

TEXT 2 – Structure of the text

The text is an editorial published in the wake of what is now considered as two political earthquakes: the Brexit referendum and the first election of Donald Trump as president, both in 2016. In both cases, the low turnout rate among young voters was identified as a key factor.

- **A - Background to the debate on legal voting age: low youth voter turnout is dangerous**
 - Legal ages vary a lot but legal voting age is 18 almost everywhere but opposition to lowering it is a mistake (KEY IDEA of the editorial)
 - Figures from around the world
 - Why it's dangerous: debating the voting age makes people overlook what is the REAL issue: disengagement / low turnout

- **B - The reasons behind the disenchantment / low participation**
 - voting is not seen as a duty but just as a possibility
 - if they happen to be politically active, they are around a specific issue and do not necessarily join / root for a party
 - politicians work hard to seduce older voters who are a more reliable group (higher turnout rate)
 - so young people feel that they are bound to lose / cannot possibly have an impact
 - Making voting compulsory not the solution
 - >> important to make them WANT to take part

- **C - What governments can do:**
 - **C1 - lowering the voting age is the right solution**
 - > registering and casting a first vote at 16 is easier than at 18 (are surrounded by communities, their families, their schools)
 - > they can emulate their peers
 - > when registered at a younger age the turnout has proved to be higher

 - **C2 - but lowering the voting age is not enough**
 - > registration at school needs to be boosted
 - > governments should better check that electoral rolls are accurate and up to date.
 - Automatic registration would help
 - > Civics lessons are essential (learning about how things work / a boost to political commitment)

- **D - Acting is essential to maintain democracy alive**
 - the young matter and should be heard as THEY will be impacted the most by current decision (climate change and the cost of providing for older generations)
 - they would be initiated to civic life earlier
 - In order to survive, democracy needs voters to keep voting / making choices: so it needs to appeal to the young ones

You need to choose a plan for the synthèse. I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THREE PARTS FOR THE SYNTHÈSE AND THREE PARTS FOR THE COMMENTARY even if they are of varying length.

So it means moving things around a bit or, if you follow the structure of the text, make sure you make the key ideas stand out.

Here the text is very well organised (which is always the case in a leader from *The Economist*), but you need to move things around a bit to squeeze everything into three parts (and to avoid repetitions)

I/ The right question needs to be asked about the you vote

- Debating the voting age is common
- But it is not the most urgent issue; young voters' participation is
- Why disengagement is dangerous
- Why it matters for democracy (this would correspond to part D)

II/ The reasons behind this disenchantment (> Part B)

III/ What ought to be done (Part C and what remains of part D)

OR

I/ The real danger, low participation among young voters and its underlying causes

(most of Part A and Part B)

II/ What should be done (Part C)

III/ Why it matters for democracy

(part D and part of part A)

Then you have to decide on what you will start your introduction with to catch the listener's attention:
general contextualisation / anecdote / reference to current or recent events

TEXT 4

I/ I remember being 16 in the 1960s. The prime minister seemed geriatric and I was sure he should be in care, while a group of us went to meet our young MP, a certain Margaret Thatcher. She was young, but she didn't seem as if she was with the times. We could not dream of voting for someone like her. Matter closed.

Sixteen-year-olds are great fun but they are not grown up. They > cannot marry in England and Wales, drive, smoke, get a tattoo or buy alcohol on their own. > They are legally classed as children and > are supposed to be in formal education or training to 18. Sixteen-year-olds > have not taken to the streets demanding the right to the franchise, like the Chartists or suffragettes did.

So why has Keir Starmer suddenly reiterated that he intends to enfranchise them to vote in UK-wide elections? The only plausible answer is that he hopes they will vote for him. In a desperate attempt to justify this manoeuvre, he says that, if 16-year-old soldiers "are old enough to take a bullet for our country", they should get the vote. (Likewise if they are "old enough to work" and "pay taxes".)

In fact, 16-year-olds are not old enough to "take a bullet", since frontline army service is banned for under-18s. Meanwhile, precious few 16-year-olds work, since Starmer's own party, when last in power, made it supposedly compulsory for them to remain in education or training to 18. As for taxes, younger children already pay VAT when they spend their pocket money. The whole argument is slapdash.

Even the expected electoral gain to Labour is dubious. Well under half of 18-24s turned out at the last general election. There is some evidence from Scotland, which lowered the voting age to 16 in 2014 for the independence referendum and in 2016 for Scottish parliamentary elections, that the new group would be active, though novelty may recently have been a factor in turnout. In Wales, which lowered the voting age to 16 in 2021 for Senedd and local government elections, early evidence suggests that the new group plans to vote at a similarly low rate to other age groups under 55. Either way, Starmer would be lucky to see more than half of his 1.5 million new voters actually turning out, with perhaps about a third of those voting for him. Even then, the general assumption that the young are leftwing has taken a bruising recently from rightwing influencers.

II/ Where Starmer must be right is in wanting to bring young people into what he pompously calls his "social contract" with gen Z. Here, his absolute priority should not be the ballot box, but how he proposes to prepare the new cohort for their responsibilities. With social media so clearly dominant over the views and behaviour of those whose support he seeks, its proper regulation should be a priority for any such reform.

The present government shows no interest in such regulation. Indeed, if anything, quite the reverse. Rumour has it that Starmer, in his attempt to reduce tariffs, is on > the brink of pledging no further curbs on the tech giants, in view of their closeness to Donald Trump. This would follow the cabinet's apparent > capitulation to those same giants in the matter of copyright and artificial intelligence. All this suggests a complete lack of concern for what must currently be the greatest threat to the mental health of gen Z. All Starmer has done is boast that he watched Adolescence. So what now: voting at 13?

III/ The one thing that might excuse the government's cynicism is a programme to prepare teenagers for their new responsibility. > The tyranny of academic GCSEs and exam culture should be suspended, if not for ever, then at least for one day a week, to be replaced by compulsory civic awareness. This should embrace an introduction to peace and war, national politics, local government, the law, practical economics and the handling of money. (...)

> Despite Resistance or reluctance

I know teachers who genuinely think it is not their job to "teach" a world outside education. They see no need to educate young people in how to relate to one another, work in groups or keep their minds and bodies in good shape. They see no reason to teach self-presentation or expression, the new skills of oracy so crucial to getting on in a creative career. Teachers seem to think all this is for parents, not schools, even when they know it is not true. The school curriculum is in the dark ages.

> The truth of the matter is that teenagers are acquiring these skills and attitudes from social media. It is online that they are gaining a whole new context for their personal and social lives. They are doing so from the worst possible sources: biased, uncensored, unmediated and unregulated. It must be the worst preparation for that most sacred of democratic rituals – the vote. This is the grim reality of Starmer's new social contract. (830 words)

- Sleep Dream English

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