

# **Should the voting age be lowered to 16?**

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2nd October 2024

# 1. Why are we talking about this?

- “We will increase the engagement of young people in our vibrant democracy, by giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in all elections”

**Change**

Labour Party Manifesto 2024



## 2. Outline

- Quick quiz
- Recent election results
- The current rules
- Five arguments for votes at 16
- Five arguments for sticking with 18
- Q&A

### **3. Which of these can you do in Scotland at 16, but not in England?**

- A. Get married without your parents' permission
- B. Leave school and do nothing (not study or work)
- C. Vote in local elections and referendums
- D. All of the above

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## 5. Which of the following are true?

- A. You start paying income tax at 16
- B. You can fight in the army at 16
- C. You can be a Company Director at 16
- D. None of the above

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## 7. If only people under 25 were allowed to vote, who would have won in 2019?

A. Boris Johnson



B. Jeremy Corbyn



C. Caroline Lucas



D. Jo Swinson



## 8. If only people under 25 were allowed to vote, who would have won in 2019?

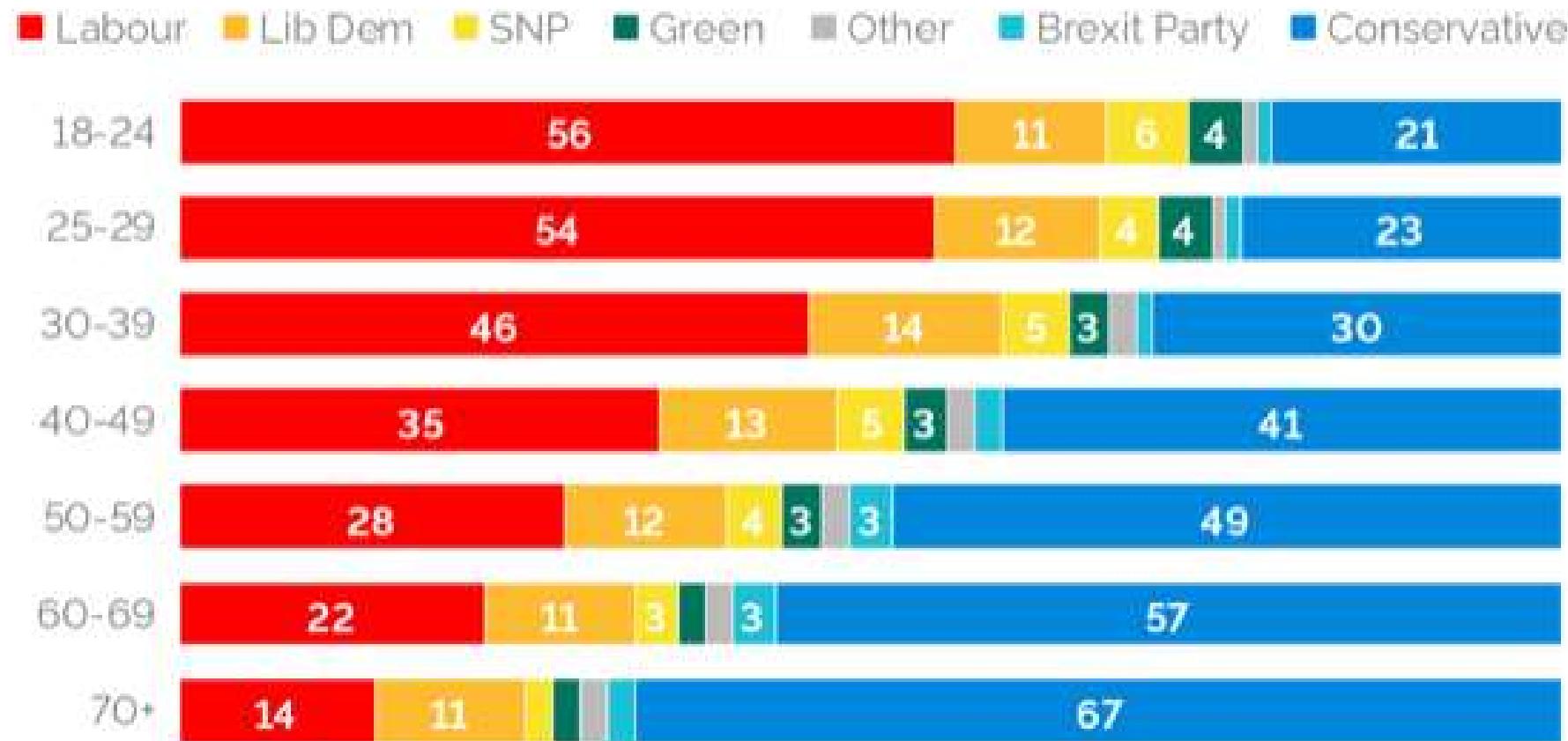
- A. Boris Johnson
- B. Jeremy Corbyn
- C. Caroline Lucas
- D. Jo Swinson



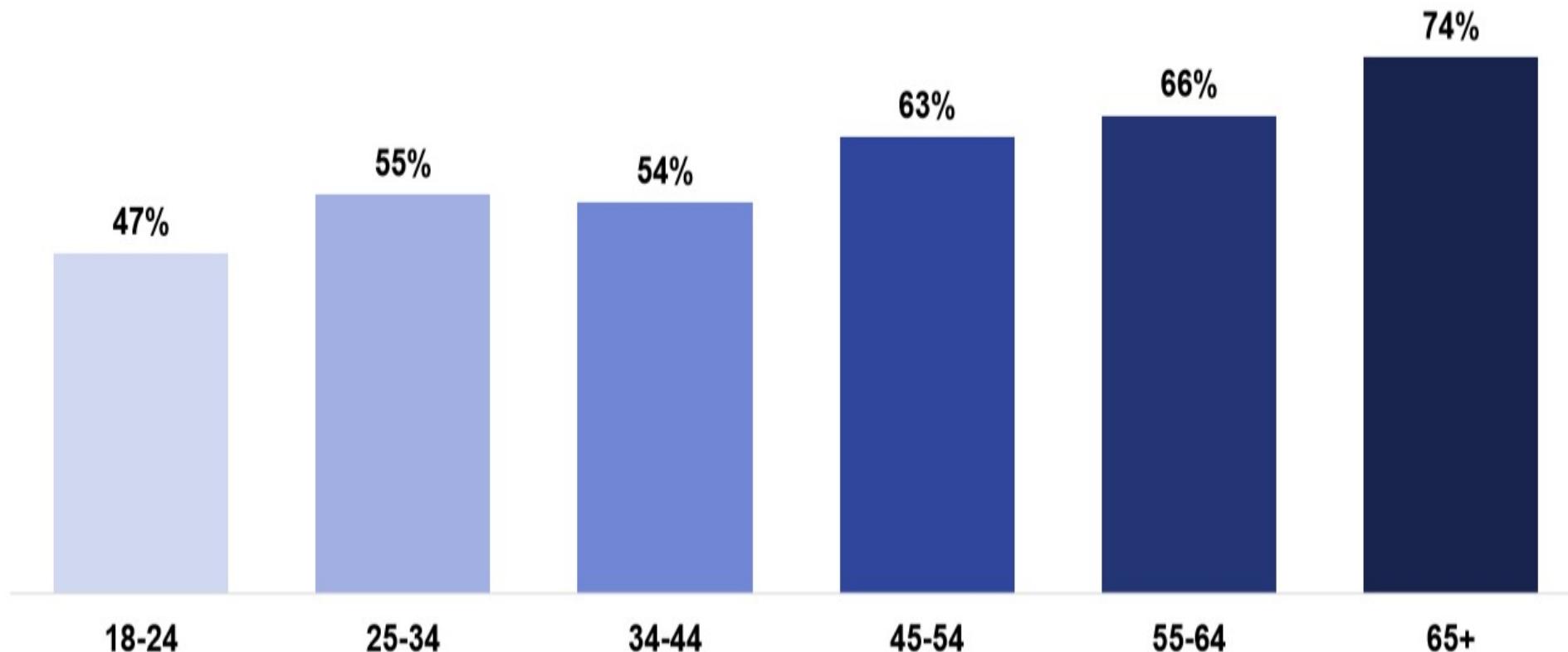
## 9. In reality, of course, it was this man...



# 10. Voting by age in 2019 UK General Election (%)

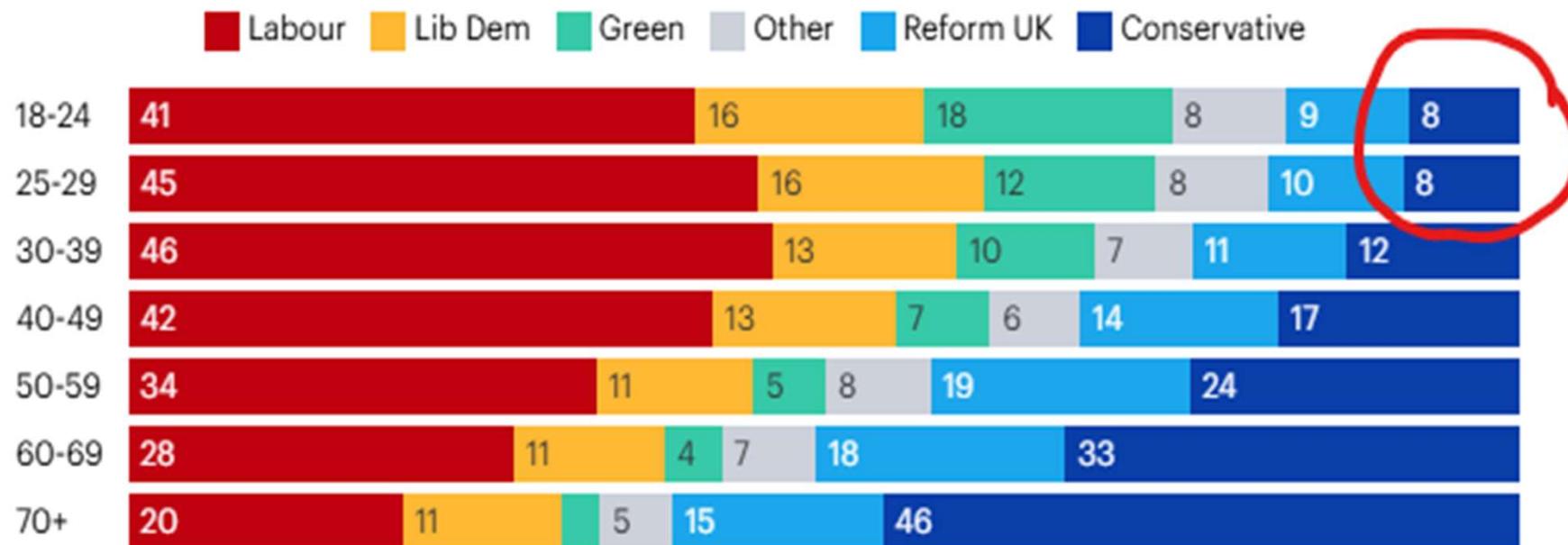


# 11. Turnout by age in 2019 UK General Election



## 12. Voting by age in 2024 UK General Election

Which party did you vote for at the General Election in July 2024? % of 35,205 voters



YouGov

5-8 July 2024

# 13. Other factors in 2024

## household income

Which party did you vote for at the General Election in July 2024? %



## education level

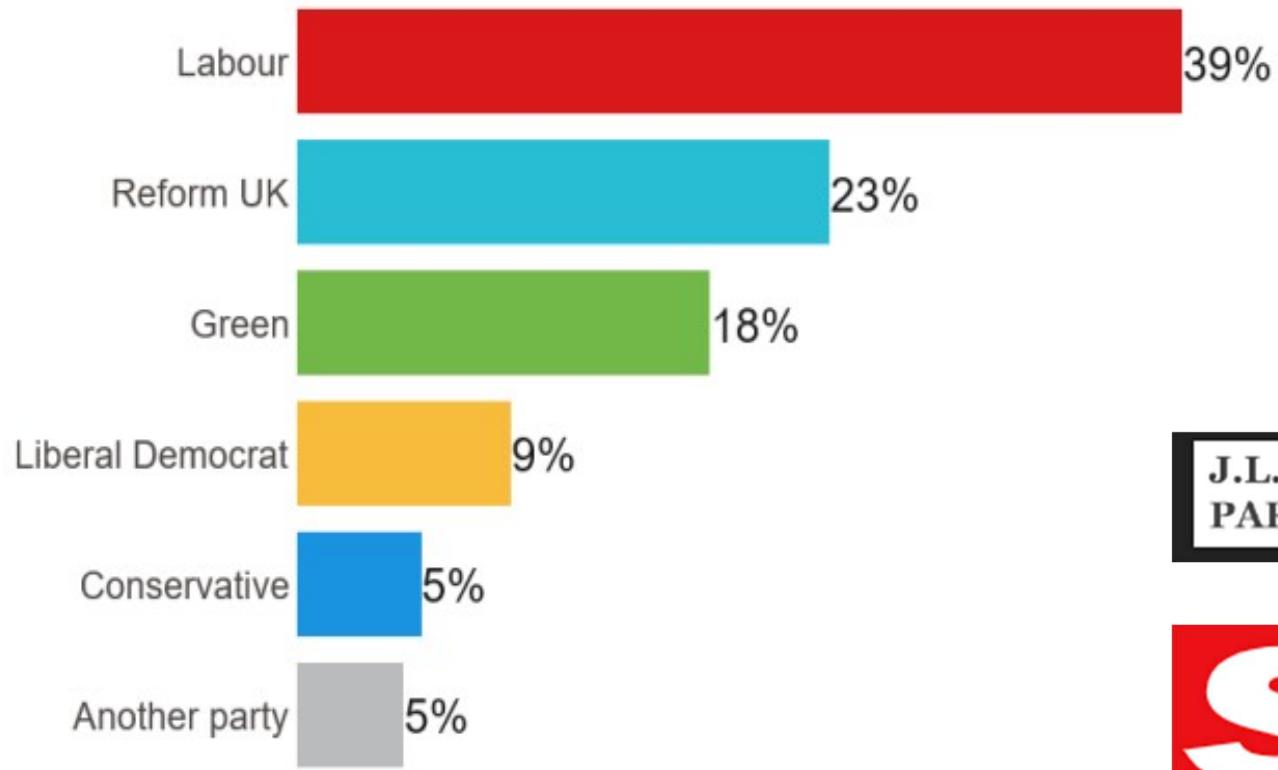
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# 14. How *might* 16- and 17-year-olds have voted?

Voting intention – those who would vote

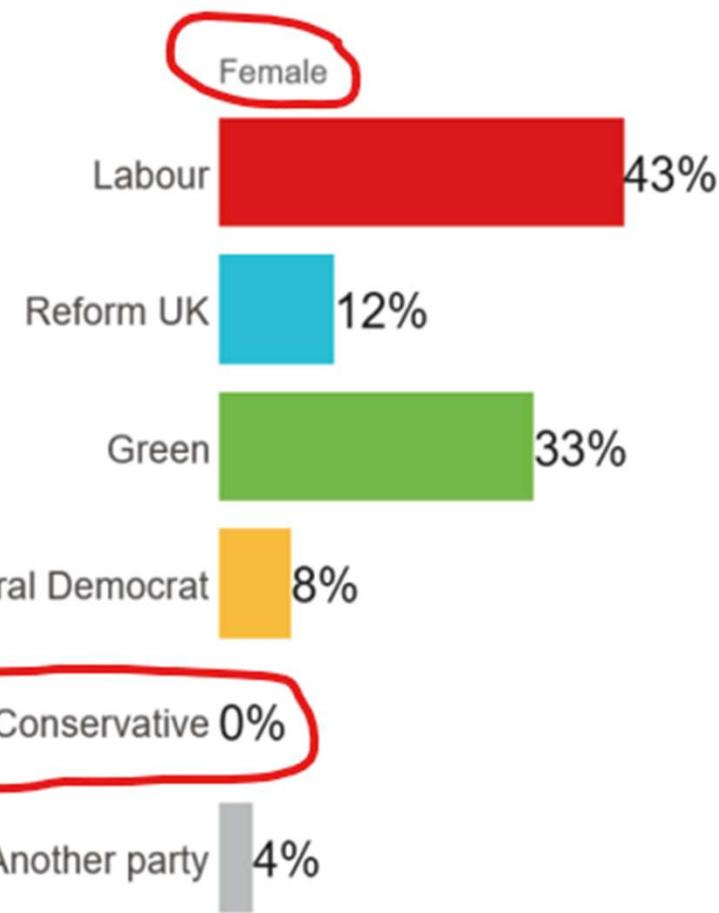
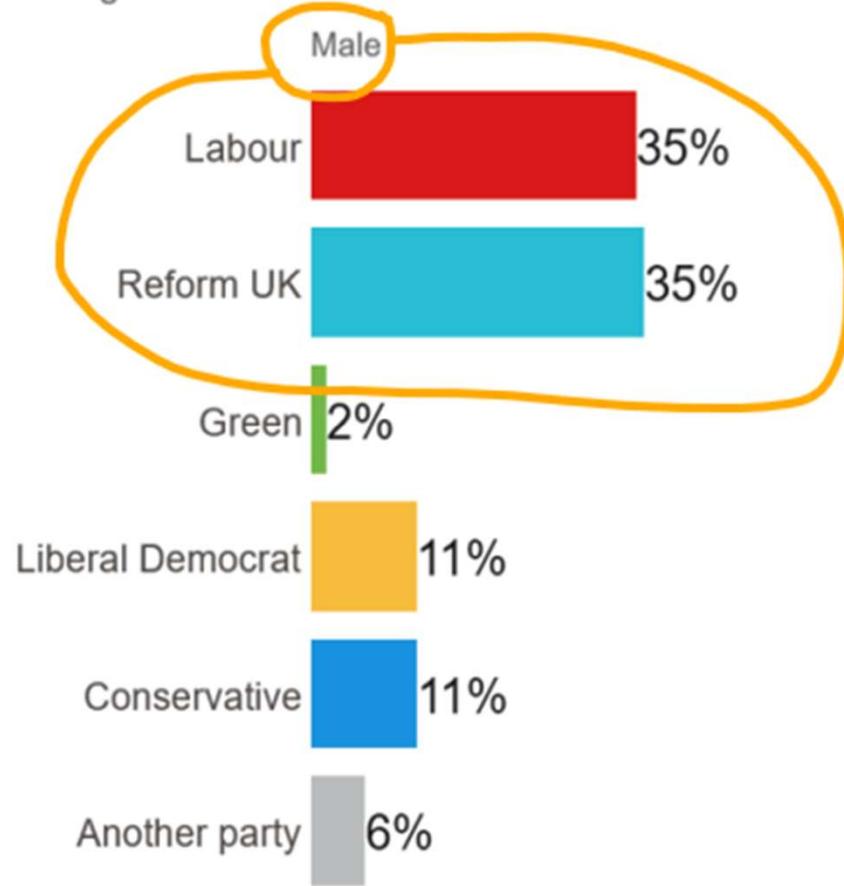
All



Which party would you have voted for at the General Election on July the 4th?

# 15. The gender gap among 16-and 17-year-olds

Voting intention – those who would vote



## 16. The current rules on the voting age

- UK parliamentary elections – 18
- Scotland – 16 for local and devolved elections (including the 2014 Independence referendum)
- Wales has now followed Scotland
- Isle of Man lowered its voting age to 16 in 2006 and Jersey followed in 2007
- But the norm across the EU is still 18, with only a few exceptions (for example, 16 in Austria and in Malta – and in Hungary if you are married!)

## 17. Where do you draw the line?

- Most people (perhaps not him?) would agree that only those above a certain age are ready to vote. The question is what this minimum age should be.
- There are good arguments for different minimum ages for different activities (and even different types of election?) depending on the potential benefits and harms both to the individual and to others...



## 18. What you can do at different ages (England)

16

- Leave home (or be asked to leave home!)
- Leave school to work full-time (with training)
- Become a company director
- Legally consent to sexual activity

18

- Get a mortgage, credit card or personal loan
- Serve on a jury
- Fight in combat roles in the armed forces
- Become a police officer
- Buy alcohol, tobacco and fireworks
- Gamble (now including the National Lottery)

## 19. Other examples

10

- Be arrested and charged with a crime  
(recently raised to 12 in Scotland)

14

- Hold a gun licence

21

- Be a commercial airline pilot

## 20. Arguments for votes at 16

1. 16-year-olds already have lots of rights and obligations – why not voting too?
2. Young teens are now much better informed
3. Important to listen to the views of younger people (especially as they will live with the consequences for longer than older people)
4. Odd to have different voting ages in different parts of the UK (16 ‘works fine’ in Scotland)
5. Getting people involved in politics sooner may strengthen engagement in later life

## 21. Arguments for sticking with 18

1. Most 16-17-year-olds are still children living at home, going to school, and dependent on their parents
2. Classroom teaching and social media are a poor substitute for experience of the real world
3. There is little social benefit (and potentially many costs) in increasing the engagement of people who are not yet ready to vote
4. People under 18 pay relatively little tax
5. Many of the things you can legally do at 16 are still not choices that society would actively encourage

## 22. My personal views (only)

- I would stick at 18 for *national* elections – 16- and 17-years olds just don't have enough life experience
- Not obvious that Scottish politics is a success story!
- More sympathetic to lowering the age to 16 for *local* elections – these are typically about local services rather than big national issues, and this would still get young people into the habit of voting
- Interesting that Labour hasn't yet legislated to lower the voting age – still five years to go, but this could give fresh impetus to youth education about politics?

# Questions and discussion