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***British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (2017)**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148117728666>

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DOI link to article:

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148117728666>

Date deposited:

04/10/2017

Exploring Youth Political Activism in the UK: What makes Young People Politically Active in Different Organisations?

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Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The research was funded by ESRC 1+3 Scholarship, ES/H018492/1.

In contemporary society we see two trends in youth political participation.¹ On the one hand, young people are *engaging less* in formal politics, seen in a decline in voting and membership in political parties over time (Grasso, 2014, Fieldhouse et al., 2007). On the other hand they are *engaging more* in non-formal politics such as boycotts and demonstrations compared to older generations (Henn and Foard, 2012, Sloam, 2012, Sloam 2013). One common explanation for this shift is that young people have a different understanding of politics and feel alienated from formal politics, and therefore they engage in a different way (Mycock and Tonge, 2012, Marsh et al, 2007). Consequently, scholars have explored young people's political participation in a wider sense, including new ways of engaging such as online engagement (Sloam, 2013, Grasso, 2013, Zani and Barrett, 2012, Norris, 2004). Youth disengagement from politics, is however still concerning because of the potential consequences for their future (non)participation (McFarland and Thomas, 2006, Quintelier, 2015, Hooghe, 2004), and the detrimental consequences being overlooked by political parties (Mycock and Tonge, 2012) may have on their lives (McKnight et al, 2015). Furthermore, taking the alienation argument seriously it seems as if the problem of youth political participation is less a matter of *whether* they participate, and more a matter of *where* they participate.² Building on the literature presented above, this article aims to

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for helpful suggestions that improved the article significantly. I would also like to thank the help of Gerry Stoker and William Maloney, as well as other colleagues and friends for their invaluable help at various stages of drafts of this article. Any errors remain the responsibility of the author.

² Importantly, this is not to say that non-participation isn't problematic, but the argument made here is that non-participation is not what the youth political participation literature is primarily concerned with either.

address the *where* question and focus the comparison by asking, *what makes young people politically active (in the same way) in different domains?*

There are three reasons presented in detail in this article for why a narrower focus is important. Firstly, it addresses issues of conceptual stretching that has led to theories political participation becoming of everything (van Deth, 2014). Secondly, it acknowledges that political participation is not a dichotomous concept (Hustinx and Denk, 2009). Thirdly, it takes the context of participation in to consideration and does not rely on self-reporting (Morales, 2009). By incorporating these critiques to the research design the article aims to contribute empirically to the debate on the definition of political participation.

Using the classic civic voluntarism model (Almond and Verba, 1963) this article explores whether young activists in different organisations hold different civic and political attitudes and skills, have been asked to participate or are motivated by different motivations. They have all turned up to participate, and therefore all able, willing and available to participate, but what makes them active in different organisations? To answer this question a unique dataset of young activists (N450) is analysed, collected using the contextualised survey method developed by Klandermans et al (2009). As such, political activists are defined as those who have *attended events organised by a political organisation*. More specifically this article compares activists in three political organisations in the UK: political parties' youth factions (YFs), the British Youth Council (BYC) and those who attended the 2010 National Union of Students (NUS) Demonstrations (Demo) in London against tuition fees and education cuts. The article takes a case study

approach focusing on the extreme case of political activism (Flyvbjerg, 2006), but has breadth by comparing organisations in different domains. The aim of the article is not to make broad generalisations about young people's political participation. Instead, the article makes an original and significant knowledge contribution by providing a more nuanced understanding of youth political activism.

The article will start with a discussion on the definition of political activism, outline the theoretical framework and how the CVM model applies to activism in different organisations. It will then then describe the organisations chosen for this study and explain the data collection method and operationalisation of variables before presenting the results of the multinomial logistic regression. To conclude, there will be a discussion of the wider implications of the findings.

Defining political activism

This article defines political activism as *attending a political meeting or event*, for three reasons. Firstly, we need a more focused definition of political participation because of the conceptual stretching the concept has suffered (van Deth, 2014). Numerous studies have urged for and used an expanded definition of political participation to account for the new ways young people participate (Sloam, 2013, Li and Marsh, 2008, Marsh et al, 2007, Norris, 2002,). Although there is no doubt these acts are *political*, the question is if we legitimately can treat them as the same kind of political *participation* (van Deth, 2014). As a consequence of the expansion of political participation it is more difficult not only to distinguish between different dimensions of the concept, but it is also more difficult to systematically

study (van Deth, 2014). Indeed, the common distinction between formal and informal political participation is problematic because it seems to conflate political behaviours that are significantly different and separate activities that are in principle very similar. For example, voting and active membership in a political party are both considered formal political participation. However, following the resource model of participation (Brady et al, 1995), we see that these activities require different amount and types of resources and seen from that perspective they are fundamentally different kinds of *activities*. In fact, the latter is a more similar *activity* to membership in Greenpeace than voting, but they are classified as different (formal vs. non-formal). Studying one activity, meeting participation, makes for a more focused comparison that addresses the challenges raised with the conceptual stretching of political participation.

Secondly, we need a non-dichotomous understanding of political activism. The literature exploring political activists stretches across political parties (Whiteley et al., 1993), interest groups (Morales, 2009, Maloney et al, 2008) and to social movements (Saunders et al, 2012). From these studies, we know what the differences are between active and passive members as well as members and non-members. Hustinx and Denk (2009) argue that whilst there has been an expansion of the types of activities that are considered political participation, the concept is still based on a binary dichotomy; active or not, formal or not, member or not. They argue that this dichotomisation of an essentially multidimensional concept limits our knowledge of political participation. This article takes their argument seriously and explores activists in different organisations, rather than those who are active or not, embracing the multidimensional nature of political activism.

Lastly, we need a contextualised measure of political activism. The operationalisation of activism in this article is observed activism rather than self-reported. Morales (2009) highlights that there are many ways members can engage in organisations, for example simply paying, being on the board or attending meetings. Relying on self-reported activism may lead to classifying different behaviours as the same thing. For example, if a respondent is only asked if they have attended a demonstration in the past 12 months with the response options of 'yes' or 'no', like in the European Social Survey, we have no knowledge about what kind of demonstration this was. The respondent might have attended a racist or anti-racist demonstration, which is indeed a crucial difference.

Together these three aspects of the definition of the dependent variable, political activism, makes a conceptual contribution to the field of youth political activism by conducting a focused comparison of the same kind of political activity, but in three different political organisations.

Applying the Civic Voluntarism Model to Explain Political Activism.

The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) is a classic model explaining political participation in terms of skills, civic and political attitudes, motivations and mobilisation (Almond and Verba, 1963, Verba et al., 1995). Or in other words, someone needs be able, willing and asked to participate. However, the CVM model does not fully take in to account the importance of opportunities to participate and the characteristics of those opportunities. A typical example for young people is

that if they are under 18, they are not allowed to vote in UK General Elections, no matter how able or willing they are to vote.

The opportunities to participate interacts with all variables in the CVM model. The skills and attitudes a citizen needs to hold to participate depend on the type of political activity a citizen engages in. For example we have seen that positive attitudes to the political system tends to lead people to engage in 'formal' political activities such as membership in political parties (Pattie et al., 2003), whilst negative attitudes to the political system encourages system challenging activities such as demonstrations and protest activities (Dalton , 2008). Indeed, as illustrated above, political alienation is seen as the main reason young people are turning away from formal politics (Marsh et al., 2007, Henn and Foard, 2012).

Furthermore, the willingness, or motivations, to participate can also distinguish between participants in different types of political activities (Olson, 1965, Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). Klandermans (2004) categorised motivations in to three groups; instrumental, identity and ideology. The instrumental motivations derive from the rational choice perspective where the participant want to gain some benefit from participating, the identity motivations are related to a sense of collective identity, the ideological measures relate to moral reasoning. Organisations offer different incentives Clark and Wilson (1961) for participation that may or may not meet the individual's motivations for participation. In other words, a citizen has certain motivations for participating and seeks out the organisation that offers incentives that can meet those motivations. For example; someone wanting to stand for election (instrumental

motivation) would join a political party whilst someone concerned with global warming (ideological motivation) would join Greenpeace.

The request to participate is perhaps most connected with the opportunity to participate as it comes from the social networks of friends, family, co-workers etc. (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). The more connected someone is in networks, the more likely they are to be asked to participate and as a consequence the more likely they are to actually turn up (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). Thus organisations that are better at recruiting and mobilising their members are more likely to have active members.

From this discussion, we can see that it is not only the individual characteristics that matter for political activism, but there is an interaction between the individual characteristics and the opportunities presented. Indeed, Morales (2009) argues for the importance of complementing the CVM perspective with an understanding of the meso-, or organisational, and macro- levels, or political institutional context. These all interact to shape political behaviour and without a consideration of them we cannot fully understand what makes people join different political organisations. Organisations offer individuals certain options for participation, which do or do not meet an individual's skills and resources for participation. The organisations have certain characteristics that are more or less attractive to individuals with certain attitudes. Organisations also offer different incentives for participation that may meet the individual's motivations for participation. Whilst the meso level is integrated into the research design, it is important to note that the level of analysis is the individual. This article makes an

empirical and conceptual contribution by building on the CVM model and the work of Morales by exploring which *individual level* factors in the CVM model best predicts which type of political organisation a young activist turns up to. In other words, the aim and contribution of this article is to explore the interaction between the individual level and organisational level to better understand what drives differential political activism.

Previous research has illustrated that we can expect differences between those who engage in political parties and in social movements (Pattie et al., 2003), does this hold true when we focus on one type of political activity? Does this hold for young people? This study uses the well-established CVM model to address the gap in our knowledge in understanding what it is that makes young people active in different political organisations. This article makes an original knowledge contribution to the literature by going further than explaining why people turn up; it explains why young people turn up to *different* political youth organisations,. Furthermore, the article makes an empirical contribution by using a unique dataset on a group of young activists not often, or in the case of BYC never, captured in a survey before. Understanding what makes someone participate in the same way in different domains has wider both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, focusing on the same type of activity across domains gives us a deeper more nuanced understanding of the trends in youth political engagement because we will know more specifically what drives differential political activism. Practically, if we understand these dynamics better we can this knowledge to come up with ways of engaging more young people in the formal political process, something that is of interest for politicians and academics alike

(Mycock and Tonge, 2014). With the theoretical framework outlined it is important to discuss the cases and the characteristics of these organisations before specifying the hypotheses.

Case selection

The three cases selected for this research are the youth factions (YFs) of the three main political parties in the UK (Conservative Future, Young Labour and Liberal Youth), The British Youth Council (BYC) and the National Union of Students (NUS). The case selection was theoretically driven (Eisenhardt, 1989) and based on three criteria: firstly, the organisations had to be youth focused either in their membership or in the issue concerned. Secondly, they had to organise events that people can attend, so that those who turn up, the activists, could be surveyed at these events. Lastly, the cases were selected to get variation in their links to the formal political system. This criterion is critical for this study as it allows a closer exploration of the alienation argument. Are the demonstrators more alienated than the BYC or YF activists? Is the level of alienation the main difference between the activists, or is it something else that makes them active in different organisations?

There is a difference between the organisations and the events organised that is important to discuss. For the YFs and BYC several meetings were attended to collect data, whilst for the NUS the national demonstration against fees and cuts in 2010 was used as main data collection event. These events have a very different nature, where the YF and BYC meetings are exclusive to members whilst the demonstration is open to anyone on the street who would like to join. Furthermore,

the YF and BYC events are more structured, including agenda and formal speakers, than the demonstration that is a more organic event. This is not to suggest that a demonstration does not require organisation and structure, but pointing out that the demonstration *event* is less structured than a meeting *event*.

Additionally, it is important to note that by focusing on a small number of organisations the article takes a case study approach (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). Although generalisations are possible from case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006), it is essential to be clear about how wide generalisations can be made. In this study the focus is on an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2006), of political activism, and as such the aim and scope is to get a rich and in-depth understanding of the activists. The study has breadth by selecting organisations with different relationship to the political system. Whilst the activists could be seen as somewhat representative of their peers in the *organisations*, they cannot be seen as representative of young people in general or everyone engaging in that way. The student demonstrators should not be taken to be representative of demonstrators in general, just as the YF members are not representative of party members in general.

Whilst these are important differences, they should not be considered major obstacles for comparison for three reasons. Firstly, the study aims to explore whether the links to the formal political system an organisation influence who turns up, and these three organisations represent a wide variation in this regard. Secondly, because of the definition on activism as event attendance it is essential that the organisations arrange events where it is important that people attend, i.e. without attendants it wouldn't be a meeting or demonstration, and the

organisations are similar in this regard. Lastly, they are all youth focused and offer a unique opportunity to study young people in their own right. The organisations, and their events, thus fulfil the key criteria in the research design to answer the research questions posed.

Case 1: Political Party Youth Factions

Political party youth factions (YFs) in the UK are sub-organisations of the political party and thus represent the organisation with the closest link to the political system. Most political parties have a youth wing, with the intention to attract younger members (Heidar, 2006). The YFs are closely associated to the 'mother' party by name and formal links, such as seats on the executive (Young Labour) or mentioning in the constitution of the party (Liberal Youth). Surprisingly few scholars have studied young people in political parties youth factions, and this article makes an empirical contribution to this emerging field (Bruter and Harrison, 2009, Cross and Young, 2008, Lamb, 2002).

The YFs of all three major parties in the UK were approached to participate in the research, i.e. Conservative Future³, Young Labour/Labour Students and Liberal Youth. There was great variation in the number of events that each of the YFs organised. For example, in 2013 Liberal Youth only organised two national events, a welcome reception at the Liberal Democrat conference in Glasgow and the Winter Conference that was surveyed for this research. At the other end of the

³ The executive of the YF was suspended in 2015 due to exposure of bullying and sexual harassment in the organisation. The data collection was conducted in 2012-2013, before the scandals were exposed.

spectrum Conservative Future organised (or at least advertised on their national website) multiple events every month and had a more professional focus such as the East Midlands Conference that had sessions on how to handle media and becoming a councillor or MP. Appendix 1⁴ is a summary of the youth faction sample, the number and types of events attended.

Case 2: The British Youth Council

The British Youth Council (BYC) is the umbrella organisation for youth organisations in Britain, ranging from Girl Guiding to local Youth Councils and Parliaments. The BYC have a particular position in the political system. On the one hand they have very close relationships with the political system, for example they coordinate the All Party Parliamentary Group on Youth Affairs consisting of Members of Parliament. On the other hand, they have no formal links with any political party or governmental body and have no formal decision making powers. Because of this ambiguous position in the political the BYC makes for a very interesting comparison with the other organisations.

In contrast to some critics of the democratic quality of the selection process to Youth Parliaments and Councils (Milliken, 2001), the BYC has a board of trustees consisting of young people who are elected by young members at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) (monitored by the Electoral Commission). The BYC organises multiple national and regional events during the year ranging from their AGM, through regional conferences to national campaigning days. There is often a

⁴ All appendices are available online

training element as part of the events for newer delegates, or on something that the organisers see as beneficial for all member organisations to learn and take part of. Appendix 2 shows a summary of the BYC sample, the number and types of events attended for this research. There is not much previous research on members of youth councils and parliaments (see Matthews, 2001 for one rare example), and therefore this case makes a unique empirical contribution to the field.

Case 3: Student Demonstrations

In 2010 the National Union of Students (NUS) in the UK called for a demonstration against the increase in tuition fees and cuts to education budgets as proposed by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition and attracted approximately 50,000 participants. A second demonstration was called a month later by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), with the police expecting 20,000 demonstrators. The student demonstrations were selected as the case for this research because student fees was an issue that particularly appealed to and mobilised young people and the organisers the NUS and NCAFC, represents students who for the most part are young people⁵. The demonstrations represents the organisation with the weakest links to the formal political system, in fact their aim was to oppose the political elites. The demonstrators were unsuccessful in their demands and in 2012 the higher tuition fees were introduced at universities across England. Appendix 3 shows the summary of the demonstration sample.

⁵ Appendix 3 shows that over 60% of respondents at the demonstrations were between ages 16-30

Hypotheses

H1: Civic and political skills.

The CVM model emphasises the ability to participate in political activities as a main predictor for participation. As all the activists have overcome that threshold we do not expect any major differences in the skills for participation (H1a). However, following the logic that skills for a certain kind of participation is developed whilst participating we can hypothesise that the activists will have previously participated in activities similar to the one they have been ‘caught’ in. Due to the structure of BYC being an umbrella organisation we can hypothesise that those who have engaged in more other organisations will most likely be BYC activists (H1b). From this follows that if someone has engaged in more radical activities they are more likely to be a demonstrator, whilst those who have engaged in the less radical political activities would be equally likely to be BYC and YF activists (H1c).

Table 1: Summary of hypotheses		
Variable	Hypothesis	Measurement
Civic and political Skills	All activists are equally likely to have the civic and political skills to participate (H1a)	Discussion of politics with others
	Most active most likely to be BYC (H1b)	Other active membership
	Action repertoire most likely to be demonstrator (H1c)	Other political participation
Mobilisation	All have been asked to participate by someone (H2)	Asked by someone to participate in event
Civic and political attitudes	Most positive attitudes most likely to be YF activist (H3a)	Satisfaction with democracy Attitude to voting Trust in political parties Attitude to politicians

	Most negative attitudes most likely to be demonstrator (H3b)	
	Mixed attitudes most likely to be BYC activist (H3c)	
Motivations	Instrumental motivation most likely to be demonstrator (H4a)	Instrumental motivations
	Identity motivation most likely to be YF activist (H4b)	Identity motivations
	Ideology motivation most likely to be BYC activists. (H4c)	Ideology motivation

H2: Mobilisation

Being asked to participate is an important predictor for political participation in the CVM model. The mobilisation networks give both an indication of how embedded the individual is in social networks, but also to what extent the organisation and its members are actively recruiting new members. Because all activists have turned up it is hypothesised (H2) that all activists will be equally likely to report they have been asked to participate. If, however we do see differences in mobilisation patterns between the organisations it could suggest differences in the resources of the organisations and how outward and outreach focused they are.

H3: Civic and political attitudes

The biggest differences between the activists are expected in the civic and political attitudes. Following the patterns found in the general political participation literature (Verba et al., 1995, Stolle and Hooghe, 2011, Norris, 2002) we hypothesise that the demonstrators will be the most likely to hold the most negative civic and political attitudes (H3a) and the youth faction activists the most positive, especially with regards to the attitudes to political parties and politicians (H3b). It is particularly difficult to hypothesise the attitudes of the BYC

activists because of the lack of research on this group, but also because the organisation falls in between the two other in terms of its positioning in the political system. The BYC has some links with political institutions, suggesting their activists could hold some positive political attitudes, at the same time the BYC activists are not active in a political party, suggesting that they might have negative attitudes to the political system. The analysis will shed some light on the particular dynamics of this conundrum, for now it is hypothesised that those who hold a mixture of positive and negative attitudes will be most likely to be BYC activists (H3c).

H4: Motivations

To develop hypotheses for how the different motivations (ideological, identity and instrumental) predict the type of organisation a respondent is active in we need to map motivations on to the goals of the organisations. The goals of the organisations give us an indication of what the incentives the organisations publically offer potential activists, and are summarised in Table 2⁶. The motivational measures included in the survey for instrumental motivations are 'defend my interests' and 'pressure politicians to make things change'. These motivations fit best with the purposes of the demonstration and thus it is hypothesised that those motivated by the 'instrumental' motivations will most likely be demonstrators (H4a). The measures for 'identity' motivations included are 'express solidarity' and 'express my views', these motivations overlap best with the purposes of the YFs, and it is hypothesised that those motivated by the

⁶ Tables are available online

‘identity’ motivations will most likely be YF activists (H4b). The ‘ideology’ measures included in the survey are ‘raise public awareness’ and ‘because I felt morally obliged’. Based on the educational and campaigning purposes of the BYC it is hypothesised that the respondents motivated by the ‘ideological’ motivations will most likely be BYC activists (H4c).

Table 2 Goals of Organisations		
Organisation	Goal one	Goal two
Conservative Future	Represent younger people across the UK and their views in the Conservative Party.	To hold fun and exciting campaigning, policy, social action and fundraising events across the UK
Young Labour	Young Labour is there to represent the voice of young people within our party, and campaign for rights and interests of young people both within our party and beyond	Young Labour plays a central role in spreading the values and messages of the Labour Party through campaigning in elections, by-elections and regular leafleting, phone canvassing and door knocking
Labour Students	Recruit, train and campaign with members of the Labour party in colleges and universities	Campaign with students for Labour in elections across the country and on issues we care about on our campuses
Liberal Youth	Liberal Youth aims to train their members in skills they need to run effective campaigns	Liberal Youth aims to run strong campaigns on issues members care about.
BYC	Empowering young people aged 25 and under, wherever they are from, to have a say and be heard.	Helping young people to participate in decisions that affect them and have a voice and campaign on issues they believe in
NUS Demonstration	Defend the rights of students and university staff	Secure accessible further and higher education for generations to come’
Note: The goals of the organisations were developed based on the information provided on the organisations’ websites and in conversation with the contact at the organisation.		

Data Collection Method

The definition of political activism as *attendance* of a meeting or event organised by any of the political organisations has consequences for the data collection

method. The survey method developed by Klandermans et al. (2009) was used to collect the data on the activists. This method involves systematic sampling and distribution of the survey in the field, i.e. at a meeting or the demonstration.

For the demonstrations, the original method was used. Four teams of interviewers aimed to cover the whole demonstration, two from the front working backwards and two from the back working forward. To ensure an even distribution and to avoid interviewer bias a senior researcher acts as a 'pointer' and tells the interviewers which demonstrator to interview (see Van Stekelenburg et al. (2012)). At the YF and BYC events a team of researchers distributed the survey to every 'nth' participant that entered the venue. In all cases the survey is a self-completion pen and paper survey and the respondents were also given a free-post envelope to return the survey.

The contextualised survey approach has two main benefits. Firstly, the contextualised survey ensures that everyone sampled is active in the same way and we know the context and timing of participation. Secondly, it is possible to ask the respondent specific questions about the organisation they are active in such as what motivates them to engage in that organisation, whether they think the organisation will be effective in achieving its goals.

The Sample of Young Activists

The age span used to define youth in this research was 16-30. The lower age level was due to ethical considerations doing research with young people and the upper limit was based on the upper limits for the YFs, where Conservative Future has the

highest upper age at 30 and for comparability reasons therefore the upper age for the rest of the sample mirrors this. Additionally, the upper range reflects the burgeoning empirical evidence for elongated transitions in to adulthood, where young people today are not achieving the markers of adulthood and personal autonomy like independent living and a stable job until they are in their thirties (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006).

The overall response rate and distribution of the sample is presented in Table 3. The sample size is 450 respondents and the distribution across the organisations is even, with them representing about a third of the sample each. The sample size is relatively small, compared to general population surveys. However, considering the bespoke nature, focused comparison and the contextualised nature of the survey the depth and clarity of information gained compensates the small sample size. The overlap in membership is low as seen in Appendix 4.

Table 3 Distribution of Sample Across Organisations and Response Rate				
Organisation	Frequency	Response rate, percentage	Percentage of Sample	
Youth Factions	136	36	30.2	
British Youth Council	161	21	35.8	
NUS Demonstration	153	7.6	34	
TOTAL	450		100	

We see in Table 4 that the age profiles of the activists are quite different across the organisations. The BYC have a much younger membership than the others. We see some sharp differences in the gender distribution between the organisations. The YFs have a large proportion of men (71%) whilst the BYC and demonstration have

almost equal distributions between men and women. With regards to social class the activists are similar. The largest category for all organisations is the lower middle class, but for BYC and Demo almost a third of members identify as working class. In line with the age of BYC activists, their education levels are also concentrated among the lower end, while a majority of YF and Demo activists have a university degree. An overwhelming majority of the activists were born in the United Kingdom, and there is little difference in this regard between the organisations. More young activists have parents with migration backgrounds, but again there is little difference between the organisations. Overall, the sociodemographic profile of the activists is very similar, and they fulfil many of the ‘usual suspects’ criteria with regard to who participates politically.

Table 4 Demographics summary, percentage by organisation			
Age	YF	BYC	Demo
16-18	7	67	0.6
19-21	47	22	29
22-25	29	7	48
26-30	17	3	22
Total	100%	100%	100%
Gender			
Male	71	41	56
Female	29	59	44
Class			
Upper-class/upper middleclass	25	16	20
Lower middle class	47	42	44
Working class/lower class	17	31	27
None	11	11	8
Education level			
Secondary education	11	82	24
University degree	72	12	63
Post-graduate university	17	5	13
Respondent born in UK	93	94	84
Respondent not born in UK	7	6	16
Parent born in UK	82	80	70

Parent not born in UK	18	21	30
<i>Note percentages have been rounded to nearest whole number</i>			

Operationalizing variables

The dependent variable is political activism in different political organisations, measured by observed meeting attendance as explained in more detail above.

The independent variables explaining political activism can be grouped in to four groups; civic and political skills, mobilisation, civic and political attitudes, and motivations. To develop a theoretically sound whilst also parsimonious model preliminary exploratory analysis was conducted to explore which measurements presented the most variation between the three different groups of activists. The final model was developed based on this exploratory analysis whilst ensuring that all the groups of variables were represented and that the model was theoretically sound and parsimonious. Due to limited space, only the measurements that *are* included in the model will be discussed.

Skills for political participation is traditionally measured by the education level of the respondent (Verba et al., 1995). However, this measure is problematic because doubts about the direction of causation (Berinsky and Lenz, 2011), and especially when researching young people who may not have finished education. Instead previous (other) civic and political participation is used as the measure for skills in this research. The logic being that the respondent will either already possess or have developed the skills of participation through their previous civic and political participation. There are three measures of skills in the survey; how often they

discuss politics with friends and family ('never' to 'very often'), whether they have previously participated actively in any other civic organisations ('none' to 'more than two') and whether they have engaged in any other political activities and if so what type. The previous political participation variables were coded (see appendix 5 for details) in to three groups based on what kind of political activity it was: i.e. 'expressive', 'money' and 'action'.

The measures of civic and political attitudes that are included in the model are 'satisfaction with democracy' ('very dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied'), 'I don't see the point of voting, parties do whatever they want anyway' ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'), 'trust in political parties' ('not at all' to 'very much') and 'Most politicians make a lot of promises but do not actually do anything' ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). These operationalisations include both attitudes to the political system (e.g. satisfaction with democracy) and certain actors in the system (e.g. political parties).

The motivational variables have been coded in to the categories explored in the theoretical framework on the Klandermans (2004) distinction between instrumental, identity and ideological motivations for participation.

Analysis And Results

The results from the multinomial logistic regression analysis are presented in Table 5 and 6. Table 5 shows the result from the multinomial logistic regression model, where YF is the reference category. The model fit is assessed by the AIC (510) and a lower AIC suggest a better model fit in comparison to other

models (Long , 1997). The AIC for the final model was not the lowest, but it is the most parsimonious and theoretically sound model and a higher AIC was therefore accepted. The sample size dropped from 450 to 397 respondents due to missing values on certain variables. This reduction in sample size could also lead to small cell counts, and for some variables the lack of significance might have to do with lack of cases rather than lack of relationship. Future analysis with a bigger sample size would resolve this issue. As pointed out above, the bespoke and contextualised nature of the survey make the data and analysis unique and valuable despite these limitations.

Table 5: Multinomial logistic regression		
Variable (Model AIC 520)	BYC	Demo
Civic and political skills		
Discuss politics		
<i>Never/rarely discuss politics</i>	<i>reference</i>	Reference
<i>Sometimes discuss politics</i>	-1.79	-1.35
<i>Fairly often/often discuss politics</i>	-2.9**	-2.76*
Active participation in other organisation		
<i>No other active participation</i>	<i>reference</i>	Reference
<i>Active participation in one other</i>	2.72**	-0.69
<i>Active participation in two or more others</i>	3.36***	-1.18
Other political participation		
<i>No other political activities</i>	<i>Reference</i>	Reference
<i>Expressive activities</i>	0.66	-0.8
<i>Money activities</i>	-0.7	-0.47
<i>Direct action activities</i>	-1.25	0.47
Mobilisation		
Asked by: Not asked by anyone	<i>Reference</i>	Reference
Asked by someone	1.55***	2.81***
Civic and political attitudes		
Satisfaction with democracy		
<i>Very/quite dissatisfied with democracy</i>	Reference	Reference
<i>Satisfied with democracy</i>	1.24*	-0.92*
<i>Quite/very satisfied with democracy</i>	1.39*	-2.24***
There is no point in voting		
<i>Disagree/strongly disagree</i>	<i>reference</i>	Reference
<i>Neither</i>	0.62	-0.85
<i>Agree/strongly agree</i>	1.74*	0.83
Trust in political parties		
<i>Not at all/not very much</i>	<i>reference</i>	<i>reference</i>

<i>Somewhat</i>	-0.9*	-1.15*
<i>Quite/very much</i>	-0.91***	-2.25***
Most politicians promise a lot of things but do not do much		
<i>Strongly disagree/disagree</i>	Reference	Reference
<i>Neither</i>	0.33	1
<i>agree</i>	1.39***	0.79
Motivations		
<i>Motivated by instrumental</i>	0.67	0.75
<i>Motivated by identity</i>	-1**	-0.76
<i>Motivated by ideology</i>	0.03	2.32***
Number of observations 397		
Note: Reference category Youth factions		
*= $p \leq 0.05$ ** = $p \leq 0.01$ *** = $p \leq 0.001$		

We can see in Table 5 that most of the variables included in the model have a significant effect, but not consistently across the groups. For example, trust in political parties has a strong significant effect in distinguishing between the YF activists and the other two groups, where both BYC and demonstrator activists are less likely than the YF activists to trust political parties. Furthermore, satisfaction with democracy has a significant effect in distinguishing between the YF activists and the other two groups, however the coefficients go in opposite directions. The BYC activists are more likely to be more satisfied with democracy than the YF activists, whilst the demonstrators are less likely to be satisfied with democracy than the YF activists.

The multinomial logistic regression results only allows us to compare the two groups to the control group. The main purpose of the analysis is a comparison across the three groups of activists simultaneously and to do this post-model estimation in the form of predicted probabilities is necessary. Predicted probabilities were calculated on the model in Table 5 and this is presented in Table 6. Predicted probabilities gives the probability for any respondent for falling

in to a particular category of the dependent variable (YF, BYC or Demo) based on their characteristics on the independent variables included in the model (Long and Freese, 2006). The means add up to one horizontally and a higher mean illustrates a higher probability.

Table 6 Predicted probabilities			
Variable	YF	BYC	Demo
Civic and political skills			
Discuss politics			
<i>Never/rarely discuss politics</i>	0.03	0.63	0.34
<i>Sometimes discuss politics</i>	0.13	0.45	0.42
<i>Fairly often/often discuss politics</i>	0.39	0.27	0.34
Active participation in other organisation			
<i>No other active participation</i>	0.22	0.06	0.72
<i>Active participation in one other</i>	0.3	0.26	0.43
<i>Active participation in two or more others</i>	0.34	0.4	0.26
Other political participation			
<i>No other political activities</i>	0.25	0.36	0.38
<i>Expressive activities</i>	0.18	0.65	0.17
<i>Money activities</i>	0.4	0.33	0.27
<i>Direct action activities</i>	0.23	0.13	0.63
Mobilisation			
Asked by: <i>Not asked by anyone</i>	0.62	0.23	0.14
<i>Asked by someone</i>	0.18	0.37	0.44
Civic and political attitudes			
Satisfaction with democracy			
<i>Very/quite dissatisfied with democracy</i>	0.21	0.11	0.68
<i>Satisfied with democracy</i>	0.3	0.38	0.32
<i>Quite/very satisfied with democracy</i>	0.44	0.48	0.08
There is no point in voting			
<i>Disagree/strongly disagree</i>	0.39	0.29	0.31
<i>Neither</i>	0.21	0.4	0.38
<i>Agree/strongly agree</i>	0.05	0.45	0.5
Trust in political parties			
<i>Not at all/not very much</i>	0.14	0.34	0.51
<i>Somewhat</i>	0.33	0.38	0.3
<i>Quite/very much</i>	0.64	0.24	0.11
Most politicians promise a lot of things but do not do much			
<i>Strongly disagree/disagree</i>	0.64	0.2	0.15
<i>Neither</i>	0.42	0.25	0.33
<i>agree</i>	0.17	0.4	0.43
Motivations			
<i>Motivated by instrumental</i>	0.29	0.29	0.42
<i>Motivated by identity</i>	0.34	0.24	0.41
<i>Motivated by ideology</i>	0.19	0.19	0.62

The results in Table 6 for civic and political skills show substantial contrasts between the activists. Contrary to H1a there are differences between the activists with regards to the frequency of political discussion, and we see a polarization between the YF and BYC activists. The latter are the most likely to never or sometimes discuss politics, and the least likely to often discuss politics. In contrast, those who often/fairly often discuss politics are most likely to be YF activists, only marginally more than the demonstrators. This polarization is surprising because all activists have been 'caught' whilst doing, and presumably discussing, politics. It may be that the BYC activists don't see what they do as doing politics and therefore do not make the link between what they are doing in the BYC to discussing politics, thus reflecting an alternative understanding of politics (Marsh et al, 2007). Further analysis is however needed to confirm this.

In line with H1b, those who actively engaged in more than two organisations are most likely to be BYC activists illustrating a wide range of civic engagement. These findings are also in line with what others have found about members of youth parliaments, that they are a kind of 'super activist' who are active in a wide range of activities (Curtice and Seyd, 2003, Sloam , 2007). If we see previous participation as important skills for participation these findings also suggest that BYC activists have more or better skills for participation than the other activists, contrary to what the discussion of politics results suggested.

In contrast, the demonstrators are most likely to not be involved in any other organisation, suggesting a narrower range of active engagement amongst this group. Although first time demonstrators tend to be young (Verhulst and

Walgrave, 2009) it is remarkable that those who do not engage in any other way engage in the student demonstrations, considering the high risk involved.

At the same time, those who have been active in *one other* organisation are most likely to be demonstrators. These findings may first seem contradictory, but could simply suggest that there are two subgroups of the demonstration sample. One group who are not active in other organisations and another group who are, but only in one other organisation. Previous research has also found that a group is not necessarily homogenous because they participate in the same way (Saunders et al., 2012).

Importantly, this question specifically related to participation in organisations outside of the formal political domain. The fact that we see such contrasting patterns between the BYC and Demonstration activists suggest that they are not only channelling their engagement in very different ways, but their previous participation illustrate that they become engaged through different pathways.

Table 6 present interesting patterns for the types of political activities the activists have engaged in that generally support H1c. Firstly, those who have engaged in action political activities, such as direct action, are almost three times more likely to be demonstrators than YF activists and nearly six times more likely to be demonstrators than BYC activists. Those who have engaged in expressive activities, such as writing a letter to an MP, are almost three times more likely to be BYC activists than YF activists and demonstrators. Furthermore, those who have engaged in money activities, such as boycotting or donating money to a political group, are most likely to be YF activists, closely followed by BYC

activists. However, going back to table 5 we see that 'other political participation' was not significant, so these results should be interpreted with some caution.

With that caution in mind, these results are in line with what was expected; previous participation shape future participation and the activists have distinct political repertoires. The analysis also suggest that participation is structured around where in the political system it occurs. The activists have previously engaged in activities in a similar domain as the activity they have been 'caught' in. The demonstrators have not only been 'caught' in an activity that is least connected to the formal political system, but also most likely to engage in other system challenging activities such as direct action. In contrast, the BYC activists who have engaged in an organisation that aims to express young citizen's voices to politicians are most likely to also have engaged in expressive activities such as contacting an MP or signing a petition. Although there is little variation in the socioeconomic makeup of the activists, this analysis illustrates that they are distinct groups and empirically confirms the importance of not treating them as a homogenous group. They consistently engage in different domains of the political system, not just in the activity they have been 'caught' in but also in their wider civic and political engagement.

Looking at the mobilisation patterns we can see that contrary to H2 there are differences in the likelihood of the activists being asked to participate. Those who are most likely to have been asked to participate are demonstrators, and least likely the YF activists. Table 5 also shows that this relationship is statistically significant. This finding suggest that the YFs can become much better at actively

recruiting members, and that that decline of members might not just have to do with the changing attitudes of people, but also with how the political parties recruit (Furlong and Cartmel, 2012). It could be that this finding derives from the type of activity that was surveyed, where the YF meetings were more structured than the demonstration and not something you bring a friend along to. However, the BYC activists, who also held structured meetings, are almost twice as likely to have been asked to participate compared to the YF activists, suggesting it is something about the YFs rather than the structured nature of the meetings.

This finding is also contrary to the CVM model, where mobilisation is central. It seems from this analysis that mobilisation matters in certain contexts such as the demonstrations, but not in YFs. The findings also prompt the question raised by Hooghe and Stolle (2005) whether political parties are actually interested in recruiting young people.

The results for the civic and political attitudes largely confirm the hypotheses, and in Table 5 we see relatively consistent significance levels. Just as expected in H3a those who are the most dissatisfied with democracy, see no point in voting and have negative views of politicians are most likely to be demonstrators. Similarly, as expected in H3b, those who have the most trust in political parties and those who have the most positive attitudes to politicians are the most likely to be YF activists. It is particularly interesting to see which attitudes distinguish the BYC activists from the other activists. On the one hand, those who are the most satisfied with democracy are almost as likely to be an YF activist as a BYC activist. On the other hand, those who think there is no point in

voting and have the most negative views of politicians are almost as probable to be a BYC activist as a demonstrator.

These findings are in line with H3c and suggest that the BYC activists have some similarities with the YF activists but also the demonstrators. BYC and YF activists are similar with regards to their attitudes to the political system, whilst BYC and demonstrators are similar with regards to the attitudes to the actors in the political system. We therefore see a link between the attitudes of the activists and the domain where they participate. The most positive political attitudes are held by those who engage in the organisation closest to the political system, and the most negative by the organisation with the weakest links to the system. This so far is wholly in line with the alienation argument and what others have found before. The BYC activists illustrate that the organisation 'in the middle' also fall in between the two others with regards to their attitudes to politics.

The main finding from this analysis is the mixed attitudes of the BYC activists. Combining their mixed attitudes with the findings above that the BYC activists do not consider themselves to discuss politics, and channel a lot of their engagement outside of the formal political system, illustrates that they are the typical 'engaged but alienated' young people that the much of the literature has identified. However, despite the BYC being a clearly political organisation, and youth councils being set up to channel young people's engagement towards the formal political system, it seems unlikely that the BYC activists would take the step into formal politics for two reasons. Firstly, they have a significantly different profile both in

terms of attitudes and other engagement from the YF activists. Secondly, they hold negative attitudes to the actors in the political system.

The most unexpected finding is with regards to the motivations of the activists. The results in Table 6 show that across the three types of motivations the demonstrators are the most likely to be motivated by all of them. At the same time those who are not motivated by instrumental and ideological motivations are almost equally likely to be YF activists as BYC activists. These findings illustrate that the motivations are most useful in distinguishing between the demonstrators and the other activists, but not all three types of activists, and this challenges the CVM model. In the case of the YF activists this lack of motivation is particularly puzzling. They have not been asked to participate and they are not motivated to participate; the only thing in the CVM model they do fulfil is the positive attitudes to the political system. The results also challenge organisational literature that explains participation in different organisations based on the differences in organisational incentives and individual motivations. The organisations have distinct purposes and incentive structures, but differences in motivations is not the main difference between the activists.

Conclusion

The central research question in this article was what makes young people politically active in different domains. More specifically it explored young people attending meetings of three political youth organisations in the UK; the political parties youth factions, the British Youth Council and the 2010 NUS student demonstrations. These young people have all turned up, so they are able, willing

and available to participate, as predicted by the CVM model, so why do they end up in different organisations?

The multinomial analysis of the contextualised survey data revealed several interesting findings that give us a more nuanced image of young political activists. Firstly, the homogeneity of activists illustrated by the descriptive analysis is concerning. The similarity of activists suggest that traditional inequalities of voice and equality are maintained in the younger generations across different organisations. All three youth organisations should thus work harder to ensure that people from more diverse backgrounds feel welcome and able to be active in their organisations. Furthermore, the lack of mobilisation among the political parties' youth factions illustrate that it may not just be young people's changing attitudes that is to blame for the decline in membership, but also something about the organisations. They can get much better at utilising their existing membership to boost membership.

Secondly, the analysis of civic and political skills and attitudes showed two worrying trends and teach us something about the pathways and patterns to activism that has implications for policies to engage young people politically. Firstly, the activists have distinct pathways of previous participation. The analysis of the activist's previous political participation saw distinct patterns of other political repertoires, where the activities they had previously engaged in were similar to the activity they had been 'caught' in. Analysing their other civic participation illustrated that the BYC engaged in a much wider range of organisations than the other activists. We therefore see a path dependency in

participation, and little overlap between domains. For those concerned with engaging young people in the formal domain of politics this is an important lesson; it is important to nurture interest, skills and willingness to engage in formal politics, not just youth councils and parliaments, in order to buck the disengagement trend. Secondly, the analysis of political attitudes illustrates that BYC activists are the typical case of alienated but engaged young people and provide some important nuance to the political alienation argument. For the YF and Demonstrators we see the traditional patterns of positive versus negative attitudes to the political system that drives participation in different domains (Norris, 2002). In contrast, the BYC activists were 'caught' engaging politically in an arguably political organisation that mirrors the formal political system, whilst still holding negative political attitudes and not discussing politics. Their lack of discussion of politics, but wide civic engagement suggest that they might not see what they do as *political*. Importantly, the BYC activists were alienated from the political *actors* not the political *system*. This finding is crucial for the alienation argument, and is in line with Seeman's (1959) argument, illustrating that when dealing with alienation it is important to specify what the alienation is *from*. It also establishes that alienation does not inhibit activism, even in the somewhat institutionalised form of the BYC.

In conclusion, this article has embedded some of the critiques of the operationalisation of political participation in to the research design by focusing on political activists in different organisations. By doing so, it was able to illustrate some important similarities and differences between the young activists, including the not previously scrutinised BYC activists. The results provide some

lessons for how to engage young people politically as well as important insights to the political alienation argument. This article has illustrated that not all activism, even narrowly defined, is the same and we cannot take the activists for granted.

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