**Grant Number:** N/A

**Sponsor:** Scottish Government

**Project title:** Votes at 16 later on – Examining the long-term impact in Scotland

The following files have been archived:

| File name | File description (Short description of content, sample size, format, any linking between different types of data, i.e. survey and interviews/focus groups) |
| --- | --- |
| 857551\_Data\_with weights\_2021.sav | Data file in SPSS format, including weights |
| 857551\_Data\_with weights\_2021.csv | Data file in CSV format, including weights |
| 857551\_Supporting\_documentation.zip | Original questionnaire (Questionnaire.docx) and tabulation of all variables (unweighted, Codebook.docx) |

**Project description:**

This project investigated the outcomes of the enfranchisement of 16- and 17-year-olds on young people’s political behaviour in Scotland seven years after the change of the franchise. Scotland is one of a limited number of places in the world where the voting age has been lowered to 16. When this was done initially for the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014, a rich amount of high-quality data was collected both before and after the first vote involving 16- and 17-year-olds, and this data suggested a number of changes to young people’s political behaviour following the change of the franchise.

In order to gain insights into the longevity of some of these changes in young people’s political behaviour in Scotland, this study was designed to measure the extent to which changes to young people’s political behaviour in Scotland were maintained in different cohorts seven years after the first vote that saw 16- and 17-year-olds included in the franchise. The study surveyed representative samples of cohorts of 16- to 31-year-olds in Scotland. Its objectives were to examine (1) the extent to which greater levels of political engagement found in young people in 2014 and 2015, and greater equality of engagement between young people from different socio-economic backgrounds had been maintained, and (2) which factors impacted young people’s experiences of elections and political socialisation when they are enfranchised at different ages (16 vs. 18 or later).

**Data description:**

The data collection includes a survey covering aspects of political behaviour among representative samples of cohorts of young people aged 16 to 31 who came of age in the context of and since the lowering of the voting age in Scotland. Additionally, the survey was also conducted among a comparative sample representative of adults aged 32 and older in Scotland. The survey was designed to answer research questions on young people's voting behaviour seven years after the introduction of Votes at 16 in Scotland to assess the longer-term outcomes of the lowering of the voting age to 16 in Scotland. It covered questions on political engagement (both conventional and less conventional), political attitudes (including views on institutions and self-efficacy), family background, experiences with civic education and personal circumstances.

**Data collection method:**

The data for this study was collected in July 2021 over a period of four weeks using an online survey and respondents from different online panels. To obtain samples sufficiently large to distinguish cohorts with very specific experiences of the voting age (enfranchised at age 16 or 18 and in the context of different kinds of elections), we worked with a survey provider who was able to combine respondents from three different online panels.

Sampling was done using quotas to reflect population characteristics of 16- to 31-year-olds and adults aged 32 and over in Scotland. To achieve representativeness, we used quotas for age, gender, region, and (parental) social class based on the most up-to-date official population statistics (or survey-based proxies, where official statistics were not available). We also monitored the distributions of gender and parental social class within sub-groups of age to balance the sample across all cohorts. We used an occupational measure of (parental) social class – the classification according to the National Readership Survey NRS scale.

The questionnaire was designed using established surveys of political and social attitudes in Scotland as well as surveys specifically designed to investigate youth political engagement – thus allowing for comparisons with other research findings. These included the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (compare SN 9066) and a survey developed, piloted and implemented specifically for young people in the context of the Scottish independence referendum (SN-854933). It covered questions on political engagement (both conventional and less conventional), political attitudes (including views on institutions and self-efficacy), family background, experiences with civic education and personal circumstances.

The study has been designed in line with and reviewed by the University of Edinburgh’s School of Social and Political Science ethics committee, assuring anonymity and data protection for survey participants, full transparency on survey aims and processes (including the right to not answer questions and to not complete the survey), and the adherence to purdah period restrictions ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections.

**Data sourcing, processing and preparation:**

The data collection was executed by an independent survey provider using an online survey and recruiting respondents from different online panels. Respondents were cross-validated to avoid duplicate participation in multiple panels and assessed according to quality criteria (e.g. flatlining, speeding).

To establish representativeness, sample proportions for age, gender, region, and (parental) social class in the final sample were compared to the most up-to-date official population statistics (or survey-based proxies, where official statistics were not available). For 16- to 31-year-olds we used an occupational measure of parental social class – the classification according to the National Readership Survey NRS scale. Where deviations existed (in particular, there was an oversampling of female respondents and higher socio-occupational class of parents – as is common in such a survey), we accounted for those by producing design weights based on iterative proportional fitting that adjust for the biases to achieve population characteristics. We compared data for 16- to 31-year-olds and adults aged 32 and older separately, resulting in two weighting variables: WEIGHT\_1631 and WEIGHT\_32. To weight all respondents regardless of age, use the combined weighting variable WEIGHT\_ALL.

Using the sample of 16- to 31-year-olds only, we created cohorts of young people according to the first election or referendum they were eligible to vote in by matching election dates with the young people’s survey responses on their year and month of birth. Using a birthday in the month of an election (anytime between the first and last day of the month, regardless of when an election took place that month) as cut-off point for eligibility to vote in that election, respondents were coded to belong to a particular cohort according to the first election they would have been eligible to vote in (variable ‘FirstVote’):

**Table 1.** First-time voter experience groups in the final survey sample of 16- to 31-year-olds, N=863.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Age range (in years) in May 2021** | **First election enfranchised at (variable ‘FirstVote’)** | **Age at 1st election (variable ‘Age1stElection’)** | **Sample size (N)** |
| 16-17 | Scottish Parliament 2021 | 16-17 | 177 |
| 18-19 | Scottish Parliament 2021 | 18+ | 97 |
| 19-20 | General Election 2019 | 18+ | 31 |
| 20-21 | Local Elections 2017 | 16-17 | 83 |
| 21-22 | Scottish Parliament 2016 | 16-17 | 90 |
| 22-24 | Independence referendum 2014 | 16-17 | 103 |
| 24-26 | Independence referendum 2014 | 18+ | 85 |
| 27-28 | Local Elections 2012 | 18+ | 32 |
| 28-29 | Scottish Parliament 2011 | 18+ | 37 |
| 29-31 | General Election 2010 | 18+ | 128 |

**Publications**:

Eichhorn, J. & Huebner, C. (2023). *Votes-at-16 in Scotland, 2014-2021.* Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh. Accessible at https://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/votes-at-16-in-scotland-study

Eichhorn, J. & Huebner, C. (2025). Longer-term Effects of Voting at Age 16: Higher Turnout among Young People in Scotland. *Politics and Governance.*