

PRESS RELEASE

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65 YEAR OLDS HAVE SEVEN TIMES MORE VOTING POWER THAN 18 YEAR OLDS

Generational self-interest could be on display in the forthcoming local elections as new research reveals that 18 year olds in the 2010 General Election exercised markedly less actual voting power than generations in retirement.

The research also revealed that by 2031 there could be 1.256 million voters aged 90 years or over, more than any single-year age cohort.

By 2041 there will be fewer actual voters aged 18 than any age group until 84 years of age, and fewer actual voters aged 24 than any age until 82 years old.

The stark warning, given in the Intergenerational Foundation's latest report, *The Rise of Gerontocracy?*, written by Dr Craig Berry, calculates the political power of voters at different life stages, now and in the future, and suggests that large cohorts of older voters are creating a "democratic deficit" in the UK.

The report calls for the reduction in the voting age to 16 years of age and the creation of a permanent independent Commission/Ombudsman for Future Generations to adjudicate on likely future impacts.

Craig Berry states, "Urgent action is needed to address this democratic deficit. The UK is at risk of becoming a gerontocracy, run by older generations for older generations, leaving younger voters increasingly locked out of the democratic process."

The report used original research to reveal how too many older voters and too few younger voters are turning the traditional pattern of pyramid-shaped age distribution on its head and putting the democratic representation of younger people at risk.

This effect also mounts up through the age groups. By 2021, 40 year olds will exercise 83% more voting power than 18 year olds; 45 year olds will exercise 69%, and 50 year olds 97% more voting power.

The median potential voter in the 2010 General Election was 46 in 2010. In 2021 this will rise to 47 years of age. The median potential voter will be aged 50 by 2041, and 51 in 2051.

Taking voter turnout rates into account shows that the democratic process was even more skewed towards older cohorts. The median actual voter was aged 49 in 2010, three years older than the median potential voter. The median actual voter will be 52 by 2021, rising to 54 by 2051.

To some extent this is in young voters' hands. Younger voters tend to live in more marginal seats, which should advantage them but, because they are more transient, they are far less likely to be registered to vote, and so their potential strength in numbers is not used. In future elections, as older cohorts become more geographically dispersed, the further disenfranchisement of tomorrow's young people is anticipated.

The democratic deficit is even more significant at local elections. Only 10% of 18-24 year olds turned out to vote in the 2009 local elections compared to 85% of over-65s. It meant that over-65s exercised 7 times the voting power of their younger counterparts.

It is not that young people are necessarily disengaged: 63% of 18 year olds claim to be interested in politics and 53% of 18 year olds agree that even voting in a local election is an effective form of influence. But hesitancy, mistrust and cynicism, and a sense of powerlessness have skewed their perspectives on politics, and many of the younger generation have been labelled "radically unpolitical".

The three main political parties have also failed to encourage younger participation. The average age of a Conservative Party member is 55 years of age, Labour Party 47.4 years, and Lib Dem 48.5 years. Furthermore, Youth Councils are poorly resourced across all major political parties.

Angus Hanton, IF Co-founder, adds, "The voting age must be lowered to 16 to prevent our national politics from becoming overwhelmed by this democratic deficit."

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Notes to Editors:

Figures sourced from population estimates published by ONS; voter turnout data published in Ipsos MORI's *How Britain Voted* series, and The Voter Power Index, compiled by the New Economics Foundation.

Dr Craig Berry, Report Author, is available for interview

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