

What are Politicians able to deliver for the next generation of voters?

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Young people are the future of our democratic society but they are struggling to connect with party politics. Politicians are able to create change in our ever-evolving society, so they need to bridge this divide and deliver what is urgently needed. Politicians need to acknowledge progressive policies, which will increase the likelihood of young people joining and voting for a party. Those who choose to call out issues surrounding mental health and the failing housing market tend to gain a younger base of support. The rise of ideas surrounding climate change has also engaged more young people in politics through peaceful protests, inspired by Greta Thunberg and her school strikes. This new generation of activists and those joining the franchise have much in common as they both want action from those in power.

The lack of representation in the House of Commons and House of Lords must also be addressed. The average age of members in the Commons is 51 and in the Lords is 71. This demographic struggles to relate to the experiences of people who have grown up with recent digital technology and the largest health crisis in decades. That means the policies being created “for” them are those of politicians who cannot relate to their lives.

Yet with the election of Mhairi Black and Nadia Whittome, there has been a shift in the Commons, in a bid to create a younger house. Black and Whittome have drawn attention to issues such as LGBT+ concerns, social reform and environmental protection. This shift is appearing at a slower pace in the Lords, with the appointment of Baroness Smith of Llanfaes who has spoken out about the need for reform. Current parties are able to deliver a more representative parliament. Leaders just need to put their trust in up-and-coming politicians.

That will allow discussion of views from those who better understand the younger generation. Now more than ever, social media plays an integral role in gaining the support of young people. Politicians do not make efficient use of these platforms, which are key in expanding the younger franchise. They provide an opportunity for politicians to better communicate with younger people. However, they should not be drawn into the gimmicky nature of much social media content. The next generation wants to be spoken to as equals and provided with platforms to learn from. It is possible to deliver social media content that would encourage young people to engage with politics.

Given that young people are becoming disengaged from other news outlets, this will prevent them from being lost from the political world and instead permit meaningful and effective engagement. Overall, the changes that are needed are not constitutional; they are centred in progressivism, representation and meaningful engagement. Young people do care about politics but lack representatives to reflect their views. The question is not what politicians are able to deliver but what the next generation can push the politicians to provide.