understanding voting behaviour. Returning to the three explanations of partisan dealignment put forward by Webb (2000), I have suggested that the process of class secularisation whereby voters have lost a sense of class identity and values and have lost class cohesion, was continued by the Conservative government's trade union reforms. These reforms, I argue, had a considerable impact on working class associative activity which was dominated by the trade unions and by working men's clubs. Given the ties between the trade unions and The Labour Party we would reasonably suspect that declining trade union activity would lead to a drop in working class partisanship. There is some evidence to suggest this is the case.

The second explanation for partisan dealignment Webb (2000) outlines is that a process of cognitive mobilisation amongst modern voters has rendered political parties obsolete. According to cognitive mobilisation theory, a vast expansion of education and access to television has facilitated the independence of the electorate from political parties (Barnes and Kaase 1979). I argue that the decline in working class social networks and partisanship have meant working class people are particularly susceptible to other influences on their voting behaviour. This is particularly important for our understanding of voting behaviour because Franklin's (2004) influential work on voter turnout provides strong evidence that voting is habitual. I argue that recent generations of young people are distinctive in that they are amongst the first to have been socialised in an environment devoid of traditional party attachments. But they have also been exposed to an array of short-term factors which appear to have impacted in their political attitudes and participatory characteristics. These short-term factors have been magnified in their impact by the role of television as an information source for young people.

These changes relate to Webb's (2000) third explanation of partisan dealignment: the performance of political parties. The first point I argue is that the period between 1979 and 2001 when the young abstainers in question received their political socialisation, there was little in the way of effective electoral competition between the political parties. Whilst this was most noticeable after New Labour's general election victory in 1997, the whole period between 1979 and 2001 was one of political hegemony where voters saw only one change in government in over twenty

years. Secondly, the ideological convergence of the Labour and Conservative party's post 1992 meant that many voters failed to see any difference between the political parties. The early chapters of the thesis provides evidence that in these circumstances, many older voters, those who had acquired the habit of voting, continued to vote in the 1997 and 2001 elections, although there was a significant decline. But amongst 25-34 year olds who had only experienced one or two previous elections and amongst first time voters, more than half abstained. The combination of factors arising from the weakening of the social anchors to voting, and the failure of political parties to respond to electoral defeat and to provide distinctive policy agendas appears to have turned many away from conventional politics. The most worrying aspect of this is that if voting, as Franklin (2004) argues, is an acquired habit, many of these citizens may not return to the ballot box as they age.

In the absence of traditional ties to political participation and the informational role of social group identities, we might wonder where citizens receive their political information from. Cognitive mobilisation theory implies a somewhat optimistic approach to understanding the combined effect of rising educational standards and a huge increase in the amount of political information available. It implies that quantity equals quality in political information. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the thesis to test the role of the media in civic disengagement in Britain, we have been able to show that the timing fits and that there is a strong case for suspecting television's involvement in civic disengagement and declining voter turnout. Changes in the media environment: a decline in newspaper readership and an increase in television viewing, but a decline in television news viewing have occurred at roughly the same time as declining levels of political knowledge amongst young people. Having shown that knowledge is an important driver of turnout and that partisanship and associational activity are both positively related to increased levels of political knowledge, we are on reasonable grounds to suspect that television has, if not replaced, superseded the more subtle informational role of partisanship and associational activity. It is also reasonable to suspect that, given what we know about formative socialisation and the habitual nature of voting, younger people are more likely to have been affected by these changes than older people. But we also know that working class people, partly as a result of their particular patterns of associational activity are also more likely to be affected than their middle class counterparts.

Inglehart (1990) classified partisans and non-partisans into two groups: those

who are cognitively mobilised and use their information resources to provide them with political cues, who do not need partisanship. And those who are not cognitively mobilised and rely on partisanship. Inglehart found that the percentage of sophisticated non-partisans in Europe had increased over a decade and that there are more of these sophisticated non-partisans among younger generations. The above chapter suggests that there is another group, at least in Britain: those who are not partisans but have not either been cognitively mobilised because of their social position. I would therefore suggest that there is a darker side to the argument. Whilst cognitive mobilisation might paint an accurate depiction of the role of mass education and the rise of the media we need to have a nuanced understanding that there are likely to remain important differences between social groups.

This chapter has elaborated on the findings of the data analysis conducted in Chapters four and six, and a reading of the related secondary literature, a plausible theory of youth abstention. I recognise that the findings are tentative in nature, but argue that recent cohorts are susceptible and have been affected by the factors which characterised their political socialisation, at least in part because their psychological engagement with politics is weaker than that of previous generations. In the concluding chapter I will draw together the main findings of the thesis and make some observations about future research in the field as well as returning to discuss the implications of the findings presented in the thesis for the participationists and realist visions of democratic engagement.

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

Central to this thesis has been the investigation of electoral change through the lens of British democracy's youngest voters. I have suggested that this age group have a special place in understanding change because they are relative blank canvasses and react differently to political contexts or periods than older sections of the population who have imprinted on their lives their specific social and political experiences. These experiences clearly have something to do with the development of attitudinal characteristics which in turn impact on participation in social and political life.

What we know about political participation is that it has traditionally been conditioned by the psychological engagement with political parties which in turn has stemmed primarily from economic and social class positions. But it is becoming clearer that it is not only attachments to parties and how they have changed that is key to our understanding of political participation, but the attachment and engagement of individuals with social groups; families, neighbourhoods and communities. Whilst this thesis does not examine this latter point in detail it provides some indicative evidence towards this contention and is suggestive of the need for further research to examine the long-term nature of electoral change.

8.2 Revisiting the research questions

The central questions the thesis has sought to address are to what extent has electoral turnout declined amongst young people; what evidence is there of a generational effect

occurring in electoral turnout in Britain; and what might explain these trends? These are important questions for a number of reasons. First, because profound changes in political participation, away from electoral politics could pose serious questions for the legitimacy of our political system if the trend continues. Whether we come to a participationist conclusion that declining participation is a bad thing for democracy, or a broadly elitist one which might argue that it is desirable to have limited participation, observing and explaining trends in political participation is a key task of political science.

I have argued that there has been a significant contribution to our understanding of the changing nature of political participation by those who have identified a growing trend of activity in unconventional types of politics. But there is far less research on the relationship between conventional and unconventional activity. Related to these central questions, this thesis has focused solely on voting behaviour amongst young people, arguing that there is a significant gap in our understanding of the extent and reasons for young people's disinclination to vote.

It is clear that these questions are of fundamental importance to the study of electoral change and the nature of democratic politics. Generational shifts may only occur very occasionally and may result in entirely new understandings of politics and new forms of political participation. In order to best understand what is happening in relation to electoral turnout the thesis has focused on why change and why change at this juncture? In answering this question I found that a significant proportion of the recent literature in this area can be viewed as a 'participationist' reaction to the idea that young people are apathetic towards politics. Denver (1997) writing just prior to the explosion of interest in this area pointed out that young people have always been relatively apathetic, this is nothing new. The response to this view is evident in much of the subsequent literature which has tended to argue along the lines that young people are only apathetic towards politics when narrowly defined and are shown to be interested and involved in politics when more broadly conceived (eg. Henn et al 2002; O'Toole et al 2003a, 2003b; Marsh 2007). In identifying gaps in existing research through which to build the research questions for this thesis, this response seemed inadequate because the argument that young people are interested and involved in alternative forms of political or social activity does not prove they are not apathetic about conventional politics, or explain why this is the case.

Although it is highly likely that the two are likely to be linked, there is a lack of information in this area and certainly not enough to assume that participation in unconventional types of politics can or will replace participation in conventional forms. One of the reasons it is simply not possible to prove this contention is because no research to date has adequately ascertained whether the trajectory of new, alternative forms of political activity is not the opposite to that of electoral turnout, that is that it declines with age.

8.3 Contributions made by the thesis

Given the identification of this gap in the literature the thesis is able to make some valuable contributions to the existing work on political participation and electoral change and also points directly to the need for further research in this area, both to elicit and explore in depth the findings presented here and also to explore a range of new research questions. Chapter four provides a unique analysis of the trajectories of turnout for ten age cohorts. Whilst again making the necessary caveats with respect to the limitation of an analysis of pseudo cohorts in the absence of panel data and of life-cycle, period and generational effects, the analysis provides an original picture of the uniqueness of the most recent cohorts of young people's voting behaviour.

Chapter four examines in detail turnout characteristics to conclude there is sufficient prima-facie evidence of a generational change taking place to warrant an investigation into why this might be the case. The turnout characteristics of cohorts 1 to 7 are generally supportive of the life-cycle theory of political participation, but the remaining youngest cohorts, those who came of voting age in 1987 and after, appear to be following a different pattern. Clearly there is strong evidence that this generation are unique. Their low levels of turnout in 1997 and 2001 are unprecedented. This represents one kind of generational effect as we can say for sure that they are different from their predecessors at the same stage in the political life-cycle. Neither is there a precedent amongst any of the age cohorts to recover from such low levels of turnout for these lows to be accounted for simply by life-cycle explanations.

Notwithstanding how strong the evidence appears to be, Chapter four details that it is impossible to attribute these electoral characteristics to a set of enduring generational changes until these young people age. With this important point re-stated, there are two further reasons to suspect the existence of a generational change from the data. The second reason we might suspect a generational element to turnout change is that between 1992 and 2001 the most pronounced decline in turnout was amongst the 25-34 year olds, not the youngest 18-24 year olds. This is significant because according to the life-cycle explanation of voter turnout this is an age where we would expect turnout to begin to increase as a cohort ages and has more at stake in society and is encouraged to vote. Another reason is provided by the pseudo cohort analysis in Chapter four. Table 4.6 shows that cohort 9 turned out at 75.3 per cent in 1992, but thereafter, at the point where we might expect it to increase, the experience of the period and election context meant that in 1997 the figure declined to 63.2 per cent and in 2001 to 54.3 per cent. According to Franklin (2004) this cohort is likely to maintain these habits if the 2010 election does not provide the impetus for an increased level of turnout.

A further contribution from the analysis of trends in turnout is insight into the paradox of voting associated with rational choice theory: why do people vote at all when the likelihood of their vote being pivotal to the outcome is, at best, minimal? The results of the data analysis suggest an answer: the paradox is best explained with reference to understanding partisanship as a psychological engagement with politics which meant that people identified with a political party and felt the duty to vote. In contrast what we see amongst today's young people is the beginning of the end of this paradox. Young people are no longer anchored to politics in the same way as previous generations and they do not vote because they realise their vote is not going to make a difference to the outcome and because they feel that politicians do not offer them any reason to. This may shed some light on our understanding of the reported rise in unconventional activity. Young people unshackled from the psychological chains of conventional political engagement now rationally deduce there is no point in them voting. However, it doesn't follow that they have necessarily become rational in all aspects of their participation. We might argue that, exposed to an increasingly consumer focused media environment, as discussed by Russell

(2005), their participation has mutated into that of particular demands on single issues concerns.

The second contribution the thesis makes to the existing literature on youth disengagement is to rigorously test a variety of established explanatory models of voter turnout and party choice on young voters. The approach follows Clarke et al (2004) and Pattie et al (2004). Clarke et al (2004) found that age was the most consistently statistically significant variable in their analysis. They also test for the significance of political generations using dummy variables for the Macmillan, Wilson/Callaghan, Thatcher and Blair generations finding no life-cycle effects and significant generational effects ‘with the decline in turnout across generations starting with people who entered the electorate during the Thatcher era. This pattern continued during the Blair years’ (Clarke et al 2004: 270). Chapter six builds on Clarke et al’s findings, probing in more detail the specific factors contributing to young people’s turnout. By doing so it enables the thesis to take the analysis of turnout decline a step further towards an understanding of generational change, as the factors specific to a generation are separated out from those of the whole sample. The contribution is highlighted by the difference in the findings of this research. Clarke et al argue that social capital and most of the sociological variables are of little value in exploring turnout over time. But by examining the age groups in detail it is possible to ascertain that the effects of specific variables on different age groups are masked by modelling the whole sample as one. Clarke et al’s central argument in relation to the significance of sociological variables is that they cannot account for the major changes in turnout ‘across successive elections, such as the massive drop that occurred between 1997 and 2001’ (274). Both Chapter six and Chapter seven argue that it is possible to identify the period between 1979–2001 as one which formed the attitudes related to these declines. It is not possible using BES survey data to measure the underlying factors associated with turnout and political socialisation prior to a person’s first experience at an election with any accuracy. Nevertheless, it is plausible that long-term societal changes were having a gradual and disproportionate effect on a generation who had not yet had its first experience of voting and who had therefore yet to reveal its turnout or attitudinal characteristics in surveys. The fact that turnout declined for all age groups in 1997 and 2001 is consistent with this argument as it declined markedly less. I argue that this is because older portions of

the population were and are relatively immune to these changes as a result of their particular socialisation experiences which would have engendered in them enduring partisan anchors to voting. In contrast, those who entered the electorate for the first time after 1992 were amongst the first to be devoid of any party identification through which to mitigate specific factors associated with their pre-political socialisation as well as the election specific contexts of their political socialisation. This is far from conclusively demonstrated in this thesis, but the evidence provided is consistent with this theory and it points to the need for further research to examine the interaction of long and short-term factors on political participation.

The results confirm the relative importance of the variables in the general incentives model. Clearly the motivations to vote, or not to vote encapsulated in the general incentives model fare best of all those tested in the analysis. We might expect this to be the case given the core hypothesis relating to change. Today's young people are least of all anchored to political parties through partisanship and social class affiliations and as a result their voting behaviour is best understood, at least partly through the prism of the various cost, benefits and incentives to voting which they must weigh up in deciding whether or not to vote and who to vote for if they do. However, the elitist/realist understanding of democracy would lead us to suspect that citizens may not be capable of making the most rational decisions when it comes to this decision. Participationists view engagement as having an educative function; but given that the majority of young people do not vote, or at least have not done so since 1992, we might consider that they have not experienced or been able to take advantage of the educative element of participation and that this leaves their understanding of politics as well as their participatory and attitudinal norms even further from their counterparts from previous generations.

A broader picture of young voter disengagement began to emerge from the results combined with the assumption relating to the importance of the absence of traditional anchors to participation. The significance of the variables in the social capital model suggested that the anchors to political participation provided by partisanship may not be the only types of socio-psychological ties which provide strong underlying motivations towards political engagement. The composite model operationalised in Chapter seven sought to combine an understanding of a combination of long-term and short-term

influences on voter turnout. This understanding of engagement turns cognitive mobilisation theory on its head because it criticises the assumption that increases in access to higher education means that citizens are more able to process large amounts of politically relevant information. The assumption that quantity equals quality is, in my view, flawed and there is a growing body of work suggesting this may be the case (eg. Norris 1999, 2000, 2003; Wattenberg 2007; Prior 2007). Having said that it seems that another contention of the cognitive mobilisation model may be closer to the truth – those who are more educated, media reliant, politically interested and knowledgeable tend to be more likely to protest. But, again there is a problem. Whilst it is intuitive to suspect that those more educated and interested are more likely to protest, especially if the core assumption of this that they are no longer tied to parties through partisanship is true; it assumes that rising educational standards equal a concomitant rise in knowledge about politics. I would argue that it is more reasonable to suspect that knowledge of political issues is likely to cause a rise in protest activity, only when combined with a lack of knowledge about conventional politics and what it is realistic to expect from conventional politics. Without a broad understanding of what politics can realistically be expected to deliver and therefore what citizens can achieve by participating in politics, politics is likely to appear unresponsive to them.

To return briefly to the participationist vs realist / elitist debate. One argument against the participationist view of democracy is that politics has traditionally had as one of its aims the redistribution of unequally distributed resources – and this has been a great source of citizen participation. If those resources are now distributed more equally, at least to the extent to which the majority of people have their basic economic needs met and they are no longer tied to politics by their material needs, then, as Hibbings and Theiss-Morse (2002) suggest, the majority may desire for nothing less than to be involved in politics.

The results support the hypothesis that in the absence of long-term economic and social psychological anchors to participation, the development of voters' participatory norms are far more susceptible to factors associated with the political period in which they were socialised. The results of Chapter seven are consistent with the theorised importance of political information. Butler and Stokes (1969) argued that a major change in the political climate may mean voters dropping their partisan cues learnt at childhood in favour of those received at their first voting experience. They also suggested that partisan identity

had an informational function. Party attachments provided a frame of references which allowed voters to process new problems into an established pattern. Without these references we might suspect that Wattenberg's (2007) diagnoses in close to the truth – young people are becoming insulated from politics, their levels of knowledge are low and the sources of political information they are exposed to are not conducive to participation in conventional forms of politics – including voting at elections.

The second element of the generational model I propose theorises the influence of election contexts, previously shown to have been important factors in young people's voting (Russell 2002). I argue, after Crewe (1992c) that the period 1979-2001 can be characterised as a 'hegemonic political period' and one of ideological convergence between the main political parties. There is much evidence from the existing literature that young people report being unable to see a difference between the political parties and feel that voting will not make a difference. As Labour shifted to the right in the mid 1990s the ideological difference between parties narrowed and BES survey data confirms the expected fall in the number of young people who report being able to see a difference between the political parties after 1992.

These election-specific contextual factors may have helped account for why young people did not vote in 1997 and 2001. But I argue that the period immediately before this, one where many will have received their political socialisation was one dominated by images of sleaze and media portrayals of incompetence and dishonesty. This is reflected in research showing that many younger people perceived politicians as untrustworthy (eg. White et al 1999; Marsh et al 2007). Whilst the thesis does not directly test the contention that these period specific factors were exacerbated by young people relative susceptibility to negative images of politics and politicians as well as politics being unresponsive and the parties providing little alternatives from one another, the intuitive appeal is strong after having tested the effects of long-term factors on the decision to vote in 2001 and adding to existing evidence on the importance of the political period.

8.4 Implications for participationist and realist theories

Returning to the participationist / realist debate: the findings and conclusions presented above can be interpreted in a number of different ways. For participationists the findings are rather negative in that they do not point to a citizenry involved in politics, at least not in voting. Political parties have tended to move closer together to reflect the position of the electorate and this has begun to consolidate relatively low levels of electoral engagement. Clearly this could change and as we approach another General Election. Firstly, after ten years of Labour in government, voters may feel similarly exercised towards change as they did in 1997 and this could increase turnout from 2005 levels. The General Election is also likely to be more closely fought than the ones in 2001 and 2005 and there is now significant ground opening up between the two political parties as Labour under pressure to start rebalancing the books lurch leftwards, raising taxes on top earners. Nonetheless, it is rather unlikely to be a coincidence, that even before the details of MPs expenses were revealed ahead of their publication by the House of Commons in July 2009, that allegations of corruption, sleaze and incompetence rear up to cloud the political landscape as they did in 1991 and in the period after the 1992 election up until Labour's victory at the polls in 1997. Separating out the effects of those things likely to encourage voters to the polls with those likely to discourage them will remain problematic. Whatever the influence of these factors, the General Election of 2010 and subsequent analysis may prove more positive for the participationist vision.

It is my contention that the participationist view is weakened in one respect by the findings of this research, but that it may be strengthened by an increasingly prevalent feature of our modern communications environment – one which has and must continue to be the basis of much future research into citizen participation. I believe the participationist position to be weakened simply because the evidence suggests that there are good reasons that people are not involved in regular, time consuming mass participation – they probably do not want to be. Or they have become involved in particular issue based politics as they arise. The fact that conventional political participation would appear to be changing dramatically over recent years, but that there is little evidence to suggest that politics, political institutions or politicians have changed in such a way as could adequately explain

this, indicates that we should be looking for explanations which focus on citizens or the way in which politics is mediated to reach citizens.

Whilst the participationists view of democracy sees the essence of citizen participation lying in its ability to achieve a common good, these findings suggest that citizens have become less likely to vote because their personal economic fortunes have improved and having independently weighed up the costs and benefits of voting, they decide not to vote as it is not sufficiently in their interest to expend time doing so. This rather implies that citizens are somewhat more self-interested than the participationist model would allow for.

Participationists argue that participation has an educative function. It may be that the participationist vision of democracy was more achievable when citizens were more palpably tied to politics by a fundamental need for improvement of their economic circumstances. But we might argue along Schumpeterian lines that low levels of knowledge about politics and about the nature of politics make it dangerous to involve more people in complex decisions. If demands are unrealistic and channels to participation are increased this could lead to instability. The participationist might retort that citizens are capable of ascertaining for themselves the limitations of politics and would therefore appreciate the need to balance their demands with those of their fellow citizens.

It depends on one's view of the relative importance of the findings of this thesis as to which side one ends up on the participationist / realist debate. We might view the decline in the importance of long-term structural and psychological anchors to voting as proof that citizens no longer need to vote and therefore make the rational choice not to do so. Or we might consider that the political period has turned them off politics and that if people were able to see more opportunities to be involved in a meaningful way where they can make a difference they would do so. One would suspect that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of the two positions with the participationists over estimating the capacity and desire of citizens as well as the logistical possibilities for mass participation; and the realist/elitist position underestimating the educative function, ability and will of citizens to be involved in mass participation. Perhaps we might conclude that evidence that the positive aspects of mass participation would materialise should the political system incorporate a significantly more participatory approach is not strong enough to risk changes to an inherently stable

system. That said, it is entirely possible that the rise of unconventional political activity charted by Dalton (2008) and others will lead, as they age, to a youth more engaged with conventional politics.

Viewed in one way, the rise in unconventional forms of political activity supports the realist/elitist position. These types of activity tend to be by their nature based around single issues such as the environment, war, animal rights, or the territorial rights of populations such as the Tibetans in what is now China. This would seem to reinforce the view that people are increasingly coming to see politics as sets of single issues that somehow governments have a moral obligation to address. But these demands tend to lack an understanding of the nature of modern pluralist politics, where issues are inter-related and where there are significant limitations on government in addressing any one policy area, both financially and through the diversity of interests involved to achieve even a modest outcome. But this is not to deny the role pressure groups have had in highlighting the importance of issues to governments and instigating changes, for their much more radical, in many cases, sets of demands. I would suggest that these kinds of groups may become more problematic should they become the choice of a larger proportion of the population as a means of participation rather than a minority of activists and protestors. However, as has been suggested, the jury is still out on whether we are likely to see a significant increase in these forms of participation.

The participationist view of democracy that people should be involved in more day to day decision making, if not all decisions, is strengthened logistically by the massive surge in the use of the internet which has and will continue to transform the way we live our lives. This is no less the case for democratic politics as it opens up huge possibilities for mass involvement in everyday politics. There are a huge number of websites which aim to give citizens the chance to respond to government consultations, to view the record of MPs and to contact any of their local representatives, as well as a large number of ways in which people can be involved in less conventional types of activity. A concern is that it is not uncommon to hear people talk of 'e-democracy', as if somehow electronic means of participation are a panacea for disengagement and social exclusion. There is good reason to suggest that the internet is not such a simple answer to disengagement. One example is a recent article by Baumgartner and Morris (2009) showing that whilst social networking

sites, amongst the most popular with young people, are recognised by them as a source of news, the news they consume from these types of sites offer them little in terms of good quality information. Moreover, users of this type of media are no more likely to participate in politics than are users of other types of media.

A related concern is the ability of the internet to connect with traditionally disadvantaged groups. There would seem to be scope for the internet to help many of these groups, for example in cases where anonymity encourages engagement, or where it is simply more convenient for a single parent to interact with a computer at home, where physical interaction may not have been feasible. However, while there seems great potential for these kinds of benefits and many more, there is perhaps greater potential for new technology to maintain the status quo. Furthermore, this may exacerbate it simply because there are still very significant portions of the population who do not have access to the tools for electronic engagement and even when disadvantaged groups do have access they are less likely to know what channels of engagement are open to them and use them less than the rest of users (Ofcom 2009). Clearly more research is needed to unearth the types and quality of media that young people are consuming, particularly as the internet looks increasingly set to become part of everyday life.

The internet may be the medium par excellence for non face to face and single issues participation. Its rise is inevitable and governments across the globe are harnessing its potential to, amongst other things, make savings and to consult effectively with citizens. The concern is that web-based politics could exacerbate common consumer based misunderstandings of politics and lead to a rise in unrealistic demands on the state, simply by virtue of its capacity to aggregate huge numbers of people on single issues. I conclude hesitantly that it may be necessary to reform politics not specifically because it is desirable to involve more citizens in democratic processes, but because it is undesirable for unrealistic demands which cannot be met by government to grow and threaten the stability of representative democracy.

The case for generational change made by Wattenberg (2007) and others is strengthened by this research which clearly shows that there are good reasons to suspect that recent generations are distinct from their older counterparts. The case made by the UK based 'anti-apathy' school and by Dalton (2008) that the emergence of new forms of

political behaviour represent a shift in the norms surrounding political participation may well be true. Nonetheless, this conclusion is the victim of the central methodological difficulty established in this thesis that we simply cannot be certain what changes in voting behaviour or the rise in new forms of political participation mean, in terms of generational change until these cohorts age. However, the reason that we can be significantly more confident of the conclusion made about election turnout is that we have the data on election turnout covering a period which allows us to compare previous generations with current ones. This means we can say with confidence at least that young people are unique in their voting behaviour. The challenge is somewhat more complex when looking at other forms of political behaviour. Firstly because there is little reliable and comparable longitudinal data through which to make conclusions as to how far young people have always been involved in 'other' types of political activity. Second, because the types of activity and engagement have changed over time so it is difficult to assess and compare the extent of involvement.

8.5 Reflections and implications for future research

There is clearly a need for further research in this area and it is possible to identify some specific areas. The first is the need to probe further the compelling findings of Chapter six and Chapter seven. The methodology of this thesis set out that it is impossible to provide anything but strong prima facie evidence of generational changes results from a number of related limitations. Firstly, the impossibility of conclusively separating life-cycle, period and generational effects in looking at the turnout characteristics of the youngest age group will be possible to overcome as cohorts age and it is possible, using panel survey data, to compare their attitudinal and participatory characteristics with other cohorts in existing panels. This should provide a clearer picture of their distinctiveness. There is also a case for conducting some qualitative interviews or focus groups to elicit the attitudes of this generation and comparing with the reflective evidence from older cohorts.

Another area where we need further evidence is on the explanatory variables modelled in Chapter six. A post-doctoral research agenda might seek to test the extent to which the explanatory findings are generational. A key limitation of the methodology utilised was that the explanatory analysis was limited to one period in time and can

therefore only make reliable conclusions about the factors that were involved in young people's decision to vote in 2001. Extrapolating from this to argue these variables are associated with a generational change is problematic as it is entirely possible that these factors are those that have always been involved in causing young people not to vote; life-cycle factors. With the data limitations discussed in the methodology, the decision was made that a set of hypothesis should be test based on existing knowledge of electoral changes and the likelihood that at least some of the reasons for the unique decline in the youth vote in 2001 would be picked up in the analysis. This would be strengthened by investigating through qualitative methods older generations' anchors to political participation and social life such as social capital and partisanship. It would also be possible to examine the impact of short-term factors on older generations to probe further the finding that an absence of anchor to engagement renders young people more susceptible to short-term factors. In their report to the Electoral Commission, Russell et al (2002) identify the need for more information on the differences in voter engagement amongst gender and ethnic groups. Whilst it has not been the aim of this thesis to probe these specific differences, there is clearly a need, based on the findings of previous research for a need to investigate what underlying differences and explanatory factors amongst these groups exists. One of the possibilities for post-doctoral research in this area is to examine differences between ethnic groups. This is likely to become an increasingly important area for research as the UK become increasingly multi-ethnic.

The second area which urgently needs addressing through further research is the relationship between conventional and unconventional political activity. In particular we need to ascertain how a decline in voting amongst young people is related to other forms of political participation. How prevalent is unconventional political activity in Britain; what are its main channels; is it something which primarily young people are involved in and does it decline with age? Is its rise something that politicians should be concerned about: does it pose a risk to representative politics? Answers to these questions would considerably improve our understanding of the current state of politics and help political parties to reengage with the electorate more effectively.

Perhaps one of the most important areas of research relates to the impact and potential of the internet on politics and its potential for democratic engagement. There is a

considerable body of work which looks at this already and it has been beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate this. Even during the course of writing this thesis there have been considerably advances in the content of the internet and in the quality of connections. On commencing this research using the internet was far less user friendly than now and the growth of Web 2.0 environments is likely to transform the user experience radically in the coming years. One of the most intriguing aspects of government's use of online methods of engagement is whether the Conservative Party will be as enthusiastic in promoting online engagement as the Labour Party have been, given the demographic of Conservative support. This said, it will be interesting to see how the so called 'Silver Surfers', that increasing proportion of the population of over 60s using the web, can be empowered by online methods of service delivery and political engagement.

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