

THE BIG TURN-OFF

By Dr Madsen Pirie & Professor Robert Worcester

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**Attitudes of young people to government,
citizenship and community.**

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1. Introduction

The Adam Smith Institute, in conjunction with the polling organization MORI, has been engaged in a series of surveys to discover what young people in Britain are like. Conscious that the century we are now embarked upon, or at least the first half of it, will be largely shaped by the young people of today, the ASI and MORI have undertaken research to find out what young people think, what their priorities are, and what goals they aim at.

A public policy research organization, popularly dubbed a *think tank*, tries to develop policies appropriate to the problems of the time, and, even more importantly, to anticipate future social and economic problems and to produce innovative solutions to them. In this context it is entirely appropriate for both the Adam Smith Institute and MORI to attempt to ascertain the nature of the people on whose behalf those policies will be implemented. The solutions might work better if they are drawn up in some knowledge of the hopes, aspirations and ambitions of those whose interests they are designed to serve.

The boomers

The first fruits of this research appeared as *The Millennial Generation*, co-authored by Dr Madsen Pirie and Professor Robert Worcester. It looked specifically at the ambitions and aspirations of those who would come of age just before or just after the turn of the millennium. These 16-21 year-olds had not been subjected to the same kind of scrutiny which had been lavished on their predecessors. The famous baby-boomers, some now well into their 50s, had been the generation born at the end of World War II, when returning troops had created a population surge. This was the generation which grew up in prosperity and in the comparative security of the nuclear peace.

The X-ers

Following the baby-boomers, the researchers turned their attention to Generation X, defined as those born between 1965 and 1975. The oldest of these are into their mid-30s, and were called the *latchkey kids*, many brought up by working parents, and who had themselves experienced in youth the uncertainties of economic recession and inflation. This was a generation defined largely by its consumer preferences for clothes, shoes, household appliances, magazines and personal convenience goods, especially electronic ones.

The 'Millennial Generation'

The new cohort of youngsters, the 16-21 year-olds, had their childhood under the Thatcher and Major governments in the UK, and the Reagan and Bush presidencies in the USA. Brought up at a time when market ideas were enjoying a resurgence, and when personal incentives and opportunities were being brought to the fore of public policy, they were dubbed *The Millennial Generation* because they represented the future of Britain in the new century.

The findings reveal a previously unsuspected degree of self-confidence, self-sufficiency and ambition in a generation which had largely been ignored because it was thought to be a younger version of the previous cohort. In fact there are quite startling differences in outlook and aspiration which make the Millennial Generation distinct and unique. The combination is one of almost limitless personal ambition for their careers, combined with very traditional goals for their personal lives.

Famously, only one percent currently look to careers in the civil service or local government. Some 48 percent, however, aspire to own their own business at some stage, with slightly more women than men listing this ambition. What captured popular attention was the 43 percent who listed becoming a millionaire by 35 among their aspirations. Not surprisingly, some commentators dubbed them "Thatcher's Children." Despite this, most supported New Labour rather than the Conservatives, although even more of them thought the way they voted would make little or no difference to their lives.

Crucially, the *Millennial Generation* think themselves already part of a classless society, rating determination and education as the factors which count, rather than background or connections. The traditional personal goals they list are owning their own home and being happily married with children. They also rate other people for personal qualities such as honesty and a caring approach, rather than superficial features such as being attractive or fashionable. The pundits should take caution from the fact that the 16-21 year-olds respect doctors, policemen and teachers most, but politicians and journalists least.

It was a remarkable insight into the thinking of a new generation, and one which many commentators confirmed from their own experience, even of their own children. Newspapers, magazines and television programmes which took small samples of teenagers to highlight the findings found that the youngsters they chose were overwhelmingly in agreement with the poll findings.

The 'Next Leaders'

The Adam Smith Institute and MORI followed the first research with a study of those currently at university or college. Taking a sample across the country and covering different types of institution, they sought to establish what students thought about higher education, how they spent their time and money, and how they rated their own prospects. This research was published by the same authors, Pirie and Worcester, under the title *The Next Leaders*. Again, it received extensive notice as a snapshot of the lives, hopes,

and attitudes of the 35 percent of young people who go through the university or college experience.

The findings reinforce those of the earlier study, in that the students emerge as ambitious and self-sufficient, yet looking to traditional qualities to earn their esteem on a personal level. They are as convinced as the rest of the *Millennial Generation* that their success will depend on personal qualities, rather than on their background or the social position of their families. Despite their readiness to enjoy the social side of university life, they are serious about their career choices, and about the value which education represents. A huge majority agreed that a university education is one of the best investments a person can make.

The Next Leaders have the same skepticism of government and its ability to help them as does their age group as a whole. The 16-21 year-olds do not expect government to help them to secure a job or a house. The students among that group list government assistance as a vanishingly small factor in their likely success. Moreover, they think that the universities would make a much better job of running their own affairs than politicians and civil servants do, and that the institutions should have much more control over their own financial affairs. The prospect of free-standing, independent universities would fit comfortably with their views.

While commentators tended to focus on student indulgence in sex, drink and drugs, the figures show nothing very dramatic to those who have seen universities in close-up. Most students interviewed confirmed the picture revealed by the survey. Students have always enjoyed themselves and have tested their new freedoms away from home; as ever, most of them can handle it. More interesting are the regional variations, including those between north and south, and between the older institutions and those which recently changed from polytechnics to universities. The status of Manchester is confirmed as the home of hedonism: it tops the poll in all three categories — sex, drink and drugs.

Students spend more on drink, clothes, entertainment and personal convenience goods than they do on books. Nonetheless, they place a high value on what they are doing, with 74 percent listing educational qualifications as a top ingredient for success, just behind the 77 percent who list determination and ambition.

Just as most 16-21 year-olds exhibit an easy-going tolerance, with majorities against banning most things (with the exceptions of Ecstasy and fox-hunting), their student counterparts also show very little prejudice of any kind. Most have friends who are from ethnic minorities, are gay or lesbian, or who regularly use illegal drugs. Indeed, the most significant thing which students do not tolerate is intolerance itself; very few of them say they have friends who are racist, homophobic, or religious fundamentalists.

The citizens

A common feature of both earlier surveys is the low level of expectations from the political process. The young people interviewed talk in terms of

what they hope to do *personally*, not of how they hope to influence the policies or practices of governments. Politicians feature very low on the list of people whom they trust or respect, and those seeking careers in public policy scarcely register. It is not obvious from the responses whether they represent a non-political generation or an anti-political generation. Certainly, the last few years have seen politicians reported in an unfavourable light, involved in sleaze or influence peddling. It is significant, perhaps, that a group which scores even lower, journalists, has also been subjected to hostile coverage for intrusion and invasion of privacy. It could be that young people's perceptions have been shaped in part by the hostile publicity.

There are important implications for future policy, whether the effect is non-political or anti-political. Public exhortations and citizenship classes have emphasized participation, encouraging young people to play a part in the institutional processes which make up the political landscape.

Political commentators and writers have drawn attention to what they describe as a death of *community*, seeing the breakdown of the nexus of familiar relationships which secured people in society and gave them the feeling that they belonged in a web of co-dependency which encouraged them to think about and care for others as well as themselves. Given that people are less rooted to their original neighbourhoods, more mobile, both physically and socially, than ever before, and more likely than ever to live in single person households, social analysts have sought to find some antidote to these trends, some means of asserting the importance of community and relationships, and of turning young people into what they regard as useful social citizens.

It is pertinent to ask if any of this has had a discernible effect so far, and whether or not there can be reasonable expectations that it might. The initial surveys of the attitudes of young people do suggest that their outlook is more individual than societal, and that they have little time for the collective activity which used to form the outlet for social concern.

Attempts by government to involve more young people in civic activities, to play a larger role in local government, to become more politically active, and to identify with a community role, might simply be inappropriate, given the way in which young people regard their role in the world, and the things which they see as important for their own future.

The questions raised here are those which concern the attitude of the younger age group to government, citizenship and community. How much do they feel they know? How interested are they? How much do they feel that it matters? What steps are they taking to become involved? Behind these questions lie the deeper issues which might question the validity of attempting to recreate artificially a degree of participation and concern which once happened spontaneously. It could be that today's young people have developed values and priorities appropriate and relevant to the global society into which we are moving, rather than to the communities we remember.

2. Cares less and knows less

One fact which emerges clearly from the data is that young people do not seem to be as interested in voting as is the population in general. Of the things which do occupy their time, attention and interest, voting is not one of them. This fits comfortably with the findings which show they expect little from the political process, and have scant trust and respect for politicians.

A recent MORI survey¹ asked people whether they were registered to vote. Those who reply that they are registered to vote either in the constituency where they live (89 percent) or elsewhere (3 percent) make up 92 percent of the population. Eight percent admit they are not registered, even though failure to return the relevant form is an offence, and can lead to a substantial fine. For those aged 18-24, however, only just over half, 55 percent, say they are registered in the constituency, with one in twenty, 5 percent, registered elsewhere, making a total of 60 percent. Thus four in ten young people have not registered to vote, compared with only 8 percent of the population as a whole. This is five times as many, and clearly bears out their lack of interest and commitment to the process, with significant implications for the turnout of new voters at the polls at the next election. This is in spite of the efforts made by the political parties to engage young people to involve them in the political process. It also calls into question the efforts the political parties make to persuade to their cause this generation of potential voters, when those over 55 have four times the electoral power of the youth vote, since there are twice as many of them, and they are twice as likely to vote.

Is this political apathy just a product of the present generation of young people? There is strong evidence that it is. MORI regularly ask their samples which of a list of ten socio-political activities they have done "in the last two or three years"; comparison of the answers given by 16-24 year olds in 1999 with the responses of the same age group in a survey in 1972 show there has been a sharp fall in claims to have done four of the ten things on the list, three of which are directly related to elections or party political activity, but no significant change in five of the remaining six and an increase in the incidence of the sixth. In 1972, 43 percent of the age group said they had voted at the last general election (bearing in mind, of course, that around half would have been too young to do so); in 1999, after a similar time period since the previous election, only 30 percent said they had done so. Those who had "urged someone outside my family to vote" fell from 18 percent to 12 percent; those who had "taken an active part in a political campaign" fell from 6 percent to just 2 percent. On the other hand, other forms of participation have remained constant: 24 percent of the 16-24 year olds in 1972 had helped on fund-raising drives, and 24 percent had done so in 1999; those having written to an editor were 6 percent in 1972 and 5 percent in 1999

¹ MORI survey of 2,017 adults aged 18+ on 24-27 April 1998, on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA).

(not a statistically significant fall); and those who said they had "made a speech before an organised group" rose, from 10 percent to 14 percent. The present generation of young adults are less involved with organised politics than their predecessors, but they are no less active in other ways.

When asked about their voting record in local council elections, most people say they vote at least some of the time. Those who claim to vote always, usually, or sometimes (48 + 18 + 9 percent) account for 75 percent of the population, whereas 23 percent say they vote rarely or never (7 + 16 percent). In the age-group 18-24, however, the figures are reversed. Those who say they vote always, usually, or sometimes (12 + 13 + 8 percent) constitute 33 percent, versus 59 percent, six in ten of this age cohort, who say they rarely or never vote (7 + 52 percent). This includes just over half of them who admit they do not vote at all. The figures for the general population are over-optimistic, given the voter turnouts which actually take place in local elections. It could be that 'sometimes' means 'at some time in their lives.' It may also be that young people are less prone to exaggerate the frequency of their participation in local elections; but if this is so, it probably reflects only that they feel less moral pressure upon them to vote – and hence less guilt when they fail to do so – precisely because they are less likely to consider such elections important.

Even allowing for this, it is clear that there is a very significant difference, however, in the degree to which young people participate in local elections, compared to the older age groups. This difference is further reinforced when they are asked about their attitudes to voting in local elections. 11 percent of the 18-24 group say they do not think voting is very important, nearly twice as many as the 6 percent of the population as a whole who say the same.

Those who say they are "too busy to vote" account for 4 percent of the general populace, but 11 percent of the 18-24 bracket. This once again indicates a clear difference of priorities. It is probably not true that young people are busier, only that voting ranks low on their list of things worth finding time for. One in ten, 10 percent of youngsters admit they do not know when local elections are held, versus 4 percent of the adult population, and 7 percent of them say they do not know where the polling station is, as against 3 percent of people in general.

The pattern which emerges is of an age group which cares less and knows less about the whole procedure and activity of local voting. Government hopes to boost voting by introducing novel ways to make it more convenient do not derive much support from the answers they give. Only 3 percent of young people say they cannot get to the polling station because it is too inconvenient, with another 3 percent saying the opening hours of the polling station are inconvenient. These 6 percent who cite inconvenience do not provide large numbers to work on. Even if the government managed to reduce the inconvenience for half of them, it would represent but a tiny increase in the numbers of young people who might vote.

When asked about their attitude to local council elections, 15 percent of young people reply that their vote does not make any difference; this is half as many again as the 10 percent of the general population who say that. Slightly more young people (20 percent) say that it will make no difference to

local taxes and services, than the 17 percent of the general populace who say the same. 10 percent of youngsters say their party stands no chance in their area, as against 8 percent of the population who give that response, while a significant 13 percent of the 18-24 group is nearly twice the 7 percent of people who claim that "none of the parties stands for the policies I would like to see."

The indications are that young people are turned off by the whole thing not because it is inconvenient, but because they feel it does not meet their concerns or address their needs. They do not see its relevance, or think it will make any difference to them.

When offered a variety of suggestions which might make local voting more convenient, the 18-24 year-olds are rather more inclined than the rest to think they might make a difference. However, for most of the proposals the most popular answer for both groups is that it would make no difference. This applies to voting on Sunday instead of Thursday, to voting by post, to voting on Saturday, to having polling stations open 24 hours, to voting from home or from work by digital television or the internet, and to voting at train stations.

The 18-24 year-olds seem to like shopping. Asked if voting at shopping centres would make them more likely to vote, they are split equally between the 46 percent who think it would, and the 46 percent who think it would make no difference. A clear majority of the general populace (56 percent) reply "no difference."

Asked about telephone voting, more of the population (50 percent) think it would make no difference to their likelihood of voting, than think it would (40 percent). For the 18-24 year-olds the figures are reversed, with only 39 percent who say it would *not* make a difference, but 49 percent saying that it would.

The big suggestion which divides the age groups is that of keeping polling stations open for more than one day (as is to be done in the election of London's Mayor and Assembly in May). The general populace think by nearly two to one (62 percent) that it would make no difference, as against the 32 percent who think it would make them more likely to vote. For the 18-24 year-olds, only 39 percent say "no difference," versus the 53 percent who reply "more likely."

It is important not to overstate the importance of these answers, bearing in mind the tiny proportion who cite inconvenience as a reason for not voting. Making it easier might just sway some of that tiny proportion, but might have little impact upon total turnout. As for the few suggestions which do attract some degree of youthful interest, it should be noted that young people are already known to like shopping, using the telephone, and putting things off until tomorrow.

The government has suggested that the ability to vote for a directly elected mayor who would run the council might diminish voter apathy, especially among young people. The MORI survey suggests otherwise. 21 percent of people say it will make them more likely to vote, but 62 percent say it will

make no difference. For young people the answers are similar: 19 percent say "more likely," but 59 percent say "no difference."

The pattern which emerges from this is that young people are not deterred from voting in local elections because it is difficult or awkward, but because they cannot be bothered. Just as they find little space in their lives or their perceptions of the future for the political process nationally, they see little at local level which deserves their interest or their participation.

Half of 15-24 year olds, 51 percent, agreed in the 1999 MORI/Socioconsult survey² that "I'm not interested in politics", compared to 42 percent of those aged 25 and over. This was particularly true of young women, 59 percent of whom agreed; 44 percent of young men did so.

The easy questions, and the wrong ones, are how can young people be exhorted and motivated, and how can it be made much easier to participate? These offer the prospect of easy solutions, but ones probably doomed to be ineffective, given the responses. The harder question is how can the political process be changed so that it can become more relevant to their lives? And a harder question still, one which politicians find difficult to ask, is whether or not young people might be right to set so little store by a process which was designed to solve the problems of a different era, and which seems increasingly out of phase with their attitude to life, their attitudes to citizenship and community, and to their view of the future.

² MORI interviewed 1,190 British adults aged 15+ on 19 November-17 December 1999.

3. Civis Britannicus Sum

The first question to be asked about the ties of citizenship is "citizens of what?" When John Major first instituted the Citizen's Charter in 1991, he was taken aback at its first press conference to be told that neither Britain nor the UK had citizens, only "subjects." He dismissed this as archaic and somewhat demeaning nonsense. When asked what was a British citizen, he replied it was someone who lived here and had the right to do so, and all that went with it. The answer might have been off-the-cuff, but it captured the essence of what it is. He included the notion of duties as well as of rights.

MORI asked people about the loyalties they feel to the various communities they might be called members of³. Those who think that they feel very strongly or fairly strongly to belong to the local community in which they live amounted to three quarters, 74 percent, of those interviewed. Only one in four, 25 percent, said they felt this not very strongly, or not at all strongly. Younger people, aged 15-24, showed more diffidence. Nearly two thirds, some 65 percent, said very or fairly strongly, and 35 percent replied not very, or not at all strongly. The young people feel significantly less attached to their local communities than their parents or grandparents do.

When asked about their loyalties to England, Scotland or Wales, their countries within Britain, a similar disparity emerges. Of the total population, 84 percent feel very or fairly strongly attached; but this falls to 77 percent for the 15-24 year-olds. Similarly, of the whole population, the 15 percent who feel not very, or not at all strongly attached, rises to 21 percent among the youngsters. Clearly the young people do not feel the same pull as their elders do to their country.

If the country is taken to be Britain itself, the picture changes somewhat. 78 percent of the general population declare themselves very or fairly strongly attached to Britain, as against only 66 percent of the young people. And the 21 percent who say they are not very, or not at all strongly attached, rises to 33 percent of the 15-24 year-olds. While there is still a respectable two to one majority among young people, it is an eye-opening thought that one third of them feel no strong attachment to their own country.

Those who tell us that the new loyalties, particularly among the young, are to Europe have no support from the findings. Of all respondents, only 35 percent feel very or fairly strongly attached, against 64 percent who reply that they are not very, or not at all strongly attached. Even less young people (32 percent) feel attached in any degree, and rather more of them (65 percent) feel little or no attachment. It may be significant that the percentage

³ MORI interviewed 896 adults aged 15+ on 17-21 July 1998, on behalf of the Institute for Citizenship, sponsored by NatWest.

of those who oppose even staying in the EU at all is rising among the young as well as among the general British population.

The loyalties are still there, to local community, country and nation, if not to Europe; but they are noticeably less pronounced among the young. A majority still feel loyalties to Liverpool, Scotland and Britain, although not to Europe. The fact emerges, however, that the 15-24 year-olds are less attached in every case. It is not that they have different loyalties; it is that they have weaker loyalties. Pessimists might conclude that they have less commitment to their communities, but optimists might suggest that they are developing the loyalties appropriate to a global society, feeling a weaker pull of locality as they increasingly think of themselves as on a world stage.

As a footnote to this, it should be noted that young people do not share the pessimism of their elders about the state of their nation. MORI asked people if they thought that, generally speaking, Britain as a place to live is getting better. Gloom outvoted sunshine, with 40 percent saying "worse," and 24 percent saying "better." The 15-24 year-old age group were less certain, however, with 28 percent for "better," and 28 percent for "worse."

4. Rights & responsibilities

Young people feel themselves less anchored than their elders to any particular local loyalties. They do not feel the same bond to locality, country, nation or power-block. If they truly feel themselves to be 21st century citizens, the obvious question is "what does it mean to them?" If it does not mean local loyalties, the ties which bind people to their neighbourhood, street, village, town and region and which, according to Burke, "ascend by degrees into patriotism," what does it mean?

A MORI survey⁴ asked people how much they feel they know about their rights as a citizen. The result was an even division between those who think they do, and those who think they do not. In the population as a whole, 50 percent consider they know a great deal or a fair amount (6 + 44 percent). A similar 49 percent think they know just a little, or hardly anything (37 + 12 percent).

Young people aged 15-24 are less sure about it. Only 35 percent think they know their rights a great deal or a fair amount (5 + 30 percent), as against the 65 percent who feel they know just a little or hardly anything (42 + 10 percent). Thus young people not only feel themselves less attached to the various layers of polity to which they might belong, they also have far less sense of what rights any such citizenship might convey upon them.

With rights, we are famously told, come responsibilities. We are told so correctly, for one person's right to something implies the duty of others to provide it, or at least not to resist it. If a person has a *right* to free education, for example, it means that someone or others has a binding obligation to provide the funds to pay for it.

Asked about their *responsibilities* as citizens, people have a clearer idea what is involved than they do about their rights. While among all age-groups, two in three, 64 percent, say they have a great deal or fair amount of knowledge (14 + 50 percent), only 35 percent know little or hardly anything (28 + 7 percent).

For the 15-24 age group, fewer than half, 47 percent, think they know a great deal or a fair amount (6 + 41 percent). This compares with the 35 percent who think they know their rights. Similarly, the 52 percent who feel they know little or nothing about their *responsibilities* (42 + 10 percent), compares with the 65 percent who think they know little or nothing about their *rights*. The striking fact about these answers is that although young people are divided more equally between those who know their rights and their responsibilities, significantly more of them know little or nothing about their

⁴ MORI interviewed 896 adults aged 15+ on 17-21 July 1998, on behalf of the Institute for Citizenship, sponsored by NatWest.

responsibilities than know a great deal or a fair amount. This is not true of their elders, of whom almost two to one do know a lot or a fair amount, as opposed to a little or practically nothing.

Plainly, the young are less likely than their elders to feel that they know what their responsibilities are. A majority of them feel they know little or virtually nothing. There could be several possible explanations for this.

Commentators might make a rush to judgement, attributing the lack of knowledge about wherein their responsibilities lie to a lack of character or concern on the part of young people. Preparing to label them the "me generation," some might leap to the conclusion that the concern of the young is with self. It could be correct, in that young people have always been interested in their developing personalities, and preoccupied much more so than are their elders with a sense of identity. However, another possible explanation might be that young people know less about the whole process of politics, citizenship and community, and are therefore less aware of their responsibilities.

Evidence from another MORI survey suggests that the young do not express themselves unwilling to consider others' needs rather than their own. The 1999 MORI/Socioconsult carried out at the end of the year⁵ found that two-thirds, 66 percent, of 15-24 year olds disagreed that "I have enough trouble worrying about my own problems without worrying about others"; this was significantly *more* than the 57 percent of the population as a whole who disagreed.

Further to their voting habits referred to above, people were asked how much they feel they know about issues such as the workings of their local council, Parliament, and the European Union. To probe a little further, they were asked about their perception of the way business relates to society and the community, and asked on one specific and topical item, namely proportional representation.

Count me among the don't knows

Local councils score badly. Anyone who has participated in local elections, or simply sat through local election results, knows that the level of participation is low. In some districts 30 percent counts as a high turnout. When asked what they feel they know about their local council, 28 percent of the population at large choose "a great deal" (5 percent) or "a fair amount" (23 percent). These are set against the 71 percent, two and a half times as many, who feel they know "just a little" (43 percent), or "hardly anything at all" (28 percent).

Local Councils do not seem to feature among the things about which people choose to keep themselves informed. The information is out there, beyond question. It is not that people wish to know it and find it difficult; it is that they do not bother to search it out.

For the 15-24 year-olds, the picture is that of a group even less well informed. Those claiming a great deal, or a fair amount of knowledge, come to 9

⁵ MORI interviewed 1,190 British adults aged 15+ on 19 November-17 December 1999..

percent (2 + 7 percent), while those pleading just a little, or hardly any, knowledge come to a staggering 88 percent (33 + 55 percent). Thus, in the younger age group, those who do not know outnumber those who do by nearly ten to one.

Parliament fares slightly better. Rather more of the general population, 36 percent, feel they know a great deal or a fair amount (7 + 29 percent) about the way Parliament works, while 64 percent plead little or hardly any knowledge (33 + 31 percent). These figures show that somewhat more knowledge is claimed about Parliament than about local government. This could be because people feel that Parliament matters more to their lives, or perhaps because it receives so much more coverage in the national press, radio and television, that they soak up more knowledge of it. Either way, there is little to comfort the political classes, given that nearly two-thirds of the entire population profess to know little or virtually nothing about Parliament.

For young people the figures offer even less comfort. Those professing a great deal, or a fair amount, of knowledge amount for 19 percent (1 + 18 percent), as opposed to the 81 percent who claim little or hardly any knowledge of Parliament (24 + 57 percent). Thus less than one in five of the 15-24 year-olds know about Parliament, whereas more than four out of five claim to know little or nothing about it.

If citizenship is to be expressed through knowledge of, and participation in, local councils and Parliament, plainly there will be very few "citizens" drawn from the younger age group. Indeed, if they retain their present attitudes, we may well be witnessing a decline in the status and importance of any concept of citizenship which is expressed through the institutions of state.

Perhaps people are better Europeans? We are told by some enthusiasts that the "narrow, petty and small-minded" expressions of nationalism are being replaced by a wider, European, sense of identity, nowhere more visible than the young. It is certainly true that at the level of popular culture, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognize the differences between countries. A pop concert in Prague is barely to be distinguished from one in London or Tallinn or Oslo. The McDonald's, Levis and Coca Cola culture is arguably the nearest thing the world has to a universal culture, and it is nowhere more evidently or enthusiastically embraced than by the young. The question is, does it reflect itself in a pan-European sense of identity which recognizes Europe as a political community?

For the general population the answer seems to be no. Only 17 percent think they know a great deal or a fair amount about the European Union (3 + 14 percent). This compares with the 79 percent who say they know little or nothing about it (31 + 48 percent). Thus those who know anything about the EU are even fewer in number than the minority who know about local government and Parliament. Plainly they have not transferred their interest, participation and sense of belonging from local and national institutions to European ones.

What about the young, though? Are they *the European generation*? Here again, the answer is no. They know even less about it than their elders. Only

9 percent of the 15-24 year-olds say they know a great deal or a fair amount about the EU (0 + 9 percent). On the other hand 83 percent profess little or no knowledge of it ((28 + 55 percent). Several facts emerge from this.

First of all, it is surely significant that in this MORI survey, *no young people at all* in the sample profess to know a 'great deal' about the European Union. Secondly, far from being *the European generation*, they admit they know even less about it than their elders, with more than nine times as many of them professing ignorance of it as claim knowledge.

This fits in squarely with the previous findings about loyalties. It is not that young people, any more than people in general, have substituted European allegiances for local and national ones. On the contrary, they score *lower* than their elders. It is instead that younger people feel weaker attachments to, and knowledge of, local institutions, national institutions *and European institutions*. If there is a gap in their citizenship aspirations, it is not one filled by Europe.

Nor are they a generation of 'global' citizens. Only a third, 32 percent, agreed that "I feel I am more a citizen of the world than a citizen of my country" in MORI's 1999 Socioconsult survey⁶, the same percentage as did so in the adult population as a whole. The young people "like to feel that I am in touch with what is happening in other countries in the world" (66 percent agreed), but so do their older compatriots (75 percent of the general public agreed).

What else?

People in the sample were asked two additional questions. If they do not themselves profess much knowledge of the institutions of local, national and European government, how much do they feel they knew about the involvement of companies in society and the community? Many companies, for various motives, make a point of being "good citizens" by involving themselves in community projects, for example. The question sought to ascertain how much people are aware of this, and how well informed they feel themselves to be.

The results do not bode well for the public relations departments of corporations. Only 16 percent of the general populace consider that they know a great or fair amount about the business involvement in community and society (2 + 14 percent). This contrasts with the 78 percent (34 + 44 percent) who feel they know a little or negligible amount about the subject. This means that the population as a whole pleads ignorance on the subject by almost five to one.

For the 15-24 year age group, knowledge scores lower and ignorance higher. Those claiming a great or fair knowledge were only 12 percent (0 + 12 percent), while those who claim to know little or next to nothing came to 80 percent (29 + 51 percent). Thus for young people the ratio of ignorance over knowledge rises from the five to one which their elders score to more than six and a half to one. This tells us that in terms of knowing what role business plays in society and the community, people as a whole have little knowledge, and young people even less than their elders.

⁶ MORI interviewed 1,190 British adults aged 15+ on 19 November-17 December 1999.

In order to test the general by a particular, people were asked about a topic of current constitutional relevance. The subject chosen was *proportional representation*, which featured as an election promise by the Labour Party, and which remains at the top of the Liberal-Democrat agenda. The subject appears in public debate from time to time precisely because of what both its supporters and detractors claim are its far-reaching constitutional implications. Proponents say it will enhance participation because it "makes every vote count," and avoids the problem that many votes in safe seats are currently "wasted." They also claim it to be fairer, and say it will make citizens feel that their representative bodies more genuinely representative of them.

Proportional representation has been widely featured in news and analysis stories in the media, and has actually been introduced in practice in limited forms for regional assemblies and for the European Parliamentary elections. It could be a valid test of citizenship to discover what its impact has been upon ordinary people.

The MORI poll brings no good news for the political classes on this subject. It may ride high among the cognoscenti as an answer to boost the problem of apathy and unconcern, but it scarcely plays in the popular conception of things. Of the general population, 21 percent (3 + 18 percent) feel they know a great deal or a fair amount about it. On the other hand, 62 percent, nearly three times as many, declare their knowledge of it to be tiny or negligible (28 + 34 percent). 15 percent of the population, more than one person in seven, *have never even heard of it*.

Advocates of PR and its ability to transform and modernize the representative institutions we live under might hope that the young generation will be more in tune with it. This is, after all, the generation whose students were dubbed *The Next Leaders?* by the Adam Smith Institute. In fact the knowledge of the 15-24 year-olds is very much *less* than that of the general population. Only 9 percent think they knew a great deal or a fair amount about it (0 + 9 percent), while 58 percent (13 + 45 percent) profess to know just a little or hardly anything. *A staggering 30 percent of the youngsters claim they had never heard of it*. Adding that figure in for both populations, those who claim little, hardly any, or zero knowledge constitute 77 percent of the populace, and 88 percent of the youngsters.

Once again, the degree of knowledge in the institutional fabric which makes up our representative communities is tiny. Those who seek further participation in communities via this route would appear to have a tremendous uphill battle ahead of them.

It is true, of course, that these figures are about what people profess to know about local, national and European government, and about what business does in the community, and about what proportional representation means to them. They do not tell us specifically that the population in general, and young people in particular, are skeptical or indifferent to the role which such institutions and ideas might play in their lives. Nonetheless, it would take a brave analyst to suggest that, while knowledge might be lacking, interest and concern are not.

The fact is that people feel ignorant about many things. No doubt great numbers profess to know little about the human genome project, or about the early nano-seconds of the life of the universe. The difference is that these require the backing of a technical education, without which they might remain inaccessible. On the other hand, details of the workings of local government, Parliament, and even the European Union are accessible everywhere to those who wish to know. Public relations firms and political parties would be delighted, too, if people would only avail themselves of the mountain of information they put out about business and the community, and about proportional representations.

If people do not know about the institutional workings of their communities, it is a reasonable assumption that they do not consider it worth the effort of finding out. In other words, in these subjects *ignorance is a proxy for lack of interest*. They do not know because they do not think it worth knowing. Community and citizenship, whatever they are, do not matter sufficiently to them if they come in the form of institutional arrangements and representative bodies, to justify the effort of finding out about them. And this applies even more to the young than it does to the general population.

The obvious question is that if community and citizenship do not find any interest or expression though the institutions of representative government, are they felt to play a significant role in people's lives in some other sense; and does this apply more to the younger generation than it does to their predecessors?

5. What does all this mean?

If citizenship does not, apparently, mean keeping abreast of, and participating in, representative institutions, it is pertinent to ask what it does mean. MORI asked a sample of British adults aged 15+⁷ what responsibilities they thought they had as a citizen. People were asked to pick out the ones which they agreed with.

The first three choices for the population as a whole are obeying the law (66 percent), respecting others (62 percent), and being a good neighbour (57 percent). At the bottom end come volunteering to do things (20 percent), being active in the community (21 percent), and challenging the law when you think it wrong (24 percent). Other low scorers included knowing your rights as a citizen (27 percent), and having a say in what goes on (28 percent).

The salient fact which emerges from this is that people seem to view citizenship in terms of character, rather than community. Good citizens, they tell us, are law-abiding, respect others, and are good neighbours. These are all *personal* things which people do as *individuals*, rather than any kind of social or collective activity. People reject the participatory choices which involve any kind of activism. In other words, they see good citizens as people with good qualities, rather than as people who take part, campaign, and become involved with society's institutions.

The young people (15-24) show a similar picture. Respecting others is their top choice (60 percent), with obeying the law and looking after the environment as second equal (56 percent). Another high scorer is setting a good example to others (50 percent). These are also based on personal qualities rather than on participation. Only the answer on environment could be construed as activist, and even this might be seen at a personal level.

Way down on the list which young people pick out as their responsibilities as citizens are volunteering to do things (15 percent), challenging the law when they think it wrong (18 percent), and giving something back to their society or community. Other low scorers include being active in the community (24 percent), knowing their rights as a citizen (25 percent), and having a say in what goes on (27 percent). With some variations, they fall into a pattern very similar to that of the population at large. Activism is out, and being the right sort of person is in.

To those who claim that the youth are the activists, the doers and the go-getters who will transform tomorrow's world, the answer would appear to

⁷ MORI interviewed 896 adults aged 15+ on 17-21 July 1998, on behalf of the Institute for Citizenship, sponsored by NatWest.

be "not on a social or community level." They want to be what it takes, but not to take part in anything.

These findings indicate that the ignorance which they profess about community and social institutions is indeed based on their low valuation of them. They do not know because they do not want to know; they do not take part because they do not think it worthwhile. Citizenship, insofar as it involves participation in the community, is the big turn-off.

What do you do?

Whatever qualities people think it takes to be a good citizen, there remains the question of what they themselves actually do about it. People were given a list of possible things which citizenship might involve, and asked to pick out the ones which they themselves currently do.

Their selections fall into a similar pattern to those they thought counted. Top of the list of the citizen-like things which three in four claim to do is obeying the law (74 percent). Also, three out of four believe they are a good neighbour (73 percent), which beats those who say they are good at respecting others (69 percent) into third place. Other choices with high numbers include paying taxes (64 percent), voting in elections (61 percent), being a good parent (54 percent), and setting a good example to others (53 percent).

These mostly represent character traits rather than degrees of involvement. The top choices for citizenship are for someone who is a law-abiding, good neighbourly, respecter of others, rather than someone who throws themselves heart and soul into community activities. As before, actual involvement features at the bottom of their selections.

Least chosen among things which they do to be good citizens is challenging the law when they think it wrong (15 percent). Just above that is improving their local area or community, with only 17 percent claiming to do it. Third from bottom is being active in the community (18 percent). Other low scorers are knowing their rights (22 percent), or giving something back to their community or society (24 percent). As before, activism is out, being a good person is in.

For young people in the 15-24 age bracket the choices are similar, but with interesting variations. They list the same top three as does the general populace, but in different order. Easily topping the bill for the younger group is respecting others (74 percent). This came third for the general population. Second choice for the youngsters is obeying the law (59 percent), and third is being a good neighbour (57 percent). Their only other significantly high choice is setting a good example to others (46 percent).

They thus fall into a similar pattern to that of the population as a whole, in that they choose character over action to point to among the things they do. For them, too, citizenship is not about doing things. Their least popular choices reinforce this picture. Their lowest choice (7 percent) is having a say in what goes on. They do not do it, perhaps because they are too young. Their second least popular choice is challenging the law when they think it

wrong (11 percent). Also unpopular are improving their local area or community (13 percent) and giving something back to their society or community (15 percent).

Another aspect of citizenship that might be considered is the response to tension between loyalty to society and loyalty to our friends. Here citizenship among young people comes off distinctly second-best by comparison with friendship: even though obeying the law scored well among young people in the citizenship survey, the Socioconsult survey found them reluctant to commit themselves to helping the authorities to uphold it. When asked "A friend is in trouble with the police. You were present that day and you are asked to give your testimony. Would you describe everything you actually saw, even if this will lead to your friend's conviction, or not mention everything so that he/she will be discharged?", the public as a whole split two to one in favour of giving evidence (67 percent to 33 percent of those who gave an answer); but women aged 15-24 were evenly split (47:53), and young men were almost two-to-one (62 percent to 38) in favour of keeping quiet.

A picture of the young as the activists would be difficult to paint from these brush strokes. They follow their elders, with some differences of detail, in opting against active participation as a path to citizenship.

6. What about my *rights*?

In addition to what they think it takes to be a good citizen, and to what they actually do about it themselves, people were asked what rights they thought they had as citizens. The answers are revealing. Citizenship rights are mostly it seems, about services. Of the top four choices, three are the prime state services of health, pensions and education. Top choice of citizen's rights is NHS hospital treatment "within a reasonable time." This scores 84 percent, well above the second right picked out, which is entitlement to a state pension, on 72 percent.

The right to vote in elections is the only non-service item to score high (71 percent), while the fourth choice is the right to higher or further education (58 percent). This is a remarkable picture; it shows a view of citizens not as dutiful participators and activists, but as passive recipients of state provided services. These answers are even more interesting in the context of the changes which are taking place within these state services.

The recent flu crisis revealed glaring weaknesses in the ability of the NHS to provide an efficient, universal service. Higher education has seen student grants replaced by loans and fee charges introduced. State pensions are diminishing as a proportion of average wages, to the point where they will become a negligible factor in the income of retired people within a decade or two. Analysts might well speculate as to whether the diminution of the value of these collectively provided services will diminish people's sense of citizenship. If one's sense of involvement in society is measured in terms of what it provides, does this decline if the value of those services deteriorates?

The priorities of young people are similar, but represent a different time horizon. They, too, put NHS treatment top, but with 69 percent (as opposed to the 84 percent of the population as a whole). The right to a state pension does not feature among their top choices, probably because they cannot imagine they will ever be old enough to need one. Second for young people is the right to higher or further education (64 percent).

Third is employment (64 percent), and fourth is unemployment benefit (61 percent). Again, these show that the concerns of young people may be different, but centre on their perceived needs, just like those of their elders. It may be jobs rather than pensions simply because of the age difference. As before, these services are all under threat of deterioration. The NHS and education are seen by many to be no longer capable of providing universal free services, while unemployment pay is now more restricted and contingent upon behavior than it was. Once more, the decline in the value of these collective services might well indicate a perceived decline in the value of citizenship, and people's sense of being part of a community.

How do you stack up?

Do people think that they and their compatriots are good citizens? And do young people do so to the same extent? To answer these questions people were asked if they considered themselves to be good or bad citizens.

Overwhelmingly, the British consider themselves to be *good* citizens. No less than 96 percent of them think that they are, with none in the sample admitting to being bad citizens. Only one in twenty five, 4 percent, think of themselves as "both good and bad." Plainly, whatever they think good citizenship involves, they think they qualify. Their answers should be taken in the context of what they *do* think it is all about — that it consists of having the right attitudes, rather than actually doing anything.

Nearly all young people aged 15-24 also think they are good citizens. 93 percent of them consider themselves to be so, with only 1 percent regarding themselves as bad citizens, and 4 percent opting for the ambiguous "both good and bad." Thus young people in Britain follow the general population to practically the same degree in thinking that they qualify as good citizens.

The answers are more mixed when they are asked about other people. They might think themselves good citizens, but they are not as emphatic about their fellow countrymen. There is a large majority who think that Britons in general are good citizens, but it falls to two out of three (67 percent), down from the more than nineteen out of twenty who rate themselves good citizens. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of Britons think that their compatriots qualify as "both good and bad," while 7 percent think that other Britons are, in the main, bad citizens.

The answers for young people follow a similar pattern, and is, as it is for themselves, slightly less positive about others. The 15-24 year-olds who rate their fellow Britons as good citizens falls to three out of five (60 percent), which, although still a healthy majority, has nothing like the near unanimity they feel about their own status. 28 percent of the youngsters rate their compatriots as "both good and bad" citizens, which is close to three out of ten, and 8 percent think that Britons are, in the main, bad citizens.

Young people, by 60 to 36 percent, rate Britons as good citizens, rather than as bad or mixed, but this is less favourable than the judgement they make about themselves. Those who argue that a sense of citizenship is declining in Britain, and that extraordinary measures are needed to breathe new life and vitality into the idea, should note that the vast majority of the British population does not agree with them. By overwhelming majorities the British think they are already good citizens, and by huge margins they think that their compatriots are as well. It would seem that those proposing solutions have work to do first to persuade their countrymen that there is a problem.

Getting involved

People in general, though not by large margins, feel they have a say in how their community is run. Nearly half, 47 percent, say they agree strongly, or tend to agree that they do (10 + 37 percent). It should be noted that the bulk

of this positive response lies in the "tend to agree" category. Similarly, of the 33 percent (26 + 7 percent) who tend to disagree, or disagree strongly, most of the negatives "tend" to disagree. A further 18 percent neither agree nor disagree.

These are positive, but not overwhelming results. For young people they are somewhat more ambiguous. For those aged 15-24, some 44 percent (13 + 31 percent) agree strongly or tend to agree that they do have a say, whereas 39 percent (28 + 11 percent) tend to disagree or disagree strongly. A further 16 percent neither agree nor disagree. These are broadly similar responses than those for the general population, albeit slightly weaker. In both cases, less than half of those who replied think they have a say in how their community is run.

We have already seen that people do not rate community activities very highly when it comes to personal action to be undertaken by themselves. Getting involved, putting something back, campaigning for improvement, and volunteering all come at the low end of their priorities. They take a different view, however, of what other organizations should be doing. They were asked specifically about businesses and schools.

Do companies have a responsibility to improve the community? The answer is quite a resounding yes, with 80 percent (31 + 49 percent) saying they agree strongly or tend to agree. Only one tenth of that number, 8 percent (6 + 2 percent) tend to disagree, or strongly disagree. A further 10 percent cited neither.

Young people (15-24) are broadly in agreement. In their case 78 percent (26 + 52) think yes, strongly or weakly, against only 6 percent (4 + 2 percent) who are in weak or strong disagreement. 12 percent said neither.

These figures, substantial as they are, must be seen as providing solid support for the public relations advisors and departments who urge major corporations to play a full part in improving the community. They have the solid backing that the British people thinks this does, indeed, feature among their responsibilities. The implication is that those companies which do this, and are seen to do this, will be thought by the populace to be discharging their responsibilities, and playing the role of good citizens.

There is even stronger support for a key role to be played by the schools. Asked whether schools should teach children about how to be a good citizen, 95 percent of the populace replies that they strongly agree or tend to agree with this (66 + 29 percent). It is noticeable how two-thirds of those responding positively do so strongly. Only two percent tend to disagree or disagree strongly (2 + 0 percent), with 3 percent answering "neither." This is a massive support for the idea that schools should teach citizenship, and one which is repeated among the younger age group.

Of the 15-24 year-olds, 93 percent come out in strong agreement or tend to agree with the idea (52 + 41 percent). Fewer of them endorse the idea quite as strongly as the general population, but the majority in favour is still overwhelming. Only 3 percent tend to disagree or strongly disagree (2 + 1 percent). These figures are very much in accord with those of the general

population, even though those who have recently left school, or are still attending, might have a different perspective on what should be taught.

Thus the population, including its younger element, think that businesses have a responsibility to improve the community, and that schools should teach people to be good citizens. There are important caveats.

The first of these is that it is very easy to suggest that others, such as business or schools, should do something. It is, after all, a great deal easier than doing anything yourself. To endorse activity by businesses and schools is to let someone off lightly, if that is all it takes to discharge their obligations as citizens.

The second caveat is more subtle. One should take into account just what it is that people consider it takes to make good citizens. They list respect for others, obeying the law, and being a good neighbour as the important elements. This is presumably what they want schools to teach. It would indeed be strange if schools taught students lack of respect for others, disobedience of the law, and being bad neighbours. All this says, really, is that they expect schools to teach children, if they can, to be of good character.

This is unlikely to be the agenda of those who would be assigned to draw up the syllabus for citizenship classes, and to decide what should be taught. One can imagine the emphasis on easily taught facts about local government, Parliament and the EU, the very things which the surveys show do not move, inspire or interest people, and which people do not connect with citizenship.

Further, one can easily imagine any citizenship courses loaded with exhortations and helpful advice about the virtues of participation, and instructions about how to become involved. Student special projects which involved activism of some kind might qualify as valid course-work in the subject. This is despite the fact that people reject by huge majorities, any idea that this is what citizenship consists of, or commands their respect.

In other words, although people say, by overwhelming majorities, that they favour schools teaching children how to be good citizens, it appears that they have a very different idea of what this would involve from those who might be given the task of introducing and implementing such courses.

7. Summary and Conclusion

Dramatic patterns emerge from the findings. Young people are less likely than their elders to be involved in the political process at any level. They take less part in it, and know less about it. A small proportion either register to vote or actually does so. While there has always been a tendency for this to be true, it is more prevalent now, and may not be something this generation will grow out of as they become older.

They are less involved.

Crucially, youngsters today are less involved in politics than their age group was nearly thirty years ago. Compared with young people in 1972, the young people polled last December have a smaller proportion saying they had voted in an election, urged people outside their families to vote, or had taken an active part in a political campaign.

They are less likely to vote.

Young people today are less likely to vote in local government elections, and claim, by huge margins, that it is not the inconvenience which deters them. Indeed, for most of the proposals to make voting easier, most young people, like their elders, say it would make little difference. By more than a three to one margin, about the same as for the populace as a whole, young people say that being able to elect a mayor directly would not make them more likely to vote. Over half of the 15-24 age group describe themselves as "not interested in politics."

Fewer express community identity at any level, even towards Europe.

In terms of loyalty to their local community, to their nation (England, Scotland or Wales), to their country (the UK), and even to Europe, young people feel significantly less attached. While most of them feel loyalty to their community, nation and country, they feel less of it than their elders. Neither group expresses loyalty to Europe. The general population has 35 percent claiming such attachment, falling to 32 percent for the youngsters.

They don't know their rights. Fewer young people than their seniors say they know either their rights or responsibilities.

They don't know much about nuthin.

A significantly smaller proportion of youngsters claim to have knowledge of local government, Parliament or the European Union. Indeed, among young people, nine times as many profess ignorance about Europe as claim knowledge. A smaller number of them than their elders say they know about the involvement of businesses in the community. When tested upon a specific topical political subject, proportional representation, 88 percent of young people plead negligible knowledge, *including three in ten who admit to never having heard of it.*

They don't identify with the Civic Society.

Citizenship, for the British, seems to consist of being the right sort of person, rather than doing anything specific. This is also true for young people. To them, being a good citizen requires you to respect others, to be law-abiding, and to be a good neighbour. Only very small proportions of them think it involves volunteering to do things, challenging the law if they think it wrong, or being active in the community. When asked what they do about being good citizens, they give similar answers. Good character is in; activism is out.

Young men would rat on justice rather than their friends.

Young people, unlike their elders, say they would not give evidence against a friend who had broken the law. Young women strike a balance: 47 percent who would against 53 percent who say they would not. For young men it is substantially different; only 38 percent say they would, versus 62 percent who say they would keep quiet about it.

They're a 'gimme' generation.

Young people, as their elders do, see their rights as citizens in terms of the social services to which they are entitled. They list access to free NHS treatment first, followed by rights to higher and further education, then employment and unemployment pay.

It isn't my responsibility, it's theirs.

Huge majorities of young people think that businesses have responsibilities to the community, and that citizenship should be taught in schools. These are views also held by the population as a whole, but they represent duties to be performed by *others*, and are quite compatible with the rejection of personal activism and participation which characterize their other responses.

- Only 60 percent of 18-24 year-olds say they are registered to vote, as against 92 percent for the population at large. 40 percent of young people are not registered, against 8 percent of the general populace.
- The young have only one quarter of the voting power of the over 55s, who are twice as many and twice as likely to vote.
- For 16-24 year-olds polled in 1999, compared to their 1972 equivalents, fewer have voted in an election, fewer have urged non family members to vote, and fewer have taken an active part in a political campaign.
- Asked if they vote in local elections, 75 percent of the population say always, usually or sometimes, about the average of general election turnouts over the years, but a wild exaggeration for local elections. Only 33 percent of the 18-24 group say they do. Of those who vote rarely or never, it is 23 percent for people generally, but 59 percent of the 18-24 group, with over half saying they never vote at all.
- Nearly twice as many young people (11 percent) as their elders (6 percent) say voting is not important.
- Only 6 percent of young people say they do not vote because it is inconvenient to do so.

- 15 percent of young people say their vote would make no difference (versus 10 percent overall). 13 percent of them say that none of the parties stands for policies they wish to see (versus 7 percent overall).
- A majority of young people profess themselves no more likely to vote
 - if voting were switched from Thursday to Sunday,
 - if voting by post were allowed,
 - if they could vote on a Saturday,
 - if the polls were open 24 hours,
 - if they could vote from home or work by digital TV or the Internet,
 - or if they could vote at a train station.
- Nearly half of young people say they would be more likely to vote if they could do so at a shopping centre (46 percent yes, 46 percent no).
- A majority of young people say they would be more likely to vote if they could do it over the telephone (49 percent to 39 percent) or if polling were spread over more than one day (53 percent to 39 percent).
- By three to one (59 to 19 percent), young people say that a directly elected mayor would *not* make them more likely to vote.
- Over half of the 15-24 age group say they are "not interested in politics."
- Young people feel less sense of belonging to their local community than their elders do (65 percent versus 74 percent). The same is true of their nation (England, Scotland, Wales) (77 percent as against 84 percent), and of their country (66 percent versus 78 percent). One in three young people feel little or no attachment to the UK.
- Young people are *less* loyal to Europe than their elders (32 percent as opposed to 35 percent).
- Asked if they know a great deal or a fair amount about their rights, only 35 percent of young people say yes, as against 50 percent of the general population. Asked about their responsibilities, 47 percent say yes, versus 64 percent of people as a whole.
- Asked if they know a great deal or a fair amount about their local council, 9 percent of young people say yes (28 percent generally). For Parliament the figure is 19 percent (36 percent generally). For the European Union it is 9 percent (17 percent generally). Nine times as many young people plead ignorance as profess knowledge about Europe.
- Eight in ten young people admit to knowing little or nothing about business involvement in the community.
- 88 percent of young people know little or nothing about proportional representation, including 30 percent who say they have never heard of it.

- Young people think that being a good citizen involves respecting others (60 percent), obeying the law (56 percent), looking after the environment (50 percent) and setting a good example (50 percent). They do *not* think it means volunteering to do things (only 15 percent), challenging the law if they think it is wrong (19 percent), or being active in the community (24 percent).
- 62 percent of young men say they would not give evidence against a friend, versus 38 percent who would. For young women 53 percent say they would not, against 47 percent who would. Of their elders, only 33 percent would not, against the 67 percent who would.
- Young people think their rights as a citizen are free treatment on the NHS (69 percent), access to higher and further education (64 percent), to employment (64 percent) and unemployment benefit (60 percent). Many more of their elders put the NHS first (84 percent), and unlike the 15-24 group, they put entitlement to a state pension second (72 percent).
- 93 percent of young people think they are good citizens, as against 96 percent of their elders. Only 60 percent of them think that other people are good citizens. This is less generous than the 67 percent of the general population which thinks so.
- Do companies have a responsibility to the community? Yes say 78 percent of young people. Should citizenship be taught in schools? Yes say 93 percent of them. This is roughly in line with what the general population says.

The chill-out generation

Today's young people say they are not interested in politics and do not regard political activity as worthwhile. They know little about the institutions of government at various levels, and feel little loyalty to the communities of which they are a part. They reject community activism, and do not participate. They regard citizenship only as a way of behaving, and of having regard for others.

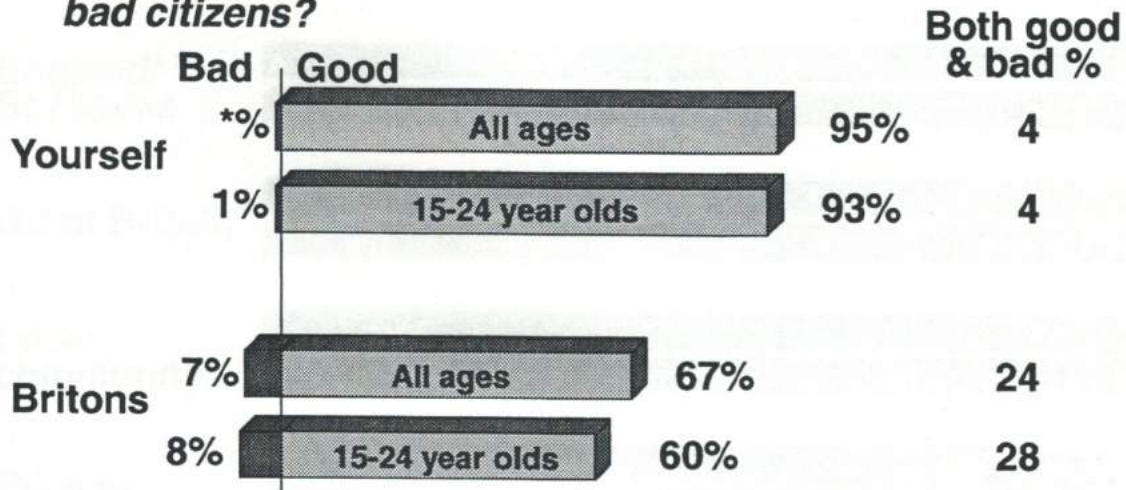
This will be seen by some commentators in a negative light, but it need not be. The institutions and attitudes which young people reject are ones which evolved in a different time to meet different circumstances. It could be that young people regard them as no longer relevant, and decline to participate because they are no longer seen to matter. At a time when problems and their solutions were seen to be political, it might have been important to participate; but it could be argued that this is no longer true. The efforts of governments and parties to encourage people to become involved might be misconceived, and doomed to failure.

The young people could be right.

Good or Bad Citizens?

Qa Overall, do you consider yourself to be a good or bad citizen?

Qb In the main, do you consider Britons to be good or bad citizens?

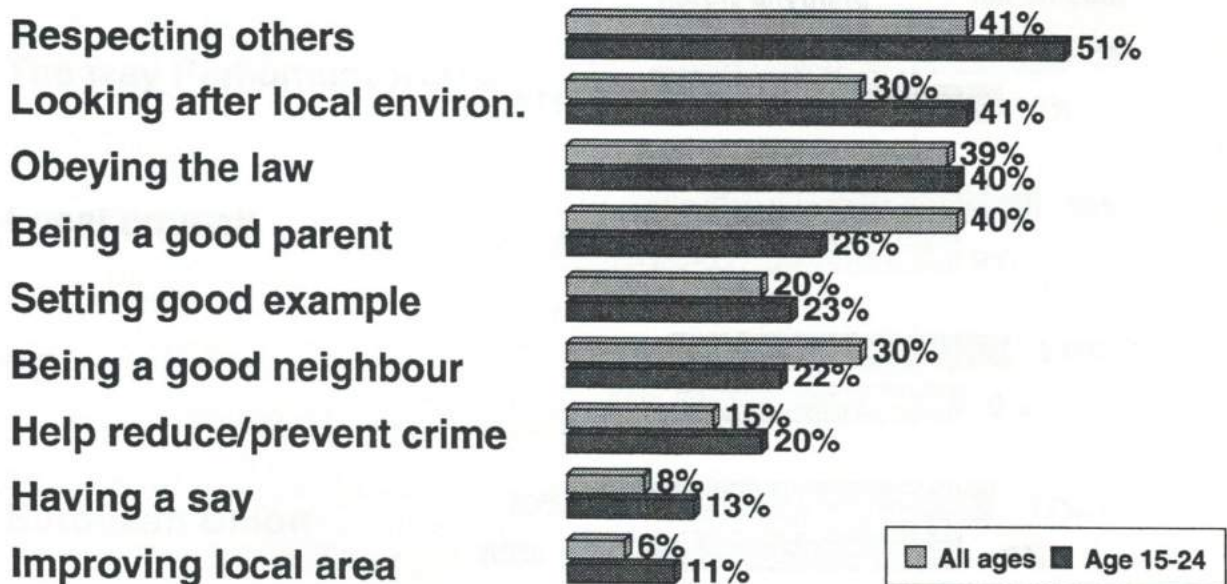


Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

What does Good Citizenship Involve?

Q Which two or three of these do you feel are most important to being a good citizen?



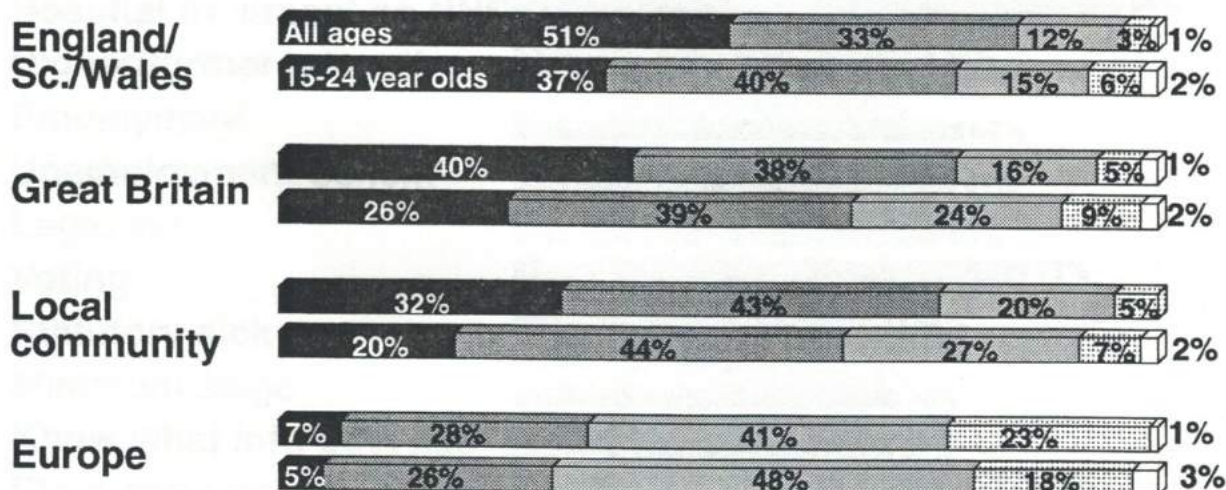
Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

A Feeling of Belonging?

Q How strongly do you feel you belong to ?

Very strongly
 Fairly strongly
 Not very strongly
 Not at all strongly
 Don't know

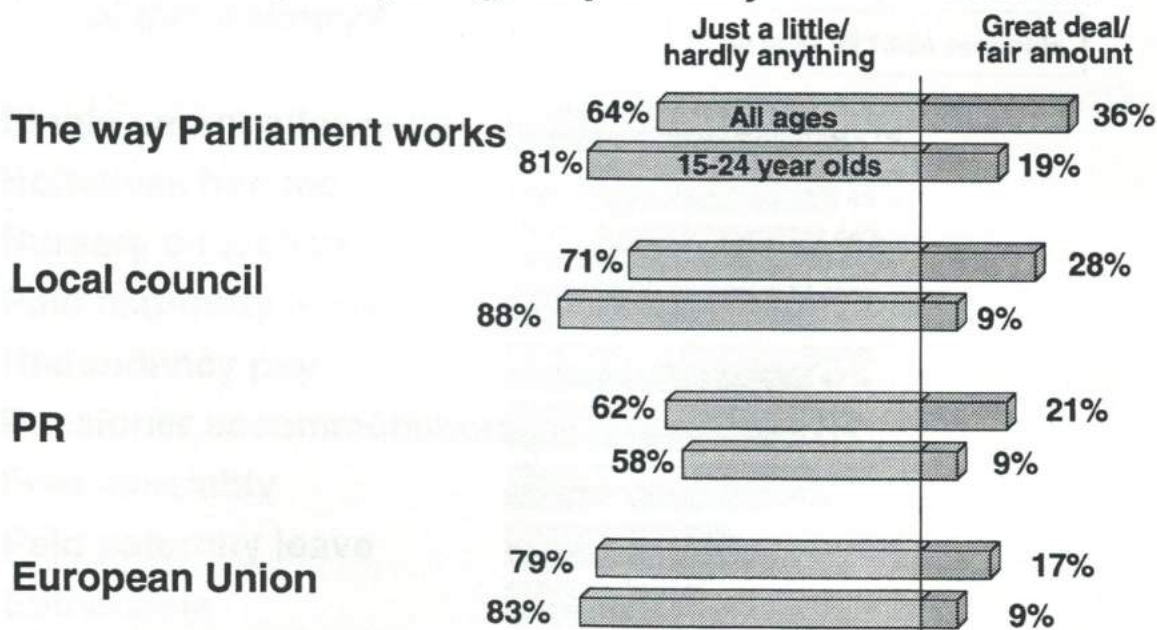


Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

Knowledge

Q How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...?

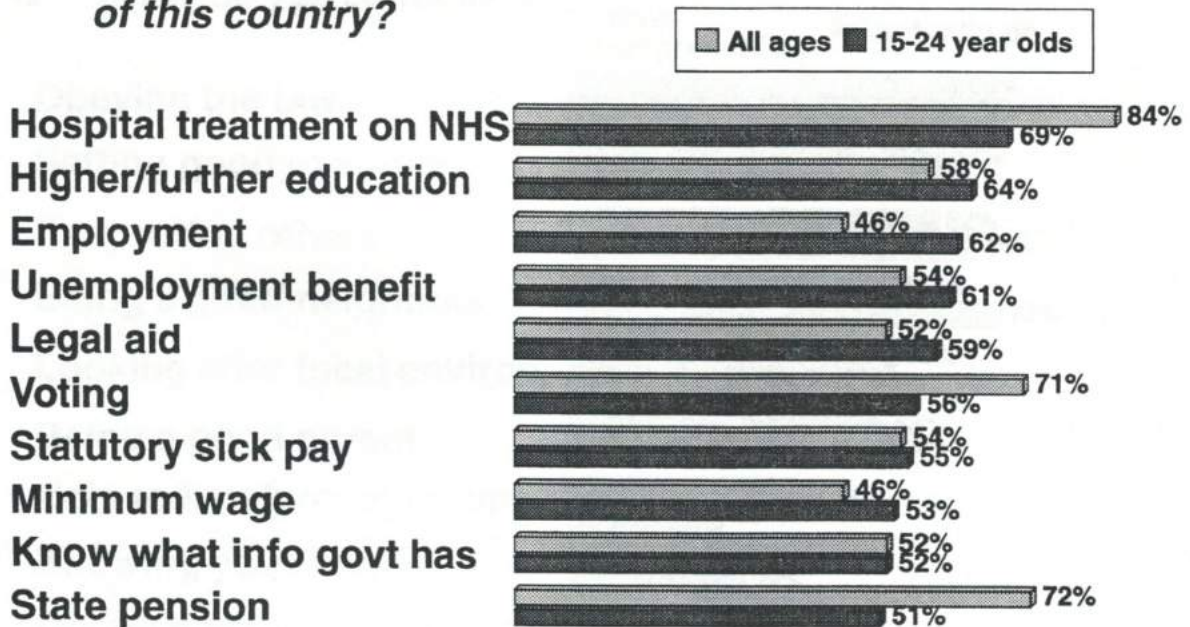


Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

Citizens' Rights - 1

Q *What rights, if any, do you think you have as a citizen of this country?*

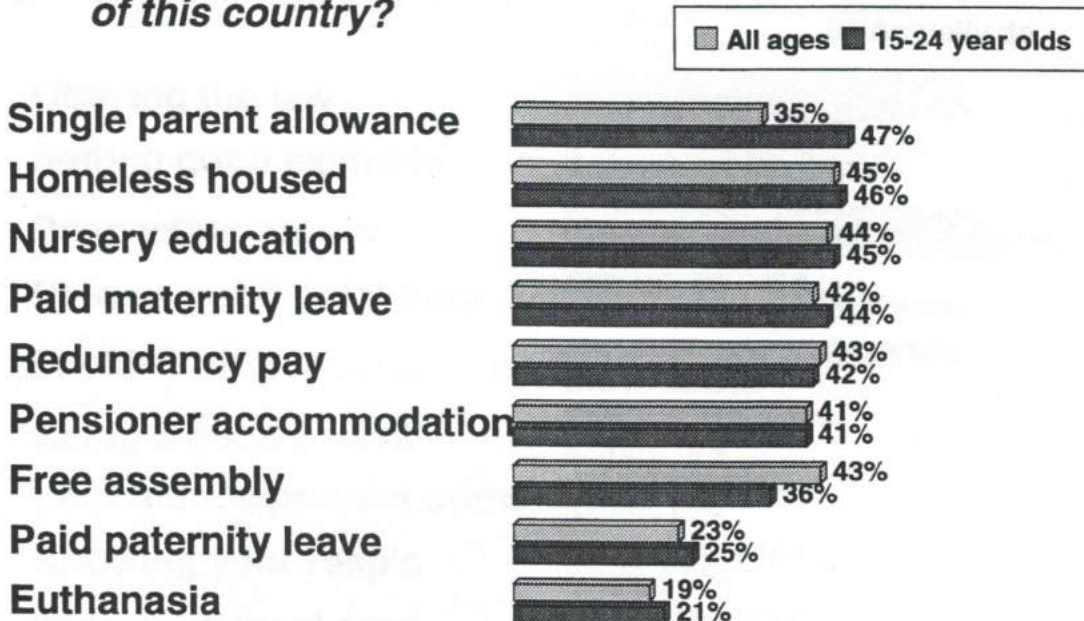


Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

Citizen Rights - 2

Q *What rights, if any, do you think you have as a citizen of this country?*



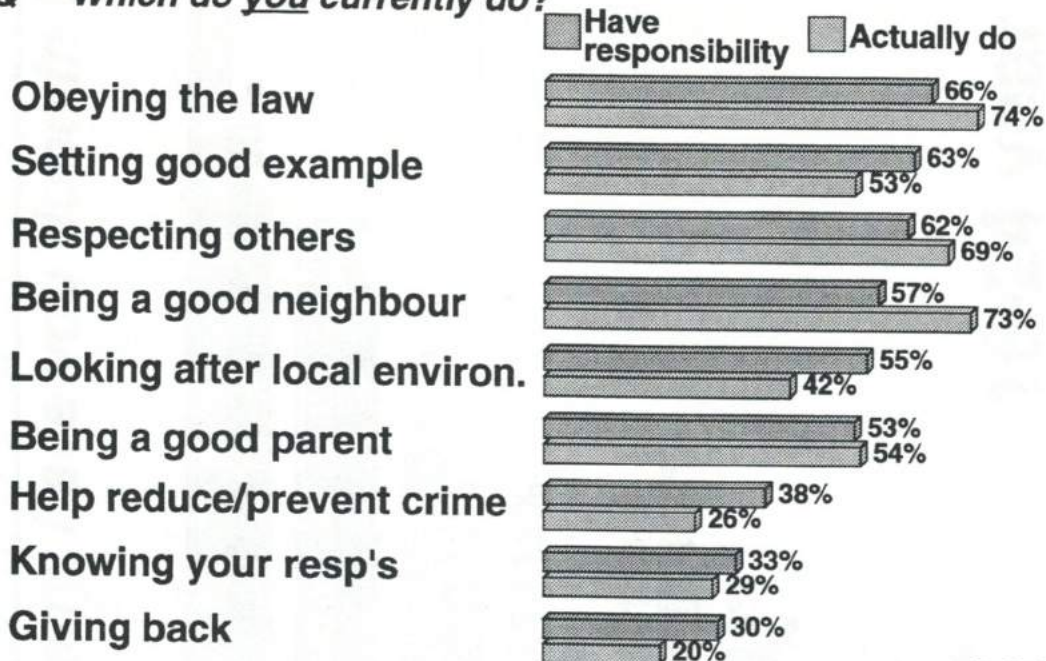
Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

What does Citizenship Involve? (All ages)

Q Which responsibilities, do you think you have as a citizen?

Q Which do you currently do?



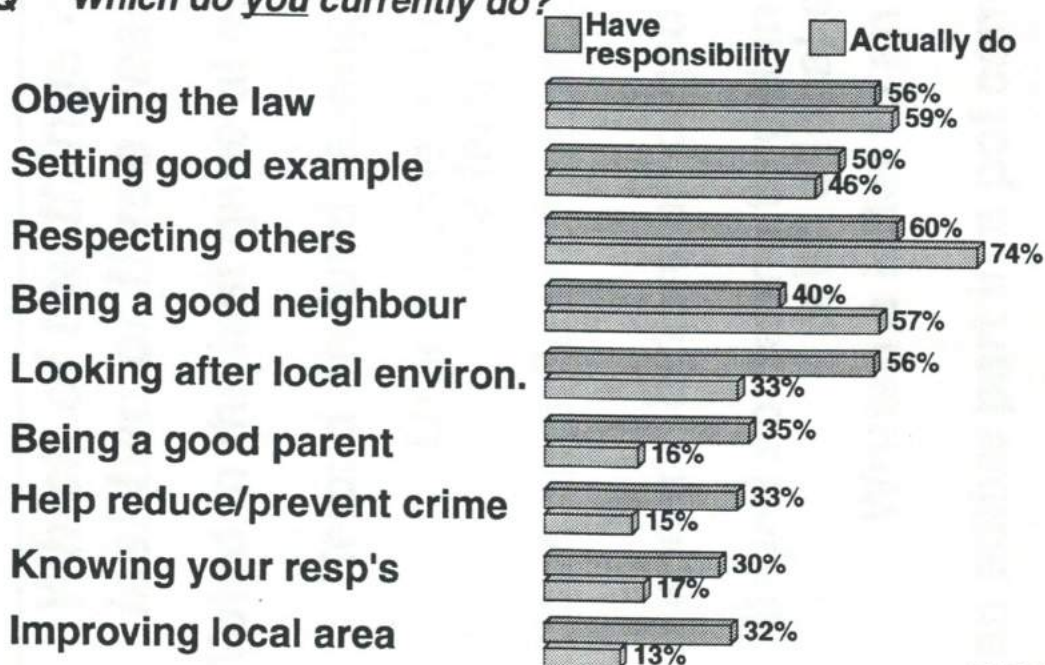
Base: 896 general public 15+, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

What does Citizenship Involve? (Age 15-24)

Q Which responsibilities, do you think you have as a citizen?

Q Which do you currently do?

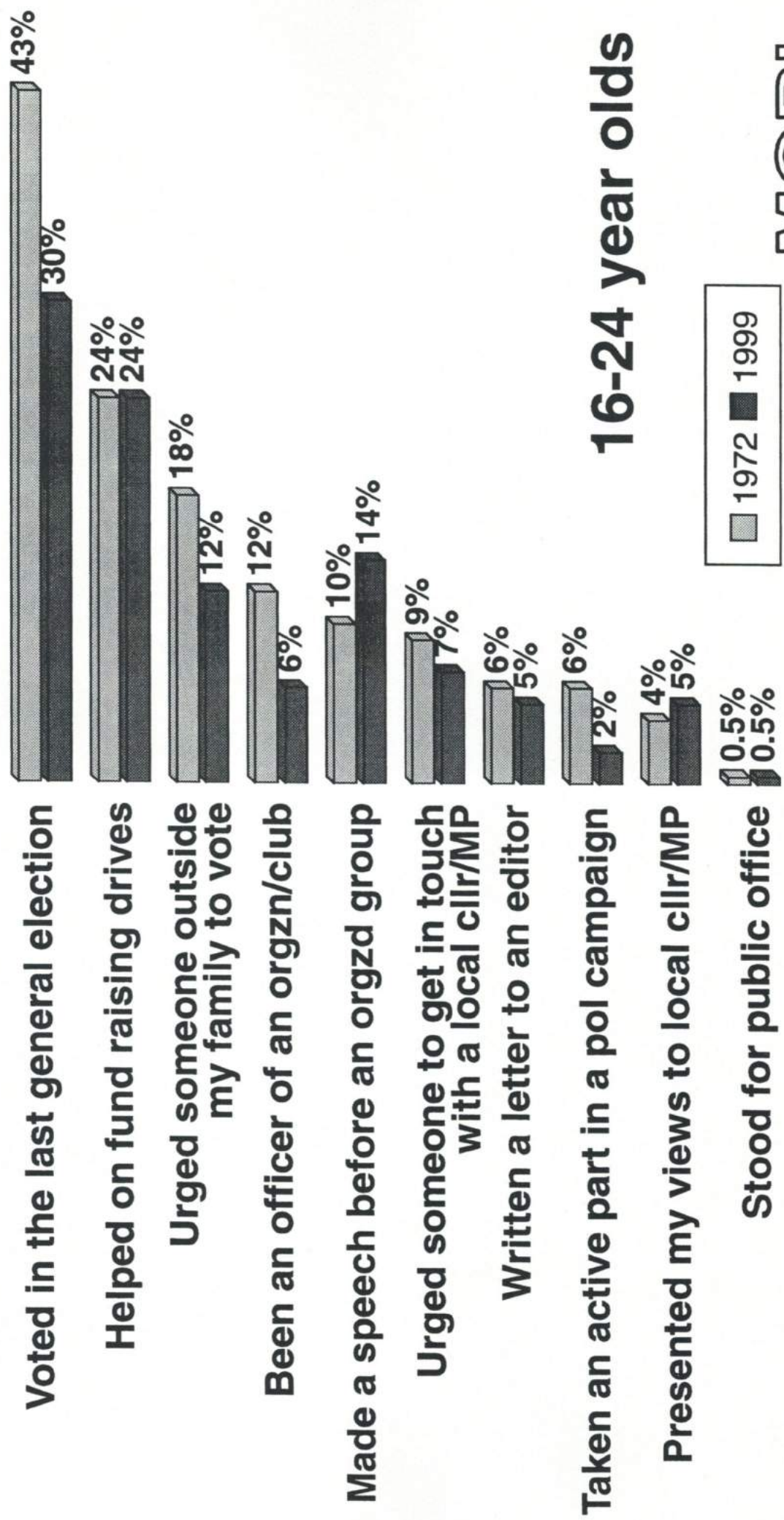


Base: 145 general public 15-24, 17-21 July 1998

MORI

Young people's activism - then and now

Q Which of the things on this list, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?



16-24 year olds

1972 1999

Base: 338 aged 16-24 in 1972, 6,319 aged 16-24 in 1999

MORI