

# First Time Voters – Part I

## Introduction

How do first time voters tick? In our two-part series on First Time Voters, we dig deep into their political attitudes, personal concerns and anything else they might face. Opinium’s sophisticated survey with 503 Britons aged 17-22 and 2,003 UK adults (aged 18+) delivers answers to all the questions one might have about first time voters and how they differ from the other generations.

Part one of our series covers political aspects, whilst part two will concentrate on the research outcome of individual and social questions.

## Voting Intention

First time voters present a slightly different picture than the other generations. First time voters are much more likely to vote for the Labour Party than the UK population as a whole and less likely to vote for Conservatives (26% vs. 29%).

Especially interesting is the different patterns of support for other parties. First time voters are three times as likely to vote for the Green party than the average UK voter (19% vs. 6% of the adult population) and at the same time much less likely to vote for UKIP (3% vs. 19% of the adult population).

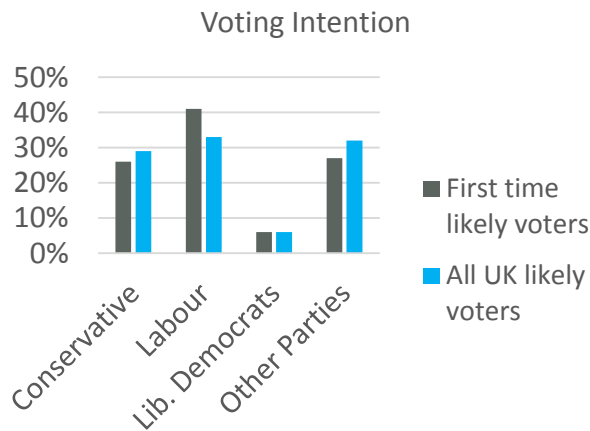


Figure 1: Voting intention

## Approval Ratings

Despite being more likely to vote for a party of the left, David Cameron still had a higher approval rating than the other three leaders.

While the adult population clearly puts Nick Clegg at the bottom of the list, first time voters have an even more negative opinion of Nigel Farage, with only 13% approving him vs. 29% of the adult population.

	First time likely voters		All UK likely voters	
	% Approve	% Disapprove	% Approve	% Disapprove
David Cameron	35%	41%	38%	47%
Ed Miliband	24%	42%	22%	54%
Nick Clegg	13%	58%	15%	61%
Nigel Farage	13%	64%	29%	45%

Table 1: Approval Ratings

## Important issues

The most important issues facing Britain according to first time voters and adult UK voters:

### First time voters

47% health / NHS

41% unemployment

39% Poverty / inequality

38% economic situation

33% immigration / race relations

### All UK voters

54% health / NHS

43% immigration / race relations

38% economic situation

22% low pay

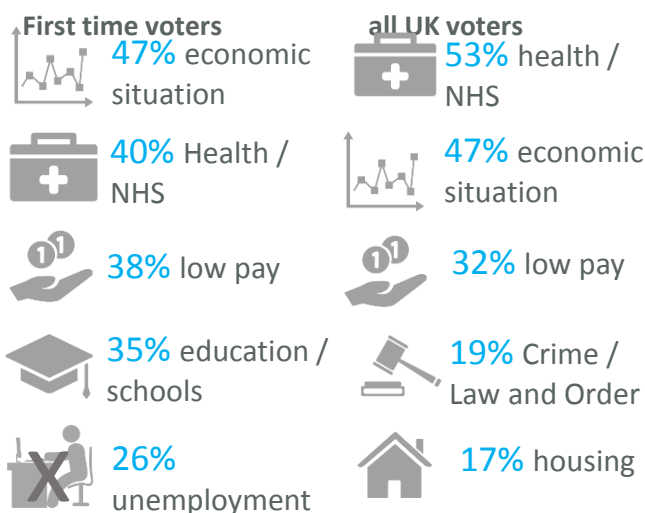
22% unemployment

First time voters were less likely to see race relations and immigration as a problem facing Britain, and more likely to see problems such as unemployment and poverty / inequality as an issue for the country.



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The most important issues facing individuals and their family according to first time voters and adult UK voters:



The top three issues facing first time voters and the adult population were surprisingly similar – health, the economy and low pay.

## Europe

62% of first time voters think that the UK's membership of the European Union is a good thing, while only 14% say that it is a bad thing. This includes even 57% of first time Conservative voters that say it is a good thing.

Similarly, if a referendum were to be held on EU membership, two thirds (67%) would vote to remain inside the EU, and 19% would vote to leave.

## Economy

First time voters are still slightly more likely to trust David Cameron and George Osborne than Ed Miliband and Ed Balls to handle the economy (28% vs. 19%).

However, three in ten (29%) said they did not trust any of the three main economic teams, and a further fifth (19%) did not know which pair they trusted most.

## Who do you trust to handle the economy?

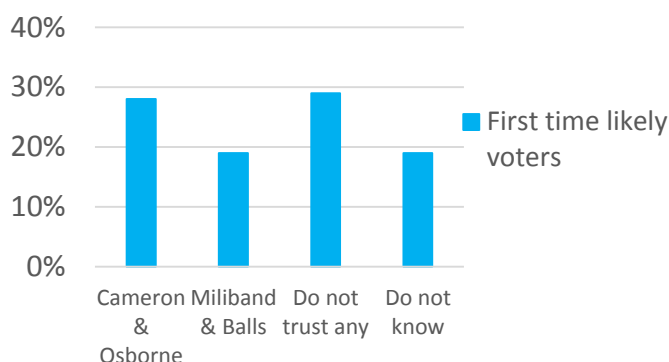
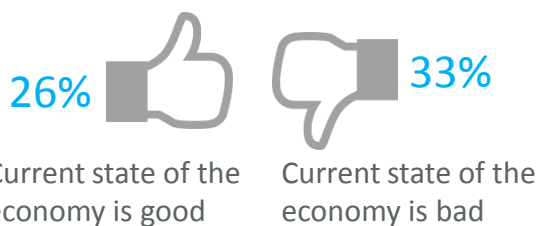


Figure 2: Economy

Furthermore, slightly more hold the current Coalition government responsible for the economy than the last Labour government (38% vs. 32%).



## Political Attitudes

### Human Rights Act

65% of the first time voter generation thought Britain should keep the Human Rights Act in its current form, while 17% thought it should be repealed and replaced with a British Bill of Rights. However, half (50%) the adult population thought Britain should repeal the HRA, while only 33% thought it should be kept.

### Drugs

Interestingly, half (51%) thought that possession of drugs should continue to carry a prison sentence, while 37% thought adults should be allowed to possess a small amount of drugs for recreational use.

Two thirds (67%) of first time Green voters thought small amounts of drugs should be legal for recreational use.

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## House of Lords

Just under half (48%) thought the House of Lords should be replaced by an entirely elected body, while 25% thought it should remain appointed. Half (50%) of first time Conservative voters thought the Lords should remain appointed.

## Monarchy

Two in three (65%) thought the UK should remain a monarchy, while a fifth (20%) thought Britain should become a republic. Even a majority of first time Green voters (57%) supported retaining the monarchy.



**65%** think the UK should remain a monarchy.

## The deficit

Surprisingly, 59% thought the government should reduce the deficit primarily by reducing spending, while only 18% thought this should be done primarily by increasing taxes. Just as interestingly, first time voters seemed keener on spending reductions than adult voters (59% vs 53%)

## Welfare and benefits

First time voters were divided on the problems facing Britain regarding welfare. 47% thought the bigger problem facing Britain is rising poverty and use of food banks caused by welfare cuts, while 39% thought the bigger issue is the large amount of spending on benefits and social security. By comparison, the adult population was evenly divided (44% vs 43%).



**1 in 2** thinks that rising poverty is a bigger problem than benefits spending

## Immigration

48% thought that immigration is generally a good thing, while 31% thought that is generally a bad thing.



**62%** of first time voters think that the UK's membership of the European Union is a good thing, and **67%** would vote to remain inside the EU in case of a referendum.

Those at university were most likely to think immigration is a good thing (56%), while first time voters in work were evenly divided on whether it was good or bad (38% vs 39%). The adult population generally thought immigration was a bad thing (51%).

## Green Belt

Three fifths (61%) believed that 'the Green Belt must be preserved to protect the countryside from being swallowed up by urban areas', while 21% believed that 'it is necessary that we start building homes on some Green Belt land to meet the demand for housing'.



**61%** believe the Green Belt must be preserved to protect the countryside from being swallowed up by the urban areas.

## Climate change

A large proportion (80%) of first time voters across all parties believe that climate change is taking place, while only 11% think it is not.

When we asked those that believe climate change is happening what they think is causing it, three quarters (74%) believed that it is caused by humans, while 13% thought it was occurring naturally.

By comparison, only 67% of all UK adults thought that climate change was taking place, and even a fifth (21%) of those thought this was occurring naturally rather than being caused by humans (62%).



**80%** of first time voters believe that climate change is taking place, with **74%** of those believing it is caused by humans.

# First Time Voters – Part I

## Democracy

Respondents were asked to select up to 5 factors that they thought were the most essential for a country to be considered a democracy.

First time voters were more likely than adults to describe aspects of social democracy as essential features of a democratic state, such as the protection of minority rights (30% vs 20%) and the protection of citizens against poverty (25% vs 23%).

First time voters were also more likely than adults to select elements of citizen engagement such as governments needing to explain its decisions to voters (33% vs 23%) and the media needing to provide reliable information (32% vs 22%).

On many of the elements of democracy that first time voters were more likely than adults to view as essential, the UK is seen as not performing the function well.

Of those that selected “the government explains its decisions to voters” only 17% of first time voters thought the UK did this well, while 55% think it does this badly.

First time voters were also less likely to say that the media provides citizens with reliable information.

The adult population were noticeably more likely than first time voters to think the government protects minority rights well and believe the courts successfully stop the government acting beyond its authority.

Which of the following are most essential for a country to be considered a democracy?	First time voting generation	UK adult population
National elections are free and fair	62%	61%
The courts treat everyone the same	48%	45%
Citizens have the final say on the most important issues by referendum	45%	37%
The courts are able to stop the government acting beyond its authority	36%	33%
The media are free to criticise the government	34%	36%
The government explains its decisions to voters	33%	23%
The media provide citizens with reliable information to judge the government	32%	22%
The rights of minority groups are protected	30%	20%
Opposition parties are free to criticise the government	27%	34%
The government protects all citizens against poverty	25%	23%

Table 2: Democracy Part 1

How well would you say the UK fulfils the criteria you mentioned to be considered a democracy?	First time voting generation	UK adult population
National elections are free and fair	86%	87%
The courts treat everyone the same	49%	51%
Citizens have the final say on the most important issues by referendum	36%	35%
The courts are able to stop the government acting beyond its authority	38%	57%
The media are free to criticise the government	77%	77%
The government explains its decisions to voters	17%	33%
The media provide citizens with reliable information to judge the government	30%	49%
The rights of minority groups are protected	39%	56%
Opposition parties are free to criticise the government	88%	91%
The government protects all citizens against poverty	20%	24%

Table 3: Democracy Part 2

# First Time Voters – Part I

## Participation

The first time voting generation are not necessarily complete strangers to voting. The most common elections to have voted in where:

Which of the following types of elections have you voted in before?	First time voting generation	UK adult population
Local elections (e.g. for your councillor)	32%	63%
European elections in May 2014	24%	54%
Police commissioner elections in November 2012	6%	19%
I have never voted before	50%	15%

Table 2: Participation

Although many had cast ballots before, half (50%) of the first time voting generation said they have never voted before, while only one in six (15%) of the adult population said they had never voted before.

Despite the fact that local elections happen almost every year in most parts of Britain, the first time voting generation is only half as likely to have voted in a local election as the adult population (32% vs 63%).

Only **1 in 3** voted in local elections before.



**50%** of not voted in any type of election before

**28%** of first time voters discuss politics on social media.



The first time voting generation was less likely to have engaged in some more traditional ways of democratic participation.

First time voters were more likely than adults to discuss politics on social media (28% vs 18%). However, they were much less likely to have participated in more traditional ways such as writing to an elected official (13% vs 30%), attending a public meeting (9% vs 23%) or join a political party (3% vs 10%).

## Summary

The research provided crucial insights into the behaviour and thoughts of first time voters and their political attitudes. Besides different voting intentions especially in terms of support for the Green Party and UKIP, the first time voter generation shows concern over different issues than the older generations. Unemployment and poverty is perceived as a key worry for Britain by first time voters, while all UK voters consider the economic situation and low pay of a more important issue. Closer to home, the top three concerns are equally the economy, health and low pay. On other political issues, the first time voters do have opinions that differ from those of the overall UK voters especially in regard to the EU, the Human Rights Act, spending reductions and immigration.

Furthermore, first time voters were more likely than adults to describe aspects of social democracy as essential features of a democratic society, and they were more likely than adults to select elements of citizen engagement with government. On those elements, first time voters were more likely than adults to view the UK as not performing the function of a democracy well.

Lastly, participation in political discussion shows a strong development away from traditional methods towards more modern methods such as social media engagement with politics.

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## About Opinium

Opinium Research is a leading insight agency based in London. Our clients value our high levels of responsiveness, the involvement of our senior researchers at every stage and our intimate way of working.

We work with organisations to define and resolve commercial issues, helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate, by ensuring we develop the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insight, targeted recommendations, and address specific business challenges.