

The  
Electoral  
Commission

# YOUNG VOICES ON DEMOCRACY

What they know  
and what they need



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# 1

## Introduction

**Young people are a vital part of our democracy. Whether building an early understanding about politics or planning to vote for the first time, they should feel confident about participating in elections, now or in the future.**

The Electoral Commission strongly believes every young person should have the chance to learn about democracy, giving them the knowledge and confidence to get involved. So far, we've supported over half a million young people to take part in democracy through our resources and work with schools and youth organisations.

Through this, we've seen how keen young people are to learn more about politics and elections. Our research also shows that the earlier someone learns and talks about politics, the more likely they are to take an interest in our democracy. Voting is habit forming, and the more we do to give young people the right information now, the more confident they'll become.

We also know there is an appetite to meet and hear directly from politicians, which helps to build an understanding of their role and encourage respectful debate. Over the coming years, we will look to scale up our education work, particularly necessary if the voting age across the country is lowered to 16.

We are pleased to publish these findings and to share these important insights directly from children and young people. As the next generation of voters, their voice and views should be heard.

**Vijay Rangarajan,**  
Chief Executive  
of the Electoral Commission



### Who are we?

The Electoral Commission is an independent body that makes sure elections in the UK are fair, open, and well run. We're here to ensure its integrity as well as help everyone understand how to vote and feel confident in taking part.

We also regulate the money that political parties and campaigners spend and receive, checking it is fair, transparent and legal.

### What does democracy mean?

Democracy is the system which gives everyone a say in how the country is run. It works best when everyone has the chance to get involved. It's not just about voting – it's about understanding how decisions are made and feeling well-informed about elections and how to join in, whether it's at a local or national level.

# 2

## Listening to young people

This research brings together insights from over 2,500 young people, aged 11 to 25, from across the UK. We used a mixture of surveys and focus groups to gather their thoughts and listen to what they have to say.

We designed the questions to understand how much young people know about voting, politics and democracy, and how confident they feel about these topics. We also explored what is taught in schools, where young people get their information, what could be improved and how more young people can engage with democracy. DJS Research carried out this research for the Electoral Commission.

**A huge thank you to our Youth Voice partners and champions for helping shape this research and contributing to this report.**

**I really enjoy being a part of the Youth Voice Network, as I get to understand more about how elections are run, and how much work goes into them being equal. It's important for young people to vote, as it's a guaranteed chance for them to be able to have their say on what matters to them.**

Evelyn, Youth Voice Champion

## Are young people interested in politics?

# 3

### 45%

Less than half of young people in the UK say they are interested in UK politics. Levels of interest are similar among young people in England, Wales and Scotland, but around 10% lower for those in Northern Ireland.

### 36%

Interest in local politics is even lower – a pattern seen across all four nations. This lack of interest is reflected in voting habits, with many young people saying they don't vote simply because politics doesn't interest them.

### Interest in politics also varies across different groups

Age	Region	Ethnicity
Only 34% of 15-17 year olds are interested in UK politics, despite soon being able to vote.	63% of those based in London show an interest in politics, notably higher than other regions in England.	57% of young Black people express an interest in UK politics, the highest rate compared to any other ethnic group.

**I guess not many people actually interact with their local MPs and councils, so feel a bit disinterested in the local stuff whereas, obviously during general elections, it's like everyone gets involved.**

Boy aged 17-25 years old

# 4

## Are we educating young people enough about politics, democracy and voting?

### UK Government

Less than a third of young people say they know a lot about what the UK Government does.

**31%**  
know a lot about what the UK Government does



### Devolved nation parliaments

Awareness of the parliaments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is generally low:

**24%**  
know a lot about what the Scottish Parliament does

**18%**  
know a lot about what the Northern Irish Assembly does

**15%**  
know a lot about what the Senedd Cymru does

### Does the amount that young people know about politics influence how much of an interest they take?

Those who know a lot about the UK Government are **three times more likely** to be interested in politics than those who know nothing.

### What happens when young people don't have enough knowledge about politics?

**28%** of those who didn't vote say it was because they didn't know which candidate to choose. The gaps in political knowledge extend to the voting process too.

### How well do young people understand voting in a general election?



**84%** know that you need to register before voting



**37%** know that you cannot vote online



**49%** know that taking photo ID is not optional

### Do young people get enough information on voting in elections?

We asked those aged 18 or over, who voted in recent elections, how they felt about the information they had at the time.

### Who?

**57%** need more information on who to vote for

### Why?

**49%** need more information on why it's important to vote

### How?

**48%** need more information on how to vote



With many young people left wanting more information on how and why to vote, it's clear that they need more education about democracy and elections.

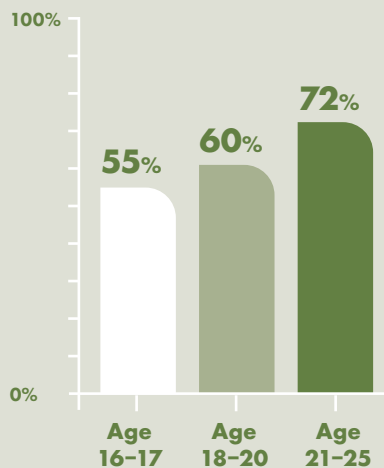
# 5

## Do young people feel confident to vote?

It seems a lack of knowledge could also be affecting young people's confidence in voting, because only half of those who have not voted before are confident they would know how to do so. What's more, not all those who are eligible to vote – or soon will be – are confident with the process.



### What percentage feel confident when it comes to voting?



### What influences confidence in voting?

Hearing about politics at home or at school makes a big difference in how confident young people feel about voting, but many of them miss out on these discussions.



**81%** of those who talk about politics at home weekly, or several times a week, feel confident about voting

But only half of young people are having these discussions regularly.



**76%** of those who have heard about politics in the last year at school feel confident about voting

But just over a third of school age children have learnt about it in this way.

# 6

## Who is teaching young people about politics, democracy and voting?

### Top five sources of political information for young people:

- 1 TV
- 2 Social media
- 3 Adults at home
- 4 Internet  
not including social media
- 5 School or college

**I'm not surprised by it [politics] on the TV either because when I'm walking past in my living room, my Dad's always got it on.**

Boy aged 11-13 years old



Although TV is the top way that young people say they hear about politics, this tends to be digested passively (for example overhearing what their parents are watching), instead of something they've chosen to watch themselves.

Social media is the second most common source.

Young people get most of their information on politics, voting, and elections from sources that they have little control over or don't fully trust. However, they are much more likely to trust what they learn about politics from parents or teachers.

**When it comes to learning about politics...**

**44%**  
trust social media

**78%**  
trust what they learn from their parents

**74%**  
believe what they learn about politics at school/college



**Democratic education is very important as voting in elections allows you to express your beliefs, stand for what you believe in and have your voice heard. To me, this is vital because everyone's opinions should be represented, and education is the best way to empower and encourage others to become engaged and have their say.**

David, Youth Voice Champion

Many young people aren't regularly talking about politics at home or at school. What's more, those who had heard about politics at school recently said that it was often in the context of history lessons, rather than modern day democracy.

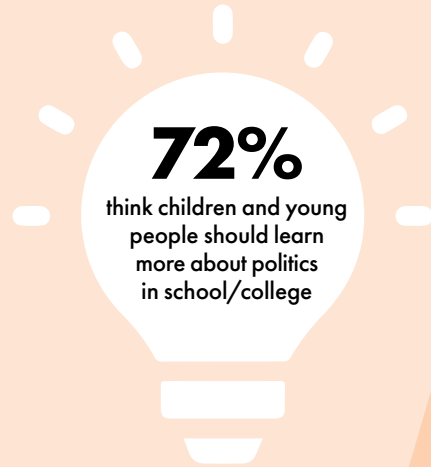
### What does this tell us?

Young people don't always learn about politics from the places they trust most, which highlights a need for more conversations about politics at home and at school.

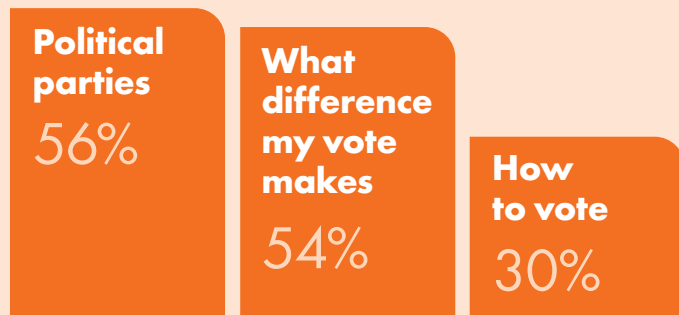
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## What do young people need to be engaged, informed voters?

Young people come across political content in many places, but they can't always be sure it's reliable. Many of them agree that there should be more democratic education in schools and colleges. Let's explore what they want to learn and how they'd like to receive this information:



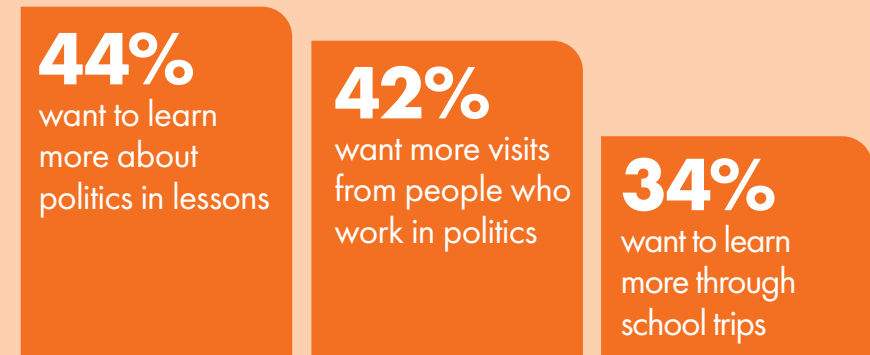
### They want to learn more about:



Through the Youth Voice network, I've come to understand that democratic education is more crucial than ever. The recent decline in voting rates among young people is deeply concerning, as it highlights a lack of awareness about how politics impacts our lives.

Zani, Youth Voice Champion

### How do young people want to learn more about politics in school/college?



Since so many young people feel they aren't learning enough about politics at school, we need to meet the demand for better democratic education in trusted spaces.

Democratic education resources for educators and teachers:  
[electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/resources-educators](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/resources-educators)



## Get informed and get involved

Young people tell us the main reason they vote is to have their voices heard. We want to support them to build the knowledge and confidence they need – not just to vote, but to get involved in democracy in other ways too.

### Ready to take the next step?

Here are some ways to get started...



#### Find out more:

Check out our resources to learn all about democracy, elections and voting:  
[electoralcommission.org.uk  
/resources/resources-young-people](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/resources/resources-young-people)

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#### Start a conversation:

Talk to people at home and in the community, and ask questions about the things that matter to you

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#### Get involved:

Join a school council, local youth council or debate group

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#### Write:

To share your opinion or raise an issue in your local area, write to your local elected representative at:  
[writetothem.com](https://writetothem.com)

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#### Stay informed:

Follow trustworthy news sources and fact-check information – a great place to start is:  
[shoutoutuk.org/resources/#media](https://shoutoutuk.org/resources/#media)

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#### Register to vote:

If you're 16 or over in England or Northern Ireland, or 14 or over in Scotland or Wales, you can register to vote at:  
[gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://gov.uk/register-to-vote)

**Engaging with democracy is a way to get your voice heard. We can support people to become informed by educating people on who the political parties are, what they offer, and how to vote.**

Andrew, Youth Voice Champion



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