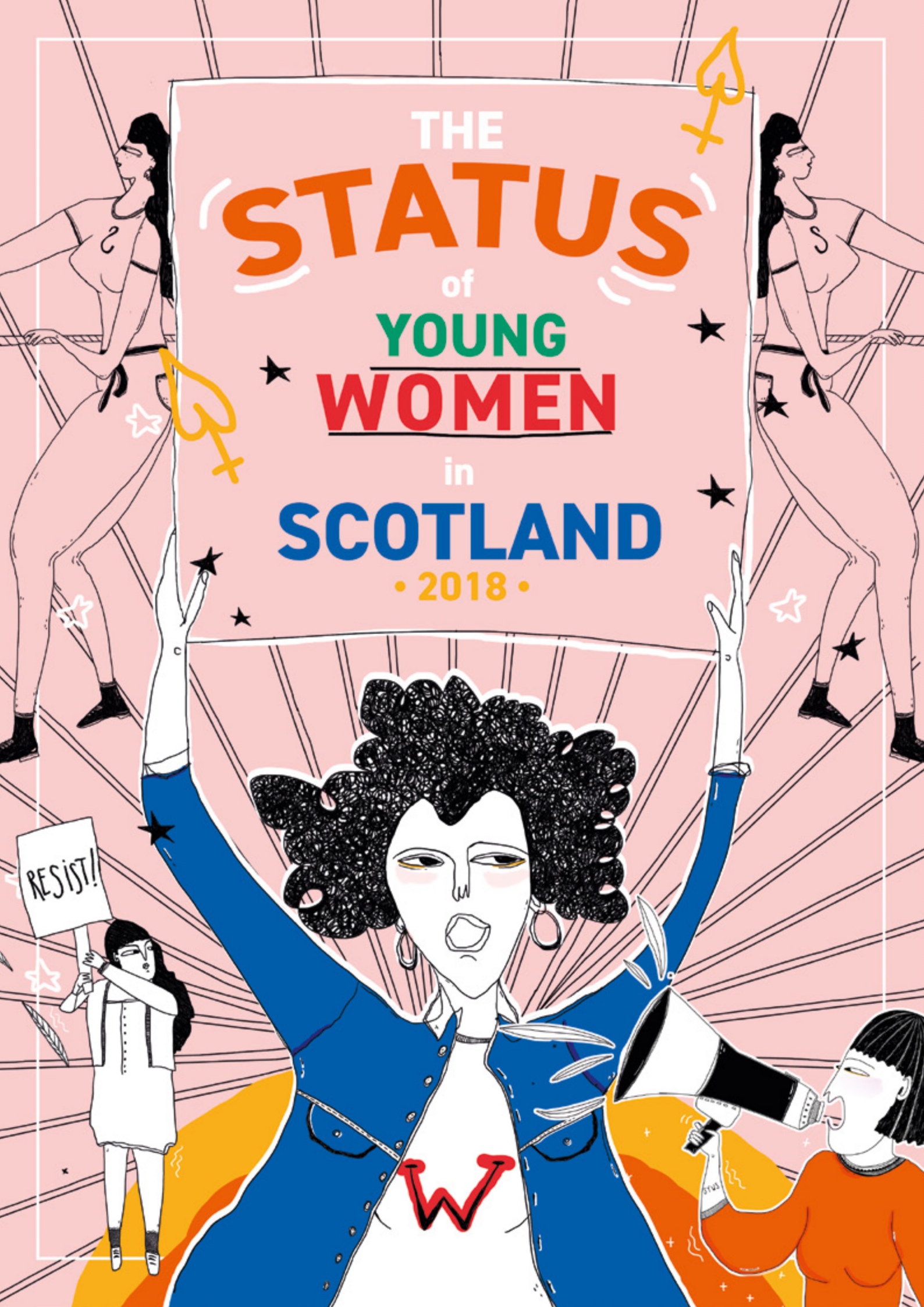


THE
STATUS
of
YOUNG
WOMEN
in
SCOTLAND
• 2018 •



Dedicated to the memory of Mary Smyth

Status of Young Women in Scotland 2018

Young women's political engagement, representation and activism in Scotland.

Produced by YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, please contact us at hello@ywcascotland.org

About Us

YWCA Scotland-The Young Women's Movement is a feminist organisation and part of a worldwide movement of women leading change. Our vision is a world where every woman can shape her own life journey and fulfill her potential, where the voices of women are heard, respected and celebrated.

Ypeople Group In 2017, Ypeople and YWCA Scotland – The Young Women's Movement merged under the same banner of Ypeople Group. Ypeople's aim is to support positive change in people's lives across Scotland. We provide support in many forms including: mentoring, housing advice, supported accommodation, counselling, and after school care.



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Foreword

On June 10 2018, thousands of women and girls marched in Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff and London to mark the 100th anniversary of the Act of Parliament that gave some women the right to vote. It was also a chance to remember the suffragettes and the legacy of their activism, without which women's suffrage may well not have happened when it did. 1918 was also the year that women were first allowed to stand to become a Member of Parliament.

It was an incredible day, full of energy and enthusiasm and a hunger for more progress. There has been an incredible shift in women's participation and engagement in politics over the last 100 years and particularly in the last 30 years. Before the late 1980s the number of women MPs had always been less than 5%.

But women are far from equally represented. The number of women MPs ever is only now surpassing the number of male MPs in the House of Commons now. That is incredible. In the Scottish Parliament 35% of MSPs are women, less than when the Parliament was created in 1999, and across Councils the number of women councillors is fewer still.

I want to see more women in politics, and particularly a more diverse range of women - from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled women, women from working class backgrounds and women of all ages. All political parties must play their part if we are to realise that aspiration.

But I am far from despondent. I have met and spoken to so many incredible women, young women and girls. They are my colleagues, members of other political parties young women using their activism to effect positive change in their communities, as well as to build their careers and support and care for their families and loved ones.

I am grateful to the Young Women's Movement for creating a platform for young women to have a say on these issues. The richness of women's experiences should be heard and when they are the understanding and decisions of our political institutions are all the better for it.



Nicola Sturgeon
First Minister of Scotland

Intro

We are very excited to share with you the third Status of Young Women in Scotland report. **YWCA Scotland – The Young Women’s Movement** commissioned this research in 2015 to explore the realities of gender inequality in Scotland. It quickly became one of our most important annual projects offering a snapshot into various issues affecting the lives of young women in Scotland.

In 2018 we decided to focus the report on providing a deeper insight into young women’s political engagement, representation, and activism. 2018 was special - we’ve celebrated 100 years of (some) women’s vote and the Year of Young People 2018 and we also saw amazing movements like #TimesUp and #MeToo led by women across the globe, but we wanted to make sure that voices of young women continue to be heard in the political arena in Scotland beyond 2018! We also ran our Young Women Lead programme for the second time this year. Borne out of the SYWS 2015 and 2016 research, where young women told us that leadership roles often seemed unattainable, this leadership programme run in partnership with the Scottish Parliament aims to strengthen participation and visibility of young women in a political space.

While we recognise and celebrate all these positive movements and actions, we also know that there is still a lot of work to be done, while women still make up only 35% of MSPs, 25% of local councillors, 16% of council leaders and 17% of MEPs (Engender - Sex and Power in Scotland 2017). Are we doing enough to make sure that young women of all diverse backgrounds feel represented politically? What are the barriers to political engagement and are we doing enough to address these in Scotland? What role does activism play in all of this?

The report explores all of these questions and more, and we included some key actions suggested by the participants that could help to ensure that our political system encourages and facilitates young women’s involvement. We hope that these will act as a talking point for a wider discussion on women in politics and that service providers and policy makers will use these key points to continue moving Scotland towards gender equality in all spheres of life. 2019 promises to be another year of big political changes in Scotland with Brexit and a second independence referendum on the horizon. We will continue to advocate for young

women's voices to be included in conversations about these life-changing political decisions.

This report was written, produced and designed by women aged 35 and under. The research was conducted by Edinburgh-based social researchers, The Lines Between, who interviewed 44 young women, and analysed responses from 443 young women who completed an in depth online survey. We recognise that gender is a spectrum, and this report does not attempt to be representative of every young woman in Scotland, but we worked hard to ensure that the report includes views of a diverse group of young women, including young women from rural and urban Scotland, young women with a disability or long-term condition, young women with experience of the care system, BAME young women, and LGBTQ young women. We were extremely inspired by the stories they shared with us, and they fuelled us on our quest for gender equality in Scotland. We hope they will do the same for you!



Patrycja Kupiec

Director YWCA Scotland-The Young Women's Movement

1

YOUNG WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS



1. YOUNG WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS

Status of Young Women in Scotland 2018 (SYWS 18) explores young women's relationship with politics and political issues. Themes include how young women feel about politics, what they are excited about and what encourages or discourages them to be involved. The research carried out for this report offered us a chance to explore what might take their engagement further, such as pursuing a career in politics.

OUR ONLINE SURVEY

We first wanted to get a sense of how engaged young women are in politics. By 'engaged' we mean how much they keep up to date with politics, how involved and interested they are in voting and party politics, but also wider political and social issues such as feminism, austerity and the environment, and what this actually means to them in their day to day lives.

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Our survey asked young women: '*How engaged do you feel in politics at the moment?*' Over two thirds (67%) of survey respondents said that they felt either very engaged (19%) or quite engaged (48%).

Our survey results were representative of current voting trends; young people are taking more of an interest in politics. More young people (64% of 18-24-year olds) voted in the 2016 EU Referendum than any general election since 1992¹.

¹Financial Times T (2017): Youth turnout at general election highest in 25 years, data shows (<https://www.ft.com/content/6734cdde-550b-11e7-9fed-c19e2700005f>)

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups gave us a chance to explore political engagement in more detail. Many of those we spoke to during the fieldwork said they were actively engaged in politics in some form, which may be expected given that they were keen to be involved in research about politics. As well as party politics young women expressed an interest in a wide range of wider political and social issues such as: feminism, austerity, homelessness, climate change, community development, LGBTQ issues, mental health awareness, disability rights, Brexit/Scottish Independence; youth work and participation, refugee and immigration issues and human rights.

The wide and rich discussions initiated by young women who came to the focus groups demonstrated the breadth and depth of the views and interests of young women in Scotland today, and how valuable their contribution to these issues are.

MEANS OF INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

The research explored how young women engage in politics and political issues. The survey asked specifically about voting, the use of social media, how much they discuss politics with family and friends, membership of political parties, and whether they consider themselves activists. These topics were then discussed further in the focus groups and the findings are summarised below.

+ VOTING

Most young women who took part in the research had engaged in politics by using their vote (where age permitted). Over two thirds (68%) of survey respondents voted in the Scottish Independence Referendum, 17% were too young to vote and 10% were not permitted to vote. Assuming those too young or not permitted had voted, that is potentially 95% of respondents who could and most likely would have voted. Response figures were similar for the EU Referendum vote (71%, 16% and 6% respectively).

When asked about voting, some of the younger research participants talked about lowering the voting age to 16 years and mentioned that a right to vote at 16 has the potential to encourage more political engagement in young people. They also highlighted wider positive impacts of lowering the voting age, suggesting that schools would then have a level

of responsibility to educate young people about how politics affects their lives. The comments below show how they felt and how they expressed the importance of encouraging more young people to take an interest in issues that impact them and by raising awareness that young people can make a difference:

'I feel like a lot of people our age would give an educated vote'

'The voting age should definitely be lowered but only if politics is taught more in schools'

'I think a lot of [young] people are underestimated, it's a big responsibility but I don't think it's anything young people couldn't cope with'

Young women also discussed recent political events such as Brexit, expressing frustration with the outcome and their exclusion from the vote. Some suggested that if 16-18-year olds had been able to vote the result could have been different:

'If our generation was able to vote, I feel like a lot of us would have voted for something different. A lot of older people who voted, it won't affect them. It's our future'

'It's infuriating when you're standing outside polling stations at age 15, 16 and 17 and you aren't able to vote even though you've campaigned every day for three months'

+ SOCIAL MEDIA²

Online political expression such as sharing, liking and tweeting about politics is relatively widespread



²Primarily Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat

³Avril Keating and Gabriella Melis: Social media and youth political engagement: Preaching to the converted or providing a new voice for youth?: (2017)

with young people in the UK. Many of the survey respondents talked of the positive aspects of social media because it has helped them to engage more in politics. For example, 90% of survey respondents agreed that social media makes it easier to get involved in campaigns and activism. In the focus groups, young women talked about the value of social media as a means to connect and discuss with like-minded people. They also highlighted its importance as a means to access information that may not otherwise be available:

'It's so great to read the words of someone who has a personal experience to share which either you relate to or maybe it gives you some insight or empathy, I also like that social media enables me to discover events that I would otherwise not know about'

'Twitter is a great place to keep up to date and see a wide range of views that I would not normally come into contact with'

The survey asked young women where they get their political information from. Over half of the respondents stated 'news websites and apps', and just over a third of those surveyed stated 'social media' as their main source of politically-based information. Other sources of information identified by participants included blogs, podcasts, and work colleagues.

+ POLITICS CHAT

One way that many of the research participants said they engage in politics and political issues is through discussions with friends and family. A large majority (85%) discuss politics with their friends, 80% with their families.

During the focus groups young women shared many examples of engaging in discussions with fellow pupils, students, colleagues and family members on a whole range of issues from Brexit to the pay gap, recognising the importance of discussion to develop their own ideas and views, but also using it as an opportunity to educate others:

'[We talk about] stuff about like Brexit and stuff about rights, women's rights especially, we're all very opinionated about that'

'There's people in our group who don't have the same views so we can still have discussions and we're not all like "yeah yeah, we feel the same" – but we have discussions and see other people's points of view. We don't change our mindset but it could affect how we see things'

+ PARTY AND LOCAL POLITICS

A small number of research participants were actively engaged in party politics; as members of political parties or elected local councillors. This activity has given them experiences of canvassing, campaigning, and party-political meetings:

'I was a party member but I had not done anything. Then the Independence Referendum was such an inspiring thing that I got involved. That was the first time I went door knocking, doing table stalls, canvassing, things like that'

'I'm a member of the Women for Independence National Committee and I do a lot of work on raising awareness about sexual harassment in schools and I'm on the cross-party group for violence against women and girls as well as some campaigning with Women's Aid'

+ ACTIVISM

Activism was a theme in the discussions around engagement in politics and political issues. Examples of marches and protests that participants had attended include: Make Poverty History, Anti-Trump, The Women's March, and Equal Lecturers across Scotland:

'The first time I went to protest something was the Women's March, being surrounded by such incredible people couldn't not give you some hope'

Some also talked about more arms-length approaches, such as using social media to create, discuss and engage in online discussions and campaigns:

'I set up an online Instagram account to raise awareness and create a safe space for girls to share their stories'

There was a considerable amount of discussion about activism during the fieldwork and this is explored more in chapter three.

MOTIVATIONS

During the focus groups young women discussed their motivations to engage in politics and political issues. They described being inspired by teachers, or friends and family, or their own research. Triggers for involvement ranged from important social issues to specific circumstances; big political events sparking their interest, as well as personal experiences that led them to want to influence change. These are discussed below.

+ BIG POLITICAL EVENTS

Many participants discussed how significant political events both in the UK and abroad, such as the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the election of Donald Trump and subsequent mid-term elections in the USA, being what sparked their interest in politics and activism. They had been inspired to campaign and for some even join a political party, and this interest had continued:

'I have been a member of the SNP since the referendum'

'I was a strong supporter of Scottish Independence and that was where I got my first insight into political activism'

'After the referendum I joined a political party'

'What really inspired me was the mid-terms in America, the voter turnout increased so much because everyone decided they're not going to let it happen again, [it's inspiring] when everyone is trying to make a difference'

+ PERSONAL INTERESTS, EXPERIENCES AND WIDER SOCIAL ISSUES

Some talked of their engagement being sparked by personal interest, experiences and wider social issues, for example women's health issues, or disability rights:

'My political engagement is not at all party politics based, it is much more my interest based. I am more involved through like third sector and through that kind of activism rather than engaging directly with the parties themselves'

Others spoke of being motivated by personal experiences, for example when someone they knew or loved had been affected by an issue they were motivated to do something about the situation to improve it. For some this was not necessarily recognised as being politically active, it was more that they were trying to change things for the better for others:

'I do modelling to try and encourage other women with disabilities to model'

'I've participated in the Special Olympics and I'm training for the next one, too'

+ HOME LIFE

In the survey, nearly two-thirds (62%) of participants said they are encouraged by their family and friends to be politically active. In the focus groups, young women talked about how their interest in politics and political issues had initially come from the home and growing up in a politically engaged family. They talked of how they had been encouraged by family members to take an interest in politics and taught the importance of using their voice for good:

'I have always been encouraged to take an interest in current affairs by my family and I will always use my vote'

'I learned from my mum and granny the importance of people power'



+ OPPORTUNITIES FROM WITHIN INSTITUTIONS

Institutions include for example, university, schools and youth groups. Some noted their engagement with politics started at school, for example through Modern Studies classes, discussions with friends (as mentioned above). A few had taken up opportunities for them to be involved in some form of political activity such as the Scottish Youth Parliament or more specific campaigning. A small number had also been involved in debating clubs.

Others described university as an opportunity to access groups and peers with similar interests, giving them the chance to explore their thoughts and opinions on important issues. For some, this was their first meaningful experience of such interaction and discussion.

There were references to supportive teachers, youth workers and colleagues acting as informal mentors, encouraging them to get involved in political issues. Participants highlighted the importance of mentors and the development of strong relationships to support them to not only initially engage in politics but to sustain that engagement and interest:

'I went to my first protest when I was 10, that was with my youth worker'

'It is so important to have allies who encourage you, especially when you are disabled'

'I learned so much from my direct-action group, it was all women which was refreshing and so much thought was put into making it accessible'

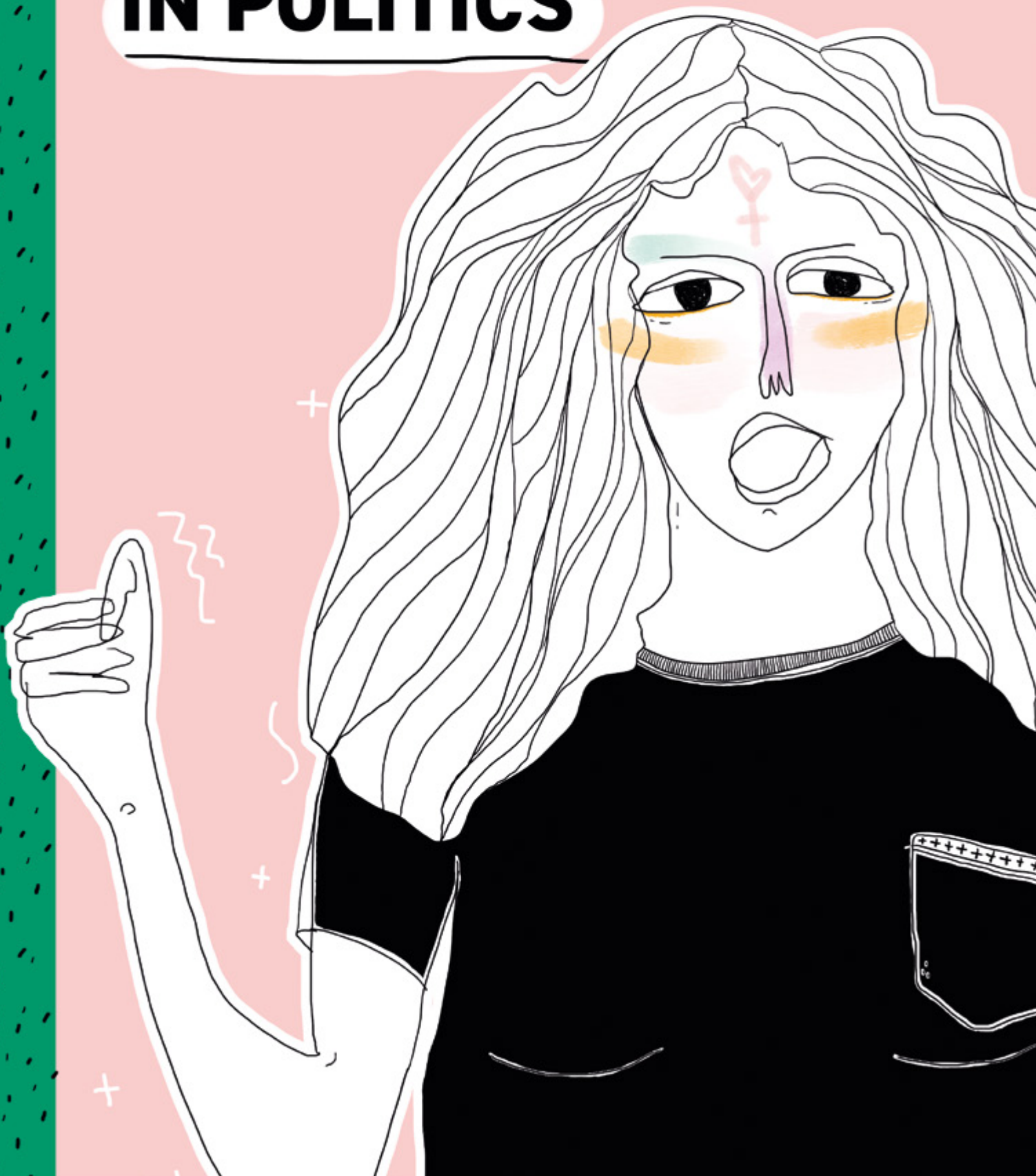
'When I was in high school we did a lot of work in the global community like a partnership with a school in South Africa'

'I had two really good youth workers who helped us explore different issues, both around the world and locally. So, I got involved there and never really stopped'

The varied responses from the young women involved in the research show just how engaged many are in politics today. It was encouraging to hear about the wide range of ways young women can and do engage and get involved in politics and the various opportunities they have had - at home, with their peers and from within the institutions they are involved with. Some research participants displayed impressive levels of engagement, motivation, and confidence in their ability to meaningfully participate and have their voices heard, this left us feeling inspired and hopeful for the future.

2

YOUNG WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS



2. YOUNG WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS

Beyond engagement and interest in politics, we also wanted to get a sense of how represented young women feel. We created opportunities to discuss representation both in relation to the visibility of women, but also in how far policies and practices reflect the views and experiences of young women today. This was explored in the survey and the fieldwork.

Nearly two-thirds (64%) of survey participants stated that they do not feel their voices and views are sufficiently represented in Scotland's politics and policies today.

The survey asked young women if they feel their voices and views are sufficiently represented in Scotland's politics and policies today; nearly two thirds (64%) stated that they are not. The response to this question during the fieldwork discussions was a resounding "No!"

This feeling of under-representation is understandable; in 2017, women were 52% of the population in Scotland yet our political institutions are far from representative of that figure. In Scotland, women make up only 35% of MSPs, 25% of local councillors, 16% of council leaders and 17% of MEPs⁴.

We gained useful insights into the importance of representation of young women for their engagement in politics. For some individuals this lack of representation is a catalyst to engage more in politics and activism, however for others it puts them off engaging at all.

Those we spoke to want to see more young women involved in politics at every level, from school debate teams through to public office. They want politicians to truly listen to them and reflect their views in policies. It was suggested that if young women felt heard, they would be inspired and more likely to participate and engage in politics:

⁴Engender (2017) Sex and Power in Scotland 2017

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‘If you see someone who looks like you in a position you are interested in you are far more likely to think of yourself as being able to achieve something similar’

‘I think more young women would engage if they saw their peers involved’

‘The political system looks from the outside unapproachable from the stance as a young person and doubly as a young woman... I think more young people in politics generally would help’

‘Young women need to be visible in positions of power’

Many of the focus group participants acknowledged that Scotland has achieved a lot in relation to women being represented at the highest levels of politics. For instance, they talked positively of having a woman First Minister and at one point (2017) all three political parties being led by women (Nicola Sturgeon, Ruth Davidson, and Kezia Dugdale). Having such positive role models meant some young women felt proud and inspired:

‘I think we’ve got it relatively good in Scotland and are well represented’

‘I think there are good role models across parties for young women in Scottish politics’

‘Having a female First Minister has been great, whether a young woman supports the party or not she can see that she will be welcomed’

‘Having such a strong First Minister has helped so many women across Scotland to have the confidence to become more politically active’

‘It’s seeing a lot of role models and seeing people doing similar things which inspired me to join the SNP at age 15’

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Despite this positivity, it was also acknowledged that political representation is not consistent, particularly within local politics. Participants recalled the lack of women on local election ballot papers, and how in reality there are still very few women visible in public office. Discussions often turned to the need for more visibility of women in all realms of politics and the media. Young women also suggested the lack of visibility and representation of women throughout the political system risks losing some of the benefits and positive impacts gained from having women leaders:

'It's seeing a lot of role models and seeing people doing similar things which inspired me to join the SNP at age 15'

'There are councils in Scotland with no female representation at all. One council has three men with the same name but there are no women. Pale, male and stale!'

'More young women at a local level!'

'Women need to be more visible in public office positions'

'More women need to participate at more levels of government and politics'

'There needs to be more women involved not only in politics but in the media, which has an important role in how politics is reflected back to people - I've experienced well-meaning and progressive men in the media totally failing to understand the relevance or interest to any reader the issues that may have major impacts on women'



One participant talked specifically of how some political movements, such as the Labour and Independence movements, are still very male-dominated:

'We need to call out movements that continue to be male dominated, the independence and Labour supporters are guilty of this and don't acknowledge that it's a problem'

Another participant highlighted that despite the positive impact of role models within political parties, women do not talk sufficiently of the barriers they have faced to get to where they are. They suggested that more needs to be done to acknowledge the barriers in order to be able to break them down:

'I'm proud that the Scottish government has so many female leaders, but I still think they do not sufficiently discuss the barriers they faced in order to ascend to these positions'

Linked to this, one participant felt that even if a politician is a woman, she may still be serving a party or working within the constraints of political institutions that do not focus on issues affecting women or young women in particular. This may limit her opportunities to represent or highlight issues affecting young women which perpetuate their feeling of being under-represented:

'When they go into the chamber [female politicians] are speaking about what they've been briefed on, so you won't feel represented because it doesn't matter to you, it isn't raw, it doesn't hit home'

Participants also feel that women's achievements are not visible enough. They argued that if women's successes are discussed and acknowledged more through education and in the media, political engagement and participation would seem more accessible. This would reinforce the belief that young women are able to instigate and achieve change:

'The achievements of young women in politics should be better shared, for example tackling period poverty, to encourage young people that their involvement can achieve amazing things'



'[There needs to be] more awareness of the impact [young women] can have and proof that their voices matter within society'

'There needs to be more examples of times where young women have made change, showing young everyday women from all walks of life with experience of making change or campaigning'

'Role models. It seems like an obvious one but having more representation, and equal representation of political figures alongside a push to teach children about women change-makers, radical, powerful people who paved the way for us and where we sit in the political sphere now'

'Relatable young female role models need to spear head the representation campaign'

+ YOUNG WOMEN ARE NOT A HOMOGENOUS GROUP

Another discussion theme was around the limited diversity in the representation of women and the need for more explicit recognition that women are not a homogenous group. Despite the increasing visibility of women in politics, there are still gaps in representation. For example, disabled people are underrepresented in local councils and across public boards, including Health Boards which can significantly impact their lives. This was reflected in our research, as participants suggested that across the political sphere there is a lack of young women in general and specific gaps in representation of those with disabilities, from minority ethnic backgrounds or from the working class. This contributes to a sense of not being heard, understood or represented sufficiently in politics and policies:

'There is better gender representation now but it's still seriously lacking in young women but also people of colour'

'As a young and disabled woman of colour I am not represented at all in politics in Scotland'

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‘We’re not a homogenous group... we all have different experiences, [Scottish female politicians] are all white and the majority in the Scottish parliament are over 30 with the exception of Kate Forbes, so it’s not representative of Scotland’

‘It’s not clear how policies impact different groups of people, [...] and if it’s not figure-headed by someone who looks and sounds like you, it’s easy to understand why people don’t feel policies are representing them or why they aren’t being reflected in the making of policies’

‘Social class is an issue, you tend to find people from upper and middle classes represented in politics but not working class’

‘Invite female, BAME, disabled, LGBTQ+ MSP’s, local councillors etc. in to show young people that politics are for everyone. Show them people who look like them, and it might open up the idea in their mind that they can do it too...’

‘Ethnic minority, disabled, working class identities must be targeted and olive branches must be extended to these communities’

‘[There should be] more representation from people that have a disability or people that use wheelchairs because they need to be aware of [the issues that face us]’

Again, this sense of under-representation is grounded in reality. In Scotland, only 1.5% (2 out of 129) MSPs are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, despite making up 3.7% of the Scottish population⁶. One fifth (26 out of 129) MSPs have been privately educated, compared with just 4% of the Scottish population. There is one openly disabled MSP, and with one in five members of the working-age population registered as disabled; a fully representative Scottish Parliament should have around 23 disabled MSPs⁷. However, 10 MSPs openly identify as LGBTQ (7% of

⁶Engender (2016): Equal Voice Equal Power: the case for gender quotas in Scotland

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Parliament) compared with 2.2% of the Scottish population, so while misrepresentation exists in some areas, it is achieved in others.⁸

TOKENISM

Linked to the issues around representation, during the focus groups, we discussed the idea of tokenism; this issue resonated strongly with young women engaged in political parties and campaigning activities. They shared experiences of feeling tokenised when asked to take part in debates, political events and conferences. There was a perception that often the reason they had been asked to attend, contribute or speak, was purely because they were a young woman or a young woman with another under-represented characteristic (e.g. young woman of colour, young disabled woman, young LGBTQ woman) and the organisation involved wanted to ensure they were viewed as being inclusive:

'Oh yeah, a lot of the time we're pushed to the front of photos for no other reason than we're the only young woman at the event'

During the discussions about young women's experiences of being the 'token young woman' participants voiced frustration that their contributions and views were only sought on issues about being a young woman, such as period poverty or domestic violence, rather than inputting on wider, more general topics such as Brexit or the economy:

'I've had the media ask me "what's it like to be a young woman in the media and what do your friends think about it?" when you are ready to talk about the economy or Brexit figures and they are like "Oh we don't need to hear about that, what do you think of voting at 16?" and you're like, please challenge me!'

'So, we might be asked to talk about something concerning like violence against women in schools or like period poverty but for broader things... general things that might benefit from different opinions.'

⁸BBC Bitesize (2017): Representation (www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/z2m8cj6/revision/6)

⁷Holyrood.com (2017): Where are all the disabled MSPs? www.holyrood.com/articles/comment/where-are-all-disabled-msps

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'I've had the media ask me "what's it like to be a young woman in the media and what do your friends think about it?" when you are ready to talk about the economy or Brexit figures and they are like "Oh we don't need to hear about that, what do you think of voting at 16?" and you're like, please challenge me!'

'There are so many young women who have done incredible things... [but] I feel like there is a huge lack of young women speaking about anything other than being a young woman'

'Anything to do with trans people, people of colour, they [the media] are like "here is our token diversity champion"'

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It is clear that the young women who took part in our research do not currently feel represented in Scottish politics or in processes of policy development. They feel frustrated and under-utilised, suggesting they have so much to offer if only they were listened to and taken seriously. Young women appreciate that Scotland is changing, and there is a certain level of diversity, however there is more to be done and a clear demand for more progress.

3

YOUNG WOMEN

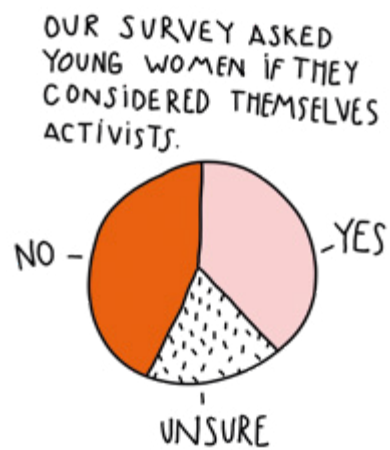
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ACTIVISM



3. YOUNG WOMEN AND ACTIVISM

The research explored thoughts and experiences in relation to activism. By activism, we mean taking part in a campaign to bring about political or social change. Our survey asked young women if they considered themselves activists. Views were broadly split; 39% said 'no', 37% said 'yes', and a quarter (24%) said they were unsure. Interestingly, almost half (44%) of those who said they do not consider themselves an activist, responded 'yes' to the question about whether they had contributed to an online campaign via social media (e.g. #MeToo or #Repealthe8th). This suggests a level of uncertainty around how activism is understood and perceived among young women.

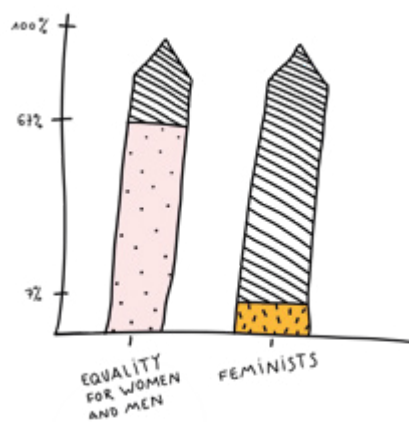


In focus groups we probed why so many young women said they are 'unsure' about being activists. The groups were also an opportunity to explore the views of those who had been involved in activities such as setting up an online campaign or attending a demonstration, but did not consider themselves an activist. We felt it was important to get to the root of why they did not identify as an activist.

+ THE NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS

There were parallels between the negative connotations of identifying as being a 'feminist' to those identifying as being an 'activist'; intrinsically linked to how the terms are viewed by others.

Research by the Fawcett Society found that over two thirds of people (67%) across the UK support equality for women and men, however, only 7% of people



identify as feminists⁹. The young women who participated in our research could relate with this notion, discussing times that they had been criticised for identifying as a feminist:

'I feel like the word feminism scares just about 99% of the boys in this school... they absolutely think it's a cult but it's not'

'But then there's people, like women, who are afraid to admit that they're a feminist, they're like- I'm not a feminist, I just want equal rights'

'Yeah, sometimes you'll say something and people will be like "oh feminism". It's always boys that make comments like that. Like "feminists do this" and "feminists do that" ... like "you're a feminazi"'

Some participants discussed the labelling of 'activist' as being undesirable for women, that if you call yourself an activist, much like if you call yourself a feminist, you run the risk of being labelled as 'mouthy, triggered easily, too sensitive and a leftie' and that perhaps you are someone 'who goes too far' or is 'extreme':

'For a while I felt embarrassed to [call myself an activist], because of that stigma and that having an opinion or wanting to do things with that opinion was wrong'

+ 'I DON'T DO ENOUGH TO BE CALLED AN ACTIVIST'

Some young women said they 'do activism' but would not go so far as describing themselves in these terms. They described different 'levels' of activism and perceptions of what is required or expected of you in order to justify calling yourself an activist. For example, some felt that in order to identify as an activist you need to be involved in specific groups or be totally devoted to a cause:

⁹The Fawcett Society (2016): We are a nation of hidden feminists <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/we-are-a-nation-of-hidden-feminists>

'I feel as though I talk and write about politics more than actually doing anything and I'm not involved in any specific activist groups so I'm not sure I can realistically call myself an activist'

'I'm politically active, I've been on marches, I sign petitions, I vote, I talk about politics, and I work for a campaigning charity, but I feel that the term activist implies a level of dedication that I'm not currently giving (e.g. being in a dedicated group, organising protests)'

'I do think I do things that would make me be considered an activist, but I think this is on too small a scale to be considered an activist'

'I am very aware of political issues but other than posting, sharing ideas, sharing media I don't campaign or work for an organisation that has influence over change. I will stand up for what I believe in and engage in debate. I have on occasion attended rallies and such, but it doesn't make up a large proportion of my life. I feel activists are people who are always engaged in positive change, doing, making or making their voices heard to a wide enough audience that it will promote a difference'



'I don't think I spend enough time on activities related to activism in order to say I am an activist'

'I guess I don't consider myself an activist, but I'm not sure why. My day job is very policy and activism focused, and I follow lots of social justice activism on social media, but I'm not actively part of any campaign, and I tend not to attend or take part in organised activism activities'

'I don't feel like I *do* enough to be considered an activist. I am very politically aware/engaged, partly because my job involved parliamentary monitoring and partly because I'm interested, but I feel like to be considered an activist I need to do something political in my spare time, like be part of a lobbying group (whereas all I do is retweet funny and despairing politics things)'

'I do too little to campaign to consider myself an activist'

'Feels like an activist is a full-time role'



The evolution of activism may go some way in explaining this disparity in how young women perceive it. For example, participants reflected on how activism has changed over recent decades, from generations previous who 'chained themselves to trees' to current times where contributing to online campaigns on your phone from the comfort of your sofa is classed as activism. They discussed the differences between The Civil Rights Movement of the sixties and seventies in comparison to the current Black Lives Matter movement and how activism has evolved in line with technology:

'Like the civil rights movement was loud but now if you look at the civil rights movement you can see it in Black Lives Matter which actually is still very loud, but it has brought itself from an online cause as well'

+ THE ACTIVISM HIERARCHY

Participants discussed experiences of 'one-upmanship' and 'competitiveness' in relation to activism. Some were reluctant to use the term 'activist' because they didn't feel worthy of it in comparison to what others are doing. For example, one participant suggested you are an activist from the moment you become a volunteer with Amnesty International; another said that despite canvassing and campaigning during the Brexit referendum, they were not considered an activist by their peers or colleagues. Sometimes such distinctions can be confusing.

'I think sometimes there's a ranking of how good of an activist you can be, how many nights you spend campaigning, how hard you're working... there's a hierarchy'

One participant also talked about the power structures within activism movements being off-putting:

'I think an awareness from activist groups that they can often, whether intentionally or not, mirror the power structures of establishments they are working against is key, because the same gatekeeping that occurs in politics occurs in activism and is similarly off-putting'

+ RECOGNISING ACTIVISM

It was interesting that many young women who stated they were not 'activists' went on to describe involvement in activity which may be considered activism, such as participation in campaigns (including online campaigns) or attending demonstrations.

I'm not an activist but...

'In my year two people tragically committed suicide, after that I started a petition to ask if they wanted mental health issues taught in the school and the whole year signed it and so we demanded it should be taught in SE (Social Education)'

'I'm not politically active however I do lots of volunteering around STEM, children's rights and youth participation'

'I'm busy trying to get more money spent on Myalgic Encephalomyelitis'

'I work with and volunteer with organisations that align with my values'

'I have signed petitions and joined in campaigns such as Amnesty's Write for Rights'

+ PROUD ACTIVISTS

Despite some young women's reluctance to identify as activists, we heard from some proud activists who felt neither ashamed nor unworthy. They described experience of campaigning for political parties and involvement in wider campaigns to impact on positive social change:

'I'm open and openly show and discuss my politics. I'm feminist, bisexual, vegan, anti-racist, LGBTQIA+ ally, pro-choice; anti-Brexit etc. I wear badges, tote bags etc. to openly show and perform my politics, as well as trying to discuss them with people at work, peers, and family. I also teach university level one students' sociology and try to bring many of these topics and issues to the tutorials to allow the young students to discuss them. I vote and read political news daily. I've also taken part in marches and demonstrations'

'I am not afraid to speak up about issues I care about, especially when I see something that I know is wrong. I believe it is important to show up physically to marches and other community events in order to support one another and share ideas. There are some exceptions, but I feel more often that to not be an activist in today's world is to be silent and apathetic towards the needs and problems of others'

'In my everyday life I actively seek to destroy the patriarchy and spread awareness as much as I can. Not only in terms of actively standing up for gender equality but also for racial equality, social justice and the recognition and support of trans men and women and others who self-identify. I suppose I would categorise myself as an activist because at every available opportunity I attempt to challenge the status quo and support change towards a more progressive and inclusive society'

“

Young women talked passionately of their motivations for being activists; they want to help others, to effect change and have a positive impact on the world:

'I feel I don't have a choice [about whether I am an activist] anymore because I am aware of the horrific reality of disadvantage'

'I feel that I need to actively voice my opinion/knowledge/experience in order to help others see a different viewpoint to drive toward seeing change for the better for everyone'

'I consider myself an activist because I care about issues that are important to me and other people, such as human rights, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights etc and I get involved in campaigns that are available'

'Because it's important to fight for what you believe in'

'I am a member of a political party and several NGOs, have worked in voluntary positions at a political party which have involved working on campaigns and direct action'

'As a child of an immigrant I feel like I've seen what barriers held back my mother and I try to make sure those barriers cease to exist in the future by whatever means (big or small) I can'

”

'I speak up about the issues that I care about and take steps like contacting my political representatives and asking them to enact change'

They talked about attending marches and protests such as Make Poverty History, Anti-Trump, and the Women's March:

'I moved to Glasgow from Manchester... and find that there are more women actively campaigning for change here'

'The first time I went to protest something was the Women's March, being surrounded by such incredible people couldn't not give you some hope'

Many have used social media to create, discuss and engage in online discussions and campaigns, while others have organised events:

'I set up an online Instagram account to raise awareness and create a safe space for girls to share their stories'

'I felt really powerful when I helped to organize this conference and bring almost 100 women together to talk about activism'

'I have taken part in some "obvious" activism i.e. attend marches, campaign during elections. But there is also subtle or more soft activism that can manifest in the conversations you have with others (have you ever argued for something or tried to convince someone to change their mind). Even voting is a form of activism as you are acting to bring about social or political change'

Other young women discussed campaigns they had started because of an issue that directly impacted them or someone they know:

'I'm running my own national campaign to make a treatment for Spinal Muscular Dystrophy available in the UK on the NHS'

'I started a petition and got my university to reform their policies about punishment for behaviour and made them take them - still not as seriously as academic misconduct- but a lot more seriously'

A small number of participants felt that everyone should be an activist, they argued that if there was greater awareness of the inequalities that exist in society, we all would be:

'I feel like it's something everyone should do, it should be a normal thing that everyone should do. We don't have a choice, we need to keep fighting'

'I don't call myself an activist because I believe everyone should be one and therefore it should be a pointless term, but alas we're not there yet!'

+ A NEED FOR MORE OPPORTUNITIES

A significant number of young women in both the survey and the fieldwork said they would be more involved in activism if they had more opportunities to do so:

'I want to be [more involved in activism],
I've just never found the opportunity'

'I sometimes feel, or maybe I'm just
personally not aware of, that there is a
slight lack of opportunities to be involved
in political issues for young women in my
area'

'Haven't had much chance for activism,
would like to get more into it however'

'I don't have enough opportunities'

'Although there is plenty of organisations and clubs in cities/places with higher populations of people, it's hard to find such things in smaller places – especially where I live (Scotland) where I live in Scotland isn't particularly small and I would consider it suburban, but there is little feminist spaces, let alone ones that are inclusive towards socially anxious people plus ones that are for young women. and I know that how difficult that could be for women from less inclusive places and countries where generally, feminism is considered radical and ridiculous. so inclusive online (and IRL [in real life]) spaces and groups, for women all over the world – from small and big countries, from rural areas, urban areas, suburban areas, as well as including POC and BAME people, women with disabilities (which aren't always visible!!), trans women and LGBTQ+ women, autistic women and women with ASD, women with mental health disorders/issues, ETC. social media opens up so many possibilities – really there's no excuse for not being inclusive! Intersectional feminism really needs to mean intersectional. 2018 (almost 2019) and it's really about time for that'

“

‘Improved accessibility and visible intersectionality – different causes working together. I don’t want to feel like I have to ‘pick a cause’ when I feel passionate about so many different areas. I want to focus my energy but also not feel like I am ignoring other things that are important to me. For example, LGBT activism is very important to me personally, but I also feel very strongly about disability rights and it’s difficult to feel like you could spread yourself thin enough to do anything about both (plus all the many other issues I feel strongly about)’

Some participants suggested that if young women were more comfortable identifying as an ‘activist’ this could ignite a feeling of collectivism and therefore help towards more young women campaigning together for a cause. They also discussed feeling more comfortable ‘doing activism’ if they were supported by their peers, or if they were part of a group:

‘Having a team is important, I’d campaign for change if I had people doing it with me’

‘We don’t shut each other down, we’re always respectful to each other’s opinion’

”

It is clear that many young women have passion and enthusiasm for a range of political and social issues. We were encouraged by the number of young women who were happy to talk proudly about their activism and how they campaign for positive change, it was also clear however that more needs to be done to allow young women to take ownership and pride of what they do, whatever the scale of their individual and collective activism.

4

WHAT'S PUTTING YOUNG WOMEN OFF POLITICS?



4. WHAT'S PUTTING YOUNG WOMEN OFF POLITICS?

To achieve equal representation in politics, more young women need to see the viability of running for office as a career option. In the last election, only twelve extra women MPs were elected, if this rate continues, it will take fifty years to achieve equal gender representation in parliament.¹⁰ The research explored factors that discourage young women from engaging further or having a career in politics. Responses from young women were varied but had some themes which are described in this chapter.

'Women, especially young women, are so routinely patronised and belittled no wonder they all want to stay out of public office'

When considering the importance of role models and the positive representation of women in politics as discussed in previous chapters, the fact that 75% of the women who stated they felt politically engaged then went on to say that they would not consider running for public office suggests that true representation may be out of reach.

Young women gave reasons for their discouragement from engaging with or having a career in politics. The issues raised fell into two main categories; external factors, such as the current political climate and inaccessibility of the political system; and online judgement and abuse. They also discussed factors relating to personal circumstances, such as their employment, location, confidence, and the lack of awareness of opportunities.

Our survey asked if young women had ever considered running for public office (e.g. as a local councillor, an MSP or MP) or whether it is something they would like to do in the future. Only 25% said yes.

¹⁰5050 Parliament (2018): Ask an inspirational woman to stand for Parliament! (5050parliament.co.uk/askhertostand/)

¹¹Financial Times (2017): Young voters reshape UK's political landscape (<https://www.ft.com/content/08bc419c-4d2c-11e7-919a-1e14ce4af89b>)



EXTERNAL FACTORS

+ THE CURRENT POLITICAL CLIMATE

Many young women talked about the current political climate. They suggested that a prevailing atmosphere of negativity and divisiveness undermines their desire to engage in politics and wider political issues. Other research has shown that young people were more than twice as likely to vote Remain rather than Leave in 2016's EU referendum (71 per cent to 29 per cent), leading to a feeling of being increasingly disenfranchised by the current situation around Brexit.¹¹ Participants in this research supported this finding, some talked of feeling disheartened, disillusioned, powerless and disenfranchised from our political system, thus avoiding engaging in politics altogether:

'Talking about politics has almost become taboo because it's so depressing it's easier not to talk about it'

'It hasn't been easy to be politically active since those [Independence Referendum and Brexit] events as it can feel as though you have been defeated and let down by the world. It dims your perspective of the world as a whole'

'After we got the 'no' vote I was disheartened and lost total faith in our institutions and our media'

'I feel that after the 'yes' campaign and Brexit the energy and fight depreciated'

'I don't think I can make much change as just one young woman and don't bother going to rallies or protests'
'It's very easy to get burned out when looking at women's issues because the same problems keep persisting. I'll be honest, marching isn't going to stop men raping'

Linked to this, they suggested confidence in information is crucial when it comes to engaging in politics and political issues. With the abundance of 'fake news' and the blatant discrediting of sources of information from across the media, it can be a confusing landscape to navigate:



¹¹Financial Times (2017). Young voters reshape UK's political landscape (<https://www.ft.com/content/08bc419c-4d2c-11e7-919a-1e14ce4af89b>)

'I find it difficult to know what to trust, most people write with bias'

+ 'THE SYSTEM IS NOT DESIGNED FOR WOMEN'

Participants identified structural issues within the current political system, believing it is not designed with women in mind. Some talked of old-fashioned political institutions which do not accommodate women. Examples include a lack of maternity leave available for local councillors and the demands of the roles in public office do not fit well with the societal expectations on women or with having a family. Others suggested the low salaries for local councillors make it difficult for young women to consider a career in politics:

'The more I became engaged in it the more hopeless I felt, I couldn't make the changes I wanted to see because of political structures, money and power'

'Structural issues are at the heart of it. Lack of maternity leave, lack of financial ability to run [for office]'

'I have no desire to attempt to make a living and to be honest and transformative where those two goals aren't compatible'

'If you want to go into politics at the moment you have to pick between [having a] family or a job'

'If you do get elected it's not good for having a family life, its bad hours and in councils you don't get maternity leave'

“

‘If you have a family to feed and rent to pay, living as a councillor... it is amazing that you have stood but is it sustainable? Have you got to travel to where the main council building is?’

‘Even just the way parliament is run, Scottish parliament is a bit better, they have holidays that run with the school holidays and they have a crèche whereas Westminster runs into the night’

‘On average it cost a person eleven thousand pounds to run for a seat in the last general election... if the structures aren't in place to encourage diversity then how can you ever truly get it’

‘We are never going to get gender balanced political representation until councillors have a doable role and are paid well’

‘So far I've found activism exhausting, you're fighting for your life against a system that isn't designed to hear your voice’

‘The more I became engaged in it the more hopeless I felt, I couldn't make the changes I wanted to see because of political structures, money and power’

Participants highlighted the societal expectations often put on women having an impact on how much they can engage in politics and political activity. For example, participants discussed the greater role that women often play in relation to childcare and caring for relatives and the impact this has on how much they can engage:

‘Women's unpaid care work is a major barrier because there is no time for them to do anything else a lot of the time’

‘It's not just about having time after work but fitting it around the rest of your life’

”

+ MISOGYNY AND SEXISM

Compounding the sense that the system is not designed for women, those with direct experience of operating within a political setting, be that through their work as a local councillor, or as a member of a political party, described experiences linked to sexism and misogyny. For example, some shared their experiences of the differences in the expectations on their male counterparts and how difficult it can be to get your voice heard:

'... I was judged constantly on my looks, my hobbies, my relationships and ex-boyfriends, who I worked for and 'how' I got there. It was rare that my work ethic, degree from university, own opinions or ambitions were discussed and I felt like I had to constantly stand up for myself...'

'I have just finished running as a by-election candidate and my experiences really opened my eyes being a young woman who was putting herself out there. I was judged constantly on my looks, my hobbies, my relationships and ex-boyfriends, who I worked for and 'how' I got there. It was rare that my work ethic, degree from university, own opinions or ambitions were discussed and I felt like I had to constantly stand up for myself. I was asked my opinions on abortion, the #metoo movement etc when I was a local candidate. I felt extreme pressure on how I looked and how I presented myself and my mental health struggled'

'When you get there it's so hard to get your voice listened to by men who won't take you seriously, sexism is everywhere'

“

‘Because I am a young woman, other councillors will look past me, not engage with me, and not talk to me’

‘I have to walk past the sea of old white men to get to my office. There are five portraits of women and about one hundred of men’

‘The other thing is that I have got pink hair. I do adjust accordingly. I will dress more smartly because I don’t want people to judge me and not take me seriously. I know that once I get the work done, and start working with people, they will see that I am really good at my job. I know people will then take me seriously. Sometimes, it is quite useful to be underestimated because then I can prove them wrong’

‘Due to it being dominated by men who tend to be very opinionated and confident in their knowledge and opinions, it can feel intimidating to voice my own opinion. There is a very noticeable difference when women are involved, because I feel they listen more and ask questions in a more open ended way that allows for an uncertain answer, whereas I feel like men tend to show off their knowledge and can make you feel silly if you’re not as equipped as them to quote from Marx or something!’

”

These direct experiences were supported by views from participants who reflected on the clear differences between how men and women politicians are often treated by the general public, how women are scrutinised more heavily and how they have to work harder to be taken seriously:

'Women [in politics] are held to a higher standard... there have been so many crap men out there and no one cares but if you are a crap woman it's even worse'

'When guys do something stupid it's not a big deal but when it's a woman it's like "she's messed up here and she looks like this and acts like this and she has done this to her family" everything is scrutinised, not just the one thing you've messed up on'

+ AGEISM

Young women with experience of operating within the political system felt that because they are young, there had been occasions when they felt they were not taken seriously or had been made to feel they have insufficient experience to contribute meaningfully.

'When I was younger I went to council meetings but I never felt listened to, I believe this was because of my age, sometimes people still treat me like I have no life experience'

'I have been in meetings with quite senior people and someone said to me, I said something and they were like, "you do know that in the real world, that's not how it works"'

“
‘I’m only 17 and it’s hard to get my opinions heard, age is definitely a restrictive barrier’

‘Barriers are older people not opening doors to younger people, creating elite circles’

Young women also discussed the generational differences and the impact of being labelled as a ‘millennial’ and stereotyped when in discussions with those from older generations:

‘I consider barriers to be the misunderstanding and negative perception that older generations place upon those considered millennials’

In addition to gender and age, young women talked of the additional barriers they face when they have another ‘identity’, stating that not only do they face discrimination due to being a [young] woman, but additional barriers exist as a result of being, for example, disabled, from a working-class background, or a woman of colour or minority nationality¹².

+ ABLEISM

Some young women discussed their disability and wider attitudes towards disability as being a barrier to engaging in politics, most notably participating in political activities.

Women with physical mobility issues for example, told us they had been unable to participate in marches, rallies or canvassing because they were unable to stand for long periods of time or the routes were inaccessible for their mobility devices:

‘There are also additional barriers for disabled women, for women of colour. There is only one woman of colour in [my council] and she wears a hijab as well. She was running for a leadership position and she received really derogatory comments from her own party implying that she would get a sympathy vote. These things do exist. Biases do exist’

¹²Also known as ‘Intersectionality’

'There is an issue within political parties because the most common thing I'm asked to do is go round the doors and this isn't accessible for me'

'Many places have physical barriers to being included if you are disabled... often people overlook these and don't expect you to complain or need adjustments...'

'We need a big attitude change, I was horrifically offended at the way disabled people and people with support needs like me are talked about in parliament'

'I have been involved in feminist activism for around 15 years, I have campaigned in a variety of formats for a number of years, I do a lot of my activism online as I am disabled and attending rallies can be difficult for me'

'I would like to be more involved in other activism projects, poverty, no borders etc but find many places have physical barriers to being included if you are disabled which is a challenge'

+ CLASSISM

Discussions about class focused on how the middle-classes often dominate the political system due to their privileged background, including their education, their subsequent higher incomes and access to more free time to engage:

'Women from working class backgrounds without exposure to politics or the social/cultural capital to engage in politics can find it to be an environment they would rather avoid'



'People who aren't from privileged white private school backgrounds have had other shit to deal with and maybe they haven't had the time to go and learn how to be a proper debater and also maybe those opportunities weren't there when they were growing up, we need to give people those opportunities to see if they like it and want to do it'

'It's mainly private educated people that go into politics. We're sitting here in a [state] school and we can't really become politicians because of our upbringing and our education'

'I often found I could not attend political events because I was working at the weekend, I think there's definitely an element of working-class voices being underrepresented in movements because of scheduling on the assumption that no one works evenings or weekends because organisers are often middle class'

'Many activists come from middle class backgrounds and income is a massive barrier'



Political journey

We spoke to a young woman who shared her experiences as a local councillor for Glasgow City Council. The conversation goes some way in demonstrating the extent to which the system has to change in order to make it an attractive and then sustainable career option for women.

‘Another thing is that in Glasgow’s City Chambers we are having this ongoing and, absolutely ridiculous, battle about sanitary bins in the toilets...If men needed bins in the toilets this would have been sorted last year’

‘The other thing is the structure of this and why I wouldn’t necessarily recommend it. Being a councillor, you are supposed to work part time and you are only paid part time... So, I am holding to account, in theory, people who are making ten times my wage. I am on the board that covers the integration of health and social care. So, I have people round the table with me who are the Chief Doctor and the Chief Psychiatrist and Chief Medical whatever and they will be getting mega-bucks and there is me on £17k’

‘Then it is just the fact of how broken local government is. I would be a really good councillor to one of the six areas that I am supposed to be representing. I would be at everything, I would be able to have pretty much weekly meetings with the school, I would be able to support all the community groups, I would be able to deal with all the casework, and I would be really well known. That is the scale at which this job would actually work’

‘[it’s about] Making a councillor a role worth wanting and doable. I am lucky that most of the time my caring commitment is not a big thing. It is like a day a week, but if that increased, or if there is a crisis, that is a big problem. One of my colleagues is off with a family crisis at the moment. There is no maternity leave. All these things that do not work because the system is not designed for women. We need more support. In Glasgow we get a fifth of an admin person for support’

+ XENOPHOBIA

A small number of women highlighted the inaccessibility of politics for those women who were not born in Scotland, stating how they face barriers as a result of their language, and discrimination based on misconceptions and prejudices about their countries of origin:

'Politics is inaccessible in Scotland, I feel like you have to have grown up here to understand, paired with the fact that there are not many opportunities for female migrants to get involved with the political discussion. Language is also a factor, we face discrimination based on misconceptions and prejudices about our countries'

'I feel my nationality stops me from being involved in more ways in Scotland'

+ THE FEAR OF ONLINE JUDGMENT AND ABUSE

While the benefits of social media were widely recognised, most participants also talked of the negative aspects associated with its use. Many participants had used social media as a means of engaging in politics online, however a range of reasons were given for why they were cautious in doing so, and why some did not engage in politics through social media at all. Reasons included fear of judgement, fear of abuse from trolls, and fear of being reprimanded and pigeonholed for the opinions they shared:

According to a study by Amnesty International and Element AI, on average, women politicians and journalists of colour receive 'problematic messages' every 30 seconds.

'I've felt fearful about being too visible online due to fear of threats'

'I would like to be more vocal about political opinions but I am fearful of online abuse'

'What is holding me back is fear of judgement... I would never post anything on Facebook'

'It is too easy for trolls and others to attack you for your personal views, it's not worthwhile'

'I feel worried about being 'called out' for retweeting the wrong person or not articulating myself well and being misunderstood'

'I feel like sometimes sharing my political views so openly would pigeonhole me on particular issues, or invite criticism for my way of life'

This fear of online abuse was largely in response to young women witnessing the abuse faced by women politicians, such as Labour MP Diane Abbott, and women who speak up against the system. This fear is justified, women politicians and journalists of colour in the UK are disproportionately targeted for online abuse – according to a study by Amnesty International and Element AI on average, women politicians and journalists of colour receive 'problematic messages' every 30 seconds¹³:

'The trolling that female politicians receive is atrocious, it doesn't feel safe'

'They always say the same things: get in the kitchen or you're fat. So, they attack your appearance and weight. Once I was told I had fanatic eyes, which I quite enjoyed'

¹³Amnesty International: Twitter study reveals shocking scale of online abuse against women (www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/crowdsourced-twitter-study-reveals-shocking-scale-of-online-abuse-against-women/)

“

‘There needs to be a systematic overhaul in the way the media treats women in the public eye, this has been one of the major things that has put me off being more politically active’

‘We need to change the way we talk about female politicians, clamp down on online hatred’

The same Amnesty International study found that online abuse affects BAME women MPs more than their white counterparts. The BAME MPs in the study received almost half (41%) of the abusive tweets, despite there being almost eight times as many white MPs in the study. Out of the top five most abused women MPs three are Labour with one SNP and one Conservative¹⁴:

‘For me I wouldn’t run for office because I would be terrified of the hate you would get online and also being a woman of colour, a Muslim, [you are] more of a target’

Some described the divisiveness between women and how this puts them off contributing to discussions:

‘It’s other women and non-binary people’s judgments I fear the most. I want to be respected and free to be myself but have heard women speak badly about each other, which makes me want to censor myself or avoid saying something that will put me in a box or give me a label I can’t shake off even if I later change my mind’

¹⁴Amnesty International: Online violence against women MSPs (www.amnesty.org.uk/online-violence-women-mps)

”

PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Additional reasons why young women involved in our research did not engage more in politics or had considered politics for a career were due to their personal circumstances such as their employment or where they lived. A small number of young women also talked about their lack of confidence about engaging in politics, or a lack of awareness on where to start or how they might contribute. The sections below summarise the main points discussed.

+EMPLOYMENT RESTRICTIONS

A number of respondents said they were not active politically in their spare time or online because of their work and a fear of being reprimanded by managers or colleagues, based on their political views. A few mentioned that they had been specifically asked to refrain from sharing their political views online by their employer:

'Due to my job in the NHS I am not allowed to publicly share my political views online'

'Due to the occupation I am going into activism isn't deemed as appropriate or professional and I don't want my career to be affected by this'

'Due to my job I am unable to be too politically active or share political opinions on social media'

'I would like to be more politically active but feel it is discouraged as I work for two local authorities and there is a real sense of fear that you will be reprimanded'

'I often worry about tweets or political stances and how these differ from those in my workplace and if seen, how they may impact me'

Some also felt that having a job meant there was less time to actively engage in politics outside of working hours:

'After starting full time employment, I have less time to focus on the activities like I used to take part in in university; it's also been more difficult to find opportunities'

+ LOCATION

Young women from rural areas discussed the barriers to engaging in politics linked to where they live. They talked of limited opportunities to get involved in political activity, such as theme-based groups, protests and campaigns, compared to what is available in the bigger towns and cities, particularly in the Central Belt. Their rural location often means they are rarely able to attend events. This was particularly the case for younger participants with limited access to transport:

'I live in Stirling and there is not a lot of political activity taking place here'

'Rural areas are often cut off from the urban political scene. Events often happen where there are more people and it's not cheap or easy to travel there especially when you live on an island and have to work for a week just to cover the cost of leaving the island'

'I feel like because we're a rural community we are dislocated, away from it all, in Glasgow there are protests and there's nothing like that here'

'In Highland Youth Voice (young people's political platform) it's quite hard to get stuff done because we are so rural and people live in different villages. In Nairn they can meet any time they want but we have to think about transport. We can't even meet after school because of the buses'

+ LACK OF CONFIDENCE

Some participants highlighted a general feeling of inadequacy and lack of self-belief stopping them from engaging in politics. Some young women felt they didn't have the knowledge or experience to feel qualified to meaningfully engage in political discussion or activity. This was often linked to limited trust in the information available to them and having a general lack of confidence in their own skills and abilities:

'I do not have a platform on which I feel comfortable speaking out'

'I'm not politically active because I don't have much knowledge about what's going on at the moment'

'I think being publicly active requires a person to know everything there is to know about their topic and since I don't feel I have this quality I do not take part'

'I felt ill informed and lacked the confidence to speak up for fear of seeming stupid'

One young woman talked about the lack of 'safe spaces' for women to discuss and engage in politics, particularly those who may lack the confidence to speak out in front of large or potentially hostile groups:

'I do not have a platform on which I feel comfortable speaking out'



One participant reflected on the damaging impact of blaming individuals for a lack of confidence:

'I think the real danger is making it an individual problem. It does frustrate me when people just talk about confidence, women need to have more confidence, rather than acknowledging this is a societal issue and that the patriarchy makes women doubt themselves, makes them compete against other women, makes them unable to shout about what they are good at. We are raised not to do these things. This is not about individual women not having the confidence, it is about women being raised in this toxic context. We are at a massive disadvantage from the start'

Such feelings of inadequacy and a lack of self-belief are commonly acknowledged as issues for women of all ages, and not just in relation to politics. For example, Columbia University carried out a study which discovered that men tend to overestimate their abilities by around 30%, compared with women who routinely underestimate their abilities. This has been dubbed as 'the confidence gap' and is also thought to contribute to the pay gap and the lack of women in leadership positions¹⁵:

'Reassurance, confidence building – repeatedly being told that you are good enough, men with fewer qualifications will be throwing their hat in the ring – and your hat is much bigger, prettier, and has more feathers'

+ MENTAL HEALTH

A small number of young women mentioned their struggles with anxiety preventing them from attending groups where they would have to interact with new people or attend marches with large crowds of people:

'Anxiety stops me from coming to events and you don't know how inclusive things are going to be and sometimes feel as if I don't have enough knowledge on things compared to others'



¹⁵BBC (2017): 100 Women: Katty Kay on how 'the confidence gap' holds women back (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-41444682>)

'I also suffer from anxiety so putting myself out more publicly is scary, considering female politicians and high-profile activists are under such a huge amount of scrutiny from the media – not just on what they say but on what they look like, their age, how many children they have, their marital status, etc... It has taken a while for my confidence to grow to a level where I am comfortable speaking out on some issues online, but I am scared of my opinions going viral or getting picked up by the media and lots of right-wing and anti-feminist men (or women) attacking me online.'

+ LACK OF AWARENESS

Young women discussed their lack of awareness about where to start looking for opportunities to engage in politics.

'I don't know where to find information on politics. I see things on social media and don't understand what role I play or how to pull together a coherent understanding of what's happening'

'I just don't know where to start or how my skills would be useful'

'I don't know how to get involved in politics and don't see how my opinion will make a difference'

'Unsure of what activities I could get involved...'

'I don't know a lot about politics as I have never actually been taught about it and my family aren't politically up to date really. Although I would like to be more politically educated'

'Currently I think there isn't a clear message in politics and I find it hard to follow. I have no party that I have a particular connection with anymore as I don't think anyone know what is going on!'

“

'I don't really know what's out there and I don't feel like I'm knowledgeable to put myself out there'

'Barriers are not knowing what's out there to join to be active, if anything'

+ LACK OF TRUST IN THE MEDIA

Some participants also commented on the lack of trust in online sources about political issues in relation to how they engage in politics and political issues. This included concerns over 'fake news' and media bias:

'...[social media] is a great platform to target younger people...but I feel like this also has its disadvantages in terms of false information and fake news...'

'I see issues I want to get involved in and do so when I can, for example showing my support for the Pride march in Inverness. However I feel there is a lack of credible information around. I only want to make a stand when I have enough relevant information and know what I'm standing up for in the example of the Scottish referendum. I felt there was too much false information and it was a contentious subject to deal with'

'I find it difficult to trust that I have found the truth in the majority of article etc. I see online and in social media/papers since most people write with bias (or in the case of social media) without looking further at the facts behind the scary headline. This makes it hard for me to form an opinion as I'm unsure of the facts and feel that almost all of the political parties have major flaws meaning I've never been able to fully get behind any of them enough to campaign'

”

This chapter has highlighted the wide range of significant barriers, perceived or otherwise, that young women face when wanting to engage in politics. There is much that needs to be done to help young women overcome some of these barriers and these are discussed further in the next chapter.

5

WHAT NEEDS

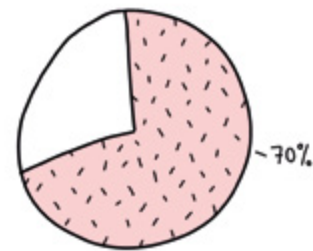
TO CHANGE?



5. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

We asked for views about what needs to change to make young women want to get more involved in politics. Participants talked about the need for more opportunities to engage, better education about politics at a younger age, and greater representation of women.

THEY WOULD LIKE MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS



MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE

'I'm an activist, I always want to drive what I'm passionate about forward, since I've had more opportunities to be engaged, I've been more enthusiastic'

Over two thirds (70%) of survey respondents said they would like more opportunities to engage in politics. This finding was also reflected in the focus groups and interviews where young women talked about the need for more opportunities for young women to get involved in politics. Young women discussed the opportunities they would like to see available to them.

+ OPPORTUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

'We didn't do any politics at all at school, we didn't even talk about politics at school, that needs to change'

Opportunities were often mentioned in relation to education. Young women talked of the lack of education on politics, and the subsequent lack of opportunities to get involved in meaningful discussions about social and political issues at school; for some of the young women in our focus groups in schools, their involvement in the research was the first time they had had the opportunity to openly discuss feminism and some of the wider issues they are interested in. They called for politics and wider political and social issues to be taught in schools from a much younger age:

“

‘I only became more aware of politics when I started uni, they talk about social issues all the time in class... poverty and mental health issues, I’ve got more awareness now than I ever did, I wish I’d known about it when I was younger’

‘Opportunity for participation within politics and activism [needs] to start much earlier so that young people feel empowered and engaged and confident in their own knowledge and capability by the time they reach voting age’

‘I think there needs to be more in school for people who aren’t particularly interested in social sciences to still be able to feel they know enough about politics to take part.’

‘We need to teach younger kids [about politics], education is the root cause of everything, so if we educate people about politics and we remove the stigma from it then so many more people will feel educated enough to vote and have a voice and it will be more representative of the population’

‘I only became more aware of politics when I started uni, they talk about social issues all the time in class... poverty and mental health issues, I’ve got more awareness now than I ever did, I wish I’d known about it when I was younger’

‘Obviously in some elections you can vote at 16, and people are like you need to vote to get your voice heard, but no one actually knows what you’re voting for because no one understands, we don’t learn that in school, it’s kind of boring but we should at least have a basis of knowledge about how the politics in our country works so when it comes to voting we can make our own decisions, like educated decisions’

”

'We need more opportunities at a young age, way before high school'

'Before this year [5th year] I had no opportunities at all from school'

'Having more discussions in schools and start it from an earlier age, talk about role models who are female and politically active. Look at accomplishments, give women opportunities, let them get involved and don't be scared of being "too vocal"'

'Start from a young age and level we should be introducing topics and politics into school activities and the Curriculum'

'Politics should be taught at a level where the loftier ideas are shown to have real community impact. It seems intimidating but how the big ideas operate in small places is the fabric of our citizenship as women, femmes and queers. Encouraging conversation and promoting listening skills from a young age is very important'

'I know it's really difficult for teachers to express or talk about political things because they aren't supposed to be doing that, but we really need to inform young people about what is actually happening... I spoke to someone in the year below me the other day and they didn't even know what Brexit was, I was completely shocked'



Young women suggested there is an over-reliance on Modern Studies to be the only source of political information for young people, particularly since it is not a compulsory subject. Their Modern Studies classes were often the only political education that the young women had been a part of in their high schools:

'Modern studies is the only place we've learned about politics in school, the only other option is higher politics, but you have to leave the school to take that'

'We're only taught about politics in modern studies'

'I'm taking national 5 [modern studies] this year. I knew a bit before but it's only now I'm learning about the distinctions between the House of Commons, House of Lords, different voting systems and things like that. Before that it was so unclear, especially in primary school I feel like that's a foundation that hasn't been set'

'Our modern studies class was really small and there wasn't an emphasis on debating whatsoever'

'If you study modern studies specifically then you will be learning a lot but otherwise I don't think we actually learn very much about politics'



A need for equality of opportunity in education between state schools and private schools was discussed. For example, one participant described her experience of presenting a workshop at a private school and feeling like the pupils were already very informed on the subject, this was very different from her experiences of giving the same workshop at a state school.

Young women called for more opportunities to be involved in debating in schools, as well as learning how to formulate arguments and defend opinions – key skills needed to be successful in politics. They feel that those educated in private

schools have an important advantage as a result of being exposed to considerably more opportunities to develop

‘Our modern studies class was really small and there wasn’t an emphasis on debating whatsoever’

these skills. This could explain why the proportion of politicians who have been privately educated is five times that of the proportion of the population who have attended public private schools i.e. 20% of MSPs elected to Holyrood in 2016 were privately educated, while only 4.1% of children in Scotland attended private schools in 2017¹⁶:

‘There needs to be a focus on debating, especially in state schools because I find, when I worked in Westminster, I was in a minority coming from a state school and I have never felt more out of my depth. They were all from private schools and so eloquent, what they had, which I didn’t, was the opportunity to debate. It was normal for them because they’d been doing it for 10 or 15 years already, even though I studied politics at university I’d never practiced nearly to that level’

It was felt that if girls and young women were encouraged to make change from a younger age, more young women would be involved, and peer representation should increase.

¹⁶Both statistics taken from reports in www.heraldsotland.com



+ OPPORTUNITIES AND OUTREACH THROUGH OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Young women stressed the need for better outreach, to connect young women with existing opportunities:

Outreach. There needs to be more effort in connecting young women to the fantastic opportunities there are out there to develop their political side, and to have safe spaces constantly. I think there are resources out there which are immediately evident to women who are politically active on social media or connected already to some of these organisations, but I think there are also important voices which are not being heard because those women don't even know these opportunities exist, and often this has to do with the fact that they are too worried with the stress of succeeding in life. However, opportunities like this can help us develop the skills and confidence we need for those worries to be overcome. So, in all, I would say there needs to be a bigger effort to make us aware that there are opportunities out there for us!

+ INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE EVENTS AND SAFE SPACES

Young women called for the need for more safe and accessible spaces to engage in politics:

'Events that are accessible, you don't need to know everything to go and understand what is being talked about... More opportunities to learn about politics better teaching and discussion in school'



'There needs to be more opportunities to get involved that don't involve sitting around listening to middle aged white dudes talking about themselves and using politics jargon like "nuance", "panacea" and "narratives" For that to happen there needs to be diversity, but how do you start it without entering into these spaces?'

'Accessibility needs to improve... physically of venues but also inclusion of wider society. Recognition that different people have different needs but all should be allowed to take part'

'Politics needs to give opportunities to young people, so it seems like a sector that isn't exclusive to older folk'

Linked to the two last points on outreach and safe spaces, after our focus groups at UPMO and Perth High School the youth workers and teachers took note of how much the young women appreciated the opportunity to talk through some of the issues raised, and the need for safe spaces to do so; they then pledged to do more to make those available to the young women they work with.

CHANGE IN THE CULTURE

Many of the young women we spoke to suggested that even if representation increases, there still needs to be a culture shift in relation to how women are treated in public life:

'The culture within politics needs to change, women can be represented but if attitudes don't change it will be the same as having a white man'

'We need cultural change; politics, despite progress, is an old boys club'

“

‘We need to change the way we talk about female politicians, clamp down on online hatred’

‘[We need] messages prompting and encouraging women to enter politics. A message that demonstrates a scale of involvement, showing the smallest level of participation up to how to become heavily involved in politics. It would highlight to our busiest women that even they can be involved in politics’

+ CHALLENGING MISOGYNY AND SEXISM

Linked to this, young women discussed the need to challenge and eliminate misogyny and sexism from the political landscape (and wider society) to encourage young women to take part in politics:

‘Men need to change their attitudes and be less sexist towards us. Political parties need to be firmer and create robust zero-tolerance approaches towards sexist abuse, sexual harassment and assault.’

‘A general requirement for the success of feminism might come into play here as well since many young women still feel too intimidated or undervalued to give their real opinions’

‘If people started listening to women and not stereotyping and tearing them down as soon as they enter the public realm, I’m sure they would be more active. I have found from experience it is too tiring, too much of a burden or personal and professional relationships to be too politically active. This is because the sexism we face every day is tiring’

”

'The amount of shit women, especially young women, in the public eye get needs to stop. Just look at Alexandria Ocasio Cortez. She has done something incredible – mobilised an entire voter base and become the youngest ever congresswoman (maybe congressperson?) but she's getting so much shit that I guarantee she wouldn't be getting it if she was a man. Women, especially young women, are routinely patronised and belittled and no wonder they all want to stay out the public eye because of that'

'I think women's voices need to be taken more seriously, it has come a long way but there are still people out there who don't think women have a legitimate opinion when it comes to politics. Women need to know they will be accepted and respected on their own terms without being accused of being overly emotional or trying to "be a man"'

+ CHANGE FROM WITHIN THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Participants also discussed the institutional change needed within political parties for young women to feel more inclined to enter politics. Examples include women-friendly workplaces and more accessible language:

'I think political parties need to be more creative in terms of finding women whose voices need to be heard because all too often those who get involved with schemes that are available are self-selected and well-connected'

'We need political parties to put women forward as their top choices over men. I know in SNP and Green Party, they encourage women candidates to run but prioritize men in their campaigns'

“

‘Opportunity for women-only groups, but really important that mixed groups/ campaigns make an effort to think about obstacles for young women e.g. meeting accessibility, cost, structure of discussions – allow opportunity to speak. Members need to be informed about this... Same goes for established older groups e.g. Constituency Labour Party Meetings do not attract young women because they are not actively engaging with them’

‘A lot of party politics, and political operations (i.e. the budget) are deliberately represented in vague and unapproachable terms, and then people are excluded for not understanding, so more transparency and accessible language around things like this would be a real help’

‘I think my party could have done a lot more to prepare me for a career in politics’

”

This chapter has highlighted the range of areas where young women feel there needs to be change. In the following chapter, we lay out our responses to the findings and commit to challenging the various barriers to political engagement that young women in Scotland face today.

6

WHAT'S NEXT?



6. WHAT'S NEXT?

This year's discussions have highlighted the variety of ways young women engage in politics across Scotland. We heard some inspirational stories and discussions, which left us feeling hopeful for the future.

We also uncovered some common themes regarding the limitations and barriers facing young women. While so many young women are involved across a wide spectrum of meaningful activities, they highlighted the persistent limitations and barriers they are facing, such as a sense of under-representation, a lack of appropriate opportunities, and the feeling that the current political system is not designed to encourage and facilitate young women's involvement.

As demonstrated throughout the report, many of our main findings are supported by previous research, suggesting that a lot of the issues raised are not new ones. We believe therefore that our findings reinforce the importance of action to move the agenda forward. These are our commitments to action:

1. WORK WITH SCHOOLS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

For most of those involved in our focus groups this research was the first opportunity they had had to openly discuss their interest and involvement in politics and feminism. The Young Women's Movement is committed to challenging the lack of opportunities for these kinds of discussions by working with organisations and institutions, particularly high schools and primary schools, to encourage the creation and use of open, safe and accessible spaces to facilitate a debate about young women's political engagement.

The Young Women's Movement is committed to continue developing new partnerships with organisations that work with young women who face multiple barriers in order to give support and advice on how to develop and provide access to a safe space for discussion on how they may feed into the decision-making processes.



2. CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE REPRESENTATION

The Young Women's Movement is committed to defying the barriers that young women face in entering the political sphere by encouraging young women to be more politically active. The Young Women's Movement is committed to including more campaigns that equip and support young women in their agenda, especially by encouraging women to stand in for election for example, through our #ScotWomenStand campaign in partnership with The Parliament Project and through our leadership programme - Young Women Lead - in partnership with the Scottish Parliament.

3. CAMPAIGN TO LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Amongst the school-aged research participants there was clear support for a campaign to lower the voting age to 16 years. However, it was discussed that this comes hand in hand with how young people learn about politics. Therefore, The Young Women's Movement is committed to challenging the school curriculum (beyond what is taught in Modern Studies) by creating partnerships with organisations in order to ensure that schools take on a greater responsibility to educate pupils on how the political system works and what it means to vote.

4. WORK WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

The Young Women's Movement is committed to challenging tokenism, prejudice and discrimination within political parties by raising awareness and providing support to political parties about how young women feel within their parties and how to make their young women members feel more welcome. We are also committed to challenging the lack of information about tokenism, prejudice and discrimination within political parties by encouraging more research in this area.

5. SUPPORTING YOUNG WOMEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

The Young Women's Movement is committed to challenging online trolling by working with relevant organisations to support those who are victims of, or risk being victims of online trolling.



6. MORE IN-DEPTH RESEARCH WITH INTO THOSE YOUNG WOMEN FACING MULTIPLE BARRIERS

The Young Women's Movement is committed to challenge the gap of information about the multiple barriers young women face in engaging and being involved in politics and activism, by conducting more in-depth research with young women facing multiple barriers in the next SYWS report.

ABOUT THE STUDY

THE RESEARCH TEAM

The Lines Between were commissioned to undertake the fieldwork, analysis and reporting for SYWS2018 on behalf of The Young Women's Movement¹⁷. The Lines Between were supported by a small team of four volunteers¹⁸ from the Young Women's Movement: Rebecca Morrice, Kiva Richard, Zoe Clarke and Lizzie Edwards.

ONLINE SURVEY

An online survey tool¹⁹ was used to generate both quantitative and qualitative data about young women's experiences of political engagement and participation. The survey also asked young women to provide suggestions on what needs to change for young women in politics and their hopes for the future. This online approach allowed us to reach a much wider range of young women who might not have had the opportunity to have their voices heard through this research. Survey participants were also asked if they wanted to contribute more to the research, by taking part in an interview or group discussion. The survey was open from October until the end of December 2018 and received 469 responses, 443 of which were eligible to be included in the research (i.e. response from young women aged between 16 and 30 who live in Scotland).

FIELDWORK - INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Face to face methods helped us to capture and explore varied experiences. For example, we engaged with a range of organisations that work with young women from across Scotland, including rural schools and a charity supporting young women with disabilities. During the focus groups and interviews we use a range of aids to stimulate discussion, such as emerging findings from the survey results and visual prompts. A large degree of flexibility was needed when using our discussion guide to ensure accessibility. Interviews and focus groups typically lasted an hour, with all dialogue recorded and transcribed for analysis. We also carried out three in-depth telephone interviews lasting up to an hour with two young women in Glasgow and one in Fife. The fieldwork took place between October and December 2018 and we spoke to a total of 44 young women across Scotland.

¹⁷The Lines Between also undertook the SYWS2015 and SYWS2016 studies.

¹⁸The volunteers assisted by transcribing of interviews and creating social media content to promote the research.

¹⁹www.surveymonkey.com

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

+ THE SURVEY

Potential participants were reached through a social media campaign, using the twitter handle **#SYWS2018** and a series of leaflets. The link to the survey was shared by individuals and groups with a strong reach among people who are interested in gender equality and women in politics in Scotland, such as The Glasgow Women's Library and **#ScotWomenStand**.

+ INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

We contacted organisations and agencies working with young women to gain their buy-in to the research and raise awareness among potential participants. Our contact with a range of schools in urban and rural Scotland helped us to reach young women who may not have participated in the research otherwise. This approach allowed us to gain a range of perspectives from young women. Some described themselves as engaged in political issues; others did not.

TRAVEL

Our efforts to reach rural communities involved travelling around Scotland by train and car around the peripheries of the central belt and across the Highlands.

PHOTOGRAPHY

We took photographs of the participants if they were willing; some preferred a more anonymous style of portrait. The young women were photographed in the area that our focus groups or interviews took place, showing the places that features in their lives each day, such as high schools and university buildings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

We conducted a light-touch review of existing research into women's representation in politics, women in activism and online abuse. This search focused on quantitative findings, which allowed us to situate some of our findings in a wider research context.

LIMITATIONS

Although the activity described above has many strengths, we acknowledge the limitations of the methodologies

employed. The findings should not be considered representative of the experiences of all young women in Scotland; they shine a light on the lives and views of those who participated in this research.

THE YOUNG WOMEN WHO TOOK PART IN OUR RESEARCH

The research included a total of 487 participants (443 survey respondents and 44 fieldwork participants). From the outset, we endeavoured to reach a diversity of perspectives and voices. The table below shows the range of young women who participated in this research.

PARTICIPANT GROUP / CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENTAGE ²⁰	NUMBER
Young women from Rural Scotland	30%	141
Young women from Urban Scotland	70%	324
Young women with a disability or long-term condition	19%	89
Young women with experience of the care system	8%	35
Young women from minority ethnic communities	7%	32
Young women who identified as lesbian or gay	7%	34
Young women who identified as bisexual	15%	68
Young women who identified as something other (responses included: Asexual, Queer, Pansexual, gay-ish, homoflexible ²¹)	2%	10
Gender identify not the same as assigned at birth	1%	5

AGE RANGE	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER
16-18 years	22%	100
19-24 years	33%	153
25-30 years	46%	211

²⁰ Shows the % (and number) of respondents who answered the question – some survey respondents chose to skip questions.

²¹ 'other' responses provided by young women

LOCATION OF FIELDWORK	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Glasgow group hosted by YWM	2
Aberdeen University	5
Canongate Youth (Edinburgh)	4
UPMO (Edinburgh)	3
YWCA Scotland (Edinburgh)	4
Perth Grammar School (2 groups)	12
Kingussie High School (2 groups)	11
Phone interviews (Glasgow, Fife)	3
Total	44

CREDITS

We are immensely grateful to the young women who found the time to share their experiences, opinions and ideas with us in our online survey, interviews and focus groups. This report would not have been possible without your contribution.

Thank you!

SYWS 18 DONORS

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Highland Youth Convener
LGBT Youth Scotland
National Union of Students
Children in Scotland
Social Bite
Glasgow Women's Library



WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We would love to hear your thoughts on the themes and topics discussed in SYWS 2018.

Reach out on social media using the **#SYWS18** or email us at hello@ywcascotland.org

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