

Concern about the below-average turnout of young people in Britain – and its future impact for British democratic legitimacy – have grown steadily since the late 1990s, prompting much research into the potential causes of the decline. In the search for an explanation, some scholars and journalists have suggested that controversial political events, such as scandals and particularly the Iraq War in 2003, have dissuaded the young from participating in politics by undermining their faith in the democratic system. This article tests this theory by constructing a measure of democratic faith, and using a range of survey data and employing an age-period-cohort analysis framework, examines how the faith of the Millennial generation has changed since the late 1990s. The analyses show that faith in democracy is a relatively stable political orientation, and that there is no indication that the Millennials' faith has changed dramatically in light of any of the controversies to hit British politics since 1997 – including the Iraq War. There is no evidence to support the claim, therefore, that the unusually low turnout of the Millennials is a result of a loss of faith in British democracy.

Keywords: young people; political efficacy; political interest; democratic faith; Iraq War; scandal

In 1970, almost two thirds of 18-24 year olds voted in the first general election following the reduction of the voting age to 18 (House of Commons Library 2013). In 1992, the figure was almost the same, at 67%. By 2005, however, the turnout of the youngest voters had plummeted; just 38% of 18-24 year olds voted in the general election (House of Commons Library 2013). While turnout had fallen across all age groups in this period, the fall was particularly pronounced among the young; between 1970 and 2005, the gap between the turnout of the under 25s and the wider electorate more than trebled, from 8% to 26%.

There was a modest recovery in the 2010, with overall turnout increasing and the gap between the under 25s and wider electorate shrinking to 15% (House of Commons Library 2013). There had already been more than enough time, however, for worries about the future health of British democracy to build up in light of the steady trend of declining youth turnout in previous elections. Journalists, politicians and academics began to worry about what would happen to British democracy if this generation of non-voters did not change their ways as they aged (e.g. Henn et al 2005; Farthing 2010; Whiteley 2012; *The Observer* 2013).

In seeking an explanation for this trend, journalists such as Owen Jones (2013), Laurie Penny (2013) and Rowena Davis (2013), and scholars including Banaji (2008), pointed towards the effects of high profile scandals or controversial events in British politics over the last two decades. They suggested that these events discouraged the young (non)voters who entered the British electorate since 1997 – the 'Millennial generation' – from engaging with the political process by undermining their faith in the democratic system. Events such as the Iraq War in 2003, the cash for honours scandal in 2006, the financial crisis of 2007/08, and the Parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009 are suggested to have undermined the belief of (particularly young) citizens in the fairness, integrity, representativeness and openness of the British democracy. This, it is suggested, discourages them from participating in politics, either because they do not

feel they can have a meaningful influence, or because they perceive that the democratic system is simply not worth engaging with.

Despite the growing popularity of this view, there is very little academic research which explores the impact of controversial political events on democratic faith. Nor is there research which looks at the impact of such events specifically on younger voters, who are still living through politically formative years, and so are particularly susceptible to the effect of external influences. The claim, therefore, that political controversies could be leaving the Millennials with a lasting lack of faith in British democracy which explains their low turnout has yet to be tested.

To address this gap in the literature, this article examines the effects of political controversies between 1997 and 2010 on the democratic faith of the Millennial generation in the British electorate. Using a range of data from the British Election Study, the British Social Attitudes Survey, and the Audit of Political Engagement, the article examines how the Millennials' faith in democracy changed following major political controversies like the Iraq War, and whether or not the impact of such events is lasting.

The analyses show that contrary to the expectations of those who believe that political scandal and controversy is driving Britain's young voters away from politics, such events appear to have had no substantial impact on the democratic faith of the Millennials. In fact, democratic faith is shown to be a relatively stable political orientation, exhibiting signs of only limited, short-lived variation alongside evidence of a positive life cycle effect; as young people get older, they appear to become more likely to feel that the democratic system is worthy of their engagement – a clear sign of their faith in it. There is no indication, therefore, that the unusually low turnout of the Millennials is the result of a loss of democratic faith.

The article begins by outlining the theoretical argument that political controversies and scandals have a detrimental effect on democratic faith – and consequently political participation – based on academic research and media arguments primarily relating to

Britain, but also drawing on research in America where this theory is slightly more developed. It then outlines a definition and conceptualisation of 'democratic faith' which can be used to test such a theory, before presenting the analyses. The article concludes by showing that while political controversies' may have an effect on some political attitudes, they have little to no lasting effect on democratic faith, before considering avenues for further research.

Scandals, Wars and Democratic Faith

Ever since the particularly low and declining turnout of the British Millennials was first identified following the 1997 election, it has become increasingly common for journalists, scholars and even young people themselves to suggest that political controversies and scandals have something to do with keeping them away from the ballot box. In a recent survey of British young people's views of democracy, Henn and Foard (2012) found that almost two thirds of 18-24 year olds said that they were 'turned off' from politics by the actions of politicians and political parties. Furthermore, studies such as Marsh et al (2007), Russell et al (2002), and White et al (2000) highlight the frustration of the Millennials with the conduct and decisions of politicians and the government. The Hansard Society (2012), Dalton (2004), Stoker (2005) and Newell (2010) also point to rising levels of cynicism regarding the integrity and trustworthiness of politicians and political institutions among all citizens – particularly the Millennials - which is also said to discourage them from engaging with politics.

While this is evidence of a more generalised connection between the actions of political elites and the motivation of young citizens to engage, there are also studies that draw a more explicit link between the two. The logic of their argument is that these controversies undermine the belief of young citizens in the fairness, integrity, representativeness and openness to citizens' influence of the democratic system and the actors within it, thereby undermining their motivation to participate in the political process (Delli Carpini 2000; Bennet 1997; Banaji 2008).

In the United States (US), for example, Bennet (1997) and Delli Carpini (2000) suggest that the numerous high profile political scandals and controversies in the US since the 1960s has undermined the democratic faith of successive generations of young Americans. As Bennet (1997) argues, "too many public officials have had feet of clay. The history of official corruption, misjudgements, and peccadillos since the mid-1960s includes Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-contra, Whitewater, FBI 'Filegate', and sex scandals", and these have eroded the faith of particularly young Americans in their political elite (Bennet 1997 p.50). Delli Carpini (2000) points to the corrosive effect of such events on political efficacy, arguing that such scandals have led to American politics being "viewed as irrelevant and ineffective at best and corrupt and the source of many of our problems at worst" among the young (Delli Carpini 2000 p.346).

Hyman (1972) and Ranade and Norris (1981) suggest that there was a similar though potentially more dramatic effect on American young people in the 1950s and 1960s from the Vietnam War. They show that not only did the War and the decisions of the American government (not least the draft) reduce their support for the leadership at the time, it reduced their support for American democracy more generally – in some cases contributing to the decision of some young Americans to renounce their citizenship (Hyman 1972; Ranade and Norris 1981); surely the strongest possible indicator of a loss of faith in American democracy.

The effect of such events and controversies on democratic faith is argued to be particularly important for young people because they are living through the impressionable years of their political socialisation (Bennet 1997). This period is the time during which political attitudes, values and habits are still developing, and are susceptible to change and outside influence (Jennings 2007; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2009). Once citizens age and move out of their formative years, these attitudes, values and behavioural habits become crystallised and reinforced (Dinas 2013; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2009). Consequently, they become less likely to change, regardless of the influence of external factors such as peers, the workplace, or controversial political

events (Jennings 2007). If a particular generation experiences something which undermines their faith in politics during their formative years, therefore, there is a possibility that this will leave a lasting impression upon their attitudes, values and behavioural habits, which will be reflected through their political engagement throughout their lives (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2009; Bennet 1997).

The same arguments are made in relation to the British Millennials, although the period in which such an effect is apparent is suggested to be more recent. The most common political controversy which is identified as the source of the Millennials' loss of democratic faith is the Iraq War in 2003. The controversy began in 2002, global protests against military action in Iraq began to spread throughout advanced Western democracies (Kahn and Kellner 2005; Such et al 2005). Many thousands of British citizens took part (Kahn and Kellner 2005; Such et al 2005), many of them young people and school children (Banaji 2008; Cunningham and Lavallette 2004; Such et al 2005; Cushion 2007). The presence of so many young people was a matter of great interest to the British media (Cunningham and Lavallette 2004; Such et al 2005; Cushion 2007), and challenged the conventional wisdom at the time that the young were generally apathetic and unengaged political actors (Sloam 2007; O'Toole 2004).

The eventual decision by the British government to go to war despite the large and numerous protests is suggested to have undermined the faith of British citizens in their democracy. Like Bennet (1997), Banaji (2008) and Noor (2007) imply that the effect was particularly profound for younger citizens who were living through their impressionable years, for many of whom their participation in the protests, or at least their awareness of their peers' and contemporaries' participation in them, was a defining event of their early political life. Banaji (2008) argues that the failure of the protests to prevent the war undermined their belief that the political system was open to them: "While the sense of anger...about an impending unjust and illegal invasion of another country that led some two million people to protest...only deepened over the course of the following months, the sense of political efficacy engendered by these collective

actions was short-lived" (Banaji 2008 p.551). Furthermore, Banaji (2008), Noor (2007) and Al-Ghabban (2007) also suggest that many young people "became increasingly disenchanted by both the official sanctions taken against them...for their actions...and [the] lack of responsiveness to the arguments and actions against the war" (Banaji 2008 p.551). As a result, they questioned not only the openness of their British political system to their influence as citizens, but its representativeness of them and their interests (Banaji 2008; Noor 2007).

The theory that political controversies like the Iraq War are responsible for undermining British citizens' – and particularly the Millennials' – democratic faith has also received extensive media attention. Since 1997, a number of high profile controversies have hit British politics, which some have suggested have had a corrosive effect on citizens' engagement. Runciman (2014), for example, suggests that the last decade has been a period of almost unprecedented scandal and controversy, in which "the standing of many of the central institutions of British public life has been undermined". He suggests that consequently, "British democracy is going through its worst crisis of confidence for decades" (Runciman 2014).

While the extent to which the post-1997 period is unprecedented in terms of scandal and controversy may be exaggerated, it cannot be disputed that there have been plenty such events. Several journalists – and even the former Archbishop of Canterbury (Bingham 2012) – have suggested that some or all of them have eroded the trust and faith of British citizens in their democratic system, processes, institutions and elite. Such controversies include the revelation of John Major's affair with Edwina Currie in 2002 – despite the latter's 'back to basics' moral campaign while in government; the 'cash for honours' scandal in 2006, when Tony Blair was accused of offering peerages to businessmen who had lent vast sums to the Labour Party; the financial crisis in 2007/08, which brought the global economy to its knees and precipitated what is becoming known as the 'Great Recession'; the 'cash for influence' affair in 2009, when several former Labour ministers offered their services as advisors and lobbyists – complete with

government contact books - to private companies in exchange for vast daily sums; and – of course – the Parliamentary expenses scandal in 2009, in which around half the House of Commons was found to have claimed Parliamentary expenses for in some cases ludicrous, and in other cases illegal, purposes (Mason 2014; Martin 2014; Lefort 2010; Bingham 2012; Woolfe 2006; Wilson 2008; Runciman 2014; Rawnsley 2008).

While these controversies are suggested at some point to have played a role in depressing British citizens' democratic faith, the event which is most often highlighted as the cause of the Millennials' lack of faith by journalists is also the Iraq War. Journalists such as Sam Parker (2013), Libby Brooks (2003) and Owen Jones (2013) agree with Banaji's (2008) view that that for many young people involved in the protests against the war, their participation marked their 'political awakening' (Parker 2013) – their first engagement with politics as active citizens. They also argue that the fact that the protests failed to prevent British participation in the war had a devastating effect on the young Millennials who either took part in or witnessed the protests (Jones 2013; Murray 2013; Clark 2013).

Laurie Penny (2013), for example, argues that the young people who took part in the protests felt a 'life-changing sense of betrayal', and had their faith in democracy 'buried under an avalanche of cynicism' (Parker 2013). Andrew Murray (2013) and Rowena Davis (2013) suggest that the effect was even wider, affecting young citizens whether they were involved in the protests or not because they witnessed the apparent futility of democratic engagement in influencing government decisions. Murray (2013) described it as a 'body blow' from which British democracy may never recover, and Davis (2013) suggests that this is responsible for changing the way young citizens participate in politics – encouraging them to embrace more direct forms of engagement with political actors because they have so little faith in democratic processes to represent them.

The theory that political controversies are responsible for undermining the democratic faith of the Millennials, therefore, is one which spans both academic and media circles. In the context of British Millennials' low turnout, the argument is that controversial

events like the Iraq War have undermined their faith in democracy during their impressionable years. This has left a lasting habit of limited faith in democracy, which subsequently depresses their participation in politics.

What is Democratic Faith?

Despite the growing popularity and frequency of the argument that political controversy is undermining the democratic faith of the young, there is relatively little research into such a relationship (most research focusses on the electoral impact of such events e.g. Whiteley et al (2013); Pattie and Johnston (2012)). This means that there is little research from which to draw a definition of democratic faith to use in this analysis.

The literature above suggests that 'democratic faith' refers to an individual's confidence that the democratic system and the actors within it are representative of them and their interests/views/beliefs, and also open to their influence when they participate in the political process. Delli Carpini (2000) and Banaji (2008), for example, suggest that political controversies undermine political participation through convincing the young that they cannot influence the political process. Such a feeling is also apparent in journalists' accounts for why the Iraq War had such a toxic effect on democratic faith for British young people – because they could not alter the decision of the government despite protesting against the War (e.g. Jones 2013; Parker 2013).

In addition, the accounts of Hyman (1972), Ranade and Norris (1981), Jones (2013), Parker (2013), Murray (2013) and Penny (2013) – as well as Henn and Foard's (2012) evidence that many young people are 'put off' politics generally by the behaviour of politicians and parties - demonstrate that past assessments of the performance of the democratic system are also important. In the case of the Vietnam War, some young Americans were so angry at their government that they renounced their affiliation with the American political system altogether (Hyman 1972; Ranade and Norris 1981), while following Iraq Parker (2013), Jones (2013) and Penny (2013) all wrote of profound feelings of anger, bitterness and betrayal among the young. In both cases, assessments

of the previous performance of the political system more generally – not just the government, a particular politician or a particular party – are central to the notion of democratic faith.

This leads, therefore, to a definition of democratic faith which refers to an individual's faith that their democratic political system and the actors within it are representative of them and their interests and agenda – which includes the expectation that the system will operate in a way which they consider to be just and appropriate – and is open to their influence as citizens.

Data and Methods

This study will assess how the democratic faith of the Millennials in Britain has changed between 1997 and 2010. The 1997-2010 period is suitable for such a test because it corresponds to the past four general elections in which the turnout of the Millennials has been shown to be unusually low (compared to previous generations at the same age), it is a period for which plenty of data is available, and it is a period during which there were several high-profile political controversies which could plausibly have affected democratic faith.

To measure democratic faith, three indicators widely available in surveys will be examined: political efficacy, which captures an individual's perception that they can influence political decisions when they engage with politics (Fahmy 2006); democratic satisfaction, which represents citizens' satisfaction with the collective democratic system, including the political authority, regime and community (Clarke et al 2004); and political interest, which represents an individual's motivation to engage with the political system (Dalton 2013) and so is a proxy measure of how much faith they have in it – we would not expect someone with no faith in democracy to express much interest in engaging with it (further detail on the variables can be found in the appendix). Collectively, these three variables give an indication of the key components of democratic faith outlined above, as well as a good proxy measure of its consequence.

The analyses below use three data sources: the British Election Study (BES), a detailed survey of political attitudes, values and behaviour conducted on a wide sample of British voters around every general election; the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA), an annual wide-ranging survey of social attitudes and behaviour; and the Audit of Political Engagement (APE) another annual survey (which has run only since 2003) of political attitudes and behaviour in Britain. Collectively, these three surveys allow for an (almost) annual reading of democratic faith among British Millennials between 1997 and 2010, and all use comparable measures of efficacy, interest and democratic satisfaction.

For a given event to be said to have had a significant effect on democratic faith, we would expect to see a statistically significant change in all three indicators in the year(s) following the event. The effect does not have to be of identical magnitude, but it does have to be statistically significant and in the same direction. For instance, if the theory that the Iraq War undermined the Millennials' democratic faith was to be supported, we would expect to see a significant decline in interest, efficacy and democratic satisfaction in 2004 and potentially beyond.

To assess the changes in the democratic faith indicators over the 1997 – 2010 period, an age-period-cohort (APC) analysis framework will be used. The survey samples will be split into four 'sub-cohorts' of the Millennial generation (i.e. voters who entered the electorate from the 1997 general election onwards), based on the election at which they became eligible to vote. This produces four sub-cohorts: the 1997 attainers, the 2001 attainers, the 2005 attainers, and the 2010 attainers. The average interest, efficacy and democratic satisfaction of each cohort will be identified for every year (where data allows) from when they entered the electorate until 2010, and the differences between them tested for statistical significance using one-sample t-tests.

The benefit of such an approach is that not only will it give an indication of how the overall democratic faith of the Millennial generation changes over time more generally, but it will give an indication of how such changes could be the result of aging effects (associated with an individual's aging and moving through the life cycle), period effects

(associated with an individual's exposure to a particular point in history), and cohort effects (associated with the distinctive experiences of that individual during their formative years) (Neundorf 2010; Grasso 2014). By presenting the data in a cohort-specific fashion over time, it will be possible to get an indication of whether there are any changes in democratic faith which result from the life cycle (in which case all cohorts will exhibit the same pattern of change, albeit at different times), period effects (which should affect all cohorts in similar ways, regardless of age), or cohort effects (which should see the cohorts enter the electorate with different respective levels of interest, efficacy and satisfaction) (Neundorf 2010; Grasso 2014). The drawback to this approach is that it results in small sample sizes. The number of survey respondents in each cohort is rarely above 200, meaning that there is insufficient data to sustain reliable regression analyses. Other factors which might affect democratic faith cannot, therefore, be controlled for, and the effects of age, period and cohort cannot be definitively disentangled (Grasso 2014). That said, the APC framework supported by t-tests of differences in means is sufficient to determine whether or not democratic faith has changed significantly from one year to the next, and whether or not that change is likely to be a result of controversial political events through period or cohort effects.

Results

Democratic Satisfaction

Figure 1 shows the average democratic satisfaction scores for the four attainer cohorts between 1997 and 2010 from the BES data i.e. it shows the average democratic satisfaction for each cohort at the time immediately after the general election at which they were first eligible to vote, up until the 2010 election. Figure 2 presents a slightly more detailed picture, using the BSA which provides data from more frequent intervals.

Figure 1 here

Figure 2 here

The two graphs show that there is little difference between the four cohorts throughout the series; generally, all four have had comparable levels of satisfaction with democracy since 1997/8. Both graphs suggest that there are no cohort effects present, and little evidence of a substantial shift in satisfaction following any of the controversies in the 1997-2010 period – with the exception of a decline in the satisfaction of the 1997 attainers from 2001 to 2003, which endured until 2010.

This impression is confirmed when the significance of the differences between the average scores is examined; Table 1 shows the average satisfaction for each cohort at the point at which they entered the electorate and identifies those averages which were found to be significantly different from the equivalent figure for the previous cohort (i.e. tests for inter-cohort differences from the points at which they entered the electorate). Table 2 shows the average scores for each cohort between 1998 and 2010, and reports those figures which showed a significant difference from the preceding figure for each particular cohort (i.e. tests for intra-cohort differences across time).

Table 1 here

Table 1 shows that there were no significant differences between the average satisfaction levels of the four cohorts when they each entered the electorate; each cohort averaged between 2.5 and 2.6. There is no indication of later cohorts entering the electorate with substantially higher or lower levels of democratic satisfaction. Table 2 shows that while some of the differences in satisfaction from one year to the next for the 1997, 2001 and 2005 cohorts are significant, most of those differences do not usually suggest a long term trend. Again, the one exception is for the 1997 attainers, who do appear to have exhibited a significant decline in their democratic satisfaction from 2001 to 2003 (falling from 2.4 to 2.3 and then 2.1), which remained fairly stable thereafter.

Table 2 here

The data suggest that democratic satisfaction is both a relatively stable attitude – changing little from the value with which each cohort entered the electorate – and does

not vary as a result of the life cycle. With regard to the relationship between political controversies and satisfaction, therefore, the data suggests that controversies have very little effect. There is no sign of a cohort effect, meaning that none of the events between 1997 and 2010 appear to have had a profound effect on the formative experiences of any particular cohort which left a lasting mark on their democratic satisfaction. There is also no sign of a generation-wide period effect, suggesting that there was no impact from such controversies on the cohorts which were already in the electorate.

The one exception is the significant decline in satisfaction for the 1997 attainers between 2001 and 2003, and relative stability thereafter. As this period coincides with the build-up and conclusion of the Iraq War, it is possible that these events drove down the democratic satisfaction of the 1997 attainers from 2001 to 2003, and then left them with permanently suppressed satisfaction (at least until the end of the data series in 2010).

Caution must be exercised in such an interpretation, however. First, the decline in satisfaction is limited to the 1997 attainers – the 2001 attainers show a decline only between 2001 and 2002, followed by stability. It is unclear why controversial events between 2001 and 2003 would have a stronger effect on the 1997 attainers (who should be less likely to be influenced by external events) than the 2001 attainers (who were still in their politically formative years), and such an effect is not consistent with the theory outlined above. Second, if the shift in satisfaction was caused by events between 2001 and 2003, it is unclear why the other events between 2003 and 2010 would have no effect. If the satisfaction of the 1997 attainers, for example, was mutable enough to have been affected by the Iraq War in 2003, why was it not mutable enough to change as a result of the cash for honours or expenses scandals? While there is no doubt that those who became eligible to vote for the first time in 1997 suffered a slight but significant decline in democratic satisfaction between 2001 and 2003, it remains unclear that this was the result of political controversies in that period.

Political Efficacy

Switching to political efficacy, Figure 3 shows the average efficacy scores for each cohort between 1998 and 2010 based on BSA data, and Figure 4 shows the same information based on APE data. Collectively, the two surveys give an almost annual indication of the cohorts' efficacy between 1998 and 2010.

Figure 3 here

Figure 4 here

The story for political efficacy is similar to that for democratic satisfaction; there are generally few differences between the efficacy of the cohorts throughout the series, and there is no indication of a long or short term dramatic shift. Like democratic satisfaction, political efficacy seems to be a relatively stable attitude which has changed little in the Millennials over the last two decades.

Tables 3 and 4 provide the results of the significance testing to complete the picture. Table 3 shows the BES data for the efficacy of each cohort at the time they entered the electorate (with the exception of the 1997 cohort, the first available data for which was in 2001), and Table 4 shows the average efficacy scores for each cohort between 1998 and 2010 based on both BSA and APE data.

Table 3 here

Table 3 shows that there are some significant differences between the average efficacy scores of the cohorts when they entered the electorate. The differences do not suggest a linear cohort effect, but that there is something distinct about the 2005 attainers. The 2005 cohort's average efficacy when they entered the electorate was significantly higher than that of both the 2001 and 2010 cohorts (a t-test of the difference between the 2010 and 2001 cohort showed that the difference between them is not significant). This was not a lasting effect, however; the BES data shows that in 2010, the 2005 cohort's efficacy score was 1.7; similar to that of the other cohorts (1997 attainers = 1.9; 2001 attainers = 2.3; 2010 attainers = 1.8). This difference is also not apparent in the APE or BSA data, suggesting that it may be an artefact of the BES efficacy variable.

Table 4 here

Table 4 shows that there is no sign of a lasting change in efficacy for any of the cohorts between 1997 and 2010, confirming the impression given by Figures 3 and 4. The significant shifts in efficacy shown in Table 4 (such as the significant increase from 2.7 to 3 for the 2001 cohort between 2005 and 2006) constitute a short-term deviation from the average – not a lasting change (for example, that shift from 2.7 to 3 was preceded by a significant decline from 3.1 to 2.7 from 2004 to 2005). It also shows that the efficacy of the 2005 attainers upon their entry to the electorate was not dramatically different from that of the other cohorts.

There is little indication, therefore, of a significant effect on efficacy from controversial events. There are almost no significant shifts in efficacy which correspond with any of the major controversies to hit British politics between 1997 and 2010. The only exceptions are the unusually high levels of efficacy among the 2005 attainers when they entered the electorate, which did not last and were not detected in either the BSA or APE, and a slight fall in efficacy among the 1997 attainers in 2010. It is once again unclear why the events of 2009 or 2010 would affect the 1997 attainers in this way but not the other cohorts, and given that there is insufficient data available to determine whether or not the shift was a lasting effect – alongside the fact that none of the other shifts in efficacy between 1997 and 2010 were lasting – it is unlikely (though not impossible) that this drop in efficacy was caused by the expenses scandal or any other controversy around that time.

Political Interest

Figures 5 and 6 show how the final indicator of democratic faith has changed – political interest. Figure 5 shows the average interest score for each cohort upon entry to the electorate from the BES, and Figure 6 shows the average scores from the BSA, which usefully contains data for every year between 1997 and 2010.

Figure 5 here

Figure 6 here

Once again, there is little evidence of a substantial difference in political interest between any of the cohorts – they tend to exhibit similar levels of interest in politics throughout the series. There is, however, a hint of both a cohort effect and a potential period/life-cycle effect. Figure 5 shows that the 2005 and 2010 cohorts appeared to enter the electorate with higher levels of interest than their predecessors, and Figure 6 suggests that there has been a slight but steady increase in political interest for the 1997, 2001 and 2005 cohorts throughout the series (allowing for short-term variations).

The data in Table 5 confirms that there is indeed evidence of a potential cohort effect, in which the 2001 attainers exhibit significantly lower interest upon entry to the electorate than the other three, and the 2005 attainers have higher interest than the 2001 or 2010 cohorts. The table shows that the 2001 cohort's average interest was significantly lower than the 1997 cohort, and further t-tests confirm that it is significantly lower than both the 2005 and 2010 cohort's figures as well. While the 2010 attainers' interest is significantly lower than that of the 2005 groups, neither the 2005 nor 2010 attainers' interest is significantly different from that of the 1997 attainers. This suggests that the 2001 attainers stand out for having particularly low interest, and the 2005 attainers stand out to a lesser extent for having particularly high interest, when they each entered the electorate.

Table 5 here

The data in Table 6 confirms that there has been a steady increase in political interest across all three pre-2010 cohorts throughout their time in the electorate. Most of the differences in interest for each cohort are not significant, but those that are show a significant increase which is not reversed at a later time (with the exception of one or two significant drops in interest which are reversed soon after, such as the drop of interest for the 1997 attainers in 1999 which was reversed in 2001). For example, the 1997 attainers show a significant increase in interest in 2005, 2009 and 2010 which are

not reversed; the 2001 attainers show a significant increase in interest in 2005 and 2008, which are also not reversed. The data shows, therefore, a slow and steady increase in political interest since these cohorts entered the electorate.

Table 6 here

Political interest – while apparently fairly stable for each cohort from the time they entered the electorate – is distinct, therefore, from efficacy and democratic satisfaction in that it shows clear evidence of a steady, rising trend across all pre-2010 cohorts throughout the 1997-2010 period.

The implications for the potential relationship between political controversies and political interest are similar to those found for efficacy and democratic satisfaction. In most cases, there is no indication of a significant shift in political interest which corresponds to any of the controversies occurring between 1997 and 2010. The one exception is a significant decline in political interest among the 2001 cohort in 2003 – around the time of the Iraq War – but this was reversed the following year. While the Iraq War may have depressed their motivation to engage with politics in 2003, therefore, the effect was not lasting. The only other evidence of a potential impact from similar controversies is a significant change in 2008 for the 2001 attainers (around the onset of the financial crisis), in 2009 for the 1997 attainers (the same year as the expenses scandal), and in 2010 for the 1997 and 2005 attainers (following the expenses scandal) – however, in all of these cases, there was a significant *increase* in political interest, which is inconsistent with a loss of democratic faith.

While it is possible that these changes are the result of controversial political events, it is more likely that they are not. First, the changes are not consistent across the cohorts; they tend to be restricted to one or two at most. This means that any claim that controversial events caused the changes in interest would have to explain why they did not affect all of the cohorts, including in several cases the youngest cohort which should have been more susceptible to such an influence. Second, the most likely explanation for

these changes is that they are a part of a longer term trend of rising interest which reflects the influence of the political life cycle. It is well established that as citizens move out of the 'youth' stage of the life cycle, they find themselves in circumstances more conducive to political engagement, and so become more interested in politics (Smets 2012; Stoker 2005). Finally, several of the shifts in political interest, including the unusually low entry-level interest of the 2001 attainers, coincide with general elections, which are also shown to have a substantial, short-term influence on political interest (Clarke et al 2004; Whiteley et al 2013). While the effect is usually to increase interest, Clarke et al (2004) show that interest was unusually low around the time of the 2001 election because of the widely held view that it was a foregone conclusion. This may explain, therefore, the unusually low interest of the 2001 attainers in that year.

Conclusion: Political Controversies and Democratic Faith

The central question of this article was whether or not there is any reason to believe that controversial political events like the Iraq War are responsible for the unusually low turnout of the Millennial generation since 1997, through undermining their faith in British democracy. Developing a measure of democratic faith which captures citizens' faith in the integrity, representativeness and openness to influence of their political system, and using an extensive range of survey data, this article has shown that the answer is a pretty resounding no; there is no evidence to suggest that controversial political events like the Iraq War, the Parliamentary expenses scandal, cash for honours, cash for influence or the financial crisis have a detrimental effect on an individual's faith in the democratic system. Such events may affect specific attitudes (as the Iraq War may have affected the democratic satisfaction of the 1997 attainers), but they do not affect an individual's faith that their democratic system is representative of them, open to their influence, or worthy of their engagement.

The overwhelming picture of the three indicators of democratic faith explored here is one of stability; significant changes in democratic faith are rare. Second, while the indicators do show several instances of significant change which coincide with some of the political

controversies of the 1997-2010 period, none of them are consistent across all three, or even two, of the indicators. For example, the 1997 attainers showed a significant drop in democratic satisfaction between 2001 and 2003, but there was no accompanying significant shift in interest or efficacy for this cohort during that period. They also showed a significant drop in efficacy in 2010 – but this was accompanied by a significant increase in political interest at the same time. As was specified above, a pre-requisite for concluding that a particular event had a significant effect on democratic faith is that all three indicators show some evidence of that shift. At no point in the series is this the case.

Finally, if the Millennial generation had indeed suffered a loss of democratic faith, and this was responsible for their low turnout, we would expect to find evidence of a loss of faith across all of the sub-cohorts of that generation, or at least most of them. The only point at which there was a drop of any of the democratic faith indicators which affected more than one cohort at the same time was a drop in democratic satisfaction in 2002 (apparent in both the 1997 and 2001 attainers). This shift was not accompanied by a similar significant change in any of the other indicators for either cohort, and so it is not consistent with the expectation of an indication of a loss of democratic faith.

While there are instances between 1997 and 2010 where it could be plausible to believe that a given controversial event might affect some citizens' faith in their democratic system – not least the shocking expenses scandal in 2009 – the evidence in this analysis shows that, as far as the Millennials are concerned, this is not the case. At no point was there a shift in the indicators suggestive of a loss of democratic faith which might imply such a relationship.

This is not to suggest that political scandals or unpopular wars have no effect on voters; as several studies have shown, the effect on voters' perceptions of or trust in the government or particular politicians can be substantial (Whiteley et al 2013; Pattie and Johnston 2012; Kavanagh and Cowley 2010). Nor is it to suggest that the Millennials have particularly high or low levels of faith in democracy – without a comparison with

older voters (beyond the scope of this article), such a determination is impossible to make. What this research does show is that, contrary to the claims of some journalists and academics, and in contrast to the media frenzy that surrounds them, controversial political events have very little effect on citizens' faith in democracy. Rather than living up to headlines like 'Tony Blair and Iraq Robbed a Generation of their Faith in Politics' (Parker 2013), 'Stupid Funding Scandals...Corrode Faith in Democracy' (Rawnsley 2008), or 'Forget the expenses scandal: it was Iraq that exploded what trust millions had in our political establishment' (Jones 2013), when it comes to the Millennials' faith in democracy the story is closer to the "archetypal boring newspaper headline: small accident, no-one injured" (Pattie and Johnston 2012 p.748).

While this analysis is sufficient to dispel the notion that events like the Iraq War have undermined the democratic faith of the Millennial's to the extent that they are turning away from electoral politics, there is substantial room for further research which could both uncover more about the impact of political events and controversies on democratic faith, and learn more about democratic faith itself. First, as was discussed above, this study was inhibited by its dependence on an unavoidably small sample, meaning that reliable regression analyses could not be conducted. Such analyses would allow for external factors which might influence democratic faith to be controlled for, therefore increasing the chances of isolating the effect of the political event in question. They would also allow for age, period and cohort effects to be more effectively disentangled, providing more insight and certainty into the mechanism of change as well. A repeat of this analysis with a much larger sample and over a longer time period, sufficient to underpin reliable regression and age-period-cohort analyses, would be an excellent avenue for further research.

Furthermore, while this research has demonstrated that controversial political events have little to no effect on democratic faith, there is still room for more research to be done into just what effect such events have. Most research into such effects focusses on their electoral implications, with only limited research examining other areas such as the

impact on voters' political trust and views of the responsibilities of MPs. There is good reason to believe that events like the Iraq War may have consequences for citizens that go beyond electoral calculations, perhaps affecting their trust in the government or politicians, their conceptions of citizenship, or their political participation. Further research which broadens the scope of the potential impact of political events beyond electoral outcomes or faith in the democratic system could take a substantial step in identifying just what impact the multiple high profile scandals and controversies of the New Labour years, not to mention to newly emerging scandals and controversies of the Coalition era, might have on British voters, and on the formative years of young citizens in particular.

Word Count: 7,176

19/08/2014

Appendix

- **Cohort Sample Sizes**

Table A: N of cohort in each survey year

BES	1997	2001	2005	2010				
1997 Attainers	197	145	329	276				
2001 Attainers		118	212	196				
2005 Attainers			181	168				
2010 Attainers				162				
BSA	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
1997 Attainers	73	170	178	221	189	237	331	205
2001 Attainers					123	153	196	147
2005 Attainers								
2010 Attainers								
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010		
1997 Attainers	266	346	335	344	270	265		
2001 Attainers	210	199	196	243	198	167		
2005 Attainers	175	206	160	177	155	144		
2010 Attainers						159		
APE	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1997 Attainers	140	139	86	132	82	77	98	89
2001 Attainers	138	118	72	82	70	67	81	71
2005 Attainers			71	111	66	72	82	106
2010 Attainers								137

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010; British Social Attitudes Survey 1997 – 2010; Audit of Political Engagement 2003 – 2010

- **Variable Information**

- Political efficacy: In the BES, respondents were asked how much influence they feel they have in politics on a scale from 0 (no influence at all) to 10 (a great deal of influence). In the BSA they were asked to what extent they agreed with the view that 'people like me have no say in what government does', with responses ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). In the APE, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the view that when people like them engaged with politics, they could have a real influence over the way the country is run. The responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
- Democratic Satisfaction: In the BES, the democratic satisfaction variable has a range of 1 (not at all satisfied) to 4 (satisfied). In the BSA, the respondents were asked for their opinion on the present system of governing in Britain, with responses ranging from 1 (needs a great deal of improvement) to 4 (works extremely well). The APE question is almost identical, with minor differences in phrasing only.
- Political Interest: In the BES, respondents were asked how much interest they have in politics, with responses ranging from 1 (none at all) to 5 (a great deal). In the BSA, respondents were asked how much interest they generally have in what is going on in politics, with responses ranging from 1 (none at all) to 5 (a great deal). In the APE, respondents were asked how interested they would say they were in politics, ranging from 1 (not at all interested) to 4 (very interested).

Each of the variables was recoded (where necessary) so that a higher score implied a greater level of interest, efficacy or satisfaction. Any 'don't know', 'n/a' or 'refused' responses were omitted.

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Figures and Tables

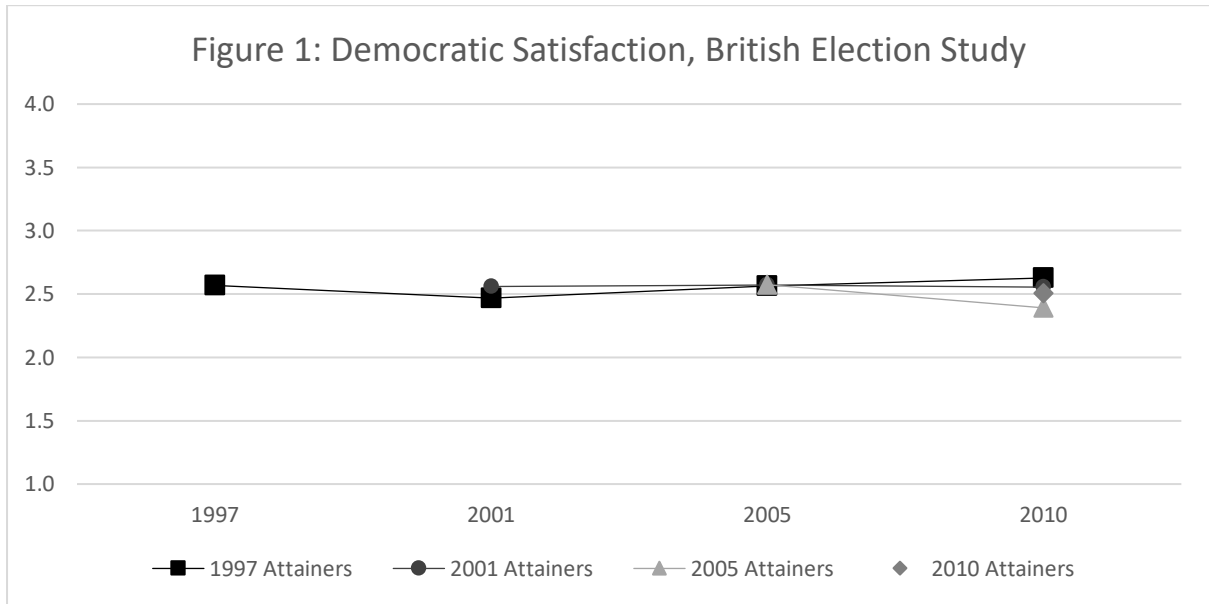


Figure 2: Democratic Satisfaction, British Social Attitudes

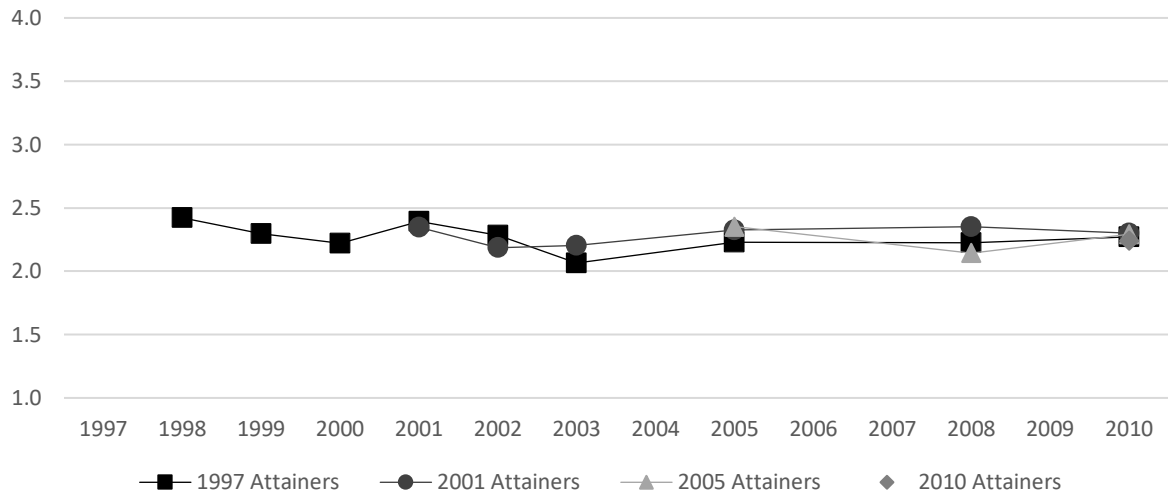


Table 1: Democratic Satisfaction at Point of Entry to Electorate

Democratic Satisfaction	1997	2001	2005	2010
1997 Attainers	2.57			
2001 Attainers		2.56		
2005 Attainers			2.57	
2010 Attainers				2.50

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001

Table 2: Democratic Satisfaction, 1998 - 2010

Democratic Satisfaction	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
1997 Attainers	2.42	2.30	2.22	2.39*	2.28*
2001 Attainers				2.35	2.19*
2005 Attainers					
	2003	2005	2008	2010	
1997 Attainers	2.07***	2.23	2.23	2.27	
2001 Attainers	2.21	2.33	2.35	2.30	
2005 Attainers		2.35	2.14*	2.29	

Source: British Social Attitudes survey. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001

Figure 3: Political Efficacy, British Social Attitudes

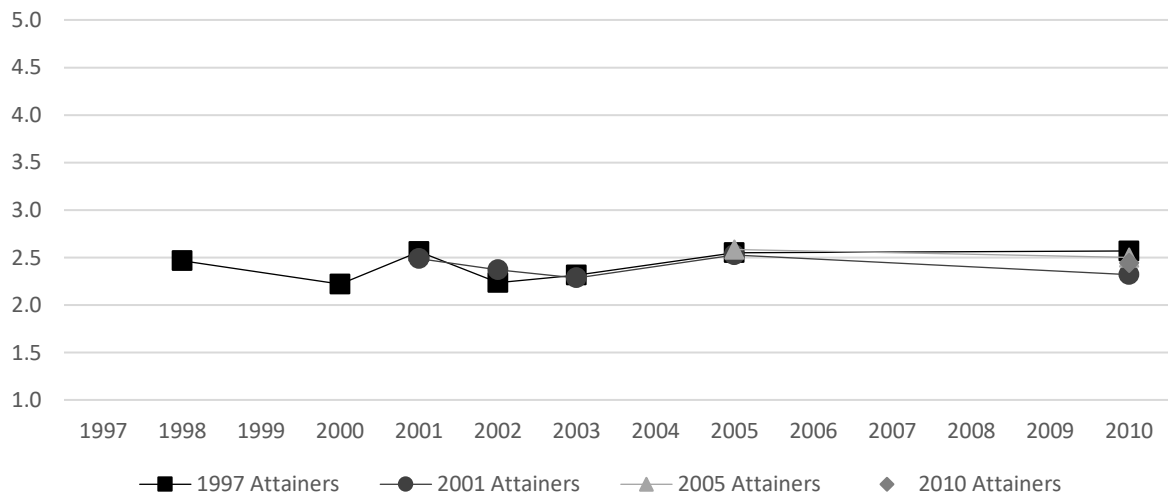


Figure 4: Political Efficacy, Audit of Political Engagement

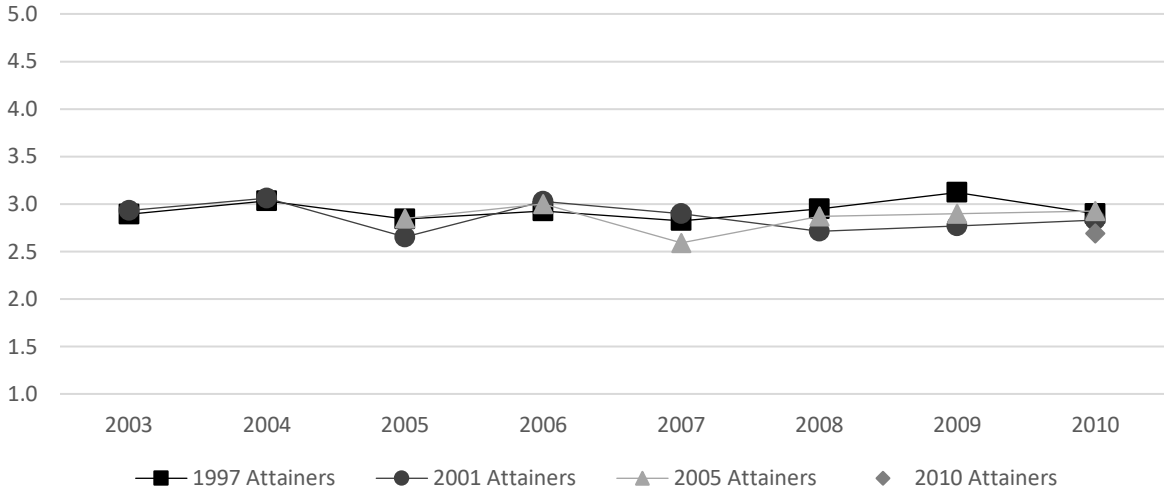


Table 3: Political Efficacy at Point of Entry to Electorate

Political Efficacy	2001	2005	2010
1997 Attainers	1.47		
2001 Attainers	2.07**		
2005 Attainers		2.75***	
2010 Attainers			1.79***

Source: British Election Study 2001 – 2010. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001. Note that the significance test for the 2001 attainers compares their entry figure of 2.07 with the 2001 data for the 1997 attainers.

Table 4: Political Efficacy, 1998 - 2010

Political Efficacy	1998	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
1997 Attainers	2.47	2.22**	2.56**	2.24***	2.31	3.03
2001 Attainers			2.49	2.37	2.28	3.06
2005 Attainers						
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1997 Attainers	2.84	2.93	2.82	2.95	3.12	2.90*
2001 Attainers	2.65**	3.03***	2.90	2.71	2.77	2.83
2005 Attainers	2.85	3.00	2.59**	2.87**	2.90	2.93

Source: British Social Attitudes survey (1998 - 2003); Audit of Political Engagement (2004 - 2010). * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001. Note that the 2004 figures were not compared with the 2003 data as the 2004 data is from the APE and the 2003 from the BSA

Figure 5: Political Interest, British Election Study

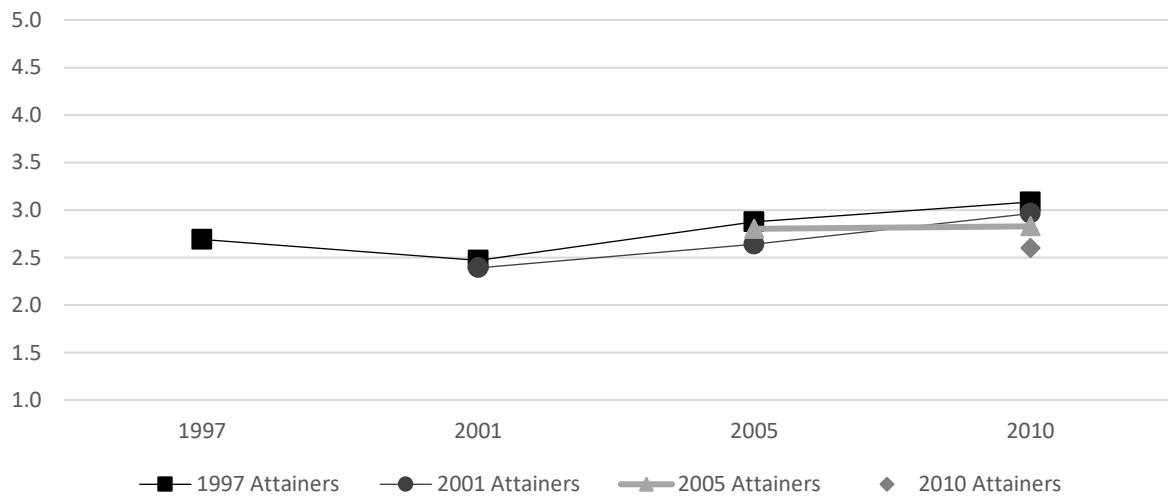


Figure 6: Political Interest, British Social Attitudes

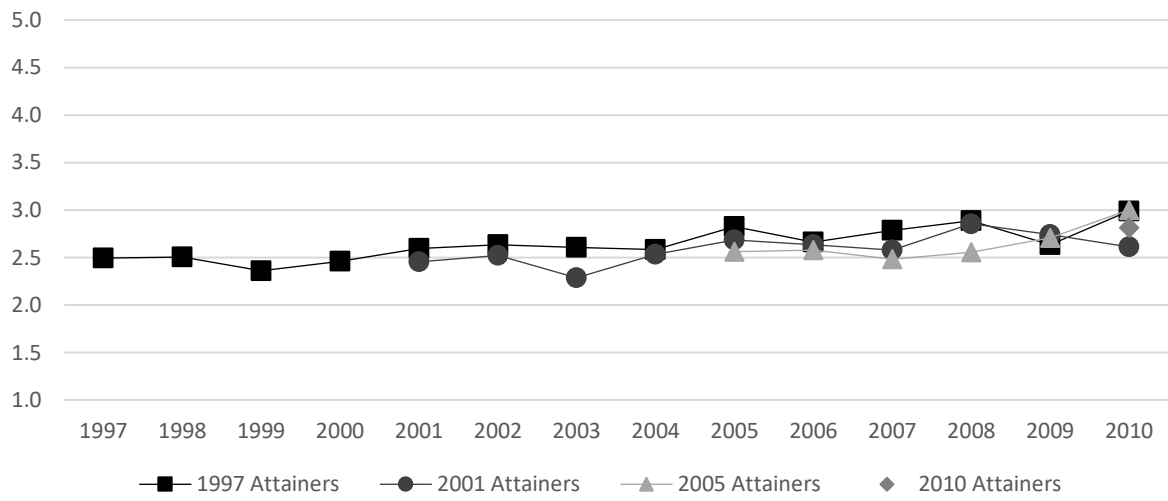


Table 5: Political Interest at Entry to Electorate

Political Interest	1997	2001	2005	2010
1997 Attainers	2.69			
2001 Attainers		2.39***		
2005 Attainers			2.80***	
2010 Attainers				2.60*

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001.

Table 6: Political Interest, 1997 – 2010

Political Interest	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
1997 Attainers	2.49	2.51	2.36*	2.46	2.59*	2.63
2001 Attainers					2.46	2.52
2005 Attainers						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
1997 Attainers	2.61	2.58	2.82***	2.66	2.79	2.89
2001 Attainers	2.29**	2.53**	2.69*	2.63	2.57	2.85*
2005 Attainers						
	2009	2010				
1997 Attainers	2.63*	2.99**				
2001 Attainers	2.74	2.61				
2005 Attainers	2.71	3.00*				

Source: British Social Attitudes survey. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001.

Captions

Figure 1

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010, post-election face to face survey wave

Figure 2

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1998 to 2010

Figure 3

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1998 – 2010

Figure 4

Source: Audit of Political Engagement, 2003 – 2010

Figure 5

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010

Figure 6

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey, 1997 – 2010

Table 1

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001

Table 2

Source: British Social Attitudes survey. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001

Table 3

Source: British Election Study 2001 – 2010. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001. Note that the significance test for the 2001 attainners compares their entry figure of 2.07 with the 2001 data for the 1997 attainners.

Table 4

Source: British Social Attitudes survey (1998 – 2003); Audit of Political Engagement (2004 – 2010). * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001. Note that the 2004 figures were not compared with the 2003 data as the 2004 data is from the APE and the 2003 from the BSA

Table 5

Source: British Election Study 1997 – 2010. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001.

Table 6

Source: British Social Attitudes survey. * - p-value <0.05; ** - p-value <0.01; *** - p-value <0.001.