

# Action, Reaction, Inaction? Young Adults' Citizenship in Britain

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**Action, Reaction, Inaction? Young Adults' Citizenship in Britain.** This paper examines young adults' orientations to citizenship in Britain, drawing on surveys of random samples of 18-24 year olds. A range of experiences, behaviour and attitudes are explored including: citizenship education, voting, attitude to voting, party affiliation, participation in clubs and societies and engagement with social and political issues.

These questions have been asked at a time when citizenship is on many agendas and there is much concern about the apparent apathy of young people regarding local, national and supranational issues. In Britain, some commentators hoped that the advent of a Scottish parliament would help re-engage young people in Scotland with politics and citizenship. This paper compares young people living in Edinburgh, Scotland with young people living in Manchester, an equivalent sized city in England.

Like previous research, our data show that while young people are interested in social and political issues they do not focus their concerns on engagement with formal political systems. Many hold negative views about politics, such as feeling that they have little control over what the government does. However, young people's disaffection with voting is somewhat lower in Edinburgh than Manchester despite no greater faith in political parties. This may be an effect of the Scottish parliament. At the same time, young people in Edinburgh are only slightly more likely to be involved in associations and no more likely to be interested in and engaged with a range of wider social and political issues. If there is an effect of devolution on active citizenship, it is, at least for this cohort of young citizens, a very modest one.

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## Introduction

The threat of the US/UK led military action in Iraq was marked in Britain, as elsewhere in the world, by massive protest marches against the war. Thousands of school pupils took part in the marches, often in school hours (Parkinson, J., 2003). Young people's engagement with this issue contradicted assumptions made about their self-absorption and apathy with respect to many local, national and supranational affairs (Womack, S., 2003). The government and all mainstream political parties in Britain have expressed a desire to counteract political apathy and stimulate engaged citizenship. Since 2002, citizenship education has been a key and required aspect of the school curricula in England and a voluntarily adopted aspect of the school curricula in Scotland. Perhaps the large numbers of young people marching to protest against the war can be seen as a mark of success of the new curricula? However, many of the young people on the marches were classified as truants and reprimanded by the school authorities (Parkinson, J., 2003) and some were even suspended from their school (Newsround, 2003; Dyer, C., 2003; Waterhouse, R., 2003).

As the above illustrates, there are seemingly different meanings and agendas of citizenship in Britain. In recent years, the agendas have variously stressed rights, responsibilities, and activities of citizenship. This article discusses these concepts in the context of British research investigating young adults' understandings of these issues. Our own data from Edinburgh and Manchester will be used to document young adults' opinions about various aspects of citizenship as well as their citizenship behaviours. Young people's experience of citizenship in Britain was potentially changed and diversified in Scotland, England and Wales when many of the powers of the British state were devolved to a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly in 1999. The article compares the experiences and views of young residents of Edinburgh, Scotland with the residents of Manchester, England, an equivalent sized city. This enables an assessment of whether or not hopes for a Scottish parliament have been realised – the revitalising of interest in politics and citizenship, by bringing the parliament closer to the people.

One of the problems of trying to get a handle on citizenship is that alongside the varying agendas, there is no clear agreement of what the term actually encapsulates (Lister, R., 1997). For some, citizenship is a universal status bestowed or withheld by the state (Marshall, T. H., 1950), others emphasise the variable experience of citizenship and the active relationship subjects play in its construction: a 'total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging.' (Werbnar, P. - Yuval Davis, N., 1999, p. 4). The most influential account of citizenship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that of Marshall (1950) who outlined its development in modernity as an evolvement of universal rights providing ever-increasing rights and protection by and from the state (first civil and legal rights, then political rights, then social rights) for the citizen. However, Marshall's belief in universal

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citizenship has been criticised as failing to theorise the propensity of states to sustain some citizens less equally than others (for instance, women, ethnic minorities and young people).

What citizenship offers British citizens continues to be moderated by age (Jones, G. - Wallace, C., 1992; Wallace, C., 2001) rather than being a universal status afforded to all. Jones and Wallace (1992) suggest that economic status is the key to achieving citizen's rights. Reaching the 'majority' age of 18 is no longer a guarantee to getting the same rights as other adults, for those who are not full-time wage-earning workers. Young adults' rights have been depleted in recent times, through, for instance, the decline of state support for young adults below the age of 25, the end of support for those aged between 16-18 years (Land, H., 1996). The variable experience of citizenship is further demonstrated by research with young adults from minority ethnic populations which suggested that, for them, "citizenship was hierarchised and unequal...[and] connoted white power, authority and privilege" (Harris, C. - Roach, P., 2002, p. 6).

The contestation of the concept of citizenship reflects changes in national and global societies (Turner, B. S., 1993; Hall, T., et al, 1998) which have affected the "commonality and belongingness" of individuals to their citizenship(s) (Hall, T., et al, 1999, p. 512). Political debate about the State's ability to care for its citizens has been fuelled by economic changes weakening the standing of nation states as economic actors in global markets (Turner, B. S., 1990). The rhetorical emphasis in discussions of duty to care has shifted from nation and community to individuals preferably paying their own way rather than state support available to all members of society<sup>3</sup>. Thus as Hall et al note, "Citizenship is centre-stage today because the conditions for the sorts of commonality and belongingness to which it once referred have shifted. Recent economic, social and cultural changes make shared social membership – a status and identity common to all – problematic, no longer something to be taken for granted" (Hall, T., et al, 1999, p. 512).

With the growth of interest in citizenship has come an emphasis on 'active citizenship', especially, but not exclusively, from right-of-centre thinkers (Hall, T., et al, 1998). What is meant by active citizenship varies from undertaking charitable activities to rallying against an issue or state system (Helve, H. - Wallace, C., 2001). For people cynical of the British government's plans, active citizenship is a way for the state to save money by promoting, for instance, voluntary community schemes that 'good' citizens can take part in, allowing the state less of a financial responsibility. For others, 'active citizenship' is the route to revitalising the democratic shaping of society by involving young people at younger ages. The latter vision has inspired schemes to consult young people and enable them to shadow decision-making, for instance, through youth councils and parliaments, or to incorporate them into local decision-making (Matthews, H., et al, 1999). However, as Hall et al suggest, "there is an ambiguity here as to what exactly 'involvement' entails" (1998, p. 312) and some young people remain reluctant to take part in active citizenship. The 2001 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2001) of Europeans aged 15-24 found that, when asked what could be done to encourage the participation of young adults, they felt that consultation of young adults in decision-making processes (46%) and information campaigns aimed at young people (45%) would facilitate a contribution from young people. Slightly fewer thought that introducing compulsory education about citizenship (37%), the establishment of clubs for young people in all of the EU countries (28%), encouraging voluntary work (19%), reducing the voting age (13%) or age to stand for election (9%) would increase participation.

While citizenship is seen by some as a universal status, and for others, as active engagement with decision-making authorities, others stress that more mundane aspects of our everyday lives are expressions of citizenship. Feminist informed authors emphasise the importance of caring relationships as an aspect of citizenship (Lister, R., 1997). Though the abstract concept of citizenship often means little in daily lives (Harris, C. - Roach, P., 2002) something which is "rather formal and asocial character, too cumbersome for use in the everyday and personal complexities of social interaction" (Hall, T., et al, 1998, p. 309), there is a sense that citizenship can nevertheless be witnessed through many caring relationships and activities. Harris and Roach (2002, p. 20) describe this process of doing citizenship:

"In a more immediate way, the telling and retelling of stories, particularly about recent events, amongst those who saw each other frequently, provided opportunities to develop a kind of lived citizenship of mutual respect and obligations in which advice, encouragement and 'positive vibes', support/'look out for me', concrete assistance, identity affirmation and so on featured strongly" (2002, p. 15).

## Doing Citizenship

Media headlines suggesting that young people do not have much of an interest in politics or citizenship are supported by some but not all indicators of British young people's behaviour and attitudes. For example,

<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister driving these policy changes, Margaret Thatcher, famously remarked, "There is no such thing as society, there are individual men and women, and there are families" (Woman's Own, 31 October 1987).

the youngest voters, those in the 18-24 age group, are the least likely to vote. Data from 2001 British General Election show that only 53% of 18-24 year olds voted compared to 25-34 (57.5%), 35-44 (70%), 45-54 (78.5%), 55-64 (80.5%) 65+ (87%) (Park, A., 1999). The youngest age group are also the least likely to be registered to vote; only 60% were registered compared to 92% for the population as a whole (Pirie, M. - Worcester, R., 2000). The British Social Attitudes Survey shows that only a third of the age group agreed that there is a moral duty to vote. About 13% of the age group thought that there was no reason to vote (Park, A., 1999). Moreover, around a third of 18-24 year olds had no loyalty to any particular political party (Park, A., 1999). As with older adults, young people are least likely to vote in local elections. Rallings and Thrasher (2003) found that with respect to local elections, young people did not think their vote mattered or made a difference. On the other hand, they also found that voting making use of new technologies, such as texting using a mobile phone and voting via the internet, were disproportionately taken up by young people, although they had a very low take up overall (Rallings, C. - Thrasher, M., 2003). A survey conducted in Scotland by M.O.R.I (Naysmith, S., 2003) found that young people aged 11-25 believed that volunteering is a more important activity than voting. Only 16% of those aged 17-25 in Scotland believed that voting is an aspect of being a good citizen. Only 48% of those surveyed thought it important to vote. This survey also identified low levels of political knowledge, for instance, only around a quarter knew "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of what the Scottish parliament does. Furthermore, 31% of 17-25 year olds said they had never heard of the Scottish Youth Parliament and 48% claimed to know hardly anything of what it does. This is surprising given that other research has found young adults to be knowledgeable and eloquent in speaking about politics (Henn, M., et al, 2000; O'Toole, T., et al, 2003). Perhaps then these survey findings reflect poor transmission of information about the Parliaments rather than reflecting political disinterest?

The absence of voting, engagement with elected bodies or support for political parties does not necessarily mean apathetic disinterest in politics or disengagement from all forms of citizenship. A number of authors have demonstrated that British young people's orientation to political participation and citizenship is a great deal more complex and varied. For example, qualitative research with 14-24 year olds (White, C., et al, 2002), found that many young people are engaged with political issues even if they do not identify themselves as interested in 'politics', reserving the term for party politics and elections. Issues relating to education such as funding and achieving qualifications, problems with insecure employment prospects, drug use, personal safety and bullying, are issues that were cited by the young adults as of interest to them (White, C., et al, 2002). Similarly, Henn et al's (2000) research refutes claims that young people are apolitical and apathetic, finding that, in fact, they are interested in a range of issues "essentially 'political' in nature" (2000, p. 4). However, they found young people to be sceptical in politicians, their parties and institutions, and a feeling that politics was "distant from their lives" (2000, p. 16).

Like young people across Europe, British young people do not have high rates of membership of or taking part in clubs and organisations. The Youth Eurobarometers of 1997 and 2001 (European Commission, 1997; 2001) found that 50% of young Europeans were not a member of any group and that those who were, tended to be members of sports clubs. However, some studies suggest a rising number of young people are involved in single issue campaigns and organisations such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, etc (Roker, D., et al, 1999b). Furthermore, lack of formal memberships does not preclude young adults from being active in other ways. A Home Office survey focussed on citizenship (Prime, D., et al, 2001) found that young adults aged 16-24 had the lowest reported rate of participation in citizenship activities such as signing a petition, contacting a public official or local councillor, attending a public meeting (only 28% in the previous 12 months in comparison to 44% of 35-49 year olds). However, it also found that the highest rates of both informal volunteering<sup>4</sup> and social participation, including involvement in sports, hobbies, religious groups, adult education, and local community groups, were amongst the 16-24 age group, involving over 70% of this age group.

One of the particular barriers to taking part in community events for young adults is the greater uncertainty and flux in their lives as many negotiate the transition from family home to independent household, from school to work or training. Thus moving house or starting a new job may mean that people are not established in their communities or that they are busy taking on new responsibilities through work. The Scottish Household Survey found that 22% of 16-24 year olds had changed residence in the previous year. This figure is high in comparison to the residential change in other age groups (Hope, S. - Brauholtz, S., et al, 2000). It might explain why young adults were found to be the age group who helped neighbours the least, and who attended or helped organisations the least (Krishnamurthy, A., et al, 2001) and who felt disconnected from civil society (Coulthard, M., et al, 2002).

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<sup>4</sup> Such as giving advice, helping to look after a house, pet or child, keeping in contact with someone, getting shopping for someone.

## Our Findings

Our data measure the political engagement and active citizenship of young adults through a range of indicators<sup>5</sup>: experiences of citizenship education at school, voting behaviour, political party affiliation, participation in social and cultural organisations, clubs and societies, and interest in a range of social and political issues. In each case we can compare the results for our samples of 18-24 year old respondents resident in Edinburgh with their equivalents in Manchester.

### School Based Citizenship

The introduction of 'citizenship education' as a named aspect of the curriculum did not exist when the respondents were in compulsory education but most schools, nevertheless, would have claimed that they were equipping their pupils for citizenship. We asked our respondents whether they remember participating in a range of events<sup>6</sup> associated with citizenship when they were at school. More respondents in Edinburgh than Manchester remembered having had a 'discussion of democracy' ( $\chi^{2\text{Sig}} <.001$ ), their 'being an opportunity to air views in school about how it should be run' ( $\chi^{2\text{Sig}} .046$ ), 'having spoken to a politician or a member of the local council' ( $\chi^{2\text{Sig}} <.001$ ), and having 'signed petitions or doing some canvassing or campaigning' ( $\chi^{2\text{Sig}} .001$ ). However, slightly more people in Manchester remember 'learning about the festival or feast days of other religions of cultures' ( $\chi^{2\text{Sig}} .019$ ), possibly reflecting the response of schools to the greater ethnic mix of pupils in the Manchester area.

### Membership of Clubs and Societies

Respondents in our survey were asked whether they were currently a member of or a participant in any organisation, club or society. The majority of people were not (90% in Manchester, 82% in Edinburgh). Eight percent more respondents in Edinburgh were members or participants than in Manchester ( $\chi^{2\text{Sig}} .003$ ). These findings suggest a much lower percentage of membership among our random samples of young people than that discovered in the Eurobarometer surveys. There were clear gender divisions in the data: in Manchester, half as many women (7% of women and 14% of men) reported participation or membership. In Edinburgh too, women's participation (14%) was lower than that of our male respondents (23%). In the majority of cases participation related to sport (4% in Manchester, 9% in Edinburgh) rather than any of the other possibilities such as hobby, cultural, political or humanitarian groups. Some people were a member of more than one club or society. In Manchester, 3% (n=11) of the random sample were a member of more than one group. In Edinburgh, 6% (n=17) of the random were a member of two of more groups. The largest number of groups that someone was a member of was seven.

Many more people in Edinburgh than Manchester said that they did not have a religion: 53% vs. 24%. This might reflect the greater number of people of an ethnic minority who made up our sample in Manchester<sup>7</sup>. Attendance at church was low in both Edinburgh and Manchester. Those who did have a religion were asked how often they attended services or meetings. Most people who had a religion did not attend services on a regular basis. 62% of respondents in Manchester and 53% of those in Edinburgh reported never going to a religious service of going very infrequently. Manchester respondents (16%) were slightly more likely, than those in Edinburgh (10%), to be those who attended church frequently (at least once a fortnight). People in Edinburgh (32%) were more likely than those in Manchester (14%) to attend every six months to a year. Of all the religions, Islam was only one to have more regular attendance by amongst its followers amongst our respondents; members of all the other religions attended very rarely.

While the young people in Edinburgh were marginally more involved in clubs and societies, overall, our research confirms that the average young person in Edinburgh and Manchester is not much of a participant in any of the group activities identified. It was suggested above that there are particular barriers to young people's participation in organisations because of the degree of transition and flux in their lives. Some may

<sup>5</sup> The survey data presented do not provide the in-depth understanding of the lived relationships of mutual support and friendship that authors such as Harris and Roach (2002) suggest may indicate levels of everyday citizenship. We hope to provide additional depth at a later stage in our research through more qualitative techniques.

<sup>6</sup> Discussion of democracy, opportunities to air views in school, learning about festivals and feast days of other religions and cultures, talking to politician or councillor, raising money for charity, signing petitions, canvassing or campaigning.

<sup>7</sup> In comparing our sample in Edinburgh and Manchester, we should note that Manchester had a greater divergence of ethnicities than Edinburgh.

also face specific circumstances that deter such engagement, such as shift work and financial insecurity, making it hard to attend and/or afford to pay membership fees, as Roker et al (1999b) found in their research. However, it is also possible that lack of group participation does indicate low civic engagement; our findings from other activities linked to citizenship will assist us to see if this is the case.

### **P(p)olitical Views**

As political apathy is often connected to young people, we wanted to understand their political views both in terms of party politics and broader political issues. The questionnaire asked about these issues through: (1) whether they voted, (2) whether they had a political party that they felt represented them; (3) how they felt about politics, and (4) whether they had an interest in social and political issues.

Many people said that they would not vote<sup>8</sup>. In Edinburgh, the Scottish election was the election that young people were most likely to say that they would vote in, followed by the national election, the local elections and then the European elections. This is shown in the table below. In Manchester, a similar pattern emerges but more so, with a larger number of people saying they would not vote in national, local and European elections. While it is not possible to say for certain whether this difference between Edinburgh and Manchester is the effect of the Scottish parliament or not, it is clearly consistent with the anticipated effect.

### **% (Number) of Non-Voters**

	Manchester	Edinburgh
European election	65% (233)	54% (168)
Local election	45% (163)	36% (110)
National election	40% (143)	32% (99)
Scottish election	Not applicable	26%

Differences in the data tended to be statistically significant when comparing the samples in Edinburgh and Manchester. People in Edinburgh were more inclined to vote in European elections ( $\chi^2_{Sig} .011$ ), national elections ( $\chi^2_{Sig} .025$ ) and local elections ( $\chi^2_{Sig} .001$ ) and more likely not to know if they would vote in them than their Mancunian counterparts.

We invited those interviewed to tell us whether there was a political party they supported or felt represented their own political views. The most popular party was the Labour party (traditionally the main left of centre party in the UK). The Labour Party was chosen by 51% of the total sample in Manchester and 21% in Edinburgh. In Edinburgh, the sample reported more varied political parties than their counterparts in Manchester and the Labour Party was less emphatically chosen by them. Instead, a broader range of parties were selected: 14% chose the Liberal Democrats and 13% the Scottish National Party. A minority reported having 'no political party' (21% in Manchester and 26% in Edinburgh) and some said they did not know (12% in Manchester and 16% in Edinburgh) whether a political party have views similar to their own. In total, large proportions of people do not feel that their views are represented by a political party (42% in Edinburgh, 33% in Manchester). It is interesting to note that while more young people in Edinburgh than Manchester lack the belief that a political party represents their views, fewer suspend their willingness to vote. Again, while this is not proof of the effect of the existence of the Scottish parliament, it seems plausible to interpret this difference as the effect of devolution. Young people in Edinburgh are more likely to vote despite lacking party affiliation, perhaps because they feel they have their own parliament. Moreover, the fact that the Scottish parliament operates with a coalition of parties rather than one-party dominance may encourage a sense that several parties reflect their views and that they cannot choose one that fully represents their views, as some of the respondents reported during the interview. Power in the Scottish Parliament is itself split, shared by a coalition of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, with the Scottish National Party acting as the opposition.

The higher rates of apparent disaffection with the political system in Manchester were also suggested by additional questions about voting. Respondents were asked about their views of the effectiveness of voting

<sup>8</sup> The figure for non-voters includes those who say they would not vote and 'Don't Know' answers. In the local elections, don't know was a response given by 3% of Manchester random sample, 9% Edinburgh random sample. For the Scottish election, 6% of random sample didn't know if they would vote. In national elections, 4% of the Manchester sample and 8% of the Edinburgh sample did not know if they would vote. In European elections, 5% of the Manchester sample and 10% of the Edinburgh sample said that they did not know if they would vote.

through the statements ‘It really does matter which political party is in power,’ ‘I have no influence over what the government is doing,’ ‘There is a moral obligation to vote,’ and ‘There is little point in voting.’ The statements offered two positive action views – it does matter who votes and there being a moral obligation to vote and two negative views – having no influence over the government and there being little point in voting. The table shows the two negative statement responses reversed so as to group them with the two positive responses as we would expect people who respond positively to the first two, to respond negatively to the last two statements.

### Views on statements about politics and voting (%) in Manchester (Manc) and Edinburgh (Edin)

	Manc	Edin	Manc	Edin	Manc	Edin
	No agreement		Mid Point		Complete Agreement	
It really does matter which political party is governing/ in power	28%	26%	20%	20%	51%	56%
There is a moral obligation to vote	35%	37%	24%	19%	41%	44%
	Complete Agreement		Mid Point		No Agreement	
I have no influence over what the government is doing	59%	51%	18%	26%	23%	23%
There is little point in voting	36%	29%	18%	14%	46%	57%

We found a slightly larger proportion of Manchester interviewees took a negative view of the effectiveness of voting, and slightly more of those in Edinburgh taking a positive view of voting. Over half of all those from Edinburgh and just under half of the Manchester respondents did not agree with their being little point in voting ( $\chi^{2Sig} .018$ ). However, while the data suggests that more people felt positive about voting than not, this does not apply to the feeling of having little influence on the government – which was agreed with completely by 59% of Manchester and 51% of Edinburgh respondents ( $\chi^{2Sig} .028$ ). If differences between Edinburgh and Manchester are the effect of having a Scottish parliament, then they are relatively modest. The gender differences were small on these items. Overall, these findings allow us a sense of the complexity of young adults’ feelings about voting and politics: feeling positive about some aspects of voting does not necessarily mean that one feels positive about all aspects. This is consistent with the view of Henn et al: “far from being politically “lazy” and disinterested, young people are relatively sophisticated (but cynical) observers of the political scene” (2000, p. 21).

People who are not particularly interested in party politics are nevertheless often interested in social and political issues. This point has been made concerning young people in a number of studies (Roker, D., 1999a; Smith, N., et al, 2002; White, C., et al, 2002). In our survey we asked whether a range of issues were of interest to the respondents. The issues of most interest (rated 3 or 4) overall were ‘job and training opportunities’ (85%), ‘quality and content of education’ (82%), ‘equality between men and women’ (80%), ‘public services or facilities (e.g. transport, leisure)’ (80%). Nevertheless, all the other suggested issues were also of interest to the majority with the exception of the Unification of Europe.

The pattern of responses to political and social issues was generally similar between Edinburgh and Manchester, with the exception of a small number of items. The items showing the most difference are ‘discrimination against minority groups’, of considerable importance to 70% in Manchester and 61% in Edinburgh ( $\chi^{2Sig} .006$ ) and ‘animal rights’, which was of considerable interest to 70% in Manchester and 58% in Edinburgh ( $\chi^{2Sig} .003$ ). Other items with a statistical significant difference were terrorism, 79% in Manchester and 72% in Edinburgh ( $\chi^{2Sig} .037$ ) and the Unification of Europe, 39% in Manchester and 30% in Edinburgh ( $\chi^{2Sig} .039$ ). There were no differences between the proportion of men and women picking many items but in Manchester there was a bigger gap between women and men expressing considerable interest in gender equality ( $\chi^{2Sig} <.001$ ) and in discrimination against minority groups ( $\chi^{2Sig} .002$ ). Animal rights was found to be an issue that women rather than men tended to be interested in both in Edinburgh ( $\chi^{2Sig} <.001$ ) and Manchester ( $\chi^{2Sig} <.001$ ). It is not possible to suggest explanations of all of these differences. However, at the time of our survey there were on-going problems in Manchester following violent clashes between young men of different ethnic groups and the success of the far-right British National Party in local elections. Racism and sectarianism have also been identified as problems in Scotland. Around the time of our survey, racism was in the news after a report noted an increase in the occurrence of racially motivated crimes (Doherty, J., 2002). Concurrently, an advertising campaign was launched to

counter racism, which asked for Scots not to “let Scotland down” by being racist. However, it is likely that violent events in Manchester focused concern much more directly on racism and discrimination against minorities as an issue than the Scottish Executive advertising campaign in Edinburgh.

### **Importance (‘important’ or ‘greatly important’) of social and political issues by gender and location.**

	% of UK Sample	Manchester			Edinburgh		
		All %	Men%	Women %	All %	Men %	Women %
Job and training opportunities	87	88	87	88	85	85	86
Quality and content of education	82	82	80	84	83	81	84
Equality between men and women	80	80	68	89	80	75	84
Public services or facilities (transport, leisure)	80	79	78	81	80	80	79
Terrorism	76	79	78	81	72	75	69
Poverty	74	70	67	73	71	69	73
Discrimination against immigrants or other minority groups	66	70	60	78	61	60	62
Animal Rights	65	70	60	77	58	45	68
Environmental Issues	60	59	58	59	62	60	63
Unification of Europe	35	39	34	42	30	26	34

### **Conclusion**

The meaning of citizenship is contested and reshaped according to the social and political milieu. The shift in conceptual emphasis from citizenship as a static universal status, to ‘active citizenship’ and then ‘lived citizenship’ questions a characterisation of young people as apathetic and disengaged citizens as an appropriate analysis of their disaffection with party political systems. Rather, analysts are challenged to seek a fuller understanding of young people’s everyday negotiations of a murky changing landscape of multiple transitions (Morrow, V. - Richards, M., 1996), which may provide barriers to involvement in some aspects of active citizenship. In the British context, conflicting messages are directed to young people concerning their citizenship. On the one hand, entitlement to the full range of rights as a citizen has been deferred to older ages and on the other, more efforts are now devoted to formally inducting people at younger ages into ‘active citizenship’ through the rolling out of citizenship education across the school system. The experience of citizenship has also diversified with the devolution of state power to the new Scottish parliament and, to a lesser extent, the Welsh Assembly. Commentators in Scotland hoped their parliament would re-engage Scottish citizens, including young people, with the political system and give new life to active citizenship.

The data summarised in this article have documented aspects of young people’s political views, experiences and behaviour, through two random samples of 18-24 year olds, residents of Edinburgh and Manchester. The comparison between them suggests that there may indeed be an effect of the Scottish parliament modifying the citizenship engagement of young people in Edinburgh. The main difference is that a significantly smaller minority of young people in Edinburgh than Manchester, albeit, nevertheless, not an insignificant minority, are disinclined to vote. A number of other measures indicate that young people in Scotland are less disaffected with the political system despite being no more likely to think that any one political party represents their views. Other indicators, however, do not suggest that young people in Edinburgh are substantially more engaged in active citizenship than young people in Manchester. Young people in Edinburgh were slightly more likely to have experienced some form of discussion about and participation in democracy when they were at school, and to express their citizenship by participation in some form of club or association. However, the overwhelming majority are not participants in any club or association and these differences between young people in Edinburgh and Manchester are modest. For this cohort of young people, any effect of devolution on their experience of citizenship seems to be either relatively modest or fairly specific to willingness to vote. What is clear from our data is that young people in both Edinburgh and Manchester are concerned about a wide range of social and political issues. Responses to

the military action in Iraq suggest that under some conditions, concerns can be translated into active political engagement despite, and perhaps because of, wide spread cynicism with the political system.

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