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Huebner, C. orcid.org/0000-0003-0321-2546 and Eichhorn, J. (2022) The tide raising all boats? Social class differences in political participation among young people in Scotland. *Scottish Affairs*, 31 (2). pp. 165-189. ISSN 0966-0356

<https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2022.0407>

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Edinburgh University Press in *Scottish Affairs*. The Version of Record is available online at:
<http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/scot.2022.0407>.

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The Tide Raising All Boats? Social Class Differences in Political Participation Among Young People in Scotland

Manuscript accepted for publication in Scottish Affairs, Volume 31 Issue 2, Page 165-189, ISSN 0966-0356 Available Online Apr 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2022.0407>

Abstract

Social class differences in political participation are a pressing issue for democracies and they are particularly severe among young people in the UK. Disadvantaged young people are the least likely to be politically engaged in the UK and it is assumed that with declining levels of participation inequalities in political participation increase. What happens to political inequality though when levels of youth participation *increase*? Do more advantaged young people account for most of the extra participation or do disadvantaged young people 'catch up'?

Based on representative survey data, this paper investigates levels of political inequality among 16- and 17-year-olds in a context of increasing participation in Scotland. We find that in Scotland young people of all social classes were equally likely to be politically engaged, while among young people in the rest of the UK and adults from Scotland those of higher social status were more likely to be engaged in politics. Overall, social class differences in political engagement were less pronounced amongst 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. The paper offers some possible explanations of this finding and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: political participation, social class, inequality, young people, youth participation

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Acknowledgements: We thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback to an earlier version of this article. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available from UK Data Service at <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-854897>, reference number 854897.

Introduction

Disadvantaged young people are the least likely to be politically engaged in the UK (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016; Park, 1999) and social class plays a role in this stratification among young people (Henn et al., 2007). Among young people, class-based differences in political participation are found to be particularly severe in the UK (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007), higher than in many comparable countries (Schulz et al., 2010). Such social class differences in political participation are a pressing issue for democracies because they constitute a 'democratic dilemma' (Lijphart, 1997).

It is generally assumed that with declining levels of participation, such as they have been observed among young people in past decades (Grasso, 2014; Henn et al., 2007; Jowell & Park, 1998; Sloam, 2007), inequalities in political participation increase (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). What happens to political inequality though when levels of youth participation increase? Do more advantaged young people account for most of the extra participation, do disadvantaged young people 'catch up', or is the increase uniform and without much change in the distribution? Given a wide range of measures aimed at increasing youth political engagement, including the provision of citizenship education and the lowering of the voting age in parts of the UK, the question how changes in youth political engagement affect inequalities in political participation among young people is timely and important.

Scotland offers a unique case to examine what happens to political inequality when levels of youth participation increase. After the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and the coinciding lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16 years, 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland were found to be more engaged in politics overall than their peers in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn, 2018b). What has not yet been researched is how this increased political engagement distributes among young people of different social status. Did all young people in Scotland increase their participation equally or did some account for more of this higher overall participation than others? In other words, did the tide in Scotland raise all boats equally or did some rise more than others?

In this article, we examine social class differences in political participation among young people from Scotland in a context of increasing levels of participation. Using data from a representative survey conducted ahead of the 2015 general election, we compare levels of political participation among 16- and 17-year-olds of different social classes in Scotland to those of older adults from Scotland as well as to peers in the rest of the UK and examine the factors that account for differences. We first provide an overview of the mechanisms that can accelerate or mitigate class-based political inequalities among young people, before discussing the specific circumstances of the cohort of young people studied. We then introduce our survey data and methods to examine the social class distribution of political participation among young people and discuss the results. The findings increase the theoretical understanding of inequalities in youth political participation and point towards avenues for further research on how to address them.

Class-based inequalities in youth political participation

For young people, social class differences in political engagement can come about indirectly, through socialisation in the family and the associated transmission of economic, human, cultural, or social capital (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Bynner & Ashford, 1994; Quintelier, 2015; Verba et al., 2005). Parents may pass on their civic attitudes and behaviours through their own social status, resources and education, with the schools they choose for their children, by acting as role models, and by reinforcing political behaviour or discussing politics within the family (Jennings, 2007; Quintelier, 2015; Verba et al., 2005). In this way, the behaviours and attitudes that impact young people's participation choices are determined by the class backgrounds of the family and by processes of early socialisation. It would be expected that regardless of increases in levels of participation, young people of higher social status would always be more likely to be involved in political processes than their less well-situated peers. Thus, when investigating social class differences in political participation among young people in different contexts we would expect to find **no overall effect** of these contexts - whether they are characterised by high or low levels of participation - on levels of political inequality among young people.

In addition to family socialisation, young people's political participation is also impacted by the level and type of education they receive. More years of - and higher - education are positively associated with political engagement. While some argue that following an effect of linear acquisition, more years of education give young people more of the knowledge and skills that motivate political engagement (Nie et al., 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Verba et al., 1995), others argue that education is merely a proxy for social class and has no additional effect on young people's political participation (Campbell, 2009; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Persson, 2014).

Additionally, the type of education received in different educational pathways plays a role in manifesting participation inequalities (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016; Janmaat et al., 2014). In contrast to vocational tracks, academic streams are believed to offer more opportunities for debate, belonging, and decision making in the classroom, thereby affording young people in these streams more opportunities "to learn the skills, the attitudes (such as self-efficacy) and the dispositions to protest and vote" (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016: 87). This reinforces greater disadvantages for young people from working class backgrounds (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016; Hoskins et al., 2016) and could lead to an overall acceleration of class-based inequalities. If in a context of higher levels of political participation young people from advantaged social backgrounds account for most of an increase in youth participation, for example due to the education they receive or the educational stream they follow, any increase in youth participation could even lead to higher levels of inequality in participation. Consequently, in a context of increased political engagement overall, we would expect to find higher levels of political inequality among young people (we can describe this as an **acceleration effect**).

Compensation of inequalities in youth political participation

Based on the idea that schools provide necessary skills for young people to participate in democracies (Dewey, 1916), education can also have a compensatory effect on inequalities in youth participation. If young people have equal access to education, goes the theory, what

happens in schools may allow young people from less advantaged backgrounds to catch up and reach similar levels of engagement as their better-off peers.

Experiences of participation in schools, such as involvement in debates, student councils, mock elections, or student newspapers, have been found to be associated with higher levels of political engagement, regardless of social class (Chaffee et al., 1997; Hoskins et al., 2012; Keating & Janmaat, 2016). The theory behind this observed effect is that when young people experience participation in school, all young people equally benefit from this experience and social class differences become less important – something also empirically found by Quintelier and Hooghe (2011).

Participation experiences might only have the intended effect when they are combined with active reflection and discussion, for example with friends and family or in the classroom. There is some evidence that school discussion and an open classroom climate motivate particularly young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop an interest in and actively seek out information on political issues (Campbell, 2008; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2000). Others, however, find no compensatory effect of classroom climate (Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Persson, 2015).

However, schools do not always offer or invest time into such participation activities outside of the formal curriculum and students are not usually required to participate, meaning access to such participation experiences and student self-selection might still be an issue (Hoskins et al., 2017: 91). Advantaged young people might be more inclined to participate in school discussions, and even benefit more from them, because they are more used to and more confident in this kind of interaction than their less advantaged peers (Campbell, 2008: 442, see also Eckstein & Noack, 2015).

But what happens when such learning is incorporated into the curriculum, for example in civic education? School-based civic education has been found to affect political engagement independently of social class (Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Quintelier, 2010; Whiteley, 2012; Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013). Particularly newly enfranchised young people are motivated to seek information about politics and deem the school, rather than the family, the best place to do so (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013). Formal civic education has been found to have more of an impact on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds than on their more advantaged peers when it comes to stimulating political interest (Neundorf et al., 2016) and voting intentions (Hoskins et al., 2017). It can thus reduce political inequality. Others however find that, compared to other school-based experiences such as group projects, visits to political institutions, or an open classroom climate, the effect of formal civic education is limited (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2011; Keating & Janmaat, 2016).

Outside of schools, inequalities in political participation among young people might be reduced through mobilisation, especially when it comes to voting. Research has consistently shown that participation in extracurricular activities, belonging to clubs, groups, and associations is linked to higher levels of political participation regardless of social class (Beck & Jennings, 1982; McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Verba et al., 1995). Specific issues or intensive exposure to politics can further mobilise young people, in particular those who would otherwise not be interested or engaged in politics (Verba et al., 1978). In this way, especially salient events can act as a catalyst for mass interest (Sears & Valentino, 1997).

Zeglovits and Zandonella argue that in Austria the lowering of the voting age to 16 constituted such a 'life event' (2013: 1078), showing that it triggered high levels of political interest among young people regardless of social class. Similarly, Ødegard et al. (2020) suggest that increased levels of political participation among Norwegian young people are attributable to a mass mobilising life event – the 22 July Utøya terror attacks.

Taken together, participatory activities in schools and civic education as well as mass mobilisation, for example through participation in organisations or a particularly salient 'life event', might provide avenues for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to catch up with their more advantaged peers, although the mechanisms and magnitude of this effect are not quite clear. In contexts of increasing overall levels of participation, these activities can reduce inequalities in participation: that is when young people from families of higher social class participated as would be expected, while young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are mobilised where they would normally not be interested in politics. In this case, we would expect to find lower levels of political inequality among young people in a context of increased political engagement overall (what we might call a **compensation effect**).

Political participation among young people in Scotland

Scotland offers a unique case to study social class differences in participation in contexts of increasing levels of youth political participation. Research reported increased levels of political engagement among young people in Scotland in the years after the 2014 independence referendum and the associated lowering of the voting age to 16 for Scottish and local elections. Compared to their peers in the rest of the UK, 16- and 17-year-olds from Scotland were found to be overall more interested and engaged in politics (Eichhorn, 2018b).

In 2015, young people in Scotland showed a higher willingness to participate electoral and non-electoral forms of political participation and used a greater variety of political information sources than young people elsewhere in the UK (Eichhorn, 2018b; Huebner & Eichhorn, 2020). Breeze et al. (2017) report on young people who joined political parties and became involved in other political issues (2017: 763). It is argued that the experience of voting in the referendum instilled a new 'political confidence' in some (Hill et al., 2017: 64, see also Breeze et al., 2017) and that civic education in schools played an important role in this (Eichhorn, 2018a; Hill et al. 2017).

These findings hold for young people in Scotland overall, but so far have not addressed an important question: What does this increase in political participation among young people and their newly found confidence mean for inequalities in political participation? Two scenarios are conceivable:

- (1) If young people in Scotland were largely influenced by their family background and their level of education, we would expect advantaged young people to account for more of the extra participation and political inequality to stay roughly the same or to even increase (**no effect** or **acceleration**).

(2) If however young people from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly motivated to become involved with the 2014 referendum and subsequent political issues, they might account for a disproportionately high share of the overall increase in participation, thereby leading to lower inequality (**compensation effect**).

Thus far class-based political inequality has been deemed an issue for young people across the UK (Henn et al., 2007; Park, 1999). Despite differences in policy, social class differences remain similar overall between England and Scotland, for example in terms of occupational structures (McCrone, 1992) or educational attainment (Paterson & Iannelli, 2007). There are few reasons to assume systematic differences in class-based inequality between Scotland and England in terms of educational differentiation or provision of civic education. In both Scotland and England, the majority of young people attend comprehensive public-sector schools (Paterson & Iannelli, 2007). Scotland and England have been found to show comparable levels of inequality in terms of access to good schooling (Van den Brande et al., 2019) and educational outcomes (Raffe et al., 2006). Even though education is a devolved matter, civic education is a statutory element of the curriculum in both Scotland and England (Andrews & Mycock, 2007). English civic education, meant to be 'light-touch' (Crick, 2002), is often delivered across the curriculum, but there are also schools that teach dedicated Politics or Civics classes. The Scottish equivalent, Modern Studies, is a distinct subject, offered in most Scottish schools for a limited period or at least as an elective subject, while some schools integrate civic education across the curriculum. In our survey, 60 percent of young people from Scotland said that they had taken a subject in school in which political issues are at the core, compared to just under 40 percent of students outside of Scotland.

Data & Methods

Political inequalities among young people have previously been examined in detail only for England (see for example Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019; Whiteley, 2012). To examine social class differences in youth political participation in Scotland we use data from a survey conducted across the UK in February 2015, ahead of the 2015 general election (Eichhorn et al., 2021). The survey was administered to a representative sample of the adult population (1,630 respondents in Scotland and over 5,849 in the rest of the UK) and included a boosted sample of just over 400 respondents aged 16 and 17 each in Scotland and the rest of the UK respectively (810 respondents aged 16 and 17 in total). Respondents were asked to answer questions regarding their likelihood to turn out to vote in the 2015 general election, their participation in non-electoral forms of political engagement and their engagement with different sources of political information. Furthermore, 16- and 17-year-olds were asked questions about their educational experiences and their family's engagement with politics. We examine social class differences in political participation among 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland and compare them to those among peers in the rest of the UK and the adult population in both Scotland and the rest of the UK.

The survey was conducted on behalf of the research team by a survey provider using an online panel. We applied detailed quotas for stratification by various socio-demographic variables to ensure a match to population data. Sensitivity analyses using propensity-score-matching have shown that the data from this survey closely approximates results from the British and Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys of 2014, thus providing external validity to the

data quality.¹ Any remaining deviation from population parameters were addressed by using individual-level weights adjusting for those deviations.

We use a socio-occupation-based concept of social class based on the main household's income earner (for young people, mostly that of their parents), implemented through the 5-level NRS scale (see Table 1). This distinguishes young people from households of higher managerial, administrative, or professional (A, upper middle), intermediate managerial, administrative, or professional (B, middle), supervisory, clerical, and junior managerial, administrative, or professional (C1, lower middle), and semi-skilled workers (C2, skilled working class) from young people from households including unskilled workers and the unemployed (D/E).

[Table 1 about here]

Other good frameworks for conceptualising social class of young people exist, especially those that are based on parental education (Quintelier, 2015: 288), young people's educational aspirations (Keating & Janmaat, 2016: 417), resources, such as books, in the household (Neundorf et al., 2016), or combinations thereof. However, we needed a framework that allowed to compare the responses of the adult population with the context that young people reported to be living in. To compare young and older respondents, therefore the survey established the highest socio-occupational status within the household. For nearly all young people that represented the socio-occupational class of their parents.

We analyse political participation in terms of intended and actual electoral and non-electoral participation, using three distinct measures: hypothetical voting likelihood, engagement in non-electoral forms of political participation, and engagement with political information. Hypothetical voting likelihood is measured for the 2015 general elections, assuming 16- and 17-year-olds were given the chance to vote (on a scale from 0 to 10)². Voting intentions are widely used to capture young people's future political engagement when their actual levels of participation cannot be measured (Hooghe et al., 2004; Hoskins et al., 2017; Wilkenfeld, 2009). Beyond electoral democracy, we analyse respondents' levels of non-electoral political engagement, in terms of having participated in demonstrations or boycotts, having signed petitions, or having written to a member of parliament (measuring the number of different types respondent had done, on a scale from 0 to 4)³, as well as their engagement with different types of political information sources (measuring the number of different types used in the last three months on a 0 to 6 scale)⁴.

Using a set of multivariate, ordinal regression models we examine levels of political participation along these three dependent variables among 16- and 17-year-olds of different social classes in Scotland and the rest of the UK. This analytic strategy allows us to take into

¹ For a detailed account of the data quality analyses, please see: Kenealy et al., 2017.

² "Please imagine that the voting age for UK elections was lowered to 16. Please think of a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means very unlikely and 10 means very likely, how likely would you be to vote in the 2015 general election?"

³ "Below you will find a list of some different forms of political action that people can take either in person or online. Please indicate for each one whether you have actually done this thing, whether you might do it or whether you would never, under any circumstances, do it. Participating in demonstrations, signing petitions, writing to a member of parliament, participating in boycotts"

⁴ "Have you followed the news about politics in the UK during the last three months using any of the following sources?" Print newspapers; Online news websites; Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram; TV programmes; Radio programmes; Publicity materials from political parties; Other.

account multiple ordinal measurements such as social class and being from Scotland or the rest of the UK and estimate their relationship with ordinal outcomes such as levels of engagement with different forms of political participation. We contrast findings from models of outcomes among young people to those of the respective adult populations and examine potential socialising influences that may explain the findings for 16- and 17-year-olds in line with the existing evidence and literature.

To allow for estimation of the regression models for ordinal variables the probabilities of the levels of our three categorical response variables must be transformed to a continuous scale and for this transformation, it matters how each of the three dependent variables are distributed. Most respondents said that they are fairly or very likely to vote if they were given the chance, especially respondents from Scotland. Because of this top-end skew in the distribution, the set of ordinal regressions for hypothetical voting likelihood is estimated with a complementary log-log function, typically used when higher categories are more probable. In contrast, for non-electoral forms of participation and information source usage, the data is skewed towards the lower end. We thus estimate the ordinal regressions for these two dependent variables using negative log-log functions, most often used when the probability of lower categories is high.

We proceed in three steps: (1) We first estimate differences between social classes in levels of political participation for each of the three dependent measures, controlling for gender and whether respondents are from Scotland or the rest of the UK (models 1a, 2a, 3a, Table 2). This provides a comparison between social classes for 16- and 17-year-olds across the UK as well as the average difference between young people from Scotland and their peers in the rest of the UK. We then add interaction effects between social class and whether or not a respondent is from Scotland (models 1b, 2b, 3b, Table 2) to establish whether levels of political participation by social class are different between 16- and 17-year-olds from Scotland and those in the rest of the UK.

If in this first step we find significant differences in levels of political participation by social class between 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland and peers in the rest of the UK, this would not necessarily suggest that this effect is specific to young people. In part (2) of the analysis, we therefore contrast the effects for young respondents in Scotland and the rest of the UK with those in the population aged 18 and above. Models 4a-6b (Table 3) replicate the analyses from part (1) for the adult population to establish whether potential differences are distinct for 16- and 17-year-olds or hold for the populations in Scotland and the rest of the UK more generally. This approach was successfully used by Eichhorn (2018) to show that levels for some forms of political participation, such as hypothetical voting participation, were indeed higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, but with larger differences among 16- and 17-year-olds compared to adults.

In a final step (3), we account for potential socialising factors that may explain observed differences in levels of political participation by social class among young people in Scotland and the rest of the UK. We add explanatory variables to our previous models of young people that take into account socialising influences that have been identified in the literature to potentially compensate or accelerate social class inequalities regarding levels of political participation among young people: whether young people were members of any voluntary

organisations⁵, whether over the course of the last three months young people had talked about politics with family members⁶ or in school⁷, whether young people had taken some form of formal civics-focussed classes⁸, and whether they actually took classes recently in which political issues were discussed in the classroom⁹ (models 1c-3c, Table 4). We examine whether any effects identified in part 1 of the analyses are robust beyond taking into account these socialising factors or if effects identified in step 1 may disappear when including these socialising factors, suggesting that the differences are explained by them.

Results

Figure 1 shows mean estimates (with 95% confidence intervals) for the three dependent variables, electoral political participation (in terms of hypothetical voting likelihood), non-electoral political participation, and use of information type sources for each of the socio-occupational classes, among young people from Scotland and their peers in the rest of the UK as well as for adults.

[Figure 1 about here]

There are indeed substantial differences in the social class distribution of political engagement between 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland and their peers in the rest of the UK. Taken together, 16- and 17-year-olds across England, Wales and Northern Ireland show the classic patterns of social inequality in all three dependent variables, here shown in the downward sloping mean estimates of levels of political engagement for groups of young people in the rest of the UK who are from backgrounds of decreasing social status (with young people from upper middle-class backgrounds on the left and young people from working class backgrounds on the far right). Young people from households with higher socio-occupational classes are more likely to say that they would vote in an election, that they have engaged in non-electoral forms of political participation, and that they have used a greater variety of information sources than their peers from lower socio-occupational classes. This broadly reflects what we would expect to find based on the classic pattern of inequality in political engagement.

The results for young people in Scotland however are different. For Scotland-based 16- and 17-year-olds, having parents from higher socio-occupational classes is not associated with greater political engagement. While in Scotland, too, there is some fluctuation in levels of political engagement between young people from different socio-occupational classes, there is no one-directional, linear pattern as we observe it for 16- and 17-year-olds elsewhere in the UK.

⁵ "Please look at the following list of voluntary organisations and say which, if any at all, do you belong to? Religious or church organisations; Trade unions; Political parties; Professional associations; Sports clubs; Education, arts or music associations; Local community and support groups; Other (Write in); None at all; Don't know"

⁶ "Who have you talked to how the UK is governed in the last three months, if anyone at all? Family members"

⁷ "Have you been in a class in school during the last three months in which current political issues were discussed? Yes; No"

⁸ "Have you ever taken a subject in school in which mainly issues about politics and society were discussed?"

⁹ "Have you been in a class in school during the last three months in which current political issues were discussed?"

The regression analyses confirm these findings. Examining 16- and 17-year-olds across the country, we find only a moderate effect of social class on various forms of political engagement, but a strong effect of respondents being from Scotland or not (Table 2, models 1a-3a). On average, 16- and 17-year-olds from Scotland show significantly higher levels of engagement across all measured forms of political participation, in line with the observation that levels of participation were higher overall in Scotland in 2015. Additionally, young people from socio-occupational classes A and B (and C1 for electoral participation) have slightly higher levels of engagement across all three dependent variables, but the effect is only statistically significant when contrasting socio-occupational class B with D/E for hypothetical voting likelihood and use of different types of sources for political information, not for non-electoral participation.

What then can be said about the *distribution* of political engagement among young people from different social class backgrounds in Scotland and the rest of the UK? Effects of being from Scotland and of social class on all three forms of political participation are greater after adding interaction effects between being from Scotland and social class (Table 2, models 1b-3b). This suggests that levels of political participation by social class are significantly different between 16- and 17-year-olds from Scotland and their peers in the rest of the UK. The interaction effects between being from Scotland and social class are strongly negative in direction and nearly all statistically significant. At the same time the main social class effects become stronger and comparisons of young people from households in classes A, B, and C1 to those in the lowest socio-occupational class (D/E) are significant. This indicates that higher social classes are associated with greater engagement across all three forms of political engagement, unless respondents are based in Scotland, where this effect is mitigated by the interaction of being from Scotland with social class. This result means that the context of being from Scotland or not – and thus a context of overall higher or lower levels of political engagement – *did* make a difference for levels of political inequality among 16- and 17-year-olds. Taken together, the size of the interaction mirrors that of the main effects, suggesting that while social class differences do exist for young people in the rest of the UK, we do not observe them among young people in Scotland. This indicates that, in 2015, 16- and 17-year-olds from Scotland were not only on average more engaged in politics than their peers elsewhere in the UK, but also that social class was not a strong distinguishing factor in their levels of engagement. The Scottish context did matter, and it mattered insofar as lower levels of political inequality can be observed among 16- and 17-year-olds from Scotland (indicative of a possible *compensation effect*) compared to peers from the rest of the UK. In Scotland, the tide did raise all boats, but it raised those of young people from the lowest social classes more than others.

[Table 2 about here]

Is this finding specific to 16- and 17-year-olds or does it indicate different levels of political engagement across social classes in Scotland and the rest of the UK overall? Models 4a to 6b (Table 3) replicate the above analysis for the adult population. While levels of political engagement are higher among adults in Scotland overall (as indicated by a significantly positive effect of being from Scotland for all dependent variables, see models 4a-6a), the social class distribution is not less unequal for those aged 18 or older in Scotland compared to those in the rest of the UK. Compared to adults in the lowest socio-occupational classes (D/E), adults in socio-occupational classes A and B are significantly more likely to vote, to

engage in non-electoral forms of political participation, and to use different sources of information on political issues (with the latter displaying significant effects for the classic linear relationship across all socio-occupational classes).

Yet, there is much less difference - actually hardly any at all - in the social class distributions between adult respondents in Scotland and the rest of the UK (Table 3, models 4b-6b). For hypothetical voting likelihood and non-electoral participation, the interaction effects are very small and all statistically insignificant, indicating no difference in levels of political inequality between adults in Scotland and the rest of the country (while in step 1 we saw strong differences here for the 16- and 17-year-olds, indicative of a potential compensation effect *among young people only*). For the range of information sources used, social class inequality among adults is in fact more pronounced in Scotland than elsewhere, as the interaction effects are positive and significant (model 6b). This means that the difference in social class distributions of political engagement for 16- and 17-year-olds between Scotland (where we see very little inequality) and the rest of the UK (where traditional social class inequality is clearly discernible) is not a consequence of an overall difference in population patterns. Instead, the lower levels of inequality for young people from Scotland appear to be specific to their age group – and require further investigation.

[Table 3 about here]

According to the theoretical factors that can account for a compensation of political inequalities among young people, we next examine various socialising factors that can impact social class differences in levels of political participation among young people to check whether they explain differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK (Table 4, models 1c-3c). These socialising factors theorised to account for overall lower levels of political inequality among young people include whether young people were members of any voluntary organisations, whether young people had talked about politics with family members, whether young people had taken some form of formal civics-focused classes, and whether they actually took classes recently in which political issues were discussed in the classroom.

Indeed, socialising influences have significant effects on levels of political participation among young people. Overall, 16- and 17-year-olds who talked to family members or in class about politics were more likely to plan to vote, to have taken part in non-electoral participation, and they tended to use a greater variety of information sources. Similarly, both membership of organisations such as sports clubs, arts, music or professional associations, trade unions, churches, or local community and support groups, and choosing to take civics classes are associated with greater levels of political engagement among young people (mirroring findings from previous studies; c.f. Campbell, 2008; Eichhorn, 2018a; Hoskins et al., 2017; Keating & Janmaat, 2016; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2000; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Controlling for these socialising factors reduces or partially removes effects of social class that were previously identified as statistically significant (Table 4, models 1c-3c), indicating that these activities *can* indeed lead to the observed compensation of political inequalities among young people. For example, differences in terms of hypothetical voting likelihood, non-electoral political participation, and information source types between young people whose parents are members of socio-occupational classes B and D/E are

substantially reduced and no longer significant. This indicates that indeed social class inequality in political engagement is partially a consequence of such socialising factors.

Crucially however, these socialising factors do not account for the differences between young people in Scotland and the rest of the UK in terms of social class inequality in levels of political participation. Most interaction effects between being from Scotland and social classes remain robust and their effect sizes are hardly affected (Table 4, models 1c-3c, when comparing effect sizes to those in models 1b-3b, see Table 2). So, while socialising influences matter, differences in whether or not young people discuss political issues with family members or in class, take civics classes, or are members of organisations do not comprehensively explain why we find much less social class inequality among 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland compared to their peers in the rest of the UK. Instead, the results indicate that these socialising influences similarly compensate for political inequalities among young people in Scotland as they do for young people in the rest of the UK, meaning that the substantial differences found in political inequality by social class among 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland and the rest of the UK must be accounted for by other factors.

[Table 4 about here]

Discussion

The findings suggest two key learnings: first, that compensation for inequalities in political participation in a context of increasing overall levels of participation is possible. For young people in Scotland, overall higher levels of participation after the 2014 independence referendum did not come with the levels of inequality in participation we would expect to find and which we did find in the Scottish population overall and among young people in the rest of the UK. While young people in the rest of the UK and adults from Scotland displayed a standard pattern of inequality in political engagement by social class, newly enfranchised 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland were rather equally engaged with politics, regardless of their social class. This means that for young people in Scotland, the tide *did* raise all boats, but it raised those of young people from the lowest social classes more than others.

Secondly, our examination of what might explain this compensation indicates that civic education and young people's participation experiences matter significantly for inequalities in political participation. This is in line with findings from England (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019). Having discussed politics with family members and in school, being a member of an organisation, and choosing to take civics classes all increased levels of political participation among young people and accounted for some of the difference between young people of different social classes. However, these socialising factors mattered for young people regardless of whether they lived in Scotland or other parts of the UK. They did not account for – and hence cannot explain – the differences in social class inequality in levels of political participation between young people in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

This means that other influences must have shaped the behaviours of 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland – mobilising in particular those young people from lower social classes – in a way that was distinct from their peers elsewhere in the UK. One obvious contextual factor is the Scottish independence referendum of 2014. The data underlying these analyses was collected in 2015, a few months after the referendum, and could thus indicate a sustained

referendum effect. However, our finding of sustained levels of inequality in the adult population in Scotland suggests that a general referendum effect is not a sufficient explanation. If the differences were due to the referendum in general, then we would have expected to see similar patterns among the young and the adult population in Scotland – but that was not the case.

While it is likely that the independence referendum had an impact on young people in Scotland, we cannot simply attribute the findings to an overall referendum effect. Another unique contextual factor is the lowering of the voting age in Scotland. With the voting age lowered, 16- and 17-year-olds were of particular interest during the referendum campaign. They were specifically targeted in voter registration drives and by the media. In contrast to peers in the rest of the UK, the lowering of the voting age also made voting and becoming engaged with politics less of a hypothetical scenario for young people in Scotland. It gave young people an opportunity to vote on a salient political issue and ample space to discuss this issue with friends, family members and in schools, which could have impacted young people from lower social classes.

Further research should consider what may have been distinct for young people in Scotland, in particular for those from lower social classes, in their experience of engaging in politics that set it apart from that of peers in the rest of the UK and older adults in Scotland. Another key question is how long-lasting and sustained the findings of lower inequality and higher levels of political participation among young people in Scotland are. If it was the lowering of the voting age that mobilised young people in Scotland to engage with politics, in particular those of the lowest social classes, we would expect to see a similar effect on subsequent cohorts of young people in Scotland, and potentially in Wales too, where the voting age has been lowered in time for the 2021 Welsh Parliament election. If however it was the unique combination of the independence referendum and the lowering of the voting age that mobilised young people in Scotland – in line with a uniquely mobilising ‘life event’ (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013: 1078, see also Ødegard et al., 2020) – we would expect to see this cohort and subsequent generations of Scottish young people return to the standard pattern of inequality in political participation that is driven by social class.

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Table 1: 5-level NRS scale of household socio-occupational social class (for most young people in the survey that of their parents, based on National Readership Survey, n.d.)

Grade	Social class	Main household income earner's profession
A	Upper middle class	Higher managerial roles, administrative or professional
B	Middle class	Intermediate managerial roles, administrative or professional
C1	Lower middle class	Supervisory, clerical or junior managerial roles, administrative or professional
C2	Skilled working class	Skilled workers
D/E	Working class and non-working	Semi-/unskilled workers, casual workers, unemployed

Table 2: Ordinal regression models for 16- and 17- year-olds for hypothetical voting likelihood, non-electoral political participation, and information sources used

	1a		1b		2a		2b		3a		3b	
	Hypothetical voting likelihood ^a				Non-electoral political participation ^b				Information source types ^b			
	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.
Social Class (Base: D/E)												
A	1.34	.18	1.59	.23*	1.22	.19	2.64	.30***	1.14	.15	2.12	.23***
B	1.49	.16*	1.89	.21**	1.05	.17	1.84	.29*	1.34	.14*	1.56	.21*
C1	1.17	1.4	1.40	.17*	0.80	.16	1.29	.26	1.04	.13	1.41	.18+
C2	0.91	.16	1.23	.19	0.86	.18	1.15	.30	0.92	.14	1.20	.21
Female	1.01	.09	1.01	.09	0.77	.10*	0.79	.10*	0.93	.08	0.94	.08
Being from Scotland	2.11	.10***	3.77	.27***	1.70	.11***	3.77	.29***	1.41	.08***	2.56	.22***
Interactions												
From Scotland X Social Class (A)			0.57	.39			0.26	.39***			0.31	.31***
From Scotland X Social Class (B)			0.51	.35+			0.37	.36**			0.65	.28
From Scotland X Social Class (C1)			0.57	.32+			0.41	.34**			0.50	.25**
From Scotland X Social Class (C2)			0.41	.34**			0.57	.39			0.54	.29*
-2 Log Likelihood	682.7		675.2		293.0		278.9		571.9		555.9	
Cox and Snell Pseudo R ²	0.097		0.105		0.053		0.070		0.041		0.061	
N	810		810		810		810		810		810	

***p≤0.001, **p≤0.01, *p≤0.05, +p≤0.10; ^acomplementary log-log function applied, ^bnegative log-log function applied

Table 3: Ordinal regression models for adults aged 18 years and older for hypothetical voting likelihood, non-electoral political participation, and information sources used

		4a		4b		5a		5b		6a		6b	
		Hypothetical voting likelihood ^a				Non-electoral political participation ^b				Information source types ^b			
		OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.
Social Class (Base: D/E)													
	A	1.40	.08***	1.38	.09***	1.43	.06***	1.39	.07***	1.75	.05***	1.66	.06***
	B	1.49	.06***	1.49	.06**	1.33	.04***	1.34	.05***	1.78	.04***	1.70	.04***
	C1	1.02	.05	1.01	.06	1.06	.04	1.05	.05	1.30	.04***	1.23	.04***
	C2	0.96	.06	0.97	.07	0.97	.05	0.99	.06	1.11	.04*	1.03	.05
	Female	1.27	.04***	1.27	.04***	1.04	.03	1.04	.03	1.37	.03***	1.37	.03***
	Being from Scotland	1.76	.05***	1.73	.11***	1.19	.04***	1.19	.08*	1.25	.03***	1.04	.07
Interactions													
	From Scotland X Social Class (A)			1.07	.23			1.11	.14			1.26	.12+
	From Scotland X Social Class (B)			1.00	.16			0.95	.10			1.23	.09*
	From Scotland X Social Class (C1)			1.07	.15			1.05	.10			1.26	.09**
	From Scotland X Social Class (C2)			0.92	.17			0.95	.13			1.42	.11***
-2 Log Likelihood		949.3		948.4		528.8		524.7		782.1		769.4	
Cox and Snell Pseudo R ²		0.036		0.038		0.015		0.016		0.073		0.072	
N		7479		7479		7479		7479		7479		7479	

***p≤0.001, **p≤0.01, *p≤0.05, +p≤0.10; ^acomplementary log-log function applied, ^bnegative log-log function applied

Table 4: Ordinal regression models for 16- and 17-year-olds accounting for socialisation influences

	1c		2c		3c	
	Hypothetical voting likelihood ^a		Non-electoral political participation ^b		Information source types ^b	
	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.	OR	s.e.
Social Class (Base: D/E)						
A	1.16	.25	2.20	.32*	1.43	.24
B	1.37	.24	1.64	.31	1.08	.23
C1	1.40	.19 ⁺	1.17	.28	1.37	.19 ⁺
C2	1.04	.22	1.00	.33	1.11	.22
Female	0.89	.11	1.25	.11*	0.82	.09*
Being from Scotland	3.32	.33***	3.00	.30***	2.12	.23***
Interactions						
From Scotland X Social Class (A)	0.65	.44	0.27	.41**	0.40	.32**
From Scotland X Social Class (B)	0.48	.40 ⁺	0.35	.38**	0.68	.29
From Scotland X Social Class (C1)	0.50	.38 ⁺	0.43	.36*	0.44	.27**
From Scotland X Social Class (C2)	0.38	.40*	0.76	.41	0.74	.30
Member of an organisation	1.41	.11**	1.01	.12	1.44	.09***
Talked to family about politics	1.68	.11***	1.41	.12**	1.95	.09***
Civics classes (Base: None)						
Yes, had to take	0.97	.14	1.44	.16*	1.29	.12*
Yes, chose to take	1.33	.14*	2.02	.14***	1.89	.11***
Yes, not sure	1.02	.20	1.36	.24	1.36	.17 ⁺
Politics discussed in class	1.52	.11***	1.32	.12*	1.81	.09***
-2 Log Likelihood	2027		1124		1883	
Cox and Snell Pseudo R ²	0.185		0.157		0.289	
N	715		715		715	

***p≤0.001, **p≤0.01, *p≤0.05, +p≤0.10; ^acomplementary log-log function applied, ^bnegative log-log function applied

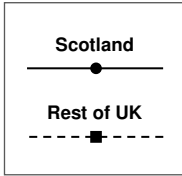


Figure 1: Political engagement by social class in Scotland and the rest of the UK for 16-17-year-olds and adults (means with 95% confidence intervals)

