

# SHOULD THE VOTING AGE BE LOWERED TO SIXTEEN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

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INTRODUCTION

This investigation touched upon political ideologies, psychological perspectives on cognitive maturity and rationalisation, as well as the social views and legislative issues surrounding the lowering of the age of suffrage. To do this, professional, political, and public opinion was gathered through the use of surveys and interviews, in order to decide whether the voting age should be lowered, and if any safety measures

need to be implemented to secure the integrity of the vote and prevent the abuse of the right to suffrage. The issue of suffrage resurfaced at the end of the First World War when many women refused to return to traditional roles, expressing desires to continue working. The Representation of the Peoples Act 1918 gave “Women over the age of 30” the right to vote as well as “all men over the age of 21” (Archer-Shee, 1918). However, it was not until The Equal Franchise Act was

passed in 1928 that the voting age for women was equal to their male counterpart (Joynson-Hicks, 1928). Since 1963, those over the age of eighteen could vote in any election in the United Kingdom as the voting age was lowered to eighteen in 1969. It now seems to be the right time to debate suffrage once again, not for the right to vote for women nor to make it an equal vote, but rather to enfranchise a new generation.

RATIONALE

I chose to instigate whether the voting age should be lowered to sixteen in the United Kingdom as I believe that democracy in the United Kingdom, as it stands today, could be damaged because of apathetic voters as well as party policies which aim to appease an increasing nationalist vote, which isolates younger voters and benefit older generations. I investigated this in order to see if sixteen and seventeen year olds could be the boost the electorate needs to rejuvenate politics as well as to balance the UK’s global view, creating a fair and representative electorate. With over thirty organisations, including political parties, asking for change now would be the best time to make an amendment to the voting age. The Scottish Referendum in September 2014 also peaked my interest in the voting age as it showed us that, when necessary, sixteen and seventeen year olds can come out in might and strength, despite social and political criticism about their objective understanding of voting. The combination of political apathy, nationalism, and an ageing population have contributed to my reasoning for choosing to investigate lowering the voting age.

DISSERTATION STRUCTURE



POLITICAL REASONING, THEORY AND IDEOLOGY



SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AND ACCEPTANCE

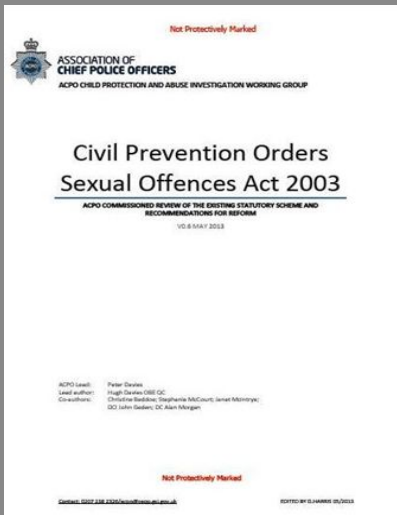
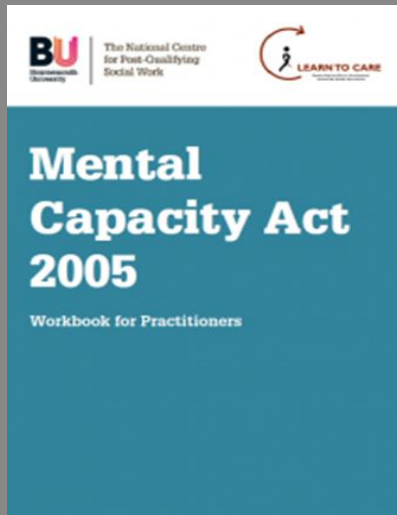


PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTES



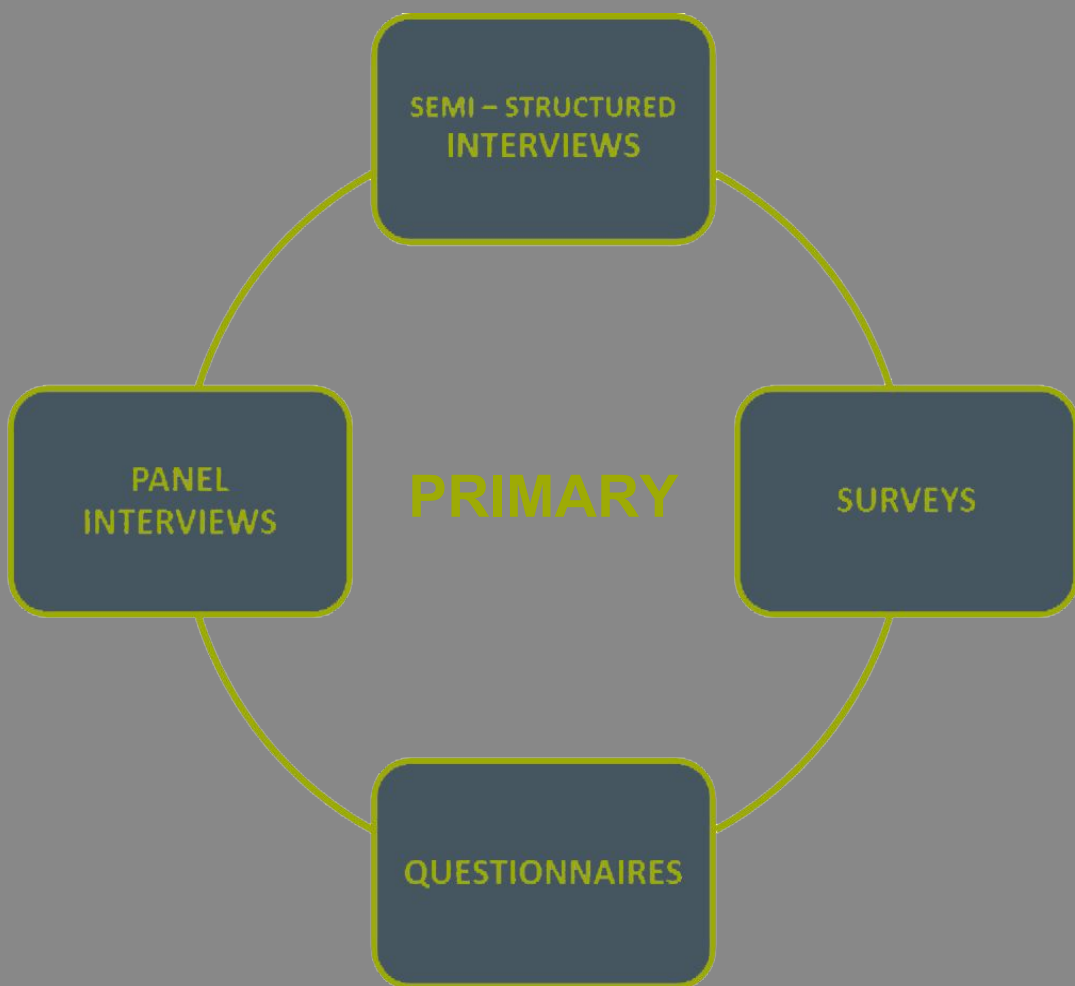
EFFECTS ON THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND DEFINITIONS OF ADULT

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Legislation that contradicts the age of an “adult” (The Stationery Office Limited, 2003/2005)

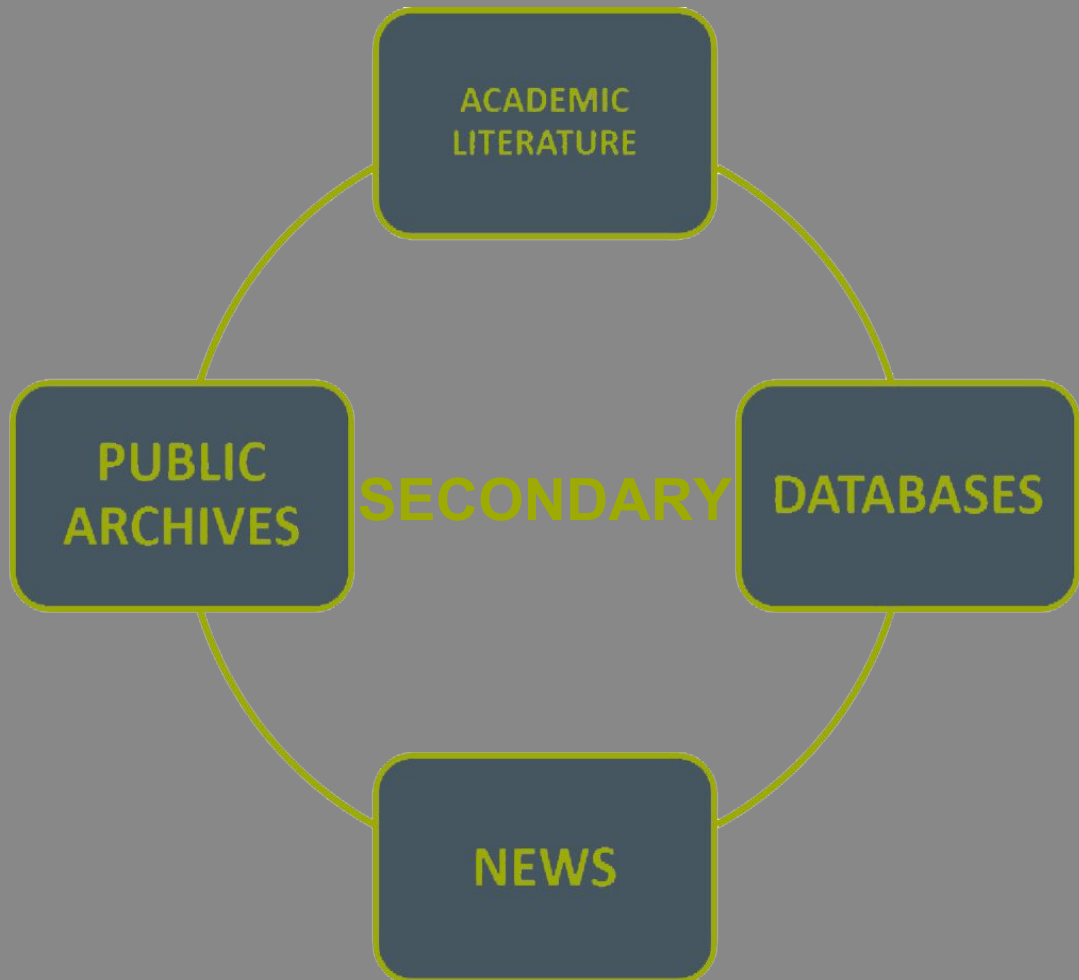
PREFRONTAL CORTEX (L) complex cognitive behaviour e.g. decision making - FRONTAL LOBES (R) controls behaviour and learning



Gain an understanding of general public opinion, as well as the opinion of key decision makers such as MPs and Councillors.

Interviews started by asking structured and direct questioning e.g. “Do you believe the voting age should be lowered to sixteen in the United Kingdom?”, leading to a more informal semi-structured interview to draw out developed opinions.

Basic questionnaires, consisting of just two questions, one closed question and one open question were also used. The first being “Do you believe the voting age should be lowered to sixteen in the United Kingdom?” with a yes or no response and the second question being “why?”



Gathered secondary information to gain a better understanding of certain fields such as psychology and law.

Used a broad range of secondary sources from JSTOR, academic literature, and news articles. Enabled me to gather key figures and statistics to create the arguments within the investigation and to save time.

CONCLUSION

Whilst lowering the voting age would indeed provide a new world to younger electorates, opening legal roles and further suffrage factors, it is likely that the government would try to legislate and curb, furthering the current restrictions.

The four key areas that I looked at all provided valid arguments for lowering the vote to sixteen. Politically, more parties are now supporting the change, but psychological and legal factors could sway the public opinion. Taxation shall remain a prominent issue, as it's been argued that there should be no taxation

without representation for sixteen and seventeen year olds as they cannot decide how, or who, the money is spent on and by.

I do believe that the vote should be lowered, along with a majority of sixteen and seventeen year olds, but I also believe that testing should be implemented till the age of eighteen, to ensure that voters have an understanding of different political theories and ideologies so they would not be electing manifestos which they do not properly understand. Supplementary lessons should be made available for those in year nine and above, hopefully encouraging political activity

rather than disbarring it, preventing a general apathy toward voting.

I believe that the overall benefit to lowering the vote would far outweigh that of the issues, such as cost or time. An alternative to lowering the vote to sixteen, would be to lower it to seventeen. This would ensure less of a waiting time, whilst also allowing for individuals to gain a little more reality. This would be a more viable option as it would gain more support than lowering the vote completely to the discussed sixteen.

## REFERENCES

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METHODOLOGY