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**DOES THE WEB CREATE A PATHWAY TO POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?
AN EXAMINATION INTO THE EFFECTS OF ELECTORAL WEBSITES ON POLITICAL
ATTITUDES, BEHAVIOUR AND COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT.**

**A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in Social Change in
the Faculty of Humanities**

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Abstract

Does the web create a pathway to political engagement for young people? An examination into the effects of electoral websites on political attitudes, behaviour and cognitive engagement.

This paper seeks to examine the impact of electoral websites on young people's electoral engagement, focusing on the 2012 London Mayoral and US Presidential election. It does so by employing an innovative research design to connect the supply and demand side of the equation, including quantitative content analysis and an innovative experiment that allows for qualitative evaluation as well as for an examination of the causal effects of exposure to specific websites. The three specific types of websites examined in each election are: youth mobilization websites, the official candidate campaigning websites and Vote Advice Applications. We explore the effects of these websites on behavioural, cognitive and attitudinal aspects of engagement: likelihood of voting, attention to news, internal and external efficacy and political trust. Research to date on the effect of electoral websites on young people has produced mixed results on political engagement and efficacy (e.g. Tedesco, 2007; Xenos and Kyoung, 2008). We find no direct effect on young people for voting across the websites but we do find a number of significant effects across the other variables, which are occasionally found only amongst those with the lowest pre-existing levels of engagement. This leads us to conclude that the web can create a pathway to participation for young people but this is dependent on the specific type and attributes of the website, the election context and the young person themselves.

Keywords: *political engagement, attention to news, political efficacy, political trust, youth, voting, 2012 election, London Mayoral election*

Cheryl Anderson, University of Manchester, PhD in Social Change

26/06/15

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Dedication

This thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of many people. Firstly I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors: Rachel Gibson, Dave Cutts and Marta Cantijoch, for all of their patience, encouragement and belief throughout the PhD process. Special thanks go to Pippa Norris and Diana Owen for kindly hosting me at Harvard and Georgetown.

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Introduction

This thesis examines the question of whether political websites can offer a means to engage young people in politics. It makes an original contribution to the broader research fields of digital politics, web communication and youth engagement by exploring three different types of election mobilization websites across two different election contexts, in order to understand both the supply and demand sides of the engagement equation. It does so by firstly analysing the content and features of each type of website, before utilizing an innovative experimental method to find out how young people experience the websites and isolating the causal effects of exposure to the websites, in order to understand if any of the websites create direct or indirect effects on young people's electoral engagement. Our three chosen types of websites: youth mobilization websites, candidate campaign websites and Vote Advice Applications (VAAs) have an increasing presence at elections in the US and the UK, but have rarely been the subject of systematic study to examine effects on users, particularly young people and so we aim to move the body of knowledge forward with our study. VAAs in particular have tended to be examined in terms of effects on vote choice, with less attention paid to their potential effects on more pre-participatory aspects and very little research has been undertaken on these specific sites in the US and UK, as compared to European nations. By examining these VAAs in these two countries as well as developing a new coding scheme in order to analyse the functions and features of these sites, we believe we have made a significant substantive and methodological contribution, especially to the growing field of VAA research. Across the two election cases, we find a number of interesting similarities and differences between our two chosen election cases and between the different types of sites, which we do find are often experienced differently depending on whether the viewer is 18-30 or over. In terms of effects, we do find evidence that exposure to election websites can significantly affect young people's engagement, dependent on the specific website, aspect of engagement, election context and the characteristics of the young people themselves.

Our interest in examining the question of young people's engagement stems from the fact that in recent years, young people have been disengaging from formal electoral politics and many have seen this as a cause for concern. Building on the idea that voting is a habit to be learnt and once acquired, individuals tend to continue to vote, the greatest concern is that if this habit is not established then the pattern is likely to continue to repeat itself throughout both current young adult's lives and future generations, leaving a cumulative 'footprint' of low participation (Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Franklin, 2004; Norris, 1997, Plutzer, 2002). If we hold that that political participation has benefits for both the individual and society in general (e.g. Mill, 1955; Pateman, 1976), any decline in participation raises concerns for the health of a democracy. Whilst falling turnout might be traditionally considered as a mark of a disengaged or dissatisfied electorate (Teixera, 1992; Dalton, 1999), more recent work suggests that a move away from traditional electoral participation might reflect a more critical and informed citizenry, with young people taking part in alternative forms of political participation (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011). This thesis does not seek to assess this debate from a normative point of view but does accept the idea that changes in young people's formal engagement with politics has significance and impact on the democratic process and introduces potential problems of representation. For example, it has been suggested that where large numbers of the electorate do not participate in politics, it brings into question the democratic legitimacy of these countries, as unequal representation of citizens is a serious threat to democratic government (Schlozman, Verba and Brady, 1999, Topf, 1995, Teixeira, 1992, Wattenberg, 2002). As Mesch and Coleman put it, "Any political system in which a large section of the population is either unwilling or unable to participate is not satisfactorily representative", (2007:35). Aside from the institutional effects, young people are likely to have different interests and values from other parts of society and if they are not engaged with the electoral process, they run the risk of having little real representation or opportunities to protect these rights and values (Henn et al, 2002; Mill, 1958).

On a less theoretical level, several scholars have examined the effects on young people's low turnout in specific elections and have argued that had young people turned out in higher numbers in the

1992 British general election (Dorling et al, 1996) and the 2000 and 2004 US elections (Dalton, 2008; Wattenberg, 2002), they may well have changed the outcome of these elections. Young people's votes therefore do matter and whilst we do not wish to essentialise youth, we feel that it is important to examine and understand their patterns of participation and seek ways to increase their turnout and broader political engagement (Mycock and Tonge, 2014).

A variety of theories have been proposed as to why young people might be less engaged with electoral politics, often based on either problems with young people and society (the demand side) or issues with politicians and political systems (the supply side). Very few studies have focussed on what young people themselves think (e.g. Marsh et. al 2007, Collin 2015), but where they have, the answer is often a combination of both: whilst many have some level of interest in issues and politics, they lack confidence in their knowledge and understanding of politics, feel that politicians do not communicate well or listen to younger voters and they do not trust politicians to keep their promises (Henn and Foard, 2011; 2014). Any solution to youth engagement therefore needs to address both the supply and demand side of the equation.

Many have hoped that the web might hold the answer to revitalizing youth engagement, given that young people today can be considered 'digital natives', having grown up with the internet and it being fully integrated into their daily lives. Several studies have concluded that the political web can impact on political engagement (e.g. Boullianne, 2009) and may have indirect effects on participation by affecting levels of important pre-participatory attitudes such as political efficacy and trust or increasing levels of attention to news and thus leading young people to become more engaged with elections and their own participation. For parties and candidates, the web provides a new opportunity to potentially reach young people outside traditional methods of contact.

Much of the recent research relating to the web and young people's engagement, has tended to focus on social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. However, there are a number of different types of mobilization websites designed specifically to engage people in elections, including

young people and with the attention largely focussed on social media, the potential role and effects of these websites have been somewhat left behind. These mobilization websites include youth mobilization websites, election campaign websites from candidates and Vote Advice Applications. Whilst these sites appear to be growing in number and quality with each election, there has been a lack of systematic research connecting the make-up of these websites with their potential effects; in other words attempting to connect the supply and demand sides.

This thesis will attempt to shed some light on these specific types of websites, using the case studies of the US Presidential election in 2012 and the London Mayoral election in the same year to do so. Whilst this is not a comparative study in the truest sense, we wanted to provide a robust critical test of mobilizing effects of the web on young people and specifically understand the nature of mobilization websites, and so wanted to examine two similar types of elections in order to examine if any findings were replicated across the two contexts. The majority of the research on websites and political engagement has tended to focus on the US, given its history of digital innovation on candidate campaigning websites and in addition, it has a relatively long tradition of youth mobilization organisation and websites. Therefore the US is a crucial context in which to explore the nature of mobilization websites and effects, given that it has also suffered declines in young people's engagement over the last few decades. In order to keep the type of election constant, we chose the London Mayoral election as our second case. Whilst there are clearly differences between these elections in terms of size, office and profile, it allows us a rare chance to examine candidate-centred elections in both countries. It also enables us to explore a second-order election, albeit a high profile one, which is important as turnout in second-order elections is usually much lower than general elections (e.g. Wattenberg, 2012) and therefore any aids to increasing electoral engagement would be especially useful for these kinds of elections. We emphasise here that this is not a country comparison, as the electorate for the London Mayoral election differs in several respects from the UK as a whole but there may be implications of our findings for general elections.

These two cases lead us to conflicting expectations in terms of how the different types of websites might be presented in each election and what effects might be seen. On the one hand, we might expect to see more sophisticated websites and greater effects from the sites in the US, given the longer history of web campaigning by candidates and non-partisan youth mobilization organisations and we therefore might expect these sites to achieve greater effects. On the other hand, we might expect to see candidates in the Mayoral election to make greater use of the web in campaigning than we might see in general elections for example, and perhaps we might see stronger effects on those who view the websites as there is greater potential to be informed and mobilized in a second-order election.

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter, the literature review, consists of four sections. The first examines changes in turnout at a general level, before narrowing our focus to youth engagement and the theoretical explanations for these changes as well as some of the solutions that have been proposed to increase young people's participation in elections. The second section focuses on the web and engagement, tracing the body of research from its early theories to the most recent empirical research. The third section examines the three different types of mobilization websites: youth mobilization, candidate campaign sites and Vote Advice Applications, and the fourth section identifies gaps in the literature and presents our research questions. The second chapter outlines the data and methods used to address the research questions; focussing firstly on the quantitative content analysis used to examine the supply side before turning to the survey and experiment, which allow us to examine the demand side in a number of different ways. We then present three empirical chapters. The first, chapter 3, presents the findings for the content analysis of the three types of websites across the two elections. Chapter 4 examines the impact, evaluation and experience of the highest-scoring websites from the previous chapter among young people. Finally chapter 5 presents the results of the findings of the experiment to examine if exposure to any of the websites has direct or indirect effects on behaviour, cognitive engagement or political

attitudes. Our sixth and final chapter, concludes our research with a discussion of our findings overall and the implications of these results.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

The chapter is divided into three sections: the first examines turnout and young people's political engagement, the second explores the relationship between the web and engagement and the final section brings together the literature on the three specific types of electoral website. In this section, we first outline the changes in turnout in established democracies, before turning to examine specifically youth turnout, focussing on the US and the UK. We will examine the trends in young people's turnout over time to examine if the changes are simply a result of lifecycle effects or if generational effects are at play. Following this, we will examine the key theories of participation to see the extent to which they can explain why this is occurring, alongside some particular factors that have been suggested as having a role to play in young people's engagement. We turn finally to some of the solutions that have been proposed to address the problems of youth engagement.

1.1 Electoral engagement and theoretical perspectives

1.1.1 Is turnout declining among young people?

Since the 1960s, there has been widespread concern about the seeming "crisis of engagement" amongst established democracies, with much attention focused on changes in turnout, specifically a decline in many countries. Examining the average turnout of twenty-two Anglo-American and European countries from 1945 to 1999, Franklin (2004) showed a rise in turnout from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, which is then followed by a period of declining turnout which continued to the end of the time period studied. Whilst this decline is clearly of concern, it is worth noting that it consists of around six to seven percentage points and so on average, turnout can be considered

relatively stable across these countries. What is important to note here is that whilst at an overall level turnout is relatively stable, turnout does vary by country and needs to also be examined at this level, especially given that some countries are showing signs of recovery as we shall examine later in this section.

Franklin (2004) argues that a consistent (and the largest) contributing factor to turnout decline across countries is in fact generational replacement, specifically the cohorts entering the electorate after the voting age had been lowered to 18 in the majority of the countries studied, which were both larger than previous cohorts of young people and consisting of younger people less likely to vote. Whilst this is not the case in all established democracies, (for example Japan has also seen declining turnout without having reduced voting age to 18, although this is likely to be enforced in 2016), it is clear that youth turnout is an important factor in understanding changes in overall turnout.

It is generally accepted that young people will have lower levels of turnout than older citizens (Norris, 2002; Phelps, 2005; Fieldhouse et al, 2007) and this usually attributed to lifecycle effects, suggesting that young people are likely to become more engaged with politics as they get older and acquire the responsibilities of adulthood (Verba and Nie, 1972; Highton and Wolfinger, 2001). Implicit in the idea of the lifecycle effect is that low levels of political engagement have always been characteristic of youth and if this is the case, youth political engagement at the aggregate level within a specific country should remain fairly stable over time. Franklin (2004) examined the average turnout by cohort in six countries (Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States) and found that whilst the majority did show a general pattern of decline from earlier cohorts to more recent, this was not always the case, with some countries actually seeing increases in turnout amongst later cohorts, notably Germany and Sweden. This suggests that declining youth turnout is not inevitable and that other factors can override generational replacement. This was not evident in the US and the UK, who saw large differences in youth turnout in the time period studied,

with much lower turnout amongst the most recent cohorts. We therefore turn our focus to the patterns of youth turnout over time in the US and the UK, to establish if there are differences not only between different cohorts but between older and younger citizens.

To examine this, we can use the national election studies in the UK and the US to track turnout by age group over time to see if youth participation is really in terminal decline or if the picture is more nuanced. This also allows us to study more recent cohorts than the scope of Franklin's and to understand if there are changes over time and if different patterns can be seen in the two countries. Turning first to the UK (figure 1), we see that as expected, young people (here defined as 18-30 year olds) have always voted at a lower rate than older groups but that youth turnout remains relatively high, until the 1997 election where we see a steep decline and the gap between younger and older voters increasing, a pattern which continues to the low of the 2005 election. In 2010 however, we do see an increase in the youth vote and the gap between 18-30 year olds and the 31-59 group reduces to 10 percentage points. At the time of writing, data was not yet available on the 2015 election but forecasts from the British Election Study suggest that youth turnout could be high, in line with an overall high turnout (Kingman, 2015). This pattern in the UK does suggest that for the most recent cohorts, there is something beyond just the lifecycle effect happening. The concept of generational effects suggests that formative and historically specific experiences during adolescence and early adulthood create a lasting imprint on young people which affects their political orientations and behaviour, which in turn affects voting patterns in the present and the future (Zukin, 2006; Martin, 2012). In the UK therefore, we do see some evidence of generational effects, although the electoral context from 1997-2010 cannot be ignored.

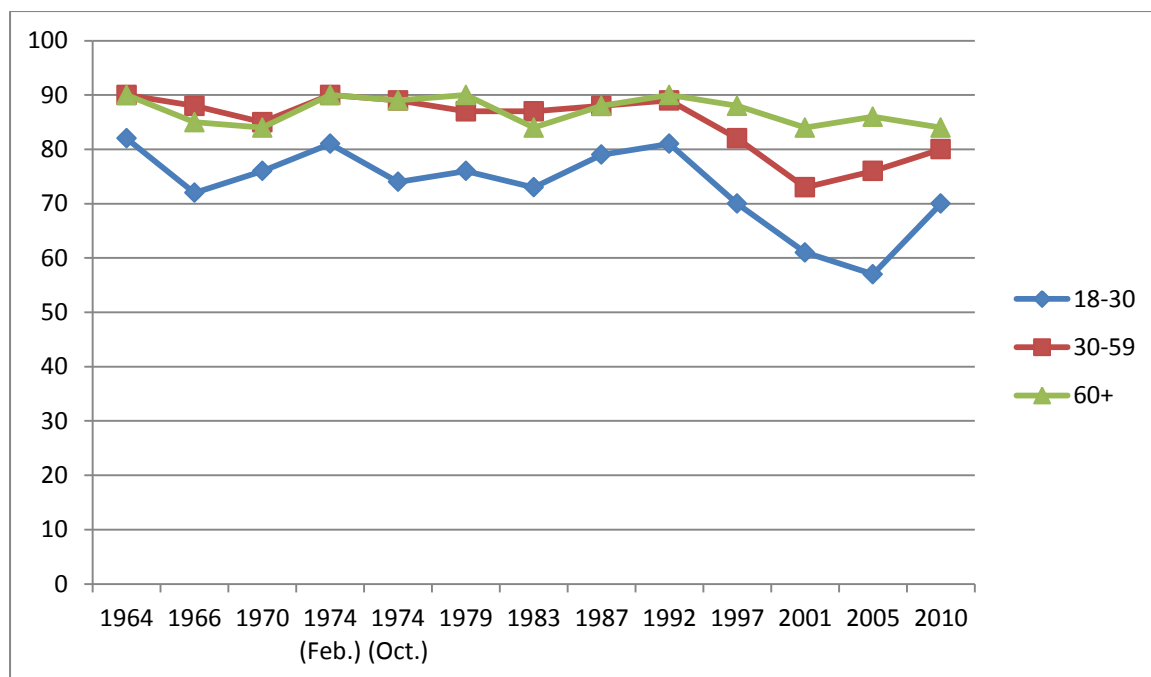


Figure 1: Voter Turnout in the UK 1964-2010 (British Election Study)

Turning to the US, we see that the pattern of youth turnout is not so much one of on-going decline but rather of volatility (figure 2). From 1972 to 1988, we do see a trend of declining youth turnout, reaching a low of 50% in 1988. 2004 saw a sharp increase and although the ANES shows a small drop again in 2008, other sources suggest that this might be attributed to changes in the wording of the ANES in that particular year and suggest that young people's turnout actually increased again (CIRCLE, 2008; Falcone, 2008; Milner, 2010). Looking at data from the US Census Bureau however, suggests that youth turnout did increase but by just 2%, hardly the 'Year of the Youth Vote' that many commentators had described Obama's campaign as (Wattenberg, 2012). For 2012, the ANES suggest that turnout declined overall and young people's turnout fell to around 51%. Other sources suggest different calculations but all conclude that turnout among young people in 2012 was lower than 2004 and 2008 (CIRCLE, 2013). What we see across the time period is that even when youth turnout has risen, large gaps have opened up between young people and older age groups, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st century. This suggests that young people are becoming less

likely to vote than older people and lends support to the concept of generational rather than simply lifecycle effects.

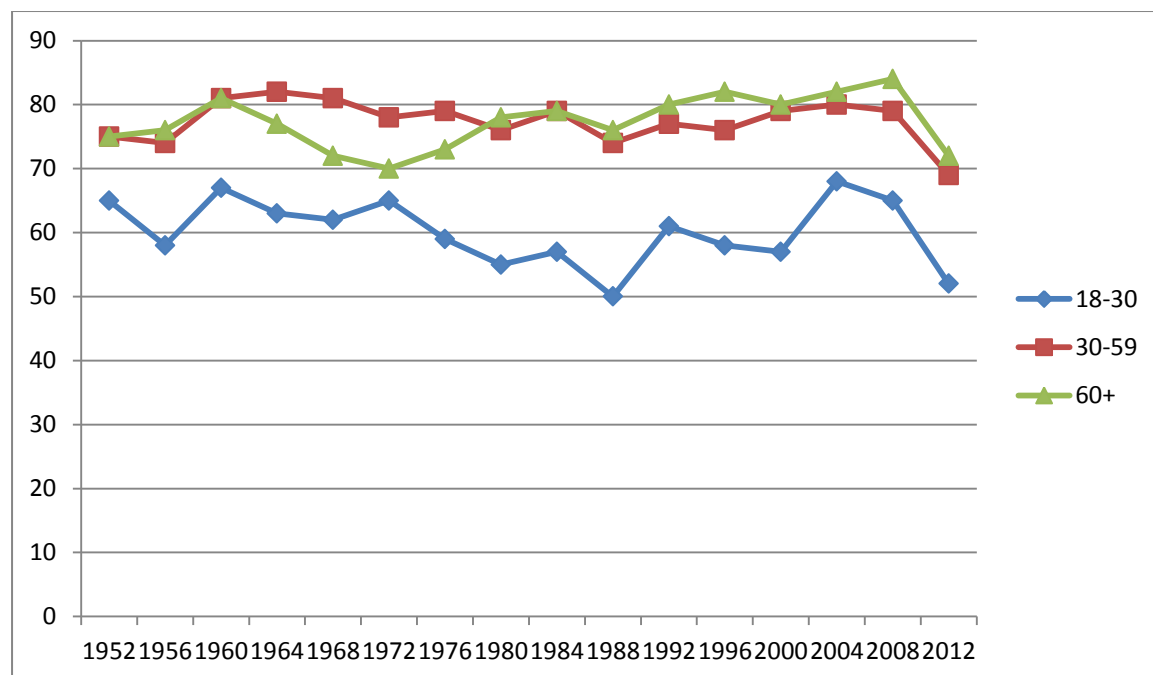


Figure 2: Voter Turnout in the US 1952-2012 (American National Election Study)

Across the two countries, the trend is volatility rather than a straightforward decline and as Martin (2012) suggests, young people should be considered volatile voters rather than non-voters and it is not a given that they will vote at lower levels than earlier cohorts (although we acknowledge that the general trend is one of decline). However, there is still cause for concern. Firstly, we see that in recent years larger gaps have been opening up between younger and older citizens, suggesting a specific generational effect (Clarke et al., 2004) and secondly, young people are noticeably absent from some elections. Here we have examined the turnout patterns for general elections but Wattenberg (2012) suggests that the pattern for second-order elections is worse, with very small proportions of young people engaged in them. Why are young people, particularly those in the late 20th and early 21st century (also known as Generation Y) engaged with some elections and not others?

Understanding the reasons why people do or do not turn out to vote, has been a challenge for many scholars over the years leading to a number of different explanatory and occasionally over-lapping theories. These can largely be grouped in terms of supply and demand: those that relate to the voters (or indeed non-voters) and those that relate to the parties and elections around them. In our next section, we will examine the key theoretical explanations for turnout and assess the extent to which they can explain these changing patterns in young people's turnout.

1.1.2 Explanations for youth (dis)engagement

We now turn to examine the three main groups of theories relating to electoral participation: rational choice approaches, sociological approaches and civic voluntarism, in order to understand what each can tell us about changes in young people's engagement.

Rational choice approaches

The rational choice or rational actor model (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968) focuses on the demand side of the equation and suggests that individuals must first decide what the expected benefits of participation are to them and weigh these up against the expected costs. If the costs of voting e.g. time, the effort required to find out information etc. outweigh the expected benefits of voting, then the theory implies that the individual is unlikely to vote. Given that it is highly unlikely that one vote will make a difference to the result of an election, it is considered irrational to vote but the fact that many people do is often referred to as the 'paradox of participation'. Building on the general rational choice framework, the general incentives model (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley and Seyd, 2002) incorporates a wider range of benefits or incentives to vote, recognising that people may also desire to fulfil social norms by undertaking their civic duty or more altruistic reasons relating to benefits for members of their group or society as a whole. Butler and Stokes (1969) also

suggest that voters may also have expressive reasons for voting such as wanting to show support for their party of favoured candidate or as has been seen more recently, to send a message to government (Franklin, 2004).

A more specific rational choice theory relates to issue voting, whereby a potential voter is motivated to vote by their interest or concern in a particular or set of issues (Thomassen, 2004). Butler and Stokes (1974) suggest that there are four conditions that must be met if it is considered to be issue voting: that the voter must be aware of the issue or issues, that they must have a particular opinion on or attitude towards the issue, that they must see that parties as having different policies on the issue and therefore they vote, and specifically vote for the party that they see as being closest to their own stance on the issue.

For rational choice theories to explain young people's turnout, it implies that the cost of participation must always outweigh the benefits for them. Assuming that the physical costs of voting in terms of actually going to a polling station and casting a vote are no heavier than for any other member of the general public, we can infer that any differences are likely to be found in varying levels of interest and knowledge of politics as low levels of these would likely lead to a lower likelihood of voting. Several studies suggest that some level of cognitive engagement with political issues and events is necessary for political participation (e.g. Verba et al., 1995; Zukin et al., 2006) so is it true that young people have lower levels of interest and knowledge of current affairs than older citizens?

Interest and Attention to News

Starting first with interest in politics, the 'disaffection perspective' (Loader, 2007) has often been the one embraced by media accounts of today's young people, suggesting they are lazy and apathetic (see Russell, 2004; Phelps, 2012) and locates the 'blame' for non-participation at the door of young people themselves (Kimberlee, 2002, Fahmy, 2006). This is in line with Putnam's (2000) suggestions

of a 'post-civic' generation who are not interested in politics and value materialism over voting or civic participation. The definition and measurement of political interest has been debated within the literature, with overlaps into political knowledge, attentiveness to news and in some instances political understanding, which would be more usually understood as political efficacy (Zaller, 1992; Milner, 2010). Findings from the literature relating to young people's interest is somewhat mixed, which may relate to these issues of operationalization. Whilst Inglehart (1997) and Dalton (2000a) suggest that political interest is increasing, the majority of the literature relating to young people in the US and the UK suggests that their levels of interest are decreasing (e.g. Galston, 2007; Levine, 2007; Jowell and Park, 1998; Pattie et al., 2004). A more recent study in the UK however, looking at 18 year olds prior to the 2010 general election found that the majority did have some level of political interest (Henn and Foard, 2011).

Martin (2012) has tracked the changes in interest by age group to examine if there have been any noticeable differences in young people's interest and if this can be attributed to lifecycle or generational effects. In the UK, the BES asks how much interest respondents have in politics and using data from 1974 to 2010, we can see that young people are less interested in politics than older people but the gap between the two is relatively consistent. Most interestingly, from 2001 the trend is actually an increase in interest across the age groups, with levels of interest across the time period higher than at the start. Therefore in the UK, we do not see a generational decline in political interest.

Turning to the US, the closest question in the ANES asks how often respondents follow what's going on in government and public affairs, which Martin (2012) uses as a proxy for interest but is better defined as attention to news, although clearly there are overlaps between the two. Rational choice theory suggests that people need to be aware of political issues and events and that parties have different policies to be more likely to vote and Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) suggest that it is particularly crucial for young people to understand what policies would most benefit them: in other

words, connecting the dots between the world of formal politics and issues that are most relevant to them or that they are most interested in.

Specifically relating to electoral participation, Wattenberg (2012) argues that irregular attention to news and low political knowledge means that young people are less likely to know who is actually running for office, what the candidates stand for, be interested in the issues being debated and have less idea of what is at stake in particular elections, both individually and for the wider population. He argues that young people have failed to be socialized into habits of media consumption of previous generations, whereby they no longer pay frequent attention to news and current affairs.

Returning to the ANES data from 1960 onwards, we see that much like the pattern for turnout, there is not a straightforward decline in young people's attention to politics but rather a pattern of high volatility. Despite this volatility, if we compare the start of the time period to the end, young people have approximately the same amount of attentiveness to politics, however the extremely low levels of interest in some elections (most noticeably in 2000) may be a cause for concern. Therefore, the evidence does not support the idea of young people becoming less interested or attentive to politics per se, but from the late 1990s, we do see larger gaps opening up between younger and older age groups, suggesting that young people are becoming less interested or attentive to politics relative to older people in the US.

Evidence from the World Values survey shows that just 17% of 18-29 year olds follow politics in the news every day in the US, compared to 63% of the over 65s. In the UK, the situation is even more concerning as although there is a slighter smaller gap between the age groups (8% of 18-29 year olds compared to 35% of the over 65s), the UK had the lowest scores of the 14 countries studied. Prior (2007) suggests that this may not be a deliberate choice to avoid news but simply that younger people are much more likely to choose entertainment instead. Given the plethora of entertainment options across media sources, it is very easy for young people to pay little attention to news. This is in line with Schudson's (1998) argument that young people today are now monitorial citizens rather

than informed citizens, whereby they scan information rather than engaging deeply with news. He suggests that young people may seem inactive but if a candidate or issue truly engages them, they can be mobilized to action.

The overall trend seems to be that young people have some interest in politics but they are not regularly consuming news in any great depth, which in turn results in low levels of political awareness and therefore a lower likelihood of voting. However, the volatility in the US suggests that young people can be engaged by short-term determinants such as particular events and candidates; but this does rather depend on them being aware of these events and therefore attention to news is likely to be a key factor in explaining turnout. Rational choice theory therefore does highlight some of the key determinants of youth turnout but does not provide a full explanation. We therefore turn to the sociological approaches to understand what the social context of individuals might add to our understanding of youth engagement.

Sociological approaches

The sociological approach originated with the Columbia School (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Berelson et al., 1954) and argues that social environment is a key determinant in political behaviour. At its simplest, this suggests that people participate because their social location including their class and group memberships, drive them to vote. A more nuanced socio-psychological theory was developed by the Michigan School (Campbell et al., 1960) building on socialization theory suggesting that voting behaviour and political attitudes are informally learned through social structures such as the family, social cleavages and institutions such as the church (Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Jennings et al., 2009; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Sapiro, 2004). It is suggested that two of the key mechanisms by which this takes place are party identification and civic duty.

The concept of party identification (also referred to as party ID or partisanship is integral to the Michigan model. It suggests that social influences, particularly those within the family, help

individuals to develop attachments to a particular party, which are often informed and strengthened by class cleavages (Dalton, 2004). The stronger this sense of affinity, the more likely an individual is to vote (Verba et. al, 1995; Zukin et al., 2006; Denver et al, 2012). The notion of civic duty encompasses a number of different themes such as abiding by the law or paying taxes but our interest here is on the concept of being a good citizen by voting. Family and societal norms transmit that turning out at elections is part of doing your civic duty and therefore promote electoral participation. Several studies have suggested that a high level of civic duty in relation to voting is one of the key predictors of turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Blais, 2000; Milner, 2010).

An alternative sociological approach relates to social capital theory, popularised by the work of Coleman (1988, 1990) but fully developed in relation to political participation by Putnam (2000). In essence, social capital refers to the interactions and networks between people: where an individual has high levels of these alongside social trust, they are more likely to vote. Strong social ties are also likely to be a mechanism of transmitting social norms, in other words a means of socialization.

For young people, it can be argued that the socialization process has gone somewhat awry (Loader, 2007) as extensive social change has occurred concurrently with the fall in electoral participation (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). The sociological approach as outlined above offers a fairly good explanation of the previously relatively stable political systems, whereby young people learnt the political orientations and behaviours that are seen as necessary for participation. However, it has been suggested that the traditional socialization process has broken down and these attitudes and behaviours are no longer being disseminated to young people; whether this is from social networks and institutions or from the family and household context (e.g. Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2012). Several scholars suggest that suggests that the changes in youth electoral participation are rooted in socio-economic modernization which has led to greater individualisation, post-materialism and changing conceptions of personal identity, alongside a more critical citizenry (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Norris, 2011). It has been argued that young people are

more likely to engage in non-electoral forms of participation (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1995), be drawn to single issue groups such as New Social Movements (Dalton, 1998; Hallsworthy, 1994) or to alternative forms of participation such as protest or consumer politics (O'Toole et al., 2003; Pattie et al., 2004; Tarrow, 1990). Many have theorised that this is due to changes in how people conceive of citizenship, with young people arguably more likely to have notions of engaged or self-actualizing citizenship, involving more direct and self-expressive participation compared to more traditional and dutiful conceptions of citizenship (Vromen, 2003; Zukin et al., 2006, Bennett et al., 2009).

This suggests that young people are less likely to have high levels of civic duty and of partisanship: both key predictors of turnout. Turning firstly to civic duty, the literature suggests that young people in both the UK and the US do have low levels of civic duty (Topf, 1995a; Pattie et al., 2004; Clarke et al., 2004; MacManus, 1996; Zukin et al., 2006). Dalton (2009) found that civic duty was both lowest among young people and had declined over the generations, suggesting generational effects at play in the US. Martin (2012) found that whilst young people in the US were less likely to feel that it was very important to always vote in elections compared to older generations (55% of 18-29 year olds compared to 68% of 30-59 year olds and 76% of the over-60s), this was still much higher than the findings from the UK where just 14% of young people thought it was important, compared to 35% of 30-59 year olds and 68% of over-60s. Civic duty is clearly lower amongst young people and this effect is much more pronounced in the UK. The implication is that young people are not acquiring a strong sense of civic duty (at least in terms of the importance of regular voting) from previous generations and this is likely playing a part in young people's volatile voting patterns. It has been suggested that this may be an effect of falling social capital (Putnam, 2000) whereby citizens no longer have the close and dense social networks of previous generations and subsequently do not have the social reinforcement or motivation to vote. However, this may only be relevant in the US case as social capital has been found to be stable or even increasing in several other countries despite their declining political participation (e.g. Dalton, 2004; Hall, 1999).

In terms of partisanship, the erosion of class cleavages is likely to have had an ensuing effect on party identification. We see that there has been a general decline in the overall levels and strength of party identification with particularly low levels evident amongst young people (Miller and Shanks, 1996; Clarke et al., 2004; Henn and Weinstein, 2006; Zukin et al., 2006). Martin (2012) finds evidence of generational effects in both the US and UK, with large gaps opening up in recent years between older and younger age groups despite the overall trend of decline. This suggests that the socialization process has broken down in terms of young people's acquiring their parental party preferences and implies that political parties are becoming much less attractive to young people. One suggested explanation for this decline in partisanship, is that there has been an increasing lack of distinctiveness between parties and their policies, means that voters are less likely to vote as they perceive there to be little at stake. Looking at the UK case, Klingeman et al. (2006) examined party manifestos for the three main parties in all post-war elections and found that by 2001 and 2005, the parties were closer to the centre and to one another than at any other time during the period. Staying with the UK as an example, the extremely low turnout in the 2001 election may well have at least in part been a result of the lack of perceived closeness of the election, with most pre-election polls suggesting a large Labour victory (Whiteley, 2012). However, this cannot be said for the US case with the parties becoming more ideologically polarized (Pew Center, 2014), reinforcing the need to examine the specific country and electoral context when trying to understand changes in turnout. Several scholars have suggested that these changes in citizenship and disengagement from political parties have led to young people moving away from formal electoral politics and becoming more engaged with informal or alternative politics. Dalton (2008) supplies evidence from the US that those who fit this more modern profile of an 'engaged citizen', were more likely to have signed a petition, taken part in demonstrations and boycotted particular products. However, Martin (2012) shows that participation in these three activities is not necessarily the preserve of the young in the US and the UK. 4% of young people in the UK took part in a protest in the last year, compared to 3% of 30-59 year olds and 2% of the over-60s. In the US, the figures are only marginally higher with 7% of 18-29

year olds taking part in a protest, compared to 6% of 30-59 year olds and 3% of the over-60s.

Petition signing was more frequent, but young people are not more likely to do this than the next age group: 35% of 18-29 year olds compared to 36% of 30-59 year olds in the UK and 31% compared to 37% in the US. The same can be seen with boycotting products: 21% of 18-29 year olds compared to 26% of 30-59 year olds had boycotted a product in the last year in the UK, compared to 25% and 26% respectively in the US. However, there is little evidence to suggest that involvement in alternative or informal politics is a replacement for electoral politics but rather supplementary activities, with those most likely to be involved also most likely to vote (Zukin et al., 2006; Blais, 2010; Milner, 2010; Whiteley, 2012).

Overall, the sociological approach is helpful to a certain extent in explaining the decline in young people's turnout, by showing that changes in how political orientations and behaviours are transmitted through the generations are likely to have an impact of whether young people vote or not. However, it does not explain very well the patterns we see among recent cohorts e.g. volatility in the US and a decline and subsequent rise in the UK. For a more comprehensive explanation, we turn to the Civic Voluntarism theory which in simplest terms suggests that people participate because they can, because they want to and because they are asked to.

Civic Voluntarism

The first incarnation of this theory was the Socio-economic (SES) model (Milbrath, 1965), proposing that citizens with higher socio-economic status specifically in terms of having completed higher education, having higher income and higher status jobs are more likely to participate in politics than those with lower socio-economic status due to greater access to resources. Building upon this, the civic voluntarism model (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba et al. 1995) suggests that the reasons people do not take part in politics (and conversely, why they do) are threefold. Firstly, they lack the resources (such as time, money or civic skills) and secondly, they do not have the psychological engagement required to participate such as interest in politics. The third reason crucially bridges the supply-side,

suggesting that people do not turn out to vote simply because they are not asked; in other words, because they have not been mobilized by political actors or other institutions. This theory brings together some of the important factors from the other explanatory theories but crucially includes the role of the supply side in the equation.

Starting with resources, it is safe to assume that young people will be poorer in terms of resources such as money, civic skills and possibly time, therefore providing a straightforward explanation for the generally lower levels of turnout for young people compared to older people. However, taken alone it does not explain the generational effects on youth turnout that we have seen. We turn next to the psychological or motivation component, with Verba et al., (1995) suggesting that political interest, efficacy, information and partisanship were the most important factors. More recent work in the US by Zukin et al., (2006) also found that a battery of orientations and attitudes that they termed “political capital”: attentiveness to news, political knowledge, efficacy, partisanship and a strong sense of civic duty, had the greatest effect overall compared to other potential predictors of electoral participation. Having already discussed interest, attention to news, partisanship and civic duty as part of the other theoretical explanations, we now focus on the more attitudinal variables.

Political attitudes

Several scholars have suggested that these attitudes are precursors for participation (e.g. Niemi and Klinger, 2012) and that low levels of these ‘pre-participatory’ variables (Montgomery et.al, 2004) may underpin some of the generational effects we have seen, if young people are not developing sufficient levels of them. Some have suggested that a combination of low levels of internal, external efficacy and trust could lead to political alienation (Southwell 2012). We therefore turn to explore these attitudes in more detail, turning first to examine political efficacy with its internal and external dimensions, followed by political trust.

Political efficacy

Turning to the more attitudinal pre-participatory variables, we first examine political efficacy. This concept is usually described as a person's feeling that they have the ability to influence the political process (Campbell et al., 1960), and its relationship with political participation has been of interest for many years, particularly as studies have shown that political inefficacy is a key predictor of non-voting for young people (Kaid et al., 2000). Most studies consider both internal and external dimensions of efficacy, which Niemi et al, (1991) defining internal efficacy as "the competence to understand and to participate effectively in, politics" and external efficacy as "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" (p.1407). The relationship between electoral participation and efficacy has been of interest for many years e.g. (Abramson, 1983; Campbell et al., 1960; Verba et al., 1995) with the general consensus being that higher levels of internal and external efficacy are positive predictors of turnout Southwell 1985; Weatherford 1991; Abramson and Aldrich 1982). However, the literature suggests that efficacy has seen a general pattern of decline since the 1960s (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Abramson and Aldrich 1982). The few studies on young people's levels of efficacy suggest that they are low (e.g. Henn and Foard, 2011) but they do not indicate if this is in line with the general trend of decline or if generational gaps can be seen.

Political Trust

Discussions about the role of political trust in relation to turnout (Almond and Verba, 1989) and a broader political disenchantment amongst the public (Hay, 2007) suggest that this has run concurrently with the changes in turnout. There is evidence that trust has been on a downward trajectory in recent years (Nye et al., 1997; Dalton, 2004; Rawnsley, 2005; Norris, 2011) with some seeing this as a key factor in the general fall in turnout (Bowler and Donovan, 2004; Keele, 2005). These changing attitudes to politics and politicians have been in part attributed to the nature of modern campaigning, with the rise of professionalised campaigning considered to have had an

influential role on changing patterns of turnout (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Farrell and Webb, 2000; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Stoker, 2006). Many scholars have suggested that the culture of spin, 'selling' policies and vague ideological messages associated with this political marketing style of campaigning has created greater disengagement from the process amongst the electorate and has potentially played a role in the decline in turnout (Davis, 2002; Esser et al., 2001; Franklin, 2004).

How these changes have played out amongst young people is disputed in the literature. The earliest studies suggested that young people start out with higher levels of trust compared to older people but as the lifecycle progresses; they acquire more negative experiences and connotations of government and elites (Easton and Dennis, 1969). This was partially supported by a study by Niemi and Klinger (2012) which found that in early adulthood (in this instance the seven year period between 18 and 24 years of age) trust in government decreased. Some studies have found young people to be no less trusting than older people, with all age groups having low levels of trust (Putnam, 2000; Orren, 2007). However, the majority of studies have tended to suggest generational effects with young people having lower levels of trust than older cohorts (Dalton, 2004; Fahmy, 2006; Henn and Weinstein, 2006; Martin, 2012) but this is within the context of decline across all age groups.

We see then that these pre-participatory attitudes have an important role to play in young people's broader engagement and specifically in terms of increasing the likelihood of voting. We now move away from individual-level demand side factors to the third element of the civic voluntarism model; that of the role of parties and elites in mobilising citizens to participate. Many of the explanations for young people's low turnout have been focused on individual and social factors without reference to the institutional part of the picture. As O'Toole et al. (2003) put it, "Too often, concern about youth political disengagement is focused on an impending crisis of political participation...rather than on the failure to engage with young people and the issues that affect and concern them" (p 349).

Mobilization

As suggested in the civic voluntarism model, parties and other political organisations have a central role to play in political engagement (Wright, 2003; Milner, 2010) and therefore mobilization, whereby parties, candidates and activists directly try to encourage citizens to vote (Rosenstone and Hanson, 1993) is another key explanation for turnout. Several experimental studies have shown that elite mobilization can make a difference to turnout (e.g. Green and Gerber, 2008; Stoker, 2006) particularly amongst young people (Gerber and Green, 2001; Green, Gerber and Nickerson, 2002) but many have argued that young people are less likely to be the focus of these mobilization efforts. Given that finite resources mean campaigning is more likely to be targeted at those who are most likely to produce a result (Dalton, 2008) e.g. those who are likely to mobilize others (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993) or those who have voted before (Abramson and Claggett, 2001), young people who are often characterised as non-voters are less of a priority. Examining data for being contacted by parties over time by age group, Martin (2012) concludes that in the US since 1956 to 2000, there is a slight decline in the likelihood of young people being contacted but an increase can be seen from the 2004 election onwards, which parallels the increase in youth turnout. However, despite this increase, the gap between younger and older people has increased dramatically. For example, in the 2004 election, 25% of 18-29 year olds were contacted compared to 58% of the over-60s. The story in the UK shows a slightly different pattern in that there is a noticeable decline in contact across all age groups in 1997 (which again coincides with the decline in turnout) and whilst there is also a gap between the age groups where young people are less likely to be contacted, this gap is not as pronounced as in the US. In the 2005 General election for example, 16% of 18-29 year olds were contacted compared to 23% of everyone over 30.

Related to mobilization is the character of elections, with the very early studies of turnout focussing on this believing that turnout would be higher when elections were closer contests or important issues were at stake (e.g. Merriam and Gosnell, 1928; Boechel, 1928) and therefore low turnout was

considered a result of parties failing to sufficiently motivate people to vote by presenting a compelling case to do so. This approach has been revisited by Franklin (2004), loosely termed as electoral competition and argues that the character of elections has both direct and indirect effects on turnout and therefore the closeness or the perception that there is a lot at stake, is likely to drive up turnout.

In the UK, the big gap in youth turnout opens up between 1997 and 2005 before starting to rise again in 2010. This coincides with the term of government for New Labour and the 2001 and 2005 elections at least were not considered to be close contests, possibly providing little incentive to vote for young people. 2010 was a much closer race and with a higher turnout of young people. Whilst we cannot directly link this to the decline in youth turnout in this period, it would be remiss not to consider its role. In the US, the picture is not quite so straightforward. Youth turnout has been declining for a longer period, with a sharp decline from 1972 onwards. It recovers a little in 1992, perhaps due to the appeal of Bill Clinton but then falls again until 2004, perhaps in relation to concerns about the Iraq war (Martin, 2012). Whilst parties may not be able to control how close or important citizens perceive an election to be, they certainly have a role to play in mobilizing people by communicating the relevant issues and policies.

Overall, we find that the civic voluntarism model provides us with the best explanation to date of the generational effects found in young people's turnout patterns. By combining the supply and the demand side, we can understand both the need for key pre-participatory attitudes and behaviours as well as the need for parties and other political elites to make efforts to mobilize young people, which goes some way to explaining the volatile patterns we see in the US. However, the other theories do offer some insights into declining participation, particularly socialization theory which may well be the mechanism by which the aforementioned pre-participatory attitudes and behaviours are transmitted, particularly trust and efficacy: both internal efficacy, relating to their

own competence and external efficacy, relating to their beliefs that parties and politicians care very little for what they think.

This has not led to a straightforward disengagement with politics but rather a more volatile young citizenry. Survey evidence suggests that it is not that young people are not interested in politics (63% had at least some interest) but more than half (55%) have little confidence in their knowledge and understanding of politics and 75% do not feel that they have any influence on politics. A very large majority (81%) view politics and politicians negatively, with just 7% having any trust in politicians (Henn and Foard, 2011). Henn and Foard (2014) suggest that young people are struggling to find a party that shares their own opinions and aspirations and without this, there is little motivation for them to vote. In other words, “It is clear that democratic participation is hindered by issues of trust and efficacy of politicians and the political system” (Mycock and Tonge, 2014) as well as young people’s personal internal efficacy and understanding. Coupled with this, young people are less likely to be the target of mobilization by political parties and candidates and so in low-stake elections, have little incentive to make their way to the polling stations. As Plutzer (2002) suggests, it is crucial that young people are helped to transition from non-voters to voters if we are to avoid a lifetime habit of non-participation. We now turn to examine some of the initiatives that have been undertaken in the attempt to do just that.

1.1.3 What can be done to increase youth turnout?

Several suggestions have been made to try to combat declining turnout in general as well as specific possible solutions to youth engagement. Firstly, a greater role for formal civic education in the school curriculum has also been discussed as a solution. In the US, ‘Civics’ has been a compulsory subject for many years, and although the nature of the US education system means that content and quality can vary depending on the location (Galston, 2001, 2004), Niemi and Junn (1998) show that a good civics curriculum can boost knowledge of government and politics. Following the Crick report in

1998 and the creation of the Youth Citizenship Commission, citizenship education has had a place in schools in the UK since 2002 and several studies have shown it to be effective in improving democratic participation and civic engagement (Tonge, Mycock and Jeffrey, 2012; Whiteley, 2012). However, following a consultation process in 2013, a much reduced citizenship curriculum was introduced to be taught from September 2014. Whilst school-based civic education undoubtedly has a key role to play for future generations of voters, it cannot have an effect on those young adults who have already left the education system. Recently there have been calls for higher education institutions to play a greater part in encouraging political participation amongst their students (Millet McCartney et al., 2013; Kisby and Sloam, 2014) and although large amounts of young people in both countries do receive some form of higher education, many also do not and so institutional civic education cannot be the only solution.

The most obvious suggestion to combat low turnout is the introduction of compulsory voting (Lijphart, 1997). President Obama recently discussed the possibility of mandatory voting in the US, specifically to ensure that young, lower-income and ethnic minority groups would vote (Condon, 2015) and after the extremely low turnout at the 2005 UK election, several senior politicians raised the possibility of introducing compulsory voting. Looking at the example of Australia, Wattenberg (2012) presents evidence suggesting that compulsory voting is extremely effective in creating high turnout across the age groups and that Australians also have high levels of support for the policy. However, when questioned, 47% of people in the UK and just 21% of people in the US said they would support the introduction of mandatory voting. The Institute of Public Policy Research recently suggested the introduction of a system of compulsory voting for first-time voters in an attempt to compel them into forming the habit of voting (Birch et. al, 2013). Whilst this would inevitably have an effect on turnout numbers, singling out young people and forcing them to vote might create greater negative engagement, especially if they feel that it will not make a difference or if they (Henn and Foard, 2014).

Another strand of thinking relates to making registering to vote and casting a vote easier and more convenient. In both the US and the UK, citizens are required to register in advance of voting and in the US in particular, this process can be complicated and vary from state to state. Given young people's high levels of mobility and issues surrounding acceptable evidence of residence e.g. needing utility bills that young people in rented accommodation may not have access to or college dormitory addresses not being accepted (Dalton, 2008); these issues might seem to disproportionately affect young adults. However, while it seems sensible to make the registration process as simple as possible, Wattenberg (2012) points out that registration has been made simple in the US in recent years e.g. the 1993 Motor Voter Act in the US that allows voter registration when people apply for or renew their driving licence but youth registration remains low. Wattenberg also points out that even in countries where Election Day registration is possible, such as Canada or where the government compiles comprehensive voter lists, such as Japan, they have still struggled to get young people to vote. However, it is possible that registration reforms combined with a concerted mobilization effort could have an effect. Prior to the 2015 election, a National Voter Registration Day was implemented and the youth organisation Bite the Ballot was heavily involved in encouraging young people to register, claiming that 500,000 people had registered due to their efforts (Bite the Ballot, 2015). Turning to the act of voting itself, online or e-voting has been debated for many years as a way of increasing turnout, with some arguing that this would be particularly effective with younger citizens (Schaupp and Carter, 2005). Several e-voting experiments have been undertaken in a range of countries, with Estonia so far the only country to have permanently adopted national internet voting (Alvarez et al., 2009). The recent report from the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy in the UK recommends that secure online voting should be an option for all voters in the 2020 election (Digital Democracy Commission, 2015). However, although it is commendable to make registration and voting as simple as possible, these reforms do nothing to address the underlying issues we have outlined relating to socialisation and mobilization.

An alternative suggestion that has been gained much attention in recent years is that of lowering the voting age. Franklin (2004) argues that reducing the voting age to below 18, young people would be more likely to be still at home and in full time (school) education and that greater efforts would be made to educate and encourage young people, with the effect of voting becoming a social norm. The issue of 'votes at 16' has been much discussed in the UK in recent decades, with a recent resurgence in interest largely due to the special reduction in the voting age to 16 for the 2014 Scottish Referendum. Proponents of lowering the voting age argue that "those who vote young vote often" (Folkes, 2004, p 55) and that it would reform how government and politicians engage with young people (Adonis and Tyndall, 2014). Results from a post-referendum survey (Curtice, 2014) suggest that more 16 and 17 year olds voted than 18-24 year olds (75% compared to just 54%), but still lower than 35-54 year olds (85%) and the over-55s (92%). While these results certainly provide food for thought, the nature of referenda and in particular this high-profile one, mean that it does not easily translate to predictions of how this might play out in national or local elections. The case against votes at 16, argues that it is not the panacea to low youth turnout that some hope it would be and is in fact more likely to drive down the overall level of turnout (Cowley and Denver, 2004; Russell, 2014). Reduction of the voting age has taken place at a local level in some US districts, and whilst it has not been as pressing a topic as it has been in the UK, there are still discussions that a national policy of being able to vote at 17 would have a positive effect on democracy (Levine, 2015).

The issue with lowering the voting age or other structural reform such as registration or online voting amendments is that they address the symptoms not the causes of young people's low turnout (Mycock and Tonge, 2014). Rather as suggested earlier, young people have little confidence in their own political efficacy and feel somewhat isolated from the political system and political actors. Therefore any solution to the issues of youth turnout needs to address both young people themselves and their perceptions of and experiences with parties, politicians and elections. Sloam (2007) suggests that the key to engaging young people lies in "addressing the issues that concern them (listening), increasing their sense of empowerment (efficacy), heightening knowledge about

the political system and ensuring direct contact with political actors (mobilization)”. (p.549). Many have hoped that the web might have a role to play in this process of socializing and mobilizing young people into electoral politics and in the next section, we therefore turn to examine the relationship between political engagement and the internet.

1.2 The web and political engagement

In response to the decline in youth engagement outlined in the previous section, a variety of websites were developed with the aim of engaging young people both in the broader civic world and in our particular area of interest, electoral participation. To understand the relevance of these websites as well as other election sites, we need to first understand the reasons why the web has been seen as having the potential to engage young people, before turning to look at early theoretical work on the effects of the web. Finally we will explore the empirical work on the relationships between the web, political attitudes and electoral participation.

1.2.1 Why the web?

Since the emergence of the web, there has been much conjecture as to the effect it might have on political engagement. Its inherent structure and make-up has led to some to hope that it may be instrumental in engaging young people with politics (Coleman and Hall, 2001; Kreuger, 2002; Ward, 2005). The web offers huge potential for interactivity and interconnectivity (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2002), which has further increased with the evolution of social media or Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005). Chadwick and Howard (2009a) describe this evolution from web 1.0 to 2.0 as “the internet as a platform for political discourse; the collective intelligence emergent from political web

use; the importance of data over particular software and hardware applications; perpetual experimentalism in the public domain; the creation of small scale forms of political engagement through consumerism; the propagation of political content over multiple applications; and rich user experiences on political websites” (p 4).

In terms of communication, the web is unique in that it allows for the types of communication offered by other forms of communication technologies and media e.g. ‘one-to-one’, ‘one-to-many’ and ‘many-to-one’ whilst also facilitating the unprecedented form of ‘many-to-many’ (Chadwick, 2006 ; Weare, 2002). This creates the potential for people to have equal capacities as both transmitters and receivers of information (Castells, 2009). The interconnectivity of the web means that communication is no longer restricted in time and space, as people can easily and quickly communicate through symmetrical or asymmetrical means, allowing for a transcendence of geographic and time barriers (Castells, 2003), all of which offer the potential for the more self-expressive forms of participation that some have suggested young people are looking for. Finally, the vast amount of political information available online has led many to suggest that it will reduce the costs of information gathering, particularly for young people (Polat, 2005; Tolbert and McNeal, 2003; Brundridge and Rice, 2009).

Given this and the fact that today’s ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2001; Palfrey and Glasser, 2008) who have grown up with the internet embedded in their lives (although this concept is disputed e.g. Helsper and Eynon, 2009), it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that some sort of socializing and mobilizing treatment for young people is likely be web-based. An important caveat to note here is that there can be a tendency in the literature to assume that just because something - whether it be educational or campaigning - is online, that young people will automatically engage with it (Selwyn, 2007) when of course just because it exists does not mean that it will be relevant for young people, or that they will even be aware of it.

Early theoretical work on the potential effects of the web tended to fall into one of two camps: 'cyber optimists' and 'cyber sceptics' (Norris, 2001), in other words a mobilization vs. reinforcement or normalization framework. Some of those viewing the web in an especially optimistic light proposed that the Internet would have a monumental impact on political participation and communication. Rheingold (1993) was among the first to lay out the case for the web, arguing that the new ICTs would allow for a re-invigorated democracy and greater citizen engagement due to the increased opportunities for networking, communication and information gathering. Some believed that the benefit would be a more direct style of democracy, with people expressing their views online, forcing elites to respond (Morris, 2000) or a more decentralised form of representative politics leading to a renewal of citizens' engagement and activism (e.g. Negroponte, 1995; Teachout and Streeter, 2008; Trippi, 2005). They suggest the web is ideally placed to facilitate this as its potential for interactivity and organisation lends itself to the possibility of grassroots involvement in shaping campaigns and activists organizing themselves. However, whilst these particular approaches seem to emphasise public expression, in reality the scope for self-expression on offer at the time was quite narrow and offered little potential for citizens' input or for organizing themselves.

Cyber sceptics proposed that the web would either have a negative effect on political engagement or simply reinforce existing inequalities. The first approach was characterized by the idea that instead of leading to greater cohesion, the web would in fact lead to greater fragmentation and polarisation of citizens and that participation would be reduced to a 'push-button' democracy (Davis, 1999; Sunstein, 2001; Wilhelm, 2000). The self-selecting nature of web use means that people can look at and contribute to sites relating to subjects and viewpoints of existing interest, without being exposed to current affairs or differing viewpoints (Prior, 2005). Furthermore, there is the simple point that the web offers the opportunity to spend time doing such a vast number of activities that it decreases the amount of time available for participating in politics (Nie and Erbring, 2002; Putnam, 2000). Those predicting normalization believed that the web would simply benefit 'the usual suspects'; on the supply side, parties and candidates who are already well established and have

greater financial clout would be able to create and maintain more sophisticated web presences , whilst on the demand side, those who already had an interest in politics and the skills to participate would simply have another platform on which to be heard, as opposed to the web encouraging new people to become engaged (di Gennaro and Dutton, 2006; Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Norris, 2001;2002).

1.2.2 The web and engagement

Following this early theoretical work, more empirical studies began to emerge from the late 1990s, producing a number of studies covering various aspects of the internet and its relationship with political participation. Whilst the empirical body of work is still relatively young, we can see an evolution in terms of what is being examined and how it is measured.

The earliest studies of the effects of the internet tended to focus on civic rather than political participation and utilised fairly blunt measures of internet use such as how many hours they spent online or how many years' experience they had of it (Katz et al., 2001; Nie and Erbring, 2000; Kraut et al., 2001; Wellman et al., 2001; Shah et al., 2002; Weber et al., 2003 but also Sylvester and McGlynn 2010,).

Scholars then began to distinguish between different uses of the web, most commonly separating out entertainment uses compared to information seeking, often in specific election contexts. Tolbert and McNeal's (2003) study focused on the effects of web use in specific elections and found that those who had access to the internet and used it to search for political information were more likely to have voted in the 1996 and 2000 Presidential elections. Other studies looking at the relationship between online political information search and other political behaviours found some modest effects (Bimber, 2001; Hardy and Scheufele, 2003). Overall, there are now a number of studies

which suggest a modest but positive association between internet use and political, particularly electoral engagement (Dalrymple and Scheufele, 2007; Mossberger et al., 2008; Boulianne, 2009). In terms of young people, the literature suggests that the online environment can bring previously disengaged citizens into politics, particularly the young (Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2005; Gibson, Römmele, & Ward, 2004; Jensen, Danziger and Venkatesh, 2007; Owen, 2006; Muhlberger, 2004).

The causal relationships between internet use and political participation are still somewhat elusive, with both direct and indirect paths a possibility. Direct effects may be as a result of reduced costs of participation, whilst a more indirect route could be that internet use affects political attitudes, which in turn influences behaviour and more recent work has focused on this indirect relationship. As Jorba and Bimber (2012) put it, "If anything has been shown in a decade of research on digital media in the United States, it is that the effects on political participation and civic engagement are connected to people's attitudes, interest and motivation rather than simply to reduced transaction costs or easier access to information" (22). The literature shows some mixed findings with the earliest studies tending to find no effects (Lin and Lim, 2002; Scheufele and Nisbet, 2002) but more recent studies have found a relationship between the web and particular political attitudes.

Looking firstly at political interest, Jennings and Zeitner (2003) found a positive association between political web use and political interest. Wang (2007) found that online political information-seeking increased political interest when controlling for existing interest and Xenos and Moy (2007) examined the interaction between political interest and internet use, finding that those who are already politically interested see their political engagement rise as a result of their internet use. Gennaro and Dutton (2006) in the UK examined evidence from the 2005 Oxford Internet Study that showed political use of the web did have an impact on levels of political interest and political

efficacy. In terms of efficacy, Kenski and Stroud (2006) found a small but positive relationship between online exposure to campaign information and both internal and external efficacy, even when other variables such as partisan strength and other media exposure were taken into account. Wang (2007) found that expressing political opinions on the web increased internal efficacy whilst Kaye and Johnson (2002) found that political use of the web including information-seeking related positively to both efficacy and political trust, compared to uses of the web for entertainment. Overall, we see that there is evidence that use of the web may have direct effects on turnout or indirect effects on pre-participatory attitudes.

1.2.2 Websites and engagement

To understand more about these direct and indirect relationships, it has been argued that studies need to be undertaken at the website level as it is the effect of individual websites and features on those sites that create an impact (Lupia and Philpot, 2005). Different websites may also have differential effects depending on who is using them and in what contexts, so what is needed is an understanding of the ways in which the particular features, content and design of websites in specific election contexts affect political attitudes and how they might have differential effects on different groups of users (Bakker and de Vreese, 2011; Hirzalla et al, 2010; Gibson and Ward, 2000; Oates, 2008; Quintelier and Vissers, 2008). To date, the body of research looking at specific websites and their effects on the political attitudes of users have tended to be located in the e-government arena. Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) found a significant and positive relationship between use of e-government sites and trust, whilst Parent et al., (2005) found that use of e-government websites significantly increased trust and external efficacy but this was moderated by the quality of the online experience and existing levels of internal efficacy.

Further research at the website level will create a greater understanding of the features and content that may appeal most to young people and to examine the specific effects they might have on youth attitudes and behaviour. Xenos and Kyoung (2008) suggest a framework of information provision and interactivity is the most useful in understanding the potential effect of particular websites on young people. Following an 'instrumental' approach (Bimber, 2003), election related websites may reduce the costs of acquiring both practical or logistical information on registration and voting and information on candidates and policies, which "may help facilitate youth political engagement by helping young citizens think about elections, form preferences about issues and candidates and find their way to their local polling stations" (Xenos and Kyoung, 2008: 177).

Web interactivity has often been grouped into two categories: content interactivity and interpersonal activity (Bucy, 2004; McMillan and Hwang, 2002). Content interactivity allows the user to control the selection and appearance of the site they are viewing without having direct contact with other people e.g. personalizing a home page, uploading user-generated content etc. whereas interpersonal interactivity involves person-to-person communication via instant messaging, comments, multiplayer games etc. This preference for interactive features on the web also reflects some previous research in the civic education literature (e.g. Bachen et al., 2008) which found that traditional, passive learning techniques are less effective than more active styles. This re-iterates findings from the Wang (2007) study, suggesting that for political websites to impact on all political attitudes such as efficacy, they must provide not only information but interactive opportunities for participation.

Usability research on websites in general suggests that young people are most attracted to sites with interactive features (Nielsen, 2005). In terms of political sites specifically, Sundar et al. (2003) found

that greater levels of interactivity on fictional candidate sites, measured in terms of the number of clickable pages i.e. the depth of the sites, resulted in more favourable opinions of the candidate as well as higher levels of agreement with the candidate's issue positions. Using a similar experimental approach, Warnick et al. (2005) found that moderate levels of interactivity resulted in greater engagement with content on the site. Tedesco (2006) focused specifically on young people and the effects of different interactive activities across a number of 2004 election sites, including some youth engagement sites. The study found that exposure to highly interactive features led to significant increases in efficacy and the belief that it was important to vote.

Both information provision and interactivity are possible mechanisms by which political content on the web might directly affect young people's electoral engagement, either directly in terms of influencing likelihood to turnout or indirectly by developing or increasing pre-participatory attitudes and behaviours but further research is needed to examine the relationship between specific mobilization websites, these factors and potential effects on young people.

1.3 Mobilization websites

Having examined the relationship between political engagement and the use of the political web in general, we now turn to focus on specific types of election websites, in order to understand the state of web research at a more nuanced level. With each election cycle since the late 1990s, a variety of partisan and non-partisan actors have had an increasing presence online, collectively described by Foot and Schneider (2002; 2003a) as the electoral web sphere, encompassing all web resources relating to a particular election. Within this electoral web sphere, there is a smaller subset of websites specifically relating to mobilization, on which we narrow our focus. Firstly, a kind of

micro electoral web sphere has been identified, consisting of non-partisan websites which have been created with the specific aim of mobilizing young people in elections: the “youth engagement websphere” (Bennett and Xenos, 2004). Given that these sites have been developed directly in relation to the decline in youth participation, it is crucial to examine the existing work on these websites to understand what exists and what their effects might be. Secondly, as a contrast to the youth focused sites we will examine the official campaign websites of the election candidates. These candidate websites have been growing in sophistication with each election and now form an integral part of mobilization strategy for most candidates. Finally, we are interested in Vote Advice Applications, an emerging but exciting field of study within the electoral web sphere. Each type of website will be examined in turn, looking at the historical context of their development, theories of how and why they may work as mobilization tools and an overview of the state of empirical research, specifically on effects on young people and engagement.

1.3.1 Youth mobilization websites

Drawing on Foot and Schneider’s (2002, 2006) concept of the electoral web sphere, we are interested in the youth electoral web sphere; that is, the collection of websites that have been specifically created by non-government organisations in order to socialize young people into electoral politics and mobilize them into electoral participation (Owen, 2006). These websites first emerged in the 2000 Presidential election in the US and have been present in some form in every election cycle since. The sites vary in design, sophistication and content with some offering detailed issue information, whilst others have focused on providing tools aimed at simplifying parts of the electoral process such as registering to vote or finding your polling station (Montgomery et al., 2004; Xenos and Bennett, 2004). Owen and Davis (2004) estimate that 60% of young voters visited at least one of these sites during the 2004 election campaign.

There are few empirical studies focusing on these specifically electoral sites. Studies have tended to look at what has been termed the youth engagement web sphere, with a greater focus on civic or alternative political engagement (e.g. Bachen et al., 2008; Raynes-Goldie and Walker, 2008; Dahlgren and Olsson, 2007; Vromen, 2007; Vromen, 2008) rather than electoral engagement and participation or have examined youth sites that are aimed at pre-voting age teenagers rather than young adults (Macintosh et al. 2003; Gerodimos, 2008).

Bennett and Xenos's (2004) study maps the youth engagement web sphere in the 2004 US Presidential election, examining 35 youth-focused sites, (although their definition of youth engagement sites also includes civic and issue-based sites). Their content analysis of the websites showed that youth-oriented sites were substantially more interactive than other political websites, such as candidate campaign websites although they caution that youth websites were not 'a technological fix for youth disengagement' (ibid; 28). Through the use of hyperlink network analysis, they found a fairly dense network i.e. many of the youth sites had links to one another and also links out to the broader electoral web sphere, suggesting that use of these youth websites might create a starting point on the pathway to participation. However, the theoretical mechanism by which this might take place is not discussed.

Building on her previous study, Ward (2005; 2007) examined youth-oriented websites in the 2004 European elections in Britain and Ireland as part of the comparative Internet and National Elections project. Comparing civic and political engagement websites aimed at young people with the sites of the youth wings of the political parties in terms of information provision and opportunities for participation, she found that whilst youth party websites were better at providing information about candidates and issues, the broader youth websites offered more opportunities for interactivity. However, the youth websites "provide an opportunity for young people's participation but it does not obviously relate to their electoral participation, or specifically relate to the European Parliament

elections” (ibid, 146). The conclusion is that youth-focused websites still have some way to go to fulfil their potential as a means of engaging and mobilizing young people.

Xenos and Kyoung (2008) adopted an experimental approach to attempt to unpick the effects of youth political websites in the 2006 midterm election campaign. Based on the research on the web and engagement we have outlined in the previous chapter, they theorize that youth mobilization websites may stimulate youth engagement via three aspects of the internet. Firstly, by reducing the costs associated with acquiring both logistical information (i.e. registration and voting) and candidate and issue information, youth websites might encourage young people to think about and participate in elections. Secondly, online interactivity has been identified as a mechanism through which young people might be encouraged into political engagement. As Xenos and Kyoung summarise, “Assuming the presence of useful information about candidates and campaigns, interactivity may serve to draw young voters into greater cognitive as well as affective engagement with election-related issues” (ibid, 177). Finally, the potential of the web to target specific sub-sets of the electorate, such as young people, may prove effective in increasing young people’s engagement, if politics is presented in a way that is relevant and motivating for them. Their lab-based experiment on undergraduate subjects tested the effects of two different 2004 youth election websites compared to a control condition of a Google search. Post-test results show that whilst the New Voters Project website was rated much more useful in terms of providing logistical information on how to vote, both Rock the Vote and the control condition were found to be much more helpful in terms of helping to understand the issues. This highlights the need for any future research on mobilization websites to examine websites at the individual level, given the potential for differential effects. Overall, despite the prevalence of these websites, at least in the US, this appears to be an under-developed area of research.

1.3.2 Candidate websites

The use of online media in election campaigns has grown steadily over time, both by parties and candidates and by the electorate and these websites form the basis for one of the most researched parts of the electoral web sphere. Foot and Schneider (2006) argue that political websites should be seen as sites of political action, “surfaces on which campaigns’ production structures are inscribed over time and evolving structures that simultaneously manifest and enable political action”(4). Party or candidate websites are designed mainly to recruit and persuade voters, as well as provide information (Bimber and Davies, 2003; Oates, 2008). Bucy and Gregson (2001) argue that the use of digital media in campaigns makes the campaign and political system as a whole more accessible to the general public and by offering the potential to communicate directly with candidates, might contribute to higher levels of both internal and external efficacy.

Starting with the 1992 Clinton election, campaign information was available online although as Bimber and Davies (2003) point out, only a small fraction of the population would have been able to access it. By the late 1990s, campaign websites were fairly commonplace and the first empirical studies began to emerge. Studies from the 1996 US election and 1997 UK election were descriptive in nature and focused on the design and content of the websites and concluded that the sites were generally static reproductions of offline campaign materials often termed as ‘brochureware’ (Kamarck, 2002) or as ‘cyber-advertising’ (Auty and Nicholas, 1998; Gibson and Ward, 1998 and 2000). The sites were fairly rudimentary with few interactive features or attempts to interact with voters. The websites were considered to have little impact on the electorate (Butler and Kavanagh, 1997) and for these early candidates and parties, their mere presence on the web and therefore showing some knowledge of it, was considered to be web campaigning (Foot and Schneider, 2006).

The turn of the century saw the emergence of the maturation phase (Davis et al., 2009) as campaign websites in the 2000 US election began to have a wider mix of functions and more sophisticated designs appeared. The most successful innovations were perhaps in the area of online fundraising, with John McCain and Al Gore both raising large sums of money in the Primary season via their websites (Foot and Schneider, 2002). Whilst there were some attempts at interactive features across the sites, most notably Al Gore (Klotz, 2004) and many encouraged site visitors to forward newsletters or details to friends and family, it was concluded that web campaigning was generally failing to make use of its potential to connect with and mobilize supporters (Bimber, 2003; Chadwick, 2006; Gibson et al, 2003).

For the 2001 election in the UK, the two main parties launched new or updated websites and Labour launched a specific site aimed at young people (ruup4it.org.uk). Though the parties experimented with narrowcasting and providing content beyond just information, their 'interactive' content was limited to providing downloadable material such as screensavers (Butler and Kavanagh, 2001). Overall, the websites were found to be a slight improvement on their 1997 counterparts (Coleman, 2001a) but were making poor use of the technology in terms of interaction (Gibson et al, 2003a) and simply replicating traditional campaign materials in an online format. This has been attributed to politicians and their staff having little understanding of the web as a campaigning tool (Klotz, 2004) or not wanting to engage with the interactive potential of the web (Stromer-Galley, 2000).

2004 is considered to be somewhat of a turning point in web campaigning in the US, with campaigns making a move to seeing the web as "electronic headquarters" (Foot and Schneider, 2006), with Howard Dean's campaign being seen as one of the first to embrace the emerging Web 2.0 technologies. Part of the campaign's innovations came from embedding itself in existing online political communities including political bloggers, the web-based protest movement MoveOn (Hickey, 2004) and most notably Meetup.com (Chadwick, 2006; Trippi, 2005) which attempted to

bring people with similar interests together. The website saw developments in campaigning tools such as the Dean for America blog which not only allowed but encouraged readers to comment and innovative online fundraising tools. However, Dean's failure to achieve the Democratic nomination suggested that interactive online campaigning did not yet transfer directly into votes. John Kerry and George W. Bush's campaign websites did include some interactive elements but all were heavily managed and occasionally disappeared from the sites altogether (Chadwick, 2006; Williams et al, 2005). In short, the major candidates were happy to make nominal displays of their use of interactive web technologies but were not fully embracing them. Despite these advances in interactivity, Xenos and Bennett's (2004) content analysis suggested that the election campaign sites lagged behind the non-partisan, youth engagement sites in terms of use of interactive features and appeals to youth. The story of the web in the 2005 UK election suggested that the campaign sites were being aimed less at the electorate but their main purpose was instead to create stronger relationships with their existing supporters (Jackson, 2006). The extent of interactive features on the websites tended to be limited to blogs, of which only the Liberal Democrats actually allowed comments. It is perhaps unsurprising that "few voters – and even fewer non-voters – paid any attention to party or candidate websites during the 2005 election campaign" (Coleman and Ward, 2005). This was reflected in the very small number of people found to have visited a party website in the campaign: just 3% (Ward, 2005).

From 2008 onwards, the story has been the further integration of web 2.0 technologies into campaigning with some incorporated into candidate or party websites such as the 'webcameron' video blog (Anstead and Chadwick, 2009) but mainly parties utilising other social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube ((Baumgartner and Morris, 2010; Solop, 2010; Stallabrass, 2009). Because of this vast expansion of social media use by candidates, much of the literature on web election practices from 2008 onwards is focused on the use of and effects of social media rather

than the candidate websites. However, in the UK at least, many were not using social media for real two-way interaction but rather for theoretically Web 1.0 practices such as the one-way transmission of information, creating a sort of Web 1.5 (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009; Wring and Ward, 2010).

Perhaps the most striking development in terms of campaign websites has been the development of activist hub centres online such as Obama's MyBO.com in the US and MyConservatives.com and Membersnet.com in the UK (Gibson, 2012). MyBO.com combined the traditional uses of a campaigning site e.g. providing information and online donation tools with a bespoke social networking and activist organization site. The site encouraged visitors to create their own online profiles and allowed them to access others through tools such as an internal messaging system, encouraging them to be both active and interactive (Harfoush, 2009). The design, content and moderation of the site also meant that whilst people had a great amount of freedom to be inventive and contribute in a variety of ways, the campaign team had learnt from Dean's mistakes and ensured that there was a degree of centralised control, ensuring that the focus remained on fundraising and getting out the vote (Exeley, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2009). This combination of traditional principles of community organising with the potential of the online environment led Castells (2009) to describe this as the first networked campaign.

Moving now to look at the effects of viewing candidate and party websites, the body of research is limited. Some early studies explored the variance in the success of candidates in the 1996 US Congressional elections and found that those who had campaign websites saw a significantly higher vote total than those who did not, controlling for party affiliation and incumbency (D'Alessio, 1997). Studies in Australia and Ireland found similar results (Gibson and McAllister, 2006 and 2011a; Sudulich and Wall, 2010). In terms of effects on users of the websites, the research is particularly

scant. Bimber and Davis (2003) found that those who visited candidate campaign websites in the 2000 US presidential election saw their levels of political knowledge increase compared to those who were not exposed to the sites. In Sweden, Dimitrova et al (2011) found that visiting party websites during an election campaign increased the likelihood of electoral participation and this effect was stronger than for those who visited online news websites, even when controlling for variables such as existing participation, interest and news consumption. An indirect or two-step mobilization effect has been suggested whereby campaign sites might activate the activists who then mobilize others who may be less engaged (Norris and Curtice, 2008; Vissers, 2009). The effects of visiting party or candidate campaign websites, especially in the context of young people have the potential for greater exploration.

1.3.3 Vote Advice Applications

We now turn to a collection of websites known as Vote Advice Applications (VAAs). In essence, these online tools enable users to take a quiz which matches their preferences on a number of salient issues with the stances of particular candidates or parties in relevant elections. Through this matching process, the tools provide users with a 'voting advice', in other words, an indication of who they should vote for as determined by the closeness of their views. The original VAA, the Dutch StemWijzer (translated as Vote Better or Vote Wiser), started life in the Netherlands in 1989 and was initially developed as a pen and paper concept aimed mainly at those teaching civic education to young people and consisted of a small booklet containing 60 statements. In the following years, it evolved into a computer-based concept, with the first fully online version being released in time for the 1998 election campaign. Its developers believed that the tool had a mainly educational purpose to firstly increase knowledge of the differences in policy stances between parties and secondly, to help voters choose more easily between the large amount of parties that exist in multi-party

democracies such as the Netherlands (de Graaf, 2010). The StemWijzer has become extremely popular with an estimated 3.5 million unique users using it in the 2006 elections, around a third of the voting population (Hirzalla et al, 2011) and 51.8% of voters in 2012 (Marschall, 2014).

National variations of VAAs have been developed in nearly all European countries (Garzia and Marschall, 2012), as well as some pan-European VAAs (i.e. EU Profiler) for the European elections in 2009 and 2014 but it is only relatively recently that they have been the subject of focused research. VAAs have also started to appear in other countries, including the US with sites such as 'Project Vote Smart' and 'On the Issues'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the existing body of research has been conducted in the European context, likely reflecting the large number of multi-party systems, with much less research focusing on the UK and to date, none in the US. The bulk of research consists of single country studies but as questions relating to VAA use are now included in several national election studies, more comparative work is emerging.

The earliest studies were mostly concerned with what kind of and how many people were using VAAs e.g. Boogers and Voerman, 2003; Hooghe and Teepe, 2007; Treschel, 2007; Wall et al. 2009; De Rosa, 2010. In terms of the typical user profile, users tended to be younger, well-educated and with some existing political interest. Hirzalla et al (2011) however, found that VAAs were being used by many young people, particularly young women, who did not already have high levels of political knowledge and interest, whereas older users did tend to have pre-existing higher levels of knowledge and interest. It may be then that whilst VAAs have a normalizing effect on the over-30s, in terms of actually using VAAs, there may be a mobilizing effect in play for younger people.

Interestingly, evidence from Finland suggests that VAA use is generational rather than necessarily age-based, with young people who have low levels of partisan identification use VAAs when they are first eligible to vote and then continue to use them in subsequent elections, suggesting that for young people at least, it could become a habit to use VAAs (Moring and Lindfors, 2005)

With increasing popularity and in some cases millions of users (although see Marschall, 2014 for a discussion on the varying methods of how numbers of users are calculated), the scope has broadened to encompass three main strands of VAA research. Firstly, a methodological stream of research has emerged, questioning the design, consistency, validity and reliability of VAAs (Marschall and Garzia, 2014). Aspects covered have included the requirements for transparency (Ladner et al. 2010; Cedroni, 2010; Ladner and Fivaz, 2012), questions of quality in terms of the questionnaire and the issues that are covered (Walgrave et al. 2009; Nuytemans et al. 2010), how the parties' or candidates' positions are collected and presented (Treschel and Mair, 2011; Gemenis, 2013; Krouwel and van Elfrinkhof, 2013) and much debate on how the different methods of calculating matches affects the final advice provided (Louwerse and Otjes, 2012; Louwerse and Rosema, 2013; Krouwel et. a (2012); Mendez, 2012; Wagner and Ruusuvirta, 2012).

The second body of research focuses on the potential effects of using VAAs on users. Walgrave et al. (2008a) suggest that VAAs take voters by the hand through complicated political landscapes and there is a general consensus that VAAs have the potential to affect users by lowering the costs relating to the procurement, analysis and evaluation of political information (Garzia, 2010), which in turn leads to two types of effects related to participation: cognitive and behavioural. Cognitive effects here refer to information-seeking behaviour and levels of knowledge (Edwards, 1998). Boogers and Voerman (2003) found that VAA users reported that their main reason for visiting the site was indeed to gain more information on the parties' positions and the majority of users felt that their political knowledge had been strengthened by playing the quiz. Marschall and Schmidt's 2005 study on users of the German Wahl-O-Mat VAA showed that just over half of those surveyed who had used the site felt motivated to seek out further information. A more recent study from the same authors found that around 60% of site users surveyed, felt that using the VAA had motivated them to seek out more political information (Marschall and Schmidt, 2010). A study into the Swiss VAA *Smartvote* in the 2007 national elections, found that 55% of users felt that using Smartvote improved their sources of political information, with around 16.4% felt they were motivated to

search out more information on political issues and 20.7% claiming to be inspired to look for further information on parties or candidates (Ladner et al. 2010). Analysis of users of the Italian VAA *cabina-elettorale.it* used in the 2009 European elections, suggest that 34% felt they had clearer information on the differences between the parties, 40% felt they were more aware of political issues and 21% felt they were motivated to inform themselves further on politics in general. In Finland, 73% of VAA users felt that the tools were a good way to learn about candidates' views (Mykkanen et al. 2007). Whilst not specifically designed for young people, Nadig and Fivaz (2009) found that VAAs seemed to be more effective amongst younger users than older groups of the population in terms of increasing knowledge and being motivated to search for further information about the election.

There are two ways in which VAA use may theoretically affect behaviour: firstly, a *qualitative* effect, in terms of whether use of the VAA has an effect on who the user decides to vote for and secondly, a *quantitative* effect, as in whether the user of the VAA decides to vote at all (Garzia, 2010). There is a growing amount of evidence that using VAAs can affect people's vote choice, in terms of changing their decision on who to vote for depending on the advice given to them by the website. For example, turning to the Swiss case once more, Ladner et al. (2010) found that in terms of vote choice, over 70% of those under 30 agreed that using Smartvote had influenced their decision of who to vote for, compared to around 50% of the over-50s. This suggests that VAAs might have a more influential role to play with younger voters in terms of vote choice. Using evidence from the 2011 elections, Pianzola (2014) found that Swiss voters who used VAAs were more likely to change their vote after having used one of the tools, compared to those who had not. These findings have been replicated to varying degrees in a number of different country and election contexts e.g. Aarts and van der Kolk, 2007; Walgrave et al. 2008; De Rosa, 2010; Nuytemans et al. 2010; Wall et al. 2014;; Alvarez et al. 2014).

Finally and perhaps most interestingly given that many VAAs are designed with the express aim of increasing voter turnout (e.g. Vihtonen, 2007), the possible mobilizing effects of VAA use and voting

vis-a-vis abstention has been examined. Ruusuvirta and Rosema (2009) suggest three theoretical mechanisms by which mobilizing effects could occur from using a VAA. Firstly, undecided voters might be encouraged to vote by means of being provided with a vote advice with highlights suitable parties, providing them encouragement to actually cast a vote. If voters have weak preferences and are not certain about their choice, confirmation of their choices by the VAA might increase confidence and create a mobilizing effect. Secondly, following the rational choice argument previously outlined, it can be hypothesized that the easily accessible information provided by the VAA might reduce the costs associated with collecting information and therefore may increase the chance of voting. Thirdly, the authors suggest that VAAs might increase turnout by making uninterested citizens engage with elections and voting. Whilst they do not suggest how this might occur, if we consider issue voting theories, it might be that using a VAA explicitly connects a person's views on issues with that of the world of politics, which may be particularly motivating to young people who have not previously made the connection (e.g. Delli Carpini, 2000). Given that large numbers of VAA users are under 35, it is of particular interest as to whether VAAs can in fact have a mobilizing effect on young people (Bengtsson & Grönlund, 2005; Boogers, 2006; Marschall, 2005; Paloheimo, 2007; Strandberg, 200x)

Evidence of the mobilizing effects of VAAs is so far mixed. Marschall and Schmidt (2010) found that among those who had not intended to vote before using the VAA, almost 20% felt that the Wahl-O-Mat had motivated them to vote in the election. Examining Finnish voters in the 2003 National and 2004 European Parliament elections, Mykannen and Moring (2007) found that VAAs significantly increased the likelihood of voting amongst lower socio-economic groups but had little effect on voting from those in higher SES groups. Ruusuvirta and Rosema (2009) suggest that use of VAAs in the Dutch 2006 general election may have raised turnout by 3%. Dinas et al. (2014) found that in the 2009 elections, the probability of voting was 14 percentage points higher for those who had used a VAA compared to those who had not. However in the Italian case, just 3% of those who were not planning to vote prior to using the site were motivated to do so by using the VAA (De Rosa, 2010).

These findings however should be considered with some care. As many of these studies have collected their data from surveys administered on specific VAA websites, these findings are based on those who self-selected to not only use the VAA but also to answer the additional survey questions (Pianzola and Ladner, 2011). In particular, it might be considered that using a VAA and choosing to vote in an election might have common latent drivers, but a recent study found that in a comparative study of four European countries using treatment effect models, “whatever causes people to use VAAs prior to the elections is not a driving force for electoral participation. Rather, the engagement with the VAA is what leads people to turnout more at the polls” (Garzia et al. 2014. The four countries examined: Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland have the longest established VAAs which suggests that context is extremely important for untangling any effects of VAA usage.

Despite the large number of young people using VAAs, there has yet been no empirical research establishing whether use of VAAs has a direct mobilization effect on them and there is also a lack of research on whether VAAs might have an indirect effect by affecting levels of pre-participatory attitudes, for young people or otherwise. Fivaz and Schwarz (2007) have suggested a theoretical link between VAA use and political trust, in that VAAs might lead to more transparency in democracy with candidates and parties being urged to reveal their true positions on issues rather than vague valence positions, which may in turn lead to greater trust among users. However, there are no empirical studies relating to VAA usage and trust or indeed either internal or external efficacy.

Another noticeable gap in the research is the absence of VAA research in the UK or US, despite the presence of VAAs in both countries for several years. One explanation for this might be the electoral context of these countries, wherein voters usually only have a small number of parties or candidates to choose from, compared to some European countries where citizens may have in excess of 800 candidates to choose from. In the Anglo-American context, decision making might in theory be easier and therefore the need for a VAA might be seen as less of a useful tool and more of an

entertaining quiz to play (Ladner et al. 2010a; Ladner et al.2010b). Hooghe and Teepe (2007) suggest there is little need for VAAs in Anglo-American two-party systems where it “it takes little effort to get a grasp of party positions” (p968). It maybe however that for less engaged citizens and for young people in particular, it is an effort to understand issues and policies and a VAA may still be of use in these countries. Building on this, the think-tank Demos partnered with the youth mobilization website Bite the Ballot to develop a VAA specifically designed for young people aged 18-24 called Verto, for the 2015 General Election in the UK (Birdwell et. al, 2015). At the time of writing, no data were available relating to its use during the election. Given the emerging evidence on mobilizing effects from other countries and the potential effect on young people, VAAs are an interesting phenomenon and worthy of further exploration.

1.4 Mobilization websites: a pathway to participation for young people?

Following the framework of Verba et al (1995), that essentially people don’t participate because they can’t, they don’t want to or they are not asked, we have found that it is not necessarily that young people don’t want to but a lack of key attitudes and behaviours combined with being less likely to be mobilized by political elites that prevents them from engaging. Firstly, as they don’t follow news in any great depth, they have little confidence in their own understanding of politics and whilst they may have particular interest in certain issues, they do not know how to relate or even see the link between these issues and formal politics. Part of the reason for this relates to their low feelings of trust towards politics and politicians, as well as their feeling that politicians do not listen to them or relate to their needs and concerns. In other words, they suffer from low levels of attention to news, internal and external efficacy and trust, which is not helped by the lower likelihood of them to be a target of mobilization by political parties and candidates.

Many of the potential solutions that have been introduced to try to combat low turnout and specifically youth turnout have focused on the physical costs of registration and voting without addressing these attitudinal and behavioural factors. Therefore, any solution needs to play a socializing and mobilizing role but the role of elites cannot be ignored. If part of the issue is that young people do not feel that political parties and candidates are not very responsive to them, then the change also has to come from the demand side; young people need to be more aware of the issues and parties' stances on them and parties need to do a better job of communicating with young people.

We have found that political websites have the capacity to increase young people's engagement but many unanswered questions remain; specifically what kinds of websites affect young people, how and why. The three types of mobilization websites all have the potential to increase the pre-participatory attitudes amongst young people, provide them with information and mobilize them to vote but there is a gap in the research as to whether they do in fact have these effects on young people. To address this we aim to examine these websites in elections in two different country contexts to see what the provision of these sites are and if any effects can be found on young people and given the importance of electoral and country context, if any differences can be found between the two.

A US and London comparison has been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the US has a longer history of youth mobilization websites and more sophisticated candidate web campaigns, with most of the literature on the web and politics in general based on the US case so there is a need to further this research in a different context. Secondly, there is little to no literature relating to VAA use in the US or the UK, whether amongst young people or the broader public and so an examination of VAAs in these countries would move the research on in the field of VAA research. Finally, whilst this is not a comparative study in the purest sense, it is common for international research to compare the US and another country leading to what Ward and Vedel (2006) have called "unhelpful comparisons"

(223). Whilst the UK and the US have similar political systems, there are important institutional differences between them (Anstead and Chadwick, 2009) which impact on how online campaigning and mobilization take place in each country. With this in mind, we have chosen to examine the London Mayoral election rather than a general election, given that it is more similar to the US as it is highly personalized and candidates have a more personal mandate as opposed to a party one. After the first election in 2000, Auty and Cowen's study of the candidates' websites concluded that there were "green shoots of cyber-democracy" (2000) but there has been an absence of research on the subsequent elections. Whilst the London mayoral elections are second-order ones, they are often high profile and high stake elections and usually receive national news coverage and so offer an interesting opportunity for exploration in and of itself, as well as in comparison to US elections.

The research on politics and the internet has tended to focus on the supply side i.e. the web presence of political elites rather than on the demand side, such as the effects on users of exposure to political websites. As we have argued, both the supply and demand sides have a part to play in turnout and so a study to understand both sides is important. The few studies that have attempted to incorporate both elements either need updating (e.g. Bimber and Davis, 2003; Norris, 2003) or are interested in the causes of people's online behaviour rather than the effects (Vaccari, 2013), with none focussing specifically on young people.

Our overarching question therefore is whether mobilization websites can provide a pathway to participation for young people, which translates into the following specific research questions.

Q1: To what extent do the three types of website promote political engagement both attitudinally and behaviourally?

Q2: How do young people experience and evaluate the three types of website?

Q3: What effect does exposure to a youth mobilization, candidate or VAA website have on young people's cognitive engagement, attitudes and electoral behaviour?

To answer these questions, we adopt a three-pronged approach. Firstly, we will seek to understand the digital landscape of youth mobilization sites, candidate sites and VAAs in each election by a process of web crawl analysis. We will then test our expectations about their functionality and the relative emphasis on various types of content contained in the sites, by developing and applying original purpose-built web indices to assess this content in regard to information and interactivity. For the youth mobilization and candidate sites, these will largely be based on existing measures that have focused on top-down information provision and bottom-up opportunities for citizen input and participation. For the VAA sites, we will develop a new and original coding scheme that is designed to measure their functionality and allow for more comparative work. We will then adopt an experimental design to address questions relating to young people's experiences of the websites and their causal effects: ultimately to examine whether exposure to the three different types of websites has a direct effect on mobilization or an indirect effect on pre-participatory attitudes and behaviours. In our next chapter, we will outline these data and methods in greater detail.

Chapter 2: Data and Methods

In order to understand how political websites might affect young people's engagement, we have adopted a mixed-method approach in order to fully explore our three inter-linked research questions. Following the literature review, we have identified that our approach needs to combine both the supply and demand side: we need to understand the nature and make-up of the websites in each of the three categories, in order to underpin any findings when we explore the potential effects of the websites. In addition, we would like to try and understand young people's perceptions of the websites, in terms of how they evaluate them and experience using them.

This chapter will provide the methodological details of this overarching research design. The first section will focus on our analysis of the supply side i.e. the youth mobilization, candidate and VAA websites in the US and London for the 2012 elections. This first section will describe the process of identifying the relevant sites in each country, followed by the details of the content analysis undertaken on each of the three types of sites. The second section focuses on the demand side and is in three parts. The first part describes the process of the online experiment, which incorporates the highest-scoring website in each category and in each country derived from the findings of the content analysis. The second part focuses on one strand of the analysis of this data, namely users' quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the sites they viewed during the experiment. The third part describes the process and measures used to examine effects of the chosen websites on young people across the key variables identified from the literature review: likelihood of voting, attention to news, internal efficacy, external efficacy and trust. Following this we will discuss the ethical considerations of the project and finally a summary of the full research design.

2.1 Website identification and content analysis

We turn first to the process of identifying all of the valid mobilization websites in our three categories in the relevant elections. To answer this question, we first needed to identify which and how many sites were in existence. In both of the elections under study, a number of different site identification techniques were employed to ensure that we had the full collection of youth mobilization, candidate and VAA websites for analysis. For the candidate websites, only their main websites were included in the analysis and not their activist sites, as the focus of these sites is on supporters and not the general electorate. Our starting point for the US in terms of youth engagement sites was the previous literature, specifically Xenos and Bennett (2007) and Montgomery et al (2004). After examining each site from the lists they provide, we removed any which were not related to the relevant election, those which were aimed at youth of non-voting age or which no longer existed. In both the US and the UK, we ran a series of Google searches using terms such as “youth”, “young adults”, “young people”, “politics”, “elections”, “political participation” and “voting” and the key words for each election. For the VAA websites, we also ran numerous searches via Google using terms such as “vote match”, “voting quiz”, “who should I vote for”, again in combination with key words for each relevant election. The candidate websites were the easiest to identify, searching by name for the two main candidates in the US (Barack Obama and Mitt Romney) and the two minor candidates, who were nevertheless on the ballot in all states (Jill Stein of the Green party and Gary Johnson of the Libertarian party). In the UK, the official information website for the London Mayoral election, London Elects, provided the list of all seven candidates’ websites.

Once all of the URLs had been collected, they were then fed into the Issue Crawler network analysis tool (www.issuecrawler.net) The Issue Crawler is a web-based network location and visualisation tool created by Richard Rogers at the Govcom.org foundation. It works by allowing the user to enter a number of URLs which form a ‘seed list’. The software then ‘crawls’ the sites specified on the seed

list and uses different methods of co-link analysis to identify hyperlinks in, out and between websites on the seed list. There are a number of different types of link analysis available, of which we used snowball analysis in order to crawl two seed lists to identify any pages that received at least one outbound link from the seed sites. Other similar and more sophisticated web crawler tools are available but as this process was simply to check that we had not missed any other relevant youth or VAA websites, a simple tool was sufficient. Once we had produced our full list of websites, all were checked manually to ensure they were still live and had content focusing on the 2012 elections. This collection of websites formed the basis of the website content analysis.

As we have previously shown, the literature suggests that information provision and interactivity are crucial to websites having an effect on young people. Based on this, we aimed to analyse the youth mobilization websites and candidate websites in terms of their levels of information provision and interactivity. Given the nature of VAA sites, their quiz format means that they are inherently informative and interactive and so they could not be analysed in the same way as the other two types of websites. We therefore needed to develop two separate coding schemes to assess the different types of websites, the aim of which was two-fold: firstly to see the make-up and provision of the different features on the sites and how this compared by type of website and by country and secondly, to enable us to create scores for the websites from which we could then take the highest scoring websites forward to be tested in the experiment.

Turning firstly to the coding scheme for the youth mobilization and candidate sites, we can see from the literature that many similar studies have adopted the approach devised by Gibson and Ward (2000), which relates to operationalizing variables which measure specific content features, using these variables to code websites for the presence or absence of the features and finally developing indices of these variables in order to be able to measure and score how well the websites perform on these particular functions. The studies that have utilised this approach have measured a variety of aspects of websites in different electoral contexts e.g. Norris, 2003; Gibson et al., 2003; Lusoli and

Ward, 2005; Latimer, 2009; Vaccari, 2013, whilst some studies have focussed on very specific aspect of political websites such as the inclusion and discussion of specific issues (Xenos and Bennett , 2007). As previous studies have suggested that high levels of information provision and interactivity were more likely to engage young people and effect change on levels of political engagement (e.g. Tedesco, 2006; Wang, 2007), our coding scheme therefore focuses on these specific aspects of the websites. Following the work of Bucy (2004), we distinguish between two different aspects of both information and interactivity. For information, we measure both issue or candidate information provision and election information provision e.g. details about how and where to vote. For interactivity, we distinguish between content interactivity such as being able to share content from the website and interpersonal interactivity, such as being able to comment on the website. We also have an index relating to the design and functionality to assess how well the websites perform on basic functions such as usability and dynamism. Altogether we have five indices and the specific functions that each of these indices measure are presented in table 1. The actual coding scheme used can be found in appendix 1. The majority of features receive one point if present but a small number of features can receive up to three points, depending on the sophistication of the feature. Looking at volunteering for example, if this is possible via filling out a hard copy form this receives 1 point, by filling out an online form receives 2 points whilst being able to volunteer directly on the site receives 3 points.

The scores enable us to compare at an overall level as well as across the individual indices. To give us a simple way of comparing the scores against one another, for each index we can roughly split the total possible score into thirds which allows us to examine if the score is broadly low, medium or high. We are also able to examine the mean scores across the two different types of websites to examine if there are any differences both within and between countries.

To complement the quantitative coding, we concur with several studies who suggest that a process of thick description for websites allows us to examine aspects that may be difficult to adequately

Design and functionality (Possible total of 12 points)	Functioning website, Fixed menu bar, Homepage button, Search Tool, Site Map, Donate offline, Donate online, Freshness, Dynamism
Information provision: candidate and issues (Possible total of 12 points)	Pdf version of manifesto, Multimedia version of manifesto, Interactive version of manifesto, Opponent dismissal/comparison, Issue/policy positions in bullet points, Issue/policy positions with detailed information, Event schedule or calendar, Audio podcasts/speeches, Video, Policies for specific groups, Policies for young people, Candidate profiles/bios
Information provision: election (Possible total of 6 points)	General information about voting and registration, interactive information about voting and registration, Text information about polling place, Map or interactive information about polling place, Link to a VAA, Embedded VAA
Content interactivity (Possible total of 15 points)	Pre-set shareable content, choice of fixed shareable content, changeable content, shareable email, shareable video, shareable audio, shareable text, shareable widgets, shareable logo, offline downloads, online downloads, moderated uploads, unmoderated uploads, E-polls, E-petitions
Interpersonal interactivity (Possible total of 15 points)	Volunteer, Connect on Facebook, Connect on Twitter, Connect on YouTube, Connect on Flickr, Connect on Google+, Connect on Pinterest, Internal Blog, Blog allows comments, Campaign staff post on blog, Candidate posts on blog, Forums/bulletin boards, Candidate input in forum/bulletin boards

Table 1: Indices and related functions measured by the youth mobilization and candidate website coding scheme

capture from the coding scheme e.g. Cresswell and Miller, 2000; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007).

Therefore, we also present qualitative description for each site which was captured at the same time as the coding process took place. All coding was carried out by the author during the relevant election campaigns.

Vote Advice Applications

For the Vote Advice Applications we needed to create a coding framework from scratch, as no research of this kind has been undertaken before. Where comparative research has been done on VAAs, it has focussed on design in terms of the formulation of statements and the algorithms used to produce results (e.g. Walgrave et.al, 2009; Krouwel et al., 2012; Wagner and Ruusuvirta, 2012; Lowerse and Rosema, 2013; Gemenis, 2013; Van Camp et al., 2014) and not on the features of the sites that may contribute to any effects on users. As such, whilst the coding scheme we have developed is exploratory in nature, we believe that it makes a key contribution to the literature relating to VAAs. Although this does not allow us to compare scores to the youth mobilization and candidate sites, it does nevertheless allow us to examine differences between the different VAAs and observe any differences between countries.

As for the coding scheme for the two other types of sites, we attempted to follow the rationale of operationalizing variables relating to the function of the site, measuring the presence of these variables and then creating indices in order to assess how well the site performs in specific aspects. There are two key differences here from the previous coding scheme. Firstly, there are a larger number of variables where we simply record the number and nature of their presence rather than allocating them a score. The reason for this is that due to the lack of previous research on this, we cannot make a subjective judgement as to whether one version of a variable is superior to another. As an example, when examining the results provided by the different VAAs, some might provide simple text reporting the result of the quiz whilst others might provide this more graphically. Whilst we might intuitively think that a more visual representation might be more engaging and therefore

better, if the graphics provided are complicated or confusing then a simple text result would be preferable. This means that without previous research on the different effects of variables such as this, it would not make sense to decide that one should score higher than another. The information from these unscored variables was incorporated into the thick qualitative description. The second difference is that there are a smaller number of indices: design and functionality, information and interactivity/mobilization. Whilst we have tried to have similar themes to the indices as the other coding scheme, the variables included in each are of course different and we were also unable to distinguish between the different types of information and interactivity as previously. The variables included in each index can be found in table 2 and the full coding scheme can be found in appendix 2. From this data, we will undertake simple analysis by comparing overall counts of scores: both overall and from the individual indices.

Design and functionality (Possible total of 3 points)	Functioning website, Dynamism, Number of questions and statements, Selectivity within questions, Number and content of topic areas, Type of response categories, Ability to rate importance of issues
Information (Possible total of 7 points)	Picture of candidates/party logos, Links to further information on issues/candidates, Closest match shown in results, Matches for all parties/candidates shown in results, Presentation in results, Transparency/clarity of results
Interactivity/ Mobilization (Possible total of 8 points)	Potential to share results, Tool to compare results to others, Presence of mobilizing message or reminder to vote, Tracking tool to record impact influence, Discussion/chat tools

Table 2: Indices and related functions measured by the VAA coding scheme

2.2. Online survey and experiment

From the content analysis, we were able to identify the highest scoring websites in each country across the three different types of mobilization websites. Based on the premise that websites with high levels of information provision and interactivity (Xenos and Kyoung, 2008) will be more likely to impact young people's political engagement, we then aimed to use these websites to examine the demand side by exploring experiences of using the sites and if any effects on specific aspects of engagement can be found.

Following Lupia and Philpot's (2005) logic, our focus is on individual examples of three specific types of political website, rather than political or youth sites in general or the web as a whole. An experimental approach is preferred in order to parse out any differences between exposure to the different sites, whereby random assignment to treatment or control groups prior to elections ensures that any differences between the groups can be ascribed to having received the treatment (Morton and Williams, 2010). Experiments are however the exception rather than the norm in this type of research; from the previous research on our three types of websites, we find that there have been a very small number of experiments involving youth mobilization websites (Xenos and Kyoung, 2008; Tedesco, 2006), one involving fictional candidate websites (Sundar et al, 2003) and just one relating to a Vote Advice Application (Vassil, 2011). Most of these studies were conducted on university students or staff and so can only give an indication of whether their findings might be replicated in a more representative sample. An alternative to the experimental approach would have been to conduct the research with those who are already users of the particular websites, however we would assume that users would already have a certain level of political engagement and therefore we could not apply any findings to the wider population. Specifically for VAA research, most studies are observational in nature, collecting data from national surveys or specifically from surveys with VAA users, which suffer particularly from the issue of selection bias. When surveys are conducted on the VAA websites, often directly after users have completed the quiz, there is the double issue of self-selection into the treatment as well as into the survey (Ruusuvirta and Rosema, 2009; Vassil, 2011; Garzia et al. 2014). Examining the correlational and specifically causal links between exposure to randomly assigned websites and electoral engagement, using representative samples from the UK and US creates a useful contribution to the body of research on youth engagement and of each type of website.

We will firstly outline the design and process of the survey and experiment, before examining the specific data and methods used to answer our two separate demand side research questions. As the number of experimental studies involving political websites in this way is fairly small, we also

explored other studies which have used a pre/post-test experimental design looking at a variety of web-based mobilization (e.g. Lupia and Baird, 2003; Tedesco, 2004; Hooghe et al., 2010; Towner and Dulio, 2011). Most of these studies took place at just one point in time e.g. the pre-test, experimental exposure and post-test were all administered on one day but as we wanted to examine effects on election-related engagement, our design needed to encompass two time points. We also wanted to expand the scope of the studies by using a larger and more representative sample than has previously been possible. For example, Xenos and Kyoung's (2008) experiment looking at youth mobilization websites had a total sample of 179 participants aged 18-29, all of whom were undergraduates. Vassil (2011) had a total sample of 394 university staff and students from two Estonian universities, of which 97 people actually used the EU Profiler VAA whilst Tedesco (2007) had a sample of 271, with 136 exposed to the experimental web condition and 135 in the control group. Following on from this, we made the logistical decision to administer the experiment via a web-based survey rather than in a more traditional lab-based experiment in order to be able to recruit a large enough and more representative sample across two time points. The validity and reliability of Internet surveys has been of some concern since their inception, for example in their capacity to provide a representative sample (Best and Krueger, 2004) but more recent studies have concluded that as long as web-based surveys are administered correctly, they are as representative and accurate as telephone or face-to-face methods (Evans and Mathur, 2005; Ansolabehere and Schaffner, 2014).

Procedure and sample

Our experimental research design therefore took the form of a randomised pre-test/post-test quasi-experiment, administered via the web (see Figure 3). The procedure for the UK and US experiments follow broadly the same procedure but there are some key differences which we will highlight in the relevant sections. In the UK, we were fortunate to be able to embed our questions and experiment within an existing survey relating to the London Mayoral Election run by the polling and research

company YouGov. Whilst we would not have been able to have conducted the London survey without this opportunity, it did mean that we were constricted in some areas particularly, allowing respondents to refuse to view the websites if they wished: in other words, to complete the survey without taking part in the experiment. In the US, the survey was conducted by the research agency Research Now, a primarily consumer research organisation. In both countries, members of the research panels were sent an invitation by email asking them to participate in a survey. They were informed that there would be a short follow-up survey a few weeks after the first one and that the subject of the survey was the upcoming election. If they agreed to take part in the survey by clicking on the link in the email, they were randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups (see figure 3) which determined if they would see a website or not and if so, which one they would be exposed to. Respondents in the UK were offered a standard credit to be added to their account for each part of the survey equating to around 50p, whilst respondents in the US were offered \$1.50 for the pre-test and \$1.00 for the post-test on top of panel credits ("e-rewards") which were also added to their panel account for completing each wave.

The pre-test took place approximately two to three weeks prior to each relevant election with the pre-test following shortly after the election. In London, the pre-test was conducted in the two weeks prior to 3rd May and the post-test ran from the 6th - 23rd May 2012, whilst in the US, the two waves ran between the 16th October to the 5th November and from the 16th November to 3rd December 2012. The pre-test survey measured existing levels of political attitudes, attentiveness to news, previous political behaviour and other relevant factors such as partisanship, feelings towards the two main candidates and socio-economic demographics (see appendices 2 and 3 for survey scripts). To counter any testing effects, the whole sample completed exactly the same pre-test.

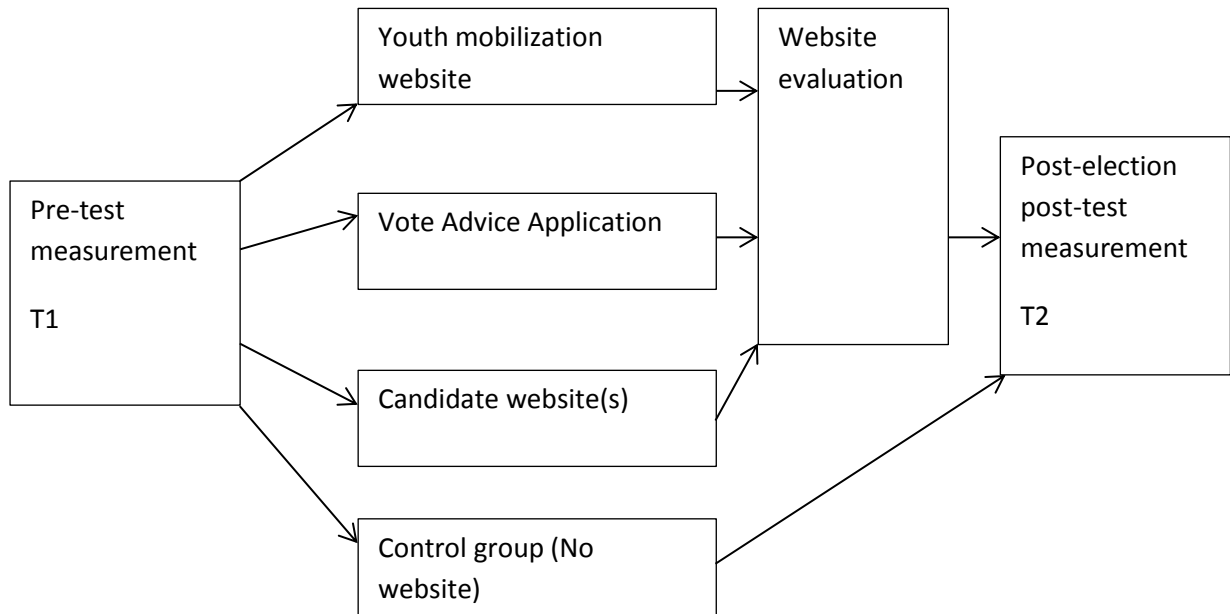


Figure 3: Outline of online experiment

Following this, those assigned to one of the treatment groups were exposed to one of the three website categories, where they were asked to click through to open the specific website in an embedded window and were asked to browse the website for a set period of time. Participants were not able to return to the survey questions until the allotted time had passed. Those allocated to the candidate site treatment group were given links to both of the main candidate sites and the order in which these were presented was also randomised. The viewing time was different in both countries. Based on the previous experimental studies discussed in the literature review, we asked respondents to view the websites for 8 minutes. However, following advice from the US research agency, this was reduced to four minutes for the US leg of the research. After viewing the website, respondents were asked a number of questions evaluating the site's design and usability before answering an open-ended response question giving their views on the website. This evaluation section will be discussed in more detail in the next section and forms the basis of the analysis presented in chapter 4.

Following the election, respondents were sent an email invitation to the post-test questionnaire, which repeated the questions relating to political attitudes and cognitive engagement as well as some measures of electoral behaviour, including whether they had voted or not. The period of time between the two surveys was short and chosen in order to make it more likely that respondents would accurately recall their behaviour during the election period as well as helping to reduce attrition rates.

In the UK, we were advised that panel respondents were unlikely to want to visit the websites without an additional financial incentive which we could not provide due to budgetary constraints. Therefore, we were obligated to add a section into the UK questionnaire explaining that viewing the websites was part of research being undertaken by the University of Manchester and that it was not compulsory to do this if they did not wish to do so. 2112 initially took part in the study but only 1081 agreed to view the websites and take part in the experiment. Of these, 266 people did not return for the pre-test and so our final sample is 815, somewhat smaller than we would have hoped. In the US, respondents were obliged to view the websites and therefore the sample is more straightforward (Table 3). The total number of respondents for the pre-test wave is 4,667 and 2,975 for the post-test wave. The attrition rate between the two waves was 36.3%. An examination of the characteristics of the respondents who dropped out showed no significant differences to those who returned for the post-wave across a number of measures. The US sample was nationally representative and the only eligibility criteria were that respondents had to be US Citizens and eligible to vote in the election. Given the different nature of the London Mayoral election, the sample is regionally representative and respondents were required to be eligible to vote in the election. Prior to both studies, we were advised that the 18-24 age-group would be difficult to recruit and during the process of recruitment, this did in fact prove to be the case and therefore both samples required a boost of young people in order to meet the quotas.

	Control group	Treatment group (all sites)	Youth Mobilization site	VAA	Candidate sites
London:					
All	479	262	137	111	133
18-30	108	97	36	24	37
US:					
All	726	2249	765	734	750
18-30	241	829	275	265	289

Table 3: Experiment sample by treatment group

2.2.1 User experience and evaluation

Despite much debate about young people, engagement and the internet, very few studies have actually been conducted specifically with young people to understand how they experience particular websites. The few that have been conducted have either been concerned with teens i.e. 14-15 year olds rather than young adults (Livingstone, 2007) or were undertaken in the fairly early days of political websites and therefore may no longer be relevant (Chicksand and Carrigan, 2006). However, we argue that it is crucial to understand how political websites are experienced from young people's point of view. Firstly, there is a tendency to assume what young people think (Collin, 2015) but we believe that it is important for them to express their opinions in their own words. Secondly, as Lupia and Philpot (2005) have argued, young and older people are likely to evaluate and experience websites differently, which is likely to impact on how appealing or engaging they are to different groups. Finally, young people's experiences of the websites gives us some additional information and context in which to understand any effects that may or not be found from exposure to the websites. Therefore to understand how young people experience the websites, we use both

quantitative and qualitative data derived from the online survey outlined above. After being exposed to the websites in the survey, users were asked to evaluate the websites they had just seen by answering the following four questions:

- How user-friendly did you find the website?
- How helpful did you find the website in understanding the key issues of the election?
- How likely are you to visit the website again?
- How likely are you to recommend the website to others?

Respondents were asked to select from a 0-10 scale for each item, with 0 being the lowest score and 10 being the highest, allowing us to compare the means by website and by age group. Independent sample t-tests were utilised to examine if any differences between age groups were statistically significant.

We then asked respondents to rate the sites in terms of their impact, in other words in terms of the effects they thought the sites had on them. Three statements were presented, with a simple binary yes/no response:

- It helped me decide whether to vote
- It helped me decide who to vote for
- It made me more interested in the election

Results were analysed using basic frequencies, allowing us to compare the percentages of young and older respondents who felt the individual websites had an effect on their voting behaviour, choice or electoral interest.

Finally, our qualitative data were derived from an open-ended question “Please tell us what you liked most about the website?” With these answers, a simple process of cross-tabulation allowed us

to categorise the responses by the website seen and by age group. A process of qualitative content analysis was undertaken, allowing us to systematically code the responses to identify key themes or patterns. The specific approach used was directed content analysis (Hickey and Kipping, 1996; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999, Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), as we started with some pre-determined categories based on the quantitative coding process: namely design and functionality, information provision and interactivity. Once all of the responses had been coded using these categories, the text was then re-analysed to explore any additional themes that were present, some of which were only relevant for individual websites. The full set of themes can be seen in table 4.

There are some limitations with the qualitative data. Firstly, as the question asked for a positive response i.e. what they liked most about the site, we were not able to carry out analysis such as sentiment analysis that a more neutral question would have allowed us to. Secondly, as it based on one open-ended survey question we cannot make inferences from the data and other qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups would have provided us with richer data. Thirdly, survey respondents in London were not obliged to complete the open-ended question but instead had the option of skipping the question. Although most respondents did answer this question to some degree, the overall sample size for London is much smaller than the US, and we therefore have a much smaller and shallower pool of qualitative responses across the London election websites.

Finally, from the specific responses, those in the candidate website condition were shown both websites and asked to evaluate either the website they liked the most or that they felt they had spent the most time looking at in the experiment. However, meaningful analysis of these responses proved impossible as a large proportion of the comments were related to the candidates themselves or the election rather the websites and the remaining comments were not of sufficient quality to undertake thematic analysis on. We therefore present qualitative analysis for only the youth mobilization and VAA sites in chapter 4.

Pre-determined codes	Design and functionality Information Interactivity
Additional themes	Tone Youth Mobilization Involvement of MTV (for Power of 12) Vote Easy VAA (for Power of 12) Presentation of results (for I Side With) Effects Bias

Table 4: Qualitative content analysis themes

2.3 Testing website effects

Finally, we turn to our examination of the effects of using the websites. To examine the correlational and specifically causal links between the use of electoral websites and direct or indirect effects on young people's political engagement, an experimental design was required. We will first outline the independent variables, followed by the dependent variables and the specific methods of analysis used for each.

2.3.1 Independent variables

The main independent variables are three dummy variables measuring exposure to the Youth Mobilization site, the VAA or the candidate sites versus being in the control group or not having

visited the specific site. The websites chosen for each country as a result of the content analysis described in the previous section can be seen in table 5.

Age is the second variable of interest, measured by a question capturing the actual age of the respondents at the time of the pre-test. This was recoded into a binary dummy variable of 18-30s compared to the over-30s.

2.3.2 Dependent variables

Our main interest is in the elements of engagement identified by the literature review as being particularly relevant for young people and the potential effects of the websites: direct effects on vote or indirect effects on attention to news and three key political attitudes, specifically internal and external efficacy and political trust. In order to assess the comparability of our data, we examined similar variables from the ANES for the US and compared them with the pre-test levels of our dependent variables, the results of which can be seen in appendix 4. Broadly, we find that the pre-test levels are similar to those from the other surveys and so we can be confident that our findings are reliable.

	London websites	US websites
Youth Mobilization site	Bite the Ballot (www.bitetheballot.co.uk)	Power of 12 (www.powerof12.org)
Vote Advice Application	Vote Match (www.votematch.org.uk)	I Side With (www.I Side With.com)
Candidate websites	Boris Johnson (www.backboris2012.com) and/or Ken Livingstone (www.kenlivingstone.com)	Barack Obama (www.barackobama.com) and/or Mitt Romney (www.mittromney.com)
Control group	No website viewed	No website viewed

Table 5: Websites tested in the online experiment

Vote

Turning finally to voting, vote was measured in the same way across both countries, with the post-test question, “We have found that many people did not vote in the recent election for Mayor of London/US President. Did you manage to vote?” Respondents were offered three options 1) I wanted to vote but was prevented from doing so, 2) I did not vote or 3) I voted. For ease of analysis this was recoded into a binary variable representing voted or not, with 3) recoded as 1 and all other options recoded as 0. There are some differences in the pre-tests relating to vote between the two surveys. In London, respondents were not asked the likelihood of them voting in the election nor if they had already voted by post. In the US, participants were asked if they had already voted by post at the time of the pre-test and for the analysis of vote, we removed these early voters from the sample for the voting question. There were a total of 463 postal voters, leaving us with a sample of

2512. Respondents in the US were also asked how likely they were to vote in the election in the pre-test, which was measured on a 0-10 scale with 0 being very unlikely and 10 being very unlikely. In order to assess the mean pre-test scores across groups, we ran a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) by treatment group which showed there were no significant differences in mean scores amongst the groups and so the likelihood of voting was distributed evenly across all groups.

For both elections, two binary logistic regression models were used to examine the effects of the websites on voting in the relevant election. In London, the two models were specified as follows: in the first iteration age group and the three website conditions were entered into the model, in the second the interaction terms of age group and the websites were added. In the US, the same variables were added into the model with the addition of likelihood of voting.

Attention to news

Turning next to attention to news, in the London survey there was not a question asking directly about attention to news and current affairs in the pre-test survey but there was an item asking how much attention they had paid to the election in the preceding weeks, which we have used as a proxy for attention to news. This was measured on a four-point scale with the options: 'A great deal', 'A fair amount', 'Not very much' and 'Not at all'. This was re-coded into two groups, with the first two responses becoming 'High attention' and the latter two becoming 'Low attention'. In the post-test, respondents were asked to indicate their level of attention to news and current affairs, measured on a 0-10 scale. In the US pre-test, respondents were asked to indicate their level of attention to news and current affairs, using a four-point scale of 'No attention', 'Not much attention', 'Some attention' or 'A good deal of attention', which were again re-coded into two groups of high and low attention. In the post-test the same question was asked, again measured by a 0-10 scale ranging from low to high levels of attention. The method of analysis used for both countries was to compare the post-test mean scores with previous levels of attention.

Political attitudes

Internal efficacy, external efficacy and political trust are all measured on a 5-point Likert scale in both countries, capturing the extent to which respondents agree-disagree (strongly agree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree) to the following three statements:

- Internal efficacy: 'Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't understand what's going on' (1=strongly agree-5=strongly disagree);
- External efficacy: 'I don't think government officials care much about what people like me think' (1=strongly agree-5=strongly disagree);
- Political trust: 'You can generally trust the people who are in elected positions to do what is right' (1=strongly disagree-5=agree).

These were coded so that the most positive answers (4 and 5) represent the highest levels of the attitude. For ease of understanding, the variables were also recoded as very low, low, medium, high and very high levels of the relevant variable. To compare the pre-and post-test levels, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was considered the most appropriate which due to the ordinal nature of the variables. These tests also allow us to compare the ranks and tied findings, meaning that we can also see what proportion saw no change to their levels of each political attitude. We first examined the effects of the treatment groups overall compared to the control group before examining the effects on each individual website condition.

In order to examine the effects of each website in more detail, we also undertook regression analysis. Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variables for attitudes, ordinal regression was initially adopted. However, from the initial assumption tests all three variables in London and all four variables in the US violated the assumption of proportional odds as assessed by a full likelihood ratio test, comparing the residual of the fitted location model to a model with varying location

parameters; the results of which are reported in chapter 4. The results indicated that any effects are different at different levels of the dependent variable and therefore multinomial logistic regression was chosen as the most appropriate method. Two models were specified, with prior levels of the specific attitude, age group and the three website dummy variables entered in the first stage, with the age group and interaction terms added in the second. The pre-test level of each attitude was treated as a continuous variable with all others being in the form of a binary categorical variable. These models allowed to us to examine the odds ratios for any significant effects, enabling us to examine the likelihood of those in specific treatment groups having particular post-test levels of the relevant attitude.

2.4 Ethical considerations

Due to the mixed-method approach, there were a number of different ethical considerations in the research. When coding the websites, the author set up an email account in case any sign-ups were required, to be used solely for data collection and this was deleted once the data had been collected.

In terms of the experimental work, the two key issues were ensuring the confidentiality of participants and guarding against bias. All survey respondent data was stored against a unique identifier assigned to each panel member allowing for demographic information to be matched back but all data is anonymous. The experiment was carried out following the guidelines of the University of Manchester, the Market Research Society and the ICC/ESOMAR.

Given the electoral content of the study, we had to be careful to avoid any semblance of ‘push-polling’ given that we were discussing candidates so close to the election date. To guard against any perceived bias, we ensured that those who were in the treatment group were given links to both of

the main candidate sites and the links were rotated so some participants saw one candidate first and vice versa.

2.5 Summary

In order to examine the effects of specific election websites on young people's political engagement in the 2012 London Mayoral and US Presidential election, we have adopted a mixed-method approach. Having identified all of the websites in the three categories of mobilization website, we then developed a coding scheme measuring levels of design and usability, information provision and interactivity based on theories outlined in the literature review. This enabled us to compare the youth mobilization websites and the candidate campaign sites in order to understand how they performed on these indices and also to see any differences between the different elections. In addition, we also developed a first attempt at a quantitative coding scheme for VAAs in order to be able to compare the key features and content across different sites.

From the scores of the content analysis, we selected one youth mobilization site and VAA for each election and tested these alongside the two main candidate sites in our unique online pre-and post-test experiment. This allowed us to expose young people to these specific websites and get qualitative and quantitative feedback on how they rated and experienced the websites. It also allowed us to examine the causal effects of viewing a particular election website on voting, attention to news, internal and external efficacy and trust and enables us to examine any differences between 18-30s year olds and the over-30s. We begin our presentation of the findings from this research design in the next chapter with the results of the quantitative content analysis.

Chapter 3: Content analysis

We now turn to the first of our three empirical chapters. In this chapter we explore the supply side of the equation, examining the population and content of the three types of mobilization websites in the two elections: youth mobilization websites, the candidate campaign websites and the Vote Advice Applications in order to understand the functions of these websites and lay the foundations for understanding how these specific functions and features may lead to effects on young people's engagement.

To recap, our specific research question is:

Q1: To what extent do our three types of website (youth mobilization websites, VAAs and candidate websites) promote political engagement both attitudinally and behaviourally?

To answer this, we need to understand what the extent of provision of these websites are in each electoral context, both in terms of number of sites and in terms of what the websites actually offer, particularly their provision of information and interactivity as the literature suggests that these elements are most likely to affect young people's engagement. To do this, we firstly identify the full population of each type of website in each election through a combination of manual and automated searches and then assess the function and make-up of each site using coding schemes. Candidate sites and youth mobilization websites can be coded based on the same coding scheme since they are engaged in broadly similar tasks but the VAAs are coded separately given their unique purpose and properties. This does limit our capacity to develop hypotheses comparing the three different types of websites but we can still formulate some expectations regarding the dominant functions of the VAAs based on the literature. Our specific hypotheses therefore are based on the candidate websites and the youth mobilization websites whereas our examination of the VAA sites is more exploratory in nature. The candidate and youth mobilization websites are coded for three

main components: Design and Functionality, Information provision (issue and candidate information and practical election information) and Interactivity (Content interactivity and Interpersonal interactivity). The VAA coding scheme was challenging to create but it broadly covers similar components: Design and Functionality, Information Provision and Interactivity and Mobilization, although these indices contain different elements to the other coding scheme. The scores from the coding schemes will be used to test our expectations and specific hypotheses about the nature of the different election websites. From the extant literature, we have three main sets of expectations regarding the candidate and youth mobilization websites which inform our hypotheses: differences between websites in the two different elections, differences between types of sites (inter-actor) and differences between individual sites within the same category of website (intra-actor).

Firstly, we seek to compare the US and the London election candidate and youth mobilization websites. As outlined in the literature, there has been little research conducted in the context of the London Mayoral election, leaving us little to base specific hypotheses on. However, given the general consensus about the relative advancement of the US in terms of web campaigning and the longer tradition of youth mobilization efforts by non-partisan organisations, we expect that the sites from the US will outperform their London counterparts i.e. be richer in content and make greater use of the interactive potential of the web.

Secondly, we wish to compare differences between the two types of websites as we would expect to see some inter-actor differences between the candidate and youth mobilization websites. As both types of websites are largely focused on providing information to potential voters and encouraging them to turnout, we would expect both types of website to offer information and promote interactivity. However, in terms of the type of information, we would expect candidate sites to present more partisan information such as details about the candidates and relevant policy issues, whereas we might expect the youth mobilization websites to provide more practical election information such as how to find your polling station. In terms of interactivity, although candidates

are interested in persuading and mobilizing voters, we would not expect them to provide high levels of interpersonal interactivity since this would be extremely costly in terms of cost and staff resources. Instead we would expect them to offer more opportunities for interacting with the site in terms of content such as downloading campaign resources. Youth mobilization websites however might be expected to be more interested in creating a conversation with young people and therefore offer more opportunities for interpersonal interactivity.

Finally, the literature is limited in terms of being able to draw out specific predictions about differences between youth mobilization websites. For example, it is not clear how it might impact on the website if a youth mobilization organisation was new or long-established or if it had an online-only presence compared to those with an offline presence. Thus for the youth mobilization websites, comparisons will be drawn in a more exploratory manner. For the candidate sites however, we can draw on previous work looking at differences between partisan sites. Broadly, following the normalization principle, we would expect the websites of the major candidates in each election to outperform the websites of candidates from more minor parties. As the literature suggests, if young people are less likely to identify with the traditional parties and feel more aligned with smaller parties e.g. Green parties or independent candidates, then it is important to understand how well their websites stand up to their rivals in terms of being able to engage young people. Other research suggests that smaller parties may be more likely to use the web to engage directly with voters and so we add a final caveat that minor party candidates are expected to score as well, if not better than their major candidate counterparts on interpersonal interactivity.

Building on these expectations, we wish to test the following specific hypotheses:

Election level hypotheses

H1: The US will outperform the UK across all measures in both youth mobilization and candidate websites.

Inter-actor hypotheses

H2: Candidate sites will place more emphasis on the function of partisan issue information provision and content interactivity than youth mobilization sites

H3: Youth mobilization websites will place more emphasis on the provision of functional election information and interpersonal interactivity

Intra-actor hypotheses

H4: The websites of major party candidates will outperform minor party candidates

H5: The websites of minor party candidates will score as well as or higher than the major party candidates on interpersonal interactivity.

The structure of the chapter examining these hypotheses is as follows. We will firstly focus on the youth mobilization and candidate websites, describing the population of both types of sites in each election before turning to examine the scores from the content analysis. We will first examine the overall scores in order to test H1 and H4 before turning to a detailed examination of each of the indices e.g. (design, information provision and interactivity) which make up the overall score, in order to explore hypotheses H2, H3 and H5. We will then turn to examine the VAAs, firstly outlining the population of these sites in both elections, before presenting an overall description of each VAA and the overall score for each VAA. We will then examine the scores for the individual indices and present a simple comparison of means allowing us to assess any differences between the sites in the two elections. We now turn to outline of the youth mobilization and candidate websites present in the 2012 elections.

3.1 Youth mobilization and candidate websites in the 2012 elections

Using a combination of manual and web searches, one youth mobilization site and seven candidate sites were identified for the London election. We note that at the time of the research, the youth mobilization website Bite the Ballot was a relatively new enterprise with little funding and appeared to aim to be a general youth engagement website, rather than one specifically relating to encouraging young people (those over 18) to vote in the Mayoral election. However, it did have a section on the tool bar headed “Youth Vote London: Mayoral Elections 2012” and so we have assumed that this was part of its remit and included the site in the analysis. In the US, we examined four candidate sites. Aside from the two main candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, Jill Stein and Gary Johnson (from the Green and Libertarian Party respectively) were included as they appeared on the ballot across the majority of states. Whilst there were a number of other candidates, they only had a place on the ballot in a small number of states and for this reason their websites do not form part of the analysis. Initially eight youth electoral mobilization websites were identified. However, when examining these websites in detail, four of these websites were the online presences of offline youth engagement organisations offering information about their campus or community based activities, rather than specifically websites designed to mobilize young people via the web. These websites were therefore not included in the analysis. These websites were for Arsalyn, Democracy Matters, Mobilize.org and The League of Young Voters Education Fund website. Their sister organisation, the League of Young Voters did also have a youth mobilization website which was included in the analysis. Another youth mobilization site Declare Yourself had been active in previous elections, however in 2011 it became part of the Our Time organisation. The Declare Yourself website was essentially a defunct website, providing some information from 2008 and a link to the Our Time website. The Our Time website was therefore coded instead of Declare Yourself. The sites which therefore make up our sample for network and content analysis can be seen in Table 6 below and a full list of website URLs can be found in the appendix (appendix 3). We can see that as

we might expect, there are a larger number of youth mobilization websites in the US compared to the UK.

	Youth Mobilization sites	Candidate websites
London	Bite the Ballot	Boris Johnson (Conservative) Ken Livingstone (Labour) Brian Paddick (Liberal Democrats) Jenny Jones (Green) Carlos Cortiglia (BNP) Lawrence Webb (UKIP) Siobhan Benita (Independent)
US	Rock the Vote MTV Power of 12 League of Young Voters Our Time	Barack Obama (Democrat) Mitt Romney (Republican) Jill Stein (Green) Gary Johnson (Libertarian)

Table 6: Websites in the US and London 2012 elections

We now turn to examine the overall scores for each of these websites.

3.1.1 Overall website scores: youth mobilization and candidate sites

From the coding scheme, the total score possible from the sum of the five indices was 60. In order to provide a rough means of comparison for the websites, we have loosely divided this score into thirds; equating to high, medium and low scores. Therefore a score of 0-20 overall would be

considered low, 21-40 would be considered medium and a score of 41-60 would be considered high. Turning first to the youth mobilization and candidate sites in the London election (figure 4), we can see that just one website achieves a high score: the independent candidate Siobhan Benita with a score of 41. Very close behind her are Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone, with scores of 38 and 36 respectively. The Liberal Democrat, Green and UKIP candidate websites all achieve medium scores but with scores of 20 and 17, Bite the Ballot and the BNP candidate achieve low scores.

These findings are particularly interesting as Siobhan Benita as an independent candidate was not allowed access to some of the more traditional campaigning media routes for the London Mayoral election which may have resulted in her embracing the web more fully. For example, as an independent, she was not allowed to take part in a candidate debate as the rules stated that she either had to be running for a particular party or have run in the previous election. Whilst the website was certainly not as polished as those of the main two candidates, it did not look amateur and was easy to use. It also appeared that she wrote a lot of the content for the website herself rather than campaign staff as is common amongst more established candidates. However, this may have been due to lack of resources rather than a specific strategy.

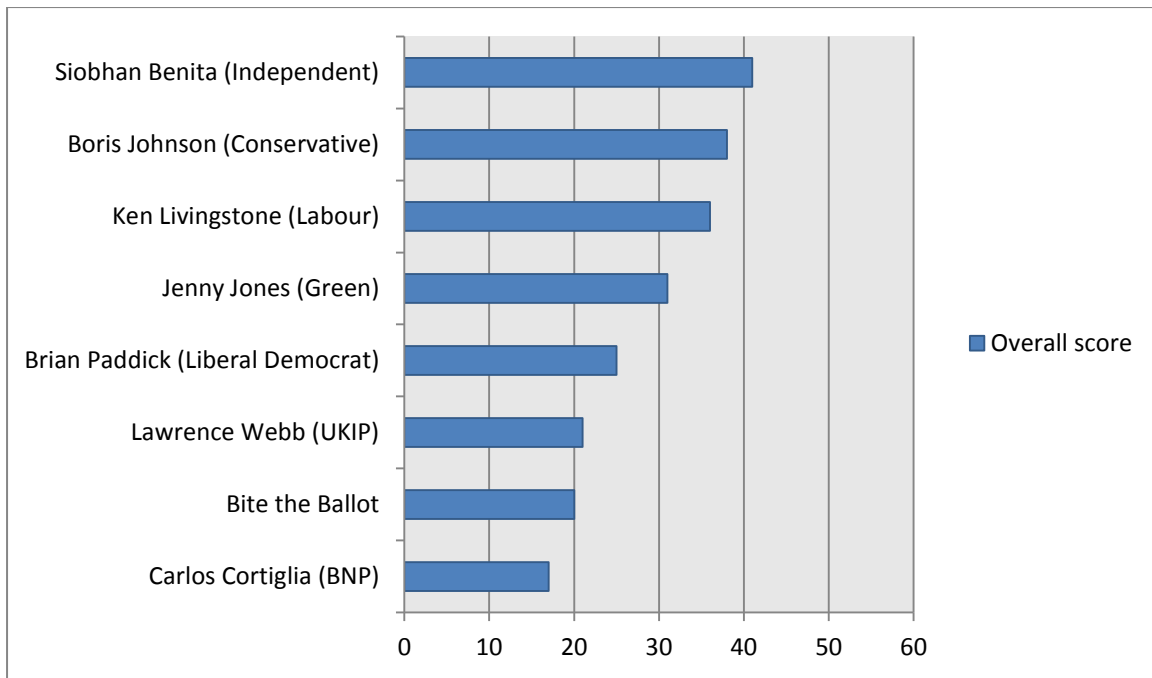


Figure 4: Overall website scores for youth mobilization and candidates sites, London

US Presidential candidate and youth mobilization sites: overall scores

Moving now to examine the US sites, the overall scores can be seen in figure 5. We see that Barack Obama's website has the highest overall score with a score of 50 out of 60. Following our scale, this is the only US website that could be considered a high scorer. Mitt Romney's site, Jill Stein and the Power of 12 website are however not far behind with scores of 37, 34 and 32 respectively. Two of the youth mobilization sites, League of Young Voters and Our Time just fall into the low scoring category, with overall scores of 20 and 19.

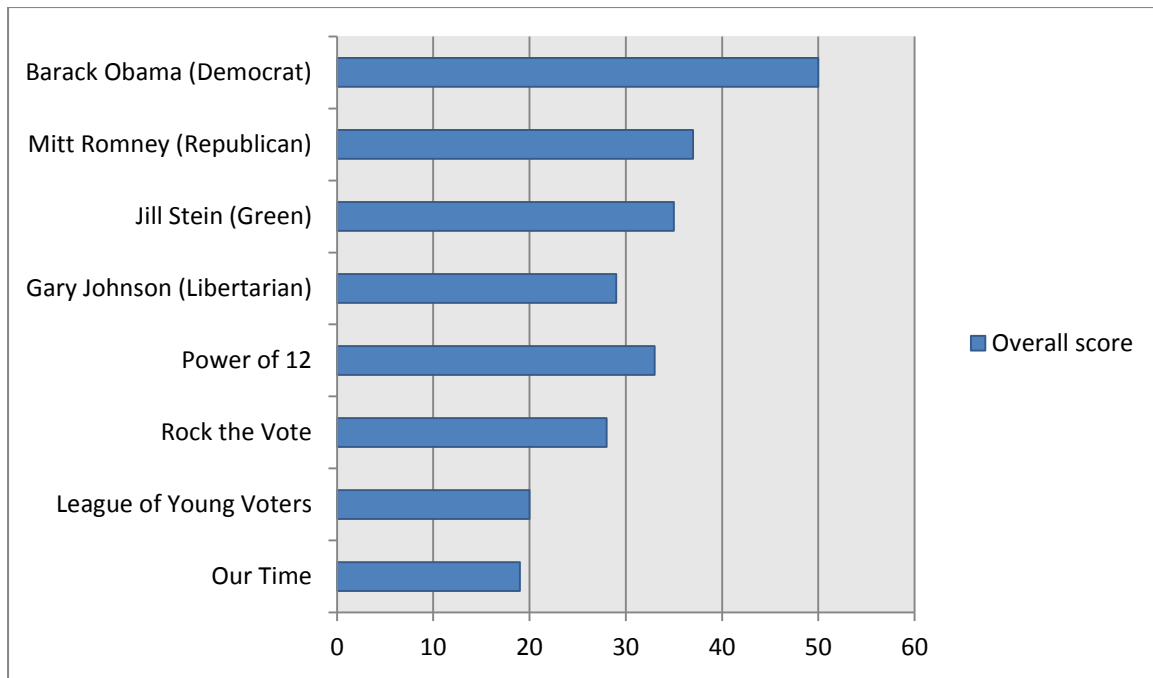


Figure 5: Overall website scores for youth mobilization and candidate scores, US

To compare the two groups, we compare the average scores by group. Looking firstly at candidate sites in the London Mayoral election, the average score is 30 compared to an average score of 40 in the US. For the youth mobilization websites, the score for only UK site is 20 compared to an average score of 25 for the US sites. Therefore we can say that H1 is supported and that the American sites do outperform the London sites across both the candidate and youth mobilization websites.

Turning to examine the overall differences between the major candidates and those from minor parties, the picture in the London election is somewhat unclear due to the presence of the independent candidate. Whilst the two major candidates did indeed score higher than any of the minor party candidates, Siobhan Benita achieved the highest score overall. In the US, the picture is much clearer with the two major candidates scoring higher than the minor candidates. Therefore we can say that H4 is supported in the US and partially supported in the UK.

We now turn to examining the individual indices in more detail, in order to understand how these overall scores have been achieved. We will examine design and functionality, information and interactivity in turn in order to test our general expectations and remaining hypotheses.

3.1.2 Design and functionality

The first of the five indices relates to design and functionality. There is a possible overall score of 12 so a score of 0-4 would be considered low, 5-8 a medium score and 9-12 a high score. Due to the nature of the coding scheme, the majority of the coded items are binary e.g. has a fixed menu bar or not but the more nuanced categories such as freshness and dynamism have a scale depending on how often the site is updated or how dynamic the site is in terms of multimedia. For these categories therefore, the bar may be larger than 1 point.

For the London websites (figure 6), we see that both Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone's websites score the full 12 points for design. Looking at the two main candidates, it is striking how similar their two websites were in terms of design with almost identical welcome screens and layout. Brian Paddick, Jenny Jones and Siobhan Benita's websites follow shortly behind with scores of 11 and 10, due to slightly less frequent updating and whilst their websites were certainly not basic or static, they did not have the full level of dynamism compared to the two main candidates due to lower levels of multimedia and Flash-based graphics. The BNP candidate scored 9 and the UKIP candidate 8, due to much lower levels of freshness and dynamism whilst Bite the Ballot scored the lowest of all with just 6 points.

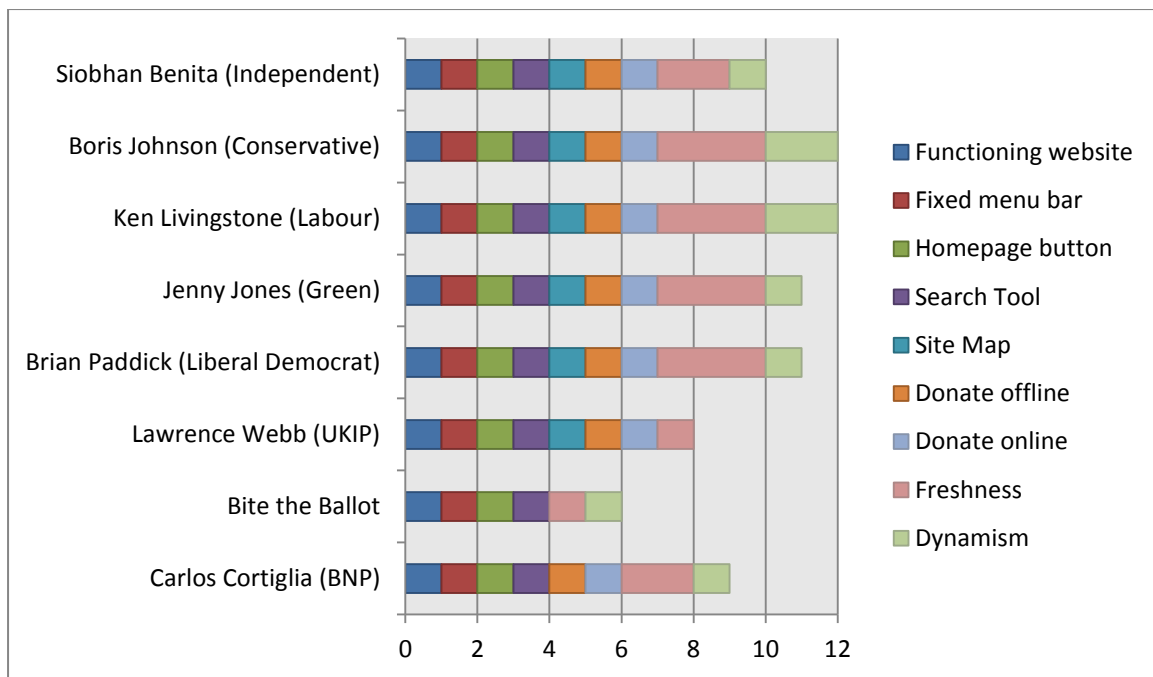


Figure 6: Design features in youth mobilization and candidate websites, London

Whilst Bite the Ballot might have been expected to score slightly lower than the candidate websites due to a lower likelihood of asking for donations, it was noticeably lower in freshness and dynamism. In practical terms, the website was difficult to navigate and this combined with the disappointing design score suggests that it may be unlikely to appeal to young people. However, despite this score being lower than the others, it is considered in the medium range from our scale and as such none of the sites had low scores for design.

US candidate and youth mobilization sites: Design and functionality

Turning to the US, we see (in figure 7) Barack Obama and Mitt Romney both score the full twelve points for design, followed closely by both the minor candidates, Power of 12 and Rock the Vote, all of which scored 10 points. The two youth mobilization sites in fact scored slightly higher than the candidate sites on freshness and dynamism but dropped points on the donation items. On our scale, all of these sites would be considered to have high design scores whilst the remaining youth mobilization sites achieved medium scores.

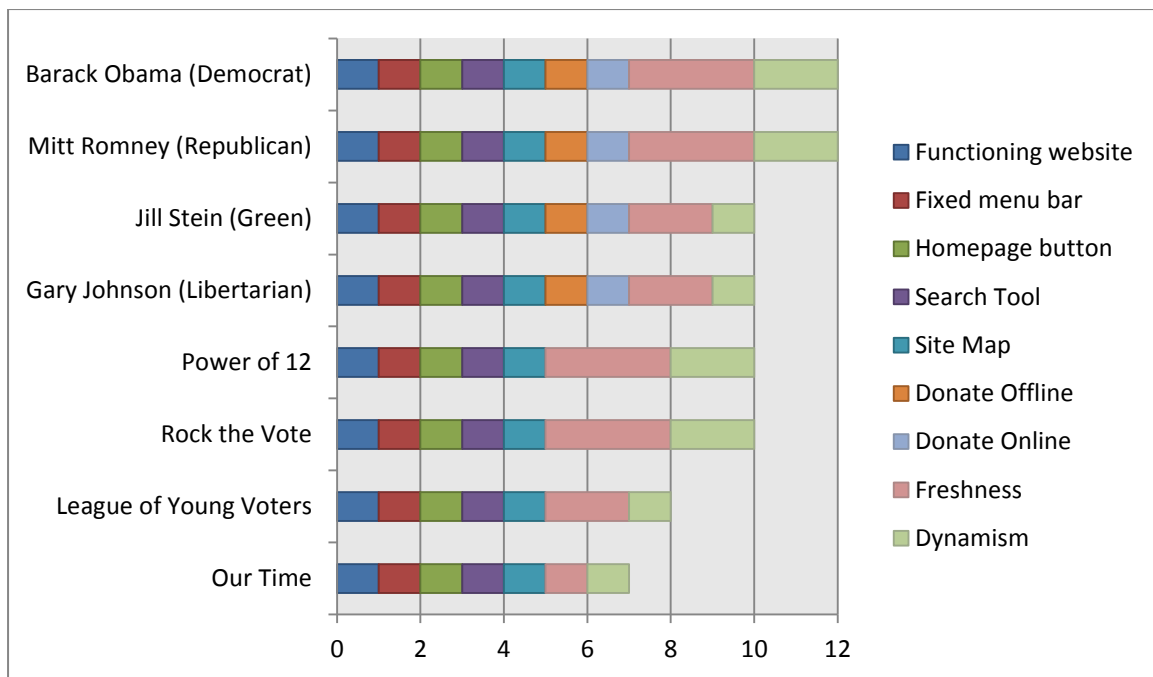


Figure 7: Design features in youth mobilization and candidate websites, US

Across the two elections, the four major candidates all scored the highest possible score for design and functionality although some of the other candidates were only one or two points behind them. All of the youth mobilization sites in the US scored higher than Bite the Ballot, likely reflecting the longevity and resources of the US sites. We now turn to the measures of information on the websites.

3.1.3 Information provision: candidate and issues

The first of the two information provision indices relates to information concerning the candidates running in the election and relevant issues in the election. Provision of candidate and issue information is scored out of a total of 12 and therefore a score of 9 or above would be considered high.

Looking first at the London websites, what is immediately striking is that Bite the Ballot and also the BNP's candidate website provide no information at all about relevant issues or the candidates for the London Mayoral Election (figure 8). Although the BNP site stated that Carlos Cortiglia was the BNP candidate for the election, this was the only election specific material on the site which was largely populated with general party details and thoughts from the party leader Nick Griffin. More worryingly, Bite the Ballot did not provide any information on the candidates, issues or policies in the election. A section of the site headed "Youth Vote London: Mayoral Elections 2012" seemed promising, but in fact contained a small amount of information about a registration rally event organised by a different organisation. Confusingly, a button in this section name "Register Now" linked not to voter registration information as you might expect, but instead to register to attend this external event (and the link in fact did not work).

Looking at the opposite end of the scale, we see Siobhan Benita with the highest score of 10 and the only score that would be considered high in our ratings. This was closely followed by Boris Johnson and Jenny Jones, both with scores of 8. Just two candidate websites provided information on their specific policies on young people: Siobhan Benita and Jenny Jones. Ken Livingstone's medium score of 6 reflects that the information on his website was quite straight to the point, with the focus mainly on key policy positions and opponent dismissal. Brian Paddick's low score of just 4 ties with the UKIP candidate and is quite surprising given that he is an established candidate from the Liberal Democrats. However, a closer examination of the candidate suggests that he is an active Facebook and Twitter user and it may be that he and his campaign are choosing to disseminate information in this way rather than via the website. For the London websites then, we can say that as expected the candidate websites do outperform the youth mobilization website in terms of issue information provision.

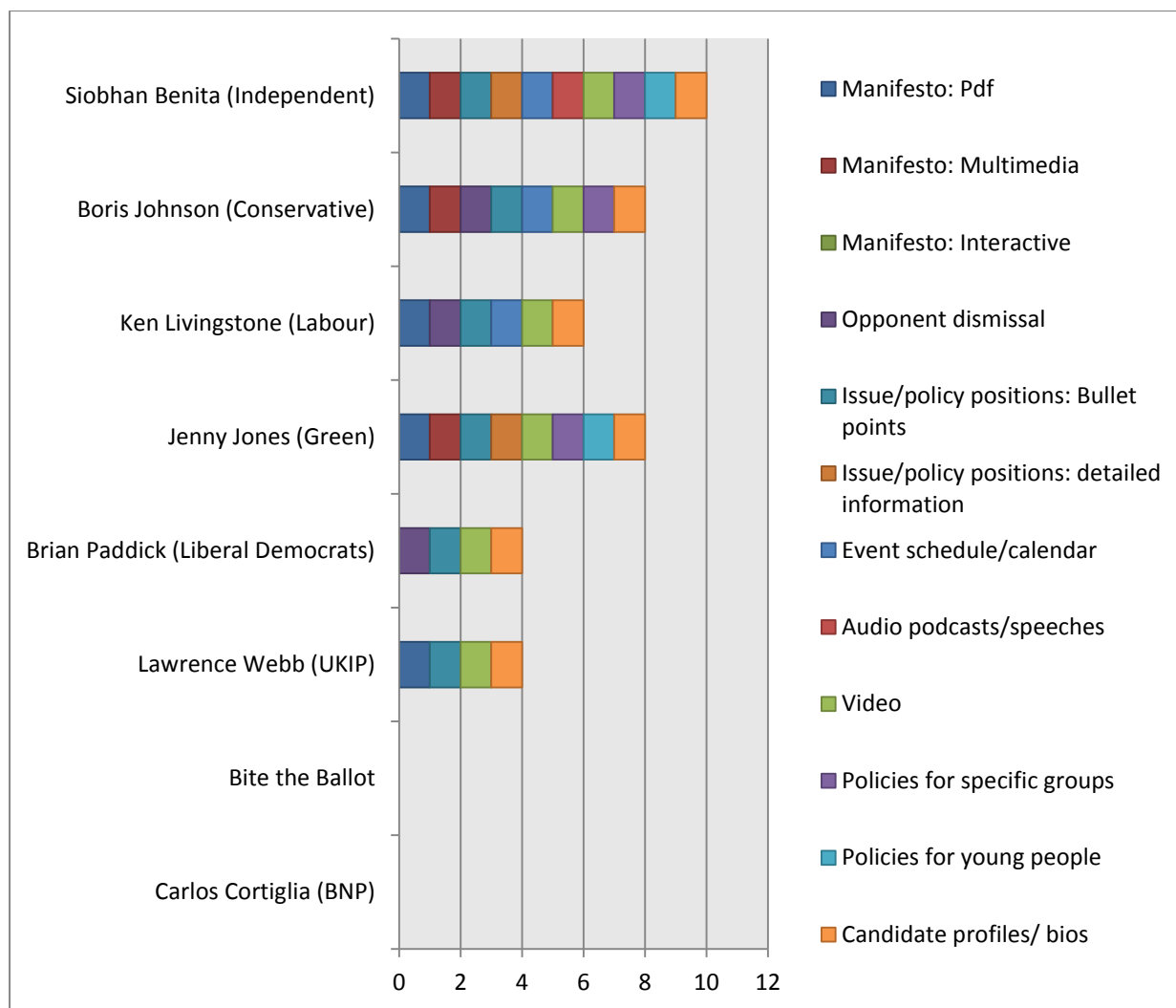


Figure 8: Information provision on issues and candidates on youth mobilization and candidate websites, London

US candidate and youth mobilization websites

Turning now to the US sites, in figure 9 we can see the scores for issue and candidate information provision. We see that once again Barack Obama has the highest score, with eleven out of fifteen; by our scale, this is the only score that can be considered high. Mitt Romney scored just seven, with little detailed information on his website. One of the reasons for this may be that the Romney campaign team also produced a number of other websites, for example “Built by US” was essentially a Romney campaign site directed at businesses and “Obama isn’t working” was a negative campaigning site. It may be that some of the more detailed information that one might expect to see

on a campaign site was in fact located on these other sites. The tone of the two sites was also quite different, with the Romney site being very explicitly about fundraising whereas the Obama site seemed to have a more even balance of providing information, fundraising and asking people to get involved. The two other candidate sites scored 9 and 6, both considered to be medium levels of information provision.

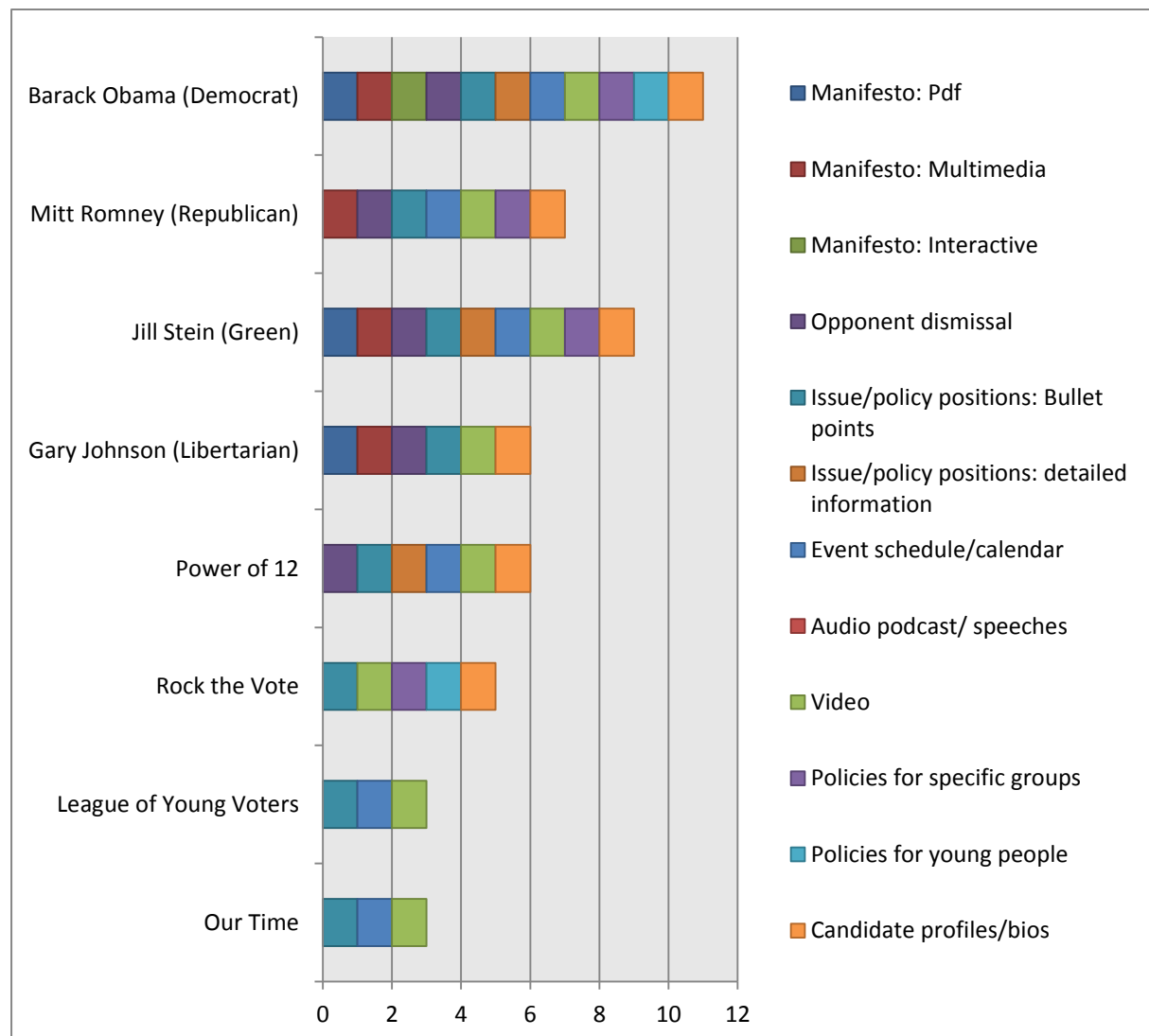


Figure 9: Information provision on issues and candidates on youth mobilization and candidate websites, US

Of the four youth mobilization websites, three achieved low score in terms of issue and candidate information provision: Rock the Vote, The League of Young Voters and Our Time. Examination of the Rock the Vote site in particular showed that although the site contains a large amount of

information, much of it is aimed at very engaged young people who may not need mediated information on the issues and candidates. For example, there was lots of advice on how to mobilize other younger voters, which was clearly aimed at those who were already active. The vast amount of content on the site makes it feel quite dense and someone visiting the site for the first time might find it overwhelming. Power of 12 scored better with a score of eight, actually higher than the Romney site. From the tool bar it was possible to access sections titled “Issues Hub” and “Candidates” which provided detailed but easily understood information. The Obama site and Rock the Vote were the only sites to explicitly have information about policies for young people in a separate section. In the other youth mobilization sites this was rather more implicit. The Obama campaign did in fact have a separate website called Barack Obama for Young Americans but this took some searching for and was not obviously linked to from the main website.

Overall, as we see in the London election, the candidate websites broadly outperform the youth mobilization websites, although the gap is somewhat closer than in London. Comparing the two elections overall by examining the means scores for the each type of site, we see that candidate sites in London scored lower for issue and candidate information provision with an average score of 6 compared to 8 for the US candidate sites. The mean score of the US youth mobilization sites was 6 and as Bite the Ballot provided no information, it is clear that the US youth sites outperformed the London site on this measure.

3.1.4 Information provision: election and voting

Moving to the second information index, we now examine information provision relating to logistical information about the election and voting, such as how to find your nearest polling station. Election

and voting information was scored out of a possible 6 points and therefore a high score would be 5 or 6.

Turning firstly to the UK, the picture is rather stark (figure 10). Just two websites provide any information at all about election practicalities such as registration: the independent candidate Siobhan Benita and Bite the Ballot. Both in fact provided links to the same sources: one, a clickable link to a DirectGov webpage “How to vote” and second, another clickable link to the Electoral commission website “About My Vote”. Although it is good to see Bite the Ballot providing this sort of information, in usability terms these links were not prominently displayed on the website and actually took some determined searching to find, which a less engaged young person might not do. It is interesting but perhaps disheartening that none of the candidates on a party ticket provided any practical election information.

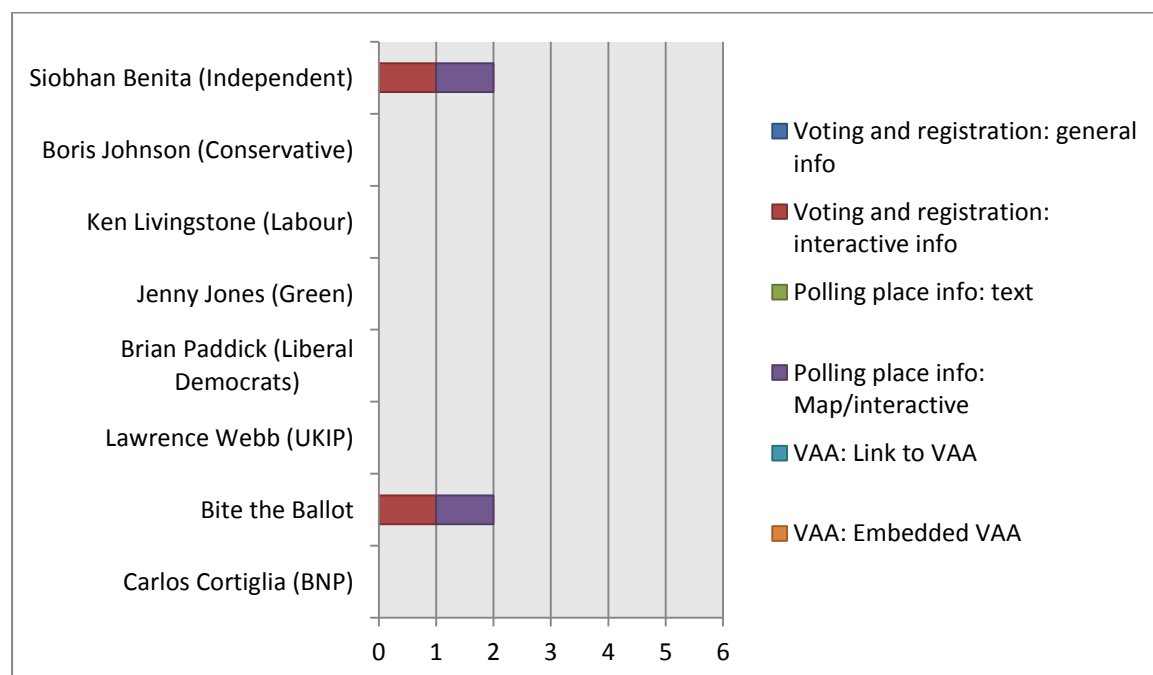


Figure 10: Provision of election information on youth mobilization and candidate websites, London

US candidate and youth mobilization websites

Examining the findings for the US websites in (figure 11), we see that amongst the candidates, Barack Obama provides the most practical election information scoring four points out of a possible six. Mitt Romney achieves a very low score of just one point, providing just a link to static information about where to find your polling place whilst Gary Johnson scored no points at all.

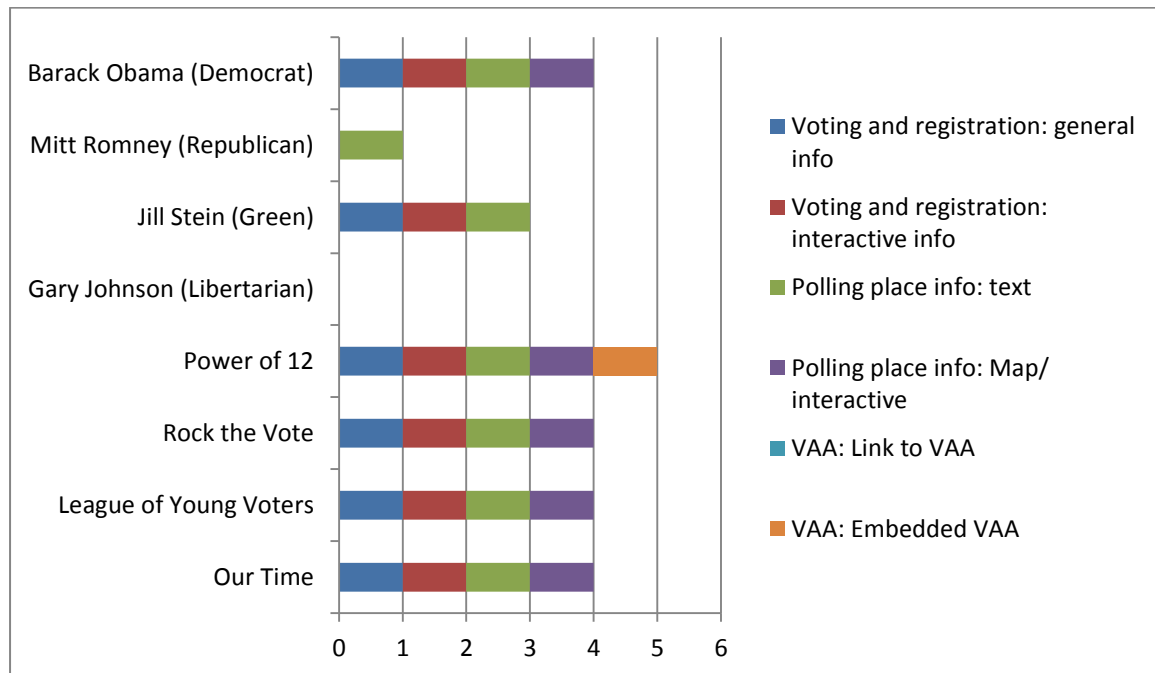


Figure 11: Provision of election information on youth mobilization and candidate websites, US

The youth mobilization sites fare much better with three of the sites scoring four points, providing both text-based and interactive information about voting, registering and how to find your polling station. Rock the Vote had a dedicated area of the site called the “Election Center” which included a map of the United States which was clickable by state and provided detailed information of when and how to vote. Power of 12 scored an extra point by being the only site to link to a Vote Advice Application tool, with Vote Smart’s “Vote Easy” VAA embedded in the site, and was the only site to score a high score on our scale. Therefore we can state that the US youth mobilization sites tended to outperform the candidate sites in terms of functional election information provision. Comparing

the two countries, it is quite clear to see that the US sites in general are much better than the London sites at providing practical information relating to voting and registration.

3.1.5 Content interactivity

Moving now to examine interactivity, the first of our two indices measures the levels of content interactivity on the websites, with a possible score of 15. From this, 0-5 would be considered a low score, 6-10 would be seen as medium score and 11-15 a high score. Turning firstly to the UK, we see that both of the main candidates and the independent candidate had the highest scores with scores of eight out of fifteen and all in fact offered the same types of interactive content (figure 12). All for example had a variety of pre-written mobilization emails which users could choose between but not alter the message. From our scale, a score of eight would be considered as a medium score. All of the other candidates bar the BNP candidate had some form of shareable content, although it was often limited to simple text or video. None of the candidates or Bite the Ballot offered the opportunity for users to upload any content to their sites. Therefore, we can state that for the London websites, candidate sites outperformed the youth mobilization websites in terms of content interactivity.

US candidate and youth mobilization websites

Looking next at content interactivity amongst the candidate websites in the US (figure 13), we see that Barack Obama once again comes out on top with a score of 10, compared to the low scores of 4 and 5 of the other candidates. The Obama site provided a wide range of shareable content including some novel content such as targeted e-cards. All of the youth mobilization sites had low scores in terms of interactive content, with most offering simple text or video to share. None of the sites, either candidate or youth mobilization allowed for users to upload any content. Overall, we see that

the candidate sites in the US outperform the youth mobilization websites in terms of content interactivity.

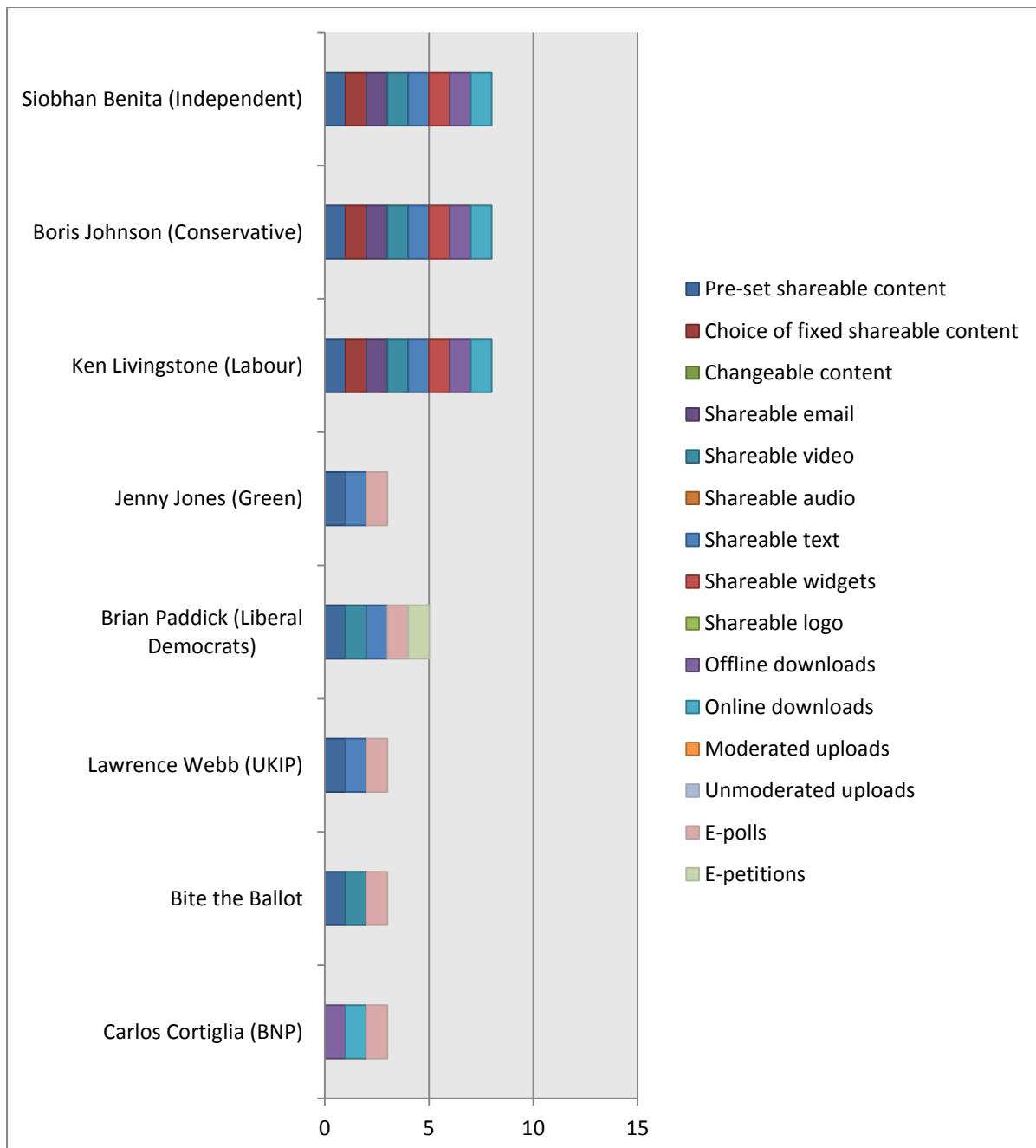


Figure 12: Content interactivity on youth mobilization and candidate websites, London

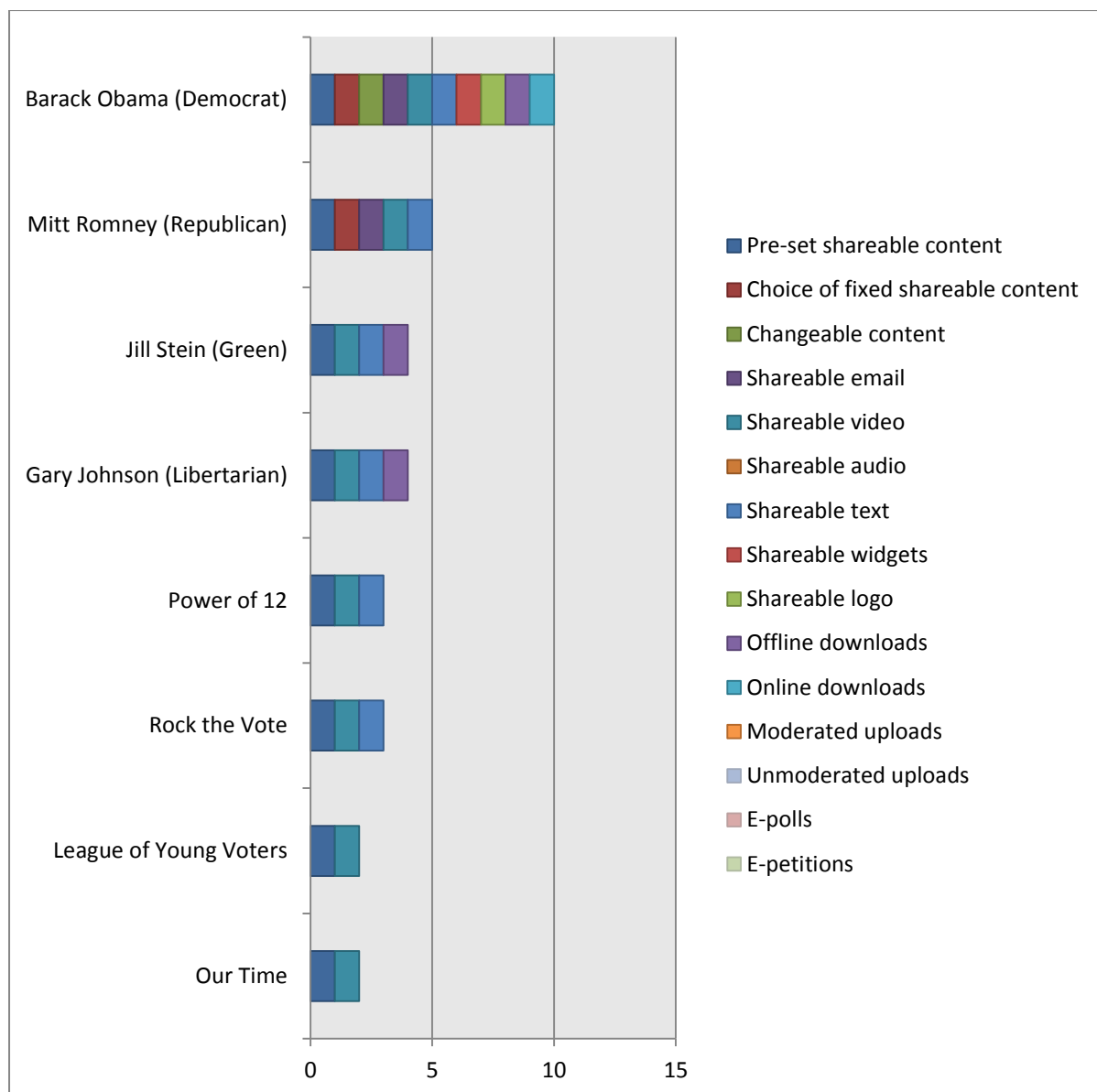


Figure 13: Content interactivity on youth mobilization and candidate websites, US

Comparing the two sets of scores, Bite the Ballot's score is the same as the mean score for the US youth mobilization websites. The US candidate sites achieve a mean score of 6, higher than both the UK candidate sites and the US youth mobilization sites. We can therefore say that the candidate sites in the US outperform all of the other sites in terms of content interactivity.

3.1.5 Interpersonal interactivity

Turning finally to our last index measuring interpersonal activity, the highest possible score is 15 and once again we suggest that 0-5 would be a low score, 6-10 a medium and 11-15 a high score.

Looking first at the London sites, we see that Siobhan Benita once again had the highest score with 11 out of a possible 15 (figure 14). Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone were just behind with a score of ten, the one point difference being that Benita had a direct link to Flickr whereas the others did not. Thinking of our rough low to high scale, all three of these candidates can be considered to have high levels of interpersonal interactivity. Jenny Jones and Bite the Ballot tied with nine points, due to Bite the Ballot offering opportunities to connect across a wide range of social media platforms. Perhaps surprisingly, Brian Paddick scored just six out of twelve due to a complete lack of direct links to any of his social media pages. Neither the UKIP nor the BNP candidate sites included a candidate blog within the site, scoring just six and five points respectively. Whilst most of the candidates allowed for volunteering via an online form, Jenny Jones from the Green Party and the BNP candidate provided just an email address for volunteers to contact. Examining the mean scores, we see that the London Mayoral candidates in the UK had a mean score of 8 compared to Bite the Ballot's 9, meaning that the youth mobilization site did score higher for interpersonal interactivity (albeit by just the one point).

US candidate and youth mobilization websites

Turning to the US, we see that the candidate sites score noticeably more highly than the youth mobilization sites (Figure 15), although there are differences between the sites. Barack Obama once again scores the highest, with a score of 13 out of 15. Mitt Romney also achieves a high score of 12. The other two candidates' scores fall into the medium bracket with interpersonal activity with links to fewer social media platforms. Both have blogs that do not allow comments; rather ironic in the case of the Libertarian candidate. Turning to the youth mobilization websites we see that League of Young Voters and Our Time score low scores of just 2 points, their interpersonal interactivity limited

to connections to Facebook and Twitter. Both Rock the Vote and Power of 12 score better, with medium scores of 6 due to the presence of their on-site blogs. The mean score for the US candidates was 11 and therefore clearly higher than the youth mobilization sites that had a mean score of 4. Therefore we can say that mobilization websites outperform candidate websites in terms of interpersonal activity in the UK but not in the US.

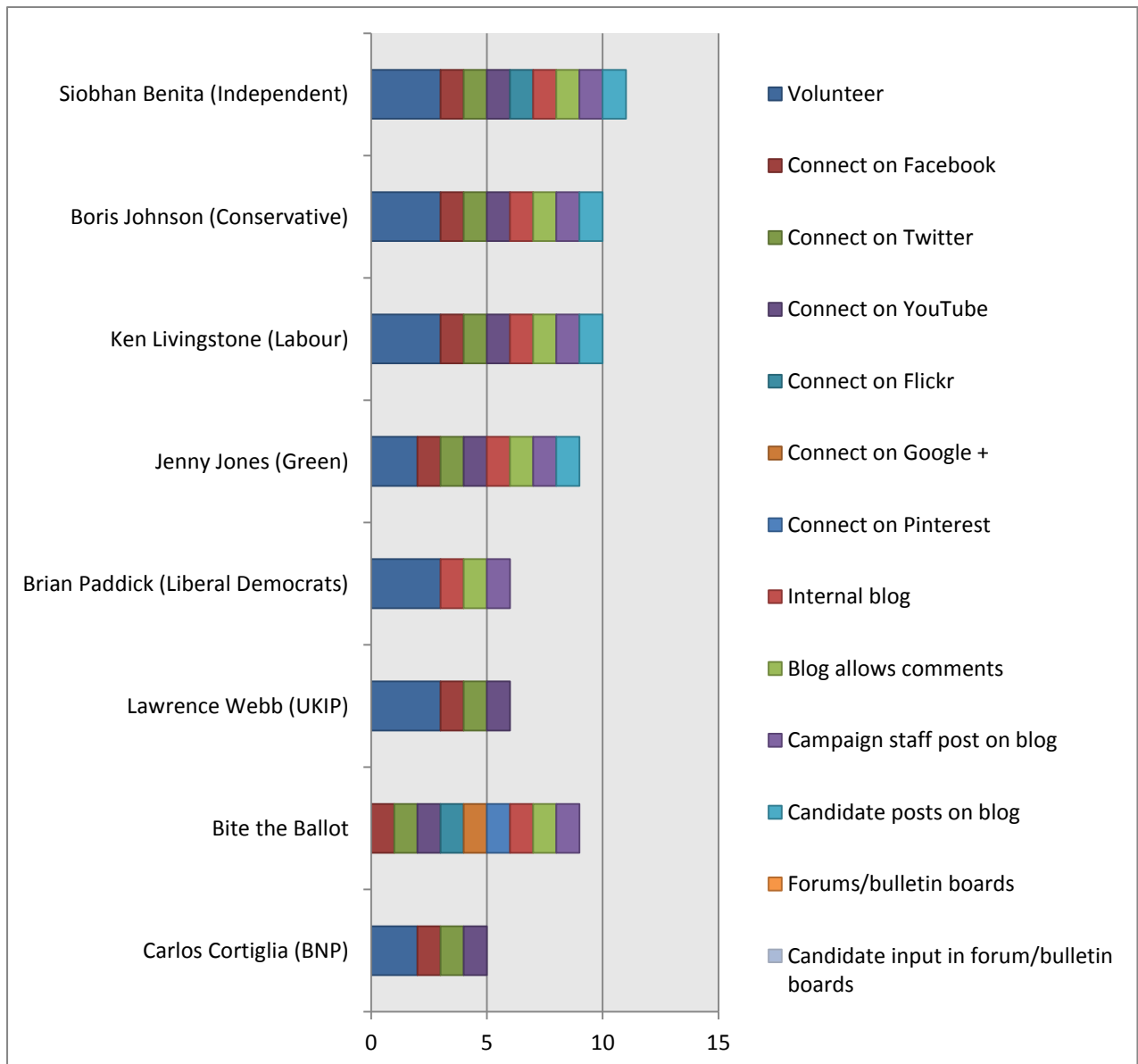


Figure 14: Interpersonal interactivity on youth mobilization websites, London

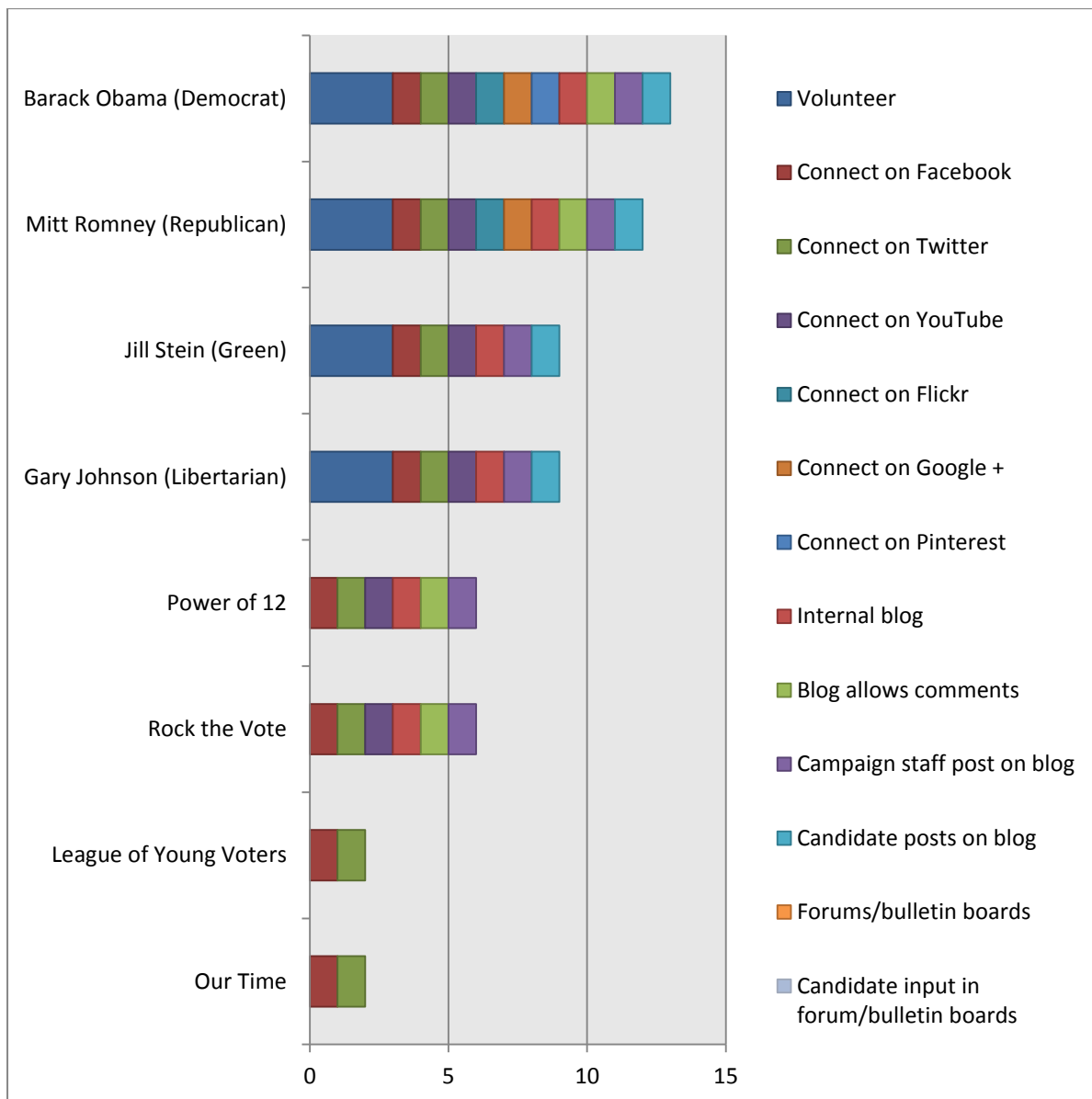


Figure 15: Interpersonal interactivity on youth mobilization and candidate websites, US

3.1.6 Candidate and youth mobilization website summary

We now return to our hypotheses to examine which were validated and which were not. Our first hypothesis proposed that the US websites would outperform the London sites and from the overall scores and indices we find that this is indeed the case. Therefore we can say that H1 is supported. This confirms our expectations that election websites in the US will tend to be more advanced than

those in the London election, given the longer tradition of web campaigning in the US and the larger resources available for campaigning in a national rather than a local election.

Turning to our inter-actor levels of hypotheses, our second hypothesis suggested that candidate sites would score higher on issue information provision and on content interactivity than the youth mobilization websites. Having examined these indices, we find that this was the case in both the US and the London elections and therefore H2 is supported. Our third hypotheses suggested that youth mobilization websites would be the higher scorers in terms of election information provision and interpersonal interactivity. Amongst the London websites, Bite the Ballot did outscore the majority of candidates (not a difficult task as they contained no practical information) apart from the independent candidate Siobhan Benita. It did however score slightly higher than the mean of the candidate sites in terms of interpersonal interactivity and therefore we can say that H3 is partially supported in the London Mayoral election. Turning to the US sites, the youth mobilization sites on average did score higher than the candidate sites but the candidate sites were actually better in terms of interpersonal activity and so we can state that H3 is also only partially supported in the US.

Moving finally to our intra-actor level hypotheses, our fourth hypotheses aimed to test if major party candidate websites would outperform those of minor candidates. Amongst the London sites, we found that whilst the two major candidates did outperform those from the minor parties, the independent candidate actually scored highest out of all the London sites and therefore we can say that H4 is only partially supported in the London election. In the US, the two main candidates did outperform the other candidates and so we can say that H4 is supported. Finally, our last hypotheses suggested that minor party candidates might score equally or higher in terms of interpersonal interactivity. Turning first to the London websites, the picture is once again confused by the presence of the independent candidate. Whilst the two major parties did score higher than the others, albeit by only one point in the case of the Green candidate, Siobhan Benita scored the

highest overall. Therefore, we suggest that H5 is partially supported in London. In the US, the minor candidates did not score as well as the main candidates and therefore H5 is not supported in the US.

Across all of the London Mayoral candidate websites and the youth mobilization website Bite the Ballot, we see that Siobhan Benita had the highest scoring website overall, as well as the highest scores for information provision on the issues and interpersonal interactivity. She scored equally highly as both Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone for content interactivity. She was also the only candidate to provide any practical voting and registration information. As an independent and first-time candidate, she in many ways had to work harder than the other candidates to be known and mobilize supporters and she has clearly tried to use the web to do this. Much of her website was clearly written and managed by her, giving a personal and appealing feel and although the overall design was not quite as polished or dynamic as the main two candidates' sites, it was by no means amateur-looking.

Looking at the two main candidates' sites, the sites were strikingly similar not only in terms of scores but the look and feel of them. Across the categories, their scores and the presence of items were identical except for Boris Johnson having slightly higher levels of information provision in terms of issue and candidate information. As noted previously, at the time of the coding Bite the Ballot was a fairly new youth mobilization website, with little funding and the only election focused youth website in the UK so we do not want to judge it too harshly, but the experience of the site was somewhat disappointing. Its overall score was lower than all of the candidate sites aside from the BNP candidate site and it provided no information at all about the issues involved or the candidates running in the London Mayoral election. It scored a low score for content interactivity and a medium score for interpersonal interactivity although it did provide some logistical information for voting registration. The site was quite difficult to navigate and although there were a number of motivational messages across the website encouraging young people to 'have their say', there was little connection between this and a clear example of what the effect of young people 'getting

involved' might be, or indeed what getting involved might constitute. Finally, it was unclear who the website was actually aimed at as there was some information directed at those still at school and a promotion of an art competition, all of which seemed aimed at a much younger audience than young voters. This is potentially problematic, as if not handled correctly, the inclusion of content for school children could be off-putting for those over-18, making them feel like the website is not aimed at them.

Turning to the US candidate sites, we see that Barack Obama was the clear high-scorer, with the highest score across every category. Although the scores for several categories were often similar for the two main candidates, there were some notable differences. For example, Mitt Romney offered much less detailed policy information directly on the website and also offered less interactive content directly on the website. Instead, there seemed to be more interactive content available on the 'With Mitt' app, which offered things like being able to customize photos with Mitt Romney and being able to share them on Facebook or Twitter or on additional websites such as the Romney Response Tumblr site. This does bring into question what the role of the candidate website should be and who it should be for in the web 2.0 campaigning world. Comparing the major candidate sites to the minor ones across all measures, we see that in terms of overall scores, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney do score more highly than Jill Stein and Gary Johnson. However, in terms of information provision for issues and election information, Jill Stein scored higher than Mitt Romney in both categories.

For the youth mobilization sites, all of the sites were well-designed and were easy to use and navigate. Power of 12 was perhaps the most clear in the aim of the website and what it wanted visitors to do, with the home screen divided into two main areas "Learn" and Activate". The Learn area provided a news feed with bite-sized articles relating to the election such as "What is the electoral college?" as well as longer articles, a link to more information on the candidates (via CNN), voter and issues FAQ and under the heading "Not sure who to vote for?" was a link to the Vote

Smart VAA 'Vote Easy'. The Activate area was related solely to the purpose of registering and voting, outlining a four-step process: how to register (with a link to Rock the Vote's 'Election Center'), what you need to bring, find your polling place and finally, a save the date tool with a countdown to election day. In addition, a ticker tape ran across the home page with the number of days left to register by state.

Both the League of Young Voters and the Our Time websites feel more modest in scope, coming from smaller organisations. However the websites did not look amateur in design and were easy to use and though the amount of information was smaller than some of the other sites, all of the information was relevant to issues in the election and to young people. The League of Young Voters also had its own voter information tool, TheBallot.org, which was similar to Rock the Vote's Election Center in that it offered local voting and registration information. All of the websites provided information on relevant issues in the election and attempted to make them relevant for young people.

One thing that is apparent from the content analysis of the youth mobilization and the candidate websites is that there can be big differences in quality and provision of content amongst election websites, even amongst those in the same type or category of website and therefore any examination of potential impact or effects needs to focus on individual websites as findings will not always be generalizable. Having examined our first two types of mobilization websites, we now turn to explore the VAAs in each country to understand what they offer in terms of design, information and interactivity.

3.2 VAA sites

We now turn to the VAAs in each country, where we will first provide an overall description of each VAA alongside the overall scores, before turning to look at the scores for the individual indices. We will also present a simple comparison of means in order to assess any differences between countries.

3.2.1 Overall scores and design and functionality

Two VAAs were identified in the UK with content relating to the London Mayoral election: Who Should You Vote For? and Vote Match. Who Should You Vote For? consisted of 15 statements relating to relevant London policy issues, and users could choose between whether they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, strongly disagreed or had no opinion on each statement. After working through the statements, a final question asked which result users actually expected to get out of six candidates (the BNP were excluded) before clicking on the 'Who Should You Vote For?' button to get the result. The Vote Match VAA was provided by Unlock Democracy and was based directly on the original StemWijzer application from the Netherlands. The VAA asked 28 questions from 6 different issue areas: Housing, Transport, Society, Olympics and Parking, Planning and Powers of Mayoralty. Users were asked whether they agreed, disagreed, were open-minded or if they wanted to skip the question. Vote Match was slightly more visually sophisticated than Who Should You Vote For, with a cleaner and more modern design and a greater use of graphics. In general this WSYVF is quite basic and largely text-based.

From figure 16, we can see that Who Should You Vote For? scores 5 out of a possible 18 whilst Vote Match scores a total of 10. In terms of design and functionality (figure 17), we see that Vote Match scores 2 out of a possible 3 points, whilst Who Should You Vote For? scores just 1 point.

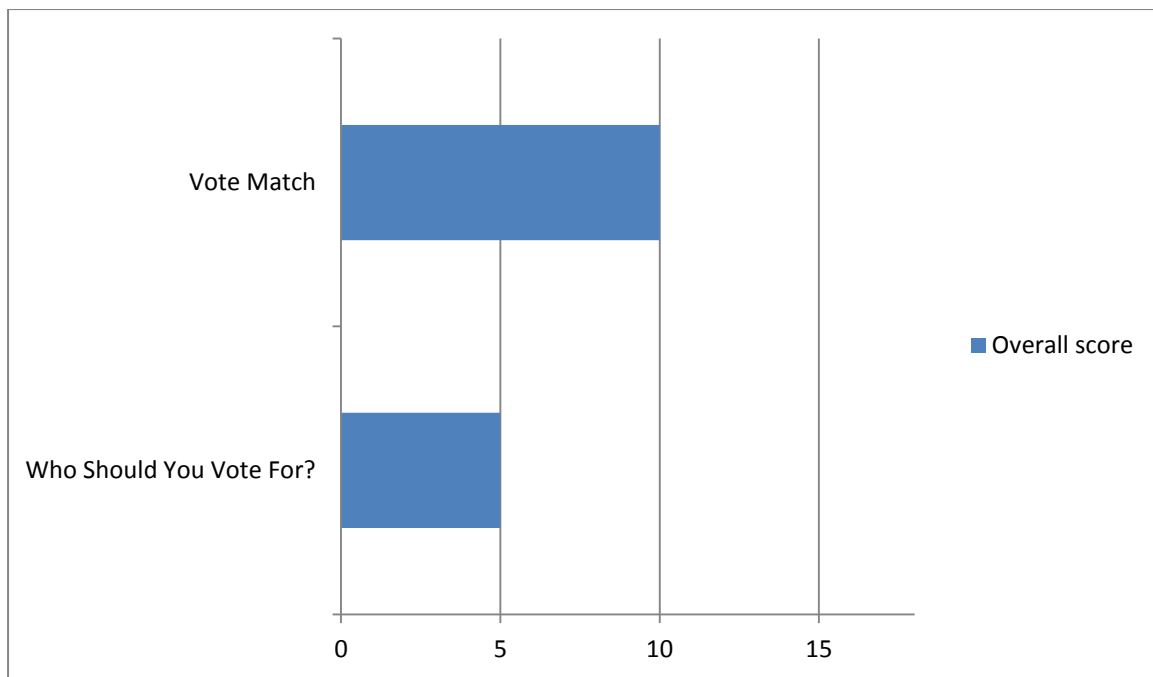


Figure 16: Overall scores for VAAs, London

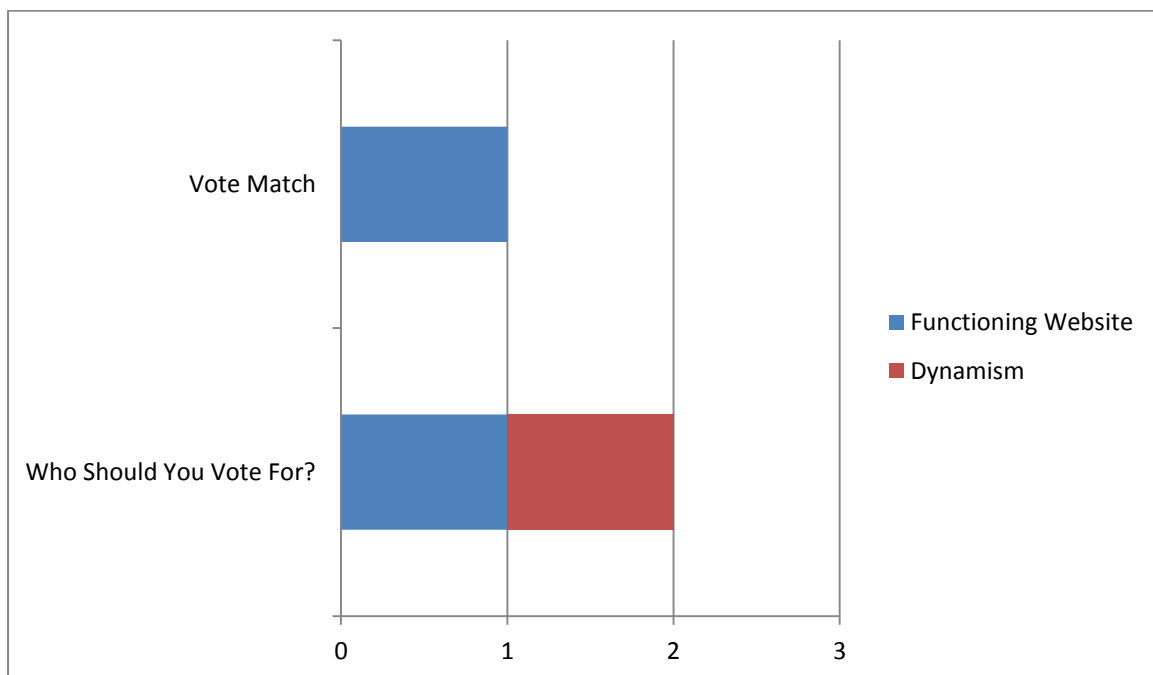


Figure 17: Design and functionality in VAAs, London

US VAAs

Turning to the US, a total of 9 VAAs were identified with content relating to the 2012 Presidential election. Seven of the VAAs were from non-partisan organisations or individuals and two were from media organisations: one from the ABC television network and one from USA Today. The VAAs varied greatly in design, substance and sophistication from basic, largely text-based sites to highly interactive sites utilising music and animation.

I Side With had a very modern and slick design, and the quiz consisted of 48 questions grouped into 8 categories: social issues, environmental issues, economic issues, domestic policy, healthcare issues, foreign policy, education and immigration issues. Users had the option of answering just 3 questions per category or expanding each section to answer the full quiz. For each question, a choice of two answers was provided (usually for and against the particular issue) as well as the option to choose another stance. Selecting this option led to the choice of five more nuanced opinions on the issue, as well as the possibility of adding your own stance. For each question, users were given a five-point scale to select how important the issue is to them, from least important to most important.

ProCon is a citizenship education organisation which provided a VAA on its website. Whilst the design is quite simple and largely text-based, it did not feel basic and was easy to use. The quiz consisted of 75 questions across 33 categories covering a fairly comprehensive range of topics. To answer each question, users had the option of selecting 'Yes, No, Neither, Unsure' or they could skip the question.

Vote Help appears to have been created by a group of individuals rather than an organisation, although little information is provided about their backgrounds. The VAA itself has a fairly basic and slightly dated design and the quiz is made up of 20 questions, although there is also the option to answer just 10 questions. Two drop-down menus were provided per issue: Your Opinion and Importance. Your Opinion is measured on a 7-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Importance is measured on a 5-point scale from not important to very important.

Select Smart is a website with approximately 20,000 quizzes on a wide variety of subjects from which religion you should be to which breed of dog is best for you. In 2012, they provided a VAA for the Presidential election, providing matches for a slightly confusing selection of candidates: Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, Jill Stein, Gary Johnson, Kent Mesplay (a candidate for the Green Party nomination), Rocky Anderson (the Justice Party), Ron Paul (a candidate for the Republican nomination) and Robby Wells (an unsuccessful candidate for the Constitution Party nomination). The site contains lots of adverts, giving it a cluttered feel and it does not feel very professionally produced. The quiz itself is all on one page and written in a rather small font, making it hard to read. It consists of 24 questions and to answer, two issue positions are provided or the option to choose neither.

The On the Issues VAA had a simple and straightforward design, although the primary colours and choice of fonts made did not give it a very sophisticated look. The quiz comprised 20 questions organised into four categories: Individual rights, domestic issues, economic issues and defence/international issues. Agreement with each question was measured with a sliding 5-point scale from strongly support to strongly oppose. This VAA matched the positions of 10 candidates including the two main candidates and vice-presidential candidates, Jill Stein, Gary Johnson, Virgil Goode (Constitution Party), Rocky Anderson (Justice Party), Roseanne Barr (Peace and Freedom Party) and Andre Barnett (Reform Party).

The Vote Chooser VAA was perhaps the simplest of all of the websites, with a short quiz consisting of just 10 questions which were all on one page. However, the design felt clean and professional rather than basic and amateur. Each question had a variety of between 2-4 options for answers

The Vote Easy VAA from Vote Smart made use of animation and music, with pictures of the candidates on billboards on the lawn in front of the White House, which move back and forth as you progress through the quiz, with the candidates you are closest to moving nearer to the front. The quiz matches 6 candidates: the two main and candidates from the Green, Libertarian, Justice and

Constitution Party. The quiz itself is made up of 18 questions spread over 13 categories, which are accessed by clicking category bars at the top of the screen. The quiz invites you to pick categories that you are most interested in rather than necessarily having to do the whole quiz. For each question, there are two opposing stances to choose from alongside a 5-point sliding scale for you to indicate the importance of the issue to you.

Finally, we turn to the VAAs from news organisations. ABC's offering was the 'Match-O-Matic' game on the ABC news website. This site also used animation, with cartoon versions of the four main Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates standing outside the White House at the beginning of the quiz, although the quiz actually matches just the Presidential candidates. The format of the quiz differs slightly from the other VAAs in that it provides two anonymous quotes from the candidates for each of 11 issues and users are asked to simply click on which statement they agree with most.

USA Today provided the Candidate Match Game allowing you to match your opinions with Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. The design of the VAA is simple but sophisticated, making use of a graphic of half of each of the candidates' faces which becomes greater or smaller than 50% as you progress through the quiz. The quiz questions were all on one page and on one side of the screen alongside the central graphic. The quiz consisted of 14 questions and users had to agree, disagree or select no opinion. There was also a 5-point sliding scale to select how important the issues were. At the end of the quiz, a 'postcard' appears with the full picture of your candidate, saying "Your candidate is (candidate's name)", the percentage and actual number of questions you agreed on and buttons to share the postcard with your friends via Facebook, Twitter, Google +, Pinterest and email. Within each question there is also a "What they said" button, which clicks through to a collection of quotes from the candidates on that specific issue.

Examining the overall scores for the websites (figure 18), we see that I Side With is the highest scoring VAA overall, with a score of 17 out of a possible 18, followed closely by Vote Smart's Vote Easy VAA which scored 14 and USA Today's Candidate Match game which scored 12. It is clear that

there can be big differences in quality of VAAs, for example the low overall score of just 5 for Select Smart in the US and Who Should You Vote For in the UK and we can assume that these differences may have an impact on the effects of using the websites, reinforcing the need to examine websites at the individual site level.

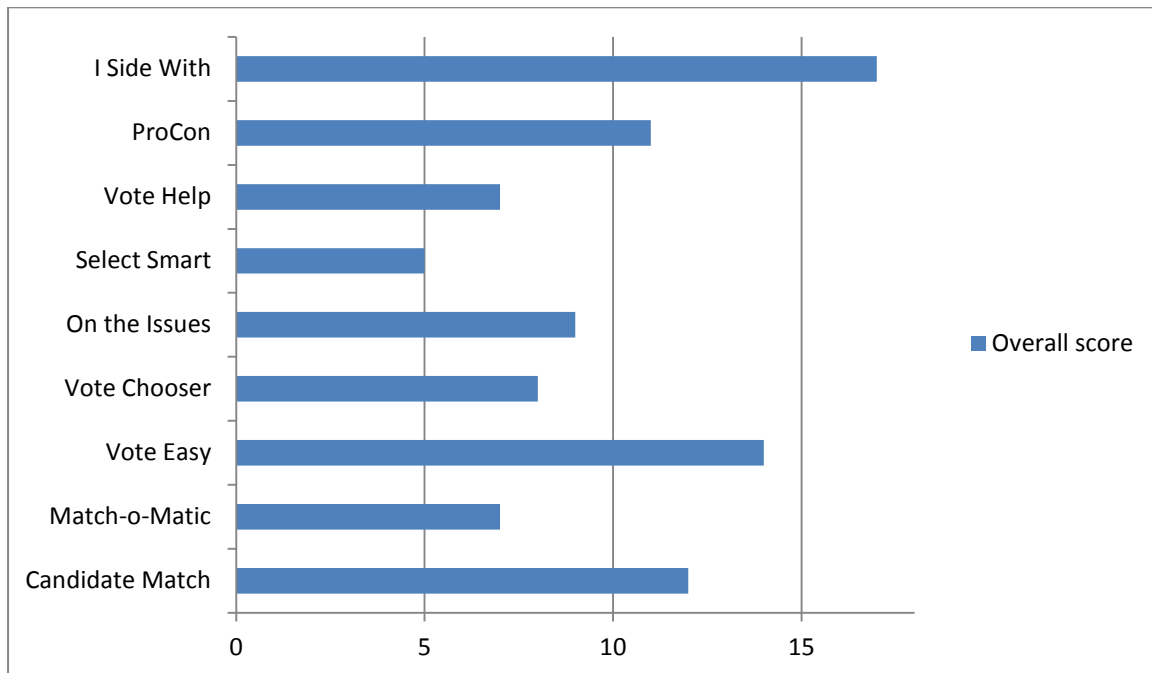


Figure 18: Overall scores for VAAs, US

Turning to design and functionality in the US (figure 19), we see that I Side With and Vote Easy score full marks alongside the two VAAs provided by media organisations: ABC news' 2012 Match-o-Matic and USA Today's Candidate Match game.

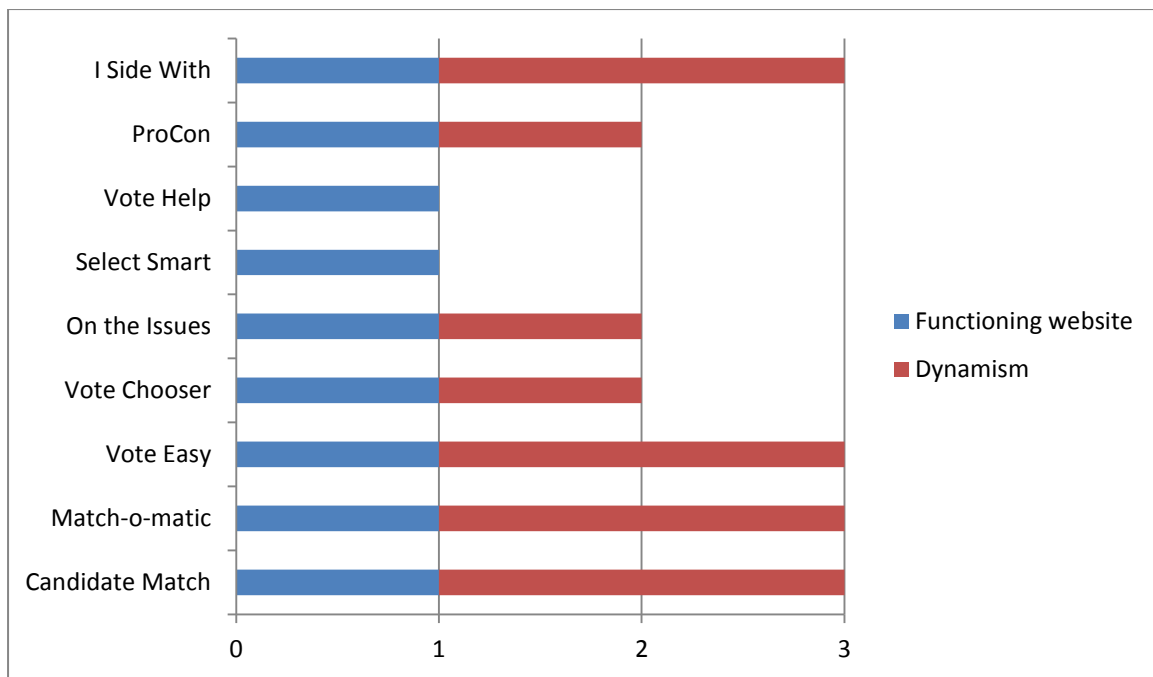


Figure 19: Design and functionality in VAAs, US

3.2.2 Information provision

Turning now to information provision, we first examine the UK findings (figure 20). We see that Vote Match outperforms Who Should You Vote For by providing pictures of the candidates and links to further information about the issues as well as greater transparency in terms of explain how the results have been calculated. In terms of how the results are presented, at the end of the Vote Match quiz users were asked to select the issue areas they felt were least important and then asked to indicate which of the seven candidates they would consider voting for. The site then tells you “Your Best Match”, showing the percentage to which you agree with the different candidates and providing a pre-written tweet to share, saying who you chose for mayor and including a link back to the Vote Match site. The site also provided a link to London Elects, the official election information website. After completing the quiz on Who Should You Vote For, a final question asked which result users expected to get out of the 6 candidates (the BNP candidate was excluded) before clicking on the “Who Should You Vote For?” button to get the result. The results were presented in the form of

a bar chart which had the candidate names along one side and positive bars for those you agree with and negative bars for those you didn't. This was quite confusing and not very clear to read or understand.

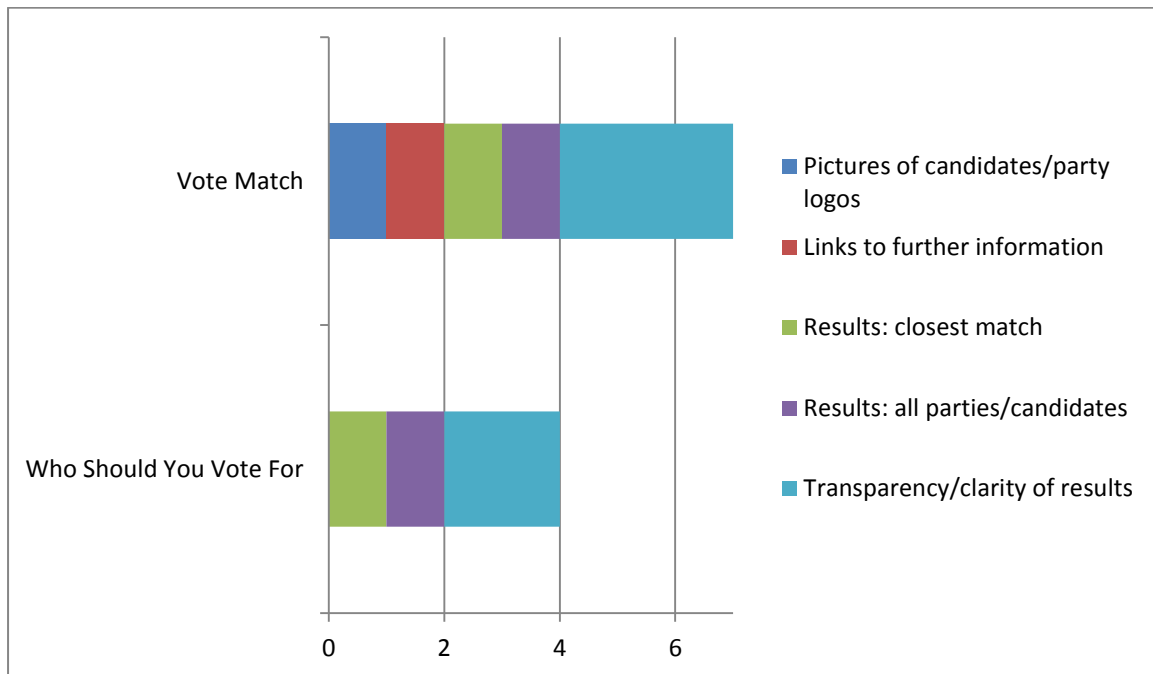


Figure 20: Information provision on VAAs, London

Turning to the US (figure 21), we see that I Side With, On the Issues and Vote Easy all score the total possible 7 points for Information and Provision. ABC's Match-O-Matic scores the most poorly, somewhat surprisingly given that the provider is a news organisation.

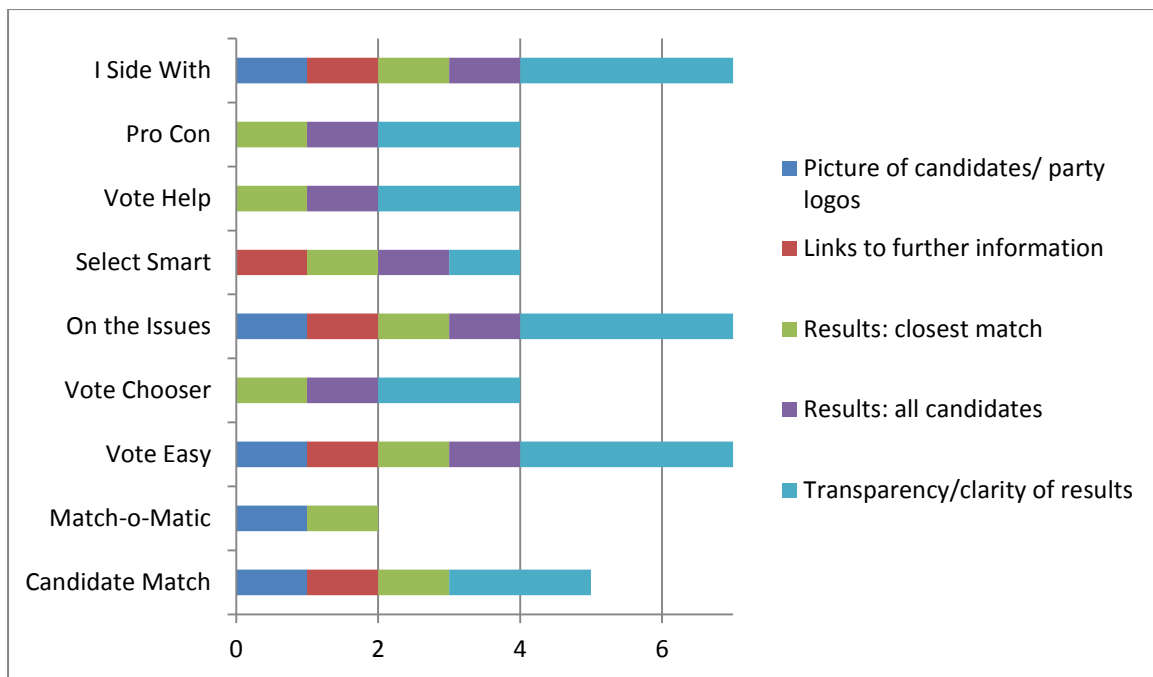


Figure 21: Information Provision on VAAs, US

Looking in more detail at how the different sites provide information, we turn firstly to I Side With. Once the quiz is completed, several results are provided. The overall result is given as “I side with (name of candidate) on most issues in the 2012 Presidential election” with a picture of the particular candidate. A list of all of the candidates in order of agreement is given, with the percentage of overall agreement and by issue as well as how your results compare to others in your state and to American voters overall. I Side With matched opinions with four candidates: Barack Obama, Mitt Romney, Jill Stein and Gary Johnson. Some information is provided on how the results are calculated and there is a large amount of information available on the candidates and the issues. Throughout the quiz, each issue has a clickable link allowing you to learn more, providing a summary of the arguments on each issue.

Looking next at Pro Con, the quiz displays a running tally of the percentage to which you match each candidate as well as the actual number of questions you agree per candidate. This is presented as a simple but easy to read bar chart in a pop-up box in the corner of the screen. The quiz matched five

candidates: the two main candidates, Jill Stein, Gary Johnson and Virgil Goode, the Constitution Party's candidate.

The results from the quiz on Vote Help were provided in two ways. Firstly, an 'issue graph' was provided whereby pictures of Obama and Romney were placed alongside green or red boxes for each issue, with the coloured boxes supposed to represent if you agree with the candidate's stance and having different shades depending on levels of agreement i.e. a pink box under Medicare alongside Romney, would suggest that you slightly disagree with the candidate on this issue. This graph was very difficult to understand and it was not immediately clear which candidate you might be closest to. Results were also provided as a percentage matching score for each candidate, which was much clearer.

On the Select Smart VAA, the results are presented by showing your top match and the percentage by which you match, at the top of a bar graph showing the percentage matches with all candidates. Underneath the closest matched candidate, there is a Google custom search box to search for candidate information and throughout the quiz, there are clickable links to Wikipedia articles on each issue.

The results from On the Issues were presented with each candidate in order of agreement and a bar chart with the percentage given for each candidate by the total, on social issues and economic issues. Beside this, there was a picture of each candidate and links to the biographical profile of each candidate as well as links to their answers for the quiz and policy positions in general. Throughout the quiz, there were also clickable links to get more information about each issue.

On the Vote Chooser VAA, the results were presented as simple text table with the candidates in order of the best matches, with a score out of 10 on how much you agreed or disagreed with them. The website didn't provide any further information on either the issues or the candidates.

Once you have answered all the questions on Vote Easy from Vote Smart, a 'Best Match' star appears above the picture of the candidate which you are closest to in opinions. Each candidate 'billboard' also has an overall percentage on it, which updates as you progress through the questions. For each issue question, there is a details button to click on which offers more information on the background and different stances on each issue and each candidate board also has a 'Learn more' button, providing information on each candidate.

Finally, looking at the two news organisations' VAAs, ABC's Match O Matic showed the results by the picture of the best matched candidate coming to the front with #1 displayed on it, whilst the picture of the other candidate recedes and is marked #2. The VAA is quick and simple to use but does not offer any further information on either the issues or the candidates. At the end of USA Today's Candidate Match quiz, a 'postcard' appears with the full picture of your candidate, saying "Your candidate is (candidate's name)", the percentage and actual number of questions you agreed on. Within each question there is also a "What they said" button, which clicks through to a collection of quotes from the candidates on that specific issue.

3.2.3 Interactivity and Mobilization

We now turn to our final index of Interactivity and Mobilization, looking first at the two UK websites (figure 22). What is immediately striking is the almost complete lack of interactivity on the UK sites, save only for the opportunity to send a tweet sharing your result on Vote Match.

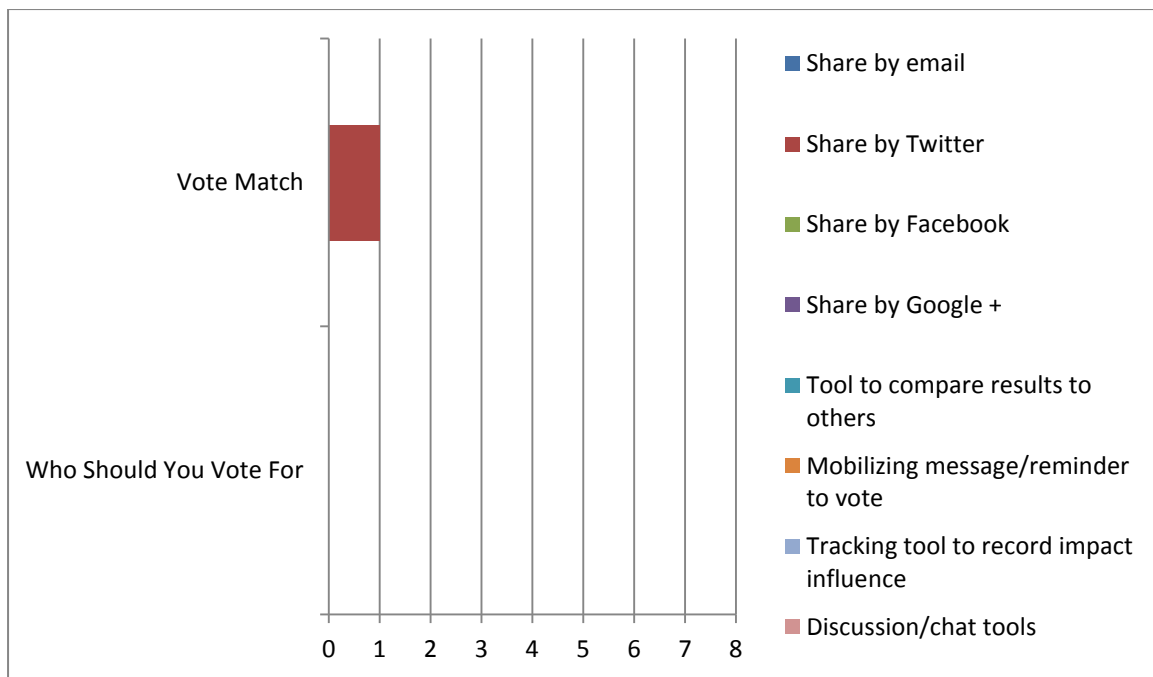


Figure 22: Interactivity and Mobilization on VAAs, London

Turning to the US results (figure 23), we see quite a mixed picture, with I Side With almost scoring full marks with 7 out of a possible 8 through to On the Issues providing no opportunities for interactivity and mobilization.

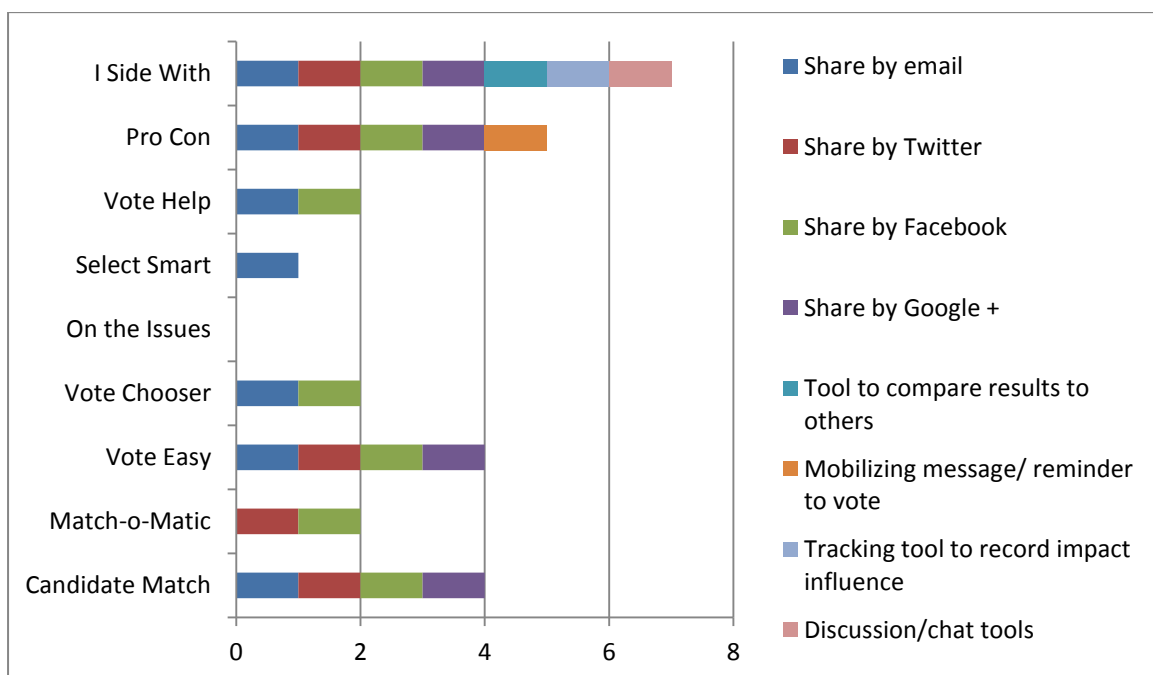


Figure 23: Interactivity and Mobilization on VAAs, US

Looking at the sites in more detail, I Side With offers several options for sharing your results with buttons for instant sharing on Facebook, Twitter, Google +, Tumblr, Edmodo and by email. It also uses an innovative tool that allows you to track your influence, showing you a tally of how many people have taken the quiz because of your shares and encourages users to do this as “Sharing the quiz with your friends creates a voter education chain reaction”. There is also the option to see other opinions, where users can choose to see votes on each issue by all votes, state, city, political party, ethnicity, income, education and marital status. The main stances on each issue are provided in a pie chart with percentages provided for the other stances. There is also a button to discuss each issue directly on Facebook.

Pro Con also provided buttons to share results by twitter, Facebook and email and general links were provided to Pinterest, Google +, Linked In and Tumblr. This VAA was the only one to provide any sort of mobilization message, with the statement “Remember to vote on Election Day, Nov. 6, 2012” presented at the start of the quiz, although arguably this might have been better placed at the end of the quiz with the results.

Vote Help provided a button was provided to share results via Facebook and an email capture box to ‘email your friends about Vote Help’. There was also a link titled Register to Vote but clicking through led to a dead link so this was not coded. Select Smart had just one option to share results by providing a link to click to email your results to a friend, as did Vote Chooser which also offered the option to tweet your result. Vote Easy, Match-o-Matic and Candidate Match all provided some options to share results via social media or email.

Overall, this first attempt at coding VAAs reveals some interesting differences between this type of election site and a surprisingly large amount of them in existence in the US, despite the lack of research relating to them. The London VAAs were certainly at the simpler end of the scale in terms of design sophistication and information provision compared to their US counterparts, with little opportunity to share results or gain more information about the candidates and issues. Of particular

interest was the finding that despite the main purpose of many of the VAAs is to mobilize voters, just one VAA in either the UK or the US actually included a message reminding people to vote on Election Day. It was interesting to note that only the ProCon site provided any sort of mobilization message with a gentle reminder to vote on election day. It may be that the providers of VAAs are so concerned with being seen as non-partisan and providing impartial results, that any overt messages encouraging users to vote are avoided so as not to be accused of bias in any way. It does however seem like rather a missed opportunity, as a mobilization message just after users find out which candidate most closely matches their opinions and values, might have a powerful reinforcing effect. It is also possible that how the website is introduced might have an impact for example, whether it is described as a quiz, a game or a voter education tool.

3.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have aimed to understand the digital landscape of three specific types of election websites in the 2012 London Mayoral and US Presidential elections; specifically youth mobilization websites, candidate campaign websites and Vote Advice Applications. We discovered that in terms of youth mobilization websites the US is rather more advanced than the UK with both a greater quantity of sites and with more sophisticated features and content in some of the sites, although the UK site scored similarly to the smaller youth mobilization sites.

In terms of candidate websites, the Obama website was quite far ahead of the other candidate sites both in the US and the UK. Interestingly, the closest scorer to the Obama website was the independent Siobhan Benita, who scored more highly than Mitt Romney, Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone. In terms of differences between major and minor candidates, the difference is somewhat less pronounced in the US than in the UK. The UKIP and BNP websites looked very

amateurish, were rarely if ever updated and had little information or interactivity. The overall feel was that they felt they had to have a website but didn't quite know what to do with it. This is likely indicative of the nature of the election and we would expect these parties to have more sophisticated websites in a general election.

For the VAAs we found a wide range of quality and sophistication across the websites across the two election contexts. It was particularly interesting to find such a large quantity of VAAs in the US and rather begs the question as to why they have not been a focus of study before, especially given that several of the VAAs were high scorers across the indices.

Looking across the scores for each type of website, we see that the highest scoring youth mobilization website is MTV's Power of 12 website and the highest scoring VAA websites are Vote Match in the UK and I Side With in the US. Alongside Bite the Ballot, as the UK's only youth mobilization website and the two main candidate websites in each country, these websites are the ones chosen to be included in the online survey and experiment. Again, this is based on the logic outlined in the literature review that sites high in information provision and interactivity are more likely to engage young people and therefore have an ensuing effect on political engagement. But is this in fact the case?

The following two chapters focus on the demand side. The first, chapter 4, focuses on the evaluation and experience of using these websites by young people, utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The second, chapter 5, examines the results of our experiment allowing us to assess if exposure to any of these selected websites can affect young people's engagement, whether directly by increasing the likelihood of voting in the election or indirectly, by increasing levels of attention to news, internal and external efficacy and trust.

Chapter 4: Impact, evaluation and experience of the websites

We now turn to examine the highest-scoring websites identified in the previous chapter in more detail, specifically to understand how young people experience them. Our specific research question is:

Q2: How do young people experience and evaluate the three types of website?

In order to answer this, we examine quantitative and qualitative data derived from the survey, which allow us to understand how young people feel about the websites after having used them in a number of different ways. Firstly, we have a number of evaluation questions which allowed users to rate the website across several aspects. Secondly, a small number of questions from the survey related to how users felt the websites had impacted on them, foreshadowing the tests for effects presented in chapter 5. For both of these sets of scores, we compare the differences between young people's (18-30 year olds) and older people's responses to understand if differential effects can be seen by age. Finally, we analyse the responses to an open-ended question in the survey asking what users liked most about the website they had seen, which adds qualitative richness to our findings and allows us to see if there are any thematic differences between age groups. To examine the qualitative data, we initially adopted the themes used in the content analysis in the previous chapter, in order to understand more about these elements before coding for the presence of themes unique to each website. As mentioned in chapter 2, our sample size for London is much smaller than that of the US and London respondents were also not obliged to answer the open-ended question. As such, the qualitative data for the London election sites are more limited than the US sites. In addition, the qualitative data for the candidate websites was not possible to analyse in a meaningful way and therefore we present the impact and evaluation findings only for the candidate sites.

The structure of the chapter therefore, is as follows. We first examine the evaluation and impact scores for the candidate websites, looking first at the two main London Mayoral candidates: Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone, before turning to the scores for the main US Presidential candidates: Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. We then move to examine the two youth mobilization websites, Bite the Ballot in London and Power of 12 in the US, presenting both quantitative and qualitative data, before finally examining the two VAAs in the same way.

4.1 Candidate websites

London Mayoral election candidate websites

Starting with the incumbent Mayor, Boris Johnson, we see that his website was evaluated slightly differently depending on the age groups (figure 24). Older people were more likely to rate the website as being user-friendly (mean scores of 8.16 compared to 8.05 for young people) but younger people scored the website more highly across the other three evaluation categories. The t-tests reveal that these differences are significant in one of the categories: younger people were significantly more likely to say they would visit the site again compared to older people ($p < 0.05$). We note however, that the sample size for both candidates in the UK is small and so all results must be interpreted with caution. (N=59 for Boris Johnson, split into 17 under-30s and 42 over-30s).

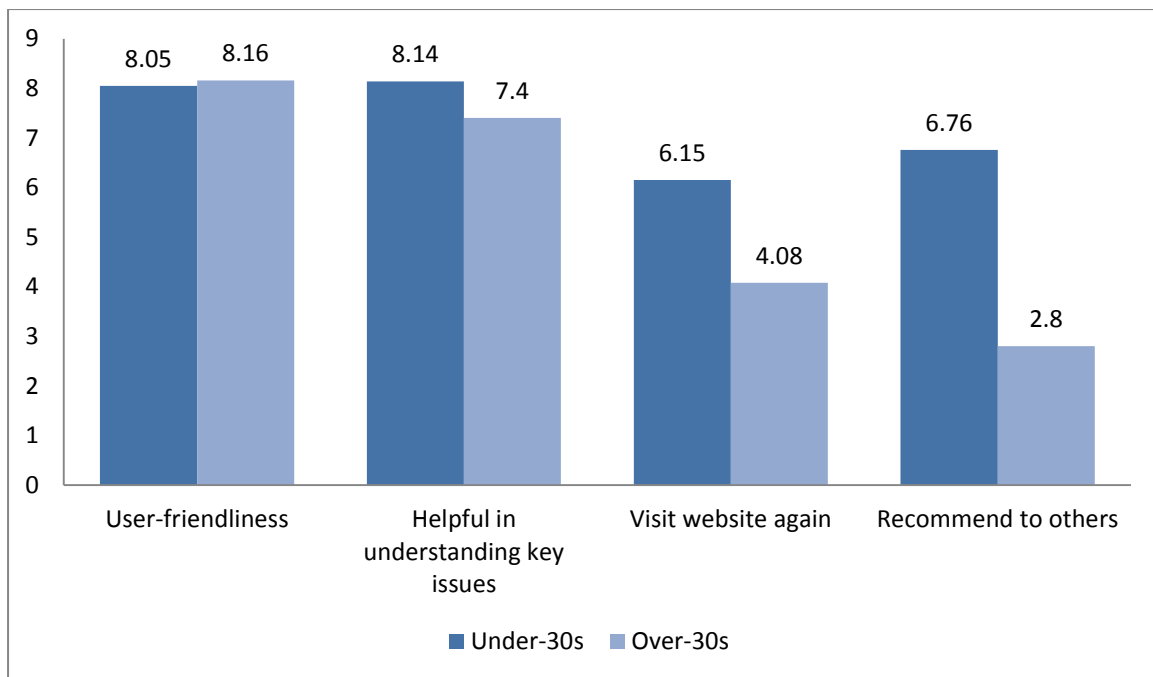


Figure 24: Mean evaluation scores for Boris Johnson's website

Turning to the impact measures for Boris Johnson's website (figure 25), we see that viewing the website has a higher impact for older people in terms of helping decide whether to vote, with no young people feeling that the site impacted on them in this way (0% for 18-30s compared to 6.2% of the over-30s). Visiting the site has a greater impact on helping older people to decide who to vote for than younger people (5.7% of 18-30s compared to 9.9% of over-30s). Looking at the impact on having more interest in the election reveals a striking result: 37.7% of young people felt that looking at Boris Johnson's site made them more interested in the election compared to 14.7% of older people. Whilst it is possible that the site might have had this effect, we note again the small sample size for this treatment group and therefore regard this finding with some caution.

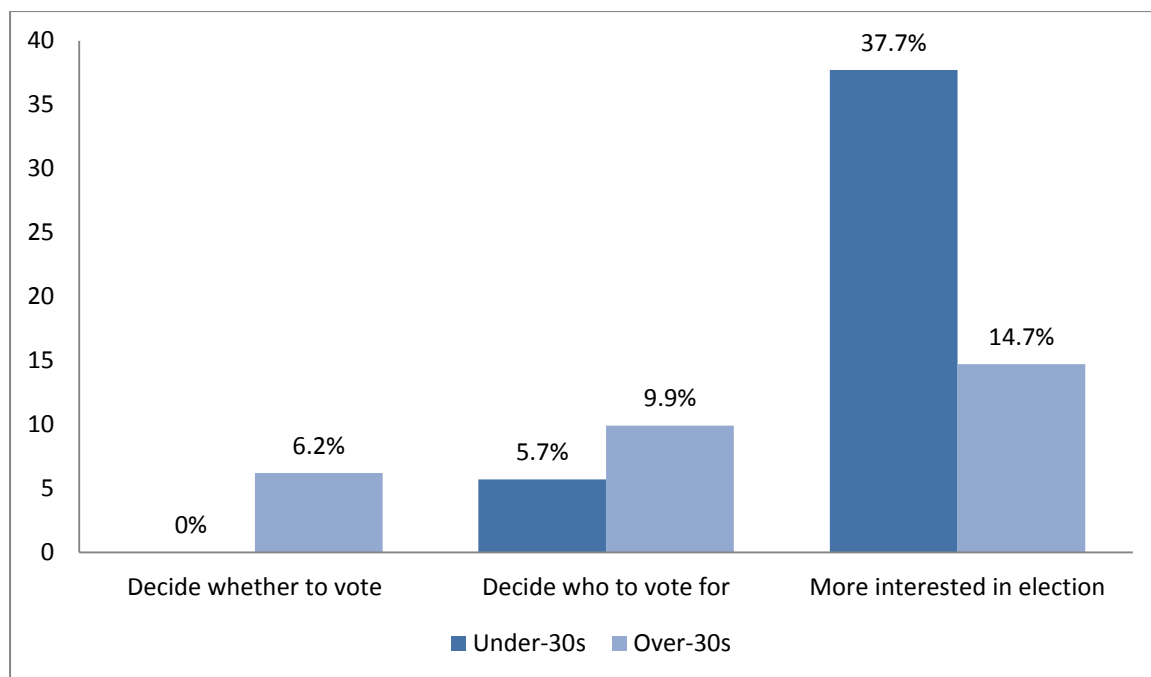


Figure 25: Impact scores for Boris Johnson's website

Moving to Ken Livingstone's website (figure 26), we see that younger people rated the site more highly than the older group across all the measures. The results of the t-tests show that some of these differences are statistically significant: user-friendliness ($p < 0.05$), the likelihood of visiting the site again ($p < 0.001$) and the likelihood of recommending the site to others ($p < 0.001$).

Turning to the impact scores for Ken Livingstone's website (figure 27) we see some striking results and once again we note the small sample size for the candidate website treatment group in the UK which is likely to have affected these findings ($n=111$, split into 34 in the young people's group and 77 in the older). Across the three measures, we see that young people report quite dramatically higher impacts than older people. In terms of helping to decide whether to vote, 31.4% of 18-30s felt viewing the site had helped them in this way compared to just 5.4% of over-30s. Younger people also found the site much more helpful in deciding who to vote for, with 47.2% reporting this impact compared to 21.3% of the older group. Finally, the site appeared to be much more effective in raising young people's interest in the election, with 41.8 of 18-30s compared to 20.1% of the over-

30s saying that they had more interest in the election after viewing the website. It is possible that the websites might have had this effect in a larger sample but once again, we remain somewhat cautious given the small sample size.

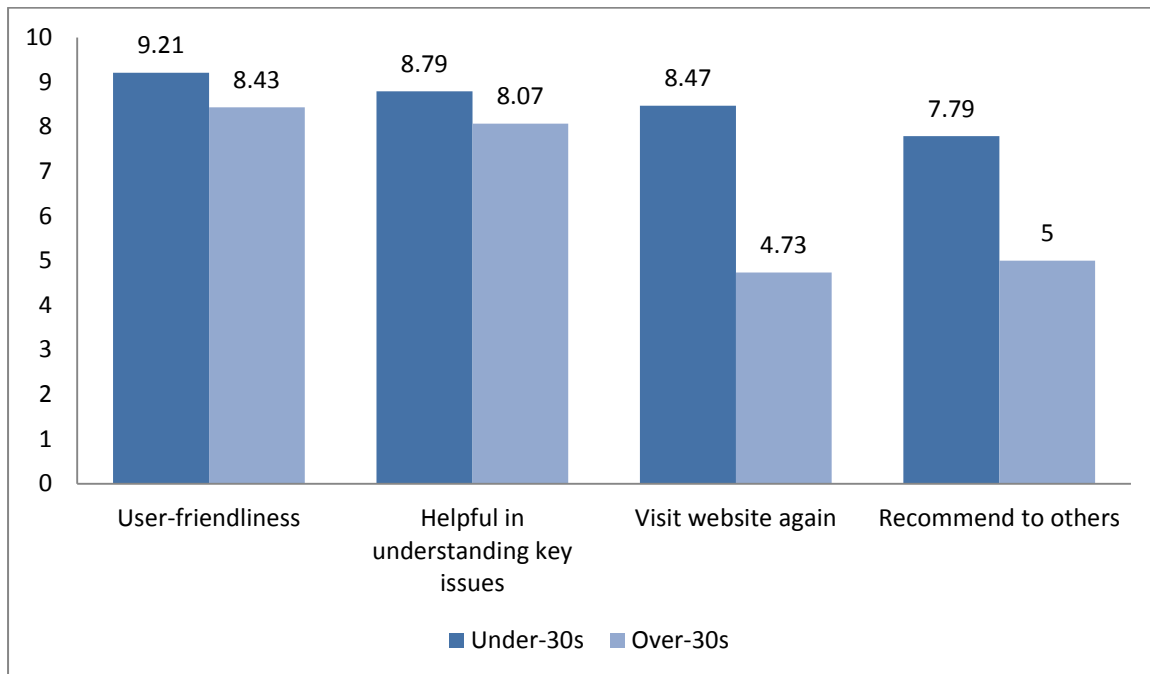


Figure 26: Mean evaluation scores of Ken Livingstone's website

US Presidential election candidate websites

Turning now to the American candidate websites, Barack Obama's website (figure 28) was rated more highly by young people than older people in every measure except one: the over-30s scored the website more highly in terms of helping to understand the key issues of the election (a mean score of 7.78 compared to 7.90). The independent t-tests showed that the differences between younger and older people were significantly so on two of the measures: likelihood of visiting the site again (mean scores of 5.93 compared to 5.22, $p < 0.01$) and recommending the site to others (mean scores of 6.07 compared to 5.75, $p < 0.05$).

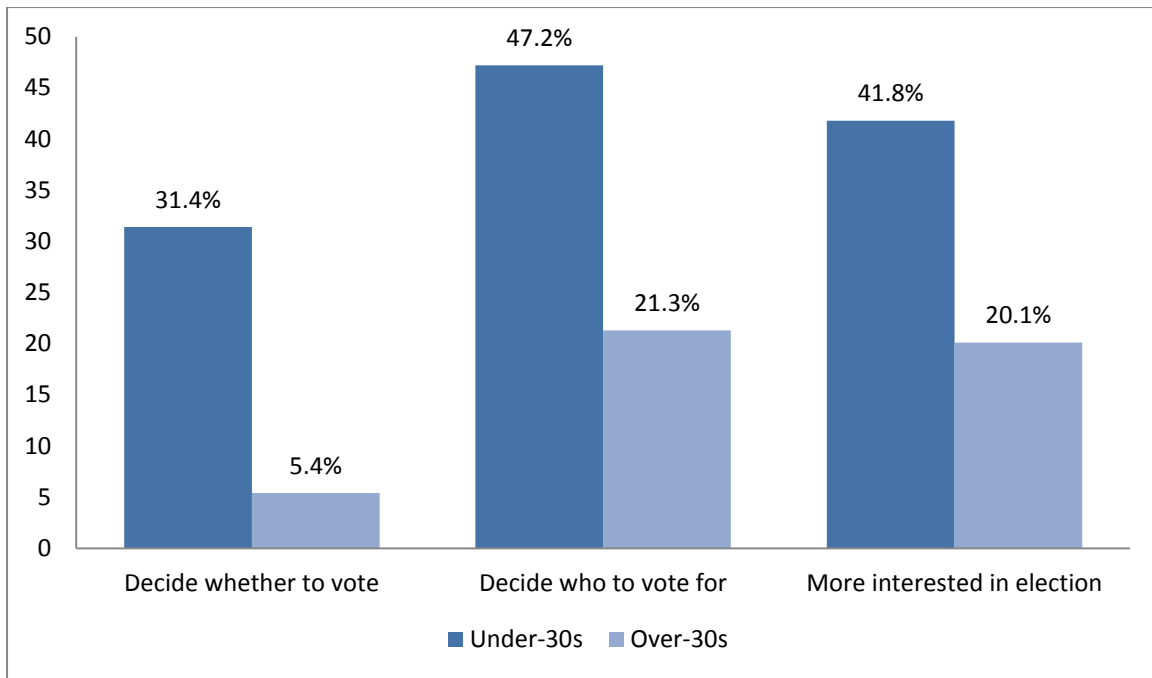


Figure 27: Impact scores for Ken Livingstone's website

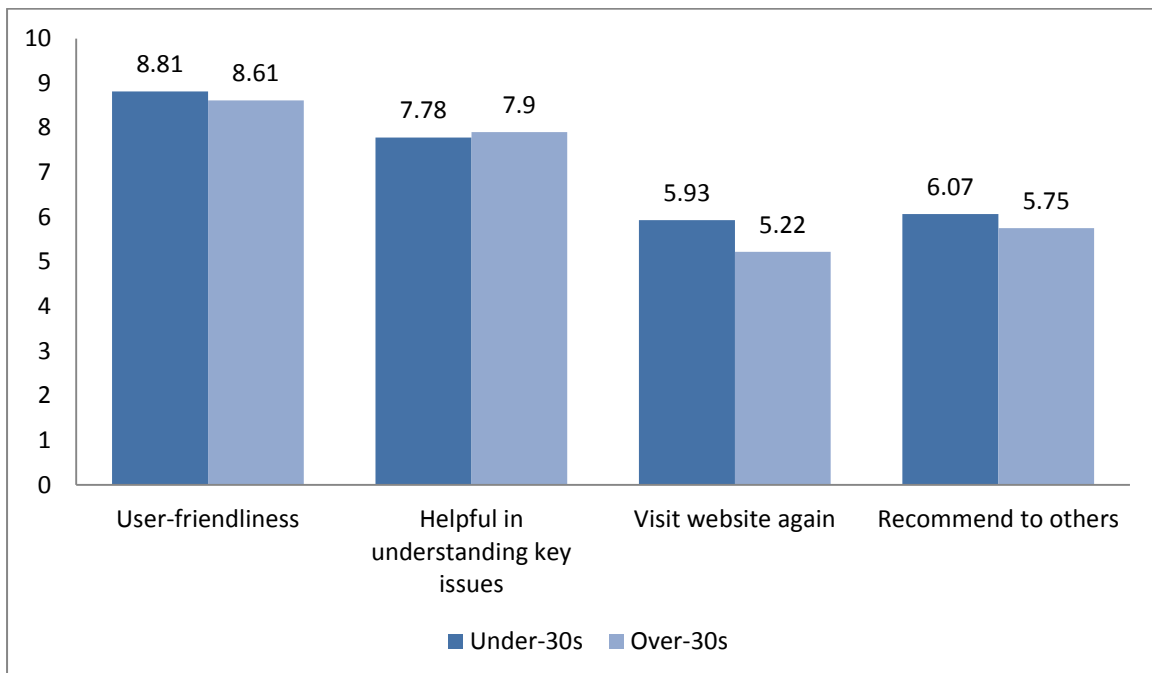


Figure 28: Mean evaluation scores of Barack Obama's website

Amongst those who viewed Barack Obama's website, younger people were more likely to feel that it had an impact on them. 10% felt that the site helped them decide whether to vote compared to

7.1% of older people, 21.8% felt it helped them decide who to vote for compared to 12.7% of the over-30s and over a quarter (28.2%) felt that viewing the site increased their interest in the election compared to 14.3% (figure 29)

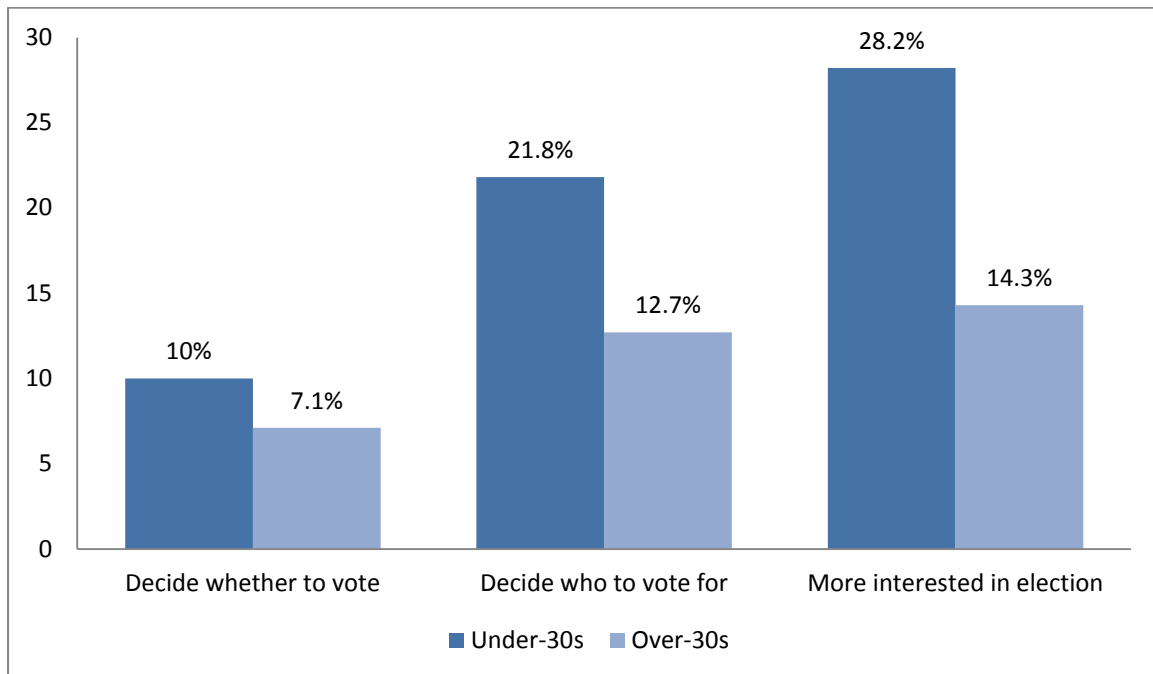


Figure 29: Impact of Barack Obama's website

A slightly different pattern can be seen in the evaluation scores for Mitt Romney's website (table 30). Older people scored the site more highly in terms of user-friendliness, helpfulness in understanding the issues and the likelihood of recommending it to others. Younger people did score the site more highly in terms of the likelihood of visiting the site again, but the difference is just 0.01 points: mean scores of 5.27 compared to 5.26. The t-tests showed that none of these differences were statistically significant.

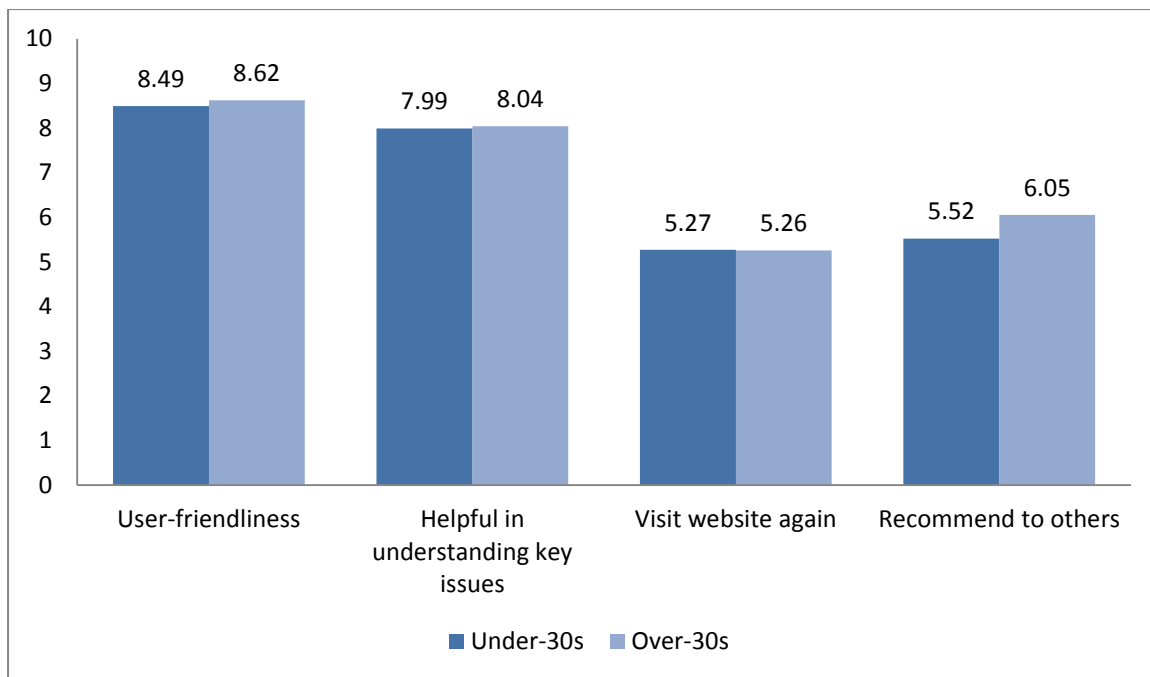


Figure 30: Mean evaluation scores for Mitt Romney's website

Looking at the reported impact of viewing Mitt Romney's websites (figure 31), we can see that young people were more likely to feel that it helped them to decide whether to vote and who to vote for (13.1% and 21.5% respectively) compared to older people (5.3% and 14.8%). Older people were slightly more likely to feel that visiting the site made them more interested in the election, with 23.5% of over-30s reporting this compared to 22.8% of the under-30s.

Comparing the candidate websites, turning firstly to the two London Mayoral election candidate websites, we see that that overall the Ken Livingstone website receives higher evaluation scores from both younger and older people compared to Boris Johnson's website. Looking at the impact findings, we also see much greater reported impact for those who viewed Livingstone's website, particularly for young people. 31.4% of young people felt that Ken Livingstone's website had helped them decide whether to vote compared to 0% of those who viewed Boris Johnson's site. 47.2% felt that Livingstone's site helped them decide who to vote for and 41.8% felt it made them more interested in the election compared to 5.7% and 37.7% of those in the Boris Johnson treatment group. Overall, it would appear that the Ken Livingstone website has a much greater impact on

young people than Boris Johnson's. However, we once again note the small sample size for this candidate treatment group.

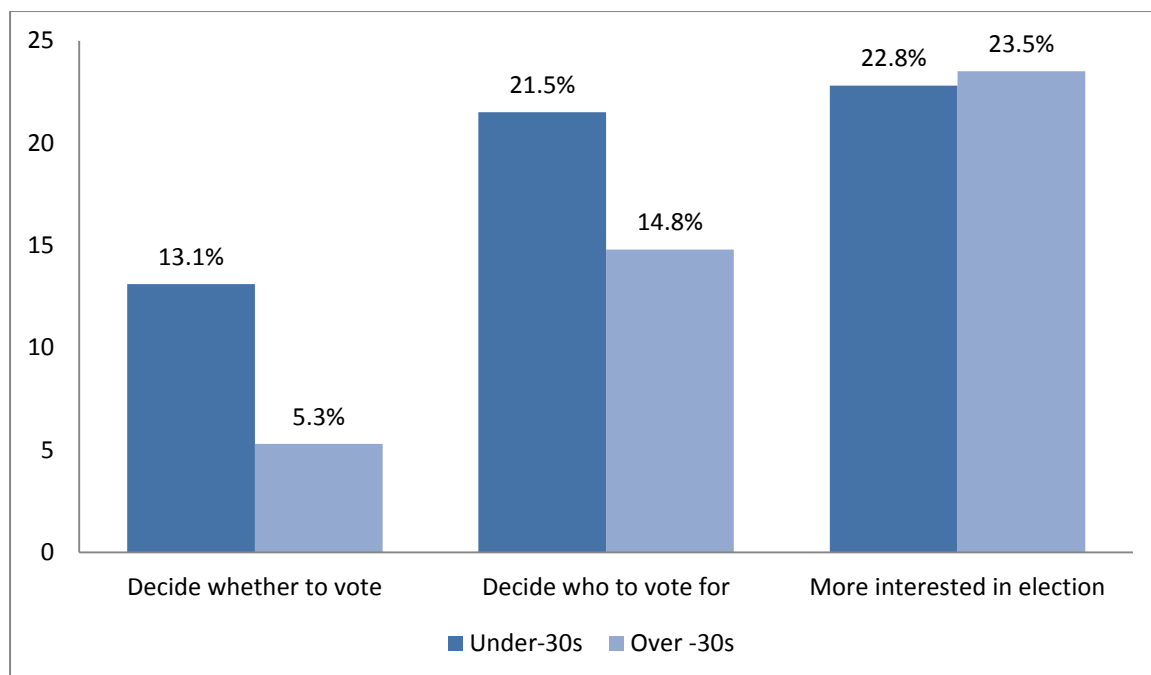


Figure 31: Impact of Mitt Romney's website

Turning to the US candidate sites, Barack Obama's site is rated more highly by young people than Mitt Romney's site, across all of the evaluation categories except for helping to understand the key issues in the election, where the Romney site is rated slightly higher (7.99 compared to 7.78 mean scores). Moving to the impact scores, the Obama site has a greater impact on young people in terms of helping them to decide who to vote for and increasing their interest in the election, but the Romney site is rated more highly in terms of helping young people whether to vote.

4.2 Youth Mobilization websites

We now turn to the two selected youth mobilization websites: Bite the Ballot in London and Power of 12 in the US.

Bite the Ballot

Evaluation and Impact scores: Bite the Ballot

Starting with Bite the Ballot, see that there are some differences between the ways in which young and older people evaluate the website (figure 32). The under-30s group scored the website more highly in terms of user-friendliness, helpfulness in understanding the issues and the likelihood of visiting the website again, whereas the older group scored more highly in terms of recommending the website to others. This is likely to relate to the fact that as a youth-orientated site, older people may not feel it is relevant to them but would feel it would be a good thing for other, most likely younger, people to visit. The independent sample t-tests show that none of these differences are statistically significant.

Moving to the impact scores for Bite the Ballot, there are some differences between the older and younger groups (figure 33). In terms of helping decide whether to vote, just 1.9% of young people felt that viewing the website had helped compared to 4.1% of the older group. Helping to decide who to vote for also had a fairly low score, although the impact was greater on younger people with 5.6% of 18-30s compared to 0.7% of the over-30s. The website did have a better impact on increasing interest in the election, although for this measure the impact was greater amongst older people: 11.2% of 18-30s compared to 13.3% of older people felt the website had had this effect on them.

Open-ended survey responses: Bite the Ballot

Turning to the qualitative responses, we see that amongst young people 75% of those who saw Bite the Ballot answered the open-ended question compared to 95% of over-30s who had seen the site. Comparing the two age groups by theme, we see a fairly similar pattern with the majority of responses from both relating to the design and usability of the website (59% of 18-30s and 49% of over-30s), a small amount of responses relating to information provision (7% of 18-30s and 10% of

over-30s), interactivity (4% of 18-30s and 1% of over-30s) and finally other themes (30% of 18-30s and 40% of over-30s).

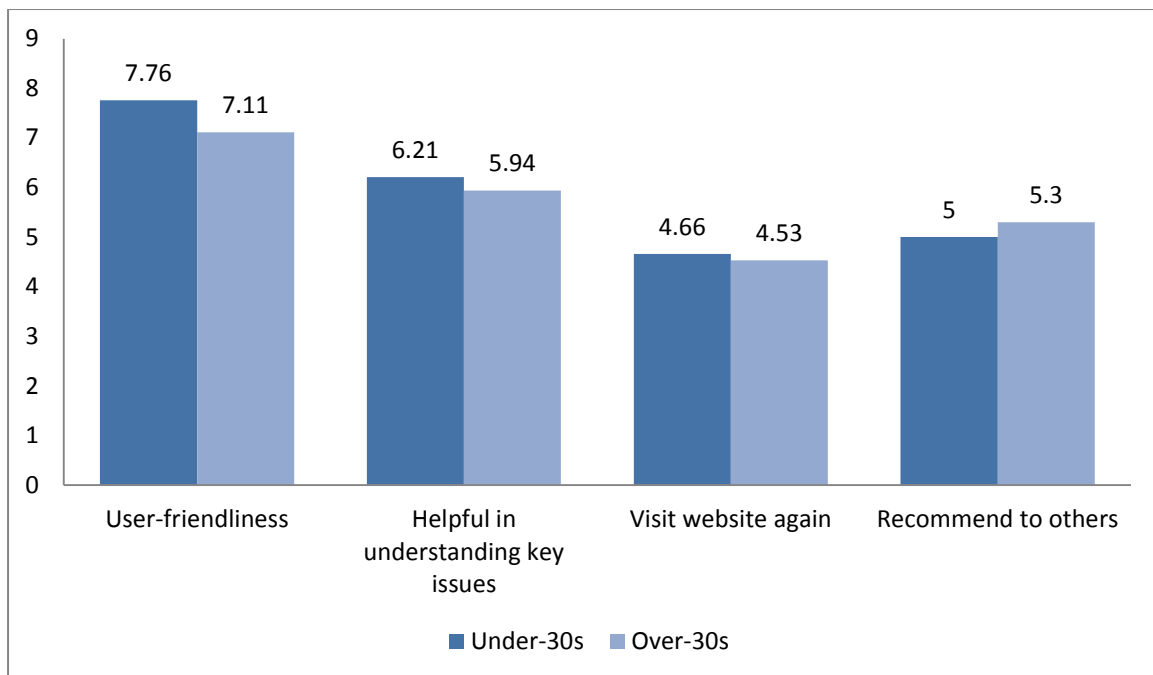


Figure 32: Mean evaluation scores of Bite the Ballot

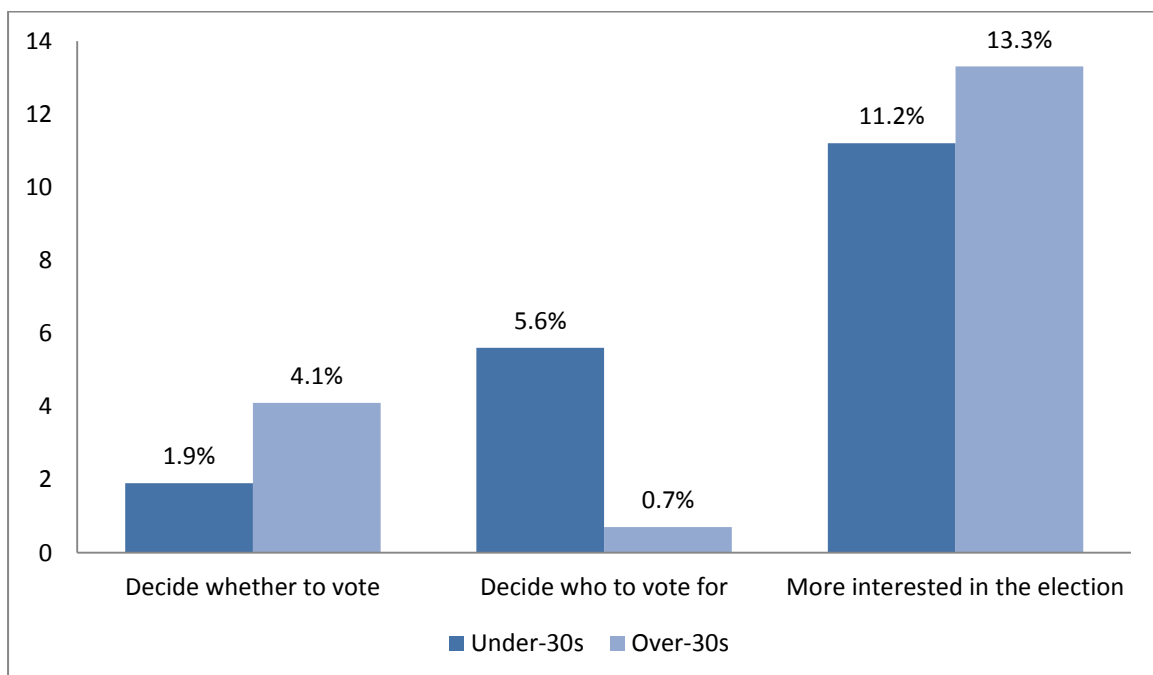


Figure 33: Impact scores for Bite the Ballot

Design and functionality

Recurring themes relating to the design and usability of Bite the Ballot suggested that navigation of the site was easy, people liked the layout and felt that it was colourful and appealing to respondents from both age groups. However, a selection of those from the older group found the design cluttered and did not view it in a positive light. The very small amount of comments relating to information provision and interactivity did not allow for coding but several other themes emerged.

Youth mobilization

Firstly, the purpose of the site was referred to positively i.e. having a website designed to inform and mobilize young people. This was mentioned a few times in the youth sample:

"I really like the concept of focussing on young voters and helping them understand the importance of voting"

(Bite the Ballot, 18-30s)

However, this was mentioned much more frequently in the over-30s group. Whilst they tend to see the site as not for them (although not always, as we shall see in the next theme), many were very approving of the idea and felt that the site would be effective.

"Good to see young people being encouraged to vote"

"It is a very friendly site targeted I felt towards young people who may not have voted before and need guidance and information about politics and their responsibility towards voting"

(Bite the Ballot, over-30s)

Tone

The second theme found in the responses was the tone of the site. Where this was mentioned amongst young people, it was generally positive suggesting the tone of the site was well-judged:

"The campaign seemed personal to those involved – like they really cared about it and supported it"

"Down to earth, has a purpose but doesn't push it, it just puts forward arguments"

(Bite the Ballot, 18-30s)

The older group were also largely positive about the tone of the site, finding it open and pitched at the right level for young people:

"I liked that it is straight talking and upfront. It's appealing to young voters without being at all patronising or contrived"

"I liked the tone of voice of the site and the way it put its target audience front and centre"

(Bite the Ballot, over-30s)

Whilst most acknowledged that the site was not aimed directly at them, some responses suggested that there was still benefit to be drawn from the site for some:

"It's direct and friendly, doesn't make you feel bad for not knowing stuff"

"I agree with what is said on the site – politics is vital but stuffy, boring and often uninteresting. I switch off to politics. I try to follow and understand but I usually give up! Your site is inviting and offers hope to someone like me"

(Bite the Ballot, over-30s)

However some of the older group were slightly more sceptical about the tone of the site:

"I found it too simplistic and rather "full of itself", trying to be young and trendy"

(Bite the Ballot, over-30s)

Power of 12

Evaluation and Impact scores: Power of 12

Turning now to the US Youth Mobilization website, Power of 12, we do see some differences between how younger and older people evaluate the website (figure 34). The under-30s who saw the Power of 12 website scored the website more highly in terms of user-friendliness and finding it helpful in understanding the key issues in the election than the over-30s. They were also more likely to say they would visit the website again and recommend it to others. The findings from the independent sample t-tests show that all of these differences in scores are statistically significant; scores for user-friendliness and finding it helpful in understanding the issues were significant at the 0.01 level, visiting again and recommending the website were significant at the 0.001 level. Overall,

we can say that young people are significantly more likely to evaluate Power of 12 with higher scores than older people.

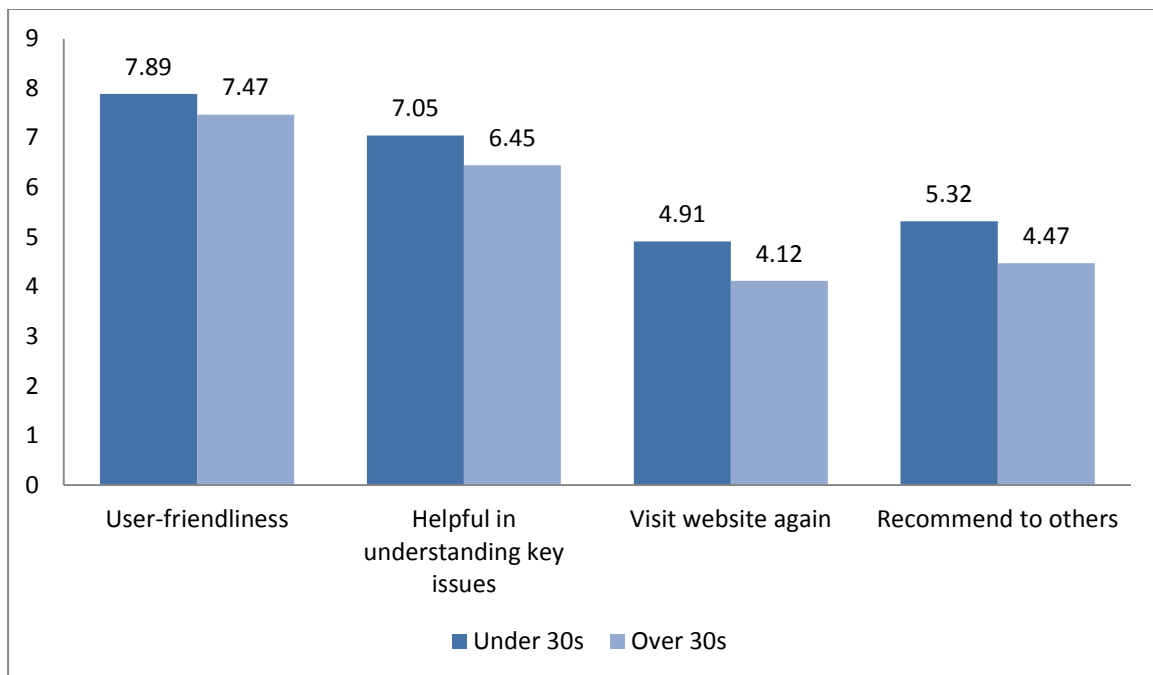


Figure 34: Mean evaluation scores of Power of 12

Turning to the impact of viewing Power of 12 (figure 35), we can see that younger people were more likely to feel that viewing the site had a positive effect on their voting decision making and interest in the election. 20.8% of young people in this treatment group felt that viewing Power of 12 had made them more interested in the election; in other words, roughly a fifth of under-30s who were exposed to the website.

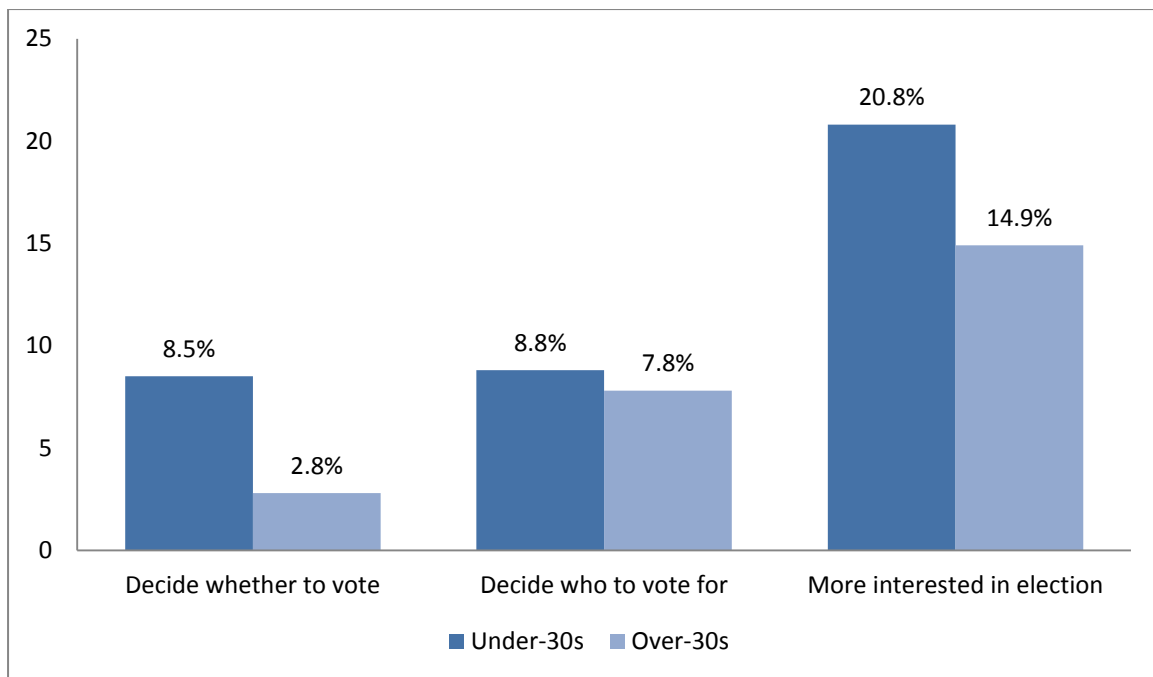


Figure 35: Impact scores for Power of 12

Open-ended responses: Power of 12

We now turn to the qualitative responses from those who viewed Power of 12, we can see that amongst the younger age group 34% of the 18-30s responses related to the design and usability of the site, 45% to the information about issues and candidates, 5% about the voting and registration information, 3% about interactive content and 12% about other themes. Amongst the over-30s, 23% of the responses related to design and usability, 52% to information about issues and candidates, 2% about voting and registration information, 5% about interactive content and 18% about other themes.

Design and functionality

We find positive responses to the design and layout across both age groups, with many commenting that the colourful and contemporary design of the website made it feel modern and attractive. However, some of the older respondents felt that it was a little 'loud' for their tastes.

"It was very appealing to the eye and made one excited about the election. I'm not that interested in politics but it made me want to find out more"

(Power of 12, 18-30s)

Information

The majority of responses across the two age groups related to the information relating to the election issues and candidates presented on the site. Many young people felt that the complexity and presentation of the content was pitched extremely well for them, providing them with and breaking down the information about the candidates and issues in a variety of formats from quick facts to longer articles and for many, it was felt that it helped them make the link between things that were important and relevant to them and the election process.

"I liked that it gave a summary of the candidates' views and answers to questions about the election and voting that young people may not know or understand"

"I liked how it tries to bring issues and make them relatable to young adults. I like how there are a lot of relevant references to concepts/people/things that we are familiar with"

"I thought that the website did a great job of listing the issues for the election. It broke it down simply, so that all could understand"

(Power of 12, 18-30s)

Other young people however, that the provision of information was too simple and felt that the site lacked more nuanced information. It seems that these respondents were already more politically engaged and so felt that although they liked the site, it did not meet their needs.

“Basic overview of some items, but nowhere close to having the depth of analysis on individual candidates’ views on issues I want. It seems a good site for first-time voters perhaps”

“The site was well put together, but seemed to lack any real content on the front page that would draw the more interested reader into the election and its issues”

(Power of 12, 18-30s)

Regarding the content of the information provided, there were many positive responses to the type of information provided: both in terms of candidate and issue information and in terms of practical information, with several mentioning the FAQ page and the ‘four steps to voting side bar’ as being particularly useful to them, suggesting that young people do appreciate having information about registration and voting as well as about the candidates and issues in one easily-accessible place.

“I really liked the FAQ page because it provided the first-time voter with all of the necessary information they would need in order to register to vote and participate in the election. It seemed to compile key points of the election into a “one stop shop” for the issues”

“It was like a guide on how to vote, what you need to do to vote and what you need to bring with you to vote”

“The site not only gave info on the two candidates, it also helped with how to register your vote and to help find your polling place”

(Power of 12, 18-30s)

Amongst older people, the responses about the level of information provided were largely positive with many people feeling that the site provided a good selection of information on a variety of topics and that it was presented simply and therefore was easy to understand. This suggests that is not just young people who are looking for information that is broken down and presented in an engaging way.

"I liked that it broke down information in detail about each of the candidates and their points. I haven't seen it as well laid out on many of the sites. This I found a positive for the site"

"Keeps it simple, easy to navigate and understand. Not overwhelming in terms of content but enough to keep my interest"

"I think it is a very good website with lots of good information especially for those younger people and others that are not up on the issues, as well as a refresher course on some of the issues and candidates for old folks such as myself"

(Power of 12, over-30s)

Interactivity

The few comments relating to interactivity most often related to the presence of video content, which was felt to be unique and engaging. Several other themes emerged from the analysis: tone and youth mobilization as for Bite the Ballot but also the involvement of MTV and the presence of the VAA Vote Easy.

Youth mobilization

As seen in the Bite the Ballot findings, many people from both the age groups particularly liked the purpose of the site: that it aimed to encourage young people to vote.

"It gave a great point of view of the election from a young person's perspective. It was definitely targeted to my demographic"

(Power of 12, 18-30s)

"I like that it is directed to getting young people to vote and explaining the election issues"

"It gives a lot of good information and seems geared toward young people. This segment of our society needs good info. Way to go!"

"User-friendly, geared towards the younger generation (of which I am sadly no longer a part!) Good information to keep younger folks informed about the issues that relate to them"

(Power of 12, over-30s)

We find again that several people in the older group acknowledge that the site is aimed at younger people but still feel that there is value in it for them.

"I never knew this site was around and I am very pleased with the information I can get to help me make up my mind"

(Power of 12, over-30s)

Tone

In terms of the tone of the site, many young people felt that the tone was gauged correctly to appeal to young people, combining a light-hearted and entertaining approach with factual content.

"It's geared towards young voters to give them the needed information of how to vote and what they need to vote. They can see what other young voters think is important. It represents the young person's point of view"

"It used humour and modern entertainment to put the election in a mindframe more relatable to a younger audience"

(Power of 12, 18-30)

However, some felt that the website was pitched slightly too young, with several people suggesting that it was aimed at teenagers including those not yet old enough to vote. Given the broad age range within the 18-30 group, it is not surprising that some will feel that it is aimed at people younger than themselves.

MTV: Bias and celebrity involvement

The fact that Power of 12 is an MTV website produced some mixed responses in terms of its sophistication, the involvement of celebrities and in terms of neutrality, with some questioning whether the site was really non-partisan. In many ways this is a valid question, given the organization's liberal stance on certain issues throughout the years. However, from the analysis we see that it is not as simple as young people liking MTV and what it stands for and older people not. Positive and negative responses to MTV were found throughout both samples, suggesting a particular pre-existing viewpoint on the organisation that is not necessarily related to age or indeed, necessarily the website itself.

"I don't really like MTV and it's very obvious that they are promoting Barack Obama"

"MTV is not a place I would ever look for anything intelligent"

"I think MTV is hokey and for a generally younger, less sophisticated and intelligent population"

(Power of 12, 18-30s)

"I liked absolutely nothing about this site. It was completely biased and very immature in its language and presentation"

"I didn't like this site at all. I didn't feel like they were credible. They were very one-sided and leaned towards President Obama"

"Worthless piece of liberal propaganda that avoids real important issues and focuses on distracting voters with liberal issues and hiding the truth"

(Power of 12, over-30s)

Other respondents however, felt that the site was unbiased and liked that it was providing them with information without trying to sway them one way or the other

"It allows you to read articles from both points of view with really no bias towards one or the other"

"It had lots of content for me to find out about the election without them saying who they liked or favoured"

(Power of 12, 18-30)

"It was extremely informative and quite unbiased. I was really impressed by it"

"It was fair and unbiased about the two candidates. It did seem to be more about discussing Obama's virtues but did give an idea of what Romney's views on topics were in an honest way"

(Power of 12, over-30s)

The use of celebrities unsurprisingly prompted some mixed responses, although we did notice that older people were more likely to see this negatively. Some felt that it was fun, entertaining and helped them engage with the content more.

"It looked fun and the celebrity references were enticing"

"I think it is nice how it brings entertainment and politics together"

"I liked the different artists encouraging others to use their voice and vote" (Power of 12, 18-30s)

However, this was not the case for several of the older respondents.

"It was very superficial, mostly aimed at those locked in on the phoney celebrity culture"

"None of us need the opinions of some (not all) no talent celebrities"

"It was a pretty stupid site. If you ask me, it is the problem with elections today. It makes everything a popularity contest not a substance contest"

(Power of 12, over-30s)

Vote Easy VAA

Interestingly, several respondents in both the young and older groups mentioned that their favourite part of the site was actually the VAA embedded in the site, Vote Easy which is part of the broader Project Vote Smart (one of the websites included in our content analysis but which did not score as highly as Power of 12). Both those who already had an idea of who they might vote for and those who were undecided found the VAA useful in terms of finding out about the salient issues and comparing candidates' views to their own.

"I liked the quiz that helps you figure out what candidates are most in line with my views on specific issues. It was very clearly laid out – it didn't change my vote, it affirmed it but it was helpful nonetheless"

"I like the link to the site that helped me choose who to vote for"

"Easy to use and get a quick idea of what the issues were between the candidates. This was nice to compare and contrast them all together" (Power of 12, 18-30s)

"I wish I had known about this site before. It's easy to use and helps me to clarify what is important to me. It confirmed that I am supporting the right choice for President"

"I liked the quiz to help you decide who to vote for. I think it was a link to an outside site. It really shows where each candidate stands on things. It solidified my decision about who I would vote for"

(Power of 12, over -30s)

4.3 VAAs

We now turn to the two VAA websites examined: Vote Match and I Side With.

Vote Match

Evaluation and Impact scores: Vote Match

Turning now to the first of the Vote Advice Applications, we see that older people are more likely to give Vote Match higher scores than younger people across all four evaluation measures (figure 36).

From the t-tests we can see that in two of these categories, the differences are statistically significant: helping to understand the key issues in the election ($p < 0.05$) and the likelihood of visiting the website again ($p < 0.01$).

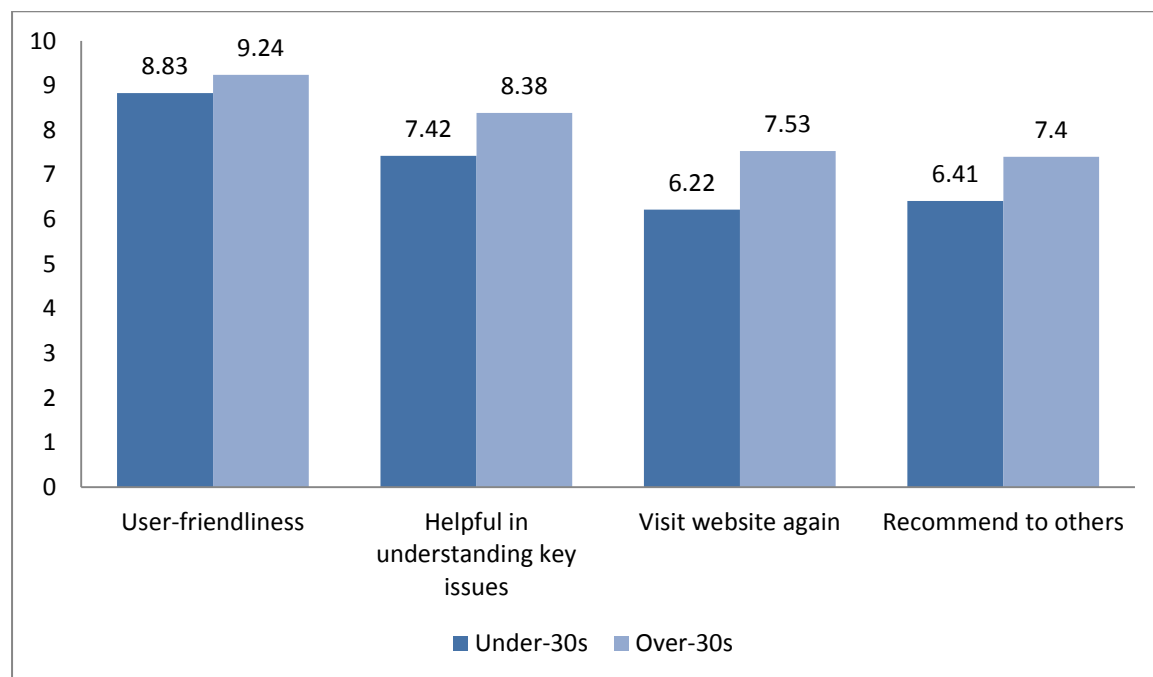


Figure 36: Mean evaluation scores of Vote Match

Turning to the impact of viewing the Vote Match VAA (figure 37), we see that the impact is higher for older people across all three of the measures. Visiting the VAA site had a negligible impact on helping young people to decide whether to vote, with just 0.4% of 18-30s reporting this compared to 5.4% of older people. It did have a greater impact on helping people to decide how to vote and this was slightly more effective amongst the older group (21.7% of 18-30s compared to 27.8% of the over-30s). In terms of increasing interest in the election, the site was again more successful in achieving this with the older group (28.6% of the over-30s compared to 17.2% of the under-30s).

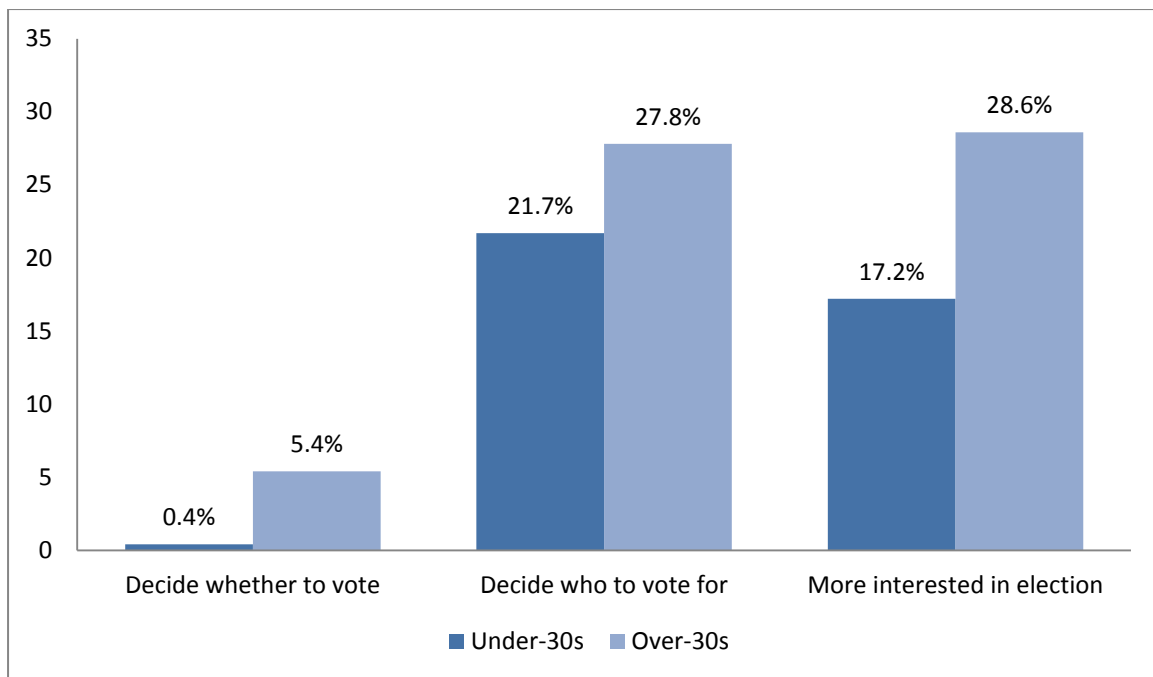


Figure 37: Impact scores for Vote Match

Open-ended responses: Vote Match

Examining the qualitative responses, we see that almost everyone in the Vote Match condition responded to the open-ended question but we once again point to the small sample size, particularly for young people (24).

Design and functionality

In general terms, the 18-30s who used Vote Match enjoy the interactivity of doing a quiz and receiving a result at the end of it. In terms of design, several mention finding the site easy to use and liking the simple design. The general tone is described as “light-hearted” and “fun”. Turning to the actual content and function of the VAA, those that referred to it found it useful in presenting the candidates’ views and informing their own opinion.

“Easy to use, helped me to decide who to vote for with very little effort required”

“It helps people to understand where they stand on the issues of the election as well as highlighting what the candidates think”

“It let me explore the issues and confirmed what I already knew, I’m a poor match to either of the candidates likely to win and all the others have some policies I like and some I don’t”(Vote Match, 18-30s)

Moving on to the older groups responses to viewing Vote Match, we see that the responses are very similar with most people finding something to like about the site and many responding positively to it. In general, people feel that it is well-designed, simple and quick to use and they like the process of filling out a quiz to get their match.

“Completing the survey was fun and I liked seeing my best match – it was a complete surprise to me”

“Did the work for me!”

“Easy to use, doesn’t take long to go through”

(Vote Match, over-30s)

Information

In terms of the function of the VAA, the responses suggest that people liked the way that the site works, felt it was credible and were interested to see what their results were, as well as possibly showing them some options that they might not have previously considered.

"Gave me information that I haven't been able to understand from other sites and publications"

"Easy to use and seems quite accurate. Covered all the main issues so I'll definitely look a little more closely at the candidate it recommended before I decide who to vote for"

"I thought it was concise in presenting the issues and was interested to see the outcome"

(Vote Match, over-30s)

Overall, those who viewed Vote Match seemed to find it helpful in providing information and helping to formulate opinions.

I Side with

Evaluation and Impact scores: I Side with

Turning to our final website I Side with, we can see that the mean evaluation scores are once again higher for young people in the treatment group across all measures other than the likelihood of recommending the site to others (figure 38). Independent t-tests show that the differences between age groups are significant on every measure; user-friendliness and helpful in understanding the issues are both significant at the 0.01 level, with returning to the website and recommending it to others were significant at the 0.001 level.

Moving to examine the impact of viewing I Side With (figure 39), we see that again young people are more likely to report a positive impact on deciding whether to vote, who to vote for and their interest in the election. 11.5% of under-30s in this group felt that viewing the website helped them decide whether or not to vote, compared to 6.1% of the over-30s. Almost a quarter (24.9%) of young people felt that being exposed to I Side With helped them decide who to vote for compared to

14.8% of older people and roughly a third of young people (37.3%) felt that it made them more interested in the election compared to around a quarter (26.4%) of older people.

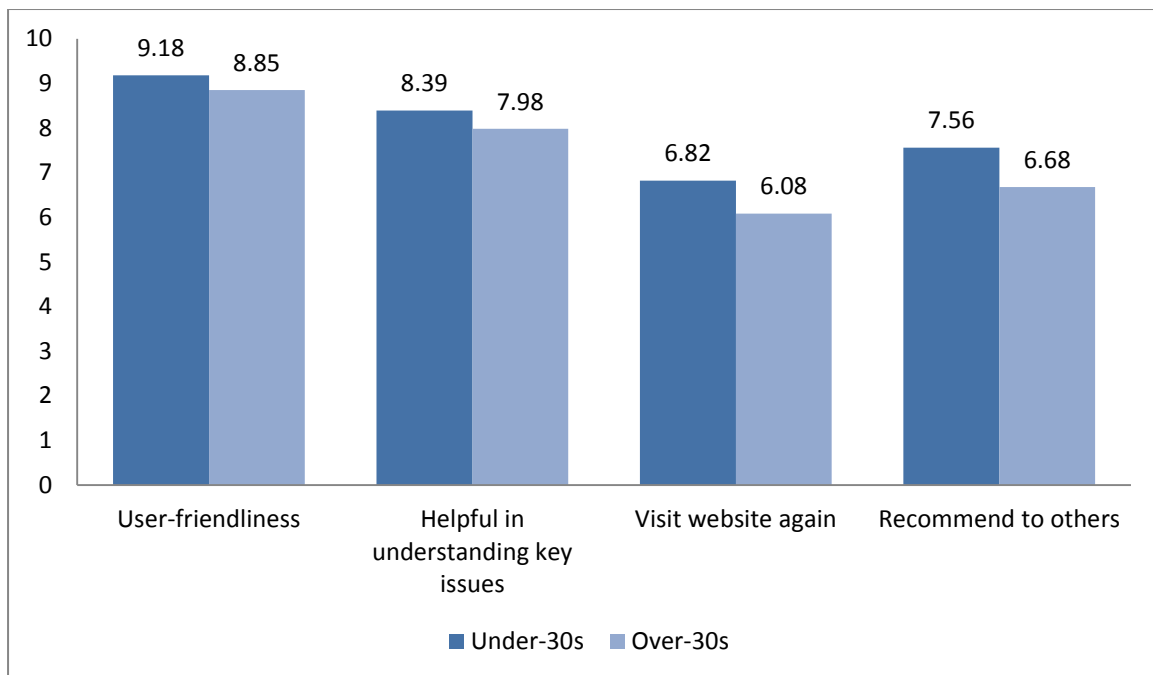


Figure 38: Mean evaluation scores for I Side With

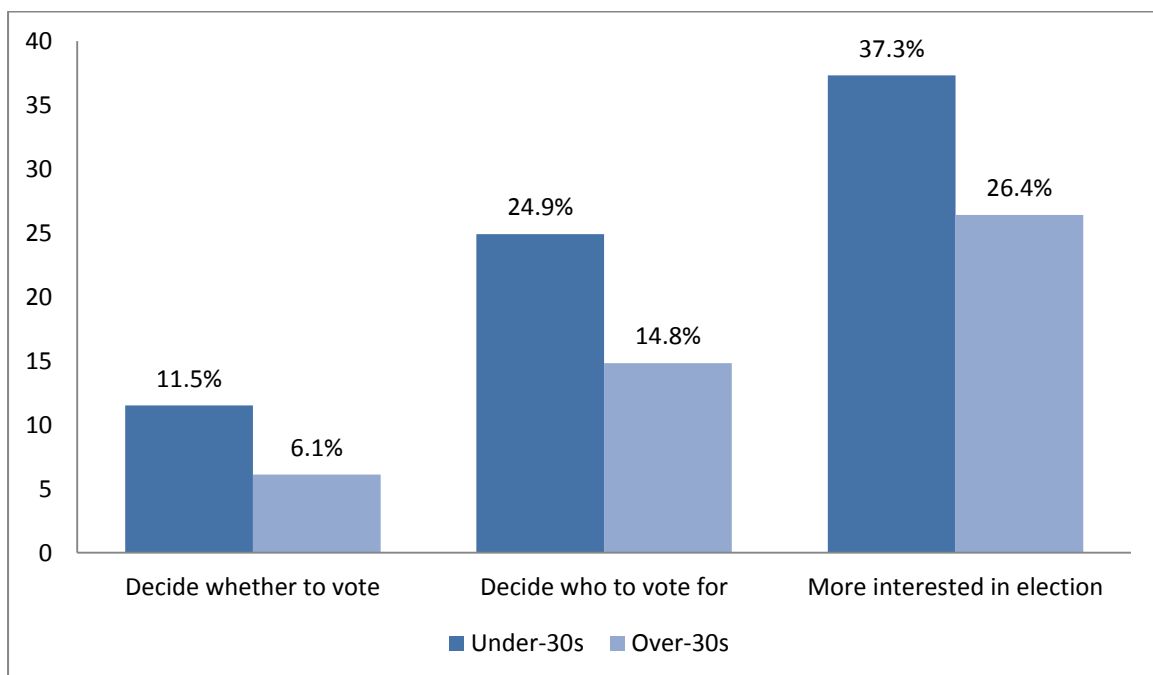


Figure 39: Impact scores for I Side With

Open-ended responses: I Side With

Before breaking down the themes, we note that a substantial number of the comments from both young and older people were very enthusiastic and related to how much they liked the site overall, making it difficult to categorise these responses. Many saw it as something new, exciting and innovative and found it intuitive to use and understand.

"It's cool, a different way to look at politics"

"It gets straight to the point and cuts all the hassle of trying to compare"

"It's a better way to understand about elections and you can see your results to see who you can vote for"

(I Side With, 18-30s)

"I love the quiz. The questions covered the major issues that are currently affecting Americans and at the end it reveals whose policies you may be more in line with"

"I liked the way the site laid out some important issues. It felt good to find out that a site like this exists"

(I Side With, over-30s)

Design and functionality

Both young and older respondents were positive about the design of I Side With, describing the interface as clean, user friendly and visually appealing, with an organised layout making it very easy to use despite a large amount of information contained on the site.

“The site was very clear in highlighting what was important without being too wordy or disorganized”

“The layout and how all the information was formatted so it was entertaining and knowledgeable to read”

“The design was neat and uncluttered despite how much information the landing page contained”

(I Side With, 18-30s)

“Easy to understand, good pictures, in layman’s terms. Its user-friendly. I think my friends would really appreciate me informing them of this for discussions and choices”

“Well laid out, attractive, easy on the eyes and to use”

(I Side With, over-30s)

Information and interactivity

Due to the nature of using the VAA, the information and interactive process are quite tricky to untangle. Overall, many people appreciated that there was a lot of information condensed into one site but without making it feel overwhelming or boring. It also collated information about all the

candidates that was considered to be difficult to find or that people felt they would be unlikely to come across if one wasn't already very knowledgeable about politics.

"This is a really nice site for compacting all the issues into one location so that people can get a nice, simple overview of the candidates before doing more in-depth research"

"The site gave you the freedom to answer the questions you think are relevant and important to YOU as an individual. It included all of the major topics one might consider and it lets the user factor in what he/she thinks is important and then generates a score"

"It conveniently had all the candidates' answers to questions in one place, which can be hard to find elsewhere"

(I Side With, 18-30s)

Fundamentally, young people really liked the process of being able to take a quiz and see which candidate matched their own views most closely i.e. using a VAA, but there are specific features of and content within I Side With that many people liked in particular. Firstly, the way the questions in the quiz were structured was considered very positively by many people, who felt that because several nuanced options were offered for each question rather than a simple yes or no choice, this created a much more personalised feel and was more likely to result in a closer match of candidate based on your real opinion. We did also see this amongst responses in the older group but it was noticeably more prevalent amongst the 18-30s, suggesting that young people either have a greater need to express themselves precisely or perhaps that they find it more helpful in working out exactly what their opinion is.

"I love the depth of the questions and how well you could match up your opinion"

"I liked the quiz because there were multiple answers you could choose from so it was very specific and could match you to a candidate better"

"I love the quiz. It was easy and it also had variations to answers to choose from if you weren't satisfied with the options! Awesome site, I am definitely going to share this"

(I Side With, 18-30s)

Those in the older group were also impressed by the information provided and felt that the language used, the structure of the questions and the way the results were presented all created a helpful and interesting site. Several responses mentioned the idea of having this information all in one place, which is both time-saving and unique.

"It allowed me to see how each candidate stands on issues that are important to me without having to research each candidate independently"

"It seems like this website offers a quick and easy overview of the important election issues. The poll results could provide important guidance to a voter like me who does not read the newspaper or read news programs regularly"

"Concise, yet covered a lot of info. Very helpful"

(I Side With, Over-30s)

Finally, the inclusion of several third party candidates in the VAA was also viewed positively by many people across both age groups, which they felt offered new opinions and information not easily available anywhere else.

"I LOVE THIS SITE. I wasn't even aware about Gary Johnson as a candidate. I found a new candidate to vote for. This is a very informative amazing site. If only everyone knew about this"

"It was user friendly, had lots of different options to read...It wasn't just about Obama and Romney"

(I Side With, 18-30s)

"I actually learned about candidates I hadn't heard much about previously. I think this site is a great idea"

"Interesting and interactive. I didn't even know who the other candidates/parties were in the mix"

(I Side With, over-30s)

Presentation of results

The way in which the match results were presented was also seen positively by many people. Results were presented by showing the percentage that the respondent agrees with each candidate and on which topic. Many people were also impressed by the interactive features that allowed you to compare your results with other people in your state, of your age group and also to read comments that other people had written on the topics included within the quiz.

"I liked that you can look at each individual state and see who the majority of people support and on what issues"

"I liked how it showed you other people's answers and yours too"

"I liked the quiz to see who you side with. I knew I didn't like Romney but I had no idea that I only sided with him 9% of the time, and no part of that is on major issues. I feel like everyone should take the quiz before they vote to see who they really side with"

(I Side With, under-30s)

Being able to see other people's opinions and to compare yourself to them does not appear to be solely the preserve of the young. Several commented on how they liked using the tools that allowed you to compare your results to others in your state or the whole country.

"I liked how my concerns compared with the president, the other candidates, democrats, Americans in general and the people of Maryland"

"I really liked getting the pulse of voters in and out of my state. Very useful and time saving"

(I Side With, over-30s)

Effects

Within the qualitative responses, several people mentioned the effects that they thought using the site had on them. Young people in particular felt that the process of working through the issues in the quiz actually helped them learn more about contemporary social and political issues and connect

these issues to the election, whilst also helping them to structure their own thoughts and develop their own opinions.

"It spelled out the various stances on important issues in this election and helped me frame my own thinking about these issues and who I want to support"

"It made me think about issues I don't normally consider"

"I liked the ability to learn about the candidates while simultaneously learning about your own views through taking the quiz"

(I Side With, 18-30s)

Those in the over-30s group were more likely to find the site useful in terms of helping them making a choice between candidates or confirming the opinions they already had.

"Gave me a clear picture why I'm voting the way I'm going to vote"

"It just clarified things for me with candidates and policies and that I am really backing the candidate whose policies I agree most with"

"You get to see what each candidate stands for. It was easy to use and just verified who I was voting for"

(I Side With, over-30s)

Bias/credibility

Many young people commented that they liked the fact that the site appeared to be unbiased and believed that they were being given credible information, although very few questioned how the matches were calculated and where the information had come from.

"I like that the site is neutral, there is no hidden agenda"

"It didn't try to persuade you to pick a candidate. It was unbiased"

"It presents the issues without regards to the political parties, which allows people to make an informed decision removed from the normal stereotypes"

(I Side With, 18-30s)

As in the younger group, several people appreciated the fact that they felt that the site was unbiased and felt that it offered an alternative way to find out political information whilst being able to avoid partisan media and advertising.

"Don't have to listen to the games the candidates play with each other"

"Helps you wade through all the political negative ads and really focus on what is important to you"

"I found it be very unique. It was refreshing to be able to view unbiased information on the candidates and the issues"

(I Side With, over-30s)

Older respondents were however more likely to be more sceptical about the content and background of the site. It would be interesting to know if these opinions held before they used the site or if they stem from a result that was different to what they were expecting e.g. some sort of cognitive dissonance which makes them question the reliability of the website.

"I enjoyed the quiz but since I don't know anything about the developers of this website, I am hesitant to take everything stated as gospel truth"

"It gave a lot of information. The only problem was I don't trust these sites. The whole time I was wondering who put it up, how is it supported? Can you believe what is printed?"

(I Side With, over-30s)

Overall, I Side With is seen as new, innovative source of information which is fun to use. It is possible that the process of answering questions about your thoughts on issues and policies increases a sense of internal efficacy and the ability to see and compare policies from different candidates gives a greater sense of transparency, leading to potential effects on young people's levels of external efficacy and trust.

4.4 Summary

Comparing the four different types of websites in the UK, we find that Ken Livingstone's candidate campaign site is rated most highly by 18-30s across all of the websites in both evaluation and impact scores. Looking at the non-candidate sites, we see that young people scored Vote Match higher than

Bite the Ballot across nearly almost all measures but that Vote Match was more effective for older people than for younger. This suggests that the youth mobilization and the VAA may have less effect on young people than the candidate sites, but Vote Match might be more effective than Bite the Ballot.

Across the four different websites examined in the US, we can see that I Side With was given the highest mean scores by young people across all four evaluation categories. In other words, young people who viewed the VAA rated it more highly in terms of user-friendliness (9.18), finding it helpful in understanding the election issues (8.39), the likelihood of visiting the website again (6.82) and the likelihood of recommending the website to others (7.56). Power of 12 scored the lowest across all of the categories, with the Barack Obama website scoring slightly higher than the Mitt Romney site over all four categories.

Looking at the impact categories, we can see that in terms of helping to decide whether to vote, viewing Mitt Romney's website actually had the largest impact on young people with 13.1% saying that it helped them, compared to 11.5% for I Side With, 10% for Barack Obama's website and 8.5% for Power of 12. We cannot be sure if this is due to people seeing the site and being mobilized to vote for Mitt Romney or if in fact, the opposite effect happened and young people viewing the site were encouraged to vote to prevent a Romney victory. In terms of helping with vote choice, I Side With had the biggest impact on young people, with 24.9% of them feeling that viewing the website helped them decide who to vote for, which given the nature and purpose of the VAA is the result you might expect. Those who viewed the candidate websites reported similar levels of impact on helping to decide who to vote for with 21.8% in the Barack Obama group and 21.5% in the Mitt Romney group. The Power of 12 had a comparatively small impact on the decision making process, with just 8.8% of young people who saw the site feeling that it helped them to decide which candidate to vote for. Finally, turning to the impact on levels of interest in the election, I Side With had by far the biggest reported impact on making young people more interested in the election with

37.3% of under-30s feeling this way. 28.2% of those who viewed the Barack Obama website felt it had made them more interested in the election compared to 22.8% for Mitt Romney and 20.8% of those who saw Power of 12. The relative success of I Side With may relate back to the idea that young people sometimes need help to connect the issues that they care about to the political process and individual candidates. By presenting users of the VAA with policy issues, making them confront their own opinion and then matching them up with the closest candidate, the VAA site may perhaps increase engagement by making the election relevant and more personally meaningful. The Power of 12 website had the least impact across the categories showing that the other types of websites were doing a better job in helping young people to make vote choices and increase interest in the election. Overall, we can see that I Side With scored the most highly across both the evaluation and impact scores, whereas Power of 12 scored the least across all of the categories. Of the two candidate sites, Barack Obama's had higher scores across almost all of the categories. Therefore we might expect Power of 12 to have less of an effect on young people, compared to the candidate sites and the VAA.

Based on this, therefore we can hypothesise that the youth mobilization websites in both countries might have the least likelihood of affecting young people's engagement. This is quite surprising given that these are the sites designed specifically for young people and in the case of Power of 12, scored highly on the quantitative analysis in the previous chapter. However, the qualitative findings show that some young people had reservations about the involvement of MTV and some felt that it was pitched at a younger age group than them, whereas Bite the Ballot scored quite poorly on the quantitative content analysis; all factors that may contribute negatively to effects on young people's engagement. The VAAs were evaluated and experienced very well amongst young people, particularly I Side With which also scored well in the quantitative analysis and so we might expect to see effects on engagement if young people are exposed to these sites. One key implication from the findings in this chapter is that young and older people do show differences in the way they experience political websites as we had expected but it is clear that young people are not a

homogenous group and therefore we may also find different effects between young people. In the following chapter we will incorporate these implications and those from the previous chapter into specific hypotheses to be tested in order to understand if the websites examined in this chapter can affect the political attitudes, behaviour and cognitive engagement of young people.

Chapter 5: Website effects

We now turn to our final empirical chapter, examining the direct and indirect effects of exposure to specific political websites on young people in the UK and the US through an innovative experiment, with the aim of addressing our third and final research question:

Q3: What effect does exposure to a youth mobilization, candidate or VAA website have on young people's cognitive engagement, attitudes and electoral behaviour?

To briefly re-cap, respondents took part in a pre-test survey prior to the election, wherein their existing levels of political attitudes and behaviour were measured. Having been randomly assigned to an experimental condition, respondents were exposed to either: a youth mobilization website (Bite the Ballot in the UK or Power of 12 in the US), a VAA (Vote Match in the UK or I Side With in the US) or the two major candidate websites. Those assigned to the control group were not exposed to any websites. Shortly after the election, participants completed a post-test survey wherein the measures of engagement were repeated, as well as questions relating to their voting behaviour in the elections, allowing us to understand if there are any causal relationships between exposure to any of the particular websites and likelihood of voting or levels of attention to news, internal and external efficacy and trust. Following what we have learnt from the literature review and our findings from the two previous chapters, we aim to test a number of specific hypotheses.

All of the websites aim to mobilize people to vote and so our first hypothesis, relates to the effect of the websites on likelihood of voting:

H1 Exposure to any of the websites will lead to an increase in the likelihood of voting

From the content analysis, we know that candidate websites scored higher for information about the candidates and salient issues than the youth mobilization websites and therefore we expect that

these sites will have a greater effect on increasing attention to news. Our second hypothesis is therefore:

H2 Attention to news is most likely to be increased by exposure to the candidate sites

Turning to the attitudinal variables, the qualitative content analysis revealed that many young people found the process of using a VAA helped them to understand the issues at stake and their own opinions on them, suggesting greater feelings of personal competence relating to politics.

Based on this, we propose that:

H3 Internal Efficacy is most likely to be increased by exposure to a VAA

Finally, we would expect young people's external efficacy to rise after exposure to a youth mobilization website as they promote the idea that young people's opinions are important and that their vote matters.

H4 External Efficacy is likely to be increased specifically among young people by exposure to youth mobilization websites

We do not have a specific hypothesis relating to trust as it is not clear as the literature suggests conflicting views as to whether websites could increase or actually decrease levels of trust in politics and politicians.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. We will first examine the direct effects on voting in each election, before turning to indirect effects: firstly examining the effects on cognitive engagement, specifically on attention to news, before turning to the three attitudinal variables of Internal and External Efficacy and Trust. Throughout the analysis, we will compare the differences between younger and older citizens in order to establish if there are any differential effects depending on age group and we will also examine if any differences can be found between the same types of website

in each election. Where possible we will also examine the extent to which effects vary depending on the pre-existing level of each variable as measured in the pre-test survey.

5.1 Vote

We turn firstly then to examine if exposure to the individual effects can have a direct effect in terms of mobilizing them to vote and if this effect is more pronounced amongst young people. We will establish this by examining the findings from a series of binary logistic models. Turning first to the London results, unfortunately there is no measure of how likely the respondent is to vote in the London Mayoral election in the pre-test so we are unable to carry out any comparisons between the pre- and post- test. Respondents were also not asked if they had already voted by post as in the US sample. Our analysis is therefore based solely on the post-test results, using a binary variable of whether respondents reported voting or not.

	Model 1	Model 2
18-30	.694 (.100)	.985 (.201)
Bite the Ballot	.096 (.123)	.263 (.145)*
Vote Match	.089 (.131)	.065 (.154)
Candidate sites	.096 (.124)	.240 (.145)*
Bite the Ballot*18-30		.610 (.277)*
Vote Match*18-30		.104 (.304)
Candidate sites*18-30		.531 (.279)*

-2 Log Likelihood

2816.054 ***

914.349

Nagelkerke R²

.031

.105

*=0.1 ** =0.05

N=815

Table 7: Effects on vote by website, London

From our binary logistic regression models, we do find some significant effects from exposure to some of the websites, albeit most at the 0.1 level. For all respondents, those who viewed Bite the Ballot or the candidate websites were significantly more likely to have voted than those in the control group ($p < 0.1$). However, this effect was more pronounced amongst the older group with the interactions between age and Bite the Ballot and age and the candidate sites significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore we can say that being exposed to Bite the Ballot or the candidate websites significantly increased the likelihood of over-30s stating they had cast a vote in the 2012 London Mayoral election.

Turning now to the US, having removed early voters from the sample, we first examine the mean scores for the pre-test measure of likelihood of voting in the 2012 election (table 8). Whilst the different scales used mean that we cannot directly compare the pre- and post-test, it gives us a useful benchmark. Respondents were asked how likely they were to vote in the 2012 presidential election and this was measured on a 0-10 scale with 0 relating to very unlikely through to 10 meaning very likely to vote. The mean scores are 7.67 for the 18-30s and 9.02 for the over-30s. These seem rather high and so any effects from the websites on voting may be difficult to detect.

	Mean score	Levene's test of Homogeneity of variance	df	p	F	p
18-30s	9.02	.970	3, 869	.406	5.169 (ANOVA)	.947
Over 30s	7.67	8.304	3, 1635	.000	9.535 (Welch)	.029

N=2683

Table 8: Pre-test measures of likelihood of voting, US

The results of the binary logistic regression models (table 9) show that the only variable that significantly affects voting in the election is the pre-test measure of likelihood of voting. In other words, none of the websites or interaction effects had any effect on whether people voted in the 2012 presidential election.

In summary, we find that in the UK Bite the Ballot and the candidate websites had a modest effect on vote but this effect was stronger amongst older people. In the US, no effects were found and therefore H1 is only partially supported.

	Model 1	Model 2
Likelihood of voting	-.668 (.031)***	.668 (.031)***
18-30	-.572 (.148)	-.463 (.302)
Power of 12	-.302 (.217)	-.258 (.297)
I Side With	.209 (.202)	.022 (.280)
Candidate sites	.115 (.206)	.094 (.280)
Power of 12*18-30		-.064 (.435)
I Side With*18-30		.382 (.409)
Candidate sites*18-30		.058 (.414)
-2 Log Likelihood	1349.134 ***	1347.691 ***
Nagelkerke R ²	.580	.580

*=0.05, **=0.01 *** =0.001

N=2683

Table 9: Binary logistic regression: Vote, US

5.2 Attention to news

We now move to examine the cognitive element of our pre-participatory variables, to understand if any of the websites had an effect on levels of attention to news amongst young people. Turning first

to London, the pre-test survey unfortunately does not have a question directly asking about levels of attention to news and current affairs but instead respondents were asked to indicate how much attention they had paid to the election in the weeks leading up to it, which we are using as a proxy for attention to news. The pre-test item was measured on a four-point scale with the options 'A great deal', 'A fair amount', 'Not very much' and 'Not at all'. This was re-coded into two groups, with the first two responses becoming 'High attention' and the latter two becoming 'Low attention'. In the post-test, respondents were asked to indicate their level of attention to news and current affairs, measured on a 0-10 scale. To understand if exposure to the websites had any effect on levels of attention to news, we can compare the post-test mean scores for attention to news with previous levels of attention to the election (table 10). We will first compare the scores for those in any treatment group compared to the control, then the individual treatment groups against the control before finally examining the differences between the age groups.

Looking first at the sample as a whole, we see that for those with previously low levels of attention to the election, the mean pre-test score for attention to news is 5.38, compared to 7.65 for those with higher prior levels. Pulling apart the findings for the individual treatment groups, we see that for those in the low attention group, those who were exposed to Bite the Ballot score very similarly to those in the control group whilst those exposed to the VAA Vote Match or the candidate sites show slightly higher levels of attention. For the candidate sites condition, the post-test mean of 5.70 is significantly higher than the control group's mean score of 5.21($p < 0.1$), suggesting that exposure to the websites may have increased this group's level of attention to news compared to seeing no websites at all. For the higher attention group, we see little difference between the control and any of the website conditions.

Examining the differences between age groups, we see no statistically significant findings across any of the sites which suggests that the effect of viewing the candidate sites is not more pronounced

amongst either younger or older people. Our main finding therefore is that the viewing the candidate sites increase attention to news amongst those who do not usually follow the news.

Pre-test level of attention to election	All sample	Bite the Ballot	Vote Match	Candidate sites	Control
Low- All	5.38	5.19	5.40	5.70*	5.21
High – All	7.65	7.69	7.65	7.52	7.69
Low- Under 30s	5.21	5.25	4.73	5.58	5.19
High – Under 30s	7.36	6.87	7.95	7.43	7.51
Low – Over 30s	5.49	5.16	5.76	5.67	5.21
High – Over 30s	7.73	7.96	7.60	7.55	7.75

*=p<0.1 N=741

Table 10: Post-test mean scores for attention to news and current affairs, London

US attention to news

Turning now to the US, respondents were asked in the pre-test survey to indicate their level of attention to news and current affairs, using a four-point scale of no attention, not much attention, some attention or a good deal of attention. In the post-test the same question was asked, however the answer was measured using a 0-10 scale ranging from low to high levels of attention. As in the UK, the pre-test findings were re-coded into two groups of low and high attention and cross-tabbed with the means of the post-test scores.

Pre-test level of attention to news	All sample	Power of 12	I Side With	Candidate sites	Control
Low -All	5.38	5.38	5.36	5.54	5.20
High -All	8.36	8.38	8.31	8.41	8.33
Low – Under 30s	5.37	5.42	5.46	5.36	5.25
High – Under 30s	7.79	7.74	7.88	7.89	7.62
Low – Over 30s	5.38	5.35	5.23	5.79	5.15
High – Over 30s	8.64	8.69	8.51	8.69	8.64

N=2975

Table 11: Post-test mean scores for attention to news and current affairs, US

Looking at the sample as a whole (Table 11), we see that for those with low prior levels of attention, the post-test mean score is 5.38 compared to 8.36 for those with high prior levels of attention to news. Turning to the individual treatment groups, we see that for the low attention group, the mean scores for all of the treatment groups were all higher than the control group: 5.38 for Power of 12, 5.36 for I Side With and 5.54 for the candidate sites compared to 5.20 for the control group. However, these differences are of course very small and t-test analysis confirms that the differences in means are not statistically significant. For those with higher prior levels of attention, there was

very little difference in the means compared to the control group. Therefore we can say that the sites do not have any significant impact on levels of attention to news and current affairs across the sample as a whole. T-test analysis also confirms that there were no significant differences between the age groups.

Across the two elections, we find different effects from viewing the websites on attention to news. In the London election, viewing the candidate websites had a significant effect on increasing people's levels of attention to news; an encouraging result as there has been convincing evidence within the literature that lack of attention to news is a key barrier to political engagement. It is interesting that this effect was not particularly pronounced amongst young people, reminding us that whilst our focus is young people, many older people also have low levels of attention to news and political disengagement. In the US however, we found no effects on increasing attention to news from viewing the websites. There could be several explanations for this. Firstly, it may be that the websites really do not have any effect on attention to news or it could be that the length of time the respondents spent viewing the websites was simply too short to create any change in their cognitive engagement. It could also be that some sort of saturation effect might have been at play. Given that it was the Presidential election, even those with low levels of attention to news might have found it difficult to avoid any mention of the election and so perhaps by the point of testing, they had reached their peak of attention to news.

5.3 Political attitudes

We now turn to the attitudinal aspect of political engagement. As outlined previously, we have identified three key attitudes of interest: Internal Efficacy, External Efficacy and Political Trust and as detailed in chapter 2, each item was measured by a 5-point Likert Scale which equated to very low,

low, medium, high or very high levels of the attitude. To examine the effects of exposure to the website we first compare the pre- and post-test findings and given the ordinal nature of our attitude variables, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were adopted rather than t-tests. This allows us to see not only any change between the pre-and post-test findings but also the proportion of people who saw any change at all. We will therefore report the percentage of people in each group who reported any change, followed by the direction of the effect and if this effect was statistically significant. For each attitude, we will first compare those in any treatment group to the control, followed by the effects for the individual websites.

We will then examine the individual effects in more detail by examining the results of the regression models. Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variables for attitudes, we initially adopted ordinal regression. However, from the initial assumption tests all the dependent variables in both countries violated the assumption of proportional odds as assessed by a full likelihood ratio test ¹. This indicates that any effects found are different, at different levels of the dependent variable and therefore multinomial logistic regression was chosen as the most appropriate method. Two models were specified, with prior levels of the specific attitude, age group and the three website dummy variables entered in the first model, with the age group and interaction terms added in the second. The pre-test level of each attitude was treated as a continuous variable with all others being in the form of a binary categorical variable. We will examine the findings for contiguous categories, for example comparing low levels of internal efficacy to very low levels, medium to low, high to medium and very high to high levels of each attitude. This will give us a more nuanced understanding of where any effects might be occurring.

¹ The results of this test were as follows: in the UK, Internal Efficacy: $\chi^2(32)=394.649$, $p\leq.001$, External Efficacy: $\chi^2(32)=411.494$, $p\leq.001$ and Trust: $\chi^2(32)=540.028$, $p\leq.001$ and in the US, Internal Efficacy: $\chi^2(24)=71.796$, $p\leq.001$, External Efficacy: $\chi^2(24)=88.324$, $p\leq.001$ and Trust: $\chi^2(24)=88.324$, $p\leq.001$.

5.3.1 Internal Efficacy

Turning first to Internal Efficacy amongst the London respondents, we can compare the post-test to the pre-test scores to understand if any change has occurred in levels of Internal Efficacy amongst those in any of the treatment groups (table 12). The ties tell us how many people saw no change at all and so by calculating the percentage of people who did not have ‘tied’ results, we see 42.1% of 18-30s exposed to any of the websites saw a change in their scores, which was in an overall positive direction but not significant ($z=-.800$), whilst 46.3% in the control group saw a change, which was in an overall negative direction but not significant ($z=-.493$). For the over-30s, 45% of those in any of the treatment groups saw a change which was overall positive but not significant ($z=1.079$). For those in the control group however, 55% saw a change, which was positive and significant ($z=.3254$, $p<.001$) In other words, we found no effects amongst young people at an overall treatment level, whilst for the over-30s, seeing none of the websites was actually more effective than viewing the websites at increasing levels of internal efficacy.

	Any treatment					Control				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18-30s	467.50	352.50	-.800	95	55	588.50	686.50	-.493	108	58
Over 30s	3895.00	3125.50	-1.079	262	144	11695.00	6833.00	-3.234 ***	350	158

Table 12: Wilcoxon signed-ranked tests: Effects of any treatment group vs. control group on Internal Efficacy, London

We now turn to examine any effects on each website treatment group in the London election (table 13). Moving first to examine young people, we see that amongst the 18-30s who viewed Bite the Ballot, 57% saw a change, the overall effect of which was positive but not significant. 37.3% of the young people who saw Vote Match reported a change in their levels of internal efficacy, which was overall positive and significant ($z=-1.561$, $p\leq 0.1$), therefore young people who were exposed to the VAA significantly increased their levels of internal efficacy. Of the young people who saw the candidate sites, 32.4% reported a difference but we see that the positive and negative ranks number the same and therefore there is no overall direction of change and it is also non-significant ($z=-.258$).

For the older respondents, amongst those exposed to Bite the Ballot 49% reported a change, which was overall in a negative direction but not significantly so ($z=-1.126$). Of the 44.3% who were in the Vote Match condition and reported a change, the overall pattern was also negative and non-significant. Amongst the candidate sites group, 41.2% reported a change in internal efficacy, a change which was overall in a positive direction and significant ($z=-3.474$, $p\leq 0.001$). However, as seen previously, we also find that older people in the control group also saw a significant increase in their levels of internal efficacy so we cannot attribute this change to exposure to the candidate websites. Overall then, we find that young people who have viewed the VAA Vote Match VAA saw their levels of internal efficacy increase, in other words they felt that they understood politics and government better than before using the website.

To investigate this in more detail, we turn to the results of the regression models (table 14) which allow us to compare between different categories of response i.e. different levels of internal efficacy to see if this finding for young people is related to a particular level of existing internal efficacy or if it is spread evenly through the different pre-test levels. We do not find significant effects for Vote Match concentrated on a particular level of change in internal efficacy but we do find significant effects for the other sites.

	Bite the Ballot					Vote Match					Candidate websites				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18- 30s	112.50	118.50	-.108	37	16	23.00	5.00	-1.561 * r=	21	14	42.00	36.00	-.258	37	25
Over 30s	481.00	695.00	-1.126	98	50	321.50	308.50	-.114	79	44	517.00	113.00	-3.474 ***	85	50

Table 13: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of individual websites on Internal Efficacy, London

Looking first at young people, we see that having viewed Bite the Ballot, the odds decreased of having low rather than very low levels of internal efficacy by 0.05 times. In other words, those with pre-existing low levels of internal efficacy seemed to feel even less competent in their understanding of politics after having seen Bite the Ballot. Amongst the young people exposed to the candidate sites, seeing these sites increased the odds of having medium rather than low levels of internal efficacy by 6.8 times and the odds of having very high compared to high levels by 6.9 times. Therefore, the candidate sites are most helpful at increasing feelings of understanding at both ends of the scale i.e. those who already had low levels or high levels of internal efficacy. However, those in the middle of the scale did not see this effect, as viewing the candidate sites decreased the odds of having high rather than medium levels of internal efficacy by 0.1 times.

For the older group, Bite the Ballot was most effective amongst those who already had high levels of internal efficacy, with the odds of having very high rather than high levels of internal efficacy after seeing the site were 2.3 times higher. This reinforcing effect could also be seen amongst those who viewed the candidate sites, with the odds of having very high rather than high levels of internal efficacy by 2.1 times. We also see an effect at the lower end of the scale, with those having seen the candidate sites decreasing their odds of having medium rather than low odds by 0.3.times. In other words, older people with lower levels of internal efficacy before seeing the candidate sites have less chance of seeing an increase in their internal efficacy after viewing the websites.

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)
Low vs. Very Low								
Intercept	1.902 (.993)	3.662	.056		19.772 (1170.260)	.000	.987	
Pre-test Internal Efficacy	.363 (.184)	3.892	.049	1.438	.353 (.185)	3.647	.056	1.424
18-30	.298 (.319)	.872	.350	1.347	.971 (.379)	6.574	.010	2.641
Bite the Ballot	-.739 (.474)	2.423	.120	.478	.147 (.533)	.076	.783	1.158
Vote Match	-.793 (.543)	2.130	.144	.452	-.534 (.626)	.727	.394	.586
Candidate sites	-.172 (.511)	.113	.737	.842	1.037 (.585)	3.135	.077	2.819
Bite the Ballot*18-30					-3.065 (1.489)	4.235	.040*	.047
Vote Match*18-30					-.504 (1.311)	.148	.701	.604
Candidate sites*18-30					-17.047 (1170.259)	.000	.988	3.949
Medium vs. Low								
Intercept	-1.502 (.687)	4.783	.029		-1.655 (1.281)	1.688	.197	
Pre-test Internal Efficacy	.443 (.109)	16.522	.000***	1.558	.460 (.110)	17.425	.000***	1.583
18-30	.678 (.267)	6.422	.011**	1.969	.516 (.377)	1.870	.171	1.676
Bite the Ballot	-.204 (.297)	.470	.493	.816	-.264 (.353)	.558	.455	.768
Vote Match	.131 (.347)	.144	.795	1.140	.408 (.393)	1.075	.300	1.503
Candidate sites	-.755 (.330)	5.235	.022*	.470	-1.325 (.420)	9.962	.002**	.266
Bite the Ballot*18-30					.106 (.671)	.025	.875	1.112
Vote Match*18-30					-1.437 (.861)	2.784	.095	.238
Candidate sites*18-30					1.918 (.847)	5.124	.024*	6.809
High vs. Medium								
Intercept	-1.171 (.719)	2.648	.104		.321 (1.396)	.053	.818	
Pre-test Trust	.523 (.102)	26.459	.000***	1.686	.519 (.102)	25.763	.000***	1.680
18-30	-.046 (.283)	.027	.870	.955	.495 (.442)	1.254	.263	1.641
Bite the Ballot	.122 (.305)	.159	.690	1.130	.095 (.343)	.077	.781	1.100
Vote Match	.047 (.368)	.016	.899	1.048	.056 (.418)	.018	.893	1.057
Candidate sites	-.221 (.298)	.548	.459	.802	.248 (.337)	.538	.463	1.281
Bite the Ballot*18-30					-.012 (.780)	.000	.988	.988
Vote Match*18-30					-.225 (.901)	.062	.803	.798
Candidate sites*18-30					-2.156 (.824)	6.844	.009**	.116
Very High vs. High								
Intercept	-4.458 (.750)	33.345	.000		-5.925 (1.320)	20.147	.000	
Pre-test Trust	.772 (.103)	56.319	.000***	2.164	.759 (.103)	54.062	.000***	2.135
18-30	-.105 (.253)	.171	.679	.900	-.642 (.382)	2.819	.093	.526
Bite the Ballot	.882 (.310)	8.075	.004**	2.416	.826 (.342)	5.841	.016**	2.284
Vote Match	.121 (.316)	.148	.701	1.129	.079 (.355)	.049	.825	1.082
Candidate sites	.702 (.283)	6.140	.013**	2.017	.225 (.329)	.467	.494	1.252
Power of 12*18-30					.297 (.821)	.131	.717	1.346
I Side With*18-30					.310 (.781)	.157	.692	1.363
Candidate sites*18-30					1.934 (.718)	7.263	.007**	6.920
	R ² = .40 (Cox and Snell), .42 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (25)=431.668, ps.001.				R ² = .42 (Cox and Snell), .44 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (40)=469.934, ps.001.			

Table 14: Multinomial regression analysis: Internal Efficacy UK

Internal Efficacy: US

In the US, we turn first to examine the effects of any treatment compared to the control group (table 15) and see that 54.4% of young people in any treatment condition did see a change between their pre- and post- test scores for internal efficacy. Amongst those who did see a change, the direction was positive but non-significant ($z = -.894$). For older people, 51.1% reported a change in post-test scores and for them, the overall direction was also positive and non-significant ($z = -.328$). Comparing this to the control group, a similar proportion saw a change in their scores; 53.9% of young people and 52.8% of the older group. Of those who did see a change, the direction was negative for the 18-30s and positive for the over-30s but neither was significant ($z = -.767$ and $z = -.742$ respectively). Therefore, at an overall level we do not find any effects on internal efficacy from being in a treatment group compared to the control group.

	Any treatment					Control				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18-30s	53329.00	48597.00	-.894	829	378	3941.00	4574.00	-.767	241	111
Over 30s	133733.00	130168.00	-.328	1420	694	17298.00	15598.00	-.742	485	229

Table 15: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of any treatment group vs. control group on Internal Efficacy, US

We now turn to examine the treatment groups in more detail by examining effects of the individual websites in the US and find we see that none have a significant effect on internal efficacy for either young or older people (table 16) . For young people exposed to Power of 12, 54.91% did see a

change in their post-test scores and the overall direction of change was positive ($z=-1.010$) whilst for older people viewing this website, 53.27% reported a difference in scores, the direction of which was negative ($z=-1.010$). Both age groups viewing I Side With saw a positive direction of change; 30.95% of young people saw a change ($z=-.183$), compared to 49.25% of older people ($z=-1.068$). Finally for those viewing the candidate sites, both age groups saw a positive direction of change; 54.67% of 18-30s saw a difference ($z=-.823$) compared to 50.76% of older people ($z=-.406$). Turning to the regression models (table 17), the only significant effects were found amongst young people who viewed I Side With, who decreased the odds of having low compared to very low levels of internal efficacy by 0.3 times. In other words, those who already had low levels of internal efficacy before viewing I Side With, were likely to feel more confused after viewing the VAA.

Internal efficacy: summary

Comparing the two elections, we can see that the websites in the London election generally do a better job at increasing internal efficacy amongst young people. As hypothesised, the VAA Vote Match is the most effective but the candidate sites did also have effects, which were concentrated amongst those who had low prior levels and those who had high prior levels of internal efficacy; in other words, both a mobilizing effect and a reinforcing effect, depending on the characteristics of the person exposed to the website. In the US, the VAA I Side With was found to have significant effects only amongst those who had low pre-test levels and this effect was unfortunately a negative one, meaning that they were less likely to feel any more efficacious in terms of their competence and understanding and politics. Therefore, we can say that H3 is supported in the London election but not in the US. Why might this be? We might have expected these findings to be reversed as our content analysis showed that Vote Match was rather more basic than I Side With and the evaluation scores show that young people found I Side With more helpful with understanding the issues than Vote Match, which would seem important for internal efficacy.

	Power of 12					I Side With					Candidate websites				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18- 30s	6008.50	5457.50	-.526	275	124	5162.00	4991.00	-.183	265	183	6735.50	5825.50	-.823	289	131
Over 30s	16136.00	18055.00	-.816	490	229	14436.50	12359.00	-1.086	469	238	14153.00	13342.00	-.406	461	227

Table 16: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of individual websites on Internal Efficacy, US

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)
Low vs. Very Low								
Intercept	.172 (.434)	.157	.692		1.266 (.634)	3.989	.046	
Pre-test Internal Efficacy	.583 (.088)	44.142	.000***	1.791	.587 (.088)	44.407	.000***	1.798
18-30	.132 (.149)	.780	.377	1.141	.688 (.296)	5.395	.020*	1.990
Power of 12	.088 (.205)	.183	.668	.916	.104 (.272)	.146	.702	1.109
I Side With	.090 (.210)	.186	.667	.914	.389 (.265)	2.152	.142	1.476
Candidate sites	.059 (.206)	.082	.775	1.061	.265 (.276)	.923	.337	1.303
Power of 12*18-30					-.486 (.416)	1.363	.243	.615
I Side With*18-30					-1.305 (.445)	8.583	.003**	.271
Candidate sites*18-30					-.526 (.416)	1.605	.205	.591
Medium vs. Low								
Intercept	-1.234 (.317)	15.179	.000		-1.345 (.466)	8.330	.004	
Pre-test Internal Efficacy	.328 (.050)	42.358	.000***	1.389	.327 (.050)	42.062	.000***	1.387
18-30	-.346 (.108)	10.310	.001***	.707	-.392 (.224)	3.078	.079	.676
Power of 12	.036 (.150)	.060	.807	1.037	.040 (.190)	.043	.835	.961
I Side With	-.044 (.152)	.085	.771	.957	-.048 (.199)	.058	.809	.953
Candidate sites	-.046 (.152)	.090	.764	.955	.000 (.201)	.000	.998	1.000
Power of 12*18-30					.194 (.308)	.398	.528	1.214
I Side With*18-30					.057 (.310)	.034	.854	.059
Candidate sites*18-30					-.068 (.310)	.048	.827	.935
High vs. Medium								
Intercept	-1.586 (.359)	19.534	.000		-1.730 (.534)	10.489	.001	
Pre-test Internal Efficacy	.488 (.053)	83.206	.000***	1.629	.490 (.054)	83.485	.000***	1.632
18-30	.481 (.121)	15.795	.000***	1.617	.409 (.249)	2.695	.101	1.505
Power of 12	-.007 (.166)	.002	.968	.968	.161 (.211)	.580	.446	1.174
I Side With	-.016 (.168)	.010	.922	.984	-.134 (.215)	.387	.534	.875
Candidate sites	-.077 (.167)	.215	.643	.926	-.243 (.215)	1.281	.258	.784
Power of 12*18-30					-.436 (.343)	1.610	.204	.647
I Side With*18-30					.289 (.348)	.689	.407	1.335
Candidate sites*18-30					.445 (.348)	1.635	.201	1.560
Very High vs High								
Intercept	-3.707 (.436)	72.178	.000		-3.675 (.684)	28.857	.000	
Pre-test Internal Efficacy	.795 (.067)	142.517	.000***	2.214	.797 (.067)	142.066	.000***	2.218
18-30	.281 (.140)	4.050	.044*	1.324	.322 (.283)	1.291	.256	1.380
Power of 12	.123 (.179)	.470	.493	1.130	.006 (.210)	.001	.979	1.006
I Side With	.026 (.177)	.021	.884	1.026	.019 (.208)	.008	.927	1.019
Candidate sites	-.018 (.175)	.010	.919	.982	.148 (.207)	.510	.475	1.159
Power of 12*18-30					.393 (.409)	.920	.337	1.481
I Side With*18-30					.051 (.399)	.016	.898	1.052
Candidate sites*18-30					-.553 (.388)	2.036	.154	.575
	R ² = .32 (Cox and Snell), .34 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (20) = 1148.871, p<.001				R ² = .33 (Cox and Snell), .34 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (32) = 1169.373, p<.001			

Table 17: Multinomial logistic regression: Internal Efficacy, US

We cannot tell if these effects are due to something about the make-up of the VAAs e.g. the number of questions, the issues presented etc. or something about the elections i.e. is a VAA more useful in understanding a second-order election than in an Presidential one? Whilst we cannot solve this puzzle here, this would certainly be an interesting area for future research.

5.3.2 External Efficacy

We now move to the external dimension of efficacy, starting once again with the London election. Examining young people in the treatment condition as a whole compared to the control group, (table 18), we find that 50.6% saw a change between their pre-test and post-test levels, which was an overall positive change and statistically significant ($z=-2.385$, $p \leq 0.01$). Comparing this to those in the control group, we see that 58% reported a change in their scores, with an overall positive but not significant direction ($z=-1.044$). Therefore, we find that the changes in young people's levels of external efficacy can be attributed to their levels of external efficacy as we do not see the corresponding effect amongst the control group. The same pattern can be found amongst the older group with a 52.7% of respondents saw a change in their levels but the change was an in an overall negative direction and this was statistically significant ($z=-1.371$, $p \leq 0.1$). For the older people in the control group, 48.6% saw a change which had an overall positive pattern but was not significant. Therefore we see that exposure to the websites from the London election increases young people's levels of external efficacy but decreases older people's levels.

To understand where these significant findings come from, we now turn to the findings for the individual websites (table 19). Looking first at the younger group, we see that 40.6% of those who viewed Bite the Ballot reported a change in external efficacy, in an overall negative direction but this was not significant (-1.076). Within the Vote Match condition, 33.4% saw a change, which showed an overall positive but not significant pattern. Amongst the candidate group, 70.3% saw a change,

which was overall positive and significant ($z=-3.311$, $p \leq 0.001$). Therefore we find that young people viewing the London Mayoral candidate websites saw a significant increase in their levels of external efficacy.

	Any treatment					Control				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18-30s	803.50	372.50	- 2.385 ***	95	47	1153.50	862.50	- 1.044	108	45
Over 30s	4171.00	5420.00	- 1.371 *	262	124	7056.00	7479.00	-.341	350	181

Table 18: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of any treatment group vs. control group on External Efficacy, London

Turning to the older group, we find that of those exposed to Bite the Ballot, 56.2% saw a change in their external efficacy scores and this was in an overall negative direction and significant ($z=-2.422$, $p \leq 0.01$). Amongst those exposed to Vote Match, we find that 49.4% of the respondents saw a change, which was an overall increase and significant ($z=-1.569$, $p \leq 0.1$). For the candidate sites, 51.8% saw a change in an overall negative direction but this was not significant. Again, as we did not find a significant change amongst the control group, we can state that the decrease in external efficacy for those who viewed Bite the Ballot and the increase in for those who viewed Vote Match are related to viewing the specific websites. Overall we see that young people exposed to the candidate sites see a significant increase in external efficacy as do the over-30s exposed to Vote Match; in other words having seen these websites, they are more likely to feel that government officials care about what people like them think.

To examine this in more detail, we now turn to the findings of the regression models for the pairs of levels of external efficacy (table 20). Looking first at the effects on young people, we see different effects by website and by levels of pre-test external efficacy. Bite the Ballot has effects amongst those at the low end of the scale but we find different effects depending on exactly how low their prior levels were. We find that viewing the site decreased the odds of having low rather than very low pre-test levels by 0.2 times but it increased the odds of having medium rather than low levels by 4 times. We see this same pattern amongst those exposed to Vote Match, with the odds ratios for young people having low rather than very low post-test levels of external efficacy decreased by 0.1 times but viewing the site increased the odds of having medium rather than low levels by 1.3 times. In other words, those who very strongly believed that politicians did not care about them seem to have had this feeling reinforced by viewing the youth mobilization site whereas those who only somewhat believed this to be true were more likely to have this feeling lessened after viewing either of these websites. For those viewing the candidate sites, we find that young people's odds of having high rather than medium levels decreased by 0.2 times for young people.

For older people, we see the positive effects of Vote Match concentrated amongst those with already high or very high levels of external efficacy, with the odds of having high rather than medium levels increased by 0.2 times and the odds of having very high rather than high levels increased by 0.3 times. In other words, those who already felt to some extent that government officials did care what they thought, had this attitude increased by using the VAA.

	Bite the Ballot					Vote Match					Candidate websites				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18- 30s	42.50	77.50	-1.076	37	22	20.00	8.00	-1.134	21	14	298.50	52.50	-3.311 *** r=	37	11
Over 30s	488.00	1052.00	-2.422 *** r=	98	43	496.50	283.50	-1.569 * r=	79	40	434.00	556.00	-.732	85	41

Table 19: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of individual websites on External Efficacy, London

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)
Low vs. Very Low								
Intercept	-.390 (.557)	.490	.484		4.395 (.1856)	5.430	.020	
Pre-test External Efficacy	.560 (.112)	24.973	.000***	1.750	.555 (.113)	24.088	.000***	1.742
18-30	.044 (.228)	.037	.848	1.045	.765 (.307)	6.199	.013**	2.149
Bite the Ballot	.163 (.268)	.372	.542	1.178	.497 (.302)	2.709	.100	1.643
Vote Match	-.168 (.282)	.355	.551	.845	.431 (.313)	1.894	.169	1.538
Candidate sites	-.091 (.275)	.109	.741	.913	-.026 (.319)	.007	.935	.974
Bite the Ballot*18-30					-1.636 (.687)	5.667	.017*	.195
Vote Match*18-30					-4.334 (1.691)	6.568	.010**	.013
Candidate sites*18-30					-.389 (.643)	.366	.545	.677
Medium vs. Low								
Intercept	-1.635 (.597)	7.494	.006		-6.475 (.2.286)	8.026	.005	
Pre-test External Efficacy	.484 (.086)	31.515	.000***	1.623	.480 (.088)	30.076	.000***	1.616
18-30	-.528 (.224)	5.535	.019**	.590	-1.208 (.311)	15.087	.000***	.299
Bite the Ballot	-.117 (.276)	.179	.672	.890	-.468 (.323)	2.098	.147	.626
Vote Match	.349 (.339)	1.062	.303	1.418	-.414 (.370)	1.249	.264	.661
Candidate sites	-.251 (.271)	.859	.354	.778	-.340 (.321)	1.122	.290	.712
Bite the Ballot*18-30					1.398 (.628)	4.950	.026*	4.048
Vote Match*18-30					4.837 (2.162)	5.006	.025*	1.261
Candidate sites*18-30					.339 (.619)	.299	.585	1.403
High vs. Medium								
Intercept	-4.005 (1.865)	4.611	.032		3.429 (2.351)	2.128	.145	
Pre-test External Efficacy	.544 (.178)	9.310	.002**	1.723	.245 (.095)	6.668	.010**	1.278
18-30	2.789 (1.335)	4.361	.037*	16.263	.200 (.353)	.321	.571	1.222
Bite the Ballot	-.086 (.664)	.017	.897	.918	.409 (.407)	1.010	.315	1.505
Vote Match	-1.770 (.601)	8.663	.003**	.170	-.168 (.444)	.144	.704	.845
Candidate sites	-.705 (.629)	1.257	.262	.494	.844 (.490)	2.961	.085	2.325
Bite the Ballot*18-30					-1.011 (.711)	2.027	.155	.364
Vote Match*18-30					-2.982 (2.233)	1.782	.182	.051
Candidate sites*18-30					-1.648 (.716)	5.302	.021*	.192
Very high vs. Medium								
Intercept	-3.593	3.668	.055		-32.886	100.148	.000	
Pre-test External Efficacy	.318 (.180)	3.137	.077	1.374	.306 (.179)	2.913	.088	1.358
18-30	3.144 (1.335)	5.541	.019**	23.186	2.134 (1.526)	1.958	.162	8.453
Bite the Ballot	-.162 (.672)	.058	.809	.850	-.358 (.697)	.264	.608	.699
Vote Match	-1.302 (.594)	4.808	.028*	.272	-1.254 (.611)	4.209	.040*	.285
Candidate sites	-.809 (.645)	1.576	.209	.445	-1.436 (.716)	4.018	.045*	.238
Bite the Ballot*18-30					14.483 (.000)	1.948	.285	.150
Vote Match*18-30					.612 (3.412)	.032	.858	1.844
Candidate sites*18-30					15.910 (.000)	1.890	.786	1.284
	R ² = .23 (Cox and Snell), .25 (Nagelkerke). χ ² (25) = 224.508, ps.001.				R ² = .27 (Cox and Snell), .29 (Nagelkerke). χ ² (40) = 272.134, ps.001.			

Table 20: Multinomial Logistic Regression: External Efficacy, London

External Efficacy: US

We now turn to the US findings to see if we find similar effects for external efficacy. Looking first at young people in the treatment condition as a whole, we find that 53.8% saw a change between their pre- and post-test scores for external efficacy after having seen any of the websites. However, whilst the overall direction of this change was positive, it was not significant ($z=-1.407$). Amongst the young people in the control group, 53.9% saw any change between their scores and the overall change was negative and non-significant ($z=-0.50$). Therefore, we find no effects on external efficacy for young people at the overall treatment level.

For older people who saw any of the websites, 47.7% saw a change in their scores, although this was in an overall negative direction and significantly so ($z=-2.743$, $p\leq 0.01$). Amongst the control group, 54.8% saw a change in scores, which was also in a negative direction but not significantly so ($z=-.221$). This means that we can state that older people in the treatment group saw their levels of external efficacy decrease as a result of viewing the websites but this effect was not seen amongst young people.

To explore this further, we now move to examine the effects of the individual websites (table 22). Firstly, we see that 55% of young people exposed to Power of 12 saw a change in their pre- to post-test scores with the overall change being positive but not significant ($z=-1.010$). Of those exposed to I Side With, 51.3% saw a change in their scores, the overall direction of which was positive and statistically significant ($z=-1.990$, $p\leq 0.05$). For the 55% of young people who viewed the candidate sites and reported a change, the overall direction was negative but not significant ($z=-.433$). Therefore we can state that the VAA I Side With significantly improved young people's feeling that government officials cared about what people like them think.

	Any treatment					Control				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18-30s	53489.00	46192.00	- 1.407	829	383	4278.00	4237.00	-.050	241	111
Over 30s	101266.00	128237.00	- 2.743 ***	1420	743	17487.50	18023.50	-.221	485	244

Table 21: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of any treatment group vs. control group on External Efficacy, US

Turning to the older group, we find that 48.4% of those exposed to Power of 12 saw a statistically significant decrease in their post-test levels ($z=-1.463$, $p \leq 0.1$). Of those exposed to I Side With, 44.3% of over-30s saw a change in external efficacy, which was negative and significant ($z=-2.093$, $p \leq 0.5$). For the candidate sites, 50.3% reported a difference in scores, which was negative but not significant. In summary, whilst young people who viewed I Side With saw a significant increase in their levels of external efficacy, whilst older people exposed to the same site saw a significant decrease in their levels, alongside those exposed to Power of 12.

	Power of 12					I Side With					Candidate websites				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18- 30s	6252.50	5223.50	-1.010	275	124	5531.00	3785.00	-1.990 ** r=	265	129	6119.00	6601.00	-.433	289	130
Over 30s	12612.00	15591.00	-1.463 * r=	490	253	9113.50	12622.50	-2.093 ** r=	469	261	12287.50	14740.50	-1.237	461	229

Table 22: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of individual websites on External Efficacy, US

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)
Low vs. Very Low								
Intercept	-1.143 (.315)	13.200	.000		-.261 (.522)	.249	.618	
Pre-test External Efficacy	1.021 (.070)	215.271	.000***	2.777	1.021 (.070)	214.388	.000***	2.776
18-30	-.439 (.114)	14.851	.000***	.644	-.021 (.229)	.008	.928	.980
Power of 12	.018 (.147)	.014	.905	1.018	.156 (.175)	.793	.373	1.169
I Side With	.104 (.147)	.505	1.110	.832	.275 (.175)	2.458	.117	1.316
Candidate sites	-.028 (.148)	.035	.852	.973	.131 (.178)	.537	.464	1.140
Power of 12*18-30					-.505 (.325)	2.409	.121	.604
I Side With*18-30					-.616 (.323)	3.643	.054*	.540
Candidate sites*18-30					-.527 (.322)	2.672	.102	.591
Medium vs. Low								
Intercept	-2.124 (.307)	47.866	.000		-1.900 (.449)	17.883	.000	
Pre-test External Efficacy	.427 (.051)	71.063	.000***	1.532	.429 (.051)	71.722	.000	1.536
18-30	-.482 (.105)	21.016	.000***	.618	-.357 (.209)	2.907	.088	.700
Power of 12	.132 (.143)	.854	.355	1.141	.251 (.185)	1.831	.176	1.285
I Side With	.324 (.149)	4.746	.029*	1.383	.495 (.197)	6.317	.012	1.641
Candidate sites	.309 (.145)	4.500	.034*	1.362	.244 (.189)	1.661	.197	1.276
Power of 12*18-30					-.281 (.293)	.921	.337	.755
I Side With*18-30					-.381 (.304)	1.566	.211	.683
Candidate sites*18-30					.133 (.296)	.201	.654	1.142
High vs. Medium								
Intercept	-.461 (.383)	1.448	.229		-.119 (.581)	.042	.837	
Pre-test External Efficacy	.218 (.060)	13.198	.000***	1.244	.218 (.060)	13.152	.000***	1.243
18-30	.355 (.129)	7.535	.006**	1.426	.533 (.273)	3.813	.051	1.704
Power of 12	-.177 (.177)	.997	.318	.838	-.124 (.228)	.295	.587	.884
I Side With	-.393 (.182)	4.657	.031*	.675	-.406 (.236)	2.956	.086	.666
Candidate sites	-.266 (.180)	2.170	.141	.767	-.149 (.231)	.418	.518	.861
Power of 12*18-30					-.221 (.369)	.359	.549	.801
I Side With*18-30					-.084 (.379)	.049	.824	.919
Candidate sites*18-30					-.326 (.375)	.757	.384	.722
Very High vs. High								
Intercept	-1.524 (.634)	5.777	.016		-2.656 (.947)	7.858	.005	
Pre-test External Efficacy	-.015 (.097)	.023	.879	.985	-.017 (.097)	.031	.860	.983
18-30	.018 (.215)	.007	.933	1.018	-.588 (.436)	1.821	.177	.555
Power of 12	.190 (.300)	.402	.526	1.209	-.142 (.378)	.141	.708	.868
I Side With	.076 (.294)	.067	.796	1.079	-.182 (.373)	.238	.626	.834
Candidate sites	.024 (.293)	.007	.935	1.024	-.227 (.374)	.366	.545	.797
Power of 12*18-30					-.934 (.626)	2.225	.136	2.546
I Side With*18-30					.733 (.609)	1.450	.228	2.081
Candidate sites*18-30					.709 (.602)	1.387	.239	2.032
	R ² = .23 (Cox and Snell), .24 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (20)=771.064, p<.001.				R ² = .23 (Cox and Snell), .25 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (32)=784.802, p<.001.			

Table 23: Multinomial Logistic Regression: External Efficacy, US

Turning now to the findings of the regression models to understand if these effects are particularly pronounced at particular pre-test levels of external efficacy (table 23), we find no significant effects for young people suggesting that the positive effects of I Side With are not limited to a specific pre-existing of the attitude. Amongst older people, we find that despite the overall negative effect of I Side With, we do find a positive effect of viewing the site on those with lower pre-existing levels of external efficacy, with the odds of having medium rather than low levels increasing by 1.4 times. However, we find that the odds of having high rather than medium levels decreases by 0.7 times after having viewed I Side With.

External Efficacy: summary

Our hypothesis suggested that youth mobilization sites would be the most likely to increase external efficacy amongst young people. For the British youth mobilization site, Bite the Ballot, we found some effects concentrated amongst those at the lower end of the external efficacy scale. It seemed to reinforce the negative feelings amongst those with the very lowest pre-test levels of external efficacy but did have a positive effect on those who were slightly less inclined to believe that politicians did not care what they thought. We see the same pattern of effects amongst those exposed to the Vote Match VAA, with a negative reinforcing effect on those with very low levels of the attitude but a more positive effect on those with low levels and no overall significant effect found. Interestingly, the candidate sites were the most effective at increasing external efficacy amongst young people but we can only speculate as to the reasons why this may be the case. One thing we can say is that the candidate sites in London did not have the same effect on the over-30s and so the candidates did a better job of making young people feel like they cared about what they thought compared to older people. Overall, although the youth mobilization site did have a positive effect on those with low levels of external efficacy and who might be considered most in need of an increase, the candidate sites were more effective overall at increasing young people's levels of

external efficacy and therefore we state that H4 is only partially supported in the London Mayoral election.

Turning to the US, we do not see the same positive effects of the candidate websites. Given that they scored similarly on the content analysis, the specific election context may play a part. Either candidate sites are more effective in a British context due to the electorate being more used to party websites, candidate websites are more effective in a second-order election or the specific messaging contained on the London candidates' websites was more engaging for young people. It could be down to any one or combination of these factors or another reason and beyond the scope of this thesis, but once again would be an interesting route for future investigation. We did find interesting differential effects between the age groups amongst those exposed to the I Side With VAA, which significantly increased external efficacy amongst young people but significantly decreased this attitude amongst older people. In some ways, one might expect the quiz nature of VAAs to affect external efficacy as one is inherently being asked what one thinks. However, this differential effect by age is somewhat puzzling given the high scores from the quantitative analysis and the very positive reception by both age groups that we found in our qualitative analysis. There is clearly something about the site that makes older people less likely to feel that they are being listened to or that their opinion is important. This is in contrast to the effects seen in the UK, where the Vote Match VAA significantly increased older people's levels of external efficacy, although we did not find the positive effect amongst young people that I Side With. Therefore, we can say that I Side With is more effective at increasing young people's levels of external efficacy than the London election VAA but the reverse is true for older people. Finally, we turn to the Power of 12 website which as a youth mobilization website was hypothesised to perform the best, especially among young people. We do not find this to be the case as it had no significant effects on young people's levels of external efficacy at any level. It did have a negative effect on older people, but this is perhaps explained by the nature of it being a youth site and the over-30s feeling that it is not for

them. Therefore in the US, we find that H4 is not supported and the VAA I Side With was more effective than the youth mobilization website at increasing young people's levels of external efficacy.

5.3.3 Trust

We now turn to our final attitudinal variable, Political Trust. As we have no specific hypotheses to test, our analysis is exploratory, to simply understand what the effects of the websites on trust might be. Turning first to the London election, we see that for young people in any treatment condition, 76.9% saw a significant increase in trust ($z=-1.558$, $p \leq 0.1$) (table 24). However, we see that in the control group, there is also a positive and significant level of change in trust (86.2% of respondents saw a change, $z=-1.919$, $p \leq 0.05$). Therefore we cannot state that changes in levels of trust between the pre-and post-test can be attributed to viewing the websites. Amongst the older group, we find a similar pattern. 86.7% saw any change in trust, which was in an overall positive direction and significant ($z=-6.069$, $p \leq 0.001$). However, once again we also find that the control group also saw a significant increase in trust, amongst 80.6% of the group ($z=-7.996$, $p \leq 0.001$). Therefore, we also cannot relate the increases in political trust to having viewed any of the mobilization websites.

Despite this, we will still examine the individual websites to understand if these increases can be seen across all the websites (table 25). For the youngest group viewing Bite the Ballot, 81.9% saw a change in their trust scores, which was in an overall positive direction but was not significant ($z=-1.090$). Amongst those viewing Vote Match, 42.9% reported any change, which was an overall positive change and significant ($z=-2.111$, $p \leq 0.05$). For those exposed to the candidate sites, 91.9% reported a difference in scores, with an overall negative direction but this was not significant ($z=-.147$). For the older group, we see that exposure to all of the websites leads to significant increases

in levels of trust but again, this is also found amongst the control group. For those viewing Bite the Ballot, 90.2% reported a change, which was an increase in trust ($z=-3.870$, $p \leq 0.001$). For Vote Match, we find 87.1% reporting a positive change in trust ($z=-2.274$, $p \leq 0.05$) and for those in the candidate website condition, 82.4% saw a difference in their levels of trust, which was in an overall positive direction ($z=-4.503$, $p \leq 0.001$). Therefore, for the London respondents the positive effect of viewing the websites derives from the VAA but this is no more effective than the control group who saw no websites.²

	Any treatment					Control				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
Trust (UK)										
18-30s	1631.00	1070.00	-1.558 *	95	22	2682.00	1689.00	-1.919 **	108	15
Over 30s	18885.50	6992.50	-6.069 ***	262	35	30761.50	9141.50	-7.996 ***	350	68

Table 24: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of any treatment group vs. control group on Trust, London

² Due to this effect in the control group, we do not present the results of the multinomial regression for Trust in the London 2012 election but for reference, the table can be found in appendix 4

	Bite the Ballot					Vote Match					Candidate websites				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18- 30s	6325.00	4115.00	-2.318 ** r=	275	131	5703.50	3612.50	-2.419 *** r=	265	129	4647.50	4130.50	-.622	289	157
Over 30s	14702.00	15926.00	-.572	490	243	13846.00	15800.00	-.937	469	226	12857.50	13707.50	-.447	461	231

Table 25: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of individual websites on Trust, London

Trust: US

In the US, we find a similar pattern for young people (table 26), as 49.7% young people who were exposed to any treatment saw a significant increase in their scores ($z=-3.100$, $p\leq 0.01$). However, looking at the control group where 46.1% saw a change, we also see a positive and significant change ($z=-2.127$, $p\leq 0.05$). Comparing this to the older group, we see that 50.8% who viewed any of that websites saw a change, which was overall in a negative direction but not significant ($z=-1.138$). For those in the control group, 50.3% saw a change, which was also in a negative direction and non-significant ($z=-1.412$). Therefore, for young people, we cannot say that the significant effect on Trust derives from having seen the websites.

	Any treatment					Control				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18-30s	49620.50	35457.50	-3.100 ***	829	417	5136.00	3379.00	-2.127 **	241	111
Over 30s	123754.50	135805.50	-1.138	1420	700	13121.00	16040.00	-1.1412	485	356

Table 26: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of any treatment group vs. control group on Trust, US

Turning to the findings for the individual websites in the US (table 27), we see that two of the websites had a positive and significant effect on young people's levels of trust: Power of 12 and the VAA, I Side With. For those in the Power of 12 condition, 52.4% saw a change, which was in an overall positive direction ($z = -2.318$, $p \leq 0.05$), whilst for those who viewed I Side With, 51.3% saw a change, which was positive overall ($z = -2.419$, $p \leq 0.01$). For those who saw the candidate sites, 45.7% reported any change, which was positive but not significant ($z = -.622$). For older people, none of the websites had any significant effect and the pattern of change is negative across all the sites. For those viewing Power of 12, 50.4% saw any change ($z = -.572$), 51.8% of those viewing I Side With ($z = -.937$) and 49.9% of over-30s viewing the candidate sites ($z = -.447$). Therefore, although we do find significant effects from the websites on young people's trust, as the control group also had significant effects we cannot say that the websites are any more effective than having not seen them.³

Trust: Summary

In summary, we find significant effects on trust from all of the websites across both elections but we also find significant increases in the control group. It is possible that the effects of doing a survey about the election, even if not exposed to any websites may have an effect on trust, at least for young people. What is interesting here is that inviting people to a survey represents a form of contact and therefore suggests that reaching out to young people in any way during an election could increase their levels of trust. However, the effects on trust could also be attributable to campaign effects or another factor that we have not been able to measure here.

³ Given these findings, we do not present the Multinomial regressions for Trust in the US but the tables for these can be found in Appendix 4

	Power of 12					I Side With					Candidate websites				
	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties	Σ positive difference ranks	Σ negative difference ranks	Z value	N	Ties
18- 30s	285.00	180.00	-1.090	37	7	40.00	5.00	-2.111 ** r=	21	12	289.00	306.00	289.00	37	3
Over 30s	2938.00	1067.00	-3.870 *** r=	98	9	1540.00	805.50	-2.274 ** r=	79	11	2003.00	482.00	-4.503 *** r=	85	15

Table 27: Wilcoxon signed-rank tests: Effects of individual websites on Trust, US

5.5 Chapter summary

To summarise the findings from the experiment, we have found a number of different effects on the various aspects of young people's engagement that we have examined in this chapter. Firstly looking at whether any of the websites had a direct effect on the likelihood of young people voting, we did not find this in either the London Mayoral or US Presidential election websites. We did however find a very modest significant effect on the likelihood of voting amongst the over-30s who saw either Bite the Ballot or the candidate websites. Whilst Bite the Ballot was not aimed at this age group, it may have had a sort of reinforcing effect on older voters and the candidate sites appear to have had a straightforward mobilizing effect on the older group, although we reiterate that this finding was very moderate. Therefore, we can say that the websites in our study did not have a direct effect on young people's electoral engagement, in terms of increasing their likelihood of voting but due to the effects on older voters in the UK, we find that H1 is partially supported.

Moving to the more indirect effects, we turn next to our findings for our cognitive dimension i.e. effects on attention to news. We hypothesised that the candidate sites would be most likely to increase attention to news given the provision of information on their websites and for the London election, we did indeed find this to be the case. The effect was found amongst those who had low existing levels of attention to news but not amongst those with higher levels, but this is an exciting finding as those with lower levels are the least likely to be politically engaged and we would expect that as their attention to news rises, over time their political engagement should also increase. We did not however find any effects on attention to news amongst the US respondents and therefore we state that H2 is supported in the London election but not in the US election.

Moving to the attitudinal variables, we first examine Internal Efficacy, which we suggested was most likely to be increased by exposure to one of the VAAs, so Vote Match in the UK or I Side With in the US. We did find that this was the case in the London election with Vote Match increasing the levels of young people's Internal Efficacy. In the US, I Side With did have a significant effect but only

specifically among young people with low levels of pre-test internal efficacy and the effect was actually to decrease their internal efficacy further. As discussed in the body of the chapter, we can hypothesise a number of reasons as to why this might be the case but the lack of effects on the rest of the US respondents is equally interesting and surprising, given the high coding scores and also the very positive feedback from the open-ended responses. We did also see positive effects from the London Mayoral candidate sites, which were found amongst young people with low levels and amongst those with high levels, showing again that the sites can increase attitudinal levels amongst those who are least engaged and have a reinforcing effect on those who already feel competent in their understanding of politics. Overall, we can say that H3 is supported in the London election but not in the US.

Turning next to the external dimension of efficacy, we tested if young people's external efficacy would be increased particularly by exposure to the youth mobilization websites. In the London election, we did find effects only amongst those in the two lowest categories of pre-test external efficacy and whilst Bite the Ballot increased this attitude for those with low external efficacy, it decreased it for those with the very lowest levels. Power of 12 in the US had no effects on young people's levels of external efficacy and therefore we can say that H4 is only very partially supported in London and not at all in the US. We did however we did find some effects from the other types of sites. We found the same effect as Bite the Ballot amongst those young people exposed to the Vote Match VAA, in that the effects were concentrated amongst the least efficacious and increased levels of those with low pre-existing levels of external efficacy but made those with very low levels feel even more alienated. In the London election, the candidate sites were actually the most effective at significantly increasing external efficacy amongst young people whereas in the US, only I Side With had a positive overall effect on young people. The opposite was true of older people exposed to this VAA, reinforcing our findings from the literature that younger and older people are likely to experience different effects from the same website. Based on the two efficacy variables at least, these political websites are unlikely to be the way to engage those with extremely low levels of

engagement and in fact, seem to make the situation worse. For these young people, another solution is needed, if indeed any can be found.

Finally, exploring the effects on Trust, we did increases in Trust across websites in both elections but this was also the case in the control groups and so we cannot say that these effects were due to viewing the websites.

	Bite the Ballot			Candidate sites UK			Vote Match		
	Overall	18-30s	Over-30s	Overall	18-30s	Over-30s	Overall	18-30s	Over-30s
Attention to news				+					
Internal Efficacy	+	+			+			+	
External Efficacy		+	-	+	+		+	+	-
Trust	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Vote	+		+	+		+			
	Power of 12			Candidate sites US			I Side With		
Attention to news									
Internal Efficacy								+	
External Efficacy			-					+	-
Trust		+		+				+	
Vote									

Table 28: Summary of the websites' effects of engagement

We now move to our final chapter to discuss further the findings from our three main research questions, to answer the overall question as to whether specific political websites can create a pathway to electoral participation and to discuss the implications of our results.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

We now turn to our final chapter to examine and summarize the findings of the thesis, to discuss its contribution and limitations and the implications for future research. Our overall aim was to understand if electoral mobilization websites could create a pathway to participation for young people, through either a direct or indirect route. Changes in young people's level of turnout has been of concern across most advanced democracies but as we have discovered from the existing literature, the reasons behind young people's lower levels of engagement are likely to be found at the individual and social level (e.g. the demand side) as well as the institutional and electoral level (e.g. the supply side). Therefore, any possible solution to increase young people's turnout needs to address both these dimensions. Many have hoped that the web might have an important part to play in increasing young people's engagement and whilst research has shown that the web can impact on engagement, there are key areas where the research is limited: the relationship between the web and specific elements of engagement for young people, the mechanism by which the web might have an effect, the features and content of specific electoral websites and the effects of these specific features and crucially, how young people perceive these websites.

We identified three types of electoral websites, all of which have the specific aim of mobilizing people to participate in elections: youth mobilization sites, candidate campaign sites and Vote Advice Applications and theorised that these websites might have a direct impact on young people's behaviour e.g. increasing the likelihood of voting or a more indirect route by increasing pre-participatory variables including cognitive engagement e.g. attention to news and political attitudes e.g. internal and external efficacy and trust. We wanted to examine this possible mechanism in two different country and electoral contexts and the 2012 London Mayoral election and US Presidential election were chosen. These elections were selected for several reasons: firstly, it offered us a chance to compare candidate-led elections in the US and the UK as well as being able to examine online mobilization in both a general and second-order election. This is important as young people

tend to turn out at even lower rates in second-order elections. Secondly, the US has tended to lead the way in online mobilization and this allows us to assess where the UK is in relation to the US.

To answer our overall research question, we adopted a research approach with three main steps. Firstly, we identified all the relevant websites in each of the three categories in each election and then developed two coding frameworks allow us to score and rank each website across several indices based on previous research suggesting which features of websites were most likely to impact on young people: design and functionality, information provision and interactivity. The first coding scheme allowed us to compare youth mobilization and the candidate websites and was based on similar schemes used across a number of website content analysis studies. For the VAAs however, a quantitative analysis allowing for scoring and ranking had not been undertaken before. Given the inherently interactive and informative nature of VAAs, we needed to formulate a new coding scheme specifically for the VAAs which followed the same broad categories as the other coding scheme but measured slightly different variables within each index.

Having analysed all of the sites, we then selected the sites with the overall highest scores for the youth mobilization sites and the VAAs (except in the UK, where there was only one youth mobilization website present) and the two main candidate websites for each election were selected to form the independent variables in our demand side part of the study. The demand side analysis consists of two separate but interlinked parts: an evaluation of these specific websites from young people's point of view and an experimental analysis to determine causal relationships between exposure to the websites and the aspects of engagement outlined previously.

The data for these two parts were drawn from an innovative pre-test/post-test experimental survey design implemented in both countries which allowed us to ensure that respondents viewed the sites and that they had the opportunity to evaluate and feedback on their experience of the sites. It also allowed us to measure their existing levels of aspects of engagement and to compare this with their post-test levels after having seen the site, allowing us to isolate the effects of the specific websites. It

also enabled us to compare the reactions and effects of young people compared to older citizens and to compare between the different types of websites.

Turning first to our findings from analysing the websites we find that as expected, the sites in the US are more numerous and generally more sophisticated than those in the UK, although amongst candidate sites we did find that the two major candidate websites in the London Mayoral election are not dissimilar to the main US candidate websites, although Barack Obama is ahead of the pack. Interestingly the highest scorer overall in the UK was the independent candidate, Siobhan Benita ahead of Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone. This is particularly interesting as being an independent, she was often excluded from some official campaigning events e.g. candidate debates and seems to have tried to make the most of the potential of the web in order to overcome this. Broadly we do see normalization in action across all three types of websites with organisations with more resources having higher scoring websites. One thing that is striking is that there can be large differences between scores within the same website category which may have an impact on their potential effects and so reinforces the idea that websites should be studied at the individual site level. Two other points of interest arise from our analysis of the websites. Firstly, the almost complete lack of information or even links to information on the vast majority of candidate and VAA sites about practical aspects of the election such as how to register or how to find your polling place. Arguably, this type of information is even more important for young people and specifically those with lower engagement and so we were disappointed to see this absence. Finally, the amount of VAA sites in the US was quite a surprise given the lack of research on these sites in the US and the suggestion from the literature that VAAs would not be of use in essentially two-candidate elections. The number and variety of VAAs found suggests that this is a rich area of untapped research.

From the evaluation and qualitative content analysis of young people's opinion of the sites, we find that Ken Livingstone's site scored most highly amongst young people in the UK across both evaluation and impact scores with Bite the Ballot scored the lowest. In the US however, the VAA I

Side With was scored most highly by young people across all the evaluation scores with Power of 12 receiving the lowest scores. Looking at the impact categories, we can see that in terms of helping to decide whether to vote, viewing Mitt Romney's website actually had the largest impact on young people followed by I Side With. It could be that young people saw the site and were encouraged to vote for Mitt Romney or if in fact, the opposite effect happened and young people viewing the site were mobilized to vote to prevent a Romney victory. I Side With had the biggest impact in terms of helping to decide who to vote for and increasing interest in the election. Power of 12 once again received the lowest scores in all three impact categories in terms of helping to decide whether to vote, helping to decide who to vote for and helping increase levels of interest in the election.

From this, we therefore expected the two youth mobilization sites to be the least effective amongst young people, a surprising given that these sites are designed specifically for young people. Reasons behind this may be that Bite the Ballot scored poorly in the content analysis, and so might have been lacking in key engaging features and from the qualitative analysis, we saw that some young people were sceptical about the involvement in MTV, bias and the use of celebrities to convey mobilization messages on Power on 12. What is apparent from the quantitative content analysis, the evaluation and impact scores and the qualitative findings is that there may be big differences between websites, even within the same type of website, in terms of what the website is made up of and how it is received by young people. In addition, the fact that young people are not a homogenous group is reinforced by our findings and what is appealing to one young adult may have the opposite reaction in another.

Building on these findings, we then analysed the results of the experiment to test if effects can be observed after exposure to the websites and if these effects are informed by what we have learnt about the specific sites. Do mobilization websites create a pathway to election participation for young people? The answer is yes but only sometimes, depending on the specific website, the country and sometimes the existing level of engagement. Firstly, examining the direct effect on vote,

we found a very small but significant effect from exposure to Bite the Ballot and the candidate websites but this was among the sample as a whole, not amongst young people. No direct effect on vote was found in the US.

Turning to the indirect effects, we see that Bite the Ballot outperformed our expectations, with young people exposed to the site seeing increases in internal efficacy, external efficacy and trust despite its relatively poor scores on both the content analysis and the impact and evaluation scores. However, young people did generally describe it positively in the qualitative findings and so it may be that seeing the sites' messages reinforcing how important it is for young people to vote, may have had this effect on the attitudinal variables. Exposure to the candidate sites and Vote Match also increased these three variables for young people with the candidate sites also increasing attention to news amongst those with pre-existing low levels, though this was found in the group as a whole not specifically amongst young people. In the US, the effects were much less widespread. The VAA I Side With performed the best amongst young people, increasing levels of the three attitudinal variables. Power of 12's only significant effect was to increase trust amongst young people while exposure to the candidate sites, also increased trust but this was within the treatment group as a whole rather than specifically young people. As noted in the presentation of results however, effects on Trust were also found in the control group and so the websites were not necessarily any more effective than not seeing the sites in terms of Trust.

Two things were striking from our results. Firstly, that there were often differential effects from the websites by age, reinforcing the idea that websites will be experienced differently by different people and consequently have varying effects depending on who has viewed it: crucial to remember for anyone building a mobilization website. Secondly, there were noticeable differences between the performance of websites in the London election and those in the US Presidential election. Given the general consensus that the US tends to be more advanced than the UK in terms of online mobilization, we might have expected to find greater effects amongst the US websites. There could

be several reasons for this. Firstly, given that the London Mayoral election is a second-order election, it may be that many of our respondents have never used these websites before in relation to the London Mayoral election or were less informed or exposed to news about the election than they might be about a general election. Therefore, it could be that simply coming into contact with these sites and so being exposed to information and mobilization messages may have resulted in these effects. It is possible that the opposite is true in the US; with their longer history of youth and candidate mobilization websites and wider range of options, is it possible that people in the US are in some way harder to mobilize through these sites due to familiarity? It may also be that as the Presidential race is probably the most high-profile election in the nation and as the survey was conducted near the end of the campaign, people had reached their peak of engagement and so the sites were unlikely to have much of an effect. However, we caveat this with the performance of I Side With in the US, particularly the significant effects among young people. We know that the rated and experienced the site very well, it may be that there was an element of newness or novelty at play.

The performance of the VAAs was particularly interesting as research on these sites have tended to focus on the effects of vote choice and occasionally on mobilizing effects but with little attention paid to the indirect effects of using these websites. Vote Match in London performed as well as the youth mobilization and candidate sites and I Side With was the only site in the US to affect all of the attitudinal variables among young people. Research in the broader European context has suggested that using VAAs appears to be habit forming, particularly amongst young people, in that once they have used them they tend to return to them each election and use of the VAA becomes a form of electoral participation in itself. If this is the case, it is plausible that VAAs could be introduced to young people before they are eligible to vote, perhaps via school-based civic education. This might have the effect of normalising the use of them for young people and possibly have an ensuing effect on participation in elections.

Overall, we do find that political websites can have a socializing effect on young people by increasing their levels of key pre-participatory attitudes. We did not however find evidence of effects on these websites on cognitive engagement, operationalised in our study as attention to news, apart from exposure to the candidate sites in the UK on those with low levels of pre-test attention to news. This may be due to the short time that respondents spent on the websites, which perhaps did not allow for the possibility of greater engagement with issues. We also did not find much of a mobilizing effect in terms of direct effects on vote, highlighting that the mobilization of young people still needs more attention from parties and other political actors.

This thesis has aimed to contribute to the broader research fields of both online politics and communication, and youth engagement and mobilization by filling several gaps in the existing body of research, at both a substantive and methodological level. Firstly at the electoral level, we have provided an empirical understanding of the digital landscape of the London Mayoral election which has received little attention to date and how this compares to a similar but much more prominent candidate-led election, the US Presidential election. This has enabled us to compare a general and second-order election as well as examining any specific contextual differences. We believe we have created the first quantitative content and features coding scheme which allows content and features of VAAs to be scored and compared, as well as the first examination of VAAs in the US. Finally we believe we have adopted an innovative approach to examining both the supply and demand side, by connecting content analysis with an examination of effects and showing that exposure to specific mobilization websites can in fact have an effect on young people's electoral engagement..

Our study does have a number of limitations. Firstly, we had a high rate of attrition between the two waves of the survey in both the US and the UK, leaving us with a smaller sample size than we had hoped. Given that UK respondents also had the option to not take part in the experimental part of the survey, the numbers of young people particularly in the individual treatment groups are sometimes very low and so we treat our findings for young people in the UK with some caution.

Secondly, the study in general would have been enhanced by the inclusion of more qualitative methods; both in terms of qualitative content analysis of the websites so we could understand the messages being communicated as well as the content and features and in terms of more in-depth qualitative work with young people such as focus groups or individual interviews, which would have given us a much richer understanding of how they felt about and experienced the websites. Thirdly, where we did find effects, we were unable to know exactly what respondents looked at whilst viewing the websites. For example, was it simply being exposed to it or was it consuming a specific message that created the effect? The thesis would have been improved if the content analysis had included a systematic capture of the messages being communicated by the specific websites. This could take the form of an enhanced content analysis or utilizing other methods more commonly found in other disciplines, such as accompanied web visits or eye-tracking.

We believe that there is a need for more joined-up research of this kind, and particularly a need for the inclusion of deeper qualitative research into how young people experience the websites as this might provide some additional clues as to how and why specific websites work in the way they do. This would also allow for a better understanding of the different needs and preferences of young people, given that they are not one homogenous group and therefore cannot be engaged or mobilized as such. We are excited to explore how the VAA quantitative content analysis coding framework could be further developed and improved and the wider scope of comparative work that could be undertaken using this kind of analysis. We hope that our research paves the way for more focussed research at the individual website level as we have found that there can be vast differences between websites, even those within the same type of website category and it is at this individual level that people interact with sites and therefore experience any effects. We would have liked to replicate this approach in the recent UK General Election in order to examine the websites present in this election for a number of reasons. Firstly, we would be interested to examine if any causal effects could be found on party websites rather than candidate websites and if they differed from what we have found here. Secondly, Bite the Ballot, the youth mobilization website appears to be much

improved from the version tested here and has had an impact with offline youth mobilization events as well as partnering with Demos to create the first VAA specifically aimed at young people.

Alongside this Verto VAA, we also noted the appearance of a larger number of VAAs for the 2015 election than have been seen before, including a UK version of I Side With. Finally, whilst we do not have the same tradition of third-party organisations in the UK, it may be that media organisations are stepping in to fill the gap such as Sky News' "Stand Up and Be Counted" campaign which aimed to mobilize young people both on- and offline. Whilst there are of course many questions about the efficacy and potential partisanship of these efforts, it is nonetheless an interesting development.

Overall, we believe that our combination of methods and exploration of both the supply and demand side has led us to a greater understanding of how specific websites can have direct or indirect effects on young people's behavioural, cognitive and attitudinal engagement in elections and we hope to continue this research in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Coding scheme candidate and youth mobilisation websites

<u>Design</u>	
Functioning website 0 = Broken link, under construction etc. 1 = Accessible, live website	
Fixed menu bar 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Homepage button 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Search tool 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Site map 0 = No	

1 = Yes	
Donate 0 = No 1= Yes, through downloading and sending form 2 = Yes, online directly through site	
Freshness 0 = Not updated or once or twice since launch 1 = Weekly 2 = Every few days 3 = Daily	
Dynamism 0 = Static, little to no multi-media content 1 = Some multi-media content but largely static 2 = Fully dynamic site	
	Design total : /12
<u>Information provision: issues</u>	

Party manifesto/s 0 = None 1 = Link to PDF 2 =Multimedia version 3 = Interactive version	
Opponent dismissal/ comparison 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Issue/ policy positions 0 = No 1 = Bullet points 2 = Detailed information	
Event schedule/ calendar 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Audio podcasts/speeches 0 = No	

1 = Yes	
Video 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Policies for specific groups 0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = For young people	
Candidate profiles/ bios 0 = No 1 = Yes	
	Total : /12
Information provision: election/voting information	
Voting and registration info 0 = None	

1 = General information 2 = Interactive advice, how to, link to forms/website	
Polling place info 0 = None 1 = Text information 2 = Map	
Voting Advice Application 0 = None 1 = Link to VAA 2 = VAA embedded in site	
	Total: /6
Interactivity: Content	
Shareable content 0 = No 1 = Yes, pre-set 2 = Yes, select among fixed content	

3 = Yes, changeable content	
Types of content Email Video Audio Text Widgets Logo	
Downloads 0 = No 1 = Yes, offline e.g. posters, leaflets 2 = Yes, online e.g. apps, Facebook badges	
Uploads 0 = No 1 = Yes, but moderated 2 = Yes, unmoderated	
E- polls 0 = No	

1 = Yes	
E – petitions 0 = No 1 = Yes, one	
	Total: /15
Interactivity: Interpersonal	
Volunteer 0 = No 1 = Yes, downloading and sending form 2 = Email contact 3 = Online form	
Links to connect Facebook Twitter Instagram YouTube Pinterest Google +	

Official blog within main site 0 = No 1 = Blog exists but external 2 = Yes, blog embedded in main site	
Official blog: allows comments 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Official blog posters 0 = Campaign staff 1 = Candidate	
Bulletin boards/forums 0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = With candidate input	
	Total: /15
	GRAND TOTAL : /60

Appendix 2: Vote Advice Application Coding Scheme

Name of site:	
URL:	
Type of provider (e.g. Media organisation, media, interest group etc.)	
<u>Design and functionality</u>	
Functioning website 0 = Broken link, under construction etc. 1 = Accessible, live website	
Dynamism 0 = Static, little to no multi-media content 1 = Some multi-media content but largely static 2 = Fully dynamic site	
Questions and statements Record actual number	
Selectivity Record if users have to answer all questions/statements or if they can choose between them	
Issue/topic areas Record number and content of issue areas covered	

Response categories Record type of response category: Binary (agree/disagree), Binary plus neutral category (e.g. Yes/no/Don't Know), Likert scale (e.g. Strongly agree through to strongly disagree) etc.	
Importance Record if users able to rate how important the issue is to them and the scale used	
	Total (_/3)
<u>Information</u>	
Pictures of candidates/party logos 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Links to further information on the issues/candidates 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Results: closest match 0 = Does not show closest match 1 = Shows closest match	
Results: all parties/candidates 0 = Doesn't show % match for all	

candidates/parties 1 = Provides % match for all candidates/parties	
Presentation of results Record way in which results are presented e.g. text only, bar chart etc.	
Transparency/clarity of results 0 = Very poor, no information provided on how result was calculated 1 = Poor, some information given but confusing and unclear as to how result was calculated 2 = Good information given on how result was calculated 3 =Excellent details provided on how each question is used to calculate result	
	Total: (_/7)
<u>Interactivity/Mobilization</u>	
Potential to share results 0 = No sharing possible One point each for embedded buttons to: Share by email Share by Facebook Share by Twitter	

Share by Google +	
Tool to compare results to others 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Mobilizing message/ reminder to vote 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Tracking tool to record impact influence 0 = No 1 = Yes	
Discussion/chat tools 0 = No 1 = Yes	
	Total: (_/8)
	Grand total: (_/18)

Appendix 3: Full list of websites and URLs

Website name	URL
Bite the Ballot	www.bitetheballot.co.uk
Boris Johnson	www.backboris.com
Ken Livingstone	www.kenlivingstone.com
Brian Paddick	www.brianpaddick.com
Jenny Jones	www.jennyforlondon.org
Siobhan Benita	www.siobhanformayor.com
Lawrence Webb	www.ukipmayor.com
Carlos Cortiglia	www.carloscortiglia.com
Vote Match	www.votematch.org
Who Should You Vote For?	www.whoshouldyouvotefor.com
Power of 12	www.powerof12.org
Rock the Vote	www.rockthevote.org
The League of Young Voters	www.theleague.com
Our Time	www.ourtime.org
Barack Obama	www.barackobama.com
Mitt Romney	www.mittromney.com

Jill Stein	www.jillstein.com
Gary Johnson	www.garyjohnson2012.com
I Side With	www.I Side With.com
On the issues	www.ontheissues.org
Vote Smart	www.vote-smart.org
Select smart	www.selectsmart.com/president
Vote Chooser	www.votechooser.com
Vote Help	www.votehelp.org
USA Today Match-o-matic	www.usatoday.com/news/politics/candidate-match-game
ProCon	http://2012election.procon.org

Appendix 4: Chapter 5 supplementary tables

Table 1 ANES – “How often do you pay attention to politics and elections?”

	Never	Some of the time	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
Under 30s	5.1%	38.3%	24.2%	23.6%	8.7%
Over 30s	2.1%	23.1%	20.4%	35.3%	19.1%

Table 2: US – Interest in politics Research Now sample

	Not at all interested	Not very interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
Under 30s	6.5%	20.1%	50.9%	22.5%
Over 30s	3.8%	11.9%	46.1%	38.2%

Table 3: Party ID ANES vs. Research Now sample (US)

	None	Democrats	Republicans	Independents	Other	Don't Know
(ANES) Under 30s	2.1%	39.7%	19.2%	33.0%	2.6%	3.6%
(ANES) Over 30s	0.9%	40.0%	24.5%	30.7%	2.8%	1.1%

Under 30s	23.5%	33.6%	23.3%	14.2%	5.4%	-
Over 30s	15.2%	33.9%	29.5%	18.3%	3.1%	-

Table 4: Contact (US)

	Yes- contacted	No – not contacted	Don't know
(ANES) Under 30s	19.5%	71.9%	8.6%
(ANES) Over 30s	45.8%	47.7%	6.5%
Under 30s	30.7%	63.0%	6.3%
Over 30s	56.5%	39.7%	3.8%

Table 5: ANES Civic Duty – How strongly do you feel that voting is a duty?

	Very strongly	Moderately strongly	A little strongly
18-30s	56.7%	32.9%	10.4%
Over 30s	70.6%	23.8%	5.5%

Table 5: ANES Trust “How often do you trust government in Washington to do what is right?”

	Never	Some of the time	About half the time	Most of the time	Always

18-30s	11.2%	47.0%	31.2%	10.2%	0.4%
Over 30s	10.2%	51.0%	25.6%	12.1%	1.1%

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)
Somewhat disagree vs. Strongly disagree								
Intercept	-2.379 (.613)	15.082	.000		-1.058 (1.219)	.752	.386	
Pre-test Trust	.322 (.110)	8.554	.003**	1.379	.324 (.111)	8.513	.004**	1.382
18-30	.304 (.259)	1.381	.240	1.356	.543 (.365)	2.209	.137	1.721
Bite the Ballot	.730 (.290)	6.316	.012**	2.075	.836 (.337)	6.167	.013**	2.307
Vote Match	1.164 (.321)	13.168	.000***	3.203	1.220 (.360)	11.494	.001***	3.387
Candidate sites	.392 (.299)	1.7117	.190	1.480	.568 (.331)	2.941	.086	1.765
Bite the Ballot*18-30					-.582 (.681)	.731	.393	.559
Vote Match*18-30					-.403 (.798)	.255	.614	.669
Candidate sites*18-30					-.882 (.766)	1.328	.249	.414
Neither agree nor disagree vs. Somewhat disagree								
Intercept	.412 (.598)	.475	.491		-2.824 (1.255)	5.061	.024	
Pre-test Trust	.522 (.092)	32.096	.000***	1.686	.528 (.093)	31.917	.000***	1.696
18-30	-.702 (.239)	8.643	.003**	.495	-1.340 (.317)	17.895	.000***	.262
Bite the Ballot	-.744 (.276)	7.242	.007**	.475	-1.194 (.321)	13.835	.000***	.303
Vote Match	-.529 (.341)	2.413	.120	.589	-.889 (.375)	5.635	.018*	.411
Candidate sites	-.421 (.291)	2.092	.148	.656	-.714 (.331)	4.638	.031*	.490
Bite the Ballot*18-30					1.895 (.643)	8.673	.003**	6.650
Vote Match*18-30					1.850 (.960)	3.716	.054*	6.360
Candidate sites*18-30					1.063 (.690)	2.377	.123	2.895
Somewhat agree vs. Neither agree nor disagree								
Intercept	-1.069 (.621)	2.692	.085		.1850 (1.202)	2.369	.124	
Pre-test Trust	.509 (.095)	28.727	.000***	1.663	.526 (.097)	29.632	.000***	1.692
18-30	.102 (.234)	.188	.664	1.107	.857 (.331)	6.713	.010**	2.356
Bite the Ballot	.443 (.300)	2.177	.140	1.557	.610 (.344)	3.137	.077	1.840
Vote Match	-.545 (.324)	2.834	.092	.580	.013 (.366)	.001	.972	.987
Candidate sites	-.535 (.292)	3.343	.067	.586	.065 (.358)	.033	.856	1.067
Bite the Ballot*18-30					-.585 (.715)	.668	.414	.557
Vote Match*18-30					-2.332 (.891)	6.855	.009**	.097
Candidate sites*18-30					-1.903 (.645)	8.704	.003**	.149
Strongly agree vs. Somewhat agree								
Intercept	-.966 (1.148)	.708	.400		-18.620 (1.310)	202.047	.000	
Pre-test Trust	.365 (.177)	4.275	.039*	1.441	.358 (.190)	3.565	.059	1.430
18-30	.996 (.404)	6.084	.014**	.369	-2.107 (.688)	9.373	.002**	.122
Bite the Ballot	-.901 (.530)	2.889	.089	.406	-1.453 (.810)	3.221	.073	.234
Vote Match	-1.044 (.519)	4.041	.044*	.352	-2.299 (.693)	11.006	.001***	.100
Candidate sites	-.012 (.606)	.000	.984	.988	.836 (1.821)	.211	.646	2.307
Bite the Ballot*18-30					.916 (1.126)	.651	.416	2.499
Vote Match*18-30					18.736 (.000)	202.086	.628	1.370
Candidate sites*18-30					-.474 (1.946)	.059	.808	.623
R ² =.30 (Cox and Snell), .31 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (25) =301.866, p<.001.					R ² =.33 (Cox and Snell), .35 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (40) =346.301, p<.001.			

Multinomial logistic regression: Trust, London

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)	B (SE)	Wald	p	Exp (β)
Somewhat Disagree vs. Strongly Disagree								
Intercept	-.695 (.328)	4.473	.034		-.372 (.551)	.455	.500	
Pre-test Trust	.914 (.071)	163.742	.000***	2.494	.911 (.071)	162.572	.000***	.353
18-30	-.385 (.120)	10.333	.001***	.680	-.227 (.244)	.864	.353	.797
Power of 12	-.223 (.157)	2.014	.156	.800	-.232 (.187)	1.527	.217	.793
I Side With	-.190 (.156)	1.476	.224	.827	-.112 (.185)	.368	.544	.894
Candidate sites	-.043 (.156)	.077	.782	.958	.080 (.189)	.178	.673	1.083
Power of 12*18-30					.024 (.342)	.005	.943	1.025
I Side With*18-30					-.277 (.345)	.642	.423	.758
Candidate sites*18-30					-.367 (.337)	1.186	.276	.693
Neither agree nor disagree vs. Somewhat Disagree								
Intercept	-1.912 (.305)	39.403	.000		-1.898 (.472)	16.155	.000	
Pre-test Trust	.661 (.054)	149.072	.000***	1.936	.661 (.054)	149.067	.000***	1.937
18-30	.310 (.104)	8.901	.003**	.734	-.305 (.219)	1.946	.163	.737
Power of 12	.071 (.142)	.252	.616	1.074	.115 (.177)	.426	.514	1.122
I Side With	.162 (.145)	1.243	.265	1.175	.194 (.182)	1.137	.286	1.214
Candidate sites	.028 (.143)	.037	.847	1.028	-.036 (.183)	.039	.844	.965
Power of 12*18-30					-.123 (.299)	.169	.681	.884
I Side With*18-30					-.077 (.303)	.065	.798	.926
Candidate sites*18-30					.172 (.297)	.336	.562	1.188
Somewhat Agree vs. Neither Agree nor Disagree								
Intercept	-1.489 (.345)	18.655	.000		-1.903 (.508)	14.056	.000	
Pre-test Trust	.397 (.059)	45.098	.000***	1.487	.401 (.059)	45.754	.000***	1.493
18-30	.002 (.113)	.000	.987	1.002	-.215 (.231)	.867	.352	.807
Power of 12	.017 (.156)	.013	.911	1.018	-.016 (.201)	.007	.936	.984
I Side With	-.047 (.159)	.088	.767	.954	-.107 (.206)	.269	.604	.899
Candidate sites	.044 (.157)	.080	.777	1.045	-.185 (.200)	.852	.356	.831
Power of 12*18-30					.105 (.320)	.107	.743	1.111
I Side With*18-30					.168 (.325)	.268	.605	1.183
Candidate sites*18-30					.588 (.323)	3.313	.069	1.801
Strongly Agree vs. Somewhat Agree								
Intercept	-3.449 (.717)	23.140	.000		-2.388	4.904	.027	
Pre-test Trust	.167 (.126)	1.761	.185	1.181	.158 (.126)	1.582	.208	1.171
18-30	.042 (.235)	.031	.860	1.042	.521 (.447)	1.358	.244	1.684
Power of 12	.145 (.293)	.247	.619	1.157	.243 (.362)	.450	.502	1.275
I Side With	.532 (.326)	2.659	.103	1.702	.775 (.425)	3.330	.068	2.170
Candidate sites	.599 (.332)	3.256	.071	1.820	1.020 (.439)	5.395	.020*	2.773
Power of 12*18-30					-.340 (.624)	.296	.587	.712
I Side With*18-30					-.679 (.682)	.993	.319	.507
Candidate sites*18-30					-1.100 (.693)	2.519	.112	.333
	R ² = .29 (Cox and Snell), .31 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (20)=1023.665, p<.001.				R ² = .29 (Cox and Snell), .31 (Nagelkerke). χ^2 (20)=1034.280, p<.001.			

Multinomial logistic regression: Trust, US

Appendix 5: Pre-and post-test questionnaire US

Us pre-election questionnaire

(PRE WAVE), INTRO

We would like to invite you to take part in an interesting survey about the US Presidential election. It will last approximately 15 minutes and there will be a short follow-up questionnaire soon after the election. Please click on the next button below to start the survey.

(PRE WAVE), INTRO2

The following questions are to ensure that we are talking to a wide spread of the population.

QCITIZEN

Are you a US citizen?

1. Yes
2. No (CLOSE)

QAGE. How old are you? Please indicate your age at your last birthday.

1. Under 18 (CLOSE)
2. 18-24
3. 25-35
4. 36-45
5. 46-55
6. 56+

QGENDER. Are you:

1. Male
2. Female

QREGION. Which of the following states or regions do you live in?

Select one response only

Alabama	1
Alaska	2
Arizona	3
Arkansas	4
California	5
Colorado	6
Connecticut	7
Delaware	8
Florida	9
Georgia	10
Hawaii	11

Idaho	12
Illinois	13
Indiana	14
Iowa	15
Kansas	16
Kentucky	17
Louisiana	18
Maine	19
Maryland	20
Massachusetts	21
Michigan	22
Minnesota	23
Mississippi	24
Missouri	25
Montana	26
Nebraska	27
Nevada	28
New Hampshire	29
New Jersey	30
New Mexico	31
New York	32
North Carolina	33
North Dakota	34
Ohio	35
Oklahoma	36
Oregon	37
Pennsylvania	38
Rhode Island	39
South Carolina	40
South Dakota	41
Tennessee	42
Texas	43
Utah	44
Vermont	45
Virginia	46
Washington	47
West Virginia	49
Wisconsin	50
Wyoming	51
None of these (CLOSE)	99

Q**Ethnicity.** What is your ethnic/racial background?

1. White

2. Black or African American
3. Asian American
4. American Indian or Alaska Native
5. Hispanic/Latino
6. Pacific Islander
7. Chinese
8. Filipino
9. Japanese
10. Korean
11. Vietnamese
12. Other Asian
98. Some other race (Please specify)

Q1. Are you registered to vote?

1. Yes, I am registered at my current address
2. Yes, I am registered at a different address
3. Not registered
4. Not sure

Q2. Have you already voted in the 2012 Presidential Election by post?

1. Yes, I have sent a postal vote
2. No, I have not sent a postal vote but I intend to
3. No, I have not applied for a postal vote

Q3. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about Barack Obama?

0 - Strongly dislike

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Strongly like

Q4. Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about Mitt Romney?

0 - Strongly dislike

1

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – Strongly like

Q5. In general, how interested would you say you are in politics?

- 1. Very interested
- 2. Somewhat interested
- 3. Not very interested
- 4. Not at all interested

Q5b. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.

- 0 – You can't be too careful
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – Most people can be trusted
- Don't Know

Q6. Did you vote in the 2008 Presidential or 2010 Congressional Election?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Can't remember

Q7. Some people think of themselves as usually being a supporter of one political party rather than another. Do you usually think of yourself as being a supporter of one particular party or not?

- 1. Democrats

2. Republicans
3. Greens
4. Libertarians
5. Independents
6. Some other party (Please specify)
7. I don't see myself as any of these

Q8. Have you ever done any of the following activities? (Please tick all that apply)

1. Voted in a national, state, or local election
2. Donated money to a political candidate or party or worked on an election campaign
3. Worked actively with a group of people to address a public issue or solve a problem
4. Contacted a politician or government official
5. Discussed politics with friends or family
6. Joined a boycott that is, refused to buy a particular product or shop at a particular store
7. Displayed a poster or other advert of some kind for a party or candidate at your home.
8. Encouraged others to vote
99. None of the above
97. Don't know

Q9. And on the internet, have you ever done any of the following activities? (Please tick all that apply)

1. Watched a video on YouTube about the election
2. Discussed politics online
3. Joined or started a political group on a social network site (e.g. Facebook)
4. Visited a political candidate or party's website
5. Signed up for parties or candidates' news alerts, updates from Facebook or Twitter
6. Visited a site encouraging you to get involved in politics or community affairs
7. Donated money online to a political candidate or party
8. Shared with others or embedded on your own site any content relating to politics
9. Signed an online petition
99. None of the above
97. Don't know

Q10. Where would you say you have received most of your news about the US Presidential election from?

1. Newspapers
2. TV
3. Radio
4. Internet
98. Other (Please specify)
97. Don't know

Q11. And how much attention would you say you have paid to news about the up-coming Presidential election?

1. A great deal
2. A fair amount

- 3. Not very much
- 99. None at all
- 97. Don't know

Q11a. How much attention in general would you say you pay to news and current affairs either in newspapers, on television or on the radio?

- 1. A good deal of attention
- 2. Some attention
- 3. Not much attention
- 4. No attention at all

Q12. Here is a selection of statements relating to participating in politics. Each statement has a 5 part scale: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree. Please tick the box that most closely represents your feelings for each statement.

- 1. It's your duty as a good citizen to vote in elections.
- 2. Voting is a good way of expressing your views.
- 3. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.
- 4. I don't think government officials care much about what people like me think.
- 5. You can generally trust the people who are in elected positions to do what is right.

- 5. Strongly agree
- 4. Somewhat agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 2. Somewhat disagree
- 1. Strongly disagree

ASK IF NOT CODE=1 AT Q2

Q13. Using this scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means very unlikely and 10 means very likely, how likely is it that you will vote in the US Presidential election?

0 - Very Unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Very Likely

ASK IF NOT CODE=1 AT Q2

Q14. If you do plan to vote, have you decided who you will vote for or haven't you decided yet?

1. Yes, I have decided

2. No, I haven't decided yet

3. I will not vote

ASK IF CODE=1 OR 2 SELECTED AT Q14 OR IF Q2=CODE 1

Q14a. Who is it that you are most likely to vote for OR if you have already cast a postal vote, who did you vote for? Please choose one.

1. Barack Obama

2. Mitt Romney

3. Jill Stein

4. Gary Johnson

98. Other (Please specify)

97. Don't know/ can't say

Q15. Have any of the candidates or political parties contacted you in relation to the election for example, by sending you a leaflet, calling at your home?

1. Yes

2. No

97. Don't know

Q16. Have you visited any of the following websites relating to the Presidential election? Please tick all that apply.

1. Candidate or party websites
2. Candidate or party Twitter or Facebook pages
3. Any content about the election on YouTube
4. News sites e.g CNN, NY times online, USA Today.com
5. An official electoral information site e.g. election assistance commission
6. An online quiz or advice site to help you decide who to vote for
7. Sites about the election aimed at young people
8. Any blogs about the election

9. I have not visited any of the above in relation to this year's election

97. Don't know

ASK IF CODES 1-8 SELECTED AT Q16

Q17. Why did you visit these websites? Please tick all that apply.

1. To find out more about the candidates as people
2. To find out more about the candidates' policies
3. To get more information on how to vote e.g. how to register or where to find my nearest polling station
4. To read news about the election
5. To find out why I should vote in the election
6. To see other people's views on the election and candidates
7. To find out who I should vote for
8. To discuss the election with other people
9. To get involved in the campaigning for the election
10. To encourage other people to vote
98. Other (Please specify)
97. Don't know

Treatment group D: Thank you for taking part in this survey today. Your feedback is very important to us. A follow-up survey will be available from [date] and an invitation will be sent to you.

> COMPLETE

Treatment groups A, B, C:

We would now like you to look at some websites. The sites you will be asked to visit are randomly selected from a list. Please use the sites as you would normally. We are just looking for your general impressions. You do not need to memorize anything and there will be no test afterwards.

dGROUP = 1 (A)

Please click on the NEXT button below and you will see a blue bar like the one below...



Please click on the blue bar to be redirected to the website we would like you to visit. Once you are in the site you will be given 4 MINS to browse it and when the bar turns from RED to GREEN you can click on it to return to the survey.

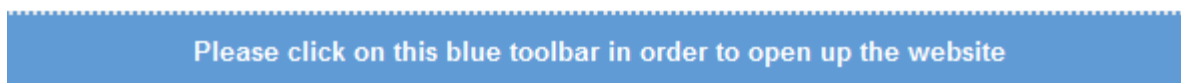


To continue to this part of the survey please click NEXT button below.

www.powerof12.org

dGROUP = 1 (B)

Please click on the NEXT button below and you will see a blue bar like the one below...



Please click on the blue bar to be redirected to the website we would like you to visit. Once you are in the site you will be given 4 MINS to browse it and when the bar turns from RED to GREEN you can click on it to return to the survey.



To continue to this part of the survey please click NEXT button below.

www.I Side With.com

dGROUP = 3 (C)

Please click on the NEXT button below and a screen will appear with a blue bar on top like the one below -



Please click on the blue bar to be redirected to the first website we would like you to visit. You will be given 4 MINS to browse it and when the bar turns from RED to GREEN like the one below you can click on it to go to the second site. You will be given a further 4 MINS to browse and then asked to click on the GREEN button again to return to the survey.



To continue to this part of the survey please click NEXT button below.

www.barackobama.com

www.mittromney.com

ASK IF dGROUP=3 (C)

Q18. Which of the two sites did you spend most time visiting?

1. Barack Obama's
2. Mitt Romney's
3. Neither, I spent the same amount of time on both sites
97. Don't know

ASK IF dGROUP=3 (C)

Q19. If you had to choose, which one of the two sites did you enjoy visiting most?

1. Barack Obama's
2. Mitt Romney's

SHOW IF Q18= CODES 1 OR 2

Please answer questions about the site you spent most time visiting> Continue to Q20

ASK IF dGROUP=1,2,3 (A,B,C)

Q20. Before today, had you visited this site?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 97. Don't know

Q21. On a scale of 0-10 with 0 being very poor and 10 being excellent, how 'user friendly' did you find the site?

0 - Very Poor

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Excellent

Q22. On a scale of 0-10, how useful did you think the content was in helping you understand the key issues in the election?

0 - Not at all useful

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Very useful

Q23. On a scale of 0-10, how useful did you think the content was in helping you decide how you will vote?

0 - Not at all useful

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Very useful

Q24. On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being very unlikely and 10 being very likely, how likely are you to visit this site again?

0 - Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Very likely

Q25. On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being very unlikely and 10 being very likely, how likely are you to recommend others to visit the site?

0 - Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Very likely

Q26. In your own words, please say what you liked most about the site? (Write in)
97. Don't know/no answer

Q27. Which of the following effects, if any, do you think visiting this website has had on you?

CODES 2 AND 5 NOT ALLOWED TOGETHER

CODES 3 AND 6 NOT ALLOWED TOGETHER

- 1. It has helped me to decide whether to vote
- 4. It has made me less likely to vote
- 2. It has helped me to decide who to vote for
- 5. It has made me less sure on who I will vote for
- 3. It has made me more interested in the election
- 6. It has made me less interested in the election
- 99. None of the above
- 97. Don't know

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is very important to us. A follow-up survey will be available shortly after the election and an invitation will be sent to you.

> COMPLETE

Post-election questionnaire

(POST WAVE) INTRO

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. This survey is about the recent Presidential election and your opinions are very interesting to us. We have tested the survey and it should take you approximately 5 minutes to complete

Q28. We have found that many people did not vote in the recent US Presidential election. Did you manage to vote?

1. I wanted to vote but was prevented from doing so
2. I decided not to vote
3. I voted
97. Don't know

ASK IF CODE=3 AT Q28

Q29. If you did vote, who did you vote for?

1. Barack Obama
2. Mitt Romney
3. Jill Stein
4. Gary Johnson
98. Other (Please specify)

Q30. Leading up to the Presidential election we asked you about your activities during the campaign. Since that time have you done any of the following? Please tick all that apply

1. Encouraged others to vote for a particular candidate
2. Encouraged others to vote
3. Contacted a politician or government official
4. Donated money to a political cause, candidate or party
5. Written or posted something about the election on a social network or blog
6. Signed up for updates from a political candidate or party on Facebook or Twitter

99. None of the above
97. Don't know

Q31. And over that same time period, have you visited any of the following websites...? Please tick all that apply

1. Any content about the Presidential election on YouTube
2. A Twitter or Facebook page for a Presidential candidate
3. A Twitter or Facebook page for a political party
4. An official website for a Presidential candidate
5. An official website for a political party
6. Sites about the election aimed at young people
7. Any blogs about the election

- 8. An official election information site e.g. election assistance commission
- 9. An online quiz or advice site to help you decide how to vote
- 10. A news site e.g. CNN, NY Times online, USA Today
- 99. I did not visit any of the above
- 97. Don't know

ASK IF CODE=4 SELECTED AT Q31

Q31a. Which Presidential candidate's website did you visit? (Please tick all that apply).

- 1. Barack Obama
- 2. Mitt Romney
- 98. Other (Please specify)

ASK IF CODE=2 SELECTED AT Q31

Q31b. Which candidate's Twitter or Facebook page for a Presidential did you visit?
(Please tick all that apply).

- 1. Barack Obama
- 2. Mitt Romney
- 98. Other (Please specify)

Q32. And in the next few years, how likely are you to do the following?

- 1. Vote in a national, state or local election
- 2. Donate money to a political candidate or party or worked on an election campaign
- 3. Work actively with a group of people to address a public issue or solve a problem
- 4. Contact a politician or government official
- 5. Discuss politics with friends or family
- 6. Join a boycott, that is I would refuse to buy a particular product or shop at a particular store
- 7. Display a poster or other advert
- 8. Encourage others to vote

- 1. Very likely
- 2. Quite likely
- 3. Not very likely
- 4. Not at all likely
- 97. Don't know

- 99. None of the above
- 97. Don't know

Q33. On a scale of 0-10, how much attention do you pay to politics and public affairs? (where 10 means a great deal of attention and 0 means no attention)

0 – No attention

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – A great deal of attention

Q34. Here is a selection of statements. Each statement has a 5 part scale: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree. Please tick the box that most closely represents your feelings for each statement.

1. It's your duty as a good citizen to vote in elections
2. Voting is a good way of expressing your views
3. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on
4. I don't think government officials care much about what people like me think
5. You can generally trust the people who are in elected positions to do what is right

1. Strongly disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Neither agree or disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Strongly agree

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Your feedback is very important to us.

>COMPLETE

Appendix 6: Pre-and Post-test questionnaire London

Questionnaire

P_Gibson_London_Pre

P_GIBSON_LONDON_PRE



Version 15

Mon May 28 10:31:06 2012

Module: RG_therm	1
Page: RG_therm1	1
Page: RG_therm2	2
Module: _1	2
Page: RG1	2
Page: RG2	3
Page: RG3	3
Page: RG4	4
Page: RG5	5
Page: RG6	5
Page: RG7	6
Page: RG8	6
Page: RG9new	7
Page: RG10	8
Page: Gibbo_random	8
Page: Gibbo_optout if randGibbo in [3,4,5,6,7,8]	8
Module: sitevisit if RG11 == 1	9
Page: randGibbo2 if randGibbo in [3,4]	9
Page: randGibbo3 if randGibbo in [5,6]	9
Page: randGibbo4 if randGibbo == 7	10
Page: randGibbo5 if randGibbo == 8	10
Module: siteqs if RG11 == 1	10
Page: RG_Xtra1	11
Page: RG_Xtra2	11
Page: twosites1 if RG_Xtra1 in [1,2]	11
Page: twosites2 if RG_Xtra2 in [1,2]	11
Page: RG12	12
Page: RG13	12
Page: RG14	13
Page: RG15	13
Page: RG16	14
Page: RG17	14
Page: RG18	15
Page: RG19	15
Module: admin	15

Page: upJump.....	15
Page: QC if panman.is_panelist	15

Module: RG_therm

Page: RG_therm1

RG_therm1-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about Boris Johnson?

required

yes

1 ☐ 0

2 ☐ 1

3 ☐ 2

4 ☐ 3

5 ☐ 4

6 ☐ 5

7 ☐ 6

8 ☐ 7

9 ☐ 8

10 ☐ 9

11 ☐ 10

12 ☐ Don't know

98 *Skipped*

99 *Not Asked*

Page: RG_therm2

RG_therm2-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means strongly dislike and 10 means strongly like, how do you feel about Ken Livingstone?

required

yes

- 1 ☐ 0
- 2 ☐ 1
- 3 ☐ 2
- 4 ☐ 3
- 5 ☐ 4
- 6 ☐ 5
- 7 ☐ 6
- 8 ☐ 7
- 9 ☐ 8
- 10 ☐ 9
- 11 ☐ 10
- 12 ☐ Don't know
- 98 *Skipped*
- 99 *Not Asked*

end module: RG_therm

Module: _1

Page: RG1

RG1-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

Are you a...?

required

yes

- 1 ☐ British citizen
- 2 ☐ Republic of Ireland citizen
- 3 ☐ EU citizen
- 4 ☐ Commonwealth citizen
- 5 ☐ Citizen of another country
- 6 ☐ Don't know
- 8 *Skipped*
- 9 *Not Asked*

Page: RG2

RG2-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

In general, how interested would you say you are in politics?

required

yes

- ¹ ☐ Very interested
- ² ☐ Somewhat interested
- ³ ☐ Not very interested
- ⁴ ☐ Not at all interested
- ⁵ ☐ Don't know
- ⁸ *Skipped*
- ⁹ *Not Asked*

Page: RG3

RG3-
required

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Have you ever done any of the following activities? (Please tick all that apply)

required

yes

order

Randomize

- ¹ ☐ Voted in a national or local election
- ² ☐ Donated money to a political candidate or party or worked on an election campaign
- ³ ☐ Worked actively with a group of people to address a public issue or solve a problem
- ⁴ ☐ Contacted a politician or government official
- ⁵ ☐ Discussed politics with friends or family
- ⁶ ☐ Joined a boycott, that is, refused to buy a particular product or shop at a particular store
- ⁷ ☐ None of the above
- ⁸ ☐ Don't know

Not randomized, exclude other punches
Not randomized

Page: RG4

RG4-**required**

MULTIPLE CHOICE

And on the internet, have you ever done any of the following activities? (Please tick all that apply)

required

yes

order

Randomize

- 1 ☐ Watched a video on YouTube about an upcoming election
- 2 ☐ Discussed politics online
- 3 ☐ Joined or started a political group on a social network site (e.g. Facebook)
- 4 ☐ Visited a political candidate or party's website
- 5 ☐ Signed up for parties or candidates' news alerts, updates from Facebook or twitter
- 6 ☐ Visited a site encouraging you to get involved in politics and community affairs
E.g. Mysociety.org, Unlock Democracy or They Work for You
- 7 ☐ Donated money to a political candidate or party
- 8 ☐ Shared with others, or embedded on your own site any content relating to politics
- 9 ☐ Signed an online petition
- 10 ☐ None of the above
- 11 ☐ Don't know

Not randomized, exclude other punches
Not randomized

Page: RG5

RG5-**required**

SINGLE CHOICE

Where would you say you have received the majority of your news about the London Mayoral election from?

required

yes

order

Randomize

- 1 ☐ Newspapers
2 ☐ TV
3 ☐ Radio
4 ☐ Internet
5 ☐ Other (OPEN TEXTBOX [RG7o])
6 ☐ Don't know
8 *Skipped*
9 *Not Asked*

*Not randomized**Not randomized***RG7o-****required**

OPEN TEXTBOX

required

yes

prompt

please specify

Page: RG6

RG6-**required**

SINGLE CHOICE

And how much attention would you say you have paid to news about the upcoming London Mayoral election in recent weeks?

required

yes

- 1 ☐ A great deal
2 ☐ A fair amount
3 ☐ Not very much
4 ☐ None at all
5 ☐ Don't know
8 *Skipped*
9 *Not Asked*

Page: RG7

RG7-**required**

DYNAMIC GRID

Here is selection of statements relating to participating in politics. Each statement has a 5 part scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree. Please tick the box that most closely represents your feelings for each statement.

required

yes

roworder

Randomize

ROWS

RG7_g1

Voting is a good way of expressing your views

RG7_g2

Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on

RG7_g3

I don't think government officials care much about what people like me think

RG7_g4

You can generally trust the people who are in elected positions to do what is right

COLUMNS

- ¹ ☐ Strongly agree
- ² ☐ Somewhat agree
- ³ ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ⁴ ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ⁵ ☐ Strongly disagree
- ⁶ ☐ Don't know
- ⁸ *Skipped*
- ⁹ *Not Asked*

Not randomized

Page: RG8

RG8-**required**

SINGLE CHOICE

Have any of the candidates or political parties contacted you in any way in relation to the London Mayoral election? For example, by sending you a leaflet or calling at your home.

required

yes

- ¹ ☐ Yes
- ² ☐ No
- ³ ☐ Don't know
- ⁸ *Skipped*
- ⁹ *Not Asked*

Page: RG9new

**RG9new-
required**

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Have you visited any of the following websites in relation to this year's London Mayoral election?
(Please tick all that apply)

required

yes

order

Randomize

- ¹ ☐ Candidate or party websites
- ² ☐ Candidate or party Twitter or Facebook pages
- ³ ☐ Any content about the election on YouTube
- ⁴ ☐ News sites e.g. BBC news, Guardian online, Mail online etc.
- ⁵ ☐ Official information site e.g. londonelects, aboutmyvote etc.
- ⁶ ☐ An online quiz or advice site to help you decide who to vote for
- ⁷ ☐ Sites about the election aimed at young people
- ⁸ ☐ Any blogs about the election
- ⁹ ☐ I have not visited any of the above in relation to this year's election
- ¹⁰ ☐ Don't know

*Not randomized, exclude other punches**Not randomized*

Page: RG10

RG10- Show if

RG9new.has_any([1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8])/required

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Which of the following best describes why you visited websites in relation to this year's London Mayoral election? (Please tick all that apply)

required

yes

order

Randomize

- 1 ☐ To find out more about the candidates as people
- 2 ☐ To find out more about the candidates' policies
- 3 ☐ To get more information on how to vote e.g. how to register or where to find my nearest polling station
- 4 ☐ To read news about the election
- 5 ☐ To find out why I should vote in the election
- 6 ☐ To find out who I should vote for
- 7 ☐ To see other people's views on the election and candidates
- 8 ☐ To discuss the election with other people
- 9 ☐ To get involved in campaigning for the election
- 10 ☐ To encourage other people to vote in the election
- 11 ☐ Other (OPEN TEXTBOX [RG10o])
- 12 ☐ Don't know

Not randomized

Not randomized

**RG10o-
required**

OPEN TEXTBOX

required

yes

prompt

please specify

Page: Gibbo_random

Page: Gibbo_optout if randGibbo in
[3,4,5,6,7,8]

****The sites you will be asked to visit are randomly selected from a list.****

****This part of the survey is being conducted by social researchers at The University of Manchester.****

****If you wish to take part you will be taken to the next page, but if you do not wish to take part the survey will move on.****

****Once you click on the links on the next page the websites will then open in a new window. Please DO NOT CLOSE this window.****

****Please use the sites as you would normally. We are just looking for your general impressions. You do not need to memorize anything and there will be no test afterwards.****

****After 8 minutes, the survey will continue on to the next question. You will NOT be able to continue before the 8 minutes are up.****

RG11- required

SINGLE CHOICE

Are happy to continue and visit the websites for an ADDITIONAL 8 minutes or would you prefer not to visit the sites? PLEASE NOTE THIS IS OPTIONAL.

required yes

- 1 ☐ I wish to proceed to the links to the external websites
- 2 ☐ I do not wish to visit the external websites
- 8 *Skipped*
- 9 *Not Asked*

end module: _1

Module: sitevisit if RG11 == 1

Page: randGibbo2 if randGibbo in [3,4]

****Please read the following instructions and then click on the link below.****

****Please DO NOT CLOSE this window.****

****Once you click on the link the website will then open in a new window. Please use the site as you would normally.****

****After 8 minutes, the survey will continue on to the next question automatically.****

****You will NOT be able to continue before the 8 minutes are up.****

[Please click here to visit the external site](http://www.bitetheballot.co.uk)

Page: randGibbo3 if randGibbo in [5,6]

****Please read the following instructions and then click on the link below.****

****Please DO NOT CLOSE this window.****

****Once you click on the link the website will then open in a new window. Please use the site as you would normally.****

****After 8 minutes, the survey will continue on to the next question automatically.****

****You will NOT be able to continue before the 8 minutes are up.****

[Please click here to visit the external site](http://www.votematch.org.uk)

Page: randGibbo4 if randGibbo == 7

****Please read the following instructions and then click on the links below.****

****Please DO NOT CLOSE this window****

****Once you click on the links the websites will then open in a new window. Please visit BOTH sites and use the sites as you would normally.****

****After 8 minutes, the survey will continue on to the next question automatically.****

****You will NOT be able to continue before the 8 minutes are up.****

[Please click here to visit the first external site](http://www.backboris2012.com)

[Please click here to visit the second external site](http://www.kenlivingstone.com)

Page: randGibbo5 if randGibbo == 8

****Please read the following instructions and then click on the links below.****

****Please DO NOT CLOSE this window****

****Once you click on the links the websites will then open in a new window. Please visit BOTH sites and use the sites as you would normally.****

****After 8 minutes, the survey will continue on to the next question automatically.****

****You will NOT be able to continue before the 8 minutes are up.****

[Please click here to visit the first external site](http://www.kenlivingstone.com)

[Please click here to visit the second external site](http://www.backboris2012.com)

end module: sitevisit if RG11 == 1

Module: siteqs if RG11 == 1

Page: RG_Xtra1

RG_Xtra1-
Show if
randGibbo in
[7,8]/required

SINGLE CHOICE

Which of the two sites did you spend the most time visiting?

required

yes

order

Randomize

- 1 ☐ Ken Livingstone's site
- 2 ☐ Boris Johnson's site
- 3 ☐ Neither - I spent the same amount of
time on both sites
- 4 ☐ Don't know
- 8 *Skipped*
- 9 *Not Asked*

*Not randomized**Not randomized*

Page: RG_Xtra2

RG_Xtra2-
Show if
RG_Xtra1 in
[3,4]/required

SINGLE CHOICE

If you had to choose one, which of the two sites did you enjoy visiting the most?

required

yes

order

Randomize

- 1 ☐ Ken Livingstone's site
- 2 ☐ Boris Johnson's site
- 8 *Skipped*
- 9 *Not Asked*

Page: twosites1 if RG_Xtra1 in [1,2]

** Please answer the following questions about the site you spent the MOST time visiting **

Page: twosites2 if RG_Xtra2 in [1,2]

** Please answer the following questions about the site you MOST enjoyed visiting **

Page: RG12

RG12-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

Before today, had you heard of or visited this site?

required yes

- ¹ ☐ Yes
² ☐ No
³ ☐ Don't know
⁸ *Skipped*
⁹ *Not Asked*

Page: RG13

RG13-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is very poor and 10 is very good, how would you rate the site in terms of being 'user friendly'?

required yes

- ¹ ☐ 0
² ☐ 1
³ ☐ 2
⁴ ☐ 3
⁵ ☐ 4
⁶ ☐ 5
⁷ ☐ 6
⁸ ☐ 7
⁹ ☐ 8
¹⁰ ☐ 9
¹¹ ☐ 10
¹² ☐ Don't know
⁹⁸ *Skipped*
⁹⁹ *Not Asked*

Page: RG14

RG14- required

SINGLE CHOICE

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all useful and 10 is very useful, how useful did you think the content was in helping you understand the key issues in the election?

required

yes

- 1 ☐ 0
 2 ☐ 1
 3 ☐ 2
 4 ☐ 3
 5 ☐ 4
 6 ☐ 5
 7 ☐ 6
 8 ☐ 7
 9 ☐ 8
 10 ☐ 9
 11 ☐ 10
 12 ☐ Don't know
 98 *Skipped*
 99 *Not Asked*

Page: RG15

RG15- required

SINGLE CHOICE

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all useful and 10 is very useful, how useful did you think the content was in helping you decide how you will vote?

required

yes

- 1 ☐ 0
 2 ☐ 1
 3 ☐ 2
 4 ☐ 3
 5 ☐ 4
 6 ☐ 5
 7 ☐ 6
 8 ☐ 7
 9 ☐ 8
 10 ☐ 9
 11 ☐ 10
 12 ☐ Don't know
 98 *Skipped*
 99 *Not Asked*

Page: RG16

RG16-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all likely and 10 is very likely, how likely are you to visit this site again?

required

yes

- ¹ ☐ 0
² ☐ 1
³ ☐ 2
⁴ ☐ 3
⁵ ☐ 4
⁶ ☐ 5
⁷ ☐ 6
⁸ ☐ 7
⁹ ☐ 8
¹⁰ ☐ 9
¹¹ ☐ 10
¹² ☐ Don't know
⁹⁸ *Skipped*
⁹⁹ *Not Asked*

Page: RG17

RG17-
required

SINGLE CHOICE

On a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not at all likely and 10 is very likely, how likely are you to recommend others to visit the site?

required

yes

- ¹ ☐ 0
² ☐ 1
³ ☐ 2
⁴ ☐ 3
⁵ ☐ 4
⁶ ☐ 5
⁷ ☐ 6
⁸ ☐ 7
⁹ ☐ 8
¹⁰ ☐ 9
¹¹ ☐ 10
¹² ☐ Don't know
⁹⁸ *Skipped*
⁹⁹ *Not Asked*

Page: RG18

RG18- required

OPEN TEXTBOX

In your own words, please say what you liked most about the site?

dk	1
required	yes
cols	60
rows	6

Page: RG19

RG19- required

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Which of the following effects, if any, do you think visiting this website has had on you? (Please tick all that apply)

required	yes
order	Randomize

- ¹ ☐ It has helped me decide whether to vote or not
- ² ☐ It has helped me decide who to vote for
- ³ ☐ It has made me more interested in the election
- ⁴ ☐ None of the above
- ⁵ ☐ Don't know

Not randomized, exclude other punches
Not randomized

end module: siteqs if RG11 == 1

Module: admin

Page: upJump

↵ *Goto survey registration_UK_update (resume at page None)*

Page: QC if panman.is_panelist

Please take a moment to rate the questionnaire you just took. This information will be used to improve our surveys.

**qualityControl_overall-
required**

SCALE

Please rate this questionnaire overall ? On a scale of 1 to 9 where 1 means the questionnaire was 'Poor' and 9 means the questionnaire was 'Excellent',

start 1
end 9
required yes

STEMS

qualityControl_overall_scale

SCALE

- 1 ☐ Poor
2 ☐
3 ☐
4 ☐
5 ☐
6 ☐
7 ☐
8 ☐
9 ☐ Excellent
998 *Skipped*
999 *Not Asked*

comments

OPEN TEXTBOX

Do you have any comments on your experience of taking this survey (optional)? In the case that you would like a response to your comment please contact us at supportuk@yougov.com

cols 70
rows 6

end module: admin