

DEMOS/v
IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Young people failed by short-termist politics

16-25 generation need injection of 'political capital'

The upcoming election will bypass Britain's 7.4 million 16-25 year olds because of a focus on short-term vote winning rather than the long term problems facing younger generations, according to a major report published by Demos today.

An Anatomy of Youth, which was produced with v, The National Young Volunteers Service, says that the failure of the current political debate to adequately discuss problems like long term economic recovery, climate change, the care gap and communities under strain is turning youngsters away from politics altogether, despite evidence that many are passionate about politics and social issues.

Demos' Celia Hannon, co-author of the report, said:

"The idea that our young people don't care about society or serious issues is wrong, but they don't feel that politicians are speaking about the issues that will affect them in future. And they're right about that.

As we head into an election, the campaign won't get near the debates young people need to have about our future. We're going to see serious generational injustice on a number of issues unless we tip the scales towards young people."

The research sets out five major challenges young people will inherit, and the extent of the sacrifices they will be forced to make in future:

Citizenship - Young people have lost sight of why traditional politics matters. Only 36% voted at the last election. Politicians must engage young people's passions, or they will go to express their politics elsewhere - as consumers, donors to charity and in grass roots movements.

Climate Change - Young people know that climate change will effect them, but are unsure how government intervention to de-carbonize the economy will effect their personal freedoms. Governments need to be honest with young people.

Care and families - Young people surveyed placed family at the top of their priorities, but over the decades ahead families will face acute pressures to provide more care, and support with fewer resources. Their families will struggle to cope with an ageing population without big changes in flexible working and state support.

Digital identity – The first generation to be called ‘digital natives’ face unprecedented challenges online between balancing internet freedom and privacy and control their personal information. Governments need to consider how they protect this generation’s digital rights.

Community – Young people are inheriting local communities under strain and low on trust and they feel lower levels of belonging to their local area than other age groups. Local and central governments will need to invest in spaces that can foster inter-cultural and inter-generational exchange between people.

The report, based on youth interviews, analysis of existing attitudinal data on young people and v’s new attitudinal poll ‘Voicebox’, found young people across Britain were keen to contribute to society, but see little evidence that mainstream politics tries to include young people in decisions outside of ‘youth issues’.

As one interviewee Babatunde, the 21-year-old founder of think tank New Turn, phrases it:

“Politicians talk about ‘young people’s issues’ but they’re only trying to push young people on ‘young people’s issues’.

By letting them do that we alienate ourselves and allow politicians to patronise us. If we fail to challenge thought on wider issues we will just be affected by those very same issues we choose to ignore now, tomorrow. “

Terry Ryall, Chief Executive of v, said:

“The report helps us understand the big challenges young people are facing, now and in the future, so that we can effectively strengthen their role in society. The findings identify the gap between those young people who are hyper-engaged and those who are disengaged with society. At v, we’re committed to supporting every young person to take action on the issues they care about”.

Notes to editors:

An anatomy of youth by Celia Hannon and Charlie Tims is available to download from www.demos.co.uk/publications/anatomyofyouth

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The report includes a foreword from **David Willetts** and essays from six public figures or thinkers to respond to the themes outlined in each chapter:

Katherine Rake on young people living and caring in changing families,

Danah Boyd on digital identities,

Peter Madden on living low-carbon lives

Zygmunt Bauman on community

Stuart White on citizenship in a troubled democracy.

The report contains results from v's 'Voicebox' survey of young people's views and attitudes. An Anatomy of Youth draws on this poll of a representative sample of 1,000 British 16–25-year-olds.

A much larger, but unrepresentative, group of 8,273 young people have also participated in the Voicebox project overall, the results of which can be found at the Voicebox website. There were six thematic areas in Voicebox: 'Labels and stereotypes'; 'Time'; 'What do you care about?'; 'Places'; 'Values'; and 'Community'.

Full findings of the Voicebox data can be found at www.vinspired.com/research.

About v

v, The National Young Volunteers Service aims to inspire a new generation of volunteers (aged 16-25) in England. It does this by funding voluntary organisations all over England to create inspiring, diverse opportunities and by helping to overcome barriers that stop people from taking action to improve lives, communities and the planet. v's aim is to create a culture where volunteering comes naturally and where the benefits of volunteering are understood and celebrated.

v is an independent charity launched in May 2006 as a result of the Russell Commission report, A National Framework for Youth Action and Engagement.

See **www.vinspired.com** for more information on what we do and how we do it.

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