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83 MPs Should Beware The Power of the Under-35s

An increase of just 2% in the voting levels of 18 to 34 years olds in the 2015 General Election would see 20 incumbent MPs ousted, according to research published by the Intergenerational Foundation (IF) today. An increase of up to 5% would see 41 MPs unseated and an increase of up to 10% would see 83 MPs unseated.

The research, which is based on turnout levels at the 2010 General Election, suggests that rather than having little or no voting power, voters under 35 years of age could deliver a nasty shock to a significant number of MPs in May 2015.

The results are based on IF analysis of the likely results if there was a small rise in the number of younger voters voting for the party/candidate placed second in 2010. When a more conservative analysis was undertaken where researchers assumed that the extra votes would be distributed 2:1 against the incumbent, even though the number of seats changing hands were lower, 9 incumbent MPs would be ousted with a 2% increase in the youth vote, 20 MPs with a 5% increase and 28 MPs if 10% more young people voted in key constituencies.

It is no secret that the UK is struggling with low youth turnout at elections. Ipsos-MORI research from 2010 identified that while average voter turnout was 65% across the UK, only 55% of 25-34 year olds and 44% of 18-24 year olds turned out¹.

However, due to the groundbreaking work of organisations such as Bite the Ballot in increasing youth registration, together with the tremendous success of the Scottish Referendum in stimulating engagement in the political process by younger people, there is growing optimism amongst voter engagement organisations that young people could in fact sway results due to the power of their vote at constituency level.

The Top 10 constituencies where under-35s could influence outcomes are Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Hampstead and Kilburn, North Warwickshire, Thurrock, Hendon, Sheffield Central, Camborne and Redruth, Oldham East and Saddleworth, Bolton West, and Southampton, Itchen.

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¹ <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2613&view=wide>

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IF also analysed likely results if 16 and 17 year olds were also able to vote next year. In 91 constituencies the total number of 16 and 17 year olds exceeds the majority of the elected MP. In 23 constituencies the incumbent MP would be removed if 16 and 17 year old registered voters voted 2:1 against the incumbent in favour of the second placed party in 2010.

Angus Hanton, IF Co-Founder comments, "Our report dispels the myth that younger people's votes hold no power. However, since the under-35s have been systematically let down by all three major parties on major issues that affect their generation such as increases in tuition fees, the removal of housing benefit for under-25s, lack of new home building, high rents, the removal of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), poor job prospects and inadequate employment protection against zero hours and short-term contracts together with declining pay, who should they vote for?"

"A rise in the packhorse generation vote at the next election could be a wake-up call for complacent politicians. Ignoring the interests of younger generations in favour of maintaining support from the grey vote with measures such as the Pensioner Bond, may see politicians punished at the ballot box. Our research suggests that at least 50 MPs should seriously consider their offer to young people."

"Giving 16-25 year olds free bus and rail travel would help young people get to work. It is also affordable if the government means-tested winter fuel payments and the TV License, and reformed National insurance Contributions so that everyone pays, irrespective of their age.

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Notes to Editors:

Figures based on ONS data for England and Wales, 2011 Census and population estimates, General Records Office for Scotland and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

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