

Young people's activism in the UK: Investigating the impact of perception and identity on non-electoral participation

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Author's declaration

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of the perception of agency, efficacy and influence on young people's activism and explored how feelings and personal identity are related to becoming politically interested and involved. It contributes to the expanding literature on young people's non-electoral political participation and combines in its original theoretical framework the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves politics' with sociopolitical development theory.

The theoretical framework was developed on the central assumption that self-perceived empowerment influences young people's engagement in non-electoral participation. Self-perceived empowerment, conceptualised as the perception of agency, efficacy and influence, was assumed to be associated with higher levels of participation in non-electoral political activities. The social settings of activist participation were explored further by examining how young people relate to their activism emotionally and how their identity influences and shapes their involvement with particular issues.

Following a mixed-method design, data was collected from an original online survey with a sample of people aged 16-24 (N = 1,094) and eight focus group discussions with young people who were politically active on the issues of climate change, anti-racism, feminism and LGBT rights. High levels of non-electoral participation were found to be connected to positive perceptions of personal agency, internal and collective efficacy and social influence. Interest in social issues was more decisive for youth activism than interest in politics.

Engagement in issue-based activism and identity-based activism was driven by different emotions and personal experiences. The central motivation in climate activism originated from caring about others. In identity-based activism, individuals reported that although their personal identity was connected to experiences of fear and discrimination, it also represented a strong source of motivation. Overall, self-perceived capacities of empowerment – agency, efficacy and influence – play a significant role in the activism of young people. However, these capacities are influenced by social power dynamics and shaped by personal experiences and identities.

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Table of contents

List of tables.....	x
List of figures.....	xii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Situating the study	1
1.2. Rationale for the study.....	3
1.3. Structure of the thesis.....	5
2. Young people, political participation and activism	13
2.1. Overview.....	13
2.2. Defining activism within civic and political participation	14
2.2.1. Understanding the ‘civic’ as part of the ‘political’	16
2.2.2. Political action repertoires and ‘Do-It-Ourselves’ politics	21
2.2.3. Outlining activism as intentional civic and political participation.....	27
2.3. Young people and political participation	30
2.3.1. Youth and young people	32
2.3.2. The conceptualisation of youth beyond age.....	35
2.3.3. Young people in the context of this research project	39
2.4. Young people’s political participation from an international perspective	41
2.4.1. Changing structures of political participation.....	44
2.4.2. Digital communication and social media in activism	47
2.4.3. Implications for further research.....	49
2.5. Youth participation in times of political upheaval and social insecurity	51
2.5.1. Young people and electoral participation: The General Election of 2017 and the ‘youthquake’ debate.....	52
2.5.2. Young people and non-electoral participation: The effects of austerity politics and living through a global pandemic.....	59
2.6. Major themes of young people’s activism in the UK	63
2.6.1. Domestic politics	63

2.6.2.	Environmental activism and climate change	65
2.6.3.	Race, ethnicity and gender issues	66
2.6.4.	Youth representation in media and politics	68
2.7.	Investigating the impact of perception and identity on young people's activism	70
3.	Theoretical approaches to political participation and activism	74
3.1.	Overview.....	74
3.2.	Theoretical approaches to political participation	75
3.2.1.	Theories of individual political participation	75
3.2.2.	Theories of collective political participation and social movements.....	77
3.2.3.	Integrative theoretical models of political participation	83
3.3.	Theoretical approaches to young people's political participation ...	87
3.3.1.	Political life cycle, period effects and cohort effects	88
3.3.2.	Sociopolitical development theory.....	90
3.4.	The theoretical framework of this study	94
3.4.1.	Activism as non-electoral participation.....	95
3.4.2.	Exploring cognitive, emotional and social factors affecting young people's activism	97
3.4.3.	A visualisation of the theoretical framework	111
3.5.	Conclusion.....	115
4.	Methodology and data.....	116
4.1.	Overview.....	116
4.2.	Paradigmatic considerations.....	117
4.3.	Developing a research design	121
4.3.1.	Contextualising quantitative research on political participation and activism	121
4.3.2.	Contextualising qualitative research on political participation and activism	124
4.3.3.	The rationale for a mixed-method research design	128
4.3.4.	Choice of methods	131

4.4. Quantitative method: an online survey on civic and political participation	132
4.4.1. Conceptual considerations	133
4.4.2. Data collection	141
4.4.3. Quantitative data analysis	148
4.5. Qualitative method: focus group discussions with young activists	161
4.5.1. Conceptual considerations	162
4.5.2. Data collection	168
4.5.3. Qualitative data analysis	174
4.6. Methodological reflections	180
4.6.1. Ethics	180
4.6.2. Quality criteria for research	185
4.7. Conclusion	191
5. Analysing young people's non-electoral participation	193
5.1. Overview	193
5.2. Non-electoral participation of young people in the UK	194
5.2.1. Measuring young people's non-electoral participation	195
5.2.2. Young people's experiences with activism	203
5.3. Factors influencing non-electoral participation	210
5.3.1. Interest in politics and interest in social issues	211
5.3.2. Internal efficacy and perception of personal agency	221
5.3.3. Collective efficacy and perception of collective agency	229
5.3.4. Perceived opportunity of political and social influence	238
5.3.5. Dissatisfaction with the government	248
5.4. Identifying predictors of young people's non-electoral participation ...	253
5.4.1. Full linear regression model for young people's non-electoral participation	254
5.4.2. Understanding the drivers for young people's non-electoral participation	258
5.5. Comparing determinants of non-electoral and electoral participation	277

5.5.1. Measuring young people's electoral participation	278
5.5.2. Full linear regression model for young people's electoral participation.....	283
5.6. Identity and emotions in activism.....	286
5.6.1. Positive connotations with activism: empowerment and belonging.....	287
5.6.2. Negative connotations with activism: fears and burdens... ..	289
5.6.3. Commonalities and differences across different strands of activism	292
5.7. Summary of findings.....	301
6. Explaining young people's engagement in activism as part of sociopolitical development	310
6.1. Overview.....	310
6.2. Understanding cognitive, social and emotional factors for activism as part of sociopolitical development.....	311
6.2.1. Becoming involved in activism as a response to perceived injustice	313
6.2.2. Personal identity and belonging in issue-based and identity-based activism.....	326
6.2.3. Activism as acts of empowerment and social identification	330
6.3. Limitations of the study	335
6.4. Open questions and recommendations for future research	338
7. Contribution of the thesis.....	342
Bibliography	347
Appendix 1: Survey - questionnaire and codebook.....	378
Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet for Survey.....	387
Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Focus Groups	389
Appendix 4: Focus group schedule.....	392

Appendix 5: Descriptive data analysis	397
Appendix 6: Dependent variables - normality tests and intra-item correlations	406
Appendix 7: Independent variables - descriptives and frequencies	408
Appendix 8: Cross-tabulations of interest in politics and interest in social issues.....	412
Appendix 9: Testing normality and homoscedasticity of residuals	413
Appendix 10: Linear regression model using an expansive conceptualisation of non-electoral activities (inclusion of zero values)	416
Appendix 11: Participation in individual non-electoral activities only and participation in both individual and collective non-electoral activities	417

List of tables

Table 2.1. Latent and manifest political participation	17
Table 3.1. The stages of sociopolitical development.....	91
Table 3.2. Electoral and non-electoral repertoires of political participation ..	96
Table 4.1. Overview of variables used in survey design	136
Table 4.2. Means of worry scores among all respondents, sorted by weighted data observations.....	151
Table 4.3. Political topics of importance among survey respondents, weighted (N = 948) and unweighted (N = 1,094).....	158
Table 4.4. Overview of focus groups.....	168
Table 4.5. List of focus group participants.....	170
Table 4.6. Domain summaries of coded focus group transcripts	178
Table 5.1. Summary of exploratory factor analysis results using a principal component analysis	200
Table 5.2. Social groups of shared concerns and means of non-electoral activities (N = 840)	202
Table 5.3. Explaining non-electoral activities with interest in politics and interest in social issues	215
Table 5.4. Explaining non-electoral activities with internal efficacy and personal agency.....	225
Table 5.5. Explaining non-electoral activities with collective efficacy and collective agency.....	232
Table 5.6. Explaining non-electoral activities with perceived opportunity of political influence and perceived opportunity of social influence	241
Table 5.7. Explaining non-electoral activities with satisfaction with the UK government.....	250
Table 5.8. Full linear regression model explaining non-electoral activities.	255
Table 5.9. Contrast tests of means scores by activity subgroups	264
Table 5.10. Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of participating in collective non-electoral activities.....	267

Table 5.11. Full linear regression models comparing male and female respondents	271
Table 5.12. Full linear regression model explaining non-electoral activities, with interaction terms male * personal agency and male * collective efficacy ...	274
Table 5.13. Mean scores of non-electoral and electoral participation by age group.....	280
Table 5.14. Social groups of shared concerns and means of electoral activities (N = 839).....	282
Table 5.15. Full linear regression model explaining electoral activities.....	284
Table 5.16. Comparison of regression coefficients of full linear models with dependent variable non-electoral activities and electoral activities	285
Table 5.17. Overview of findings for hypotheses H1-10.....	302

List of figures

Figure 2.1. Changes in scores for certainty-to-vote and interest in politics among 18-24-year-olds.....	53
Figure 2.2. Changes in scores for satisfaction with the governing system in Britain and with opportunities for involvement among 18-24-year-olds.....	54
Figure 2.3. Comparison of General Election turnout results for 18-24-year-olds	56
Figure 3.1 Visualisation of the factors investigated in the study.....	112
Figure 4.1. Adverts used to disseminate survey link on social media platforms.	142
Figure 4.2. Perception of personal, collective and institutional agency (N = 948)	153
Figure 4.3. Frequency of social media usage among survey respondents (N = 948).....	156
Figure 4.4. Word cloud generated from the 300 most frequent words in the survey's free-text comments	164
Figure 4.5. Hierarchy chart of most frequently expressed concerns in the survey's free-text comments, coded as themes	165
Figure 4.6. Hierarchy of domains within focus group transcripts.....	177
Figure 4.7. Hierarchy of themes within the domain <i>Agency</i>	179
Figure 5.1. Non-electoral activities survey respondents stated to have participated in since 2019 (N = 948)	196
Figure 5.2. Distribution of non-electoral activities among respondents (N = 948)	197
Figure 5.3. Distribution of non-electoral activities among respondents, excluding zero values (N = 840).....	197
Figure 5.4. With whom respondents believed to share their concerns about political and social issues with, in percentages (N = 948)	203
Figure 5.5. Interest in politics among survey respondents in %	212
Figure 5.6. Interest in social issues among survey respondents in %	213

Figure 5.7. Interest in politics by gender: female respondents (N = 461) and male respondents (N = 487)	214
Figure 5.8. Interest in social issues by gender: female respondents (N = 461) and male respondents (N = 487).....	214
Figure 5.9. Marginal effect plot for interest in politics on non-electoral participation.....	216
Figure 5.10. Marginal effect plot for interest in social issues on non-electoral participation.....	217
Figure 5.11. Perception of internal efficacy among survey respondents in %	223
Figure 5.12. Perception of personal agency among survey respondents in %	224
Figure 5.13. Marginal effect plot for internal efficacy on non-electoral participation.....	226
Figure 5.14. Marginal effect plot for personal agency on non-electoral participation.....	226
Figure 5.15. Perception of collective efficacy among survey respondents in %	231
Figure 5.16. Perception of collective agency among survey respondents in %	231
Figure 5.17. Marginal effect plot for collective efficacy on non-electoral participation.....	233
Figure 5.18. Marginal effect plot for collective agency on non-electoral participation.....	234
Figure 5.19. Perceived opportunity of political influence among survey respondents in %	239
Figure 5.20. Perceived opportunity for social influence among survey respondents in % (N = 474)	240
Figure 5.21. Marginal effect plot for perceived opportunity of social influence on non-electoral participation	242

Figure 5.22. Satisfaction with the UK government among survey respondents in %	249
Figure 5.23. Marginal effect plot for satisfaction with the government on non-electoral participation	251
Figure 5.24. Added variable plots for the full linear regression model with non-electoral activities as dependent variable.....	257
Figure 5.25. Coefficient plots of independent variables on non-electoral participation levels.	258
Figure 5.26. Subgroups of respondents: participation in individual activities only and participation in both individual and collective activities	262
Figure 5.27. Differences in means between respondents who participated in individual activities only and respondents who participated in both individual and collective activities.....	265
Figure 5.28. Non-electoral activities participated in by female respondents, excluding zero values (N = 369).....	270
Figure 5.29. Non-electoral activities participated in by male respondents, excluding zero values (N = 471).....	270
Figure 5.30. Two-way interaction of gender and collective efficacy	275
Figure 5.31. Predicted values of non-electoral activities participated in by gender.....	276
Figure 5.32. Electoral activities survey respondents stated to have participated in since 2019 (N = 839).....	279
Figure 5.33. Distribution of electoral activities among respondents aged 16-24 (N = 839).....	281
Figure 5.34. Distribution of electoral activities among respondents aged 20-24 (N = 508).....	281
Figure 6.1. Application of the sociopolitical development stages to the empirical findings of the study.....	331

1. Introduction

1.1. Situating the study

Since 2019 young people's activism has become a more prevalent theme in public debate. This trend can be ascribed to the fast-spreading international movement of *Fridays For Future*, strongly associated with Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, as well as the increasing accessibility of news via social media. Although youth activism may be more prominent in the news these days – not least because of dedicated direct actions seeking disruption of public life, such as environmental activists gluing themselves to roads or throwing soup on museum paintings (BBC News, 2022a; Gayle, 2022) – young people have long contributed to social movements and political change across the world. On a global scale, young people's actions have been a response to the inefficacy and failure of both the political and economic systems they experienced (Pickard and Bessant, 2018).

With membership rates for political parties and trade unions of young people falling, political protest and dissent are increasingly expressed via "cause-orientated actions" (Norris, 2007). Young people prefer participating in actions which are focused on specific issues rather than political ideologies. Through the use of various social media networks, the way young people engage in social and political matters has been moving towards informal networks dominating political expression and interpersonal communication (Moeller, Kühne and De Vreese, 2018, Vidgen and Yasseri, 2020). The political sphere has become intertwined with the private sphere, leading to blurred boundaries between civic participation and political participation. Political behaviours are no longer bound to be limited to institutionalised politics but instead can be manifested in personal actions, such as consumer choices, expression of political views online, or protest participation. Research has labelled this phenomenon of adapting personal behaviours in everyday life as a result of or influenced by political beliefs or social values as 'everyday makers' (Bang, 2005) or 'Do-It-Ourselves Politics' (Pickard, 2019). While young people are becoming less involved with established membership-based networks than

previous generations, their participatory behaviour is not secluded from the idea of community and the common good. Instead, non-electoral participation is carried out on a personal level with the consideration of a specific cause (Norris, 2002, 2007; Vromen, 2017, Pickard, 2019).

To research young people's perception of and participation in politics in the UK today, contemporary occurrences and events need to be acknowledged to find out whether they affect the current young generation. After the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014, the referendum on the UK's membership in the European Union in 2016, and three parliamentary elections since 2015, young people in the UK have been growing up within a rapidly shifting political environment generating new social and political movements. Alongside these domestic political events, issues of global concern have impacted activism in the UK – most recently, the environmental movement *Fridays For Future*, which began unfolding in 2018 and 2019, and the anti-racism protests of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, which re-emerged in the summer of 2020 and expanded from the United States of America to the international community. Furthermore, when Pickard and Bessant (2018) wrote about the 'manifold crises' young people face across the globe, the devastating impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic were yet to occur. The pandemic affected young people's personal development and interfered with their education and transition into employment, as the pandemic caused an economic recession and imposed restrictions on social life which formed part of nationally and globally introduced countermeasures against the spread of the virus (Palmer and Small, 2021; Strömmér *et al.*, 2022; Estellés, Bodman and Mutch, 2022). Economic inequalities heightened with the pandemic, and young people at large suffered from becoming socially isolated and politically marginalised. 'Social distancing' rules impeded access to activities of civic and political participation, from youth organisations to protesting (UK Youth, 2021; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2021).

Against this background of national instability, the consequences of climate change and increased precarity influenced by a global pandemic and its aftermath, young people are becoming socialised in an environment of flux and

uncertainty. In a highly digitalised era, the state of the world is imprinted upon their (dis)engagement in political participation, influencing what young people are concerned about and how they perceive their own capacities to effectuate social or political change. On account of this, this study aims to investigate how the self-perception of young individuals influences their engagement in various forms of political activities and their involvement in specific political issues. It, therefore, adopts a youth-focused approach to researching young people's activism which also includes their personal background as an important element of their political socialisation.

1.2. Rationale for the study

A large body of participation literature is concerned with defining political participation, ranging from very narrow models of voting and engagement in institutionalised politics (Almond and Verba, 1963) to more civic understandings of participation which involve community activities (Verba and Nie, 1972) as well as concepts including individual consumer behaviour (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, 2005). While there is scholarly consensus that participation, including direct political actions and civic (or 'latent political') activities, has become an umbrella term for a wide range of participatory engagements which fall into less distinctive categories of their own, the term 'activism' remains either excluded or is addressed secondarily. Even when an integral element of a conceptual model of participation, activism appears detached from other forms of participation (Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014) or attributed to a particular kind of activity, such as consumer activism (Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Teorell, Torcal and Montero, 2007). There are some approaches to conceptualising political participation that allow for a broader and more flexible definition of activism, such as Theocharis and van Deth's 'Conceptual Map of Political Participation' (2018) and Pickard's concept of young people's 'Do-It-Ourselves politics' (2019). Both are suitable for investigating young people's activism in particular.

Young people especially are an elusive subject since the transition from youth to young adulthood represents a very formative period which is affected by internal and external factors. There is a risk when studying young people's participation to homogenise observations and neglect these factors influencing their behaviour. Therefore, it is paramount to approach the thesis' topic of young people's activism with a discussion of what characterises young people and how can 'youth' and 'young adulthood' be conceptualised in addition to the measure of age. In relation to political participation, several theories focus on this transitional process from childhood and adolescence to young adulthood and attribute political development acquired during this stage to the political life cycle effects, period effects and cohort effects (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Erkulwater, 2012; Bourdieu 1979, 1980). These approaches are based on the general assumption that political behaviour is impacted primarily by age, environmental and social factors. Although political socialisation is emphasised by the theories of period effects and cohort effects, there is less focus on the introspection of the young individual. Seeing that young people's participation has been found to tend towards more personalised actions and activities in their own environment, consequently, a theoretical concept of youth should focus on the individuals within their subjective contexts. Sociopolitical development theory represents an alternative theoretical approach to understanding young people and their developmental process of political socialisation (Watts, Griffiths and Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003). The theory is less concerned with period and cohort effects and emphasises how the perception of injustice and inequality can contribute to the desire to become involved in activism, in particular, following the development of critical awareness and confidence in personal participatory skills.

By building upon sociopolitical development theory, this study also addresses another issue that is widely reproduced by integrative and expansive models of political participation. Despite being comprehensive and well-researched, most integrative models of participation remain preoccupied with the outcome of either being politically active or not being politically active. Political

participation is being framed as the end of a line of occurrences and contributing variables, omitting the fact that many forms of participation coexist with other forms – such as an increased likelihood of political participation with engaging in civic participation (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995; Dalton, 2008), and dismissing the very notion that activism is not a single act but a repeated behaviour. In addition, personal identity, experiences and feelings – subjective factors influencing the reasons people have preferences for engaging with certain topics and preferring some actions over others – are rarely included in participation research, even less so when researching young people's engagement in activism. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the literature to consolidate with empirical research on young people's participation based on theoretical approaches to their political socialisation under consideration of the complexities of young people's lives.

This study sets out to clarify how young people's personal perception of their own capabilities affects their engagement in activism. The research on personal perception includes the subjective assessment of young people's capacity to take action, to be effective in taking action, and to influence social and political change by taking action. These capacities – agency, efficacy and influence – all depend on personal perception, which is affected by the internal self and by externally constructed realities. In addition, this study looks into how personal feelings and identity may affect one's personal perception of one's own capabilities (efficacy, agency, influence) and shape one's views on what is being perceived as injustice and inequality. With these objectives outlined, the research broadly addresses the question of how personal perception and life experiences shape young people's engagement in activism. The literature review in the following chapter defines the specific gap in knowledge and presents the research question that this study will address.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

This thesis contains seven chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, presents the rationale of the thesis. In the second chapter, the literature review

looks into how existing research has been defining the two key aspects this thesis deals with – activism and young people (or youth) – before contextualising young people and political participation, with a focus on the UK, and critically engaging with existing literature on young people's political participation and engagement in activism. Building upon broader conceptualisations of political participation, the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves politics' (Pickard, 2019) or DIO politics specifically describes young people's varied forms of engagement in political and social issues. While DIO politics does not differentiate between political participation and activism, it presents a theoretical framework which confronts traditional and formalised acts of political participation (referred to as electoral participation) with more open, personalised and community-orientated acts of political participation (referred to as non-electoral participation). Pickard (2019, 2022) argues that young people tend to be more engaged in non-electoral participation, as these activities are less restricted by age and other factors, more accessible than electoral participation and correspond better to young people's living conditions. Thus, DIO politics, under consideration of literature aiming for a broader understanding of political participation which factors in context and intention, contributes to the definition of activism for the purpose of this study. Activism, while often a term that remains undefined, can be understood as intentional activities towards or against a cause (Tarrow, 1998), which, in collective form, can lead to the formation of movements (Flacks, 2003; Norris, 2003). Following an intensive review of literature on political participation, this thesis applies the term activism to actions and activities of both civic and political participation, with the aim of social or political change. By drawing on Pickard's DIO politics concept, young people's activism is regarded as intentional participation in predominantly non-electoral forms of political action.

Youth and young adulthood represent a transitional period of development and changes. With regard to political participation, this time has been found as specifically influential for the formation of political interest and participatory behaviours (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Prior, 2010, Neundorf, Smets and García-Albacete, 2013). Following an in-depth discussion of factors affecting youth

today and the uncertainty of the world young people are growing up in, the age range the study considers is specified as 16 to 24, in line with comparative datasets and in light of the fact that this time period comes with a number of life changes. These include but are not limited to transition to sixth-form or college, followed by higher education and/or labour market entry, potentially moving out, becoming of legal age, etc. In the UK, political upheaval has long affected young people's political socialisation, with the EU membership referendum setting the scene of a country leaving the political union and single market, with subsequent consequences for freedom of movement and cross-Europe supply chains. While (for the most part) young people at the time of this study had not been eligible to vote in the 2016 'Brexit' referendum, their lives have been impacted by a time of political upheaval following this process. In addition, the Scottish independence referendum has granted voting rights to young people that they had not held before. Since 2014, people who are 16 and above have been allowed to vote in Scottish Elections – a significant change to the voting franchise, which was later adopted by Wales. Beyond domestic politics, youth in the UK and across the world has been and continues to be affected by the impacts of climate change and the global COVID-19 pandemic, contributing to the volatility and increasing precarity young people are growing up in.

In these circumstances, young people's engagement in activism has been framed as a response to political and economic crises, often caused by neoliberal politics and further inciting marginalisation of young people and specific minority groups. Several studies have pointed out that there is a discrepancy between young people's political interests and expectations of political institutions to address certain issues on the one side and the response and actions from political actors on the other (Phillips and Simpson, 2015; Vromen, 2017; Pickard, 2022). The increasing tendency of activism to take place outside of formalised structures is an expression of such discrepancy, with young people making use of digital communication for expressing and organising themselves (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Grasso, 2018). Therefore, young people's activism appears to be characterised by (self-)

mobilisation and enacting agency. However, how this initial engagement in an issue begins and the relationship between how agency is perceived and its effect on participatory behaviour remains unexplored. This study represents an empirical approach to investigating why young people become engaged in activism and how their interest in a particular topic relates to their own identity. Thus, this study aims to fill the research gap of exploring such impact of the perception of agency on young people's engagement in non-electoral participation by investigating how agency is perceived by young people who engage in activism and how it is connected to their own understanding of their identities. The literature review concludes with the specification of the research questions, with the first one addressing the effect of perception of agency, efficacy and influence on young people's activism, and the second one asking how emotions and personal identity relate to young people's activism.

The third chapter gives a summary of theoretical approaches to political participation and activism. It first discusses theories of individual political behaviour before moving on to theories of collective action and social movements. Integrative theoretical approaches are relevant for constructing the study's own theoretical framework since its research questions centre on cognitive, emotional and social factors affecting young people's activism. Integrative models consider a range of factors as influential for political participation and stem from sociological and psychological research. With regard to young people, it is also essential to deploy a theoretical approach which considers the transformative period of youth towards young adulthood in its assumptions of factors influencing non-electoral participation. After discussing common theories on the political life cycle, period effects and cohort effects, the chapter introduces the lesser-known theory of sociopolitical development, which stipulates that young people's engagement in civic or political acts of participation is the result of becoming aware of and critically reflecting on issues of injustice and inequality. Moreover, what is perceived as issues of injustice and inequality is influenced by one's own experiences, perception and identity (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003; Anyiwo *et al.*, 2018; Wray-Lake and Ballard, 2023).

Corresponding to the research questions developed in chapter two, the theory chapter develops hypotheses on the grounds of the reviewed literature and the sociopolitical development theory as an explanatory approach to young people's activism. These hypotheses, in combination with qualitative concepts of empowerment and social factors, represent the components of this study's theoretical framework. In particular, the assumptions of the thesis include that a positive perception of one's own capacity to act (agency), one's own understanding of politics (efficacy) and one's own ability to contribute to influence (perceived opportunity of influence) increases the likelihood of being more active in forms of non-electoral participation. Furthermore, it is assumed that being dissatisfied with formal politics and being interested in social issues instead of being interested in politics alone enhances the number of non-electoral activities young people are participating in. Informed by sociopolitical development theory, it is furthermore anticipated that young people's interest in certain topics reflects their own lived experiences and is linked to their own identities. Participating in activism constitutes an act towards or against issues of perceived injustice and inequality and may also serve as a path to the expression of identity and finding social belonging.

The fourth chapter describes the methodology which was used to collect and analyse data for the study. On the paradigmatic basis of critical realism, the study deploys a sequential explanatory design which consists of a quantitative method followed by a qualitative method. To gather data on young people's engagement in non-electoral participation and how they perceive agency, efficacy and influence, an online survey was run from January to March 2020. The survey data amounted to a sample of 1,094 (unweighted), which, when weighted for age, gender, location of residence, and ethnicity, was 948 (weighted). The methodology chapter describes the dataset used for further inferential data analysis and depicts a sample that is clearly more interested in social and political issues and more engaged in political activities than a general population sample. Given that the study is interested in how perception affects engagement in non-electoral participation, this overrepresentation of politically active individuals does not pose an obstacle to drawing inferences.

The online survey was followed up by focus groups with young people. These focus groups were organised by activism topics, following the data from the online survey. Thus, the focus groups centred around environmental activism, the *Black Lives Matter* movement and anti-racism activism, and feminist and LGBTQ activism. Participants were recruited via the survey. In total, eight focus groups were conducted, with an overall participant number of thirty. Analysis of focus group transcripts followed thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2017, 2019).

The fifth chapter contains the analysis of the survey and focus group data. It begins with an overview of the previously developed hypotheses and presents the main themes from the focus group discussions. The data analysis then investigates non-electoral participation of young people in the UK by describing participation levels in particular activities and demonstrating which activities are likely to be clustered together. This section is complemented by findings on how young politically active people view individual and collective activities of non-electoral participation and which purpose they attach to taking part in such. The data analysis examines the linear relationships between cognitive factors, including the perception of agency, efficacy and influence, and dissatisfaction with the government on young people's participation in non-electoral activities. Young people are likely to become more engaged in non-electoral forms of participation when they are interested in politics and social issues, dissatisfied with the government, perceive themselves as understanding of politics and capable of taking action, and believe in the effectiveness of collective action. Young people overall were not confident about being able to have an influence on formal politics but, especially when being part of a group or community, were more likely to be more active in non-electoral participation when they held a positive belief about having a social impact. However, especially the perception of one's own capability to understand politics (internal efficacy) and capacity to act (personal agency) differed by gender. Young women showed a greater likelihood to be more politically active when confident about their understanding of politics, while young men showed a greater likelihood to be more politically active when

having positive beliefs about their own capacity to act and about the efficacy of collective action. These results from the survey data analysis were largely reflected in the discussions with young politically active people.

The determinants for electoral participation, a dependent variable consisting of a number of more institutionalised and formalised forms of political participation, demonstrated some overlaps and distinct differences from those affecting non-electoral participation. Young people's likelihood to participate in more electoral activities increased with interest in politics, dissatisfaction with the government, internal efficacy, and perceived opportunity of social influence. In the statistical regression model, variables such as interest in social issues, personal agency and collective efficacy did not demonstrate a significant impact on electoral participation. Thus, participation in electoral activities is primarily influenced by variables that relate to institutionalised politics and less by those which relate more to social aspects and a collective dimension, such as social networks. In the focus groups, young people expressed their dissatisfaction with formalised politics but were not generally apathetic to politics or disinterested in democratic processes. Taking part in activism, in contrast to participating in formal acts of political participation, induced feelings of empowerment and belonging. As much as their activism was a result of the self-expression of values and beliefs, for most focus group participants becoming politically active also contributed to their sense of self and of belonging to both real and imagined communities. Though, focus group participants also reported negative feelings in relation to their activism. Environmental activists said they often felt hopeless and depressed about the lack of progress from political and economic actors, while young people who were active in identity-based activism, such as anti-racism and queerfeminist activism, spoke about their personal burden which included external pressures and threats as well as feeling an innate obligation to become politically active. Overall, there were both commonalities and differences across the different topics of activism, with identity-based activism being more closely linked to one's own identity than issue-based activism in the form of climate change activism.

The sixth chapter reflects on the findings from the data analysis and discusses the original theoretical framework in the context of sociopolitical development theory (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003). Interest in political and social issues, on the one hand, and being dissatisfied with how such issues are addressed by the government are essential to developing an awareness of perceived injustice and inequality (precritical stage). What is perceived as being unjust or unequal may depend on individual views, circumstances and identity. Whether awareness transforms into critical engagement is affected by cognitive factors such as perception of one's internal and collective efficacy, personal agency, and the opportunity for social influence. During this critical stage, interest and awareness turn into the desire for action. However, participating in action (liberation stage) can be facilitated or impeded by the personal perceptions of one's efficacy, agency and influence. Activist participation does not constitute the end of a process but is rather part of sociopolitical development towards potentially repeated participatory behaviour. Experiences of empowerment and feelings of belonging as epiphenomena of young people's engagement in activism are not fixed determinants and are subject to social networks and external influences. The seventh and final chapter concludes the thesis by highlighting its contribution to knowledge and the wider field of political participation studies.

2. Young people, political participation and activism

2.1. Overview

This chapter begins by defining activism as the main focus of this study. Drawing on Ekman and Amnå's typology of political participation (2012), which locates activism within participation, and Theocharis and van Deth's conceptual map of political participation (2018), which underlines the importance of intentionality when classifying actions as political, this study defines activism as intentional participation in both civic and political activities. Following the conceptualisation of young people's participation as 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics (Pickard, 2019), young people's participatory behaviour is seen as less focused on political institutions and incorporating various 'unconventional' and civic forms of participation.

The chapter critically examines the different meanings and applications of the terms *youth* and *young people* in participation research before literature on young people and their political participation is discussed. This includes the analysis of changing structures of young people's political participation and the increasing importance of digital communication in activism. While numerous studies have researched different forms of political participation, partaking in political and civic activities has often been considered without involving individual contexts of young people's identity and belonging. Furthermore, although agency is acknowledged as a crucial aspect of youth activism, there is limited understanding of its influence on participatory behaviour, encompassing both non-electoral and electoral activities.

Against this background, young people's political participation is contextualised within the political, economic and social setting of the UK. The literature review traces back to the General Election of 2017 and discusses the outcomes of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the referendum on the UK's membership in the European Union in 2016 in relation to young people's electoral participation. It then examines the trend towards non-electoral participation among youth in view of political and social events, including the global COVID-19 pandemic. Major aspects of young people's

activism in the UK are found to be influenced by domestic politics, global developments such as climate change, and issues of identity. These major themes were identified on the basis of existing literature, as they mark the thematic field of research conducted so far and are essential information to consider in the development of this study.

This chapter concludes the review of the literature on young people's political participation by proposing two specific research questions on the effect of perception on young people's activism in the UK and on the link between feelings and personal identity and involvement with specific thematic strands of activism. The theoretical foundation and methodological approach to these questions are laid out in the following chapters.

2.2. Defining activism within civic and political participation

To understand civic and political participation, several models have been created to attribute activities to specific categories. These models categorise political actions within a wider context, framed by political institutions and the societal environment. In this sense, they provide a classifying system for studying participation and, thus, produce categories to be used in empirical research. This section reviews literature which has defined participation and identified categories of actions to develop such models of participatory behaviour. The objective of reviewing different attempts at conceptualising civic and political participation is to define more clearly this study's central topic of activism.

The work on 'civic culture' by Almond and Verba (1963) has become a standard paradigm in participation research. Although referring to political attitudes rather than civic actions, the authors defined civic culture as the "particular distribution of patterns of orientation towards political objects among the members of a nation" (1963, p. 13). This standard theory draws on psychological concepts, as the political system is based on values, beliefs and attitudes, and sociological concepts, as civic culture and subcultures refer to

collective units and actions. The focus on the nation and the comparison of nations is prevalent in subsequent research on political culture and participation (Inglehart, 1977, 1997; Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Dalton, 2008), often with, and criticised for, a focus on Anglo-American states. Subject to conceptual evolutions, the theory that political cultures can be categorised into specific actions has persisted. Whereas the original publication by Almond and Verba sought to provide a classification system of civic culture as a product of the prevalent political system, communication within the system and cultural values, subsequent models specifically focused more on political participation and the relationship between citizens and democratic institutions. In the subsequent 'Civic Voluntarism Model' (CVM), Verba and Nie (1972) proposed a four-dimensional measurement concept of participation, including: (1) voting, (2) organised political activities either within a party or political group, (3) contacting politicians, and (4) cooperative or communal activities within a local community. This model was developed further by other authors by adding other dimensions. For instance, Teorell, Torcal and Montero (2007) attributed five dimensions to political participation overall, including: (1) voting, (2) consumer participation which encompasses conscious consumerism, boycotting and donating, (3) party membership, (4) protest actions, and lastly, (5) contacting politicians, government officials or organisations. Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) developed a framework for the motivations of American citizens to participate in political life, which considers socioeconomic status alongside other 'civic skills'.

These models typically focus on observable and mostly quantifiable political activities that are directed at governments or politicians. Political actions are regarded as instruments aiming to influence political decision-making or addressing political elites (Parry, Moyser and Day, 1992; Brady, 1999). While the classical 'Civic Voluntarism Model' and its successors provided structured systems of political participation overall, it can be regarded as being limited to relationships between citizens and the state and its institutions. Furthermore, these models do not explain what activism is, nor whether it is driven by civic or political participation. To address these limitations, this chapter introduces

two more recent theoretical approaches to conceptualising participation: the new typology of political participation by Ekman and Amnå (2012) and the conceptual map of political participation by Theocharis and van Deth (2018) which both allow for more flexibility in terms of adding new phenomena and activities to existing definitions of participation, and thus, function as a basis to understand the differences and interrelations between engagement, participation and activism.

2.2.1. Understanding the ‘civic’ as part of the ‘political’

Drawing clear lines between civic and political participation is difficult. Research results have indicated that there are connections between civic participation, such as volunteering, and political participation, such as voting (Bernhagen and Marsh, 2007; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). In addressing what they call “popular engagement” (p. 5), Evers and von Essen (2019) described the relations between civic participation and political participation as more fluid. Their approach underlines an important aspect of modern approaches to participation and activism, expanding the attribution of ‘the political’ beyond “institutionalised politics and policy-making” (p. 5). While helpful in visualising the connection between civic action and political action, Evers and von Essen (2019) did not apply distinct separate meanings to the terms engagement and participation. An approach that attempts such differentiation and also assigns specific activities into more clearly defined categories was developed by Ekman and Amnå in their *New Typology of Political Participation and Civic Engagement* (see Table 2.1.).

Table 2.1. Latent and manifest political participation

Civil participation (latent political participation)		Manifest political participation		
Involvement (attention)	Civic engagement (action)	Formal political participation	Activism (extra-parliamentary participation)	
			Legal	Illegal
<i>Individual forms</i>				
Personal interest in politics and societal issues	Activities based on personal interest in and attention to politics and societal issues	Electoral participation and contact activities	Extraparliamentary forms of participation: to make one's voice heard or to make a difference by individual means (e.g. signing petitions, political consumption)	Politically motivated unlawful acts on an individual basis
<i>Collective forms</i>				
A sense of belonging to a group or a collective with a distinct political profile or agenda	Voluntary work to improve conditions in the local community, for charity, or to help others (outside the own family and circle of friends)	Organized political participation: membership in conventional political parties, trade unions and organizations	Loosely organized forms or network-based political participation: new social movements, demonstrations, strikes, and protests	Illegal and violent activities and protests: demonstrations, riots, squatting buildings, damaging property, confrontations with the police or political opponents

Source: Ekman and Amnå, 2012, p. 292

Ekman and Amnå (2012) elaborated on the classification of participation by distinguishing between civil participation, also called *latent political participation*, and political participation which encompassed *manifest political participation*. This distinction addresses the difficulty of incorporating civic behaviour which is not explicitly political into the overarching theme of participation. This new typology of political participation and civic engagement differentiates between individual and collective forms of participation. Such differentiation reflects on “the notion of *individual* political rights and liberties, but at the same time on the idea of political *representation*” (Ekman and Amnå,

2012, p. 289). Emphasising that empirical research was needed to underline the point that individual identities are becoming more important than collective ones, the authors still claimed this distinction as significant in their new typology of participation.

The typology specifies political activism as its own category, which is further divided into legal and illegal actions. Whereas political participation encompasses formal participatory acts, such as voting (example of an individual act) or being a member of a political party, trade union or membership-based political organisation (examples of collective forms), activism is characterised by extra-parliamentary activities, which include signing petitions and political consumerism (individual forms), as well as taking part in protests, demonstration and 'new social movements'. The purpose of extra-parliamentary activities is to affect the process of policymaking and expressing political views. In addition to these legal forms of activism, the model also considers illegal forms, ranging from civil disobedience to violence and politically motivated crime. It is important to note that the classification of legality is susceptible to the arbitrary decisions made by legislators which may also be influenced by police practices. For example, in 2020, the British terrorism police placed the environmental activist group *Extinction Rebellion* alongside right-wing extremist groups in a leaflet that was handed out to school teachers (Dodd and Grierson, 2020).

The inclusion of 'new social movements' in the proposed typology acknowledges the existence of loose networks and groups but also proves problematic as the distinction between an organisation and a social movement remains unclear. Ekman and Amnå (2012) did not provide their own definition of new social movements and, instead, made the point that "membership in (or activity within) groups or parties that deliberately stand outside of the parliamentary sphere, like network-based social movements or political actions groups of various kinds" (p. 290) form part of legal extra-parliamentary participation. Furthermore, as argued above, legality can constitute a tricky subject, even in democratic states.

Overall, this typology delivers a structured approach to classify political participation and to locate political activism within participation. However, civic activism – that is, civic actions with the intention of social change – is not well illustrated. Though the authors described civil participation forms as latent-political, a conclusion on what this means for the concept of activism has not been presented. As the structures in Ekman and Amnå's typology of political participation allow for new activities to be added to the categories, further in-depth research could address the examples given by the authors and broaden the spectrum of activities. This study, informed by the concept of latent political participation, specifically aimed at developing a research design that would capture activities which are not traditionally associated with political participation, such as volunteering.

While there is general consensus on some forms of political participation, e.g. electoral participation and protest activity, other actions may not be as easily recognisable as part of political behaviour. Referring to Ekman and Amnå's typology of political participation, Theocharis and van Deth (2018) pointed out that they are among the few scholars who "have challenged [the] behavioural aspect of participation" (p. 66) and systematically expanded its dimensions. Yet, Theocharis and van Deth also noted the challenge of studying "new or emerging forms of participation that are not included in the rigid batteries used in cross-national studies" (2018, p. 36).

Within their *New Taxonomy of Political Participation*, Theocharis and van Deth (2018) introduced a systematic approach to investigate participation and to determine whether a phenomenon can be classified as 'political'. While acknowledging that a certain openness to defining political participation is necessary to allow emerging forms to take a place within the academic literature, they proposed a systematic approach to classifying activities. In their conceptual map, a set of eight questions is used to determine if an observed phenomenon is, indeed, an act of political participation, and if so, to which of the five categories it should be attributed to. Their developed *decision rules* require agreement so that an activity can be subordinated to five definitions of political engagement.

The first definition presented in Theocharis and van Deth's *Conceptual Map of Political Participation* is called a minimal definition of political participation (Political Participation-I). *Political Participation-I* refers to activities of formal political participation, as they are identified to be within the sphere of government/state/politics. If activities are situated outside, the next question to ask would be if the target is the sphere of government/state/politics. In the same map, activities that target the state or politicians are considered *Political Participation-II* and would be considered individual forms of legal extra-parliamentary participation in the typology of Ekman and Amnå. The same conclusion can be drawn for activities that belong to *Political Participation-III*, which are political actions targeted at actors other than the previously mentioned sphere of political institutions but are still meant to serve communal or societal benefit.

Whereas Theocharis and van Deth's (2018) categories for *Political Participation-I to III* contain examples that can be clearly defined as political activities and allow for their placement within Ekman and Amnå's approach, categories IV and V are less easy to define. Political Participation-I, the minimal definition, is tied to institutional politics, types II and III are definitions that are targeted at either the political sphere or an issue within a community. In contrast, the definitions for Political participation IV and V do not rely on targeting specific actors but receive political meaning from their surrounding circumstances.

Political Participation-IV refers to behaviour within a political context. This means that the activity itself may not appear to be political unless it is specifically placed or framed in a political context. Theocharis and van Deth (2018) give examples of using politically loaded hashtags in social media posts or displaying other symbols or gestures of political meaning. Lastly, *Political Participation-V* is defined by politically motivated activities. This term does not refer to politically motivated acts of crime but can be applied to "any activity", according to the authors, "that fulfills the first three rules – activity, voluntariness, non-professional – but is not located in the political arena, is not aimed at either political actors or community problems, and is not placed in a

political context", as long as the activity "is used to express political aims and intentions" (p. 75) by the acting person or group. Certain forms of political consumerism fall into this category, which includes confronting companies with questions about their ethical responsibility. Although the last category is difficult to describe, it enables the broadening of what is constituted as political participation and allows for flexibility while still providing a categorisation system for empirical research on yet unclassified forms of political participation.

Overall, Theocharis and van Deth's (2018) conceptual map provides practical guidance for assessing activities as acts of political participation. However, the challenge in this approach consists in recognising political contexts and political motivations, especially when there are emerging forms of participation that do not belong to one of the previous three definitions. Their approach does not replace Ekman and Amnå's typology but instead enables categorising and measuring political activities empirically using set criteria. For this study, the combination of Ekman and Amnå's (2012) typology and Theocharis and van Deth's (2018) conceptual map provides the underlying concept for categorising political participation and localising political activism within.

2.2.2. Political action repertoires and 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics

Participation research has become more interdisciplinary over the last two decades. In addition to the continuous refinement of what participation actually means and involves (Theocharis and van Deth, 2018), the focus has turned towards actions that have not been considered political before or that have only been available to people more recently, such as the use of the Internet and social media (Vromen, 2017, Hale *et al.*, 2018; Moeller, Kühne and De Vreese, 2018). Methodologically, political participation research has become more diverse and open to combining qualitative and quantitative approaches which has fed through into newer multi-dimensional theoretical frameworks. Two of these integrative models are the concept of political action repertoires by Norris (2002, 2007) and the conceptualisation of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics

focusing on young people's participation and protest movements in particular (Pickard, 2019, 2022).

In light of declining party membership and lower electoral participation rates among younger generations in many Western democracies, Norris addressed the fears about the future of democratic and pluralist states expressed by some scholars (Miller and Shanks, 1996; Putnam, 2000). In several works, she argued that participation is undergoing generational shifts. These shifts can be observed in "common forms of political activism" (Norris, 2003, p. 2), specifically in the repertoires of political actions and the transformation of agencies. Whereas repertoires are actions of political opinion or expression, agencies refer to groups or organisations in which people are participating or with which they associate themselves. Broadly speaking, political actions can either be *citizens-oriented actions*, a term which refers to the conventional participation of casting a vote or being a member of a political party, or *cause-oriented*, addressing specific issues and expressing concerns about certain policies via protesting or petitioning, for example. Citizens are capable of possessing 'action repertoires', which can be aimed at the parliament of government but can also be directed towards other actors.

Norris made the case that younger generations tend towards cause-oriented repertoires of action (2004, 2007). These cause-oriented repertoires are not primarily concerned with the political sphere and do not just address political actors. Instead, politics becomes part of personal consumer decisions and lifestyle. Examples of concrete actions are political consumerism, i.e. boycotting certain products due to ethical, environmental or moral reasons, or basing consumption choices on these reasons. Thus, cause-oriented political actions do not strive only for political change but also include social transformation processes as means and goals at the same time. Cause-oriented repertoires are applied to issues instead of a single system or political actor. These issues go beyond the institutionalised political resorts and include formerly private topics such as ethnicity, sexuality and identity. Norris sees this observed change in activism from the political sphere towards the social one

as a sign of postmaterialist value-changes (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Norris, 2018).

Another aspect of changing participation are the agencies of political activism. These agencies relate to the changing “organizational structures through which people commonly mobilize for political expression” (Norris, 2003, p. 6). The mobilisation of newer generations no longer takes place via established communities such as churches, political parties and trade unions as it did until the 1960s. These institutionalised associations have not been replaced entirely, but other forms of mobilisation have occurred alongside them. Social movements, “typified by the women’s movement, the anti-globalization movement, anti-war coalitions, and the environmental movement” (Norris, 2003, p. 7) and grassroots movements in the 21st century stand in contrast to previous traditional membership organisations, with their loose structures, low and non-existing hierarchies, and decentralised and shared organisation.

The concept of generationally changing political action repertoires has been taken up in subsequent literature (Grasso, 2014; O’Toole, 2015), including both quantitative (Grasso *et al.*, 2017) and qualitative research approaches (Gallant, 2018; Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths, 2018). Based on Norris’ work and following research, Pickard (2019) presented a new perspective on young people’s political participation. “DIO politics” or “Do-It-Ourselves politics” refers specifically to “non-electoral forms of political participation carried out by young people” (p. 375). DIO politics is characterised by taking place in an almost entrepreneurial manner, outside of established political institutions. She argues that this term is better suited to describe the previously and currently observed political actions of young people since other words, such as ‘unconventional’, would not give due credit to practices young politically active citizens display. This is a common problem young political activism encounters with political institutions (Marsh, O’Toole and Jones, 2007, Marsh and Akram, 2015) and media depictions (Mejias and Banaji, 2019). According to Pickard, the reason why non-electoral forms of participation have been receiving less research interest is that they often do not fit into normative categories and are difficult to subject to common forms of quantitative measurements. Non-

electoral participation has even been regarded as contradictory to ‘conventional’ forms of political participation, as it could be “interpreted as a potential threat to the political status quo” (2019, p. 377).

Pickard’s concept of DIO politics combines previous research on generational value changes (Inglehart 1971, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) and the emergence of ‘everyday makers’ (Bang, 2005, 2009) and ‘life politics’ (Giddens, 1991) and provides a broadly informed approach to research and understand young people’s ways of non-electoral political participation. Young people are DIO political actors when they “take political and civic initiatives” which are happening outside of “electorally focused political structures” (Pickard, 2019, p. 391). The political institutions, as of now, do not invite or encourage young people to participate. Thus, DIO politics becomes an alternative form of political expression and participation. DIO politics is taking place “within various private and public arenas: a family, a peer group, a community, locally, regionally, nationally or globally” (p. 391). Such independence from space and time is made possible using digital media.

While Pickard criticises the rigidness of political systems, she underlines that both advancements in technology, as well as access to (higher) education, have had a positive effect on nurturing DIO politics – which should be regarded as more than just superficial ‘clicktivism’. Another reason for the rise of DIO politics, according to the author, is that politics has evoked disillusionment and distrust among many young people, as exemplified in the UK by the ‘Brexit’ referendum. In line with Norris’ considerations, DIO political participation may target both political actors and other organisations or groups, ranging from local communities to large business chains or lobby associations, to seek social or political change. In contrast to participation in a political party, DIO politics is a more flexible opportunity to take action which is not bounded to party ideology or formalised structures. Therefore, DIO politics culture is a more inclusive form of participation that constitutes collective action carried out in individual ways. Individualisation, however, is not the key aspect, personalisation is. The purpose of actions is rooted in caring for, protecting or achieving a common good. These observations support the proposition that

non-electoral participation leans towards “issue-based participatory politics” (Vromen, 2017, p. 9) and relies on cause-orientated action repertoires (Norris, 2002, 2007).

DIO politics has two main forms. The first refers strongly to what Giddens (1991) and Bennet (1998) have described as ‘lifestyle politics’ or to what Bang identified as ‘everyday makers’. Politics are daily actions that are performed on the grounds of an individual’s beliefs about social values, morality, ethicality, etc. The aggregation of people’s personal actions can turn into collective actions, attributing to changes in collective values and behaviour. The second form places the community at the centre of DIO politics. Instead of personal actions, this type of ‘doing-it’ “tend[s] to be more interactive and participative, as part of an offline or online community” (p. 393). As examples, Pickard mentions volunteering, campaigning, raising awareness etc. – acts that involve dialogue and interaction.

The concept of DIO politics does not clearly differentiate between political participation and political activism. Instead, it labels all politically intended but extra-institutional actions as non-electoral participation. The concept is also exclusively used to describe the political participation of younger cohorts. This leads to two open questions: one, whether political activism can be used synonymously with participation in non-electoral activities. Given the emphasis on intent and agency of DIO politics culture, along with its more expansive understanding of participation, it provides a definition of activism which is less constricted to particular actions and actor-led in its recognition of motivations. Two, the question remains whether this concept describes a certain phase in young people’s lives at present or whether this form of participatory culture transcends beyond generations.

Pickard described young people as “early adopters and active actors of DIO politics” (2019, p. 391) who display high levels of self-reflection and self-reliance. Although she presents examples for these claims and warns about generalising, her claims need to be consolidated by further research to hold up based on empirical findings. The approach of DIO politics challenges

traditional ways of categorising and assessing political participation, which is simultaneously a refreshing look at the issue but also poses new demands for both theoretical conceptions and methodological research implementations. The theory does conform to earlier claims of tendencies away from institutionalised political structures and membership-based organisational life towards issue-based political participation and integrated political engagement and action in one's personal lifestyle choices (Weinstein, 2004; Whiteley, 2012; Vromen, 2017). Herein lies another question to what extent individuals actually have a choice over their lifestyles and what roles perception of agency and efficacy play in these choices.

Connected to the previous points, there is room to debate issues of structural inequality and intersectionality within both participation and activism. As research findings have indicated that higher electoral participation rates are connected to higher socioeconomic status (Scott and Acock, 1979; Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995; Nevitte *et al.*, 2009) and that civic participation is likewise more prominent among groups of higher socioeconomic status (Levinson, 2010; Godfrey and Cherng, 2016), the picture of the characteristics of who becomes involved with activism is complex. This is due to the fact that activism encompasses a diverse range of actions, groups and organisations, depending on the definition of activism. People experience oppression or different treatment on the basis of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, and nationality. When two or more of these traits come together, intersections of oppression can develop – resulting in intersectionality, a number of personal characteristics on which an individual is subjected to or at risk of being subjected to structural discrimination, exclusion and violence (Hill Collins, 2019). In light of social movements and, thus, activism, structural oppression represents a cause for civic and political action. This, alongside the notion of how activism addresses and forms identities, makes it necessary to expand research on activism towards intersectionality.

Despite these issues, Pickard (2019) presented a strong argumentative case to change the way young people's political participation is being conceptualised and researched. DIO politics as a new way of understanding

young people's politics refine Norris's (2003, 2007) concept of changing political activism due to shifts in action repertoires and agencies. Similar to Norris, Pickard's DIO politics extends beyond the conventional political sphere and also includes civic forms of participation. In the context of this study, the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics is central to defining young people's activism as various activities of intentional civic and political participation with the aim to effect social or political change.

2.2.3. Outlining activism as intentional civic and political participation

Depending on the conceptualisations of political participation, activism is found as a distinct category of extra-parliamentary participation as part of manifest political participation (Ekman and Amnå, 2012), as an embodiment of civic participation (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014) or concealed as forms of "extra-representational" protest and consumer activities (Teorell, Torcal and Montero, 2007, p. 341). There are few standardised definitions of the term *activism*, despite it being frequently used in participation research literature. Activism was named alongside collective action and 'cycles of contention' in Tarrow's work on social movements (Tarrow, 1998) but only implicitly declared as political actions which are carried out by organisations or groups of people. Tarrow concluded by distinguishing activism from general political participation, as "a variety of forms of action turning away from participation in the political process and toward activism in society" (p. 207).

Activism in the form of collective actions refers to "movement participation that entails leadership activity, organizing, conscious concern about the direction of the movement, and conscious long-term commitment of time and resources and energy to the movement" by Flacks (2003, p. 143). Flack's definition of activism is tied to the mobilising character of movements and disregards other forms of smaller networks in its scope due to the lack of systematic knowledge and limited opportunities for research (p. 144). The conclusion of Flack's (2003) reasoning, thus, leads to a differentiation of types of activism into causes – smaller groups of people coming together for a common cause or

reason – and into *movements* which refer to larger social formations. While this classification may not consider activism on an individual level, it does acknowledge the connection between issues and the development of groups, or causes, which then can turn into bigger social movements.

The structures and the repertoire of political actions are central to Norris' (2003) conceptualisation of activism, in which *agencies* represent collective organisations. These participate in actions for political expression of specific *repertoires* with the intention to address specific *targets*, e.g. political decisionmakers. According to Norris (2003), agencies for political activism, i.e. "civic mobilisation" (p. 6), are social institutions or organisations, through which people are expressing their political views. Traditional agencies include political parties, churches, trade unions and cooperative associations – all of them centring on some form of membership. Modern agencies, which started emerging in the 1960s, have taken the shape of social movements and grassroots groups – a phenomenon that remains observable in the 21st century. Instead of declining, agencies of civic and political participation have been changing, with especially younger people opting for less institutionalised forms of self-organisation (Norris, 2003).

Civil society has expanded to national, transnational and global dimensions, often taking up issues of international interest or concern (Siim, Saarinen and Krasteva, 2019). Social movements are responding to crises all over the world and are finding ways to network due to rapidly growing digital communication (della Porta, 2005; della Porta and Mattoni, 2014). Researchers have been keen to examine these collective actors, which are characterised by their informal non-hierarchical structures and networks (della Porta, 2015). Organisational frames of social movements have been studied on a transnational level and investigated both intensively and extensively – Siim, Saarinen and Krasteva (2019) have called for academic attention to local groups and individuals within groups, networks, and movements. Local groups resonate with national or even international movements in that their members share interests in or concerns about an issue or a particular area. The aspect of issue salience in participation, i.e. the importance of a topic to an individual's

level of participation (Wlezien, 2005; Halpin and Frausser, 2017), can also be observed within the social formation of small and large scales. While there are ongoing debates on the theoretical conception of salience and how to measure such individual importance and potentially related participatory actions, research has shown that issue salience does have an effect on one's support for a political party and, thus, one's voting behaviour (Wlezien, 2005). In the context of activism, issue salience translates into sharing a common interest. These common interests or concerns shared by individuals in a group can manifest in issue-based activism, either with a single issue at hand or with several issues on the agenda in the form of multi-issue activism (Andersen and Jennings, 2010).

Against the backdrop of issue salience, a number of scholars found young people to be less involved in traditional forms of political participation (Dalton, 2008; Wattenberg, 2008; Caren, Ghosal and Ribas, 2011) and more likely instead to participate in "more disruptive forms of activism" (Fisher, 2012, p. 122). Other activities that are increasing among younger people – actions Norris would include in the concept of political action repertoires (see 2.2.2.) – are signing petitions (Caren, Ghoshal and Ribas, 2011), basing consumption choices on political reasons (Zukin *et al.*, 2006), and volunteering (Shea and Harris, 2006). In sum, all actions that have increased among younger generations appear to be of a more strongly "individualized, market-focused" character (Fisher, 2012, p. 122). This trend of individualisation of activism does not mean that younger generations are less sociable or less capable of communal actions. However, it does reflect trends that are observable in continuous marketisation processes, in the most radical form in neoliberalism, and the development of communication tools and their potential for civic mobilisation. The Internet and real-time communication facilitate the sharing of information and organising protests (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2002; Fisher and Boekkooi, 2010) and may even be a powerful instrument in constructing collective identities (Bennett, Breunig and Givens, 2008).

Considering these findings on changing participatory civic and political participation patterns around single or multiple issues and the tendency of

activities towards individualised but not isolated actions, activism needs to be more clearly defined and seen as an integral part of participation models. To that end, activism within this study is not just referred to as actions predetermined by the framework of institutions, law and the state. Instead, the term *activism* is being used to also include actions and activities of civic and political participation, with the aim intended by an individual or a collective actor of effecting a change of social, political or even cultural nature. In relation to young people, this study draws on the DIO politics concept and regards activism as intentional participation in non-electoral political actions.

2.3. Young people and political participation

Young adulthood can be understood as a time of transition from dependence on the family to independence, from education to work, and from co-residence with the family to co-residence with a partner, peers or living alone (Furlong, 2016). This transitional time from childhood into adolescence and adulthood has also been found to be the most formative in respect of political interest (Prior, 2010; Neundorf, Smets and García-Albacete, 2013) and when young people typically become politically or socially active. The formation of political interest during this time is furthermore influenced by social settings, such as discussing politics with family and friends (Dostie-Goulet, 2009).

Young people are going through a developmental life stage in which they not only become more aware of political and social issues around them, but they may also start assuming and attributing responsibility for these issues. The decision to participate in activism can be understood as an intentional choice to act upon this perceived responsibility (Behrens, 2023). While influenced by the desire to express one's own values and beliefs, activism also relates to issues of *belonging* and *identifying* with others. Research has found connections between young people's perception of being able to contribute to change and of carrying a personal responsibility, and their levels of both civic and political engagement (Moore *et al.*, 2016; Keating and Melis, 2022). Positive beliefs about one's ability to effect change in the world are likely to

increase community participation and strengthen community sense and personal well-being (Zimmerman, Ramírez-Valles and Maton, 1999; Christens and Peterson, 2012). Assuming responsibility for specific issues and becoming politically active is connected to *identity building* (Curtin, Kende, A. and Kende, J., 2016; Hartley *et al.*, 2016), and the development of such shared collective identities may even be essential for engaging in repeated activist behaviour (Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Louis *et al.*, 2016).

There are empirical indications that the expression of collective identities leads to collective actions and also represents the normative limits of what is deemed an appropriate form of collective action, dependent on the collective identity. As Turner-Zwinkels and van Zomeren (2020) write, this means “peaceful protests for mainstream movements, or more nonconventional or aggressive action for radical movements” are regarded as appropriate within each context of group identity (p. 509). A recent survey study on the motivation of young people to participate in the *Fridays For Future* movement showed that in-group identification on the basis of personal values was strongly impacting participation in climate protests. Young people who had friends participating in pro-environmental activism also showed a higher engagement in climate activism themselves (Wallis and Loy, 2021). These findings highlight that participation in activism is socially driven and may be normatively framed through one’s network.

Young people in the UK have been the focus of participation research since the early 2000s. One reason for this is the significantly low youth turnout in the 2001 General Election compared to previous elections. This decline in electoral participation included all cohorts but turned out to be the largest for the youngest of 18-24 year-olds (Curtice and Simpson, 2018, p. 11). Alongside the focus on voter turnout, participation research in the UK has become more diversified by looking closely at generational differences (Furlong and Cartmel, 2011) and the reasons why voter turnout and means of conventional political participation are especially low among younger citizens (Birch, Gottfried and Lodge, 2013; Sloam, 2016). Age functions as a cohort factor in these types of research. In light of volatile political environments shaped by a post-Brexit

economy and the effects of the global pandemic, ‘young people’ or ‘youth’ need to be comprehended as a multi-faceted group with equally multi-layered individual actors. The factor of age, or maybe more precisely the factor of *generation*, may well represent the new “main demographic dividing line in British politics” (Curtice, 2017, p. 3). These generational differences are likely to continue and manifest in conflicts, as the younger cohorts are still being dominated by older cohorts in political matters (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020).

2.3.1. Youth and young people

The age span which frames people as being young varies immensely in participation research. The varied use and application of the terms *youth* and *young cohorts*, occasionally even without a specification of the age group included, complicate comparative approaches and demonstrate the difficulty in making *youth* a tangible concept. This is ultimately due to the fact that although an age group can be easily identified on the basis of a common numerical characteristic, yet this process also involves a strong generalisation and simplification of a heterogeneous group of human individuals. When reviewing recent literature on participation and engagement among young people in the UK, the diversity in determining age cohorts becomes evident.

While some research defines youth rather broadly, others narrow it down to specific age groups or even subgroups. Youth in academic research rarely includes minors, meaning that only 18-year-olds and older tend to be included. This leads to ambiguity over who is included when reports and articles talk about *young people* and complicates comparisons. Such ambiguity is no surprise given that youth and adolescence are times of transition. Albeit criticising the general notion of transition as the imposition of “a particular conception of what it means to be a young person” (Marsh, O’Toole and Jones, 2007, p. 62), researchers acknowledge that it is difficult to approach youth as a homogenous group. Instead, research needs to take into account the multidimensional aspects influencing and shaping the lives of young people in various different contexts, settings and constellations. Marsh, O’Toole and

Jones (2007) defined young people in their study as being between 16 and 25 years old. The authors argued that age 16 represents a marker of transition into adulthood and that the upper age limit of 25 reflects on “youth research which stresses that the period of transition from childhood to adulthood has become longer and more fragmented in the last few decades” (Marsh, O’Toole and Jones, 2007, p. 62).

Age in research with young people is usually mentioned as part of the research design because otherwise, youth can become a rather vague term that runs the risk of generalisation and leaves too much room for the reader’s own understanding of who is included. In Kimberlee (2002), a specific age range is never mentioned, resulting in an explanation of low voter turnouts among unspecified cohorts. As the article refers to the 2001 General Elections and the statistical data from the British Election Survey, the cohort of concern is implied to be 18-24 year-olds. In fact, most academic output on both political engagement and political participation in the UK centres on the age range of 18-24 years (Hill and Louth, 2006; Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson, 2006; Sloam, 2007; Henn and Sharpe, 2016; Sloam and Ehsan, 2017; Allsop, Briggs and Kisby, 2018; Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2018; Sloam and Henn, 2019). One reason for this is the use of this cohort in official statistics on voter turnout as presented by Ipsos Mori and the British Election Study (BES) or in relation to political engagement by the Hansard Society in the annual Audit of Political Engagement. In the context of voter turnout and political participation, the focus in the UK has also turned towards ‘attainers’, young people who are new to the electoral register and become eligible to vote in an election for the first time (Henn and Foard, 2012; Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018; Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2017). In contrast to this given range of 18-24 year-olds, European data sources, such as the Eurobarometer and the European Social Survey (ESS) provide their sets of different age categories. For example, in the Eurobarometer, the youngest cohort contains responses from 15-30 year-olds, while the ESS is based on responses from 15-24 year-olds.

Beyond these ranges set by large-scale survey research institutions, various projects have defined youth differently, usually adapted to their respective

research design and purpose. These 'alternations' of youth both contain extensions towards younger and older people. O'Toole's (2015) study on ethnic minority young people's political participation in Bradford and Birmingham includes participants aged 16-25, Sloam (2016) draws on aggregated ESS data from 15-24 year-olds, and Ehsan (2018) looks at data from a representative survey among 18-30 year-olds. In some studies, the ages considered can vary even further to either include the perspectives of minors (Sime and Behrens, 2023, participants aged 12-18; Botterill *et al.*, 2016, participants aged 12-25; Eichhorn, 2014, participants aged 14-17) or to extend research on youth to young adults (Melo and Stockemer, 2014, participants aged 15-33). The latter authors criticise the inconsistent use of the terms *young adult* and *youth* and argue that in order to understand the transition into adulthood, a wider range needs to be applied. This debate has also come up in US-focused research on the topic of political participation (Flanagan *et al.*, 2011).

The varying age ranges researchers have included in their studies is an indicator of the limitations of youth participation research and the necessity to define a clear cohort in order to enable empirical research. In most of the previously highlighted literature, the age group chosen is explained and justified either in relation to specific settings within the sample scope itself (e.g. examined organisations or groups) or the requirements of the research itself (e.g. the lowering of the voting age in Scotland in the independence referendum 2014). A common choice for the definition of *young people* is referring to the 18-24 year-olds, who are commonly aggregated as a cohort by British institutes for polling, engagement and participation. Especially in the context of participatory behaviour, people under 18 are rarely considered in both quantitative and qualitative research. This limitation can be a disadvantage for comprehensive participation research on young people, as it runs the risk of not seeing youth and young adulthood as part of a transitional process. Yet, at the same time, setting clear age limits is also necessary in order to deliver a realistic research concept. Therefore, it is important to understand young people not just as a cohort defined by age or the inclusion

of further control variables alone but to reflect on the bigger picture in which youth represents a contextual factor and a result of external and internal influences.

2.3.2. The conceptualisation of youth beyond age

As demonstrated by the vast differences in age cohorts, *youth* appears to be an elusive research group. In participation research, young people have been framed as a “problematic group, displaying low levels of electoral turnout, a lack of trust in democratic institutions and signs of scepticism and cynicism regarding politicians and political parties” (Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2018). Yet, in the last two decades, both quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that when looking beneath the surface this perceived disinterest in politics and apathy is not a salient factor. Large-scale and longitudinal data from the European Social Survey, on a European level, and the Audit of Political Engagement, on a national level, illustrate that political interest has not dramatically declined amongst younger cohorts. Beyond interest alone, many young respondents stated they would both vote in national elections and take part in other forms of political participation (Furlong and Cartmel, 2011; Melo and Stockemer, 2014; Sloam, 2016). In comparison with other European countries, young people in the UK appear to be less involved with political participation, but this phenomenon may not necessarily be limited to specific age cohorts. Looking at qualitative findings among young citizens in Britain, there is no evidence for general apathy or disinterest in politics (Marsh, O’Toole and Jones, 2007; Dempsey and Johnston, 2018). The academic debate around the ‘disengagement’ of young people in Britain is majorly concerned with the lack of conventional participation levels of young cohorts, especially electoral participation. Research shows that conventional participation among people of younger age in many established democratic systems is lower in terms of proportion (Dalton, 2008; Grasso *et al.*, 2018). Young people are less likely to use their votes, become a member of a party

or associate themselves with party politics (Park, 2004; Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, 2004).

A number of hypotheses have been advanced to explain those differences, including the generational effects of participatory behaviour due to changes in life cycles overall, a higher attraction of young people to other forms of political participation, and a difference in perception and assessment of political institutions between young and older generations (Quintelier, 2007). In addition to these approaches of generational arguments as well as youth-focused and politics-focused theories, explanations have been brought forward which state that values are shifting within upcoming generations, leading to a shift in participation and engagement overall (Kimberlee, 2002). By contrast, other scholars have argued that the perception of the political institutions and parties among youth is that their own interests and concerns are not addressed sufficiently (Norris, 2003; Henn, Weinstein and Forrest, 2005; Sloam, 2007; Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010; Sime and Behrens, 2023). These hypotheses result in a need for re-assessing youth political engagement in general and its methods of measurement and evaluation (Albacete, 2014).

The preoccupation with youth political participation is often underlined by a fear that their non-engagement will continue throughout life. It is difficult to foresee such a development, but given the current research findings, there are no grounds to assume that “young people are rejecting conventional politics” (permanently) (Furlong and Cartmel, 2011, pp. 26-27). However, these concerns and reflections on potential consequences for political systems and democratic institutions have increasingly become part of current participation research and thereby put the conceptualisation of *youth* and *young people* to the test. Marsh, O’Toole and Jones (2007) challenged claims of a youth participation crisis in Britain and reconsidered politics as a “lived experience” (Bhavnani, 1991), which is also subject to generational effects. These are described as “effects [that] arise when successive generations face new challenges or experiences that make them different to previous generations” (p. 93), which can impact value systems and patterns of behaviour. In Putnam’s view (1995), the younger generation displays a tendency to be less

engaged in associational membership, therefore, impacting the social capital of their respective societies. Inglehart (1990; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) has done research on mass value changes in several established democracies and states that postmaterialist values are steadily replacing previous collectivist values. A similar idea was expressed by Furlong and Cartmel (1997), who observed an increase in individualisation among young people in post-industrial societies.

These theories tend to centre on social change rather than on changes in the political environment. Pirie and Worcester (1998) evaluated the participatory behaviour of the 'Millennial Generation' (which is defined by the authors as people who reached the age of 21 around the turn of the millennium) and reasoned that their withdrawal from conventional politics was caused by the alienation of the state and its political institutions. As a consequence, there is an increasing estrangement taking place between young people and their perceived relevance of these institutions. Bang (2005) took the opposite view of these assumptions. Instead of a withdrawal of the state, Bang (2005) claimed that the boundaries between personal life and the public and political sphere have lessened. While this allows for civil society groups to influence the governing system, it also complicates the overall process of political decision-making.

Taking young people as political actors represents an approach that acknowledges young people as agents of their own actions. Yet, as Furlong and Cartmel (2011) remarked, the debate about 'youth' in relation to participation research often proves to be narrow and restricting. Youth transitional periods have become "more complex and are frequently non-linear" (Furlong, 2016, p. 3). While not reliant on age, these processes are associated with certain age ranges. In Britain, for instance, this could be between the ages of 18 and 25. Tanner and Arnett (2016) even renamed this specific age range "emerging adulthood" to signify that while the legal age has been reached, the process of becoming an adult, socially and psychologically, has not been completed yet.

Youth is a time of lived experience and accumulation of experiences. Having shared experiences with people of the same age contributes to the construction of a social generation. Social generations are a concept coined by Mannheim (1928) who researched how youth in Germany “contested the ideas inherited from their parents’ generation” (Woodman, 2016, p. 21) during the post-war era. Mannheim found that young people’s social values and political ideologies differed from their parents. Thus, social generations are characterised by a division from one another on the grounds of age and, therefore, consequently, different shared experiences. A generation, conceptualised as a group of people undergoing a similar life stage during a certain age span in life, does, however not mean that young people share the same socioeconomic context. Social class and gender are factors to consider in both the socialisation and transition process. According to Furlong and Cartmel (2007), these factors demonstrate that generations are not just divided from one another vertically but also horizontally.

Youth has also been found to be the most formative time for political interest, which is highly related to the development of political opinions and behaviour (Prior, 2010). In a study relying on a German database called German Socio-Economic Panel which observed political interest over a longer time period, Neundorf, Smets and García-Albacete (2013) found that the level of political interest of young adults seems to increase up to the age of 25. At this point, the level of political interest tends to stabilise. Thus, influences during youth and young adulthood are more likely to have an impact on one’s political interest, which in turn may affect their engagement or participation in politics. Neundorf, Smets and García-Albacete (2013) concluded that parental socialisation with a high interest in politics within the family and “higher parental socioeconomic status” (p. 110) have a positive impact on young people’s levels of political interest. At the same time, other major life events “such as entering the labor market, experiencing unemployment, starting a family or getting married do not directly affect the growth of political interest observed directly following the adolescent years” (p. 110).

In a thorough discussion about the terminology around ‘young people’, Pickard (2019) points out the many different challenges in conceptualising this age group and which other issues appear in the study of young people’s political participation. She defines young people as 14-to-24 year-olds, arguing that this 10-year period is “the life stage when most political socialisation takes place” (2019, p. 29). Pickard also admits that this transitional aspect makes defining younger age groups as a somewhat generalisable or even homogenous cohort so difficult. The reason for choosing this particular timeframe originates in legal considerations of age, as well as research on the cognitive ability development of youth. Although the transition into adulthood might not end by the age of 24, “by then, they [young people] will however probably have acquired political knowledge, values and opinions that shape their political participation” (2019, p. 29).

In summary, three major challenges can be identified in defining *youth*. Firstly, to state assumptions about the people who are currently in a certain stage of their life without running into unfounded generalisations; secondly, to see shared age as one of several factors shaping young adult life, alongside other important socioeconomic factors, such as social class, education, access to resources, influences in socialisation processes, and personal relationships; and thirdly, to understand that, while young people can be of research interest, in certain circumstances, opinions and behaviours which may be singled out as only attributional to them are still sociological constructions, used as tools to understand young people’s lives as an aggregated concept.

2.3.3. Young people in the context of this research project

Taking into account these challenges in reference to current literature, there are common determinants for the conceptualisation of youth and young people in the UK. The transition period from youth to adulthood has become longer and more likely to be interrupted by various events (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Flanagan, 2013). This is due to longer time in education and later entrance into full-time employment (Goodwin *et al.*, 2017) – thus, delaying

economic and potentially geographic and social stability, meaning marriage and family planning are affected, too – changing societal systems, and leading to personal and collective value shifts (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Overall, young people in the 21st century face more opportunities in terms of their career and self-development but are also confronted with greater risks (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

In addition to the precarisation of the labour market, the increasing economisation of post-industrial democracies fostered trends of individualisation, strengthened by the spread of digital devices and services. In personal and public life, the boundaries between the online and offline spheres are disappearing. These structural developments do not just impact young people per se, although for youth, they have a much more direct impact. The financial crisis of 2007/2008 has led to large public spending cuts on education, social services and other forms of investment. Followed by an economic recession, the precariousness of the job market and socioeconomic instability have increased for young people in many European countries. This socioeconomic instability not only raised housing and living costs but also impeded entry into the job market, especially for young people (Sloam and Henn, 2019). Although there are vast differences among youth across Europe regarding specific actions of political participation, certain trends have become observable in the last two decades. Norris (2007) stated that “the representative capacity of mainstream politicians and traditional political institutions has weakened significantly”, while participation has gone from being based on party membership or affiliation to issue-based decisions and actions, either in support of a single-issue or a specific lifestyle (Sloam and Henn, 2019).

In the context of this research project, the maturing of this young generation overlaps with specific political events, such as the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the referendum on the UK’s EU membership in 2016, and effects of policies, such as austerity measures (Birch, Gottfried and Lodge, 2013) and the lowering of the voting age in Scotland. In the UK, the most recent evidence on youth’s political interest and their disappointment with formal

politics provide grounds to focus specifically on politically active youth (Henn and Sharpe, 2016; Mejias and Banaji, 2017). The 'Brexit' referendum was seen as an incentive to engage in political action (Sloam and Ehsan, 2017) but not necessarily in institutionalised structures. Perceived political apathy of young people should, therefore, rather be interpreted as dissatisfaction *with* or scepticism of formal politics. Building upon the discussion of whether the polarising 'Brexit effect' has had a lasting effect on conventional and/or nonconventional youth political participation, young politically active people were included as actors within these settings and as spokespersons of contemporary youth in the UK (Fox and Pearce, 2016a). On the basis of the presented literature on youth and transitional periods from adolescence into adulthood and in line with the findings by Neundorf, Smets and García-Albacete (2013) and Pickard (2019), this project accepts the definition of young people with an age range from 16 to 24 years. The upper limit of 24 was set in order to represent the youngest cohort used in standardised statistical data on voting and political participation in general (18-24). The lower limit of 16 was chosen in consideration of British legislation on the maturity of teenagers and to include people who may be eligible to vote in some elections, given the lowered voting age of 16 in Scotland and Wales. At this age, young individuals residing in certain regions of the UK are formally acknowledged as political actors by institutionalised politics. In addition, the decision to set the age of 16 as the lower limit was also informed by ethical considerations, as involving participants below the age of 16 in this research project would necessitate parental consent.

2.4. Young people's political participation from an international perspective

Worldwide, the trend towards non-electoral methods of political action can be observed. The trend towards non-electoral methods of political action is anything but recent: protest movements have expanded drastically since 1975 and, in contrast to concerns about declining civic participation (Putnam, 2000),

as Dalton (2008) has found that “[m]ore people are working with informal groups in their community to address local problems” (p. 94). Instead of just focusing on the decrease in voter turnout which has been attributed to the decline of electoral participation as a civic duty (Blais and Achen, 2019), Dalton (2008) emphasised that the “spread of engaged citizenship” was tied to desires for more direct democracy and influence. Echoing Norris (2002) and Zukin *et al.* (2006), political participation is considered as changing, as “[n]on-electoral participation gives citizens more control over the focus and locus of political action” (Dalton, 2008, p. 93).

Investigating the influence of civic associations on political participation in the US, Li and Zhang (2017) found evidence for Putnam’s argument that civic engagement in the US is declining. Their study also showed that voting is associated with a greater likelihood to participate in other forms of formal political participation. In contrast, acts of informal participation – which Li and Zhang (2017) defined as “1) signing a petition; 2) taking part in a lawful public demonstration; 3) boycotting a certain product; 4) deliberately buying certain products for political or ethical reasons; and 5) participating in illegal protests” (p. 10) – were found to be more difficult to organise and carry out. The findings indicated that informal collective participation is more strongly connected to the factor of mobilisation.

Other research has drawn connections between participation and the bigger environment it occurs within. This macro-perspective no longer just includes the political system but has been expanded towards social and economic dimensions. In the context of young people’s political participation, the consideration of transformations of young people’s lives and their “lived experience” (Bhavnani, 1991) have become part of participation research. Intensified neoliberal policies and marketisation processes (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017) enforced a situation of insecurity and precariousness (Furlong, 2009, 2013). In terms of politics, global trends towards populism and “a significant revival of parochial politics centring on local issues of racial, religious and nationalist identity and sentiment” (Pickard and Bessant, 2018, p. 6) have emerged. While some democracies are facing destabilisation from

erupting xenophobia, nationalism and unresolved racial issues, other countries are still struggling “to establish basic democratic practices [...], such as free and democratic elections and civic rights, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of academics and freedom from arbitrary arrest” (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Empirical quantitative research supports qualitative studies with the argument that non-electoral participation is favoured by the young. A comparative analysis of ESS data from the year 2008 on people’s political participation in France, Germany and the UK confirmed that young people are less likely to vote than older cohorts but are at the same time more likely to partake in other political participatory actions (Melo and Stockemer, 2014). Youth participation in the UK was identified as the second lowest among the considered EU-15 countries (Sloam, 2016). Whereas participation rates of younger and older citizens for political activities such as petition signing and boycotting products were not a particular activity of young people, age played a role in respect of other forms of protest such as wearing a badge or a sticker or taking part in a demonstration. Sloam (2016) emphasised the role of youth participation in the UK as a clear outlier, suggesting that there may be a “lack of opportunities for political expression” as well as little chances for “influencing the political process” in Britain (p. 13). While emerging waves of youth protest in Europe have been attributed to rising levels of political interest, it is noteworthy that the political action of young people “is not socially equal” (Sloam, 2017, p. 292), as differences remain across education levels and socio-economic status.

Research on protest movements in various countries and regions of the world documented that young people’s political participation is essential, if not conducive, to amend politics in a demand for democracy and freedom. From student protests against inequality and financial burdens of the higher education system in South Africa (Mudimu and Moodaley-Mpisane, 2021) and the formation of the Umbrella movement for freedom in Hong Kong (Watts, 2018) to regional phenomena of the Gezi resistance of young people in Turkey (Inan and Grasso, 2017), the Los Indignados 15M movement in Catalonia (Ballesté Isern and Sánchez García, 2018) and youth’ interest in the independence referendum of Scotland in 2014 (Sanghera *et al.*, 2018) – these

protest movements have often been youth-led or youth-centred. In recent active movements, such as the school strikes against climate change and the re-emergence of the *Black Lives Matter* movement, young people have been essential in leading and contributing to political actions, both online and offline.

Young people's engagement in political participation on a global scale is a result of the inefficacy and failure of both political and economic systems (Pickard and Bessant, 2018). This international perspective highlights the sustained efforts of predominantly young people to achieve political change by mass protesting, while voting has become a rediscovered tool for many after a period of either disinterest or disaffection. Those young people who actively engage in politics display "a preference for hands-on, direct forms of activism; a tendency to mobilise in horizontal, loosely organised groups or networks rather than vertically integrated institutions with highly formalised regulation of membership or activity" (O'Toole and Gale, 2013, p. 218). Activism can also take on the forms of everyday activism, political actions which take place in the context of one's daily life and an "often concealed everyday political practice" (Beck, 1997, p. 98), including actions such as volunteering, political consumerism, and vegetarianism or veganism (Micheletti, 2011). Another important form of activism is online political participation. Expressing political opinions online provides an accessible platform for self-actualisation (Loader, Vromen and Xenos, 2014) and allows for networking among like-minded people. Thus, young people's political socialisation is no longer exclusively defined by immediate social ties, as online political participation allows them to construct their own networks and engage in a wide range of information.

2.4.1. Changing structures of political participation

While organisational membership rates of political parties and trade unions amongst young people are falling (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012; Van Biezen and Poguntke, 2014), political protest and dissent are expressed via "cause-orientated" (Norris, 2003) actions which are focusing on specific issues rather than an entire political ideology. This has led to notable changes in the

structure of young people's political participation, or more specifically to shifts in their political activism. Young people in the UK share similar developments with peer cohorts in other countries. Although their socio-economic and political environments might differ, there are common patterns of young political activism in terms of mobilization, communication and self-organisation. According to Pickard (2019), "British youth-led dissent forms part of a global protest with shared struggles and part of a cycle with shared emotions, grievances and values among young people, as well as shared protest repertoires, tactics and rituals passed on and adapted from one movement to another" (p. 431).

There is little large-scale and longitudinal data on young people in Britain and their place in political civil society. There have been numerous quantitative and qualitative studies on voter turnout (Dempsey, 2017; Grasso *et al.*, 2018), forms of non-electoral participation (Ehsan, 2018; Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Henn and Foard, 2011; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007) and youth perspectives on current issues, such as the Scottish independence referendum (Boterill *et al.*, 2016; Eichhorn, 2014, 2017), the "Brexit" referendum (Henn and Sharpe, 2016; Mejias and Banaji, 2017), and the impacts of austerity policies (Maynard, 2017; Birch, Gottfried and Lodge, 2013), migration and identity (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019, 2020; O'Toole, 2015; Sanders *et al.*, 2013). Despite this evidence, the question of how young people organise themselves in terms of political engagement has rarely been addressed.

The most comprehensive data on civil society is annually presented by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in its *UK Civil Society Almanac*, although subdivisions by age are not available in its data. While existing research delivers evidence on the young population in general, specific structures and forms of young participation have yet to be sufficiently explored. Theoretical work on this matter (Henn *et al.*, 2002; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007; Dalton, 2008) proposes a shift of perspective when determining the political engagement of youth by comprehending their participation as a "structured lived experience" (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007, p. 212).

Alternative forms of political participation would allow a more “engaged citizenship” (Dalton, 2008, p. 77), which would bring greater satisfaction to the individual and meet intentions more sufficiently. Conventional politics and means of participation would not provide the effect of contention as others would do, therefore contesting not a de-politicised young generation but a political one, which just seeks confirmation and satisfaction in different ways (Zukin *et al.*, 2006).

In Britain, youth councils and youth parliaments, first established in the late 1940s by governmental initiative, were created to encourage youth participation and to facilitate partaking in local decision-making processes (Matthews, 2001). According to the umbrella organisation of youth councils in Britain, the British Youth Council (BYC), there are currently more than 620 active youth councils (British Youth Council, Webpage). Rainsford (2017) provided structured insight into these and other large-scale political membership-based organisations of national relevance. The selected case organisations encompassed the Youth Factions (YFs) of three political parties in the United Kingdom (Conservative Future, Young Labour and Liberal Youth), the previously mentioned BYC and the National Union of Students (NUS). The findings of this particular study depicted the young activists as rather homogenous in terms of sociodemographic characteristics – the majority of people belonging to YFs, BYC and the NUS come from a lower middle class and upper class background and are in higher education. While working-class people were found among both the NUS and the BYC, only the BYC seemed to have a fairly balanced gender ratio, in stark contrast to the membership structures of the party youth wings, which are 71% male. The results suggested a “path dependency in participation, and little overlap between domains” (Rainsford, 2017, p. 803), meaning that engagement with youth councils or unions did not automatically translate into engagement in formal political actions, including voting.

Researching political activities of non-institutionalised groups constitutes a challenge, both conceptually and methodologically. Structures of youth participation appear to be less institutionalised and activities which could be

categorised as ‘political’, are often not perceived as such by the actors. These activities can involve “volunteering, informal community networks, informal political action, awareness-raising, altruistic acts, and general campaigning” (Henn and Foard, 2011, p. 3) which, therefore, strengthen the notion that young people tend to become involved in cause-oriented or issue-focused styles of politics (Norris, 2003, 2007). This has also been the conclusion of numerous international studies. Harris, Wyn and Younes (2010) ran a qualitative survey and follow-up interviews with young Australians on their attitudes towards national and local politics. Their investigation of the response of 15-18 year-olds revealed that, similar to the UK, the participants did not show general political disinterest or even apathy but were instead involved in community matters in less formal ways. Their desire to ‘be heard’, however, stood out as a value. This desire of being recognised and responded to as political actors has been observed among youth in several studies, in diverse countries (Cammaerts *et al.*, 2014). While it is unknown whether these sentiments are a new phenomenon or rather recurring signs of younger generations within society, Chryssochou and Barrett (2017) have pointed out that youth participation has shifted “away from conventional participation toward nonconventional and civic participation instead” (p. 291). Although the authors advise against the generalisation of the political attitudes and behaviours of young people, due to the “heterogeneity of the issues, the contexts, and the means of engagement” (p. 293) which can vary within different national, cultural and personal circumstances, they also highlight the opportunity for further specified research on this development.

2.4.2. Digital communication and social media in activism

The Internet and social media play an important role in political participation today, as they are “helpful in informing, organising, mobilising and engaging young people in politics, especially in non-electoral forms of political participation” (Pickard, p. 395). While the use of these can vary greatly, in Britain, young people represent the most active user group online. In the

context of political participation research, studies have focused on the relationship between offline and online engagement (Vromen, 2017; Casteltrione and Pieczka, 2018; Hale *et al.*, 2018), the potential and dangers of the use of technology for political purposes, and also “whether social media acts only as an echochamber reinforcing already held perceptions to the exclusion of alternative views” (Pickard, 2019, p. 396).

The literature on the digitalisation process within participation puts emphasis either on individuals and their use of social media (Dahlgren, 2011), the Internet and other forms of digital interaction, and on the potential of digital means for participatory behaviour. This latter body of work often focuses on the improvement of institutionalised democracy, by considering electronic petition signing for example (Vidgen and Yasseri, 2019) and citizenship education (Couldry *et al.*, 2014). The Internet and social media platforms are rapidly becoming the most relevant sources of information for young people. Moeller, Kühne and De Vreese (2018) found that exposure to offline media did not show any significant effect on the voting turnout of young people in the European Elections 2014, unlike digital news. In a similar study in the context of the 2014 Swedish elections, Strömbäck, Falasca and Kruikemeier (2017) concluded that the consumption of political news was changing, not just among young people. They observed a “migration from traditional news media to social media” (p. 428) and recommended further studies on the role of social media on political knowledge.

Instead of distinguishing between traditional and new media, Chadwick (2013) suggested a more integrative approach to what he calls the hybrid media system. The increase in social media use has had effects on the formation of *clicktivism* (Grasso, 2018), a neologism of click and activism. Albeit occasionally used in a negative way, clicktivism refers to the phenomenon of people, often young people, becoming engaged in social and political issues online. To see social media as part of political participation is essential to understand the connection between offline events and online activity. As Vromen (2017) phrased it, “[t]he trade-off in debate is not any longer between outmoded arguments about individualised clicktivism on the one hand and

utopian views on movement driven, horizontal, online mobilisation on the other" (p. 65). Using the Internet for news, communication, and participation has been an established behaviour among the majority of young people.

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) generated a framework to classify political networks on the basis of their "digitally networked action" (p. 743), which categorises social movements and groups by their extent of online behaviour. They identified three different types of digitally networked action: self-organising networks, organisationally enabled networks and organisationally brokered networks. While self-organising networks are largely driven without a form of coordination (e.g. the *Indignados* movement), the other two forms possess some method or actor for coordination. Organisationally enabled networks represent a hybrid model, in which the collective is loosely tied to the actions of a few individuals (e.g. the *Occupy* movement). Lastly, the organisationally brokered collective action are networks of high formalisation and professional background, which is the case for many long-established NGOs and charities.

Digital communication and means of participation are changing political activism and have the potential to reshape democracy. Furthermore, the inclusion of social media leads to the "blurring of the boundaries by digital networks between emotion and rationality, and private life and public life" (Vromen, 2017, p. 69), leading to what the author calls "affective publics". Social media and digital communication tools have become important additions to the political action repertoire. Therefore, online activism also forms part of this study's understanding of young people's political participation and organisation.

2.4.3. Implications for further research

Existing research has examined the structures of political participation and identified trends of young people turning towards less formalised actions and networks to express their political opinions. They are engaged in politics in

different ways, from life-style politics to protest movements. Instead of the previously shaped dichotomous distinctions of conventional and nonconventional actions, empirical analysis has moved towards more expansive and civically influenced concepts of electoral and non-electoral political activities. Collective structures may be less dominant than they used to be but cannot be neglected completely. Networks remain important, though they might appear “more fluid and horizontal” (p. 397), which – while allowing individualistic actions – still constitute collective tendencies in both engagement and behaviour. In this regard, Pickard (2019) clearly remarked that individualistic action does not equal self-centred action, underlining that the new DIO politics does not serve an end in itself but is directed at striving for a change in society.

The increasing permeation of technology, real and perceived influences from social and political environments, issues of experiencing a misrepresentation via the ‘old’ institutions, the role of young actors within a pluralist democratic society which is also characterised by strong demographic imbalances, changes in political and economic paradigms as well as potential generational shifts in values – these multifaceted factors have been identified by prior research as shaping elements of youth participation and activism today.

Further research needs to address the differences in what motivates young people to engage in non-electoral political actions and identify the barriers to non-electoral participation, as young people do not constitute a homogenous group. It is also likely that both similar and different restrictions apply to non-electoral participation as they do to electoral participation. Studies have explored the manifoldness of potential political activities, expanding the range towards civic participation, more radical forms of protest (Corry and Reiner, 2021; Pickard, Bowman and Arya, 2020) and even the arts (Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010; Duncombe and Lambert, 2018) but focused less on the individual contexts of young people’s identity and belonging. Furthermore, while current research, including Pickard’s DIO concept of youth politics (2019, 2022), places emphasis on agency, few empirical studies have produced specific findings on how the perception of agency and influence impacts young

people's engagement (and non-engagement) with activism. This represents the research gap this thesis aims to address. By building onto the reviewed works on political participation and young people's engagement as 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics, this thesis first contextualises young people's general situation and their political participation in the UK before it presents a specific approach to examine the impact of perceptual factors, in particular perception of agency, on activist behaviour.

This study aims to address these open questions by researching motivational factors specifically for young people's activism conceptualised as DIO politics and contextualise the role of personal experiences, identity and the desire for belonging within. To this end, the following sections present the state of youth and political participation in the UK, the geographical focus of the study, and reviews the main themes of youth activism in the UK. The chapter concludes by identifying the research gap and determining the research questions of the study.

2.5. Youth participation in times of political upheaval and social insecurity

This section first looks at conventional political participation, also referred to as electoral participation, of young people in the context of General Elections, and reviews data and literature on observable behavioural patterns of young people and voting. It then turns towards political participation in its more expansive definition of young people's non-electoral participation in politics in the UK. This literature review of both electoral and non-electoral political participation serves to help understand young people's political activity as a multidimensional phenomenon and define activism in the context of political and social circumstances.

Between 2000 and 2019, General Elections have taken place six times in the UK, with the elections in 2017 and 2019 occurring just after two years of legislative period each. Both of these happened during the ongoing negotiation

process of what is widely known as ‘Brexit’ and represent a phase of constant upheaval in British politics. While the focus of public debate has been limited for a while to elected political actors, it is important to consider the impact of political developments on society as a whole. In particular, the role of civil society has been marginalised in this situation, despite indications that the referendum in 2016 has not only led to a generational division line (Curtice, 2017, p. 3) but also sparked changes of political nature within civil society (Fox and Pearce, 2016b). The academic debate about political participation in general but most specifically about young people had been reignited by both the high youth turnout numbers of young people in the Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the enduring process of Brexit.

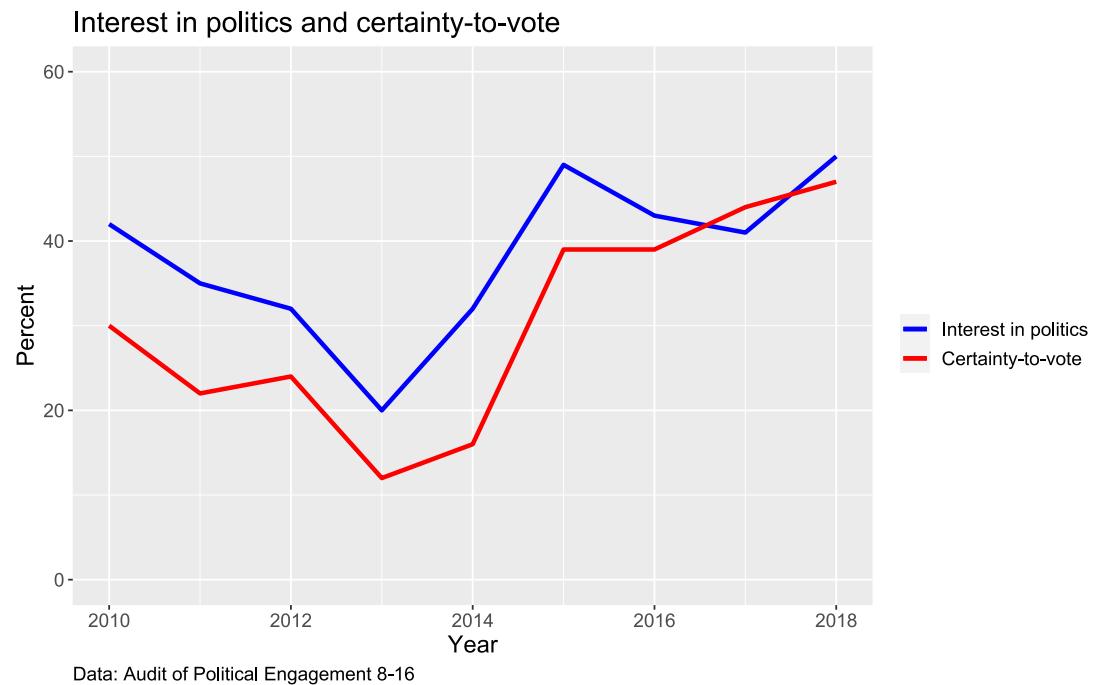
The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to restrictions to social life, thus also limiting opportunities for collective in-person political participation such as protests. Two instances where this tension between the desire for political expression and the restrictions of ‘lockdown’ and ‘social distancing’ measures became apparent were the protests in the summer of 2020 in the light of the re-emerging *Black Lives Matter* movement and vigils held in March 2021 to commemorate the murder of a young woman in London (Joseph-Salisbury, Connelly and Wangari-Jones, 2020; Stott *et al.*, 2021). With regard to young people, the COVID-19 pandemic had consequences for their education, access to healthcare and predominantly negative impacts on young people’s social lives and mental health (Strömmér *et al.*, 2022; Estellés, Bodman and Mutch, 2022).

2.5.1. Young people and electoral participation: The General Election of 2017 and the ‘youthquake’ debate

The Hansard Society has been measuring indicators of political engagement in the UK since 2003, reporting a variety of data in the context of political interest, knowledge and satisfaction in the annual Audit of Political Engagement. In regard to the relevant age cohort of 18-24 year-olds, the scores for *certainty to vote* have risen by 35 percentage points between 2013

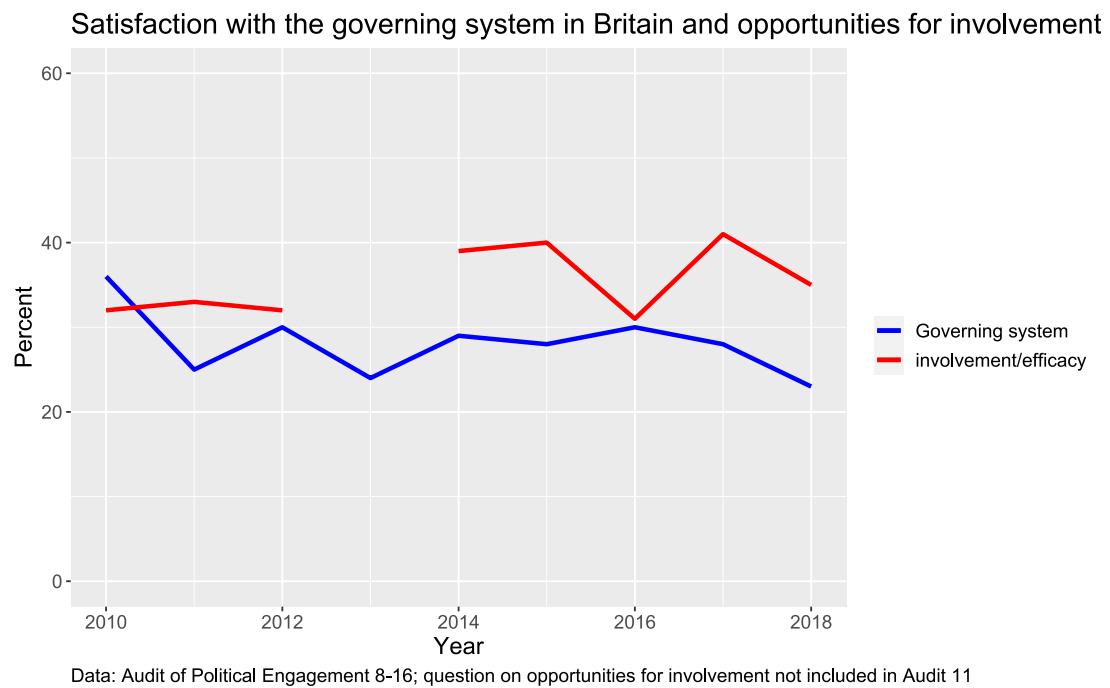
and 2018 (*Audit of Political Engagement* 10-16, 2014-2019). The study assessed the self-reported likelihood of respondents to vote in an immediate general election as an indicator of their *certainty to vote*. The data also evidenced a growing *interest in politics* among young people, with a rise from 20 to 50% from 2013 to 2018 (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Changes in scores for certainty-to-vote and interest in politics among 18-24-year-olds



A brief significant change was the increased perception of the effectiveness of personal involvement in political action in 2017 (*efficacy of getting involved in politics*). This indicator reached the highest score among 18-24 year-olds in 2017 with 41% (*Audit of Political Engagement* 15, 2018) before dropping to a value of 35% (*Audit of Political Engagement* 16, 2019). Another record score was found for their satisfaction level with the governing system in Britain. This value reached an all-time low for the 18-24 year-old respondents, at 23%, based on data from 2018 (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2. Changes in scores for satisfaction with the governing system in Britain and with opportunities for involvement among 18-24-year-olds



Young people in the UK, divided into age cohorts of 18-24 and 25-34 year-olds, were found to be less likely to participate in conventional forms of political activity than older cohorts (Dempsey, 2017; Dempsey and Johnston, 2018). While the participation levels in the GE have fallen overall since the 1950s, there is an observable trend of increasing voter turnout since the elections in 2001, which had one of the lowest turnouts recorded yet, with less than 60% turnout. Simultaneously, reported trust in the government has fallen drastically since the early 1990s. Dempsey and Johnston deduced from this data that people with little political knowledge are less likely to engage in politics and elections. Political disengagement appeared to be more prevalent among certain groups than others in the UK, with young people stating to be less knowledgeable about politics, and women seemingly less knowledgeable than men.

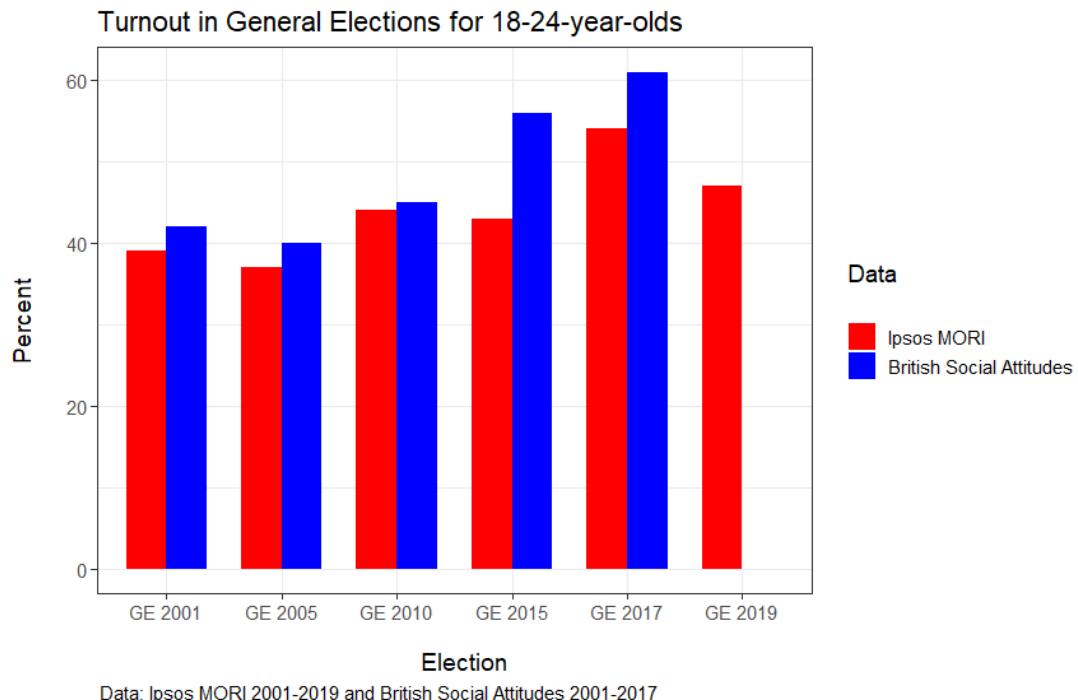
A number of theoretical approaches have been considered with regard to the question of why young British people are less likely to vote than older cohorts (Kimberlee, 2002). While lower electoral participation among youth is not a phenomenon limited to the UK or a recent occurrence (OECD, 2019, p. 130),

a more specific characteristic of youth in the UK has been the relatively low participation in other forms of political activity, as found by a study based on data from the European Social Survey from the years 2002 to 2010. Youth participation in the UK was the second lowest among 15 EU countries (Sloam, 2016). The research project looked at nonconventional forms of political engagement, based on survey responses to issue-based scenarios.

However, since then, the overall context has changed in many ways. The analysis of estimations on actual turnout in the last two General Elections in the UK shows that electoral participation levels had risen for 18-24 year-olds in 2017, indicating a trend of politicisation of young citizens in the UK (Sloam and Ehsan, 2017), which fell again in 2019. Whereas the turnout level remained about the same for the cohort of 25-34 year-olds, at around 55%, from 2010 to 2019, a significant increase could be observed in electoral participation of the youngest cohort between 2015 and 2017 (from 43% to 54%). This trend did not continue in the elections in December 2019, when the turnout fell again to 47% (Ipsos MORI, 2001-2019).

Since estimations of turnout rates are projected via self-reported surveys, different studies have presented different sets of numbers, especially for the GE 2017. Data presented by the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) varied greatly for the General Elections 2015 and 2017. According to the BSA survey, there was an 11-percentage point rise in voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds, increasing from 43% in 2015 to 54% in 2017. (see Figure 2.3). Despite these findings, Curtice and Simpson (2018) remarked that “there is insufficient evidence to support the claim that there was a particularly marked increase in turnout amongst younger voters between 2015 and 2017” (p. 10).

Figure 2.3. Comparison of General Election turnout results for 18-24-year-olds



More clearly evidenced is that the Scottish independence referendum brought forward a landslide in youth voter turnout. According to the Electoral Commission (2014), 109,593 16-17 year-olds had been registered to vote, and in the follow-up survey, 75% of Scottish citizens aged 16 and 17 reported to have voted. Although the aggregated estimation of voter turnout by age still saw the youngest cohort (16-34) at the lowest value among all cohorts with 69% (85% for 35-54 year-olds and 92% for over 55-year-olds), this youth turnout in the Scottish independence referendum was still considerably high.

A direct comparison of age-related turnout rates in the EU membership referendum is not viable due to variations in aggregated age cohorts and the fact that the 2016 referendum not only comprised the whole UK, but also that people under 18 were not eligible to vote. Yet, a look at the estimated turnout numbers by age provides insight into the makeup of vote shares and potential trends in opinions on Brexit nowadays. In their analysis of the 2016 EU referendum, Skinner and Gottfried (2016) projected voter turnout of 18-24 year-olds to be around 53% (total population of that age bracket as the basis) and 64% (among all registered of that age bracket). In terms of outcome, an

estimated 75% of this cohort voted to ‘remain’ in the EU and 25% voted to ‘leave’. These numbers are backed up by Curtice (2017) who estimated the split between ‘remain’ and ‘leave’ votes for the same age group at 72% and 28% respectively. Both reports relied on self-reported data.

Despite differences in measurement, the data on voter turnout provided by Ipsos MORI and BES ascertained a rise in turnout among young voters for the General Election 2017. The increased polarisation of the debate about Brexit was assumed to be one important driving factor for this development (Curtice and Simpson, 2017). Some of the increase in voter turnout was caused by a larger share of young citizens voting, which was seen as a political ‘youthquake’ by some. Sloam and Ehsan (2017) compared the GE 2017 turnout rates with those of previous elections and contextualised the participation rates within Europe and in the face of the EU membership referendum. On the basis of a Populus poll which was conducted in the run-up to the GE 2017, they found indicators for an expected rise in the voter turnout of 18-24 year-olds, with 57% of respondents of that age claiming to be certain to vote (an increase of 11% in comparison with a similar survey before the GE 2015), and a constantly high level of interest for both the elections (81%) and the ongoing Brexit negotiations process (88%). Referring to statistical data gathered by Ipsos MORI, the report highlights the considerable increase in youth turnout from 43% in 2015 to 64% in 2017. However, it also stresses that young people were much more likely to vote if they came from a high socio-economic background, making youth turnout essentially dependent on factors like “social grade, occupational status and ethnicity” (Sloam and Ehsan, 2017, p. 5).

Sloam and Henn (2019) further investigated the phenomenon of higher turnout of young people in the GE 2017, the development of parties in youth mobilisation and other influencing factors. Their examination of the elections also aimed to contribute to the definition of the word ‘youthquake’, which is a phenomenon depicted to possess at least one of the following developments: “increased turnout amongst young people; a decisive shift in youth support for a political party or the emergence of a new party attracting widespread youth

support; or, a significant increase in the volume or intensity of youth political activism" (Sloam and Henn, 2019, p. 8). In the case of the GE 2017, the authors attributed some of the success of youth mobilisation to the situation of Brexit and the appealing policy proposals by the Labour party, including the perceived authenticity of its leader, Jeremy Corbyn. Young people were also seen in the light of generational value changes, a cultural turn that has previously been explored by Norris and Inglehart (2018), contributing to the impression of a political 'youthquake'.

However, opinions about the youthquake were and are still divided. Critics claimed that the so-called youthquake turned out rather to be 'tremors'. No difference in the relationship between age and turnout between the 2015 and 2017 elections was found by Prosser *et al.*, (2018), essentially undermining the theorem of a youthquake. Instead, the authors argued that – on the basis of three detailed statistical analyses – the increase in the Labour party's vote share was caused by an increase in its share of the vote across all age cohorts. Curtice and Simpson (2018) supported Prosser *et al.*'s position in a BSA report, and the British Election Study team published a detailed commentary on why evidence would not confirm that there had been a significant and reliably measurable increase in young people's electoral participation (2018).

The critique brought forward by Prosser *et al.* (2018) and the BES team was taken up by Allsop and Kisby (2019) who disagreed with the definition of 'young' of being less than 25 years old, as used by Sloam, Ehsan and Henn. They concluded that a broadly defined inclusion of young people provides "good evidence that there was a significant increase in turnout for young people" (Allsop and Kisby, 2019, p. 12). The article, therefore, agrees with the notion of a youthquake in the General Election 2017 and emphasises that the BES data gives "evidence for continued engagement in politics via other means throughout the years of declining voting amongst young people and that recent years have potentially seen an increase in both types of engagement" (Allsop and Kisby, 2019, p. 12). Beyond an increase in voter turnout, they claimed that young people are also taking part in other forms of political participation, which is here generally described as youth activism. At

the same time, both Sloam and Henn (2019) and Allsop and Kisby (2019) acknowledged the challenges in measuring political engagement and participation, including more recent forms of social media activities.

Youth participation research can be very turnout-focused. The discussion and different views on whether a 'youthquake' took place in the GE 2017 showed that in order to understand youth participation, the broader social and political environment needs to be taken into account, and participation needs to be seen as more than purely electoral engagement. Pich *et al.* (2018) aimed to illustrate young voters' engagement in politics and parties by interviewing citizens between the ages of 18 and 24 who confirmed they "continued to engage *cognitively, affectively* and *behaviourally* with politics and were not apathetic with the electoral process" (Pich *et al.*, 2018, p. 3). There are limitations to focusing on electoral turnout as a measure of political participation, especially with regard to young people. Young people have continuously been seen as less involved in conventional politics and more inclined to engage in non-electoral activities. It is also short-sighted to assume that elections are the sole instrument of public participation in politics and are as such a rather limited tool if acknowledging that the purpose of participation may also entail political expression.

2.5.2. Young people and non-electoral participation: The effects of austerity politics and living through a global pandemic

Since the mid-2000s, the academic discourse around youth participation has expanded to alternative participatory forms of political actions. Scholars have looked more specifically into the changing political action repertoires of young people and have investigated transformative ideological processes and value-changes, which may have been contributing to the rise of non-electoral participation. Whereas conventional participation, such as voting or party membership, could be regarded as citizens-orientated actions, unconventional participation revolving around specific issues or certain policies was subsumed under cause-orientated actions, including protesting or petitioning (Norris,

2007). Attempts to explain changes towards and preferences of non-electoral participation among young people included a tendency towards postmaterialism (Sloam and Henn, 2019; Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018) and a reaction to neoliberalism (Allsop, Briggs and Kisby, 2018).

Younger generations, not just in the UK, seemed to “have become more involved in other forms of political activity and engagement even when they might prove disinclined to take a trip to the polling station” (Phillips and Simpson, 2015, p. 4). A cross-EU comparison found that “participating in a demonstration and displaying a badge or sticker are clearly more youth-oriented political activities than signing a petition or joining a boycott” (Sloam, 2016, p. 13). Non-electoral political participation reflected the individualisation of political action, enabled by the wide-spread use of social media (Castells, 2012) and manifested in ‘lifestyle politics’ (de Moor and Verhaegen, 2020; Theocharis, de Moor and van Deth, 2019). Against this background, political actions, especially of young people and related to single-issue campaigns and causes, have increased, “on the basis of personal interests and single-issues rather than as an expression of group solidarity, such as a shared class interest or identity” (Grasso, 2018). Young people’s preference for issue-based political action was seen to be caused by its concrete and personal approach to politics, which can stand detached from party politics and ideologies (Marsh, O’Toole and Jones, 2007; Vromen, 2017). However, at least in the UK, young people’s party identification was identified as “strongly associated with non-electoral politics in comparison to other possible predictors, such as educational attainment and political distrust” (Ehsan, 2018, p. 7). This study also showed that while social class was less of a driving factor for non-electoral participation, ethnicity remained a dividing line for non-electoral participation (Ehsan, 2018; Sloam and Ehsan, 2017).

Young people’s involvement with non-electoral participation has been explained with postmaterialist values-changes among younger generations, an explanatory model developed by the American researcher Ronald Inglehart (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). A comparative study including survey data from 2002 and 2011, both with 18 year-olds, found that young

British citizens were more likely to be dissatisfied with the government if they held postmaterialist values (Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018). The study concluded that there is evidence that “[y]oung postmaterialists are certainly more inclined towards extra-parliamentary and non-institutionalised political repertoires than are other young people” (*ibid.*, p. 732). Although the impact of pre-adult socialisation seemed to be less than expected, meaning that the economic conditions one grew up in do not determine which value-preference one displays, the difference of value-preference possessed stronger predictive power as to *if* and *how* a person participated politically.

The impact of neoliberalism on young people’s political engagement has also been examined, with neoliberalism as “a governing ‘rationality’ that aims at placing the value of competition at the heart of all human endeavour, using an interventionist state to do so” (Allsop, Briggs and Kisby, 2018, p. 5). Allsop, Briggs and Kisby (2018) argued that the ideology of neoliberalism has psychological effects on society and, in the context of youth participation, has led to “increases in individualism and declines in internal and external political efficacy” (p. 6). On a larger scale, austerity measures have increased the pressure on third sector organisations in the UK overall (Harris, 2018) and disproportionately affected the younger and less economically stable elements of the population (Birch, Gottfried and Lodge, 2013). The UK government withdrew funding for the National Youth Agency, which provides educational services and training for youth workers in the UK except in Scotland (National Youth Agency Website; Davies, 2013) and implemented a radical restructuring of youth work from previously public-funded organisations to more economically-rationalised charities (Body and Hogg, 2019). Bright, Pugh and Clarke (2018) attributed these developments to the effects of neoliberalisation and called subsequent policies “discriminatory” against young people, as they “ignore the realities of increasing disenfranchisement and marginalisation” (*ibid.*, p. 316). Bessant, Farthing and Watts (2017) pointed out that young people’s concerns about neoliberal policy outcomes have not been taken seriously by political institutions and actors, leading to a rise of reactionary pushback in the form of non-electoral political actions. Such actions are then,

in turn invalidated as political expression, “labelling [young people] lazy, delinquent or criminal” and perpetuating the public image of “young people as ‘inherently troubled and troublesome’” (*ibid.*, p. 163).

Economic and social impacts due to policymaking and external factors, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic, further contributed to the “marginalisation of young people from relevant social and political structures” (Formby, 2023, page numbers unavailable). Young people were more likely to suffer from economic hardship due to the pandemic (Tiley, Morris and Yusuf, 2021) and may also be the generation on which the economic consequences will have the longest-lasting impact (Mayhew and Anand, 2020; Henn, Sloam and Nunes, 2022). The immediate and indirect effects of COVID-19 add further to the manifold crises young people are being socialised in, such as increasing precarity, social inequality and climate change (Sloam, Pickard and Henn, 2022). While the impacts of the pandemic on young people and their participation are still being researched, there are indications that social distancing measures have created barriers to political participation and expression, especially during phases where in-person gatherings were not allowed (Barker *et al.*, 2022), and have also created opportunities for more inclusive and transnational communication and political collaboration (Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari, 2021). In particular, young people’s political participation became even more strongly embedded in social media and digital communication, as a direct consequence of social distancing measures (Reinikainen, Kari and Luoma-aho, 2020; Pietilä *et al.*, 2021).

Non-electoral participation is a constantly evolving repertoire of political actions which contrasts electoral political actions since they do not exclusively target political institutions or actors. In the UK, over the last decade, young people have been growing up in times of economic precarity and social insecurity. There is evidence that young people in post-Brexit and post-COVID Britain express themselves in particular via non-electoral participation in issues such as climate change and social justice (Pickard, Bowman and Arya, 2020; Zamponi *et al.*, 2022). While being interested in political topics, young people express dissatisfaction and disappointment with formal politics (Henn and

Sharpe, 2016; Mejias and Banaji, 2017). This evidence provides the basis for the current study to focus specifically on young people who are primarily engaged in non-electoral participation and to explore their motivations for political involvement.

2.6. Major themes of young people's activism in the UK

This section outlines major themes affecting youth activism in the UK by reviewing relevant literature on young people's political participation concerning specific issues in the decade leading up to 2022. Reviewing the literature on these broader themes of youth activism is important for contextualising this work and informing its thematic emphases and theoretical trajectory. Four central themes could be identified within young people's activism. The first one is young people's engagement in domestic politics, including the Scottish independence referendum and the UK's exit from the European Union, and more recently, the 'Kill the Bill' protests surrounding the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. The second one is the strong youth-led movement against climate change, with literature particularly focusing on the *Fridays For Future* movement and the *Extinction Rebellion* activist groups in particular. The third theme centres on issues of race, ethnicity and gender. These are, while different in type, all referring to some sort of identity and equality activism. The fourth and final central theme is youth representation in politics, which concerns all previously named themes. Youth representation in the UK is predominantly characterised by limited opportunities for young people to participate politically and by the discreditation of young people's activism by the media and institutionalised politics.

2.6.1. Domestic politics

The domestic political events of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum prompted studies on young people's views and their role in these crucial

decision-making processes. In the context of the Scottish independence referendum, Eichhorn (2014) investigated whether the negative bias towards the inclusion of 16-17-year-olds in the electorate was justifiable. Critical voices had raised issues about whether young Scottish citizens were capable of taking part in such a decisive referendum, and whether they would be particularly susceptible to influences from their families and the information provided in schools. The study found that the youngest eligible voters appeared to be as interested in the independence referendum as the general population of Scotland, and argued that the information campaign in schools made young people less likely to be swayed to vote in one way or the other. A number of follow-up projects investigated the effect of lowering the voting age to 16 on young people's engagement in politics, finding largely positive effects on their confidence to participate politically while also pointing out that the high levels of interest in the 2014 referendum might have been uniquely tied to the issue of Scotland's independence rather than politics in general (Pearce, 2019; Huebner, 2021). Following the independence referendum, young people experienced different types of security and insecurity in their everyday lives (Botterill *et al.*, 2016). A prominent topic was the perceived barrier to being fully recognised as 'Scottish' when participants were from a non-Christian religion. Respondents who were Muslim, Sikh or Hindu "expressed apprehension over engaging in conversations about foreign policy and national security issues" (Botterill *et al.*, 2016, p. 130). Interviews revealed the cultural tensions, real and constructed, which are still shaping the political discourse for many citizens who may not be fully recognised by society due to their 'otherness'. In extreme cases, xenophobia and racism affected young people of South Asian and African backgrounds, regardless of if they were formally citizens of Scotland or not. As the campaign for independence in 2014 was heavily influenced by a debate about national identity, including youth national identity, the referendum overall can be seen as both an emerging manifestation of these racist behaviours but also as a chance to overcome them. Some participants in that study felt that they had been better included in the campaign

for independence than others, resulting in certain cultural groups and religious communities feeling left out.

Whereas the 2014 Scottish independence referendum evidenced a strong engagement of young people, as the turnout rate for 16-17 year-olds was estimated to be 75%, but only 54% among 18-24 year-olds (Electoral Commission, 2015). The 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum two years later was regarded as less of a strong moment for young people's participation, even though the majority of those young people who voted were voting for the UK remaining in the EU, about 70% of 18-30 year-olds (Ehsan and Sloam, 2020). Overall, political scientists argued that the EU referendum did have a positive impact on political participation among youth in the UK (Fox and Pearce, 2016a). The outcome of the referendum, the nation's exit from the EU, opposed the "preferences of the majority of young people who have indicated their broad support for the European project and who voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU" (Henn and Sharpe, 2016). Brexit polarised the British population and led to a deepened dissatisfaction with the governing system in Britain especially among young people (Sloam and Ehsan, 2017). It also sparked an emergence of pro-European activism, with campaigns such as the People's Vote and the March for Europe by the European Movement gaining large support (Brändle, Galpin and Trenz, 2018). While the political and economic consequences continue to affect Britain, it is unclear whether the European Union will remain a focus of activism and of youth activism in particular.

2.6.2. Environmental activism and climate change

A strongly visible topic of youth participation research is the current environmental movement, which manifests itself in the *Fridays For Future* protests and pressure groups like *Extinction Rebellion*. While climate change and the environment have not been depicted by many studies as a frequently mentioned issue for young people in the UK deal with (White, Bruce and Ritchie, 2000; Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2002), 2019 saw a rise in young

people striking for changes in climate policies around the globe, as inspired by young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg (Pickard, 2019b). Young climate activists experience frustrations over the lack of action by governments and other actors given the consequences of global warming and seek to contribute to change by engaging in activism (Pickard, Bowman and Arya, 2020).

Environmental politics, while generally a domestic or national policy area, have become a major driver of international activist mobilisation, with many youth-led initiatives leading protest marches and organising other forms of political action. Climate change represents a threat to existence and creates a sense of urgency (Haugestad *et al.*, 2021). While experiencing feelings of unfairness, frustration and hopelessness, participating in environmental activism may also function as a connective activity among young people, strengthening their sense of belonging and increasing their perception of agency (Börner, Kraftl and Giatti, 2021).

2.6.3. Race, ethnicity and gender issues

Race and ethnicity became a focal point of activism in the UK, not just among young people, in mid-2020. Despite Britain's history of colonisation and associated subjugation of people of different races and ethnicities, issues of inequality between different races have not been central to youth political participation until recently. Racism and the unequal treatment of people due to their skin colour, ethnic or religious background do exist in the UK, as highlighted by the recent Windrush scandal and the Grenfell Tower disaster (Miller, 2021; Essex, Markowski and Miller, 2021). Structural racism and discrimination against minorities persist, with little will to change shown by the political institutions in the UK (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021).

After two Black US citizens were killed by police, the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement re-emerged and spread beyond the United States in June 2020. BLM protests in the UK took place while the country still had restrictions in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from protests, political

actions as part of the BLM movement involved toppling statues of slave traders, symbolising Britain's historical prospering at the expense of Black and colonised people (Mumford, 2021). The BLM movement in the UK, albeit not explicitly youth-led, attracted many young people to enter a discussion around Britain's heritage and the need for anti-racism practices (Jankowski, 2022). However, very few studies have researched the role of young people in the BLM protests and their involvement in anti-racism activism in the UK.

Another recurring topic of young people's activism in the UK has been the rights of people with non-heterosexual orientations, e.g. gay, lesbian and bisexual sexualities, and of different genders, including people who identify as transgender, gender non-conforming or non-binary. Feminist and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer people) activism has had a long history in the UK, with the 1960s and 1970s being important times for social change concerning the role of women in society and decriminalising homosexuality (Charles *et al.*, 2018). By the 2000s, “gender politics and LGBT activism were arguably as prominent as any campaigning issue on British university campuses” (Hensby, 2017, p. 49). Activism for transgender rights and acceptance of non-binary people has gained more traction since 2014 and “[f]rom the outside, the non-binary movement [has been] often regarded as both ‘young’ and ‘difficult’” (Bergman and Barker, 2017, p. 38). There have been limited studies looking into this topic of activism in specific, with many studies focusing on the transgender or non-binary lived experience of young people instead (Bower-Brown, Zadeh and Jadva, 2023).

Identity expression on social media is a common tool among LGBTQ youth, with the online platforms YouTube and Tumblr, in particular, serving as spaces “for trans youth’s cultural production” (Jenzen, 2023, page numbers not available). The UK government was planning to hold its first-ever LGBT conference “Safe to be me” in June 2022, an international event including NGOs and charities to promote LGBT rights (UK Government, 2021). The conference was cancelled after LGBT charities and other groups started boycotting the conference due to the UK government’s stance on conversion therapy (BBC News, 2022b). While the government intended to ban

conversion therapy for gay, lesbian and bisexual people in England and Wales, it announced not to do so for transgender people. This controversy sparked protests by trans-inclusive activists in Downing Street in April 2022 (BBC News, 2022c).

2.6.4. Youth representation in media and politics

Research suggests that young people's participation in politics has been distorted and even defamed by media depictions. While misrepresentation and marginalisation affect young people in the UK generally, research demonstrates that some groups are more affected than others. In the context of Brexit, Mejias and Banaji (2017) interviewed young people aged 13-29 from across the UK. The participants did not come across as disinterested or apathetic but rather stated their distrust in political and media institutions in the context of the UK's exit from the European Union. They felt that they might be left out when they wanted "their voices and concerns to be listened to and acted upon by politicians and policymakers" (p. 6). Many of the young people in the study "display[ed] a complex and nuanced understanding of Brexit and the short and long-term effects of withdrawal from the EU" (p. 6) and were vocal about their wishes for the negotiation process.

A later study by Mejias and Banaji (2019) looked into how young people were depicted by the British media and politicians. The media depictions of young people tended to frame them as susceptible to radicalisation or reduced their capability of self-determination. Governmental documents wrote about youth in a more positive light but sometimes contained contradictions or set out a rather indoctrinating approach to education. The insistence on using compulsory education or training schemes signified a mismatch and an attempt to regulate young people's participation, politically and civically, from a top-down perspective. On the contrary, the interviewed experts held a much more nuanced and detailed understanding of young people in Britain and were not prone to generalise in the same way either the media or the political institutions do. The study concluded that the inclusion of practical experts in

the field of youth policy and young people themselves is essential to understand youth participation.

Several projects have researched political participation of ethnic and migrant minorities in the UK. Sanders *et al.* (2013) found in their analysis of BES data that many respondents who belonged to an ethnic minority group had experienced discrimination and social oppression. In terms of political participation, no significant difference between people of ethnic minority groups and general British citizens was reported, while “general tendencies for the young and second generation to be less engaged” exist (p. 136). Participation of people belonging to an ethnic minority is often falsely depicted, marginalised or even ignored by media and established organisations of civil society. The exclusion from citizenship rights impedes migrants’ engagement in civic and political participation (Sime and Behrens, 2023). This leads to especially young migrants feeling stigmatised and disenfranchised in their social and political activism.

In addition, O’Toole (2015) discovered that these specific groups of young activists from diverse cultural backgrounds displayed a high “fluidity of activism between scales” (p. 193), meaning that their range of activism encompassed the local to the global spheres. Furthermore, the involved participants also seemed to prefer direct means of activism over abstract ones, as well as loose networks over institutionalised and hierarchical organisations. Studies involving young Muslim participants showed that islamophobia is still a central element in their everyday lives in the UK and, while an obstacle to integration and participatory involvement on a broader scale, can also be a driving force for political participation (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019a). Young Muslim women in particular “are positioned in a marginal and precarious space and experience a range of discriminations because of their intersecting gendered, racialized and religious identities” (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019, p. 8). Furthermore, practices of citizenship by ethnic minority groups, such as Muslim women campaigning against female genital mutilation and seeking to make mosques more inclusive spaces, are often overlooked as political

participation by policymakers, civil society and research (Lewicki and O'Toole, 2017).

2.7. Investigating the impact of perception and identity on young people's activism

This chapter has reviewed literature with the purpose of locating activism within political participation and has discussed young people in the context of political participation. It critically assessed the use of the terms *youth* and *young people* in participation research and, under consideration of youth and young adulthood as a transformative time period, identified the choice of the cohort for this study as people between the ages of 16 and 24.

Existing research has provided significant contributions to the depiction and exploration of young people's political participation internationally and in the UK. These contributions started out with a quantitative focus on electoral turnout and forms of civic and political participation, but over time, qualitative research and mixed-method projects became a common addition, especially when exploring young people's views on politics and participatory behaviour. This is also due to the fact that attention shifted from voting and institutionalised participation towards other forms of participation, expanding the concept of political participation to include activities labelled as civic or latent-political (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). Contemporary studies on young people's political attitudes and behaviour have turned towards understanding young people as both shaped by their surroundings and as actors with their own agency. Pickard's work (2019) on 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics illustrates this change in perspective and self-concept of young people very clearly.

The contextualisation of young people's political participation in the UK and the highlighted major themes of youth activism demonstrated that political upheaval and social insecurity affect political participation. Youth activism has been regarded in an environment of political upheaval and social instability caused by political events, climate change and a global pandemic. In addition,

issues of identity and belonging have become a noticeable theme in contemporary research. Gender, race, ethnicity, as well as religion and local communities, have been the foci in qualitative studies, allowing an insight into specific groups and contributing to the importance of further diversification of the field. Yet, issues of intersectionality and access to political education and barriers to political participation due to social and racial inequalities remain subject to further investigation.

Within this observed setting of issue-based activism on climate change and identity-based activism, young people tend to express themselves via non-electoral forms of participation, using a mix of online and offline actions (Flanagan, 2013; Pickard, 2019). The cause for this preference for non-electoral participation has been argued by a value-shift towards more postmaterialist views (Theocharis, 2011; Henn, Sloam and Nunes, 2021). This study, however, argues that while postmaterialist values influence young people's activism, aiming for material consequences is a central objective of activism, such as the redistribution of resources and a sustainable future for the planet. Therefore, what motivates young people to participate in activism is assumed to be impacted by their perception of politics and of themselves as an actor within.

Perception constitutes one key focus of this study. While studies have discovered that young people feel not sufficiently recognised by politicians and political institutions (Hart and Henn, 2017; O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward, 2018) and, thus, turn to self-organised forms of political participation (Pickard, 2022), there is a lack of in-depth research into how young people develop their capacities to participate in political actions, to organise themselves within groups, and to exert influence. As research has identified young people's political participation to be characterised by self-mobilisation (Norris, 2007; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012), self-reliance and reflection (Pickard, 2019, p. 391), as well as a tendency towards lifestyle politics, individualised actions but also disruptive protests (Fisher, 2012; Pickard, Bowman and Arya, 2020), it remains unclear how young people perceive their own abilities to take part in

non-electoral forms of political participation and in what way their perception of their own capacities affects their level of engagement in activism.

Personal experiences and identity represent the second key focus of this study. Studies suggest that in-group identification and shared-value expression affect young people's political participation (Wallis and Loy, 2021). Yet, how they shape one's motivations for becoming politically active and affect preferences for specific issues, especially with a comparative perspective, has received limited attention. Moreover, relating to the previous point of one's own perception, the assumption that young people's perceived capacities are equal must be rejected in light of the literature on intersectional repression (Strolovitch, 2007; Chávez, 2012; Hill Collins, 2019). Thus, there is a gap of knowledge in how the perception of one's own abilities to participate in activism intersects with personal experiences and self-determined as well as other-directed personal identity.

Therefore, this study provides an empirical approach to investigating cognitive, emotional and social factors underlying young people's involvement with activism. Activism is defined as taking part in non-electoral political actions following Pickard's concept of DIO politics which differentiates between electoral and non-electoral activities of participation. Based on the previously reviewed literature, the study addresses the research gap of exploring the impact of individual agency alongside other perceptual factors, such as efficacy and influence, on young people's engagement in non-electoral participation. It also links these factors with young people's feelings about various social and political issues and understandings of their own identities. By doing so, the project investigates which cognitive factors distinctively influence young people's engagement in non-electoral participation in contrast to electoral participation and explores whether young people's identities affect their involvement with different topical strands of activism. Thus, this study aims to fill the knowledge gap on:

RQ1: How does the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's activism in the UK?

RQ2: What are young people's experiences of activism, and how do feelings and personal identity relate to young people's involvement with activism?

The first research question examines the effect of young people's perceptions of different forms of agency, efficacy and influence on their participation in activism. Following the reviewed literature, the main assumptions are that a strong perception of agency is a prerequisite for participation and that participating in activism constitutes an action against perceived injustice or oppression. Increased positive perception of agency, efficacy and influence is assumed to be associated with higher levels of participation in non-electoral political activities.

The second research question concentrates on exploring these contextual and social settings further by examining how young people relate to their own activism emotionally and how their identity influences and shapes their involvement with particular issues. Research findings on the importance of identity building (Curtin, Kende, A. and Kende, J., 2016; Hartley *et al.*, 2016) and sharing collective identities for activist behaviour (van Zomeren, Leach and Spears, 2012; Louis *et al.*, 2016) have underlined the need for integrative social psychological models of activism. As an original contribution and in the context of re-emerging identity-based activism, this study takes into account literature on social identities, intersectionality and belonging to differentiate between issue-based activism and identity-based activism.

3. Theoretical approaches to political participation and activism

3.1. Overview

This study investigates how the perception of agency, efficacy and influence is affecting young people's activism in the UK (RQ1) and explores young people's experiences with activism, including the emotions and identities they associate with their activism (RQ2). Activism, in the context of this study, refers to actions for either social or political change, which can take on individual and collective forms. Following the conceptualisation of young people's participation as 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics, young people's activism encompasses participatory behaviour that is less focused on political institutions and incorporates various 'unconventional' and civic forms of participation.

In this chapter, theories of political attitudes and behaviour are critically reviewed to create the theoretical foundation of this study. Taking into account literature on both individual and collective political action, emphasis is placed on finding a theoretical approach specifically to young people's political participation. Central to examining youth activism are social-psychological theories, which regard the transitional stage from adolescence to young adulthood as formative for political interest and socialisation. This study builds on the theory of sociopolitical development, which assumes that young people need to become aware of an issue of injustice or oppression and develop a critical consciousness in order to take on agency and become involved in political actions. Within sociopolitical development theory, the perception of oneself, including agency and efficacy, is theorised to be impacting upon this process from developing critical awareness to engaging in political activity.

Based on this premise, the theoretical framework aims to generate assumptions about how cognitive and emotional factors influence young people's engagement in non-electoral activities and specific topics of activism. Corresponding to the literature on youth and young adulthood, this study also recognises the importance of identity formation and the desire for social belonging of youth and young adults. Therefore, the framework theorises how

social settings impact young people's interest in political and social issues and engagement in activism.

3.2. Theoretical approaches to political participation

This section discusses theoretical approaches to political participation, starting with theories which focus on the individual as the central agent of political behaviour followed by theories which address collective political behaviour. Then, integrative theories, originating from sociological and psychological perspectives, are introduced.

3.2.1. Theories of individual political participation

Theories that examine individualised political participation are primarily concerned with what influences, causes or impedes participation and are looking at a variety of factors that affect one's political engagement and participation. These theoretical approaches are concerned with the motivations and incentives individuals respond to when participating politically or civically. Various schools of political theory have produced approaches to analyse and interpret political participation, which draw on economic and social theories, such as rational choice theory and constructivism (Hindmoor and Taylor, 2018; Parsons, 2018). Since this study's emphasis lies on the role of perception and identity for participation in non-electoral political activities, sociological and psychological theories were primarily considered to develop a theoretical framework.

Sociological and psychological theories underline the importance of socialisation and networks on the one hand and emotions, perceptions and values on the other for participation. They can overlap in their use of variables, as the social sphere of a person plays a role in their cognitive and mental state. This overlap renders a clear distinction between sociological and psychological dimensions difficult. Combined or integrative approaches that draw from both

sociology and psychology to explain participation in general and activism, in particular, are subsumed under the term social psychological approaches.

Sociological approaches refer to social variables as essential for the likelihood of participating (Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001; Erkulwater, 2012), while they can also include events or occurrences which form part of socialising processes as potential contributing factors for or against participatory behaviour (Tilley, 2002). Upbringing and family ties (Block, Haan and Smith, 1969), social and economic class (Franz and McClelland, 1994; Verba, Schlozman and Burns, 2004), education and career (McAdam, 1989; Sherkat and Blocker, 1997) are all factors which have been investigated as influential for predicting activism. In the context of participation research of young people, there seems to be an over-emphasis on age, which bears the risk of generalising characteristics and expected behaviours to a constructed generation cohort (Pickard, 2019, p. 469).

Psychological approaches also look into socialisation processes but place emphasis on the values and cognitive states of groups examined, and how these form, change and contribute to an individual becoming an activist. Identification with a group (Simon and Klandermans, 2001) and potentially identifying as an activist (Kelly and Breinlinger, 1995) are predictors of participating in activism, as is the belief that a group can effectuate change (van Zomeren, Leach and Spears, 2010). Furthermore, studies found that activists are more altruistic (Franz and McClelland, 1994), share emotions with the group they are engaged with (van Zomeren, Leach and Spears, 2012; Klandermans, 2013) and that activism, within a group setting, may generate rewards for the individual. In particular, the rewards for the individual are personal fulfilment, due to the action for a purpose that is of personal importance, following the model of costs and benefits of participation (Klandermans, 1984, 1997) and the experience of “politicised collective identification” (Stürmer and Simon, 2004). While psychological participation research has focused on the character traits of activists and which factors contribute to the likelihood of taking up political or social action, the “specific role of activists in helping to bring about social change remains less well

understood" (Curtin and McGarty, 2016). The interest in understanding activism has resulted in an increase in the adoption of social-psychological approaches, as combined models of sociological and psychological theoretical approaches. There has also been an extensive focus on collective action and opinion-based activism, but this has not been matched nor integrated with research on individual action and issue-based and identity-based activism.

Contemporary political participation research has evolved by combining and integrating classic approaches, such as behavioralism, rational choice, constructivism and sociological and psychological approaches, thereby developing them further. Advanced social-psychological approaches are most frequently used in research on voting behaviour (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen, 1992; Evans and Norris, 1999; Dalton 2008) and, increasingly, on other forms of participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Cain, Dalton, and Scarrow, 2003). The complexity of civic and political participation, set in its historical and societal contexts, requires integrative theoretical models. In order to depict a multidimensional picture of contemporary activism, it also needs the inclusion of different methodological ways of investigating civic and political action from both individual and collective perspectives (Curtin and McGarty, 2016).

3.2.2. Theories of collective political participation and social movements

This section reviews theories which apply to political behaviour and attitudes of groups or within group settings. While previously highlighted theoretical approaches are also transferable to groups, the following theories refer specifically to the formation of movements, collective action and societal structures in which participation is embedded.

On an aggregated level, individual attitudes and behaviours can lead to collective action. When groups are formed because of shared concerns or for a specific purpose, they are regarded as social movements. Elements of a social movement include "(1) a group of people with a conflictual orientation

towards an opponent, (2) a collective identity and a set of common beliefs and goals, and (3) a repertoire of collective action" (Kriesi, 2017, p. 276). While the necessity of having an opponent in a strict sense is debated by literature (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007), with some scholars pointing towards the possibility that social movements may also question "existing institutional authority" (Snow, Soule and Kriesi, 2004, p. 9), the other two elements are considered as necessary conditions. The collective identity of social movements, as described by Melucci (1995), requires a cognitive dimension of shared values, beliefs, and goals, a relationship dimension concerning the relationships among members of the group and between the group and external actors, and lastly, a form of emotional attachment.

A movement is more difficult to define and research than an institutionalised organisation, as it relies on recognising its participating individuals within the collective. Unlike many standard political theories of participation, social movement theory puts emphasis on the constructivist view to understand and explain collective action (Tarrow, 1998). The construction of common beliefs is essential to social groups. Furthermore, collective action and collective identity are products of social construction, shaped "through negotiation and renegotiation" (Melucci, 1995, p. 78). Although the classical model of social movement theory assumed a breach of social order as the cause for the formation of a social movement (Turner and Killian, 1987), thus presenting a rather simple cause-and-reaction scenario, later models also included the relationship and mobilisation aspect of social movements. Two established social movement theories concentrate on the resources for mobilisation (resource mobilisation model) and political process aimed for or achieved by social movements (political process model or social movement paradigm) (Jenkins, 1983; Cohen, 1985).

Another approach emerged in response to social movements observed from the 1960s onwards, including the American civil rights movement and the peace protests in the context of the Vietnam War in the US and "towards the end of the 1970s a reinvigorated Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)" in the UK (Weinstein, 2004). *New Social Movement* theory refers to a set of

theoretical approaches to social movements that address seemingly social and cultural issues instead of strictly political ones. Melucci (1980) summarises the characteristics of new social movements in his theoretical approach to the phenomenon. New social movements (NSM) are forms of collective action that seem to bridge the “separation between public and private spheres” (p. 219). Their forms of collective action display deviance from the expected norm and even though they are an expression of beliefs and views, they are not solely focused on the political system or the government. Instead, Melucci suggests, collective actions of new social movements refuse to reciprocate political systems by rejecting representation and taking up direct participation. Direct instead of representative democracy is a key feature of NSM (Martin, 2004), as is the display and pursuit of postmaterialist values. The postmaterialist values of these political protest groups originate in their postindustrial nature and form the foundation for Inglehart’s theory of postmaterialism (Inglehart, 1977, 1990).

The diffusing use of ‘new social movements’ implies that other forms of social movements must exist. The French sociologist Touraine describes social movements as central to society and as a phenomenon which emerges in situations of social conflict, as “new economic challenges come first before new social actors and conflicts take shape” (Touraine, 1985, p. 872). Once a social movement reaches its main purpose, it may decline or disappear again. Within this logic, NSM are social movements which have yet to transform into organised social movements and assume the role of a social actor (Touraine, 1981). Pichardo (1997) criticises that the NSM paradigm relies on post-industrial narratives and research on NSM has a tendency towards left-wing movements. In addition, he argues that NSM theory does point out what distinguishes new social movements from former ones. The ascribed interconnection of NSM and postmaterialist value change has been shown to lack comprehensive empirical evidence. Cotgrove and Duff (1981) remarked that “perhaps Inglehart and later researchers have been looking at the wrong kind of variables to explain support for postmaterialism. By concentrating on the level of affluence of an individual as determinant, they have neglected

ideals [that is, personal values] as a possible cause" (p. 98). The existence and differentiation of new social movements remain contested. Contemporarily observed social movements such as environmentalism (e.g. *Fridays for Future* and the grassroots organisation *Extinction Rebellion*) and social justice movements (including the *Black Lives Matter* movement) may be based on postmaterialist values of conservation of nature, sustainable use of resources, protection of freedom and right to life and physical integrity, but also respond to the materialist inequalities of their respectively addressed societies.

While social movement and new social movement theories highlight the importance of relationships, other approaches to collective action and group formation have placed a stronger emphasis on the interrelations and networks between people and the social aspects of participation, in either civic or political ways. One established concept is the theory of *social capital*, which shares commonalities with pluralism and civil society theory. Social capital is a broad term that encompasses both engagement and participation of groups and assigns social, cultural and economic value to relationships and associations. The term was popularised in the social sciences by Putnam's articles in the 1990s and the publication of *Bowling Alone* in 2000. Before Putnam, the term had already been shaped by several authors, including Bourdieu (1977, 1986) and Coleman (1984, 1988).

All three scholars – Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam – have provided different understandings of social capital. According to Bourdieu (1987, 1997), social capital represents one of four forms of capital which can be possessed or acquired by the individual, complemented by economic, cultural and symbolic capital. Akin to the other forms of capital, social capital is the "sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). In contrast, Coleman (1988) emphasised the function of social capital as either facilitating or constraining the action of both individual and collective actors. Social capital, so Coleman, is not an attribute of the individual but "inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" (1988, p. S98). In

Putnam (2000), “social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Putnam's perspective linked social capital to a collective dimension rather than focusing solely on the individual. While taking different approaches, in essence, the concept of social capital explains social behaviour as a result of connections among people. These connections are taking place “through a series of networks and they tend to share common values with other members of these networks; to the extent that these networks constitute a resource, they may be seen as forming a kind of capital” (Field, 2008, p. 1). Thus, social connections lead to the formation of voluntary associations (Newton and van Deth, 2016), which can differ in their degree of institutionalisation.

The theory of social capital emphasises the impact of personal relationships and the potential effects of and on those relationships. Elements that affect these relationships are trust, reciprocity, sanctions, and networks (Som, 2014, p. 33). Social norms and formations have not only been found to influence a person's civic involvement but also their political behaviour (Jennings, 1996; Flanagan *et al.*, 1998; Schulz *et al.*, 2010; Tossutti, 2019). The theory of social capital has been applied to explain the decline in membership of voluntary organisations in Britain between 1981 and 1999 (Whiteley, 2012). Overall, the study concluded – agreeing with Putnam's view on the US and other Western democracies – that social capital in Britain was decreasing and then called for democratic rebuilding to address this situation. Fahmy (2006a) also used the theory of social capital in his study of youth in the UK by measuring the effects of social capital components (neighbourhood trust, social reciprocity, collective efficacy, community cohesion, social networks, social support) on types of civic action (which included aggregated activities of 'contacting' and 'protesting'). He found that “social capital is somewhat less effective in explaining variations in the nature and level of young people's civic action as compared to the general population as a whole” (p. 115) and, in the context of young people, fails to consider “the transitory nature of youth as a dimension of lived experience” (p. 115).

As Fahmy's research shows, social capital avails itself of a variety of perceptual – and thus subjectively influenced – components, such as trust and social networks. This notion of *networks* in social groups and collective behaviour is highly relevant to all research on communities. Furthermore, the theory indicates that there are several 'human' factors which play a role in the formation and implementation of participatory behaviour. These factors which have been summarised as social trust, institutional trust and beliefs about good citizenship are influential for civic participation but have also been found in connection to political participation. In fact, participating in non-political communities or non-political causes has been an established factor in the increased likelihood of participating politically, too (Verba, Brady and Schlozman, 1995; Norris, 1999; Zukin *et al.*, 2006).

As important as these insights are, the concept of social capital itself does not provide substantial methodical tools. How social capital is measured has not yet been agreed upon by scholars. Social capital is characterised by its normative setting of favouring communities that are engaging with one another and whose members are part of organised social life. The theory produces observational rather than explanatory output. As Field (2008) phrased it: "Those who are relatively high on financial and cultural capital also tend to be high on social capital" (p. 83). Warde and Tampubolon (2002) wrote that "[b]eing male, being white, having more education, being of a higher social class, having higher personal income and having more educational qualifications all significantly increased the likelihood of membership of more organisations" (p. 163).

This latter notion of the importance of gender, race and class being relevant to accumulating social capital also poses a problem, as "[r]ace, class, and gender not only reference specific systems of power; each category has its own storied traditions of scholarship and activism done by interpretive communities that developed around each category" (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 39). While these findings on the correlation between such characteristics and the likelihood of political participation may exist (Brady, Sidney and Schlozman, 1995; Franklin, 2004; Flanagan, 2009), the theory of social capital risks reinforcement of these

patterns by confirmation bias and by dismissing research opportunities on counter-phenomena. Whereas the recognition of intersectionality and feminist theory had their entry into the humanities in the 1990s (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 22), political participation research has remained less affected by critical self-reflection. However, intersectionality and forms of oppression or social justice are undoubtedly linked to groups and movements of currently observable activism. Another criticism addresses the use of the word ‘capital’, which is redolent of the economisation of social life, and that the theory does not clarify whether people and networks become social capital or whether social capital is something to be held by individuals or the state. On that note, ‘capital’ also neglects to emphasise the agency of an individual and reduces individual worth to one’s relationships rather than one’s actions.

3.2.3. Integrative theoretical models of political participation

The previously discussed theoretical approaches seek to explain participatory behaviour by a range of factors influencing a person’s decision to become engaged or to participate. Research has found connections between civic participation and political participation (Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2008). On the assumption that civic and political participation demands the existence and use of specific resources, Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) established that those resources for political participation consist of time, money, and civic skills. While the two former resources can be subsumed as socioeconomic ones (income and education, first and foremost), the latter are “communications and organizational capacities that are so essential to political activity” (p. 273). Not only did their study find that middle-aged men with a comfortable income and living situation were more likely to participate in politics, but these men also represented the group with a higher likelihood of possessing these various civic skills. They found that an additional factor for civic participation was time. The advanced socioeconomic status model (SES) simultaneously listed reasons why an individual may be less likely to

participate either politically or civically – by either lacking time, money, sociodemographic resources or ‘civic skills’.

Further factors that have been found to have a strong impact on participatory behaviour are people’s values and attitudes (Flanagan *et al.*, 1998; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Harris, Wyn and Younes, 2010), political interest and ideological orientation (Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990; Marsh, 1990; Theocharis and van Deth, 2018) and political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Bang, 2005; Nieuwelink *et al.*, 2018), exposure to forms of mobilisation, and contextual variables, such as electoral system, population features (Geys, 2006) and the historical development and transformation of political systems. As Bernhagen and Marsh (2007) pointed out in their comparative study of voting and protest behaviour between Western and Eastern European democracies, contextual variables that are closely tied with a specific election, candidate or issue, are more difficult to investigate and compare than variables relating to sociodemographic, attitudinal and mobilising factors. Increasingly, research has turned toward exploring the role of identity in activism (Giddens, 1991; Bennett, 1998), specifically the development of an ‘activist identity’ (Kelly and Breilinger, 1995; Louis *et al.*, 2016) and the possibility of multiple identities of a person who engages in different formations of activism (Curtin, Kende, A. and Kende, J., 2016).

In an attempt to summarise previous findings on factors for political and civic engagement and participation, Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) categorised research results into macro-contextual factors, demographic factors, social factors, and psychological factors. While the paper discussed these factors concerning partaking in political and civic life in general, there is an implied focus on voting behaviour. Macro-contextual factors refer to the electoral system, population features, and the structure of the existing political institutions as well as the history, the economy and the cultural features of a country. Despite being centred on nationality, macro-contextual factors can also include the participatory behaviour of minority groups (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990). Among the demographic factors, socioeconomic status has been found

to be an augmenting contributor to the likelihood of civic and political participation (Schulz *et al.*, 2010; Zukin *et al.*, 2006).

Whereas macro-contextual, demographic and social factors may be more accessible to empirical research, Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) summarised further research on the cognitive and perceptual influences on engagement and participation as psychological factors and emotional factors. Among the psychological factors, these are internal efficacy, external efficacy and collective efficacy. The subjective belief in understanding politics and civic issues is referred to as internal efficacy. This means one's own perception of competence to participate is a proven psychological factor for taking part in civic and political life (Zukin *et al.*, 2006). External efficacy, on the other hand, is the individual impression that the existing institutions of a political system are "responsive to citizens' needs, actions, requests, and demands" (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014, p. 15). This predictor is linked to institutional trust and the perceived trustworthiness of institutions (Abramson and Aldrich, 1982). Lastly, collective efficacy refers to the subjective individual trust or confidence in collective action and its potential for change (Klandermans, 2002; van Zomeren *et al.*, 2004; van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears, 2008). This predictor has been observed to be influential in collective political activities such as protesting. All forms of perceived efficacy are tied to personal perception and evaluation, these can be influenced by other people, institutions or narratives, e.g. mobilising campaigns and media stories, which are linked to emotions.

The notion of *emotions* as influential factors in decisions and actions has been existent in participation research since the emergence of sociological and psychological participation theories and remains relevant. Both positive and negative emotions, connected to an issue or a system can be a catalyst for partaking in political actions (Flanagan *et al.*, 1998; van Zomeren *et al.*, 2004). Personal motivation has also been researched in relation to volunteering and civic participation. In group settings, social identity and identification processes indicate a high impact on participation levels. Having an emotional connection with others and an established sense of community shows an increasing effect

on the groups' participatory patterns, politically and civically (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Cicognani and Zani, 2009).

As empirical research continues to uncover factors and predictors of political participation, the need for integrative models and the acknowledgement that multifactorial causation may be complex and dependent on a multitude of variables emerges more and more strongly. Integrative models on the interconnection between these factors have been presented (Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Klandermans, 2002; Barrett, 2012; Theocharis and van Deth, 2018), but these still require further research in relation to the interaction of specific factors and additional conceptual considerations. Factors for civic and political participation may vary in intensity and influence, depending on the individual's characteristics and the investigated action. On the topic of young people's participatory behaviour, Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014) individuals with high levels of non-electoral political participation and civic participation were less likely to vote or to participate in conventional ways and more likely to be younger (Barrett, 2012).

In addition, Ehsan (2018) found evidence that in the UK young people's non-electoral participation was strongly associated with party identification, with an indication that identification with either the Labour or the Greens party impacts behaviour regarding both electoral and non-electoral participation positively. Furthermore, his study found that other possible predictors of non-electoral participation include the level of education and educational status – being a full-time student appeared to "drive non-electoral youth participation" (Ehsan, 2018, p. 7) – perceived as political distrust or dissatisfaction. While these newer insights into young people's engagement in civic and political life tie in with some of the seminal works on participation in general, other factors have yet to be explored further or still need to be added to the models and calculations. Concerning activism in specific, the realm of online communication and changing realities of youth and young adulthood need to be examined more closely. Moreover, the need for greater differentiation among young cohorts is also emerging in the field of participation research, as differences in participatory levels remain on the basis of ethnicity.

Focusing exclusively on personal factors that influence civic and political participation is not sufficient to investigate young people's activism. Research findings on the importance of identity building (Curtin, Kende, A. and Kende, J., 2016; Hartley *et al.*, 2016) and sharing collective identities for activist behaviour (van Zomeren, Leach and Spears, 2012; Louis *et al.*, 2016) and the observation that civic participation is also linked to political participation (van Stekelenburg, Klandermans and Akkerman, 2016) underline the need for integrative social psychological models of activism. The reason for participating in any form of activism may not simply depend on a list of certain influences but can be a multifactorial process, differing from individual to individual. Activism research has increasingly embraced such social psychological approaches (Curtin and McGarty, 2016), whilst considering other factors such as macro-contextual ones as a framework in which activism occurs or from which issues that stimulate or provoke civic and political action responses emerge. Two major aspects have also been brought into the discussion about requirements for integrative theoretical models on young people's activism: intersectionality (Ginwright and James, 2002; Elliott, Earl and Maher, 2017; Earl, Maher and Elliott, 2017) and digital communication media (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Vromen, Xenos and Loader, 2015; Theocharis, de Moor and van Deth, 2019). However, few models combine these different aspects of societal circumstances, digitally-supported modes of participation, and their interplay with personal characteristics. This is why the present study sought to develop an approach to researching young people's activism using a conceptualisation of political participation that accounts for a variety of participation modes, including online and digital activities, and apply a theory which considers how intersectionality drives or impedes young people's involvement with particular activism(s).

3.3. Theoretical approaches to young people's political participation

The transitional stage from childhood and adolescence to young adulthood has been found to be influential on people's interest in politics and future political

and civic participation (Stewart and Healy, 1989; Fendrich and Lovoy, 1988; Marwell, Aiken and Demerath, 1987). Several political theories address this process of becoming an adult and its effects on participatory behaviour, such as the *political life cycle effect* (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Jankowski and Strate, 1995), which focus on the different 'life stages' a person goes through. According to the life cycle effect, younger people tend to be less interested and less involved in politics than older people. This rather deterministic approach has been challenged, since age may be an explanatory factor for electoral participation, but "political maturation entails more than just a collection of life-cycle events" (Smets, 2016, p. 242). Young people's engagement in political ideas and views does not "suddenly emerge at the age of majority" (Flanagan and Sherrod, 1998) but is produced by one's social interactions and activities during this transitional time towards adulthood (Vygotsky, 1978). Young people's inclination to participate in political and civic activities represents a developmental process of interest and engagement, which is shaped by environmental and social factors, as assumed by the *period effects* and *cohort effects* theory. Both the 'period effects' and 'cohort effects' theories emphasise political socialisation within specific contexts as a major influence on young people's interest in politics and other characteristics important for participation. Another approach based on the developmental process of political socialisation is *sociopolitical development theory* (SPD) which is less concerned with belonging to a specific cohort and regards the need to develop both awareness and participatory skills as critical for young people's engagement in political actions. The theory foregrounds how perceived injustice fosters the desire to become involved in activism in particular, instead of more conventional forms of participation.

3.3.1. Political life cycle, period effects and cohort effects

The assumption of the political life cycle approach is that political participation throughout life follows an upside-down U-shape: young and old people tend to participate less than other groups (Verba and Nie, 1972; Highton and

Wolfinger, 2001). The reduced levels of participation of young people are explained by both the lack of having built up a political habitus (Aldrich, Montgomery and Wood, 2011), such as voting, and the challenges they face when starting to become politically active (Kimberlee, 2002; Flanagan *et al.*, 2012). Political activity in this regard is mainly considered as electoral participation, and challenges to participation have often been referred to as a delayed transition from adolescence to adulthood (Nico, 2014).

Period and cohort (also known as generational) effects apply to the political life-cycle of an individual. Rather than age by itself, other external factors which are linked to one's age affect a person's political interest and likelihood of participation. Period effects refer to political generations, meaning that specific events occurring during one's adolescence and young adulthood have a formative effect (Tilly, 2002; Erkulwater, 2012). The approach stipulates that experiencing social, political and cultural events during one's transition to young adulthood has long-lasting imprints on one's attitude towards politics. As an extension of the period effects theory, the cohort effects theory implies that these formative effects of having lived through a specific period as a young person are carried forward and affect political interest and participatory behaviour later in life.

Cohort effects, the shared experience of events including traumatic ones, may explain generational shifts of participatory behaviour. The idea that a cohort or a generation is characterised by sharing experiences leading to a shared habitus and that different generations compete in a struggle over resources which can result in social and cultural change (Bourdieu 1979, 1980) has been pertinent throughout sociological and political research. Despite the difficulty to measure what exactly unites a generation, what provides this *Generationszusammenhang* (Mannheim, 1928, p. 91), cohort effects "integrate the impact of early life conditions and exposure to these historical and social factors can affect an individual throughout the life course" (Gray *et al.*, 2019, p. 436). Furthermore, with the growing use of digital communication and other advances of globalisation, cohort effects increasingly transcend national borders (Edmunds and Turner, 2005).

The political life cycle, period effects and cohort effects constitute theories of political socialisation and offer an explanation as to how young people are influenced by their personal contexts and the overall societal, political and cultural environments during their transition from adolescence into young adulthood. While these perspectives are important to consider when investigating young people's involvement in activism, the illustrated approaches predominantly focus on external factors and largely dismiss the interaction between the external setting and the individual. In addition to the difficulties of defining a generation, period and cohort effects also generalise political phenomena and do not respond to nuances within a generation of young people, which may be characterised by their identity, perceptions or emotions.

3.3.2. Sociopolitical development theory

Sociopolitical development theory (SPD) proposes that sociopolitical development is a “process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and the capacity for action in political and social systems necessary to interpret and resist oppression” (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 185). While “SPD is not limited to resisting oppression in the interest of justice, however; the capacity to envision and help create a just society is an essential part of the process as well” (p. 185). According to SPD theory, activism is a response to perceived or experienced oppression, which begins with developing an awareness. Both negative (e.g. discontent) and positive emotions (e.g. empathy) can foster the intention to act upon the witnessed or experienced injustice or oppression.

The theory proposes that sociopolitical development takes place in five stages (see Table 3.1). During these stages, individuals go from accepting a situation of oppression or injustice (*acritical stage*) and attempting to justify or dismiss the experience of injustice (*adaptive stage*) to beginning to critically examine such circumstances and thinking about possible ways of acting (*precritical stage*) to becoming more cognitively engaged (*critical stage*) and involved with

activism and participation (*liberation*). There is no clarity about whether the stages of SPD represent a linear process, and if and, if so, how the stages may be interrelated. Existing research presented the relationship between views about perceived injustice and inequality as linear, meaning that action followed critical awareness (Plummer *et al.*, 2022), as interdependent, meaning that action and critical awareness affect each other (Watts and Flanagan, 2007), and as “cumulative and recursive” (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 192), meaning that reaching a certain stage of sociopolitical development is not deterministic towards action and is dependent on unique cases and circumstances.

Table 3.1. The stages of sociopolitical development

Stages of Sociopolitical Development
1. <i>Acritical stage</i> : Asymmetry is outside of awareness, or the existing social order is thought to reflect real differences in the capabilities of group members. In essence, it is a “just world” (Rubin and Peplau, 1975).
2. <i>Adaptive stage</i> : Asymmetry may be acknowledged, but the system maintaining it is seen as immutable. Predatory, antisocial, or accommodation strategies are employed to maintain a positive sense of self and to acquire social and material rewards.
3. <i>Precritical stage</i> : Complacency gives way to awareness of and concerns about asymmetry and inequality. The value of adaptation is questioned.
4. <i>Critical stage</i> : There is a desire to learn more about asymmetry, injustice, oppression, and liberation. Through this process, some will conclude that the asymmetry is unjust and social-change efforts are warranted.
5. <i>Liberation stage</i> : The experience and awareness of oppression is salient. Liberation behavior (involvement in social action and community development) is tangible and frequent. Adaptive behaviors are eschewed.

Source: Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003, p. 188)

Whether individuals develop the capacity to act also depends on whether “the conditions for this mode of consciousness and action are supported in the

environment" (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 188). The capacity to act, resulting from a process of "critical consciousness, analysis, and psychological empowerment" (p. 188) is impacted by a mix of cognitive, emotional and social factors. Critical consciousness originated as a concept that addressed the observation that oppression of marginalised groups resulted in an ability to understand the factors which contributed to perpetuating oppression and marginalisation (Freire, 1973, 1993). Thus, to overcome the oppressed state, the individual needs to develop abilities to critically reflect in order to be able to act (Watts and Guessous, 2006). Synthesised as a distinct capacity to cognitively discern issues of perceived injustice and inequality, Hopper (1999) defined critical consciousness as "learning to think critically about accepted ways of thinking and feeling, discerning the hidden interests in underlying assumptions and framing notions (whether these are class-, gender-, race/ethnicity- or sect-based)" (p. 210). Previous research has found that such an awareness of inequality can positively affect civic participation, voting behaviour and other forms of political actions (Diemer and Li, 2011; Diemer and Rapa, 2016; Bañales *et al.*, 2019; Hope *et al.*, 2020).

Embedded within cognitive, emotional and social factors are one's personal life experience and cultural context. SPD theory has been applied to a number of studies on young people's civic and political participation. Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) investigated the trajectories of young African American into anti-racism activism, finding that "SPD is a cumulative and recursive process" of transactions or responses to life experiences (p. 192). Kornbluh *et al.* (2015) looked into how SPD theory could inform youth participatory action research and young people's political education. Studies based on SPD theory have found that young people's civic participation is positively influenced when their perception of their ability to effectuate change (their agency) is strengthened. Encouragement of young people's skills increases their motivation and confidence to effect change (Moore *et al.*, 2016). Social groups can act as facilitators for sociopolitical development (Nicholas, Eastman-Mueller and Barbich, 2019). Parental political socialisation, i.e. discussing politics and social issues with parents or guardians, was also found important for predicting

the political and social participation of young people from ethnically diverse and marginalised backgrounds (Diemer, 2012). A study on the activism of racially marginalised youth in the US added a critical dimension to SPD (Anyiwo *et al.*, 2020). The assumption of critical sociopolitical development (SPD) is that young people's activism is preceded by a critical reflection or analysis of oppression and social injustice. In the context of activism of racially marginalised youth, this critical analysis is fostered by life experiences such as discrimination and racism. Not only did the study find that “[r]acially marginalized youth who experience more racial discrimination report more sociopolitical action generally and more activism oriented towards promoting racial equity” (p. 87), but that collectively shared identities of race and ethnicity and shared experiences of marginalisation can contribute to motivations for collective actions. While primarily concerned with the development of sociopolitical capacities, such as critical consciousness, scholars have noted that the perception of injustice and inequality and the lived experience of marginalisation and oppression of young people are dependent on both individual trajectories and societal structures of either inclusion or exclusion (Anyiwo *et al.*, 2018; Wray-Lake and Ballard, 2023).

Sociopolitical development theory represents more of a sociological than a political theory, and the concept of critical consciousness “as a developmental competency that may promote thriving for children and adolescents, particularly those experiencing marginalizing systems” has received growing interest since the 2010s (Heberle, Rapa and Farago, 2020, p. 547). The theory has been primarily applied to research into activism within settings of inequality, injustice and oppression (Nicholas, Eastman-Mueller and Barbich, 2019; Fernández and Watts, 2023; Duque, Aceros and Paloma, 2023). It was originally shaped by research on the marginalisation and oppression of Black youth (Lozada *et al.*, 2017; Hope and Bañales, 2019) and Latin American youth in the United States (Diemer and Rapa, 2016; Seider *et al.*, 2020), but more recent studies have expanded its application towards other ethnic groups (Plummer *et al.*, 2022; Le, Johnson and Lerner, 2023). As an emerging theory, it considers both the external circumstances by which political actions are

stimulated and the internal processes those undergo who participate in such actions. Therefore, it provides a perspective on young people's activism which aligns with the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves Politics' (Pickard, 2019) in its portrayal of young people as actors with political and social agency. The theory is thus integrated into the theoretical framework of the study with the objective to research the effects of cognitive, emotional and social factors on young people's activism in the UK. Since the study's theoretical framework is drawing on the fundamental assumptions of SPD theory, its findings are also interpreted in the context of the stages of sociopolitical development to contribute to defining the central elements of each stage, specifically in relation to young people's activism.

3.4. The theoretical framework of this study

The present study builds its social-psychological theoretical approach to investigate young people's activism in the UK on sociopolitical development theory. Drawing on Pickard's 'Do-It-Ourselves Politics' concept, the central subject of activism is regarded as located within political participation and includes both individual and collective actions for social and/or political change. The study's framework is designed to address the research questions developed in Chapter 2 which centre around the role of self-perception, experiences and identity for participating in activism:

RQ1: How does the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's activism in the UK?

RQ2: What are young people's experiences of activism, and how do feelings and personal identity relate to young people's involvement with activism?

The theoretical framework considers the influence of cognitive and emotional factors on young people's activism, set within social contexts of identity and belonging. These factors are being developed by appraising the literature on electoral participation and community engagement. The objective of the

theoretical framework is to explore how non-electoral participation is influenced by commonly known factors, specifically interest in politics and internal efficacy, but also by the inclusion of lesser researched cognitive factors, such as the perception of agency and influence. In addition to conceptualising factors as variables, the theoretical framework also involves qualitative concepts, such as empowerment and social identification. In the following sections, factors likely to be influential in driving non-electoral participation and their theoretical foundations are being developed and discussed. Their development leads to the generation of hypotheses and theoretical assumptions. These hypotheses and assumptions are summarised in a visual presentation of the study's theoretical framework.

3.4.1. Activism as non-electoral participation

In the context of young people's DIO politics, Pickard proposed that political participation should no longer be restricted to the institutional sphere, but contain a broader view of "individual and collective shared values and actions (both online and offline) in public and in private, which deliberately seek to maintain or bring about change to political, societal or environmental contexts within a community, locally, nationally or globally" (2019, p. 61).

Pickard (2019, pp. 62-63) provided a list to differentiate between electoral and non-electoral forms of political participation (see Table 3.2). For this study, these examples of non-electoral political participation serve as the basis to develop and measure the dependent variable of 'participating in non-electoral actions of participation'. Activism was conceptualised as participating in forms of non-electoral participation, also on the notion that young people have been found to be less involved in conventional forms of participation and due to the fact that there are barriers of age and other factors to participate in more institutionalised forms.

Table 3.2. Electoral and non-electoral repertoires of political participation

Electoral and political party centred forms of political participation	Non electoral and political party centred forms of political participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Reading/watching political news online and offline (2) Accessing a political party's website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, blog, etc. (3) Discussing political issues, parties, politicians with friends, colleagues, family online and offline (4) Registering to vote (5) Voting in local and/or regional elections (6) Voting in general elections (7) Abstaining from voting, voting blank (when a possibility) (8) Tweeting, retweeting, posting, sharing on social media for/against a politician/political party (9) Encouraging other people to register to vote (10) Encouraging other people to vote (11) Contacting or lobbying a politician (12) Displaying a poster/placard for a political candidate or party (13) Wearing a badge, cap, t-shirt supporting a candidate or party (14) Attending a political rally organised by a political party (15) Taking part in a social event organised by a political organisation (16) Donating money to a political party (17) Being a paid up supporter or member of a political party, youth wing or student wing (18) Being an activist for a political party, youth wing or student wing (19) Campaigning or electioneering for a candidate/party (20) Standing as a candidate in an election, running for office (local, regional, national, international) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (21) Keeping informed about non-electoral political news and issues (22) Liking, sharing, posting non-electoral political information online (23) Signing a petition offline or online (24) Recycling, using public transport and other environmentally friendly actions (25) Boycotting and buycotting brands/products/retailers/countries (political consumerism) (26) Being a vegetarian or going vegan (27) Volunteering in an NGO, association, community group or network (28) Informing and mobilising within a leaderless-horizontal political network (29) Performing politics through artistic and cultural actions (30) Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally (31) Carrying a placard and/or banner during a march, demonstration or rally (32) Flash-mobbing (33) Occupying a public space, public square (34) Camping out in a peace/climate camp (35) Squatting a private building or space (36) Carrying out other acts of civil disobedience and direct action (37) Refusing to cooperate with the police and/or being offensive to police (38) Computer hacking, culture jamming, guerrilla communication (39) Participating in urban disturbances, disorder and/or riots (40) Carrying out an act of political terrorism

Non-electoral participation can further be differentiated into activities of individual and collective nature. There have been limited findings on how individual action is linked to becoming involved in collective action, and only a few studies researched activism coined as ‘Do-It-Ourselves’ politics (Ross, 2021; Estellés, Bodman and Mutch, 2022; Kyroglou and Henn, 2021; Dunlop *et al.*, 2021; Boulianne and Ohme, 2021). Most of these studies referring to or integrating the DIO politics concept in their theory focus on environmental activism. This study assumes that young people are more likely to participate in additional individual forms of non-electoral participation once they have taken part in one. At the same time, the study assumes that participation in one collective form of non-electoral participation also increases the chance of participating in further collective ones. Thus, the first hypothesis proposes that non-electoral activities appear as ‘clusters’ of participation:

H1: Individual activities of non-electoral participation are likely to be clustered together, as are collective activities.

3.4.2. Exploring cognitive, emotional and social factors affecting young people’s activism

Previous studies have almost exclusively focused on predictors of these electoral or political party centred forms of political participation, as outlined above. Among the investigated variables, such as income, education and civic skills, social influences – especially behaviour and preferences of the parental generation – interest in politics and perception of efficacy, and other psychological factors relating to social and institutional trust, have been found to be indicative of an individual’s participatory actions or even predicable for their likelihood of participation. With political interest and internal efficacy being identified as the two psychological factors with the most consistent effect on participation (Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990; van Zomeren *et al.*, 2004), future research should aim at the development of “integrative multi-level theories” which consider “the specific psychological characteristics and social

circumstances of particular demographic subgroups living within particular national contexts" (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014, p. 23).

There has been substantial research on what drives specific individual political actions (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2017; Ehsan, 2018; Heger and Hoffman, 2021) and collective action, such as protesting (van Zomeren, 2016), membership and participation in social movements (Stürmer and Simon, 2004), and expressions of group-specific identity (Turner-Zwinkels and van Zomeren, 2021). In addition to the aforementioned interest in politics and the perception of efficacy, emotions, often in relation to an issue, to institutions, and to others, have been found relevant for specific individual and collective political actions (Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Banks, White and McKenzie, 2018). These emotional factors were discovered to be linked to not just one's own identity, but also constructs of collective identities (van Zomeren, Leach and Spears, 2010; Turner-Zwinkels and van Zomeren, 2021).

Agency is a central theme of the DIO politics concept, referring to the process of (self-)empowerment of young people by becoming involved in non-electoral participation. Young people are mainly driven by discontent with institutionalised politics and become political 'self-starters' to express their political opinions (Pickard, 2019). Becoming involved in any form of participation is also influenced by the desire for self-actualisation and belonging. Thus, political participation represents the "politics of self-actualisation" (Giddens, 1991). Early participation contributes to young people's political socialisation and shapes their identity as individual and political actors.

Sociopolitical development theory equally poses agency as a prerequisite to action against oppression and injustice, thus, a prerequisite to activism. According to critical SPD, becoming involved in political actions requires an awareness of an issue or situation of injustice or oppression and the idea or will to act (Watts, Griffith and Abdul-Adil, 1999). The theory also emphasises how becoming politically active can evoke feelings of empowerment and fuel needs for belonging and purpose. However, unlike many other approaches,

SPD points out that the process of empowerment is not equal for everyone, as “these conceptualizations [seldom] involve an analysis of how social power produces and sustains social inequity or the psychological, spiritual, or material implications of dehumanization, marginalization, and disenfranchisement [of oppression]” (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2013, p. 185-186). In other words, perception of efficacy and agency are theorised to be subject to internally perceived and externally constructed power structures.

Taking into account findings from previous literature on drivers for primarily electoral forms of political participation, the following section introduces a number of cognitive, emotional and social factors with the aim of investigating their influences on young people’s engagement in non-electoral participation. This study notably includes perceptual factors, such as the perception of agency and influence in addition to the commonly used notion of efficacy, in line with the assumptions of DIO politics. Building upon sociopolitical development theory, these factors are carefully considered within the concepts of identification and social structures.

3.4.2.1. Cognitive factors for activism

Interest in politics and interest in social issues

Interest is assumed to be central to engaging in non-electoral activities. Interest in politics has been strongly associated in existing literature with participating in political activities, specifically the act of voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Blais and Daoust, 2020) and other “electorally oriented methods” (Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018, p. 732) of political actions. Interest in politics has been proven to lead to electoral participation (Van Deth, 2000; Dostie-Goulet, 2009), but it also seems to be relevant for non-electoral participation (Dahl *et al.*, 2018; Oser, 2021).

Past and current research on young people’s political participation indicates a trend towards types of activities which are more strongly linked to civic engagement (e.g. volunteering, community activities) and informal social

networks instead of more formalised political structures (Dalton, 2008; McClurg, 2003). This aspect of civic engagement has been described as part of civil participation and a form of 'latent political' participation (Ekman and Amnå, 2012). Findings from previous research also suggest that there is an overlap between those who are civically active and those who are politically active (Brady, Verba and Schlozman, 1995; Putnam, 1995; Bevelander and Pendakur, 2009).

This study investigates both *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues*. It aims to include those latent-politically active people who may not see themselves as politically active despite engaging in activities around social matters. Therefore, the second hypothesis states:

H2a: The more interested young people are in politics, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

H2b: The more interested young people are in social issues, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Younger people especially tend to be more strongly inclined to participate in political matters using non-electoral activities, and "research findings indicate a higher involvement of men in political participation and of women in civic forms of participation" (Zani and Cicognani, 2019, p. 5). By including *interest in social issues* alongside *interest in politics*, this study recognises interest in a matter that is of social meaning as a valid variable for investigating non-electoral participation and activism of young people. Thus, the second hypothesis is centred around the assumption that young people's non-electoral participation is influenced by interest in social issues rather than interest in politics.

Perception of internal and collective efficacy

Internal efficacy, or political efficacy, refers "to beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics" (Niemi, Craig and Mattei, 1991, p. 1407). In contrast to external efficacy which refers

to the responsiveness of the political system and institutions to citizens' needs and demands (Balch, 1974), internal efficacy is defined as self-efficacy in terms of one's assessment of one's own ability to act within politics (Vecchione and Caprara, 2009). Political interest and knowledge have been found to be strongly linked to internal efficacy (Kenski and Stroud, 2006). Internal efficacy can be impacted by how the environment is perceived. Studies have shown that when young people feel not taken seriously by political institutions or older people, such "lack of responsiveness reduces their belief in their own ability to have any influence politically or civically" (Zani and Cicognani, 2019, p. 8) and their motivation to participate in the future. In addition, Theocharis and van Deth (2019) found that "especially young people with lower economic security and trust in the political system – but with higher levels of political interest and internal efficacy" (p. 46) are more likely to participate in political social media posting. For this study, the hypothesis assuming an effect of internal efficacy on non-electoral participation is as follows:

H3a: The more confident young people are in their ability to participate in politics, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Some studies have challenged the effects of internal political efficacy (Heger and Hoffmann, 2021; Gil de Zúñiga, Diehl and Ardévol-Abreu, 2017), claiming that "internal efficacy is a weaker predictor of participation than collective efficacy" (Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz, 2017, p. 331) and noted that collective efficacy (the belief that a group or community has the capacity to effectuate political or social change) is often not measured and applied in models. Collective efficacy is "a person's belief in their capacity to reach collective goals together with other people" (Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz, 2017, p. 322). It refers to a subjective perception but is also influenced by social factors, due to its dependence on a real, constructed or imagined collective (Emler, 2015). Collective efficacy is related to internal efficacy (the belief in one own's capacity) and external efficacy (the belief that political institutions, including political actors, are responsive to citizens' demands). Also understood as the perception of group efficacy, collective efficacy is one of the three socio-psychological factors "why individuals support and join social

movements" (Feinberg, Kovacheff and Willer, 2020, p. 1087), alongside perceived injustice and shared social identities (Van Stekelenburg, Roggeband and Klandermans, 2013; van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears, 2008). This is because group efficacy strengthens identification with the group, which impacts on mobilisation (Zomeren, Leach and Spears, 2010).

Collective efficacy has been found to affect the likelihood of participating in civic and political actions (Velasquez and LaRose, 2015). Research on collective action for LGBT rights found that "group efficacy can bring a sense of collective strength among a group of individuals, enabling them to believe their capacity to transform the current situation and thereby boosting their participation in collective action" (Chan and Mak, 2020, p. 73). Equivalent to H3a, the hypothesis including the perception of collective efficacy assumes a positive effect on non-electoral participation:

H3b: The stronger the belief of young people in that working together is important for making changes, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Perception of personal and collective agency

Agency is a term that is mentioned frequently in participation research but often lacks a deeper explanation or theoretical foundation. Some scholars refer to *political agency* or *youth agency* as a form of empowerment or self-actualisation (Diemer, 2012; Pickard, 2019) which is subject to environmental factors, such as having the right to vote (Bowman, 2014), and potential limitations set by institutions (Nicholas, Eastman-Mueller and Barbich, 2019). Generally, agency is coined as being a sense or perception of responsibility, since "willingness to act requires a sense of agency" (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 188). This study followed Bandura's characterisation of agency which consists of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2006). People affect change by exercising personal agency, proxy agency, or collective agency. Proxy agency, which is

socially mediated agency, is located between individual and collective agency, as it refers to “influencing others who have the resources, knowledge, and means to act on their behalf to secure the outcomes” (p. 165). Although related, efficacy and agency are not the same. Efficacy is the subjective belief in understanding politics; while agency is the perception of one’s ability “to influence intentionally one’s functioning and life circumstances” (Bandura, 2006, p. 164).

The interrelation between young adults’ agency, or their “belief in one’s ability to affect change” (Moore *et al.*, 2016, p. 890), and their perceptions of how systems impact personal and collective well-being showed that a positive perception of one’s agency may increase participation in civic activities. Having a level of high agency is associated with the aforementioned internal efficacy (Schoon and Lyons-Amos, 2017) and is linked to higher levels of optimism (Keating and Melis, 2022). Young people with a strong perception of individual agency may be able to overcome structural boundaries (Hitlin and Johnson, 2015; Schoon and Heckhausen, 2019). Furthermore, a positive perception of one’s own agency has been identified to increase community participation and strengthen community sense and personal well-being (Zimmerman, Ramírez-Valles and Maton, 1999; Christens and Peterson, 2012). Since agency, the perception that one can contribute to change, has been found as an important predictor of young people’s civic engagement, this study proposes that:

H4a: The stronger the belief of young people in their capacity to act for an issue they care about, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Equivalent to personal agency, collective agency describes an individual’s ability to influence circumstances or environments by pooling resources within a group of people and by working together (Bandura, 2006). In light of increasingly popular participation in ‘life politics’ (Giddens, 1991), which involves lifestyles in accordance with one’s political views, emphasis has been placed on the individual agent who takes centre stage in the ‘politics of self-actualization’. Individualised ways of participating in politics, facilitated by media and communication technologies, resulted in a reduction of collective

agency or the presentation thereof. The individualisation of political participation, indeed, shifted attention to the individual and has also been fostered by political rhetoric which encouraged, imposed and constructed personal responsibility as a key feature of being a citizen (Black and Walsh, 2019). This societal emphasis on individualism leaves out the “questions of ideology, social and economic structures and position, collective social organization and strategic, planned action” (Sukarieh and Tannock, 2015, p. 111), which young people are acting within. This means that even though participation in activism is based on individual choices, it is still embedded in social contexts. Therefore, the following hypothesis suggests that:

H4b: The stronger the belief of young people in a perceived collective capacity to act for an issue they care about, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Perceived opportunity of political and social influence

Perceived opportunity of influence refers to the subjective assessment of one's likelihood to effect change or being responded to by political representatives. In literature, the opportunity of influence is referred to as 'political opportunity' or 'opportunity structures', which provide the environment for political action and resource mobilisation. *Opportunity structures* are “dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1994, p. 85). The environment around young people and the opportunities it offers are crucial for young people to develop participatory behaviour, to “practice skills, build relationships, and cultivate new perspectives that promote continued civic engagement” (Moore *et al.*, 2016, p 892). These opportunity structures are not just of physical or institutional nature, but can include cultural and social dimensions, too. Zani and Cicognani (2019) name *discursive opportunity structure* as a society or community that allows for discussion and is responsive to different forms of political action as one of the macro-contextual factors that impact civic and political participation. Two concrete examples of

what successful opportunity structures can look like are the acceptance of collective actions for a specific cause (Chan and Mak, 2021) and the expansion of the right to vote to 16 and 17-year-olds (Borg and Azzopardi, 2022). This study assumes that how influence is perceived affects non-electoral participation. In the context of politics, the hypothesis states:

H5a: The higher young people's perceived opportunity of political influence, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Opportunity of influence can also be understood as an expression of perceived efficacy. The beliefs one has about the efficacy of oneself, a group, or political institutions affect the way opportunities to act on social and political matters are perceived. Opportunities may be linked to the assessment of how institutions respond to citizens and whether people "have the opportunity to influence" political decisions (Pavlopoulos, Kostoglou and Motti-Stefanidi, 2019, p. 109), which is tied to the perception of external efficacy. Whether one takes opportunities for influencing politics may be linked to the desire to do something and, thus, an expression of internal efficacy or, if undertaken within a group, collective efficacy (Ekman and Amna, 2012). The perception of social or in-group influence is assumed to increase young people's non-electoral participation:

H5b: The higher young people's perceived opportunity of social influence, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

While one might argue that efficacy includes the notion of perceived opportunity of influence, this study looks at this factor separately. While the perception of influence and the opportunity thereof are usually not included in empirical analysis, the theoretical framework of the present study recognises the perception of influence as part of developing sociopolitical awareness and forming a sense of agency.

3.4.2.2. Emotional factors for activism

Dissatisfaction

Sociopolitical development theory emphasises the cognitive involvement with issues of injustice and theorises a “relationship between [critical consciousness] and emotional experiences” (Fernández and Watts, 2023, p. 6). Negative emotions affect political participation: while general disinterest in politics can result in political apathy, alienation stems from feeling powerless or perceiving that one’s concerns remain unheard. Alienation from politics is defined as an estrangement from one’s political institutions and has been found to be a contributing factor in young people’s abstinence from voting (Henn, Weinstein and Forrest, 2005). It may, however, also contribute to increased engagement in ‘unconventional’ forms of political participation (Dahl *et al.*, 2018).

Young people’s alienation from political institutions is a result of low levels of institutional trust (Fox, 2015) and feeling ‘unheard’ or “unable to influence governments” (Hart and Henn, 2017, p. 11). Feeling alienated and distrusting political institutions and politicians can be an expression of and lead to dissatisfaction. Such dissatisfaction with politics is further exacerbated by the perception that issues which concern young people at large, for instance, climate change, are not taken seriously enough by politicians (O’Brien, Selboe and Hayward, 2018; Pickard, Bowman and Arya, 2020). Being dissatisfied with politics can motivate non-institutionalised forms of participation (Marien, Hooghe and Quintelier, 2010; Grasso and Giugni, 2016; Grasso *et al.*, 2017b), as people who are dissatisfied may still be displaying “democracy-promoting attitudes” (Geissel, 2008, p. 52). Given young people’s specific situation of “fac[ing] an increasing economic burden of deprivation, inequality and disadvantage relative to older people” (Bessant, Farthing and Watts, 2017, p. 12), levels of dissatisfaction with “the present system of governing Britain” (Audit of Political Engagement 19) have been increasing. For young people’s non-electoral participation, dissatisfaction with the government is assumed to positively affect engagement in activism:

H6: The more dissatisfied young people are with the performance of the government, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

Empowerment

Although activism may result from being dissatisfied, it may also contribute to experiences of empowerment. Empowerment is a psychological construct “integrat[ing] perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 581). This standard definition of psychological empowerment has been criticised by scholars of sociopolitical development theory because it lacks “an analysis of how social power produces and sustains social inequity” (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 185). Nevertheless, empowerment is central to the critical SPD theory, as psychological empowerment is regarded as necessary to move from being aware of injustice and oppression to becoming active against it.

Empowerment represents a complex term that is difficult to measure due to its psychological dimension (Martínez *et al.*, 2017). Rather than measuring empowerment itself, studies have approached the term by examining related factors, such as perception of efficacy and self-esteem (Ozer and Schotland, 2011). Studies refer to people, both individuals and groups, obtaining power over their lives or a specific issue as processes of empowerment (Hennink *et al.*, 2012). With regard to youth empowerment within politics, research has presented a dichotomy of space between young people and political institutions. In this instance, young people’s process of empowerment means taking up more space, and, thus more influence, on political decision-making processes (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). While empowerment is generally coined as a positive outcome of young people’s political participation (Corral-Verdugo, 2012; Cicognani *et al.*, 2015), some scholars noted that undergoing this process of empowering oneself by becoming politically active can place individuals at risk of personal threats, (micro-) aggressions and further injustice – especially individuals who are already experiencing marginalisation due to

their identity (Anyiwo *et al.*, 2020). Corresponding to the warnings of SPD of using empowerment in an unreflective manner, “individuals cannot be fully empowered until intersecting oppressions themselves are deconstructed and eliminated” (Banks, Smith and Neal, 2022, p. 104).

Because of its fluid definitions and dependence on subjective perceptions, this study includes empowerment as an emotional concept, involving self-perception and personal experiences. Informed by the literature on intersectional power relations and their consequences for people of different backgrounds engaging in political actions (Collins, 2000; Frank, 2013), the term *empowerment* is applied by the study with critical reflection and awareness of social factors for and within activism, such as concepts of identity and belonging.

3.4.2.3. Social factors for activism

Personal and collective identities

Identity is another complex concept, broadly referring to “an actor's experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative” (Tilly, 1996, p. 7). The lack of a clear definition and the many different aspects the term *identity* seeks to cover have been criticised (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). Corresponding to RQ2, this study explores how young people's personal identities relate to and have an influence on their participation in activism. While acknowledging the term *identity politics*, this study uses the differentiation of issue-based and identity-based activism due to the politicisation of *identity politics*. Furthermore, this study argues that issue-based activism, such as climate change activism, is also influenced by one's identity, based on social identity. In contrast, identity-based activism has been researched as being (primarily) fostered by people sharing specific identities, such as being Black (Hope, Keels and Durkee, 2016; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones and Reddick, 2017), having disabilities (Kimball

et al., 2016), or belonging to the broader spectrum of LGBTQ (Vaccaro and Mena, 2011).

There is a growing body of research on the influence of and the interrelation between personal and collective identities, potential multiple identities of activists, and social and generational identities (Curtin, Kende, A. and Kende, J., 2016; Louis *et al.*, 2016; Ross and Rouse, 2020). Activist identity, for instance, has been defined as a behavioural identity of people who participate in a particular action, i.e. the self-perception of such people increases the likelihood of them participating in an action consistently or repeatedly (Turner-Zwinkels, van Zomeren and Postmes, 2015). This may be someone who identifies as a voter who regularly participates in elections. One's own identity can relate to other people's identities, for example, based on someone's political identity (political party support or tendency towards political ideology) or on someone's social identity (one's perception of belonging within social groups). Identifying with other people does not translate into the formation of homogenous social groups but networks that share common characteristics, including values and views on certain topics. Feelings of belonging, generated by the process of social identification and, thus, contributing to a collective identity that forms part of one's personal identity, can emerge from being part of a group or community (Yuval-Davis, 2016; Habib and Ward, 2019). Participation in activist groups may also foster positive emotional attachments and enhance psychological well-being (Melucci, 1995; Montague and Eiroa-Orosa, 2018).

The importance of relationships for collective actions has long been established (Drury *et al.*, 2005; Klandermans, van der Toorn and Stekelenburg, 2008), as has their influence in the development of collective activist identities (Thomas, McGarty and Louis, 2014; Hartley *et al.*, 2016). Studies have found connections between perceiving oneself as an 'environmentalist' influences one's environmental behaviour (Dono, Webb and Richardson, 2010) and that "social identities are an important component of climate change beliefs" (Ross and Rouse, 2022, p. 1120). For minoritised groups, participation in activism may not be a choice but constitutes

“resistance as a matter of survival” (Linder *et al.*, 2019, p. 540). In-group cohesion, the process of bonding over shared identities and experiences, was found important for activism which promotes specific group rights, such as workers’ rights and LGBTQ rights (Louis *et al.*, 2016). It also indicates that political participation for one issue may not be simply transferrable to another, but it is possible that “identities reinforce each other, while some conflict” (*ibid.*, p. 260). Research on allyship showed that while people of different identities than those focused on in their activism, allies can help support causes of equal rights and social justice of disadvantaged groups, such *ally activism* is afflicted with power structures and privileges (Droogendyk *et al.*, 2016). Out-group participation in in-group identity-based activism may cause conflicts and resentment within and alter the representation of an activist group outwards (McGarty *et al.*, 2009; Thomas and McGarty, 2009).

Social identification and belonging

Finding people with similar values and identities can give people a sense of belonging. Belonging as a relational concept “can be seen as a constant process rather than a fixed property” and “helps to frame an analysis that recognises the ways in which young people make sense of their past, present and future” (Cuervo and Wyn, 2014, p. 912). Especially for young people, finding communities of belonging is important during their transition from dependence on the family to independence of the young adult, from education to work, and from co-residence with the family to co-residence with a partner, peers, or on one’s own (Furlong, 2016). The formation of political interest during this time is furthermore influenced by social settings, such as discussing politics with family and friends (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). With regard to young people in particular, social media and other digital communication have become essential for group communication and networking and for generating knowledge and awareness, the basis for political and social interest (Dahlgren, 2011; Hartley *et al.*, 2016; Vromen, 2017).

Young people are undergoing a developmental life stage in which they not only become more aware of political and social issues around them, but they may also start assuming and attributing responsibility for these issues. Participating in activism is an intentional choice to act upon this perceived responsibility. It is influenced by feelings of dissatisfaction with political institutions and social issues but is also fostered by the desire to express one's own values and beliefs and to belong to a group. There are empirical indications that the expression of collective identities leads to collective actions and also represents the normative limits of what is deemed an appropriate form of collective action, dependent on the collective identity.

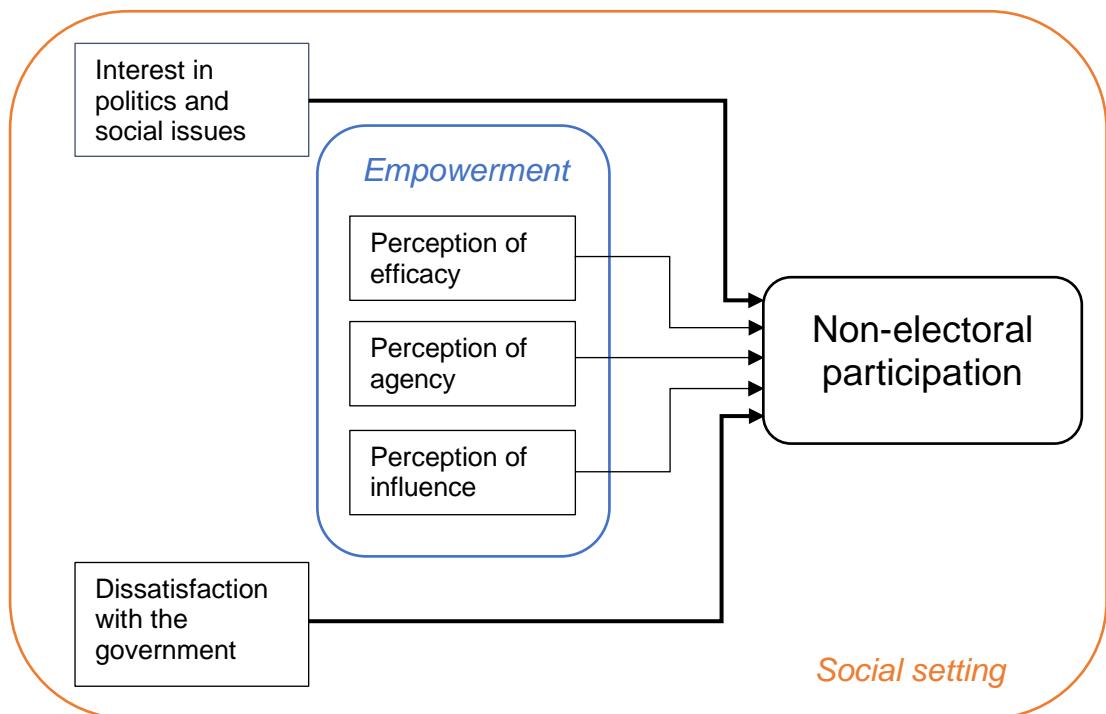
Political participation of young people is influenced by the activities of peers, especially activities of friends. A survey study on the motivation of young people to participate in the *Fridays For Future* movement showed that in-group identification on the basis of personal values was strongly impacting participation in climate protests. Young people who perceived friends participating in pro-environmental activism also showed a higher engagement in climate activism themselves (Wallis and Loy, 2021). At the same time, young people's social networks are connected to environments "along class, gender, and race lines" and thus, "they can also serve to perpetuate class-, gender- and race-based exclusions" (Kennelly, 2009, p. 270). These findings highlight that participation in activism is socially driven and may be normatively framed through one's network.

3.4.3. A visualisation of the theoretical framework

This study's theoretical framework is comprised of the discussed cognitive, emotional and social factors which, on the basis of existing literature and assumptions generated on the grounds of sociopolitical development theory, are considered influential for young people's participation in non-electoral political activities. Figure 3.1 visualises the assumed relationships between those factors that can be conceived of as variables and non-electoral participation, and illustrates how these factors relate to the concepts of

empowerment and social setting. In the theoretical model interest in politics, interest in social issues and dissatisfaction with the government are expected to be the largest predictors of non-electoral participation, while the perception of efficacy, agency and influence play a lesser but significant role for non-electoral participation. The development of hypotheses differentiating between internal and collective efficacy, personal and collective agency, and political and social influence aim to identify which specific types of perception affect engagement in non-electoral activities.

Figure 3.1 Visualisation of the factors investigated in the study



The development of the factors influencing young people's activism includes variables and concepts. Variables represent definite factors that can be measured: In addition to the differentiation between *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues*, the present study focuses on the cognitive factors of perception, including the perception of *internal efficacy* and *collective efficacy*, the perception of *personal agency* and *collective agency*, and the perception of *perceived political* and *social influence*. Negative emotions, especially a situation of strong discontent, are assumed as the starting point of the

sociopolitical development process. Therefore, *dissatisfaction with the government* is framed as decisive for engagement in activism.

Concepts refer to more abstract and subjective influences on young people's activism which are difficult to measure, as they are resulting from personal experiences. Positive feelings resulting from the process of self-expression are subsumed under the concept of *empowerment*. Drawing on respective literature, empowerment is assumed to be interconnected to the aforementioned cognitive factors of self-perception. Cognitive and emotional factors are embedded in social settings, involving social factors such as family, friends, and other networks. The social setting constitutes a relational context, in which processes of *identification* and *belonging* are taking place.

The theoretical framework addresses the first research question (RQ1) by investigating the effect of perception of agency, efficacy and influence on young people's activism and their relation to other factors, such as interest and dissatisfaction with the government. The second research question (RQ2) explores how these factors are embedded in social contexts of identity, identification and belonging, and the feelings young people associate with their activism and their sense of empowerment. Drawing on reviewed theoretical underpinnings, the study also aims to determine how and where the investigated factors fit into the process of young people's sociopolitical development.

In addition to hypotheses H2-6 which examine the effect of specific factors on the level of engagement in non-electoral activities, two further hypotheses are concerned with the differences in predictors of participating in individual non-electoral activities and participating in both individual collective non-electoral activities. Based on the assumption that there are statistically significant differences between the independent variables influencing non-electoral participation, hypotheses H7 and H8 are as follows:

H7: There are statistically significant differences in the associations of the independent variables between those respondents who only

participate in individual non-electoral activities and those who participate in both individual and collective non-electoral activities.

H8: Increases in interest in social issues, dissatisfaction with the government, collective efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence are associated with a greater likelihood of participating in both individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation.

To explore gender differences within young people's non-electoral participation, H9a and H9b look specifically at the drivers for non-electoral activities, disaggregated by gender. The study hypothesises that women's non-electoral participation is strongly driven by being interested in social issues rather than politics:

H9a: The more female respondents are interested in social issues, the more likely they are to participate in non-electoral activities.

H9b: Male respondents with a high perception of personal agency and collective efficacy are more likely to participate in non-electoral activities.

Lastly, H10 is introduced to compare the different effects of the independent variables introduced in H2-6 on electoral participation, as the dependent variable.

H10: Participation in electoral activities is, in contrast to participation in non-electoral activities, only influenced by interest in politics and not by interest in social issues.

This is relevant, as most studies focus on predictors of either electoral or non-electoral forms of political participation and do not contrast and compare predictors across electoral and non-electoral participation.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of theoretical approaches to political participation and argued that sociopolitical development theory presents a suitable approach to build this study's theoretical framework on. Following on from the research questions defined at the end of Chapter 2, the cognitive, emotional and social factors this study seeks to research have been specified, informed by existing research. This has led to the elaboration of ten hypotheses and the presentation of the study's theoretical framework which conceptualises how these cognitive, emotional and social factors may affect young people's engagement in non-electoral activities. In order to address the hypotheses and assumptions made by the theoretical framework, the following chapter reports on the methodological approach of the study and presents the data collection process.

4. Methodology and data

4.1. Overview

This chapter describes the methodological approach of the study and develops a research design in the context of existing literature. It argues in favour of a mixed-method research design to collect primary data before detailing the process of data collection using an online survey and focus groups. The aim of this study was to investigate how young people's activism in the UK is influenced by their perceptions of society and politics and social networks, and to understand the role of young people's personal experiences, identities and feelings for and within their engagement in activism. Therefore, the development of the research design was led by the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's activism in the UK?

RQ2: What are young people's experiences of activism, and how do feelings and personal identity relate to young people's involvement with activism?

To respond to these questions, the methodology gathered data on young people's engagement in social and political issues and their participatory behaviour in non-electoral and electoral activities. The mixed-method research design consisted of two stages: a quantitative stage during which data was collected via an online survey aimed at young people in the UK, and a subsequent qualitative stage which included focus group discussions with young people who stated to be active in and for particular issues. Therefore, the project added to the findings on the statistical characteristics of non-electoral political participation of young people in the UK and identified factors and their potential effects on young people's political participation. The online survey was constructed to specifically allow for a youth-centred research approach and to examine the cognitive and social dimensions of political and civic actions. The focus groups with young activists themselves provided an

opportunity to speak to young people involved in various topics of activism directly, and enabled a deepened qualitative understanding of the importance of identity and emotions in political and civic activism.

After reviewing the literature on political and civic participation, activism and youth activism, and developing the theoretical framework, based on the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics and sociopolitical development theory, this chapter addresses the methodology of the study. First, the ontological and epistemological foundations of this research are explained before the added values of the different methods, the survey and the focus groups, are discussed in the context of researching young people's activism. Then, deriving from the discussion, the research design is presented, and each research stage is described in detail, including theoretical considerations and practical issues of implementation. Next follows the reporting of the data collection process. The survey data is described and used to inform the generation of focus group topics. An overview of both quantitative and qualitative data collected is given and their intended use in the subsequent data analysis. The chapter concludes with a methodological reflection on ethics, challenges and limitations of the project, and efforts for meeting the quality criteria of research.

4.2. Paradigmatic considerations

To develop and choose methods to gather data and to respond to the research questions, the underlying paradigmatic assumptions of this study need to be addressed. Research paradigms, a term originally coined by Kuhn (1962), are sets of presuppositions and patterns shared by scientific or research communities which include "views of the nature of reality (ontological assumptions), concepts, theories and techniques of investigation that are regarded as appropriate (epistemology), and examples of previous scientific achievements that provide models (exemplars) for scientific practice" (Blaikie and Priest, 2017, p. 23).

Research paradigms are essential to understand the perspective applied to the understanding of the world, to the generation of knowledge, and to the development of tools, or methods, to observe, describe and analyse the world or any kind of social and political phenomena. They contain ontological assumptions about reality and subsequently provide logical methods of inquiry, known as epistemological concepts. Blaikie and Priest (2019, p. 106-112) differentiate between four classical paradigms (positivism, critical rationalism, classical hermeneutics, interpretivism) and six contemporary paradigms (critical theory, ethnomethodology, critical realism, contemporary hermeneutics, structuration theory, feminism). These views of the world and of how to implement research on it are different from one another, although they might share common features or even overlap occasionally (Blaikie and Priest, 2017). However, it is also possible to rely on more than one research paradigm, in the form of multiple paradigm research if the research questions require such. Two of the classical paradigmatic views, *positivism* and *critical rationalism*, are discussed here to lead over to the introduction of the paradigm that is applied to this study, which is the paradigm of *critical realism*.

Positivism, which relies on the assumption that reality is observable and scientific inquiry is being made on such observation, is a research paradigm aiming at the production of measurable facts and quantifiable output (Gray, 2004, p. 18). While often associated with quantitative research, positivism has also been dominant in qualitative social research since the beginning of the 20th century, up until the Second World War (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The critique of positivism has addressed its alleged objective nature (Crotty, 1998) and its resistance to falsification (Popper, 1968). Furthermore, the paradigm shows limitations when the object of research is not measurable by making observations and assigning it to units of measurement and distinct categories. Nevertheless, the positivist paradigm remains essential for providing approaches to research, including the “insistence on empirical inquiry, the use of experimental designs and inductive generalization” (Gray, 2014, p. 20). These aspects are intrinsic to quantitative research and represent valid aspects for the quality of such.

Critical rationalism, as opposed to positivism, is centred on the assumption that observations cannot be objective, as “[o]bservations are always made within a frame of reference, with certain expectations in mind” (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 106). Based on Popper’s critical approach of falsification (Rowbottom, 2013, p. 169-170), i.e. that a person can be wrong in their knowledge and that cooperation and constant critical reflection are desirable in knowledge generation, critical rationalism emphasises “rigorous testing” and the “process of trial and error” (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 107).

Critical realism, which can be structuralist or constructionist, depending on which ontological stance is taken, includes the reflection of the researcher’s or scientist’s role in the process of understanding reality and implementing research with tools to generate knowledge about reality (Blaikie and Priest, 2019). While observations can be made of the observable world, these observations do not objectively represent the real world, as the observations are subject to human perception, concepts and constructions (Bhaskar, 1975). That means that critical realism is ontological realism (there is a real world) combined with epistemic relativism (observations do not represent the real world but are findings of the observable world) and constructivism (these observations are dependent on the individual, embedded in a set of concepts and constructions). In contrast to interpretivism, which like critical realism, assumes that observations of social phenomena are dependent on perception and social concepts, critical realism allows for causal explanation (Sayer, 2000). Interpretivism underlines the personal understanding of observations of human interaction and social occurrences. Thus, an interpretivist research philosophy focuses more strongly on the researcher’s views and their role in conducting a study than on providing findings about a real observable world (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2020). Establishing that the real world cannot be observed, due to these circumstance, is what is described as an “epistemic fallacy” (Bhaskar, 1998, p. 27), i.e. the false assumption (according to Bhaskar, 1975, 1998 [1979]; Archer *et al.*, 1998; Danermark *et al.*, 2001) that ontology and epistemology refer to the same matter.

If the real world cannot be observed, “[s]cience then, is the systematic attempt to express in thought the structures and ways of acting of things that exist and act independently of thought” (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 250). Rather than being determined by theory, critical realism acknowledges that theory is ascribed to reality and influences the observations made. By acknowledging that observations and conclusions derived from them can only ever become close (and closer) to reality, the task of a researcher is to investigate causal mechanisms of the observable world and to explain social phenomena on the basis of rational judgement and critical self-reflection (Archer *et al.*, 1998). Causal analysis can be rooted in structuralist assumptions (a neo-realist perspective), structures and mechanisms produce social phenomena, or constructionist assumptions, knowledge about the observed social reality is “the outcome of social scientists’ mediation between everyday social language and technical social scientific language” (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 104). The latter, constructionist critical realism, thus, draws on social constructionism for its epistemological approach but, like positivism, holds the ontological view that a real world, a reality, exists – however, it cannot be observed as such.

In conclusion, critical realism combines aspects of both positivism (the existence of reality) and critical rationalism (observations are subject to an individual’s concepts, preconceived ideas, cultural settings and cannot be objective), and attempts to reconcile their shortcomings, namely that observation does not equal reality and that social constructions represent an obstacle to knowledge, by pursuing a critical and, predominantly, social constructionist epistemic approach. For this research project, critical realism represented the foundational research paradigm because it acknowledges the individuality of motivations for and experiences of young people’s participation in activism and allows to draw inferences about causal mechanisms, such as cognitive and social factors for activism as well as structural and macro-contextual ones. Furthermore, although the epistemology of critical realism is limited to only ever nearing the ontological view of a real existing world, observations can still be made and refined through multiple research and critical reflection. This critical aspect of realism is also applicable to its social

constructionist epistemic approach. Incorrect or insufficient causal explanations can be replaced or expanded, illegitimate practices and improper methodologies can be criticised (Bhaskar, 1998). With regard to the topic of young people's activism, this means a stronger focus on intersectionality in developing a methodological approach. In addition, critical realism, taking up on the premise of critical rationalism, demands permanent scrutiny of the researcher's own work as well as the work of others, in order to both refine theories and advance methodological tools (Cruickshank, 2012).

4.3. Developing a research design

This section addresses the purpose of quantitative and qualitative research and contextualises existing studies in relation to investigating political participation and activism. After an appraisal of the literature, this section then argues that in order to respond to the developed research questions, a mixed-method design is required and appropriate. The section concludes by presenting the choice of methods for the realisation of this study.

4.3.1. Contextualising quantitative research on political participation and activism

Political participation is a central part of many surveys, often also appearing in longitudinal or reoccurring polls. In the context of non-electoral participation and political and civic engagement, either original data is gathered, or secondary data is analysed to investigate the public's attitudes and behaviours towards state institutions and participatory acts. In the US, Dalton (2008) examined the perception of citizenship and citizen duties by drawing on data from the *Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy Survey* of the Center for Democracy and Civil Society, which was also the basis for Li and Zhang's (2017) investigation on the relationship between civic associations and different forms of political participation and Newman and Bartels's (2011) research on political consumerism. Especially for large-scale data,

researchers refer to secondary sources to access comprehensive and representative population datasets. Original surveys or surveys carried out either by a team of academics or a statistical information service are also common practice in specialised public opinion polling (Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson, 2007; Cicognani *et al.*, 2012; Eichhorn, 2014; Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018) and political science research (Moeller, Kühne and De Vreese, 2018). Beyond data on personal behaviour, political scientists also gather evidence from other sources, such as websites (Hale, *et al.*, 2018; Vidgen and Yasseri, 2019) or social media (Casteltrione and Pieczka, 2018). In addition to descriptive data, regression models show that there are interdependencies between political interest and political participation, as well as other factors. According to a number of studies, sociodemographic factors that also act as predictors of participation levels of young people include age, education and social class (Vecchione and Caprara, 2009; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011; Henn and Foard, 2014).

In the UK, large-scale data on social life and political participation as well as a variety of demographic characteristics can be found in the British Election Study, the British Social Attitudes (see Grasso *et al.*, 2018) and Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys. Another valuable contribution to longitudinal data on political engagement and participation used to be provided annually by the Hansard Society in the form of the Audit of Political Engagement. From 2004 to 2019, the Audit had been publishing data on voting intentions, political opinions, and selected forms of political participation in the UK. At a European level, data on young people's political views and actions can be gathered from the European Social Survey (see Melo and Stockemer, 2012 and Sloam, 2016) and specific issues of the Eurobarometer (public opinion surveys conducted by EU institutions). These European and national, and oftentimes longitudinal, surveys are important to consider for cross-comparing data on political interest and participation and validating the quality of sampling.

In terms of civil society organisations and participation research, the UK Civil Society Almanac by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) provides a yearly updated overview of the volunteering sector in Britain

(NCVO, 2019b). However, the focus lies on the work of – often very formalised – charities, and there is little exploration of the relationship between partaking in civil society activities and activism. In the face of literature claiming that participation in civil society and politics are often a joint action, the data on volunteering could be more corresponding to these assumptions.

Analysing these large sets of quantitative data has advanced research on non-electoral participation but certain challenges remain. While longitudinal studies are available, they can lack in comparability – the questions asked by the Eurobarometer survey on youth and politics vary greatly (European Commission, 2011; 2013; 2015; 2018) – or regular continuity – the British study on Young People's Social Attitudes (YPSA) by the National Centre for Social Research was discontinued after publications in 1994, 1998 and 2003. In certain cases, access to data can be restricted, thus impeding further analysis or repetition of existing findings.

For this study, the previously listed datasets lacked three elements which are essential in finding answers to the research questions proposed in this project. Firstly, there were only a few survey results of young people and the issues they cared about. Secondly, most datasets were only referring to young people as an aggregated cohort characterised by age, therefore, intra-group comparisons between other factors (e.g. gender) were difficult or impossible. And thirdly, none of them put emphasis on activism, which is what this research project has been conceptualised to look at. As these three requirements were unfulfilled by existing research at the point of developing this study, it was decided to create an original survey focusing on non-electoral participation of young people in the UK, including both a civic and a political dimension in its survey design. Non-electoral forms of political participation presented the dependent variable of the examination. In addition, behavioural trends in young people, such as integrating political beliefs in their everyday lives and actions (Pickard, 2019), changing transitions into adulthood, in comparison to previous generations (Woodman, 2020), and increasing use of social media communication, including for political expression (Marquart, Ohme and Möller,

2020), were included to contextualise young people's engagement in social and political issues within their everyday life as a young adolescent.

4.3.2. Contextualising qualitative research on political participation and activism

Qualitative research produces in-depth findings to understand the motivations behind the decision to partake in political actions, to uncover the groups and networks of activists, and to find out more about the acting people's values and perceptions (Hughes, Hughes and Cocq, 2020). These findings, drawn from forms of qualitative research, and while potentially more subjective than quantitative data, provide indicative insight and add substantial understandings of experiences, attitudes and behaviours. In the context of participation research, interviews in various settings (individual, paired, or focus group discussions) and ethnographic methods present standard qualitative tools (Berg, 2004). Two qualitative research methods, interviews and focus group discussions, are the most prevalent forms of participation research (Frey and Fontana, 1991; Guest *et al.*, 2017) and are discussed in this section as tools for the qualitative phase of this project.

Interviews are a traditional form of data collection in qualitative research (Wilkinson, 1998). They can be unstructured or semi-structured, and follow a systematic approach in methodology and analysis, thus, pursuing a set research design and strategy. The most valuable aspect of qualitative interviewing is that "it allows us to see the interviewee as a resource, not as a problem" (Jansen, 2015, p. 37). Qualitative interviews can give access to another person's opinions, experiences and feelings, potentially in rich detail and in different ways than quantitative methods could elicit.

In individual interviews, participants may disclose personal or intimate information (Morgan, 2002). Interviewing enables participants to open up about more sensitive topics, for instance, about experiences of discrimination in relation to belonging to an ethnic or religious minority (Botterill *et al.*, 2016).

Gallant (2018) investigated the action repertoires of young political activists in Quebec via semi-structured interviews, and Pich *et al.* (2018) used this method to shed light on youth engagement and disengagement in politics after the UK General Election in 2017. Individual interviews can be used to sample participants who are different in their characteristics and views, e.g. in Gallant's study, in order to deliberately avoid studying a "somewhat homogeneous subgroup of activists working together on the same issues" (Gallant, 2018, p. 81), or to sample participants who do share very specific characteristics. For Pich *et al.* (2018), participants had to have voted in the 2016 EU referendum to be included. Interviews on youth topics, youth representation and politics can also involve policy experts and practitioners (Mejias and Banaji, 2019).

While there is a number of advantages to one-to-one interviewing – the opportunity to discuss topics at length and in great detail (Guest *et al.*, 2017) and the creation of an 'interpersonal climate' between the researcher and interviewee in which they may feel more comfortable to disclose personal experiences and feelings (Kruger *et al.*, 2019, p. 254) – certain downsides have been identified. One is the power imbalance between the interviewer and the interviewee (Smithson, 2000; France, 2000; Harden *et al.*, 2000; McGarry, 2016). This unequal relationship stems from the different roles of the two people interacting with one another in an interview. The other one, linked to the relationship between the researcher and the interviewed person, is the lack of access to the participant's language, culture and typical behaviour within a group (Smithson, 2000; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007).

One way to mitigate these difficulties in interviewing is to conduct group interviews instead of individual interviews. Focus groups are interviews or discussions implemented with several participants at the same time, thus allowing for an "interaction of group participants *with each other* as well as with the moderator" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 182). They place individuals in a group setting, in which individually and collectively constructed realities present a social space that functions as a micro-cosmos of social norms and behaviours (Krueger, 1994; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999; Hydén and Bülow, 2003). While participants bring in their own identities, values, beliefs and attitudes, they are

also placed in an environment in which they become part of a group to interact with or to distance themselves from.

There is an ongoing methodological debate in the social sciences about whether the use of individual interviews or focus groups is more suitable for research on sensitive topics. No conclusion has been reached, as findings from some studies indicate that the setting within a group may generate support for the individual to speak about sensitive topics and feelings when they hear others sharing their perspectives (Coenen *et al.*, 2012), while others indicate that individual interviews could be a better environment for the disclosure of sensitive topics and personal feelings (Zeller, 1993; Guest *et al.*, 2017). Sensitive topics include a wide range of issues, which could have “negative consequences for the participants” (Kruger *et al.*, 2019), from personal feelings and socially controversial or rejected behaviours, to privileges and power issues, and personal and religious beliefs. Although this aspect remains unsettled – and is an important point to consider – the dynamic of focus group discussions has also been found to produce a higher variety of opinions than individual interviews and allow the researcher to observe different styles of “argumentative behaviour” (Smithson, 2000, p. 116) than the ones expected and witnessed in one-to-one interviews. Focus groups also grant “access to participants' own language, concepts and concerns” (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 197). These characteristics of focus groups are important when researching cohorts and considering individual experiences and views as part of a specific group, e.g. in this context, young activists. An interactive discussion puts more emphasis on the group's debate than on the position of the researcher, therefore “encouraging the production of more fully articulated accounts; and offering an opportunity to observe the process of collective sensemaking in action” (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 197).

Numerous studies on young people's political participation have used focus groups to foster interactive debate. White, Bruce and Ritchie (2000) used a combined approach of focus groups and individual interviews to explore young people's interest in and their engagement in politics. They were specifically interested in the way young people conceptualise politics and how their

conceptions and perceptions influence their will to act or not to act politically. Their use of focus groups was based on the rationale to not have a representative sample of young people in the UK but to include a diversified set of young people across a number of variables, including ethnic origin, social class, level of political interest, educational level and status.

Two central conclusions of White, Bruce and Ritchie (2000) – one, that young people are not a mere uniform cohort defined by age and, two, that disengagement does not automatically signify political disinterest – were followed up by Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) who also conducted focus groups with young people to explore their relationship with politics. Their reasoning for using focus groups was based on the dynamic of the group, which can be a measure against the “unequal power relationship between researchers and researched” (Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007, p. 73). Unlike interviews, focus groups are more likely to enable dialogue within the group and between the researcher and the participants, as participants can express their own concepts and questions (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). Focus groups also facilitate “political discussion and the exchange of ideas between young people” (Mejias and Banaji, 2017, p. 13). In Mejias and Banaji's study, focus groups were used to depict young people's concerns and preferences on Brexit negotiations with the European Union.

Both individual interviews and focus group discussions have their advantages and disadvantages. Often, these two forms are implemented in research projects to produce different perspectives on an issue (O'Toole, 2015; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019, 2020). Although focus groups bear the risk of creating a setting in which a person may not respond honestly due to expected social group bias, or in which a person may not feel comfortable sharing their opinion (Kruger *et al.*, 2019), the advantages of the use of focus groups for this specific project outweigh the potential downsides (Hollis, Openshaw and Goble, 2002; Guest *et al.*, 2017). Focus groups allow discussions in which participants react to one another instead of just reacting to prompts from the researcher. The confrontation with other people, thus other points of view, may ignite discussions that cannot be achieved by a one-on-one interview. Furthermore,

groups do not just provide context for confrontation but also for coproduction and collectively constructed meanings (Hollander, 2004).

In the context of youth activism, focus groups bring together individuals and explore their role as activists from both an individual and collective dimension. While individual interviews are an important tool for activist research, focus groups were considered more suitable for the qualitative phase in this study, as they equalise the power structure of the discussion and provide a tool to explore both shared and different motivational factors, topics of interest, experiences and ways of partaking in non-electoral forms of participation of the young people included.

4.3.3. The rationale for a mixed-method research design

Methods of quantitative and qualitative research can be combined. Mixed-method research refers to using different methodological approaches to explore a research problem or issue (Johnson and Onwuegbuzi, 2004). The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods can enhance the output of a research project, by increasing its validity due to generating data via multiple ways, helping generate, refine and identify hypotheses for testing, and adding qualitative depth to quantitative findings and illustrating, highlighting or expanding specific results. While this combined approach bears a number of advantages, Blaikie and Priest (2019) warn about the “naïve” mixing of methods (p. 219), emphasising that the tools selected for gathering data must be appropriate for both the research questions and the intended forms of analysis.

Mixed-method research design has been used as part of research on young people’s participation before, often in the form of combining a survey with subsequent interviews or focus group discussions. After processing secondary data on young people’s participation in the UK from various sources, Fahmy (2006b) used focus groups with people aged 16 to 19 in Bristol. For a study on young people’s trust in the British political system and the potential tendency

towards non-institutionalised political actions, Henn and Foard (2012) employed a two-phased research design including a national online survey on 'attainers' (people who were eligible to vote for the first time in the General Election 2010) and a subsequent series of focus groups with quota sampled 'attainers'. Other mixed-method approaches to young people's political participation, especially in the context of the Brexit referendum, include Pich *et al.* (2017) who analysed multiple-phase questionnaires, social network structures on Twitter and the content of discussions young people had online, and Casteltrione and Pieczka (2018) whose comparative research on the differences in online political participation in Italy and the UK was implemented via "[a] sequential-explanatory mixed-methods study" (Casteltrione and Pieczka, 2018, p. 4). While Pich *et al.* (2017) combined quantitative survey data with qualitative content analysis, Casteltrione and Pieczka's research design included the "collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data" (2018, p. 4).

This study intended to investigate how specific factors (perception of agency, efficacy and influence) impact upon one's level of engagement in non-electoral forms of political participation (RQ1) and to explore how young people who are politically active negotiate their own identities and feelings with their participation in activism (RQ2). In the context of literature on issue salience, current and incisive political and social events, including the EU Exit, COVID-19, climate change and the *Black Lives Matter* movement, were assumed to have an influence on motivations and topics of young people's activism in the UK. Based on the critical realism paradigm, the research questions were considered as being part of an observable reality which is affected by each person's individual concepts and constructions (Blaikie and Priest, 2017). Therefore, the application of a quantitative design helped to identify causal mechanisms for activism, by specifically asking young people about their involvement in activism, and their motivations and feelings attached to topics of social and political interest, and their participation in non-electoral political activities. The implementation of a qualitative method following a quantitative method served the purpose of critically assessing the assumptions made by

the study, developed by the review of existing research literature and informed by observations on current events in the news and media. This order of implementing a quantitative phase before a qualitative one is described as a sequential explanatory design (Creswell 2003, 2005; Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006).

The strength of the sequential explanatory design lies in its interconnection between findings from the quantitative phase and the reflection and additional perspectives of analysis in the qualitative phase (Rossman and Wilson 1985; Creswell, 2003). Results from the quantitative data analysis inform the qualitative stage and data generated from qualitative research contextualises, enriches and deepens the explanatory capacity of the study (Moghaddam, Walker and Harre, 2003). Thus, findings from the quantitative and qualitative methods are being integrated with one another (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006). One challenge of this particular research design is that it requires more complex approaches to data generation and analysis than if only one research method was implemented. The selected methods for the quantitative and qualitative phases need to correspond to the research questions and need to be combinable, i.e. the findings from the first phase need to have value and use for the second. Furthermore, the two phases must be interlinked with one another and their findings analytically combined (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003)

Mixed-method research and sequential explanatory models have become more common in participation research. In consideration of the research questions, this study pursued a sequential explanatory research design. Quantitative findings provided a basis for qualitative research by delivering indications about which of the investigated factors seem to be most influential for young people's motivation for non-electoral participation and by setting out descriptive information on which topics of activism are prevalent among young people in the UK. The combined output of quantitative and qualitative research methods enabled thus the analysis of the research topic from two distinct yet complementing perspectives (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

4.3.4. Choice of methods

The research design in this study consisted of a two-step mixed-method process. First, its quantitative component was developed based on an appraisal of existing studies on the political participation of young people at European, national and regional levels, and generated quantitative data by implementing an online survey. This online survey targeted young people in the UK between the age of 16 to 24 and mapped out the issues they were concerned with and the networks and structures of political and civic activism they were engaged in. Quantitative studies tend to be either politics- or institution-focused, i.e. data is gathered by presenting a limited scope of response choices to participants. This allows for well-founded quantitative empirical research but fails to incorporate other issues of youth participation, such as transitioning into adulthood and developing personal agency.

The survey in this research project aimed to produce findings on young people's participation in non-electoral and electoral political activities, while focusing on the cognitive and social influences on activism, as laid out in the previous chapter. To this end, the quantitative dimension explored the political actions of young people in the UK, which centred less around 'conventional' and institutionalised actions and more on broader forms of political and civic activism (Pickard, 2019). To optimise the survey design, a pilot study was completed first before the main survey was run. The pilot run helped detect unclarities in the design and language of the survey, which were then mitigated. The analysis of the data from the main survey corresponded to hypotheses H1-10 (see section 3.4.2) and enabled insights into potential factor effects on non-electoral participatory behaviour of young people. Furthermore, the analysis of the quantitative survey helped to identify topics and questions to follow up on during the qualitative part of the research.

Secondly, the qualitative phase adopted a youth-centred approach to explore the views, motivations and thought processes of 30 young people who were politically and civically active. The focus-group interviews took further the investigation of agency, identity and emotions of young adults by discussing

elements of the research with participants who had been politically active, and thus built upon and added to the quantitative data results. In line with Pickard (2019), Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007), White, Bruce and Ritchie (2000), the qualitative research emphasised learning *from* research participants, rather than just learning *about* them. The participant recruitment process was supported by the quantitative survey, as survey respondents could indicate whether they wished to be part of focus group research.

Instead of comprehending the individual methods as dichotomous, they were regarded as layers of the greater topic of youth participation and individual and collective activist behaviour. This rationale of the research design was also based on the paradigmatic considerations of critical realism (McEvoy and Richards, 2006; Fletcher, 2017). In line with the theoretical framework of the study, the premise was that participation and partaking in activism specifically is an individualised choice, influenced by the social and political setting. Perception of agency, efficacy and influence are regarded as resulting from a range of cognitive, social, and emotional factors, and central to becoming involved with non-electoral participation.

4.4. Quantitative method: an online survey on civic and political participation

The quantitative phase of the project was designed to collect information on political and social topics of interest to young people in the UK and their involvement in both non-electoral and electoral participation by using an original online survey. The survey design emphasised the cognitive and social influences in taking up forms of activism and drew on findings from previous or currently running longitudinal surveys on young people's political interest, knowledge and participation in the UK. Selected sources for this purpose were the previously mentioned annual Audit of Political Engagement (Hansard Society, 2019) and four youth-specific Eurobarometer reports by the European Commission (319a, 375, 408 and 455). These sources indicated trends within young people's political participation and volunteering and were used to inform

the creation of the online survey. They also enabled comparing the survey results with findings from similar age cohorts in Britain, such as the 18-24 year-olds in the Audit of Political Engagement and the group of 15-30 year-olds in the Eurobarometer.

The survey also asked questions about topics and organisational structures of young people's involvement with activism. There is only limited evidence about the specific issues young people are becoming politically or civically active for. A report by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) on volunteering, "Time Well Spent" (NCVO, 2019a), stated that 9% of all volunteers interviewed were voluntarily active in 'politics', 7% in 'justice and human rights' and 3% in 'Trade Unions'. However, taking the definition of activism as both political and civic participation, categories such as 'the environment', 'animals', 'citizens groups' and also 'religion' or 'local community or neighbourhood groups' may fall into the definition of issues influencing young people's activism, if the acting person is pursuing or striving towards political or social change.

The survey for this study was developed to investigate both established cognitive factors, including *political interest*, *satisfaction with the government*, *perception of internal efficacy* and *perception of collective efficacy*, as well as factors which are less common in participation research, such as *interest in social issues*, the *perception of personal agency* and *perception of collective agency*, and the *perceived opportunity of political and social influence*. Survey data sought to test the hypotheses listed in the previous chapter (see section 3.4.2) in order to find significant regression results between changes in these cognitive factors and changes in non-electoral participation.

4.4.1. Conceptual considerations

As discussed before, a vast amount of survey data on young people's political participation does exist. These include ongoing longitudinal studies on participation in political and social life (Eurobarometer, European Social

Survey, British and Scottish Social Attitudes) as well as previous long-term surveys on these matters (Audit of Political Engagement, Young People's Social Attitudes Survey, 1994-2003; the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England 1 and 2 which are also known by the titles of *Next Steps* and *Our Future*). While these and other sources contribute to an overview of demographic and social data, their range of questions was not deemed appropriate to meet the needs of this study.

Cross-sectional studies have addressed more specific topics, such as the effect of Brexit on young people's engagement in politics (Fox and Pearce, 2016b), how young people inform themselves about the Scottish independence referendum and the role of social factors (Eichhorn, 2014), and the political behaviour, especially in terms of voting or certainty-to-vote of first-time voters (Henn, Weinstein and Hodgkinson, 2006; Henn and Foard, 2012). In addition, analysis of quantitative datasets on young people's participation is strongly focused on finding explanatory or predictive factors for specific actions, such as postmaterialist value schemes (Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018), education and party identification (Ehsan, 2018), and "politicization and the contestation of ideas" (Grasso *et al.*, 2018, p. 201).

The decision to create an original survey despite the existing range of longitudinal and cross-sectional studies on young people's participation has been made in order to address five crucial aspects of the project which could not be achieved by relying on secondary data:

- Firstly, most surveys are designed around formalised political participation and do not focus on activism. In the context of this project, activism accounts for more than just political actions excluding voting. Therefore, the survey required to be designed so that civic and political participation can be analysed jointly with regard to electoral (institutional) and non-electoral participation.
- Secondly, the study's adopted definition of activism relies on the theoretical concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics (Pickard, 2019) and the assumption of changing action repertoires among young people (Norris,

2007). Therefore, the survey included categories of political and civic action which have been largely ignored as participatory or activist behaviour by former studies.

- Thirdly, existing studies and databases are often more focused on specific actions, e.g. protests or signing petitions, than on the overall setting of these actions or the themes for which these actions are being undertaken. Because of the trend towards individualisation and emotionalisation of issues, this research aimed to capture a cross-section of relevant political and social issues of young people in the UK.
- Fourthly, the notion of *political and social issues* gave room to investigate why certain topics were more prominent in activist behaviour or even movements. In addition to social factors, especially networks, cognitive and emotional factors were explored as potentially influential for a person's involvement in political and civic participation.
- Fifthly, and lastly, the creation of an original survey did not just allow for a specific survey questionnaire to be designed but also for specific age groups to be included. As reviewed in Chapter 2, the term 'young people' is not unanimously agreed upon by academic literature, resulting in very different spans of age groups. Furthermore, age is a changing variable, thus hampering the use of older datasets for matters and behaviours of young people nowadays.

A key focus of the survey was the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The dependent variable was constructed by presenting a number of non-electoral and non-party-centred forms of political participation, following Pickard's examples (2019, p. 62-62; see section 3.4.1).

Table 4.1. Overview of variables used in survey design

Independent variable	Control variable	Dependent variable	
Tested factors	Socio-demographic characteristics	Non-electoral participation	
Interest in politics Interest in social issues Perception of efficacy (internal and collective) Perception of agency (personal and collective) Perceived opportunity of influence (political and social) Satisfaction with the government	Age Gender Being a university student Socio-economic class Ethnicity	Liking, sharing or posting political content online Petition signing Political consumerism (boycotting products or brands or supporting products of brands for ethical, moral or political reasons) Dietary lifestyle changes (going vegetarian or vegan for ethical, moral or political reasons)	Individual dimension
		Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group	
		Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally	
		Being part of an activist group	
		Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally	

Participants in the survey were asked to indicate their partaking in both electoral and non-electoral forms of participation, alongside questions on topics they were concerned about, their social life and their perception of efficacy, agency, and opportunities of political and social influence. Table 4.1 shows the factors drawn from the hypotheses, the independent variables, the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, which was composed of

activities placed within an individual dimension, as well as activities placed within a collective dimension, and a list of control variables. In the following, the measurement of each variable of the three different categories – the dependent variable, the independent variables, and the control variables – are explained in detail. See Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire and codebook of the survey.

4.4.1.1. The dependent variable

The dependent variable of the quantitative research was defined as non-electoral participation. Non-electoral participation, as opposed to electoral participation, refers to activities which are not focused on voting or internal party politics. Activities of non-electoral participation can include a multitude of actions, but for operationalising it as an independent variable, the range needed to be limited. For the survey, a differentiation was made between non-electoral participatory acts on an individual level and those that are taking place within a group, or collective dimension. In the analysis, the potential effects of the dependent variables on non-electoral participation were looked at with non-electoral participation as an aggregated dependent variable but also in its individual and collective forms.

Non-electoral participation was measured as self-reported participation in selected actions (see Appendix 1, SQ4). The temporal scope encompassed the time from the beginning of 2019 till the time of the survey, which ran from January to March 2021. This specific time frame had been chosen to accommodate for the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had strong effects on people's freedom to socialise. The measurement of non-electoral participation was carried out using a nominal scale, i.e. participants could indicate that they had done one or more of the listed actions. Alternatively, participants had the option to declare that they had participated in none of the listed activities:

Have you done one or more of the following actions since the beginning of 2019?

- Liking, sharing or posting political content online
- Signing a petition

- Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons
- Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons
- Becoming a vegetarian (meatless diet) or going vegan (diet without any animal products)
- Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes)
- Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally
- Participating in or being a member of an activist group
- Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally
- None of these

In addition, participants were also asked whether they would consider any of the actions listed, especially in the context of the issues they care about. In providing the same response options as the question on already occurred participatory non-electoral actions, attention was paid towards the respondents' readiness to take up non-electoral actions for issues of personal interest or concern (SQ05). The questions on non-electoral participation formed the basis to examine different factors on the prevalence of occurrence among young people, and also allowed to identify trends towards certain types of participation.

4.4.1.2. The independent variables

The independent variables constituted the factors which were hypothesised to influence the likelihood of taking part in non-electoral participation positively. In line with the previously presented hypotheses, the primarily investigated factors of the survey included *interest in politics*, *interest in social issues*, *perception of efficacy* (*internal efficacy* and *collective efficacy*), *perception of agency* (*personal* and *collective*), *perceived opportunity of influence* (*political* and *social*), and *satisfaction with the government*.

Interest in politics is one of the most important predictors of voting (Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990; Hahn, 1998). For measuring political interest in the context of the survey, participants were asked to indicate their level of political

interest (PQ01). For *interest in social issues*, posing a question is more difficult, as social issues are harder to clearly define. Instead of generally asking about respondents' interest in social issues, the question used the example of environmental activism and the present *Black Lives Matter* movement to ask whether young people were interested in keeping themselves informed about current societal issues (SQ01).

Efficacy was investigated in the context of both civic and political participation. This included the perception of *external efficacy* (specifically attributed to politicians in Britain, PQ06), *internal efficacy* (one's own sense of understanding politics and self-assessed ability to participate in politics, PQ09), and *collective efficacy* (referring to the assessment of whether efforts made by a group of people can have societal consequences, SQ10).

The questions concerning the *perception of personal and collective agency* were asked in relation to perceived threats or concerns, such as "Globalisation", "Poverty", "Fear of not finding a job or losing a job", "Worsening of the COVID-19 situation", "Climate change", "Crime and violence", "Immigration", "Financial insecurity", and "Conflict or war". Respondents were asked to assess their levels of concern about these issues on a scale and say whom they saw as responsible for addressing them. The follow-up question aimed to record respondents' perception of (a) personal agency, (b) collective agency, and (c) institutional agency, by asking (SQ03a):

If you think about these issues, do you feel like...

- a) ...you can do something about them.
- b) ...people can do something about them together.
- c) ...politicians and the government can do something about them.

To find out to whom respondents attribute responsibility to act in the face of their own personally perceived threats, another question named possible actors, including "The UK Government", "Politicians in general", "People living in Britain", "Organisations and pressure groups", "Individuals like me", and "No one" (SQ03b). The survey also looked at the social contacts with whom the respondents said they shared their concerns with (SQ03c). Sharing the same

opinions, i.e. being part of an opinion-based group, has been found to be essential for the prediction of “engagement in issue-based activism (such as environmentalism) that do not necessarily have a readily available social identity category for people to identify with, as well as to predict engagement in causes for which one is not a group member (i.e. profeminist men engaged in women’s rights activism)” (Curtin and McGarty, 2016, p. 231). Group dynamics and identity-building have been recognised as important factors for both taking action and group efficacy but remain challenging to research (Thomas and McGarty, 2009; Thomas, Mavor, and McGarty, 2012). In the context of this survey, the respondents are asked with whom they share the concerns they indicated earlier in the scaling exercise.

Perceived opportunity of influence was measured using two questions. One referred specifically to the perceived influence over political decision-making (PQ08). The other addressed the perceived opportunity of social influence by asking about how respondents assessed their contribution to political or social changes by being part of an organisation or group (SQ08a).

Finally, *satisfaction with the government* was looked at for both perceived satisfaction with the national government (UK Government) and with the respondents’ regional governments, if applicable. The question asked for the respondents’ assessment of the performance of the respective government (PQ07).

4.4.1.3. The control variables

Sociodemographic characteristics were also recorded in the survey (see Appendix 1, DD00-DD09) including age, gender, residence, educational attainment and status, work status, economic status, and ethnicity. The questions on age and residence were posed at the start of the survey, alongside an explanatory text, to pre-select participants based on these characteristics. In the inferential analysis, the included control variables were age (as scale data), gender (being male), being a university student, self-

reported economic status (or social class, differentiating between working class and middle class), and ethnicity (subsumed as a dichotomous variable of self-described as white or self-described as non-white).

4.4.2. Data collection

Data collection for the main online survey took place between January and March 2021. The online survey was used for gathering cross-sectional data on young people's non-electoral and non-institutionalised participatory civic and political behaviour in the UK. The targeted sample population was young people living in the UK aged 16 to 24. The link to the survey was advertised using social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, thus, respondents took part in the survey via self-selection. Due to the content of the survey, they were expected to be leaning towards a higher interest in politics and to be more civically or politically active. Since the study was interested in determining the effects of perception on levels of engagement in non-electoral activities, the fact that the sample tended to be more interested and active than a general population sample would have been was not regarded as an obstacle for inferential data analysis. The following subsections discuss the sampling strategy and process of the survey, the extent to which the sample accurately represents the target population of young people in the UK, and the implications for its generalisability.

4.4.2.1. Sampling

The sampling for the online survey followed a purposive sampling process. Two criteria were set to be essential for potential respondents to be eligible for participating: age and residence. The first criterium (as discussed in section 3.3.3.) was to be within 16 to 24 years of age. The second criterium was to be residential in the UK, as the study focuses on youth activism within this particular geographical scope. The survey's main purpose was to collect data on young people who were, to some extent, interested in political and social

issues and/or participating in political and civic activities. This primary interest in young people with an existing level of interest and activity was also reflected in how the link to the survey was advertised on social media. The direct link to the survey, hosted on the survey platform Qualtrics, was distributed via social media adverts. These social media adverts were placed on Instagram and Facebook, two common social media platforms which were assumed to be frequented by the target population. The images below show the adverts used for the sampling process, with the image on the left depicting an Instagram story advert and the image on the right a post which would have been displayed on a Facebook timeline.

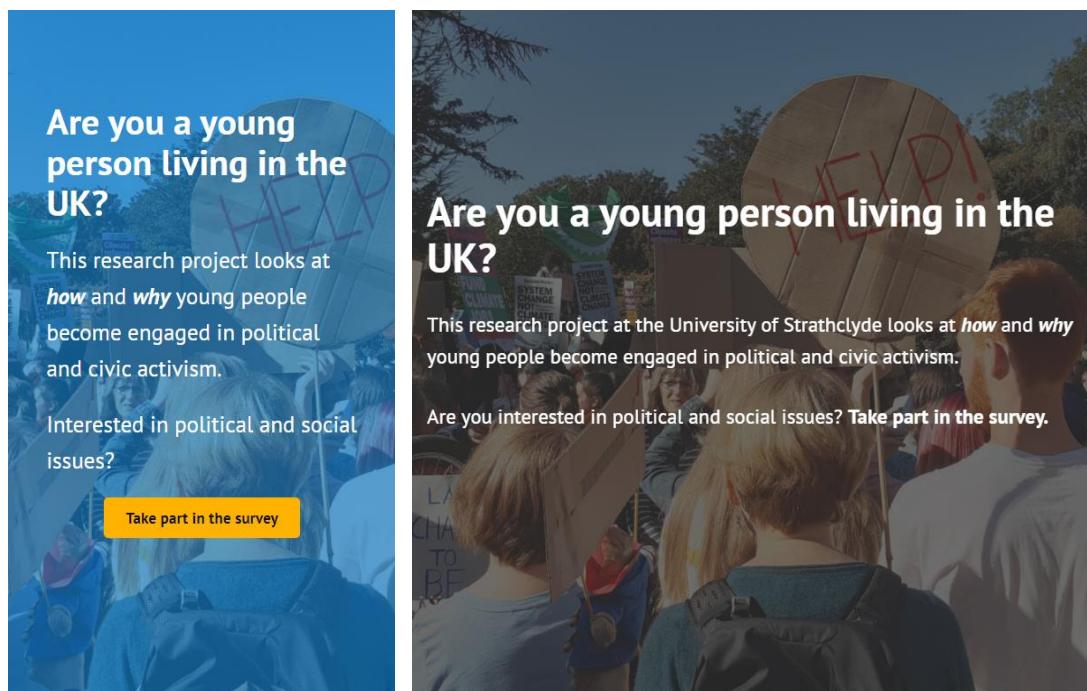


Figure 4.1. Adverts used to disseminate survey link on social media platforms.

For Instagram, adverts were placed as 'stories', meaning that users of the platform would be shown these adverts while viewing other content of their connections. For Facebook, adverts were placed as posts on users' 'feeds' or timelines. Both platforms allow for adverts to be placed within pre-defined parameters and the likely range of users reached is determined by the monetary input. This means that there is a certain level of control on the

researcher's part over who is being shown the advert, e.g. by setting an age range, geographical location, and further specifications, like interests. The social media platform is able to locate relevant audiences on the basis of available data from the user. While acknowledging the ethical issues of Instagram and Facebook (platforms which both belong to the commercial organisation Metaverse), no data about social media users was transferred to the researcher. Instead, the purpose of placing adverts served to distribute the link to the survey, which contained further information about the research, presented potential respondents with a full participant information sheet and asked for their consent before they would be forwarded to the questionnaire.

Using social media adverts on Instagram and Facebook, a sample of 1,094 was generated, which fulfilled the two pre-defined criteria of age and residence (see section 4.4.3. for a full breakdown of the sample). Based on the projections of the UK population size and composition by age group (Office for National Statistics, 2020), a minimum sample size of about 400 people (385) aged 16 to 24 would have been required. This number was calculated based on an estimated 3.972 million 15-24 year-olds living in the UK in 2020, using a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a 0.5% sample proportion of the overall sample population size. The higher number of respondents secured a more robust sample with regard to error terms and missing responses on certain survey items.

However, due to the aspect of self-selection and the particular focus on respondents with an interest in political and social issues, there are certain limitations to the representativeness of the survey data. As the survey was conducted online and sampling occurred via social media platforms, people without Internet access and/or without an active account on these social media sites could not be reached. There was a great difference between the genders in the audiences reached, with Facebook adverts reaching more young men (ratio of 83 to 17) and Instagram adverts reaching more young women (ratio of 88 to 12), especially between the ages 16 and 17. These ratios refer to the audience which was shown the survey advert, e.g. of all the Facebook users who were shown the survey advert, 83% were registered as male users. The

actual survey sample was skewed towards the lower end of the age range, people who identified as female and lived in England.

Despite these issues of non-probability sampling, the collected data can still achieve “results that are just as accurate as probability samples” (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2017, p. 3) by weighting sample units and matching the sample to the comparable population sample. To render comparison with other datasets possible and to contextualise the sample, the survey data was weighted for descriptive and inferential analysis. Yet, while purposive sampling has its strengths in reaching specific groups of interest and (potentially) being more inclusive of populations un- or underrepresented in probabilistic sampling (Lehdonvirta *et al.*, 2021), implications for the generalisability to the general population remain. In this study, the descriptive data evidenced that respondents were more interested in politics than the average young population in Britain and also more likely to participate in political and civic activities. This means that inferences drawn from the survey are more likely to be applicable to a young population in the UK (and, potentially, other countries) with similar characteristics to the sample (above-average interested in politics and involved in political and civic activities) than the general population of 16-24 year-olds in Britain.

4.4.2.2. Survey design

The survey started with information on the purpose of the research and on how respondents’ answers were going to be used. Both the start and the end of the online survey screen contained information on data protection of the respondent and stated that ethical approval had been secured via the university and the guarantee of respondents’ anonymity. At the end of the survey, participants were also asked if they would consider partaking in the subsequent qualitative research phase. For this purpose, they were able to submit their e-mail addresses, which were stored separately from the survey replies.

The survey consisted of two sections, with additional questions on sociodemographic characteristics concluding the questionnaire (see Appendix 1 and 2). Information on sociodemographic data was also needed to select who can participate in the survey, which is determined by a participant's information on age and residence. Thus, the first two questions on age and residence were mandatory fields. All other sociodemographic questions were optional and used as control variables. Sociodemographic variables included age, gender, residence, education, work status, self-attributed social class and ethnicity.

The two thematic sections encompassed questions on respondents' (1) social interests and activity, and (2) political interests and activity. Answer options were given as nominal, continuous and categorical scales, depending on the type of question, with some questions allowing for a multiple-choice response and write-in qualitative answers. The first section addressed the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics and the definition of activism as both civic and political participation. Within the first section, the respondents were asked about their engagement in non-electoral political participation. The question on their non-electoral political participation was essential for constructing the dependent variable. Further key objectives of this section were asking for organisational involvement and the respondents' views of collective action, as well as the individual level of social interest and engagement in networks. Some questions were partly based upon questionnaires from the Eurobarometer on youth issues and youth participation (319a, 375, 408, 455), and the use and role of social media were explored via a question that has been used by the Audit of Political Engagement (Hansard Society, 2019).

The second section contained established questions on political interest and political knowledge, and included the opportunity for respondents to state topics or policy areas they were particularly concerned with or passionate about. Thus, the section aimed at collecting and mapping topics of interest for young people. The second section also asked about electoral and institutionalised forms of political participation (e.g. voting, support of a party, party membership), which either had occurred already, since the beginning of

2019, or which might have been considered by the respondent in relation to their aforementioned topics of interest. A set of questions of political participation affiliation had been adapted from Henn and Foard's *National Online Survey of Attainers* (2012; Henn and Weinstein, 2006).

In both parts of the questionnaire, the respondents' perception of threats and insecurities, different forms of agency, and opportunities of influences, alongside the sentiment of satisfaction with the government and satisfaction with being represented at the national and regional levels were explored. The questions on cognitive factors corresponded to the findings from research on youth and transition into adulthood by investigating how young people discern their own role in society and politics, but also what fears or insecurities they might be facing, real or constructed.

4.4.2.3. Pilot study

Before implementing the main data collection of the quantitative phase, the questionnaire of the online survey was piloted. Piloting is a common practice to test a survey design for internal consistency, to identify linguistic or semantic unclarity, and to potentially improve the questions and the instructions (Brace, 2004; Stopher, 2012).

After ethical approval from the School of Social Work & Social Policy's ethics committee, the pilot survey was run. This involved inviting personal contacts and students to take part in the survey. In total, 30 finished responses were collected, while 17 responses to the survey were left unfinished. Given the scale of the survey, this number of 30 finished responses is an appropriate outcome for a pilot study, as recommended by the literature (Isaac and Michael, 1995; Hill, 1998). The high non-response rate of 36% (17 out of 47 in total) prompted further analysis. While drop-outs were detected due to assumed disinterest in the survey (the cut-off point at the introduction) or unfulfillment of the age criterion and/or residence criterion (the cut-off point at the question on age and residence questions), some dropouts happened much

further into the questionnaire, at the point when demographic data is requested and respondents could opt-in to leave an e-mail address for information on subsequent qualitative research. From this, it was concluded that the ending of the survey needed to be clearer. A sentence was added to the field for the optional e-mail address, asking respondents to proceed to the following page in order to conclude the survey and, thus, guaranteeing the submission of the filled-in data. The average response time of those who finished the questionnaire was 17 min 34 s, with a minimum of 5 min 39 s. The pilot questionnaire also included a feedback form, which increased the overall duration of the survey. While only 6 of 30 respondents indicated that the survey was 'too long', the data on the average time and the qualitative responses led to a reduction of questions overall.

Furthermore, the feedback showed that the devices used for filling in the questionnaire were either 'laptop/computer' (17 out of 30) or 'smartphone' (13 out of 30). Adaptability and responsiveness for mobile screens were confirmed as priorities of the visual survey design. While the questions and response options were overall perceived as 'clear' or 'very clear', the questions on social identification, i.e. people whom respondents identified as sharing the same or similar concerns as them and who respondents carried out actions of civic and political participation with, caused confusion and unclarity. It was therefore decided to clarify these items, while some were removed. Two suggestions were made for additions to the survey. While the request to end the survey with a page on links to youth groups and political groups to join could not be implemented due to reasons of impartiality, the proposal to add a question on voting age was adopted. The opinion on lowering the voting age for the General Election in the UK was subjoined to the second part of the questionnaire.

In summary, piloting the questionnaire provided insightful feedback on the clarity and flow of the survey. A few changes were made with regard to language (e.g. changing 'collectively' to 'together') and the order of the questions was slightly altered (e.g. the question on collective efficacy was moved before the set of questions on the usage of social media and the

perception thereof for the political participation and communication). Furthermore, three questions were deleted, one for unclarity and two for being perceived as duplicates, as expressed by respondents in the pilot.

4.4.3. Quantitative data analysis

This section briefly describes the original dataset from the online survey and compares a weighted version with similar sources on young people's political interest and participatory behaviour. Data analysis was conducted using the statistical software SPSS and the programming environment RStudio. Inferential data analysis, such as statistical tests and multivariate regression models were run on the weighted dataset to enable comparison of the sample within the context of the target population of 16-24 year-olds living in the UK.

The original survey data included a total of 1,094 respondents between the ages of 16 and 24. For the purpose of describing and comparing the survey data with other sources representing the general population of 16-24 year-olds in the UK, the dataset was weighted in accordance with mid-2020 demographic projections of the UK population (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Rake weights were applied to the variables residence, age group, gender and ethnicity to match the dataset's characteristics with those of the wider young population in the UK (see Appendix 5). After applying the weights for place of residence, age group, gender and ethnicity, the dataset encompassed 948 respondents. These 948 respondents were distributed as:

- 84.2% living in England, 4.8% in Wales, 2.8% in Northern Ireland and 8.2% in Scotland;
- 41.6% between 16 and 19 years old (age group 1) and 58.4% between 20 and 24 years old (age group 2);
- 48.6% identifying as female and 51.4% as male;
- 69.5% still in education (school, college, or university), while 30.5% were not in education, with 30.5% holdings GCSEs;

- 36.4% describing themselves as ‘working class’, 46.1% as ‘middle class’, and 0.5% as ‘higher class’;
- 75.1% white background, 4.0% Mixed background, 3.4% Asian background, 0.8% African or other Black background, 0.5 % Arab background, and 0.5% Other;
- 82.6% British nationals and 17.0% non-British nationals.

The differences in proportions of the unweighted and weighted datasets are compared in Table A5.2 (see Appendix 5). Survey items of the weighted dataset are described in the following sections. The weighted sample was also used for comparison with findings from previous research to contextualise this study’s focus on young people who are above-average interested in political and social issues as well as above-average active in political and civic participation.

While weighting can help transform data into more representative observations, it also distorts the original dataset and proportions. A particular challenge with the survey data was the high proportion of respondents who did not identify as ‘female’ or ‘male’. Following the weighting process of the Office for National Statistics, the binary weighting of gender meant the omission of observations from these respondents, thus, essentially no longer considering the 4.8% of respondents who identified as transgender, the 6.3% who stated their gender as ‘other’, and the 2.3% who did not disclose their gender. It is important to note that the issue of gender and gender identity presented one of the key themes brought up by respondents in the survey and was therefore taken up as a central topic for the focus group phase. At the time of preparing the data for inferential analysis (in 2021), there was little guidance published on how to weight data in order to account for non-binary gender identity. Though a recent study (Urlacher, 2023) implied “that a shift to more inclusive gender categories is unlikely to adversely affect survey weighting” (p. 59), it also drew attention to the lack of information on prevalence and theoretical underpinnings. A working paper (Kennedy *et al.*, 2022) discussing various different approaches to dealing with non-binary gender variables, both in

regard to measurement and weighting, came to the conclusion that it is difficult to establish “recommendations for one best way to measure sex or gender or a one best technique to account for measuring gender in a survey when the population measures sex” (p. 14).

One alternative to the omission of observations would have been to weight the gender variable including three (or more) categories, e.g. weighting the data for female, male and non-binary/gender-nonconforming respondents. There are three issues with this approach. One is the lack of reliable data and empirical guidance on how to weight non-binary gender data, especially within a subgroup of a specific age range. Second, current assessments regarding the occurrence of transgender and non-binary gender identity among the general population indicate an approximate figure of 0.5% (Office for National Statistics, 2023), and a prior publication by the Government Equalities Office assumed that there are between 200,000 and 500,000 people identifying as trans or non-binary living in the UK (Government Equalities Office, 2018). No robust data is available, which includes a breakdown of these estimates by age. This would mean a matching weighting process of non-binary respondents would reduce the number of them considerably and produce nearly equal effects as the omission of observations. Third, even when including three gender categories in the weighted dataset, the dummy variable for the sociodemographic data would then need to consist of either male and non-male respondents or female and non-female respondents (similar to the dummy variable for ethnicity, white and non-white). Assigning non-binary respondents to any of the male or female categories could potentially distort any gendered effects.

On the grounds of a lack of dedicated theoretical and empirical guidance on how to account for transgender and non-binary respondents in survey data weighting and the risks of disguising potential gendered effects in non-electoral participation, the decision was taken to follow a more traditional weighting process involving a binary gender variable. Data from respondents not clearly identifiable as male or female was analysed separately to investigate how this particular subgroup engaged in non-electoral and electoral activities and to

detect potential deviations from the other two gender categories (see Table A5.3 in Appendix 5). Overall, this analysis showed that non-binary survey respondents were not considerably more interested in social and political issues but slightly more involved in non-electoral activities.

4.4.3.1. Interest in social issues and current issues of concern

In the weighted dataset, the share of “very interested” respondents in social issues was lower than in the unweighted one. Yet, respondents still displayed a high level of interest in social issues, with 67.6% “very interested” and 15.6% “somewhat interested”. Respondents ranked ‘climate change’ as their greatest concern out of a list of ten set items, and ‘immigration’ the lowest. Other highly ranked concerns included ‘the worsening of the COVID-19 pandemic’, ‘poverty’ and ‘financial insecurity’ as well as ‘fear of not finding a job or losing a job’. The order of concerns, ranked on a 10-step scale, with 10 indicating “very worried” and 1 “not worried at all”, remained almost the same for the weighted data, with most mean scores reducing a little (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Means of worry scores among all respondents, sorted by weighted data observations

Question: “At the moment, how worried are you about the following issues on a scale from 1 (not worried at all) to 10 (very worried)?”		
Issues of concern	Unweighted data	Weighted data
Climate Change	8.37	7.57
Worsening of the COVID-19	7.51	6.78
Poverty	7.59	6.69
Financial insecurity	6.81	6.58
Fear of not finding a job or losing a job	6.71	6.46
‘Brexit’ and the future of the UK-EU	6.63	5.95
Crime and violence	5.70	5.56
Conflict and war	5.64	5.21
Globalisation	5.72	4.94
Immigration	3.88	4.27

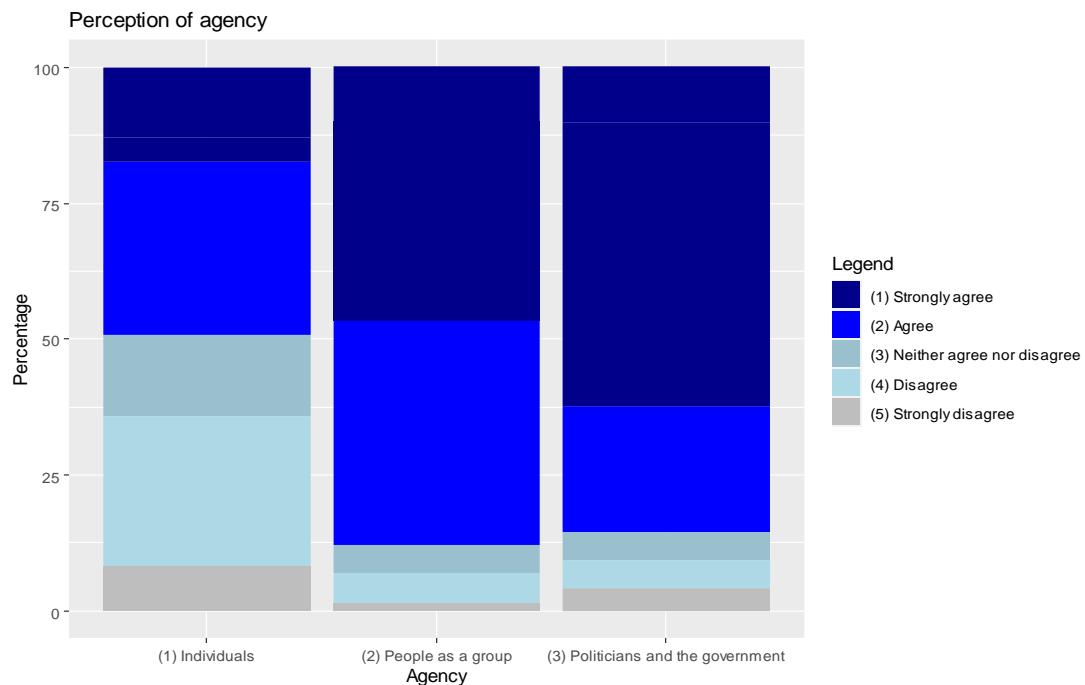
Most respondents stated that they shared their concerns with friends (79.4%) and about half of them with their family (54.2%). About a third (31.7%) said they shared these concerns about social and political issues with other

members of organisations they were part of, indicating that they were involved in some form of organisation. Climate change represented a particular concern for female respondents and for the younger age group within the sample, respondents aged 16 to 19. Female respondents also worried more strongly about issues such as poverty, COVID-19 and Brexit, and showed higher mean scores overall, with the exception of 'crime and violence', 'globalisation', and 'immigration' (see Table A5.4 in Appendix 5). The younger age group of 16-19-year-olds also displayed greater worries about these issues than respondents aged 20-24 (see Table A5.5 in Appendix 5).

4.4.3.2. Perceived and attributed responsibilities

Respondents held ambivalent views about their *personal agency*, while the effectiveness of both *collective agency* and *institutional agency* was perceived overwhelmingly positively. When asked "Who do you think can do something about these issues?", respondents were split between agreeing that individual persons could do something (36.5%) and disagreeing that individual people could do something (35.8%), while 14.9% neither agreed nor disagreed. A vast majority of respondents (78%) agreed that people can do something about these social and political issues together, and more than 75% of respondents agreed that politicians and the government can do something (see Figure 4.2). In terms of actors of agency, responsibility was largely attributed to the 'UK Government' (77.2%) and 'Politicians' (67%), and only then to 'People in Britain' (61.5%), followed by 'Individuals' (50.9%) and 'Organisations and Pressure Groups' (50.1%).

Figure 4.2. Perception of personal, collective and institutional agency (N = 948)



4.4.3.3. Participation in non-electoral activities

Respondents were asked about a range of activities they had participated in since 2019 (see Table A5.6 in Appendix 5). This period was chosen to also include time before the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions to public life. In addition, they were also asked about activities they would consider doing with regard to a topic they cared strongly about. Most respondents said they had engaged in political content online (83.0%) and signed a petition (81.7%). These two low-barrier forms of non-electoral participation were followed by acts of political consumerism, such as boycotting or avoiding products and brands (67.8%) and buying products and brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons (54.8%). Then more collectively orientated activities followed, including protesting (32.5%) and volunteering (28.5%). Changing to a vegetarian or vegan diet because of ethical, moral or political reasons was something 28.5% reported to have done. It was also the activity respondents were least likely to consider doing. About a quarter said they had participated or were participating in an activist group

(26.8%) and mobilised others to take part in protests (25.6%). Generally, protesting and being part of an activist group represented something that more than two-thirds of respondents would consider doing in relation to issues they worried about.

4.4.3.4. Organisational involvement

Young people reported to be most involved in youth clubs (24.3%), followed by local organisations (22.1%). One in five said they were involved with a sports club or organisation (19.4%). An equal share of respondents claimed to be active within a political organisation (19.4%) and within a political party (18.1%). 16.5% said they were involved with an environmental organisation, 12.5% with a human rights organisation, and 8.8% with other types of non-governmental organisations. About a quarter of respondents (23.3%) reported not being involved in any organisational activities, indicating that many respondents who are active do this across a range of organisational activities (see Table A5.7 in Appendix 5).

These voluntary activities young people attended were primarily taking place on a weekly (35.8%) or monthly basis (11.5%). In terms of geographical scope, more than half of these voluntary activities were done in local communities (57.7%) and about a third at a national level (36.1%). Only 6.2% claimed that their voluntary activities had a focus on another European country or another part of the world. Among those young people who reported to be participating in voluntary activities, 5.5% of respondents felt that they have 'a great deal of influence' and 35.2% 'some influence' regarding their contribution to influencing social change. However, 42.8% of civically active respondents said they felt they could 'not [exercise] very much influence' with regard to social change, and 16.5% said they felt they had 'no influence at all'. The impact of COVID-19 was reported to have led to a decrease in voluntary engagement for 57.6% of respondents, and an increase for 16.2%. For 23.2% of civically active respondents, the pandemic did not have an effect on their level of

activity. However, one in four civically active young people (73.1%) said the pandemic had resulted in more online activities in their voluntary engagement.

4.4.3.5. Perception of collective efficacy

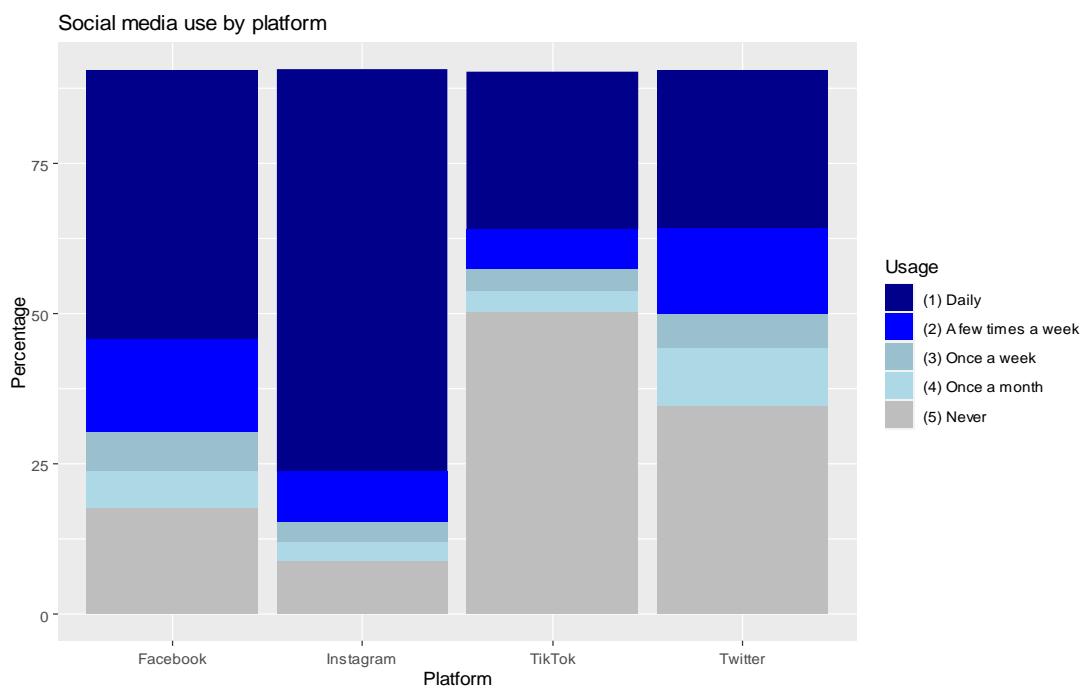
Survey respondents held strongly favourable views of the effectiveness of group actions, as 82.6% agreed that “working together is important to make small changes” and 65.3% that “volunteering and participating in local communities can change the world.” The idea that “each person can make a difference in the world with their own individual actions” was also met with more than half of the respondents’ approval (58.3%). While most respondents held a positive view of collective efforts and working together as communities, they also majorly agreed (71.8%) that “volunteering and participating in local communities cannot replace the political actions needed to tackle specific issues”.

4.4.3.6. Use of social media

Among all respondents, Instagram was the most daily used social media platform (66.8%), followed by Facebook (44.6%) and similar shares for Twitter (26.2%) and TikTok (26.3%), as illustrated in Figure 4.3. There were differences between the age and gender groups, with female respondents strongly preferring daily use of Instagram (74.9%) and TikTok (36.4%) over Facebook (25.7%) and Twitter (22.6%), and younger respondents tending more strongly towards daily usage of Instagram (78.7%) and TikTok (41.0%) over Facebook (19.2%) and Twitter (25.1%).

Male respondents favoured daily usage of Facebook (62.4%) and Instagram (58.9%), as did the older age group of 20-24 year-olds who reported using Facebook (62.6%) and Instagram (58.2%). The 20-24 year-olds were also more likely to have never used the app TikTok (65.0%); among 16-19-year-olds, this share was 29.4%.

Figure 4.3. Frequency of social media usage among survey respondents (N = 948)



Generally, respondents saw the role of social media in political communication as positive (75.4%), as “social media platforms are giving a voice to people who would not normally take part in political debate”. Furthermore, more than half (57.8%) agreed that “social media platforms facilitate interaction between voters and political parties”. However, almost two-thirds of respondents (61.8%) thought that “social media platforms are making the political debate more divisive than it used to be”, while about half (49.6%) agreed that “social media platforms are making the political debate more superficial than it used to be”.

Since these four statements on social media and politics were drawn from the Audit of Political Engagement 2018, it allowed for a comparison with how the general population of the UK views these issues (see Tables A5.8 and A5.9 in Appendix 5). In the current research, young people tended to have a more positive view of social media and politics than the general population, as they saw their potential to give “voice to people who would not normally take part in political debate” and to break down “barriers between voters and political parties”. At the same time, the young people in this study appeared to be more

critical of how social media was influencing the political debate, saying that social media platforms had a tendency toward division and superficiality. These more critical views were not common among the respondents in the Audit of Political Engagement 2018.

4.4.3.7. Political interest and knowledge

Two-thirds of respondents (66.1%) said they were “very interested” in politics and a fifth “somewhat interested” (20.0%). Compared to the Audit of Political Engagement, both male and female respondents reported a much stronger interest in politics than what had been recorded for a general population sample of the same age range. In terms of self-evaluated knowledge, 25.9% of respondents claimed to know “a great deal” and 54.9% “a fair amount” about politics, with young men representing the (self-assigned) most knowledgeable group.

The comparison with data from the Audit of Political Engagement 2019 showed that the survey sample from this study comprises overall more politically interested and more knowledgeable young people (as self-reported) than young people within the general population of the UK (see Tables A5.10 and A5.11 in Appendix 5).

4.4.3.8. Importance of political topics

When presented with a list of political topics, respondents named immigration and human rights, the environment and climate change, worries about the NHS and LGBTQ+ rights as issues they considered important at the time of the survey, in early 2021. When comparing this list of important topics with the answers from the unweighted dataset, the weighting has led to shifts in what is considered an important political topic (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Political topics of importance among survey respondents, weighted (N = 948) and unweighted (N = 1,094)

Speaking about politics in general, which issues do you consider particularly important at the moment?	Weighted	Unweighted	Difference
Immigration and human rights	67.1%	73.2%	6.1
Environment and climate change	65.1%	77.1%	12.0
Access and stability of the health care system (NHS)	64.4%	75.9%	11.5
LGBTQ+ rights and topics	54.1%	68.0%	13.9
Gender equality and women's rights	52.2%	71.1%	18.9
Education and prospects on the labour market	51.2%	54.1%	2.9
Workers' rights	49.6%	57.3%	7.7
Britain's future relationship with the European Union	47.7%	49.6%	1.9
Foreign Policy and British relations with other countries	45.6%	37.8%	-7.8
Peace and disarmament	36.8%	44.7%	7.9
National sovereignty and independence	29.3%	16.9%	-12.4

Discrepancies were particularly found for *Gender equality and women's rights*, *LGBTQ+ rights and topics* and *Environment and Climate Change* as well as *Access and stability of the health care system (NHS)*. *National sovereignty and independence*, on the other hand, increased in importance among respondents when the weighted data is considered. Since the weighting process increased the weight of male respondents and lowered the weight of female respondents, these changes could be attributed to gender differences.

4.4.3.9. Participation in electoral activities

Overall, participation in electoral activities was higher than normally expected among the survey respondents (see Table A5.12 in Appendix 5). Most people had accessed a political party's website or social media pages in the two years

before the survey (76.6%) and had discussed political issues (83.9%). Half of the respondents (48.1%) said they had contacted a politician, while almost as many (43.7%) said they had voted in a General Election and 36.9% said they had voted in local and/or regional elections. About a quarter (24.4%) claimed to be members of a political party or a political youth party.

Voting was named as one of the actions respondents would be prepared to do for topics/issues that were important to them, including voting in local and/or regional elections (82.8%) and General Elections (83.7%). Donating money was something that respondents were very unlikely to do (19.1%) or to consider doing (35.5%). Also, 17.3% said they have campaigned for a political party or candidate, while 52.2% would consider doing so.

4.4.3.10. Perception of political institutions and internal efficacy

Two-thirds of respondents (67.9%) held the opinion that “politicians in Britain do not listen to the opinions and concerns of people like me”. In terms of feeling unheard as a generation, this number amounts to 66.3% in response to the statement “politicians in Britain do not consider my generation’s future enough”.

More than a third of respondents felt ‘completely able’ (20.0%) or ‘very able’ (17.0%) to take an active role in a group involved with political issues, while 26.7% saw themselves as ‘quite able’ and only 18.7% and 5.1% as ‘a little able’ or ‘not at all able’ to do so. Similarly, 19.3% of respondents felt ‘completely confident’ and 17.9% ‘very confident’ about their own ability to participate in politics, whereas a third indicated to be ‘quite confident’ (32.8%) and less than a fifth ‘a little confident’ (17.9%).

4.4.3.11. Satisfaction with UK government and regional governments and influence on UK and regional governments

Across all age groups, there was high dissatisfaction with the UK government, with a total of 17.9% being dissatisfied and 52.0% very dissatisfied with the UK

government's performance. This share of strong dissatisfaction was similar across female and male respondents (see Table A7.10 in Appendix 7), however, male respondents indicated greater levels of satisfaction with the government than female respondents (26.3% vs. 1.7% share of being satisfied). Likewise, older respondents were more satisfied than younger respondents with the performance of the British government (18.9% vs. 7.8% share of being satisfied, respectively).

The opportunity to influence the political decision-making process of the UK government was generally regarded as unsatisfying, with 80.7% of respondents stating to have "not very much" influence or even "none at all". This perception showed no considerable differences across gender and age groups (see Table A7.8 in Appendix 7). Compared with data from young people in the Audit of Political Engagement 2019, respondents from the current research were less confident in their opportunity to influence political decision-making (see Table A5.13 in Appendix 5).

4.4.3.12. Party identification and vote intention in the General Election

About a quarter of respondents (25.9%) stated they did not identify with a particular party, while 21.7% said they identified with the Labour Party, 10.5% with the Conservative Party, 9.5% with the Green Party, and 3.6% with the Liberal Democrats. Whereas party identification roughly translated into the shares of votes in the follow-up question on which party respondents would vote for in a (hypothetical) General Election, there was a discrepancy between respondents who identified with the Labour party (21.7%) and those who said they would vote Labour (37.4%).

This study's sample appeared largely leaning towards the Labour Party, with female respondents being almost twice as likely to vote for Labour. Overall, the current research was based on a sample that reported to be more inclined to vote than young people within the general population (see Table A5.14 in Appendix 5). However, since the sample size from the Audit of Political

Engagement 2019 only encompassed 40 respondents, it was difficult to take those numbers as an adequate comparison. The suggestion to lower the voting age in the General Election from 18 to 16 was met with 45.2% support, 30.5% rejection and 14.2% indecision. Respondents aged 16 to 19 were showing considerably clearer support (56.6%) for lowering the voting age than respondents aged 20 to 24 (37.3%). 51.7% of male respondents rejected the idea to lower the voting age from 18 to 16, while only 8.2% of female respondents did so.

4.5. Qualitative method: focus group discussions with young activists

The qualitative phase of the research project consisted of focus group discussions with young people in the UK who stated to be civically or politically active between the ages of 16 and 24. The data from the survey helped map issues of interest to centre group discussions around. By doing so, participants in the focus groups had a common interest which facilitated the discussion about their involvement with activism. The methodological strength of focus groups lies in their subjectivity and their interaction (Smithson, 2000; Rinkus *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the group setting enabled conversations among people who have had experience with activism and non-electoral forms of participation for a specific issue but may differ from one another in a number of socio-economic and demographic characteristics. Semi-structured focus group discussions served to address the research questions from a mere subjective perspective, especially regarding the abstract dimensions of perception, emotions, and the complexity of personal networks and life experiences (Madriz, 1998; Hollis, Openshaw and Goble, 2002; Sim and Waterfield, 2019).

The focus groups changed the research perspective from a more generalised youth, as examined using an online survey, towards individual young people. As the qualitative phase took place after quantitative data had been already gathered, the group discussions provided the opportunity to gather individual experiences and knowledge on items already identified by the survey, such as tendencies towards specific non-electoral activities, views on the UK

government and social media preferences. The discussions constituted a group setting in which agency was not just given to a single individual, but in which everyone was enabled to voice their thoughts as part of a group. The group is an interactive format that fosters exchange, agreement and possibly confrontation between participants. It is specifically the element of interaction that distinguishes focus group from interviews and provide the potential to uncover themes generated by group dynamics (Cyr, 2016). In light of the research topic, activism, this setting was seen as an appropriate choice as it allowed discussing both individual and collective actions of civic and political participation and created a forum for young people's opinions and personal experiences.

4.5.1. Conceptual considerations

On the grounds of the explanatory sequential design, the qualitative research phase was implemented after the collection and analysis of the quantitative data. The first phase, thus, aimed at understanding the research issue and provided statistical results which were used to design and implement the qualitative phase (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). The rationale behind this research design relies on having the same set of research questions for both parts of the research process. This decision to use focus groups for the qualitative phase had been reached by considering the following five arguments in favour of the method:

- Firstly, in comparison to individual interviews, focus group discussions facilitate accessing the participants' language and culture more easily for the researcher (Wilkinson, 1998). Their setup can reduce the perceived asymmetric power relationship between the researcher and the interviewees by providing a space in which participants are among people with whom they share traits and beliefs, such as taking part in civic activities.

- Secondly, the focus of this research is on networks of young people's activism, collective action, and perceived agency of the collective and the individual set within a collective. Therefore, it is fitting to adopt a qualitative research design in collective settings, emphasising the point that groups and networks are essential for collective action and for discussing this from a meta-perspective.
- Thirdly, the group setting was selected to generate and explore individuals' views on the findings of the survey but also on the theoretical concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics (Pickard, 2019) and the notion that both action repertoires and agencies are changing as part of a generational shift (Norris, 2007). Like the survey, the discussions with the participants in the groups included elements of political and civic activism which may not have been regarded as part of participation in previous studies.
- Fourthly, while focus groups were guided by the same research questions as the survey, the qualitative phase provided a different perspective than the quantitative one. The survey collected data from individuals for aggregation at a collective level, whereas the focus groups generated data from individuals in a group setting for depicting commonalities and differences in personal views, feelings, perceptions and experiences.
- Finally, focus groups have become common in participation research, especially for generating different perspectives on topical issues, such as youth representation in the Brexit negotiations (Mejias and Banaji, 2017), perspectives on security and nationalism in Scotland during the 2014 independence referendum campaign (Botterill *et al.*, 2016), participation and experiences of discrimination by young Muslims in Scotland (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019), youth engagement and participation in politics (White, Bruce and Ritchie, 2000; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; O'Toole, 2015).

The following sections report on how the focus groups were conceptualised and detail the process of recruiting young people for three different topical discussions about their activism and the online implementation of the focus groups.

4.5.1.1. Generating the topics of the focus groups

Following the sequential explanatory design, the findings from the quantitative phase were used to determine the topical foci of the qualitative phase. Questions on issues of concern and additional free-text comments were used to develop the topics for the focus group discussions (drawing on the survey questions SQ02a, SQ02b and PQ04). As the survey had shown climate change to be a strong current issue of concern, the topic of the 'environment and climate change' was chosen to be one of the central focus areas of the group discussions.

Figure 4.4. Word cloud generated from the 300 most frequent words in the survey's free-text comments



As part of the survey, 651 comments had been collected on young people's current worries. A word frequency analysis identified that 'rights', 'racism', and 'inequality' were commonly used. Figure 4.4 depicts the 300 most frequent words (excluding common *stop words*, such as conjunctions, articles, etc.).

These 651 free-text comments were coded to detect commonalities and any trends among young people's concerns. The coding process confirmed the thematic tendencies indicated by the word frequency analysis. The three themes with the most comments include 'racism and xenophobia', 'LGBT rights (specifically transgender rights)', and 'gender inequality and sexism'. Further comments addressed issues of 'radicalisation and polarisation' within party politics and society, inequalities due to 'social class and economic distribution', and 'violations of human rights'.

Figure 4.5. Hierarchy chart of most frequently expressed concerns in the survey's free-text comments, coded as themes

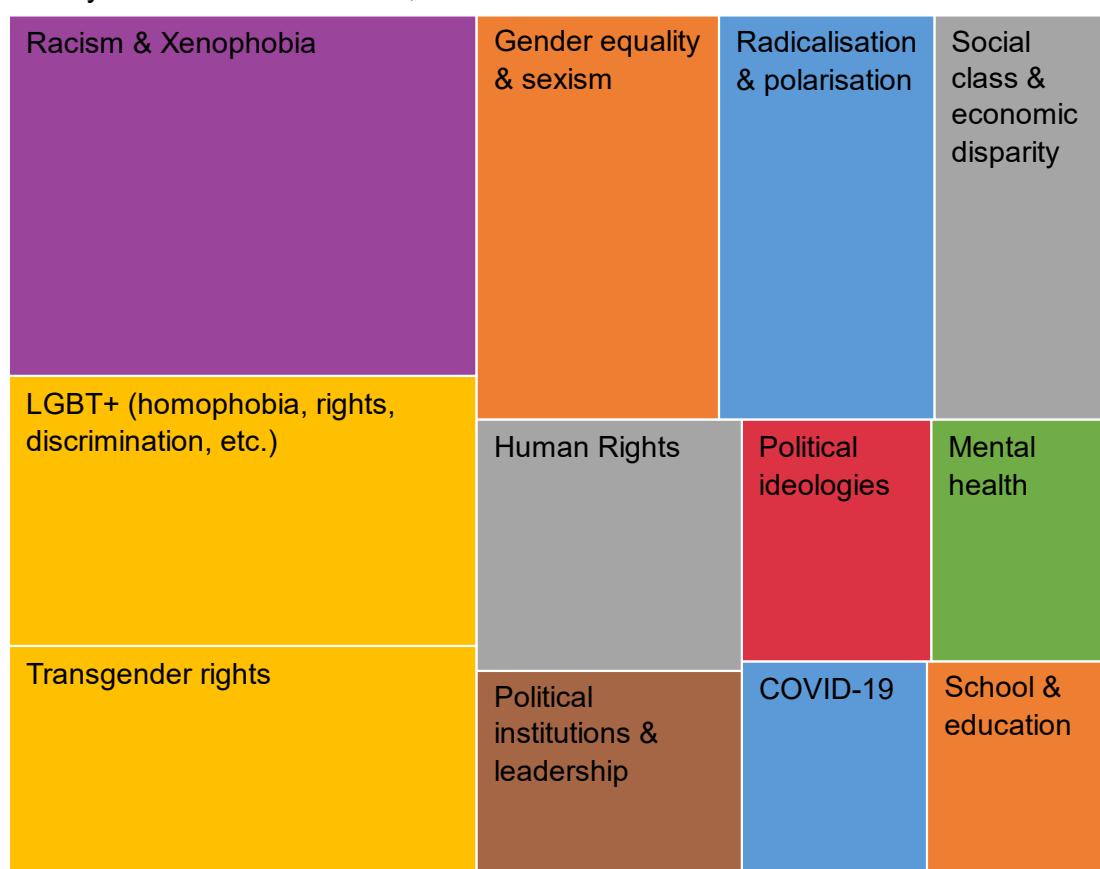


Figure 4.5 shows the 12 most frequent themes identified by coding the free-text comments. The size of the box reflects the number of references. In terms of commonalities, the comments tended to focus on personal identity-based rights and concerns about rights protection, or rather the lack of rights protection, by the state and by law. These personal identity-based rights

encompassed rights based on one's race and ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation as well as disability. Many comments displayed an intersectional perspective on issues of inequality, pointing out interdependencies between social issues. Despite seemingly similar, comments on being worried about polarisation and radicalisation were directed at both the left and right ends of the political spectrum. While there were tendencies towards worrying about personal rights, inequality, and rights in a broader sense, the comments left by respondents also demonstrated that young people represent a heterogeneous group, and it remains essential to treat them as such. Based on the survey data including the coding of the free-text comments, three topics were chosen as focal points of the focus groups around young people's activism:

- environment and climate change;
- anti-racism activism and the *Black Lives Matter* movement, human rights and immigration;
- feminism and LGBTQ*+ rights, equality and social justice

The focus groups had been planned as issue-based discussions. By focusing on one issue of activism at a time, participants were anticipated to have some common grounds to share their experiences. At the same time, issues of activism were deliberately kept broad, so that participants could bring in their own perspectives.

4.5.1.2. Planning the focus group discussions

Focus group discussions provide an opportunity to explore a topic with a group of people. This constellation enables comparisons between the participants, i.e. the researcher can contrast views from participants or underline shared views (Frey and Fontana, 1991; Barbour, 2005), and offers the possibility of engaging in a "process of collective sense-making" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 186). Collective sense-making refers to "how views are constructed, expressed, defended and (sometimes) modified during the course of conversations with

others" (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 193), in other words, how discourse and interaction with others influence one's views and way of self-expression. The content of focus group discussions follows less of a strict guide than individual interviews and is navigated by a loosely structured interview guide (Barbour, 2005). The interview schedules for the focus groups were structured into three main sections, including (1) topics of activism and issues of concern, (2) political actions and activities in activism, and (3) feelings about activism. This guided the discussions from the participants' topics of interest to their engagement in politics and activism, and towards their emotions and views on their activism and politics in general (see Appendix 4 for focus group schedule).

Two key elements in focus group implementation are facilitation and the use of adequate language. The role of facilitation and the level of interference or moderation by the facilitator should be defined before the implementation of the group discussions (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, p. 28-29). As this project aimed for semi-structured focus group sessions, the researcher followed an interview schedule (approved by the School of Social Work & Social Policy's ethics committee), guiding the conversation with questions while allowing for free discussion. Ahead of the focus groups, participants were offered a short individual introduction chat and were given information about the study and the purpose of the research. Consent was given by participants by returning a signed consent form to the researcher and was reaffirmed at the start of the focus group session (see Appendix 3 for Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Focus Groups). The researcher reminded participants at the beginning of the discussion that they could leave the session at any point, and agreed with the group to treat the discussion as a safe space in which each member is treated respectfully and enabled to express themselves.

It was anticipated that the group setting might also have effects on the individual level of contributing to the discussion. Group effects are a commonly observed phenomenon in focus group research and can take different forms, such as the dominance of one or several speakers (Asch, 1951), an uncritically assumed collective position on an issue (Janis, 1982), or expressing views

which are affected due to the need to conform with expectations or to confirm social norms. To minimise such group effects, the moderation of the group needs to encourage individual participation and react to group interaction (Barbour, 2018, p. 23). While not all group effects can be prevented, the facilitator's role is to balance the discussion by gently intervening in situations of dominating speakers and to ensure that the focus on the overall topic is maintained. In the discussions for this study, participants showed to be self-aware and responsive to one another. This facilitated a freely flowing group discussion, often needing little or no intervention from the facilitator.

4.5.2. Data collection

A total of eight focus groups took place in May and June 2021, with an overall participant number of 30 (see Table 4.4). The group discussions were centred around topics of activism, in particular environmental activism, anti-racism activism, and feminist and LGBTQ activism.

Table 4.4. Overview of focus groups

Topic	Referred to as	Number of groups	Total of participants
Environment and climate change	<i>climate</i>	3	13
Anti-racism activism and the <i>Black Lives Matter</i> movement, human rights and immigration	<i>anti-racism</i>	3	6
Feminism and LGBTQ*+ rights, equality and social justice	<i>feminism and LGBT</i>	2	11
Total		8	30

Although the researcher had originally aimed for groups of 4-6 people, the actual group sizes varied, with between 2-7 participants. The focus group size had been decided on by consulting literature on focus group research design

(Wilkinson, 1998; Barbour, 2018) and also took into account that the sessions were taking place in an online environment. The focus group discussions took place via Zoom in and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each.

The decision to stop at eight focus groups was informed by the literature on the need for theoretical saturation, which means more interviews would be less likely to uncover new themes (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Strauss and Corwin, 1990). Depending on the context, social research regards theoretical saturation as fulfilled, or likely to be fulfilled, with between 10-12 interviews (Breen, 2006). Applying the concept of theoretical saturation to the method of focus group interviews, two to three focus groups, with an average of eight participants each, are adequate to “capture at least 80% of themes on a topic” (Guest, Namey and McKenna, 2017, p. 16). However, it is important to note that an increase in the heterogeneity of a group requires an increase in focus groups. In other words, the more similar participants of focus groups are, the more likely it is that two to three focus groups are sufficient to cover a substantial number of themes on a topic.

4.5.2.1. Access and recruitment

Participants in the focus groups were young people aged 16 to 24, civically and/or politically active, with residence in the UK. Recruitment took place via purposive sampling by contacting survey participants who had given their e-mail addresses to take part in further research. Potential participants were contacted by e-mail in April and May 2021 and invited to join one of three topical groups – environmental activism, anti-racism activism, or feminist and LGBTQ activism. In total, 476 survey respondents provided a contact address. Out of those, 42 agreed to participate in focus group discussions, and 30 actually attended the sessions. This equates to a response and recruitment success rate of about 6.3%. While there was great interest in joining discussions on environmental and feminist issues, fewer people came forward to participate in discussions on the *Black Lives Matter* movement and anti-racism activism, despite this topic being one of the most mentioned ones in

the survey comments. Table 4.5 provides an overview of the focus group participants, including pseudonymised names, age and gender, and the discussion topic they participated in.

Table 4.5. List of focus group participants

Name	Age	Gender	Area	Social class	Education status	Ethnicity	Focus group
Adrian	20	Male	England (urban)	Middle class	in university	White British	climate
Anne	19	Female	England (urban)	-	in college	White British	anti-racism
Carol	18	Female	England (town)	Working class	in college	White and Black Caribbean	climate
Charlotte	16	Female	England (urban)	Middle class	in school	White British	climate
Chloe	18	Female	England (town)	Working class	in college	White and Black Caribbean	feminism and LGBT
Clara	17	Female	England (urban)	Working class	in college	White British	feminism and LGBT
Elena	16	Female	England	Working class	in college	Asian/Asian British	climate
Ella	18	Female	England (rural)	Working class	in college	White British	feminism and LGBT
Felix	23	Male	England (town)	Middle class	seeking work	White British	climate
Frankie	16	Gender-nonconforming	England (small town)	Middle class	in school	White and Asian	anti-racism
Gertrude	16	Female	Northern Ireland	Middle class	in school	White British	feminism and LGBT
Hailey	17	Female	England (town)	Middle class	in college	White British	climate
Heather	24	Female	England (town)	Middle class	working full-time (office job)	White British	Feminism and LGBT
Jane	16	Female	England	-	in school	White British	climate
Jasmine	18	Female	England	Middle class	in college	Any other white background	feminism and LGBT
Jayden	17	Male	England (rural)	Working class	in college	White British	climate
Jennifer	18	Female	England	Middle class	in college	White British	climate
Josephine	18	Female	England (rural)	Middle class	in school	White British	anti-racism
Katherine	17	Female	England	Working class	in school	White British	climate

Lena	18	Female	Scotland	Working class	in school	White British	feminism and LGBT
Lindsay	17	Gender-nonconforming	England (rural)	Middle class	in college	White British	feminism and LGBT
Lynda	17	Female	England	Working class	in college	White and Black Caribbean	climate
Madeleine	16	Female	England (rural)	Middle class	in school	White British	feminism and LGBT
Megan	19	Female	England (urban)	-	currently not in education	White British	feminism and LGBT
Naomi	17	Female	England (rural)	Middle class	in college	White British	feminism and LGBT
Paula	16	Female	England (urban)	Middle class	in school	White British	anti-racism
Sadie	24	Female	England (urban)	Working class	in university	Other ethnic background	anti-racism
Shirley	17	Gender-nonconforming	England (small town)	Working class	in college	White British	climate
Theresa	17	Female	England	Middle class	in school	White British	climate
Yolanda	16	Female	England (town)	Working class	in school	White British	anti-racism

Similar to the survey, more young women than young men participated in the group discussions and the majority of participants identified as white. Implementing focus groups in an online setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic presented some challenges but also offered advantages, such as access to participants who lived across the UK, including more rural areas.

4.5.2.2. Practicalities of the implementation of the focus groups

Conducting focus group research comes with several practical challenges to the implementation of the group interview itself, regarding the (1) setting, (2) facilitation and (3) transcription. Focus groups require time for planning, developing an interview schedule, and preparing the moderation of the group (Barbour, 2005). Considering this project, issues arising from taking the focus groups completely online also needed to be considered.

The setting of a focus group refers to the location which should put participants at ease and not be affected by any noise disturbance. The location also needs to accommodate any required equipment, such as recording devices. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus groups for this project were taking place online, using the video-conference software Zoom. Thus, the physical environment of the focus groups consisted of the facilitator's and the participants' locations, i.e. their homes. While the necessity to hold the discussions virtually as opposed to a physical in-person meeting enabled people to take part independently of their location in the UK, it also brought three potential risks. One was that the participant's location would not be a safe space to talk from, or the focus group would increase their vulnerability. Second, the digital form made it potentially more difficult to build rapport between the researcher and participants. Third, the lack of physical colocation could not just affect the relationship between the researcher and the participants but also potentially decrease the interaction within the group.

These risks were assessed by the researcher and strategies were developed to address them. Although the location of a participant as a safe space could not be guaranteed, the focus group setting was created to be an exchange among people of similar ages and interests in a respectful manner. To this end, participants were asked to agree to certain discussion rules and also invited to limit their displayed name during the discussions to their first name or the name they would like to go by. Before the focus group discussions, participants were offered individual introduction virtual meetings with the researcher to become familiar with the video software Zoom and to be able to ask any questions. These 'check-in' sessions were unrecorded and also served to increase familiarity between the researcher and the participants. In order to increase rapport during the group discussions, the researcher would reflect on what people were saying and relate statements back to indicative findings from the survey. To help build rapport among the group, the focus groups were centred around a specific topic of activism, so that participants could bond over their experiences of being engaged in a specific topic of activism. Furthermore, the focus groups began with introductions, to create a more familiar atmosphere

among the participants. Although the interaction between participants was reduced to the virtual setting, participants proved to be very knowledgeable about video chatting, especially about the functions of Zoom. Since the focus groups took place more than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, most of them had had experiences using Zoom in some form as part of their education, including school, college, and university. In bigger discussion groups, participants used the 'raise hand' function and referred to one another in their contributions, so that the discussion between participants tended to flow without needing to be guided or moved forward by the researcher often.

As Barbour (2018) noted, "the researcher's persona does impact on the form and content of data elicited using focus groups" (p. 59). This is also true for other forms of qualitative data collection, though it is one important aspect to consider in group facilitation. There is no unanimously agreed stance on whether it is better for the facilitator to be closer to the group participants in their characteristics or if a difference between the researcher and the group, real or perceived, is more helpful. While in some instances, similarity between the moderator and the group may help to bond, establish trust and put participants at ease (Smithson, 2000), in other instances, perceived or real 'sameness' may result in reduced critical reflection of the researcher and lack of in-depth answers due to assumed common views (Barbour, 2018). In this study, being a researcher who was not much older than the participants, female and with a background in civic education and political activism appeared to be helpful in terms of finding the 'right' language and connecting with young people on the issues they were engaged in.

After the focus group discussions had taken place, the data was transcribed from audio to text. One benefit of conducting focus groups online was the automated transcription provided by the video platform Zoom. Although these transcriptions were imperfect, they provided a decent base to transcribe the focus groups verbatim. Although transcripts do not necessarily have to represent all verbatim language (Macnaghten and Myers, 2004), full transcripts can help when returning to analysis after some time (Barbour,

2018). The fully transcribed focus group interviews were also pseudonymised before qualitative data analysis could begin.

4.5.3. Qualitative data analysis

Focus groups have become an increasingly popular choice in social research (Wilkinson, 2011), however, while there is plenty of literature on their implementation available, less has been published on their analysis (Silverman, 2014, p. 209; Fletcher, 2017). Depending on the epistemological underpinnings, data analysis of focus groups either corresponds to the individualistic social psychology perspective or the social constructionist perspective (Silverman, 2014, p. 210). The analytical approach of the individualistic social psychology perspective places the individual at the centre of the process of generating beliefs and opinions. The setting of the group discussion functions as a means to elicit these beliefs and opinions by “stimulat[ing] and facilitat[ing] participants’ own thinking and reasoning in interaction with one another” (Silverman, 2014, p. 210).

Following this perspective and taking into account the underlying research paradigm of *critical realism*, which is critical of realism by acknowledging that systematic research methods may only ever come so close to the existent reality, methods of strongly anti-realist ontological assumptions – the paradigmatic grounds of conversation and discourse analysis – did not seem suitable (Potter, 1997). Albeit recognising that personal perspectives are subjective and constructed, critical realism implies that while images of reality are constructs, these constructs are reflecting the perceptions of reality and are not entirely products of the individual. Yet, while this indicates that critical realism does not follow a radical approach, it is still reliant on the notion of constructionism in its epistemology. As critical realism does not subscribe to the dichotomous distinction between positivism and constructionism, it requires a methodological approach that aims for reconciliation between aspects of both of those paradigms. Thus, research based on critical realism “can and should usually incorporate data of different sorts, quantitative and

qualitative, historical and current – anything that the researcher (or their research subjects) have good reason to think ‘makes a difference’” (O’Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, p. 16).

To determine which analytic approach was most suitable in the context of the qualitative phase of this study, the unit of analysis needs to be identified and the paradigmatic assumptions considered. As argued earlier, a reason for choosing the focus group method was that it complemented the quantitative phase. Yet, while the collective of the group is part of the process in which these views and experiences are shared, the focus lies still on the individual within the group and not the group as an aggregated participant in the research phase. The ‘unit of analysis’ is the individual, or expressed more precisely, inferences are being made from the individual experiences and their personal perceptions of activism, rather than concluding aggregated experiences of the groups towards a constructed ‘community of activists’. Therefore, the individualistic social psychology perspective applies more strongly than the social constructionist perspective to the analysis of data from the focus groups in this particular study. One such analytical approach is given in the form of thematic analysis, which relies on a systematic, yet flexible coding of qualitative data based on which themes are produced (Clarke and Braun, 2017). In this regard, thematic analysis is related to other analytics approaches, such as grounded theory, critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis.

4.5.3.1. Using thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, which “can be an essentialist or realist method” (Braun and Clarke, 2006), was chosen as fitting both the perspective on the nature of the focus groups (individualistic social psychology perspective) with the individuals’ views as the unit of analysis, and the paradigmatic realist implications, influenced by the recognition of social construction. Braun and Clarke (2006) position thematic analysis in-between the paradigmatic poles of realism (or essentialism) and constructionism and claim that critical realism is

also located in-between, as “individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of ‘reality’” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81). As a contextualised method, the focus and outcome of thematic analysis are dependent on the epistemological paradigm. Thematic analysis is used “to interrogate patterns within personal or social meaning around a topic, and to ask questions about the implications of these” (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297). In the case of critical realism, thematic analysis is undertaken with a realist approach, i.e. “motivations, experience, and meaning” can be theorised and explored “because a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 85).

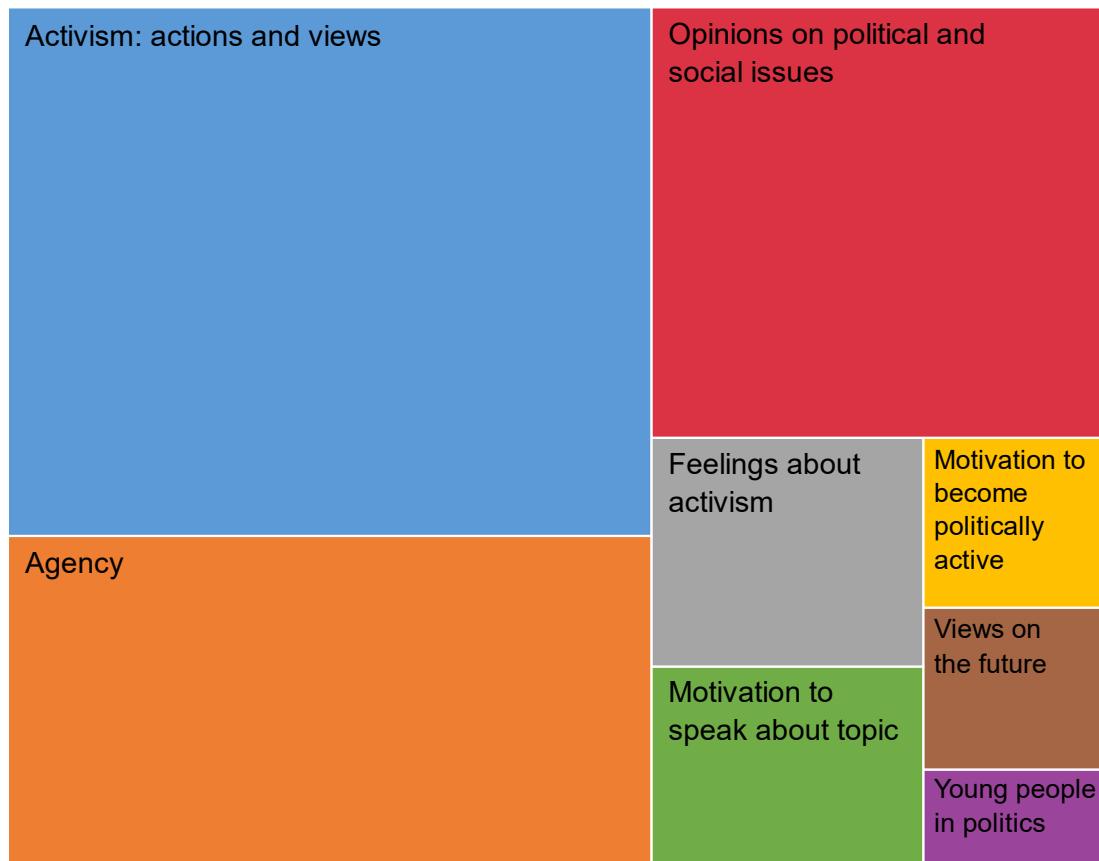
This study applied a reflexive thematic analysis in its coding of the focus group transcripts. Reflexive thematic analysis involves a coding process that includes both semantic and latent coding and is looking for themes both inductively and deductively. This means that the researcher engages with the data at a face-value level, as well as with meanings that are hidden within the text. Research questions can guide the coding process while remaining open to themes that may have not been anticipated by the research design (Braun and Clarke, 2021). In the application of reflexive thematic analysis, themes were not simply found but generated by the interaction of participants and the researcher. Themes are furthermore not a summary of just a one-dimensional concept – those are domains – but refer to “patterns of shared meaning underpinned or united by a core concept” (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

4.5.3.2. The coding process

On the basis of reflexive thematic analysis, the coding process was primarily guided by the research questions, specifically focusing on personal perceptions of and emotional attachments to participating in activism. The coding also reflected the three main parts of the interview schedule which consisted of questions around (1) the topic or area of activism (e.g.

environmental activism), (2) the actions participants were involved with, and (3) their views on their activism as well as broader politics and society. The answers to and discussions about the predominantly open-ended questions led the direction of the group conversation and therefore also influenced which domains and themes were generated during the analysis. In Figure 4.6, the hierarchy of domains of coded themes is depicted. The size of the boxes reflects the number of codes subsumed under each domain.

Figure 4.6. Hierarchy of domains within focus group transcripts.



Guided by the research questions and interview schedules, the researcher developed eight central domains during the analysis. The majority of themes was subsumed under the domain of *actions and views* within activism, followed by the perception of *agency* and discussing *political and social issues*, especially in relation to the topic of activism central to the group participants. Despite seemingly separated, these domains and codes overlapped within the discussion, i.e. when participants were talking about their involvement with activism, they would often also express how they felt about a particular topic

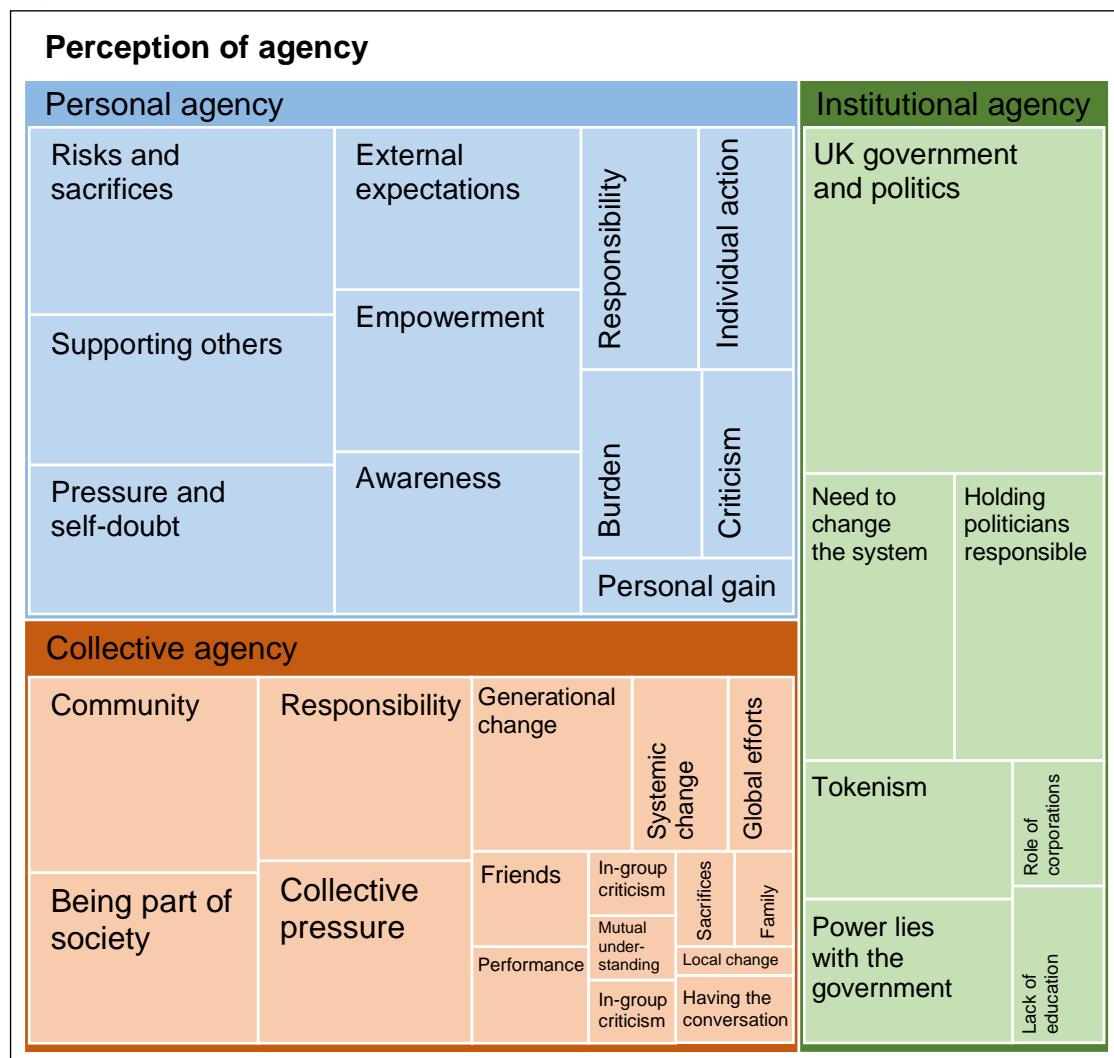
and who were other people involved in a particular action. Table 4.6 summarises the coding focus of each of the eight domains.

Table 4.6. Domain summaries of coded focus group transcripts

Domains	Content of domains	Corresponding part in interview schedule
Motivation to speak about topic	Participants' reasons to attend a focus group and their motivations for caring about a particular topic	Topic or area of activism
Opinions on political and social issues	Participants' opinions on (British) politics and important issues, as well as controversies in (British) society	
Activism: Actions and views	Participants' involvement with different forms of political action and their views on issues within activism, such as social media and performative activism	Actions participants were involved with
Motivation to become active	Participants' motivations to take action and their personal connection to their topic of interest	
Agency	Participants' perceptions of personal, collective and institutional agency, including emotions attached to these forms of responsibility	
Feelings about activism	Participants' feelings about their own activism	Participants' views on activism and politics
Views on the future	Participants' views on the future, in particular, their hopes for the future in relation to their activist topics	
Young people in politics	Participants' perceptions of how young people are treated by politicians and political institutions, and of their own generation	

These domains served to organise the topics of the focus group discussions, although they did not represent universally shared meanings. Instead, the subsequent themes and subthemes contained the differentiation between shared understandings of a concept and diverging views. An example is the domain *Agency*. Themes involved how young people perceived *personal agency*, *collective agency* and *institutional agency*. Attached to the themes were subthemes, aggregated from codes. The subthemes explored how participants felt about agency and which feelings and experiences they associated with these three forms of agency. Figure 4.7 visualises the themes and subthemes of the domain *Agency*, with the boxes representing the number of codes aggregated under each theme.

Figure 4.7. Hierarchy of themes within the domain *Agency*



Themes subsumed under *Personal Agency* were primarily generated from codes centring around experienced *risks and sacrifices* in connection to activism, the intention to *support others* and feelings of *pressure and self-doubt* associated with partaking in activism, followed by themes on perceived *external pressures, empowerment and awareness*.

4.6. Methodological reflections

This section discusses the ethical dimension of the project, the challenges and limitations of the study as well as the quality criteria observed for research. Furthermore, the discussion also illustrates how ethical issues and potential challenges were addressed in the research design, and how the quality criteria for research were considered and achieved.

4.6.1. Ethics

Ethics in research refers to the principles on which studies are being conducted. While, as Hammersley (2015) noticed, it is difficult to find a universal definition of what is being included in the adjective 'ethical', principles – i.e. general considerations regarding the involvement of humans or animals – are foundational guidelines of research. This study acknowledged the core principles of ethics as given by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2020) as the foundation for ensuring the ethicality of the research. The ESRC names six principles which include: (1) the benefit of the research project for the public and the minimisation of harm for participants, (2) protecting people's rights and dignity, (3) voluntary, informed and consented to participation, (4) integrity and transparency of the research, (5) responsibility and accountability of the researcher, and (6) independent research and declaration of conflicts of interest (ESRC, 2020).

These six core principles were considered in the research design and the application for ethical approval before the study could commence. With the objective to investigate young people's civic and political participation in the

UK, the project pursued a valid academic and public interest. For both the quantitative and the qualitative dimensions, informed consent and confidentiality were crucial. Specifically in the focus groups, potential harm to participants needed to be avoided. As respondents and focus group participants could be aged 16 or 17, the protection of minors also had to be guaranteed. For this project, ethical approval was granted by the School of Social Work & Social Policy's ethics committee.

Quantitative research methods “must take into account a variety of ethical concerns, including protecting human subjects from all forms of abuse, guarding the privacy of information, and presenting results that accurately reflect the information provided by respondents” (Oldendick, 2012, p. 23). With a strong focus on matching theoretical models with empirical data, less discussion is taking place regarding the ethical dimensions of quantitative research (Zyphur and Pierides, 2017). In the context of conducting a survey, these ethical dimensions include the importance of an adequate sampling process, an appropriate questionnaire, informed consent of the respondents to the survey and protecting respondents’ anonymity (Oldendick, 2012). For the online survey, participants were informed about the purpose and the content of the survey and the use of their data. Only after being presented with this information could they choose whether to give their consent and proceed with the survey. The introduction about the survey’s intention, purpose and use of the questionnaire gave the transparency needed for participants to make an informed decision (Gideon, 2012). The piloting of the questionnaire before the main data collection phase allowed the researcher to reflect upon the content and presentation of the survey, potentially suggestive and/or incomprehensible questions were removed or altered (Bishop, 2004). On the issue of anonymity, data from the survey has been kept anonymised and secure, in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the European General Data Protection Regulation (2018). Data was not stored with a person’s identification or their computer’s IP. Participants were asked if they would like to voluntarily submit their e-mail addresses in case of interest in participating

in the focus groups. Any e-mail addresses were stored separately from the respondents' survey answers.

For the focus groups, informed consent was likewise required. Informed consent means that participants understand the “nature of the research, who is conducting it, who is funding it, under what auspices, what their involvement will be and for how long” (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 55). Furthermore, the informed consent also included that participants were aware that their partaking in focus group research was voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw at any time and a right to privacy. For consent to be granted, i.e. the communication of consent as an act of autonomous decision making, the researcher must “provide a suitable type and quantity of information as a basis for the participant’s choice” (Sim and Waterfield, 2019, p. 3004).

As the recruitment of focus group participants took place via the survey, participants were already familiar with the overall purpose of the project. People who had voluntarily opted to be part of the focus groups received a written briefing about their participation before the discussions and were offered an online chat with the researcher, a ‘check-in’ session which did not record any data. Participants were briefed again about the purpose and content of the discussion and the use of their data at the beginning of each focus group session. The consent form which the participants were requested to sign on the condition that they have understood and agreed to the terms was a requirement for participation and emphasised the freedom to withdraw from the research at any point (Blaikie and Priest, 2019, p. 57).

The nature of the focus groups as a collective setting can create challenges in ensuring participants’ confidentiality and bears different risks of harm than the method of individual interviews might do. Confidentiality refers to the use of information once it has been obtained, whereas anonymity relates to the issue of attribution, i.e. pieces of information may be attributable to a single individual and, thus, indicating or even revealing the identity of the person who has given out these pieces (Sim and Waterfield, 2019). In focus groups, both internal and external confidentiality are relevant (Tolich, 2009). Internal confidentiality

refers to the disclosure of participants' information by one of the group participants, while external confidentiality refers to the disclosure of information by the researcher. While the researcher has control over the latter, internal confidentiality may be more difficult to achieve, as it is reliant on the group's agreement to keep confidentiality about the focus group content and participants. To increase the level of internal confidentiality, Morgan (1997) recommends that the recruitment of focus group members should only include people who do not share a pre-existing relationship with one another. During the discussion itself, the researcher (or moderator) needs to "minimize the risk of over-disclosure" (Sim and Waterfield, 2019, p. 3010), since the oversharing of information has been found to be more likely to occur in group settings (Morgan, 1998; Bloor *et al.*, 2001; Frith, 2000) but is also more difficult to repair or amend than it would be in a one-on-one research situation (Carey and Asbury, 2012).

To ensure the external confidentiality of the focus group participants in this project, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the transcribed data and, if necessary, altered sensitive data, such as information about participants' locations. The issue of the group setting and internal confidentiality was addressed by establishing 'group discussion rules' (Kleiber, 2004; Breen 2006), ground rules which were introduced to the participants prior to the start of the discussion. The aspects of the participants' confidentiality and anonymity were also part of the debriefing at the end of each group discussion, reminding participants that they were expected to treat the information disclosed by participants with care and giving them room for bringing up any issues or concerns (Breen, 2006; Sherriff *et al.*, 2014).

Taking part in a focus group "can have either a positive or negative impact" (Barbour, 2018) and it is the task of the researcher to evaluate the risks of group discussions beforehand and to seek ethical approval for this research method. As discussed, focus group research bears the risk of over-disclosure as well as other participants breaching the principles of confidentiality and anonymity – issues that the researcher must be aware of and, as the moderator, needs to address and guide. Two other aspects to consider when

evaluating the potential negative impact of this research method are the risk of harm to the participants and any sensitive issues which may come up and/or which also may induce harm to participants. Harm, in this context, refers to both physical and psychological harm. Since sharing information about oneself within a group generates personal vulnerability, certain issues can “cause distress or embarrassment” (Sim and Waterfield, 2019, p. 3011). While some of these negative feelings may be inevitable, due to the nature of the research, it is important for the moderator to be aware of such potential consequences and to lead the discussion in a way in which they are either prevented from occurring in the first place or by “minimiz[ing] their impact when and if they do arise” (p. 3012). For example, some topics may be ruled out as part of the discussion rules beforehand to prevent triggering effects. However, the moderator still needs to be prepared to respond to sensitive issues and feelings of distress by allowing negative feelings to be felt but simultaneously guiding the discussion towards a different question (Morgan, 1992; Kitzinger and Farquhar, 1999; Owen, 2001).

This study engaged with young people who were active in political and/or civic participation, and it was anticipated that sensitive topics could arise. Expressions of discrimination, racism or sexism were not tolerated as per the group discussion rules and keeping a respectful conversation was agreed to by participants prior to the discussion. While there were no strongly sensitive topics discussed in the focus groups on climate change activism, the discussions on anti-racism and feminist and LGBTQ activism involved participants speaking about issues of discrimination and racism, and gender-based and sexual violence. These issues were brought up by the participants themselves and sparked conversation among the participants. Following Sim and Waterfield’s (2019) advice, it then became the responsibility of the moderation “to deal with sensitive and potentially distressing issues that arise – perhaps unpredictably – through the dynamics of the interaction within the focus group” (p. 3018). In these situations, the researcher allowed the conversation to continue but also evaluated whether a change in topic or a break was needed. Directly after such a discussion about sensitive issues, the

researcher offered to de-brief by asking participants how they felt and whether they were able to continue. Each focus group session concluded with a debriefing and information on how to access help for mental health concerns or personal experiences with hate speech and discrimination.

4.6.2. Quality criteria for research

This section applies quality criteria for good research practice such as reliability, replicability and validity to the proposed research design (Panke, 2018). Since these criteria are strongly linked to quantitative research, further criteria for the quality of qualitative research as well as those regarding mixed-method research are being discussed.

Literature on research methods names *reliability*, *replicability* and *validity* as the most important quality criteria for research. *Reliability*, which may also be referred to as measurement validity, is concerned with how fitting a means of measure, e.g. an indicator, is designed and operated to determine a result (Panke, 2018). While this might seem self-evident, validity of measurement is highly dependent on attribution and concepts, in both quantitative and qualitative research. Measures and scales are subjected to human evaluation of saturation. Similar issues of reliability are found within qualitative research, where concepts are part of the measurement process. While concepts can help focus research on a certain issue, they also are dependent on subjective perceptions and may potentially impose an image on people or a group of people they would not identify themselves as. Reliability in the context of qualitative research has come to be differentiated as *external reliability* – meaning the aspect of replicating a qualitative study, not to replicate the findings but to replicate the method – and *internal reliability*, which includes incorporating other researchers into the project to agree on the consistency of a concept (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982).

Against this heterogeneous background of what reliability means for quantitative and qualitative research, the importance of concepts and the

adequacy of measurement tools need to be underlined. The survey was highly dependent on the sample and the consistency of concepts. By drawing comparisons to existing comparable studies, such as the Audit of Political Engagement and respective Eurobarometer survey, the questionnaire was designed to replicate the style of questions and to present several perspectives on its investigated factors for non-electoral participation. In addition, the survey was checked for inconsistencies in language and style by running a pilot survey prior to the main data collection. As for the reliability of the survey findings, efforts were undertaken to generate a large and representative sample of young people in the UK (N = 1,094, unweighted; N = 948, weighted). When applying the concept of reliability to the qualitative phase, it is important to note the ongoing debate on whether and to which extent “the traditional concepts of reliability and validity can, or should, be applied to qualitative research” (Barker and Pistrang, 2005). Instead, quality criteria for qualitative research and its dependency on concepts are discussed later on, as part of the reflections on transferability and dependability of qualitative research.

Replicability is another essential criterion for quantitative methodology. It means that future research should be able to obtain the same or, dependent on the research method, very similar results as the original study. Research replicability contributes to validity of findings and transparency (Dale, 2006). Representativeness also ties in with the criterion of *replicability*. Whereas a survey can be reproduced to a certain degree, qualitative research cannot be replicated in the same sense (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). Replicability in qualitative research can refer to external reliability which, however, does not equate to the same procedure that is standardised as part of a quantitative approach. Given how difficult replication is for qualitative research, methods are more concerned with transferability rather than an identical reiteration. To create a study that is replicable and transparent (Dale, 2006), the survey had to be designed to be comparable to previous and similar studies, and the data collection and analysis process needed to be reported in detail. The transferability of the focus group method was achieved by providing a rich

description of the process, aiming for transparency in the applied qualitative methodology.

Validity, the integrity of research findings and their expressiveness or even significance, can be looked at from three different perspectives: *internal validity* (internal consistency and causality), *external validity* (generalisability of the research findings), and *measurement validity* (aptitude of the mode of measuring for the concept which is to be measured; this is linked to reliability and concerns the meaning of measurement). Alternative criteria for qualitative research talk about credibility instead of internal validity, and transferability instead of external validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). For internal and external validity, there are differences between the quantitative method of an online survey and the qualitative method of semi-structured focus group discussions. The internal validity of the focus group approach was high, as the participants themselves explained their motivations and reasons for their behaviour (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). The online survey produced both indicative and inferential findings of statistical significance but could provide the same depth of explaining concepts as the focus group method. In contrast, the external validity was stronger for the survey findings, given the large sample size and the cross-checking with other sources. External validity of the focus groups was more limited, and personal tendencies could be observed within these specific groups of young people around a particular topic of activism instead of broadly generalisable inferences.

As the contextualisation of the selected methods shows, both the quantitative and the qualitative phase of the project exhibited measurement validity. While the purpose of the survey was to look for statistically significant evidence that social and cognitive factors impact one's participatory behaviour and may, therefore, be essential for comprehending activism, the focus groups enabled a deepened subjective perspective in relation to the research topic. The means of measurement were compatible with what they aspired to measure and have been established tools in similar contexts of participation research.

Reliability, replicability and *validity* are criteria that are debated in terms of their applicability and relevance for qualitative research, with no unanimous agreement on how they should be treated in qualitative projects (Bryman, Becker and Sempik, 2008). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in its design, purpose and findings. On this account, there is reasoning that the quality criteria for qualitative research also differ: "Qualitative data collection procedures are often highly flexible [...] and the person of the researcher is an intrinsic part of the conduct of the inquiry" (Barker and Pistrang, 2005, p. 207). Thus, suggestions to move away from the standard criteria of research conduct have been made. Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* as central categories for assessing qualitative research. Under *trustworthiness*, four criteria are subsumed: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* – which are relating to the criteria of internal validity, external validity and reliability. The other part of Lincoln and Guba's evaluation of qualitative research addresses *authenticity* and concern the internal relationship between the researcher and the participants as well as the external relationship between the research project and the public. To understand the alternative quality criteria of qualitative research, the criteria for what Lincoln and Guba describe as *trustworthiness* are contextualised next in relation to focus group discussions.

Credibility is one of the aims qualitative research projects should strive for and it refers to the portrayal of a social reality, based on several similar accounts. These accounts or descriptions of social reality are given by participants in a qualitative research method, such as a focus group. In practice, people participating in the research assess the researcher's concept of reality, by either delivering their own accounts of that social reality or by commenting on the researcher's data analysis and findings (Douglas, 1976; Bloor, 1997). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 373-376) specifically recommended that research participants are given the opportunity to check the study at the end of the research process. While the aspect of *credibility* is an important element in establishing a common language between the researcher and participants and also helps to build rapport and clarity on the topics and concepts talked about,

it bears the risk of seeking validation above anything and losing focus of the project. In this study, rapport with the participants was established by offering voluntary check-in sessions with each individual before the focus groups. Furthermore, the setting of the group discussion fostered an exchange of experiences in which people could express their views and relate to one another. Thus, these interrelations of personal accounts of events, feelings and opinions contributed to a multidimensional picture of young people's activist experiences.

Transferability relates to the claims that can be drawn from qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research, aiming for generalisability is not an option (Flick, 2008, p. 118). Yet, qualitative research is not devoid of opportunities for transferring concepts and indications to other settings. Providing a thick and detailed description of qualitative research is needed for other researchers to be able to transfer social concepts and culturally situated meanings to other contexts and environments. In relation to transferability, dependability is another aspect Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose. *Dependability* of qualitative research is meant to be the equivalent to reliability of quantitative research, with a focus on documentation. Well-kept records of the recruitment process, data collection and analysis provide the grounds for other researchers to understand, comment and amend the research findings. Lastly, *confirmability* means that a research project is being undertaken as objectively as possible, i.e. the research is carried out in good faith and personal influences are being managed and kept to a minimum.

Transferability and dependability were considered in the presentation of the research findings by giving a detailed account of the access to participants and the focus group data analysis. As for *confirmability*, the impossibility of the objectivity of a qualitative research project must be acknowledged. Nevertheless, the focus group design allowed for the researcher to step back and gain insight into the narrative accounts of young people on activism, which generated qualitative findings on the cognitive, social and emotional influences on young people's non-electoral participation and helped contextualising the findings from the quantitative survey.

The alternative quality criteria for qualitative research by Lincoln and Guba are just one example of many different attempts to define how qualitative research quality could be determined (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2008; Tracy, 2010). This study also drew specifically on Barker and Pistrang (2005) who produced a summary of criteria for research, differentiated by criteria applicable to all research, to quantitative research and qualitative research. Barker and Pistrang (2005) highlighted five criteria as applicable for all research methodologies. These encompass the explication of context and purpose, the use of appropriate methods, transparency of procedures, ethical treatment of participants, and the importance of findings (2005, p. 204). Integrity and compliance with ethical considerations represent the basis for the quality of research. While agreeing with the standard criteria for quantitative research (reliability, validity, replicability), their criteria for qualitative research are based on Lincoln and Guba's notion of trustworthiness and the idea of 'grounding' interpretations in data.

For qualitative research, Barker and Pistrang (2005) expressed four additional quality criteria. Firstly, qualitative research is influenced by the personal characteristics and background of the researcher, thus, the disclosure of the researcher's perspective is an essential element in their conduct. Secondly, the description of research data must make the "researcher's understanding of the data explicit" (Barker and Pistrang, 2005, p. 208). Interpretations must be grounded in data and clarify the theoretical and methodological approaches used in data collection and data analysis. The latter point relates to the third aspect of applying a coherent interpretive framework. Lastly, credibility should be checked for by one way or the other, including exploring multiple perspectives, having research audited by another researcher, respondent validation, or forms of triangulation. The criterion of credibility requires "that the investigator has undertaken procedures to check the trustworthiness, or believability, of his or her conclusions, i.e. that the interpretations made do not simply reflect the researcher's own flight of fancy" (Barker and Pistrang, 2005, p. 208).

The focus group design adopted here followed this quality criteria model by disclosing the researcher's background and the applied research paradigm, providing detailed accounts of the data and drawing indications from the data which are contextualised within a theoretical framework. The method of group discussions enabled having different perspectives on the focus of the research and served as an instrument for credibility checks by involving participants in the shaping of key concepts. Furthermore, the study as a whole, through the combination of a quantitative and a qualitative phase, benefitted from triangulation.

Triangulation refers to employing more than one method for a research investigation (Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Webb *et al.*, 1966). The intention is to increase the validity of the research findings by generating data on the same issue, via two or more different forms of methodology (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Although there is a debate on whether several methods can arrive at the same inferences (Gerring, 2017), multimethod research projects are often stating triangulation as part of their rationale for mixed-method research designs (Turner, Cardinal and Burton, 2017). In the context of this study, the two selected methods were very distinct, but they both aimed at producing answers to the same set of research questions. In addition to the aspect of triangulation itself, the quality of the research methods was enhanced by running a pilot study before proceeding with the actual survey and by using the information gathered by the survey to inform the design and implementation of the focus group phase.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the rationale for a mixed-method research design and detailed the methodological approach taken. It first outlined the process of data collection of the survey, including the sampling process and survey design, followed by an initial overview of the quantitative data (with a weighted sample size of 948 respondents) on young people's non-electoral and electoral participation in the UK. Based on the information from the survey, three distinct

topics were deducted as focal points of the subsequent focus group discussions. The chapter then proceeded to depict the approach to implement the focus group discussions with young people who were politically active for one of the identified topics of concerns (climate, anti-racism, feminism and LGBT) and described the analytical method used for engaging with the qualitative data. Concluding with reflections on ethics and quality criteria for research, this chapter has provided the foundation on which the data analysis, detailed in the next chapter, takes place.

5. Analysing young people's non-electoral participation

5.1. Overview

This chapter is structured around the hypotheses developed in Chapter 3. This structure has been chosen in line with the sequential explanatory research design, in which the quantitative method precedes the qualitative one. Commonly, qualitative findings are presented around themes. In this study, these themes are included in the hypothesis-led structure. Themes which could not be attributed to certain hypotheses, specifically relating to feelings and identity in activism, are addressed after the testing of the hypotheses.

The chapter presents the empirical findings on non-electoral participation activities of young people in the UK, and examines the cognitive, emotional and social factors influencing participation of young people in those activities. Based on data from the online survey and the online focus groups, the analysis also distinguishes influential factors for non-electoral and electoral activities and compares potential similarities and differences between different thematic strands of activism. The combination of the quantitative and qualitative analyses aims to answer this study's research questions from different perspectives, in alignment with the paradigmatic considerations of critical realism and in acknowledgement of the subjectivity of perception and experiences:

RQ1: How does the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's activism in the UK?

RQ2: What are young people's experiences of activism, and how do feelings and personal identity relate to young people's involvement with activism?

This chapter first depicts the findings from the survey on young people's participatory behaviour in non-electoral political activities, contextualised within the experiences of activism young people discussed in the focus groups. It then relies on data from the online survey to investigate the effects of cognitive and emotional factors on the levels of engagement in non-electoral

participation, to identify cluster and differences within non-electoral activities, to specify the gender differences in factors influencing non-electoral participation, and to contrast observed effects of the factors on non-electoral participation with electoral participation. Thus, on grounds of the survey data, the hypotheses H1-10 (see section 3.4.2.) are subject to confirmation or rejection. The survey sample used for inferential analysis was weighted to account for variations in the original dataset (see section 4.4.3).

The survey analysis is complemented by the data generated from eight focus group discussions (see subsection 4.5.3.2.) which provides subjective viewpoints from young individuals on the cognitive, emotional and social factors for and within non-electoral and electoral participation. The data from the focus groups was analysed focusing on emotions, identity and values underpinning young people's motivation to take part in activism. This includes illustrating the broad scope of emotions young people connect with their personal activism and discussing how their own identities and values play a role for participating in activism. Since the focus groups were held around three different causes of activism (climate, anti-racism, feminism and LGBT), cross-comparing among the groups indicated that different emotions and motivations were associated with particular topics.

The chapter concludes by summarising the empirical findings and leading towards the theoretical discussion of the results.

5.2. Non-electoral participation of young people in the UK

This section looks at the different types of non-electoral participation – individual and collective activities – and investigates which cognitive and emotional factors affect an increase in young people's engagement in non-electoral participation. It does so by looking at how many activities respondents reported to have participated in to conceptualise non-electoral activities as a count variable. This count variable is then used as the dependent variable in multiple linear regression models. Activities of non-electoral participation are

further analysed by identifying clusters of activities, i.e. which additional activities young people were likely to participate in when already taken part in a different one. The data findings are contextualised by how young people in the focus groups expressed actions they achieved within their activism. Since the survey approach was based on an exhaustive list of activities and assumes a difference between non-electoral and electoral participation, the findings from the qualitative phase were used to verify whether young people used non-electoral activities in their activism and how they relate them to electoral activities.

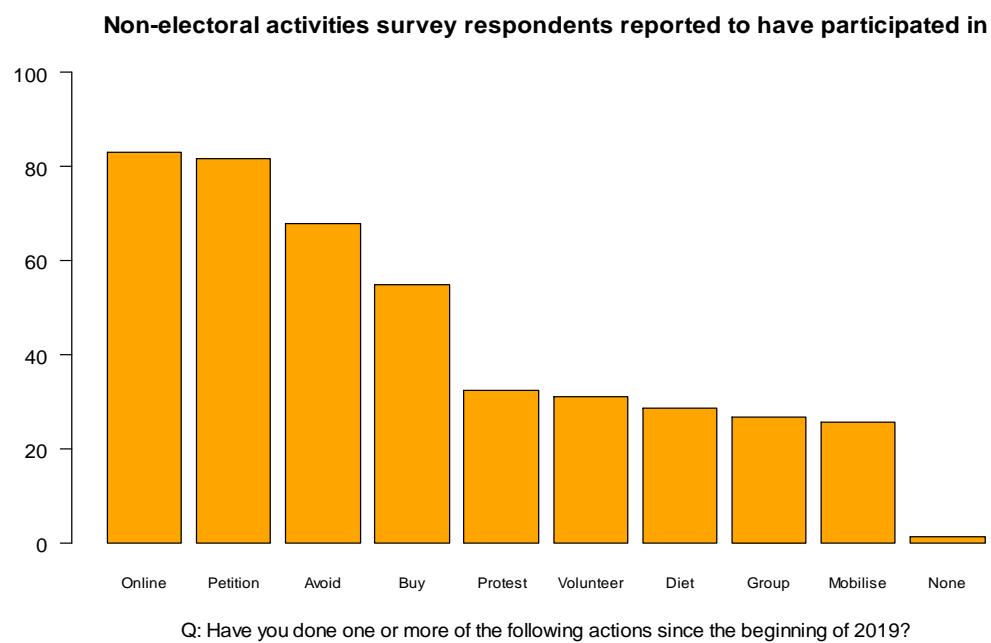
5.2.1. Measuring young people's non-electoral participation

In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate what activities they had participated in since the beginning of 2019 up to the beginning of 2021. This particular time frame was chosen to also include time before the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions to public life. The listed activities have been selected based on the depiction of young people's participation as 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics. Individual activity items included (1) Liking, sharing or posting political content online, (2) Signing a petition, (3) Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons, (4) Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons, (5) Becoming a vegetarian (meatless diet) or going vegan (diet without any animal products). Collective activity items included (1) Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes), (2) Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally, (3) Participating in or being a member of an activist group, (4) Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally. In total, nine different activities could be selected as part of this multiple-response survey question.

Engaging with political content online was the most common form of non-electoral participation (83.0%), followed by signing a petition (81.7%). Political consumerism in the form of buying or avoiding certain products or brands was reported by 54.8% and 67.8%, respectively. Only 28.5% of respondents stated

to have become vegetarian or vegan for ethical, moral or political reasons. About a third (32.5%) said they had taken part in a protest march, demonstration, or rally, and 30.9% said they were volunteering. Activities of personal participation in an activist group and mobilising other people to protest came last, with 26.8% and 25.6% respectively. Figure 5.1 visualises the percentages of respondents who reported to have participated in each of these activities.

Figure 5.1. Non-electoral activities survey respondents stated to have participated in since 2019 (N = 948)



Although there were ten available options in total (nine activities plus the option to have done none of these), the dependent variable *non-electoral activities* was conceptualised as a count variable with range from 1 to 9. This omits the zero as an option, since the dependent variable of *non-electoral activities* from 1-9 displays a near normal distribution (see Figure 5.3), unlike when ranging from 0-9 (see Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2. Distribution of non-electoral activities among respondents (N = 948)

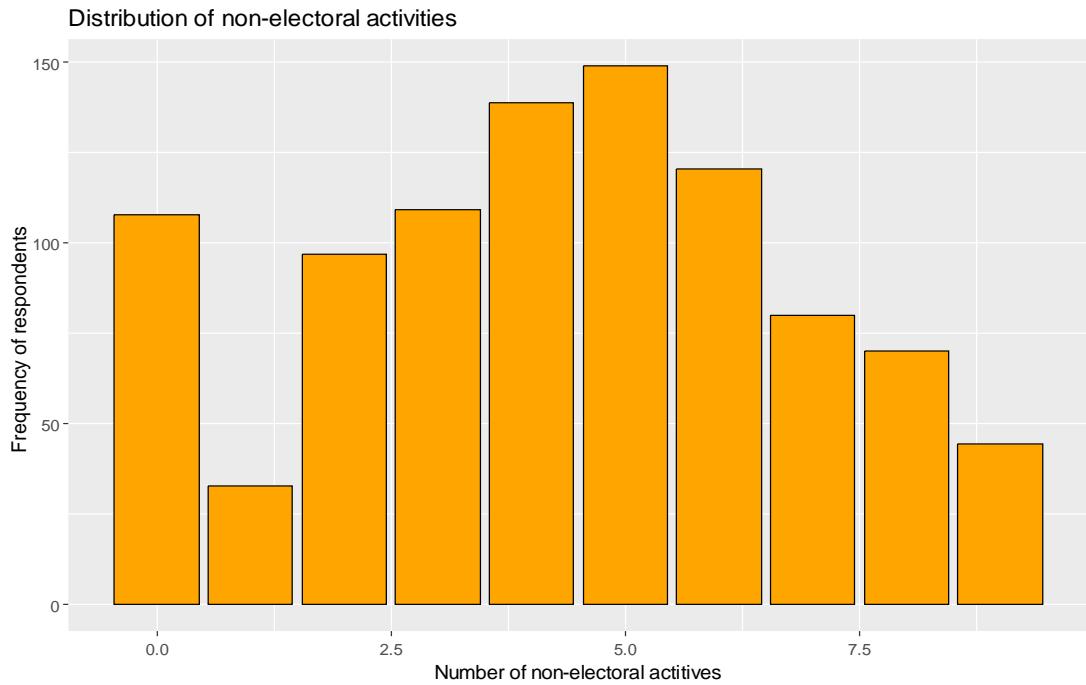
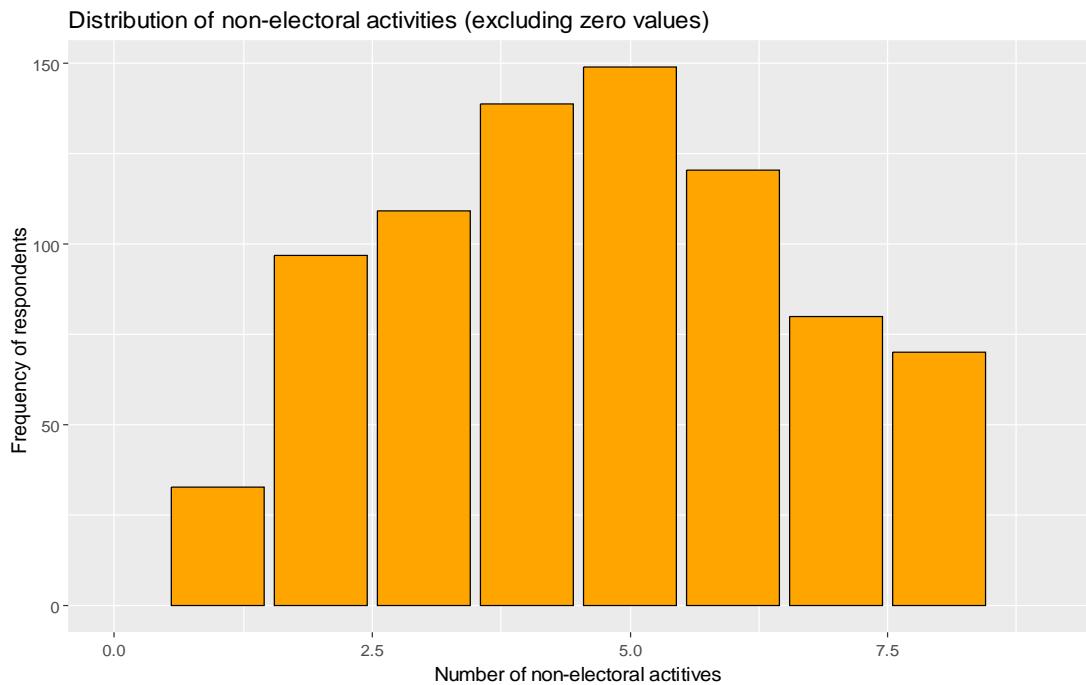


Figure 5.3. Distribution of non-electoral activities among respondents, excluding zero values (N = 840)



Testing for normality showed that this conceptualisation of *non-electoral activities* follows a near normal distribution (see Appendix 6), even though the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, used to determine normality, showed statistical

significance. Given the large sample size ($N = 840$ for non-electoral activities ranging from 1-9), the visual inspection confirmed a near normal distribution. Although a normal distribution of the dependent variable is not a necessary condition for linear regression, the assumption of normality can benefit the validity of statistical tests, increase the interpretability of the estimated coefficients and provide more reliable confidence intervals. A much more crucial assumption is that the residuals, i.e. the differences between the predicted values and the actual values, are normally distributed, as they affect the validity of the statistical inference.

The following linear regression models are based on the normally distributed dependent variables of non-electoral activities, ranging from values 1 to 9. Thus, the models test whether there is an increased likelihood for a person who has already participated in one activity to engage in additional activities. This conceptualisation of a normally distributed dependent variable was chosen because of the aforementioned benefits and under consideration that the high level of zero values in the outcome variable ($N = 108$), comprising of the non-electorally 'inactive' respondents, may lead to a bias towards investigating the effects of the individual factors for becoming involved in non-electoral activities in the first place (rather than investigating the factors increasing participatory levels of young people). Yet, the full linear regression model explaining non-electoral activities (presented in section 5.4.1) is also complemented with a model using a dependent variable of non-electoral activities which includes zero values in order to validate its results (see Appendix 10).

5.2.1.1. Principal component analysis of non-electoral activities

The survey questionnaire aimed at measuring respondents' participation in non-electoral activities. Individual activities of non-electoral participation were expected to be clustered together, as were collective activities. A principal component analysis (PCA) was run on the non-electoral activities to explore the connections between activities listed in the survey. The theoretical

assumption here was that people who participate in one individual activity are also likely to participate in other individual activities. Likewise, people who participated in one collective activity were also likely to participate in other collective activities.

Before using the reduction dimension, the data was tested. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.813, with individual KMO measures all greater than 0.762. Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .0005$), indicating that the data was suited for dimension reduction. After checking suitability and requirements, the principal components analysis revealed two main components, encompassing a total of 9 variables which represent the pre-selected non-electoral activities. The first component with an eigenvalue of 3.607 accounts for 40.08% of the total variance, whereas the second component accounts with an eigenvalue of 1.420 accounts for 15.78% of the total variance. Together, the two components explain 55.86% of the total variance. Both Factor 1 and Factor 2 showed good reliability, with Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.794$ and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.723$, respectively. See Table 5.1 for the components and their rotated factor loadings.

Table 5.1. Summary of exploratory factor analysis results using a principal component analysis

Variable	Rotated Factor Loadings	
	Factor 1	Factor 2
Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons	.813	.123
Signing a petition	.801	.088
Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons	.760	.235
Liking, sharing or posting political content online	.716	.158
Becoming a vegetarian or vegan	.497	.278
Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally	.164	.783
Participating in or being a member of an activist group	.074	.773
Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally	.246	.745
Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes)	.170	.564
Eigenvalues	3.607	1.420
% variance	40.080	15.783
Cronbach's alpha	.794	.723

Table 5.1 above depicts which activities of non-electoral participation are connected to one another. The two identified factors from the principal component analysis showed a cluster of individual activities (political consumerism, petition signing, online political activities) as well as a cluster of collective activities (mobilising others, being part of an activist group, protesting). The two activities standing out were "Becoming a vegetarian or

vegan” and “Volunteering”, both of which did not show any strong connections within the PCA.

Additional Spearman’s rho correlation tests between the nine activity items showed that moderately strong relationships existed between “Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons” and “Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons” ($r_s(734) = .633, p < .001$), “Liking, sharing or posting political content online” and “Signing a petition” ($r_s(734) = .590, p < .001$), and “Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons” and “Signing a petition” ($r_s(734) = .549, p < .001$). Among collective non-electoral activities, a strong relationship was discovered between “Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally” and “Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally” and ($r_s(734) = .663, p < .001$) and to a lesser extent between “Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally” and “Participating in or being a member of an activist group” ($r_s(734) = .515, p < .001$). Further correlation coefficients can be found in Table A6.5 in Appendix 6). These findings confirm hypothesis 1, which states that individual activities are likely to be clustered together and that collective activities are likely to be clustered together.

5.2.1.2. Differences in non-electoral activity levels based on who respondents shared their concerns with

Among all respondents who were active in at least one form of non-electoral participation, the mean of non-electoral activities participated in was 4.87, indicating that the sample of survey respondents represented an overall active cross-section of young people in the UK. Table 5.2 depicts the differences in means of non-electoral activities among respondents who indicated to share their concerns about social and political issues with their friends, their family, and fellow members of organisations they are part of.

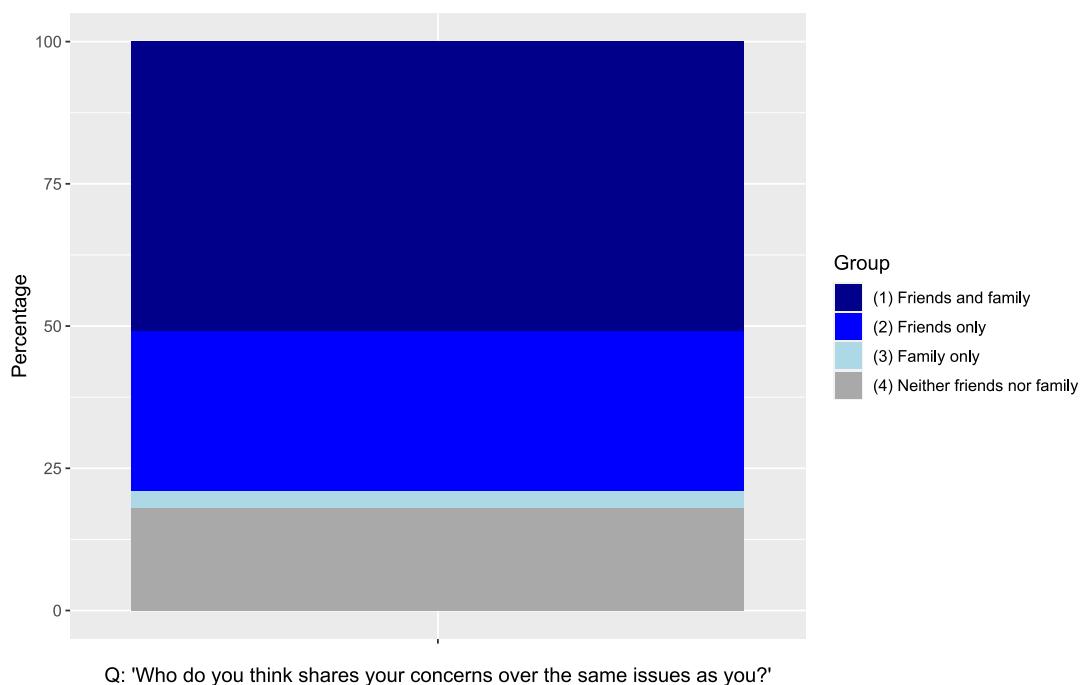
Table 5.2. Social groups of shared concerns and means of non-electoral activities (N = 840)

	<i>Who else do you think shares your concerns about these social and political issues?</i>					
	Friends		Family members		Other members of an organisation I'm part of	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
N	743	97	500	340	296	544
Percent of respondents	88.5	11.5	59.5	40.5	35.2	64.8
Mean of non-electoral activities	5.04	3.57	5.02	4.65	5.90	4.31

When comparing means of activities participated in, a gap is found between those who do share their concerns about social and political issues with friends and those who do not (difference of 1.47). A similar, however smaller, number could be observed between those who share their concerns about social and political issues with their family. The difference in mean score among respondents who shared their concerns about social and political issues with their family and those who did not was only marginal, at 0.37. Overall, those who reported sharing the same concerns as other social groups in their life showed an overall higher level of participation in non-electoral activities.

From these comparisons, being part of an organisation or a political party also indicated an increase in activities participated in (an increase of 1.59). This confirmed findings from previous studies that discussing politics with friends and family has an impact on young people's interest in politics, and indicates that there might also be a greater readiness to become politically active (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). It may also support the assumption that interest in participating in political and civic activities is fostered by social influences, specifically social rewards (Robison, 2017).

Figure 5.4. With whom respondents believed to share their concerns about political and social issues with, in percentages (N = 948)



Respondents were most likely to state that they believe to have the same concerns as their friends. While more than half of active respondents said their family shared the same concerns as them, most respondents overall did not share their worries with their family exclusively (see Figure 5.4). From the original 948 respondents, about half said they were sharing their concerns over political and social issues with their friends and family. Less than a third said they were sharing their concerns with their friends only, while sharing concerns with family only was reported by 2.8% of respondents.

5.2.2. Young people's experiences with activism

Understanding young people's experiences with activism corresponds with RQ2 and helps to frame their personal identity and feelings in relation to the activist topics they are engaged in. In the focus group discussions, young people spoke about a range of actions they have taken part in or considered taking part in. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people said they were involved in online activism and sharing political and informative

content on social media, including petitions. Further individual actions included discussing politics with friends and other people, signing petitions, and placing emphasis on a more sustainable lifestyle by recycling, changing to a vegetarian or vegan diet, or trying to make conscious efforts about sustainability and human rights when spending money. Collective actions participants reported taking part in included protesting, setting up or joining groups. This included both discussion groups in school or university, and other groups, such as *Extinction Rebellion* or local *Amnesty International* groups. Only a few people mentioned using direct actions, such as setting up protests camps and sitting on trees to protect them from being cut down, as a method of their political activism.

While the previously listed activities can be attributed to the cluster of non-electoral actions, participants also spoke about voting and having contacted politicians. Throughout all group discussions, participants did not consciously differentiate between the concepts of non-electoral and electoral activities in their accounts of activism but rather showed their dissatisfaction and disappointment about being excluded or marginalised from certain electoral activities. Since many could not vote yet because of their age, they felt not only less heard by politicians but also less (or not at all) represented. Emailing local MPs was an activity that came up in almost all group discussions. Despite some positive experiences, many participants reported that their attempts to receive a response from their representative or to schedule a meeting with them were without success.

5.2.2.1. Participating in individual non-electoral activities: self-expression and performance

“It's hard, because as an individual, you can definitely make changes that are really important and if everyone does that, things start to change. But I think it's important to have discussions just to learn [for yourself] as well.” (Hailey, 17, *climate*)

Raising awareness and talking about issues with friends and family members were common activities young people talked about. In the discussions, young people said there was an urgency to speak about big issues such as racism, feminism, climate change, and related issues. However, despite being eager and excited to talk and discuss these, a sentiment of frustration shone through. Participants appeared to be reflective on the limited impact of simply talking and discussing issues of political and social matters with other people. These limitations were even more strongly emphasised in the context of social media activism:

“In lockdown, social media, brought a conversation to the forefront, which is really good, but [social media] also limited it, because we couldn't go and have this conversation in-person with people, so you didn't have full conversations.” (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

Social media was regarded with mixed views. While some participants underlined the positive side of being able to share information quickly and the use of platforms to highlight voices of people who do not receive such platforms on conventional media, some participants also saw negative sides. These included the use of social media to just be ‘performatively’ active and the increasing pressure to share specific content, the overwhelming effect of news and, sometimes graphic, images which can affect one’s mental health negatively, and the competition among activists to be ‘perfect’ in their lifestyles. Participants also said that they were aware that social media can create an ‘echo chamber’ effect, meaning that the content they interact with is mostly in line with their own political views and that they are less exposed to other views.

Participants called out virtue-signalling of other people as well as of companies. #BlackoutTuesday was specifically named as an occurrence of performative activism, also negatively referred to as ‘slacktivism’. #BlackoutTuesday was a social media protest action on 02 June 2020, emerging from the US American music industry, to commemorate the deaths of Black citizens George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, which were consequences of police actions (The New York Times, 2020). In social

media, the hashtag #BlackoutTuesday was accompanied by posting a black square. These posts occurred predominantly on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Young people said that to some extent participating in these forms of social activism may stem from ‘fear of missing out’, as well as displaying oneself as part of a group with similar values:

“I think they definitely had the right message with the black square, but so many people did it because ‘oh shit everyone else is doing it, I need to do it because I don’t want to be the one to come that hasn’t done it’.”
(Anne, 19, *anti-racism*)

“I felt that #BlackoutTuesday was quite performative a lot of the time. It’s good to raise awareness, but it got to a point where people were using the *Black Lives Matter* hashtag, and then it was drowning out all of the actual information that was genuinely useful and everything because everyone was just posting a black square and then not doing anything else about that.” (Yolanda, 16, *anti-racism*)

Though participants welcomed its original message, they pointed out how “#BlackoutTuesday was quite performative a lot of the time” and that a lot of people had participated in it without taking deeper consequences for their own behaviour (as white people). Another phenomenon participants criticised was the so-called “rainbow capitalism” – a term participants used to describe companies using the rainbow flag in June, the month of *Pride*, in their branding and marketing.

5.2.2.2. Participating in collective non-electoral activities: finding belonging within communities

The idea of belonging (see subsection 3.4.2.3) underlined motivation to engage in social media activism, including performative acts, and also appeared to be a central motivation for joining groups. Some people stated to be members of local *Extinction Rebellion* branches and other environment-focused groups. Finding groups of interest and intergroup communication

often took place online, especially during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. Being inside one network helped accessing new groups and activities:

“I’m quite lucky that I know a fair few people who are involved in this now. A lot of my friends are involved in that community, a lot of it is just word of mouth, but otherwise there might be some really great Instagram accounts, you can follow.” (Adrian, 20, *climate*)

One participant, Frankie, talked about having set up a cultural discussion group at school to have a forum for students of colour in particular, a project that was supported by one of the teachers. Another person, Lena, reported starting their own *Amnesty International* group at school, for which they also sought support from teachers. Gertrude said that she and her friends were trying to organise a group on issues of LGBT rights.

“Tomorrow, actually, I’m meeting with one of our teachers at school to set up an *Amnesty International* group in the school, to have a place where people can come and sign petitions and get involved and educate people, which I’m really excited about. I’ve been trying to do it for ages, but because of lockdown, all the groups have been separated, and it wouldn’t really be very effective, but hopefully, that’s going to end, and I can actually get involved in that.” (Lena, 18, *feminism and LGBT*)

“In school, I and a couple of my friends have tried to start a group that helps to educate our school, especially on homophobia, racism and trans right, because it is such an issue.” (Gertrude, 16, *feminism and LGBT*)

A central topic in the focus groups were protests. Due to the restrictions to public life as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many participants were ambiguous about going to protests in person, especially in 2020. In that summer, there had been numerous protests against racial discrimination, inequality and police brutality following demonstrations in the US after a Black man had been suffocated to death by a police officer in Minneapolis. The

murder had sparked the *Black Lives Matter* movement, originally founded in 2012, to become not only nation-wide visible in the US but also internationally. While many participants across all thematic groups talked about the *Black Lives Matter* movement and the protests of 2020, some people shared that they did not go to any protests despite wanting to. In the face of restrictions and for health reasons, some people felt conflicted going to a protest or march because they feared catching the Corona virus and being a risk to their family members, since many of the participants were still living with their parents or guardians. Other participants said that they attended public marches and demonstrations and as some were still underage at the time, they were accompanied by a parent or guardian:

“I really wanted to take part in the protests, but I didn’t go for two reasons: one, COVID; and then also I live with my parents who told me that I couldn’t go because it wasn’t safe.” (Paula, 16, *anti-racism*)

“It was interesting going with my dad as he was the one that suggested it. I guess that was nice, in a sense, that it was like family bonding over anti-racism [activism].” (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

Further protests attended by participants included *Fridays For Future* marches and strikes, *Kill the Bill* protests, going to *Pride* marches and the vigils organised as part of the *Reclaim These Streets* campaign after the murder of Sarah Everard, a young woman in London.

“Like the protest I went to for ‘Kill the Bill’, I know there’s an increased police presence each time. There were vans all over the city, there were horses, there were always police [officers] in front leading us. And it was at the most recent one I went to, out of nowhere, this police van just came in front of us, lights on, and everyone filed out, and it was quite... you sort of step back and think, ‘are they going to go after us?’” (Jayden, 17, *climate*)

Participants were divided over the impact protests could have on political decisions. For some young people, protests were a way of “holding [politicians]

accountable”, of expressing openly dissent with the government and policies. Although agreeing with the notion of having to influence political institutions to achieve change, some participants were less hopeful about the impacts protesting could have. They did not see protests as a way of effecting real change, in particular in the context of violence against women and femicides:

“No amount of protests is going to do anything. You can probably provoke change from outside of voting, but ultimately, the government has all the power and there's very little we can do about that, outside of voting.” (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

“I think protests are not enough to make a change. We held vigils for day one, day two, day three. Then at the end, people just kind of forgot about it and nothing changed. But people who are actually traumatised by [sexual assault and rape] can't get through that very easily. [...] I think we need to do more than protest or talking about it on the social media.” (Jasmine, 18, *feminism and LGBT*)

Some participants also expressed their concern about the *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill* (which had not been passed at that point but was being discussed in Parliament), as they worried about their right to protest and potential negative consequences for their activism. As young people, participants feared being limited in travelling and disadvantages on the job market as a result of being arrested and convicted under the new bill. They considered the proposed law as a “major rights violation” and a “crush of the democratic rights to protest”. Despite these fears, some participants did not seem to back down in their convictions and their intentions to protest:

“If it's a massive disincentive to protest – a criminal record means your job opportunities are not as good, it means that there's certain countries you can't travel to, you can't go to America if you've got a criminal record – that is often used to dissuade people from protest and from taking political action and stuff which is just really shit basically. But there's no two ways about it, unfortunately, it's just one of the risks and sacrifices

which people take, and obviously that's not for everyone." (Adrian, 20, *climate*)

5.3. Factors influencing non-electoral participation

This section presents the analysis of hypotheses 2-6 (see section 3.4.2). It looks at the following cognitive variables and their effect on the levels of young people's participation in non-electoral activities:

- interest in politics and interest in social issues (H2a and H2b)
- internal efficacy and perception of personal agency (H3a and H4a)
- collective efficacy and perception of collective agency (H3b and H4b)
- perceived opportunity of political and social influence (H5a and H5b)
- satisfaction with the government (H6)

The analysis examined these five hypotheses by running linear regression models with *non-electoral participation* as the dependent variable, conceptualised as a count variable from 1 to 9. The data used in the following multiple regression models is drawn from the weighted online survey dataset, with a sample size of 948. Due to the inclusion of control variables which led to the omission of observations that had not enough information on those, the number of observations for each regression model is 840. Each hypothesis is individually examined before the variables are placed into a combined model. Sociodemographic variables always include age (scale data), gender (female/non-male respondents and male respondents), social class (working class and middle class), being in university (no university student and being a university student), and ethnicity (white and non-white). After testing the hypotheses individually, a full model is presented.

The results from the regression analysis are also accompanied by findings from the focus groups on respective themes. The data from the focus groups consisted of eight transcripts which have been coded using thematic analysis. Although looking at the same research questions, the data from the survey and focus groups do not align on every aspect of the analysis, since the focus of

the group discussions was to obtain a more personal picture of young people involved with activism. Thus, the findings highlight the cognitive underpinnings of taking part in activism and the social and emotional connections young people have in relation to institutionalised politics, non-electoral participation, and issues of their interest.

5.3.1. Interest in politics and interest in social issues

The relationship between *interest in politics* and *non-electoral participatory activities*, and between *interest in social issues* and *non-electoral participatory activities* were both expected to be positive, i.e. interest leads to increased non-electoral participation. Another expectation was that the difference between *non-electoral participation* and *electoral participation* is founded in differences between the levels of interest, meaning that *interest in social issues* is more likely to be associated with *non-electoral participation*, whereas *interest in politics* is more likely to be associated with *electoral participation*. The latter will be analysed at a later point by hypothesis H10 (see section 5.5). In this instance, the effects of interest on young people's level of engagement in non-electoral activities were being examined via two hypotheses:

H2a: The more interested young people are in politics, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

H2b: The more interested young people are in social issues, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

The equation for the model, i.e. including both interest variables and non-electoral participation was assumed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{interest in politics} + \beta_2 \text{interest in social issues} + \varepsilon.$$

Y represents the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, with β_0 as the intercept or constant. ε stands for the error estimates.

Both *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* were measured on a 4-step scale ranging from 1 = *Not at all interested* to 4 = *Very interested*.

Whereas more female respondents stated to be interested in social issues, more male respondents stated to be interested in politics. This difference indicated that female respondents may see themselves more likely to be interested in issues when they are framed as 'social' rather than 'political'. The scores for *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* were both strongly positively skewed, meaning that interest levels among the sample were higher than what would be expected among the general population. Instead of displaying tails of a normal distribution, the interest variables concentrated on the maximum value end of the distribution (see Appendix 7 for all descriptive statistics).

Figure 5.5. Interest in politics among survey respondents in %

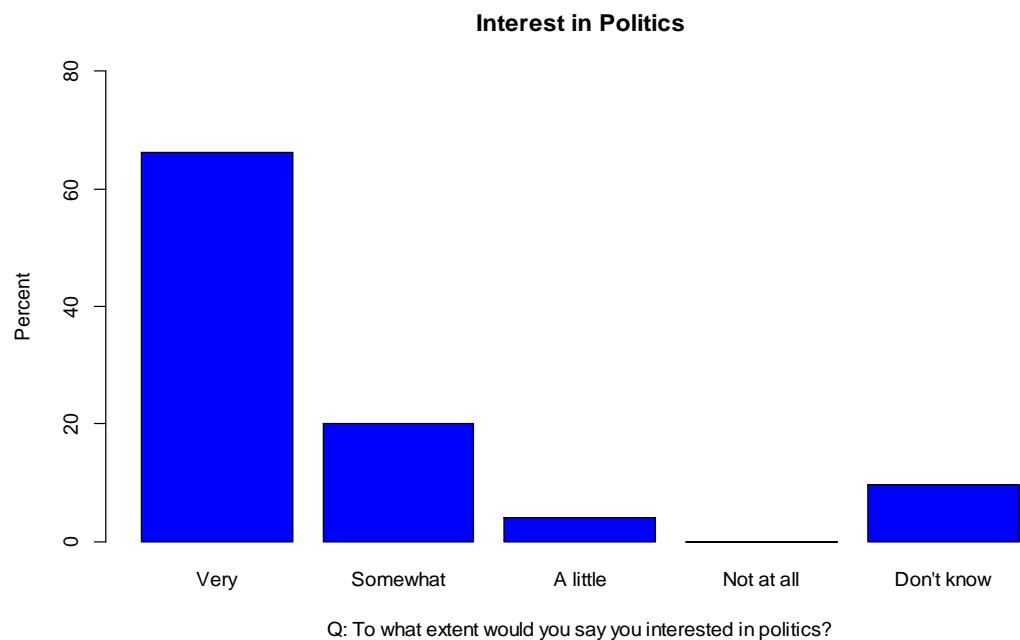
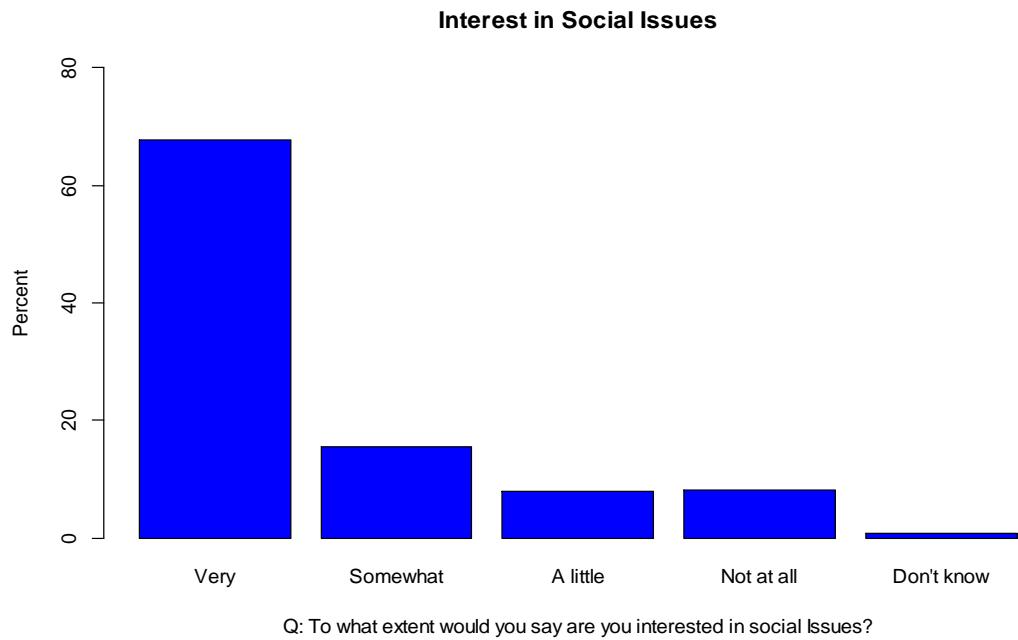


Figure 5.6. Interest in social issues among survey respondents in %



Since the assumption of a normal distribution of the interest variables was rejected, the relationship between them was examined using nonparametric correlation tests. No significant correlation was identified using a Spearman's rho test. This is a counterintuitive result, since both interest variables display a similar distribution, and the assumption would be that *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* are linked. However, cross-tabulating the data shows that those who are interested in politics are also highly likely to be interested in social issues. Whereas those who are interested in social issues may not be equally as likely to state to be interested in politics. Of those very interested in politics, 85.7% also said they were very interested in social issues, while among those with a strong interest in social issues only 68.2% claimed to be very interested in politics (see Appendix 8).

The difference was even stronger when the data is disaggregated by gender. Female respondents tended to express stronger interest in social issues (88.3% *very interested*) than male respondents (48.2% *very interested*). Almost the reverse figures were found for interest in politics, with 51.4% of female respondents and 79.9% of male respondents being *very interested* in politics (see Figures 5.7 and 5.8). This could be an indication that male and

female respondents attribute different themes to the terms 'political' and 'social'. Differences between male and female respondents are further analysed in section 5.4.2.

Figure 5.7. Interest in politics by gender: female respondents (N = 461) and male respondents (N = 487)

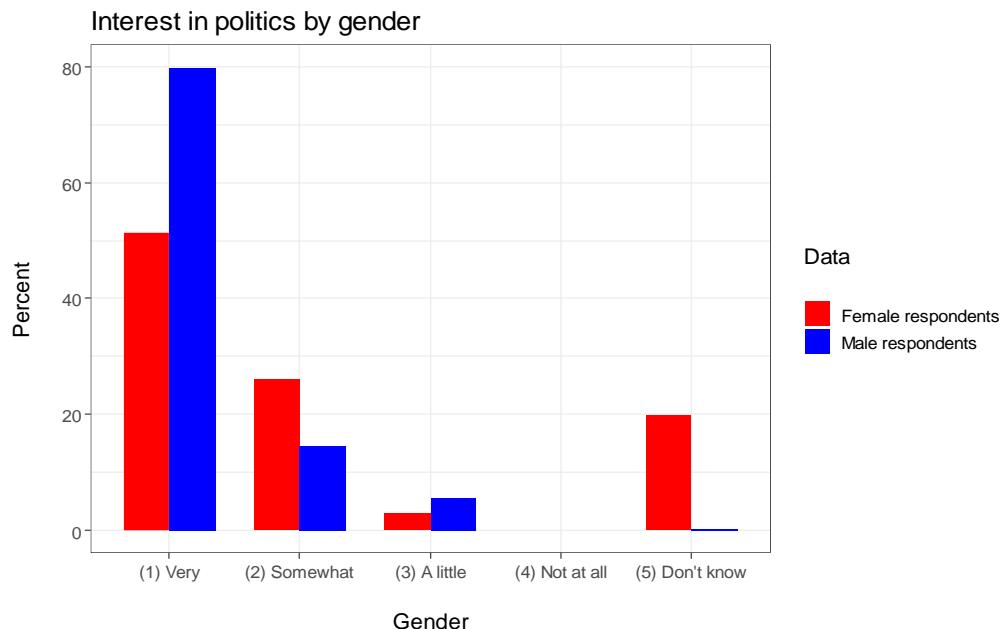
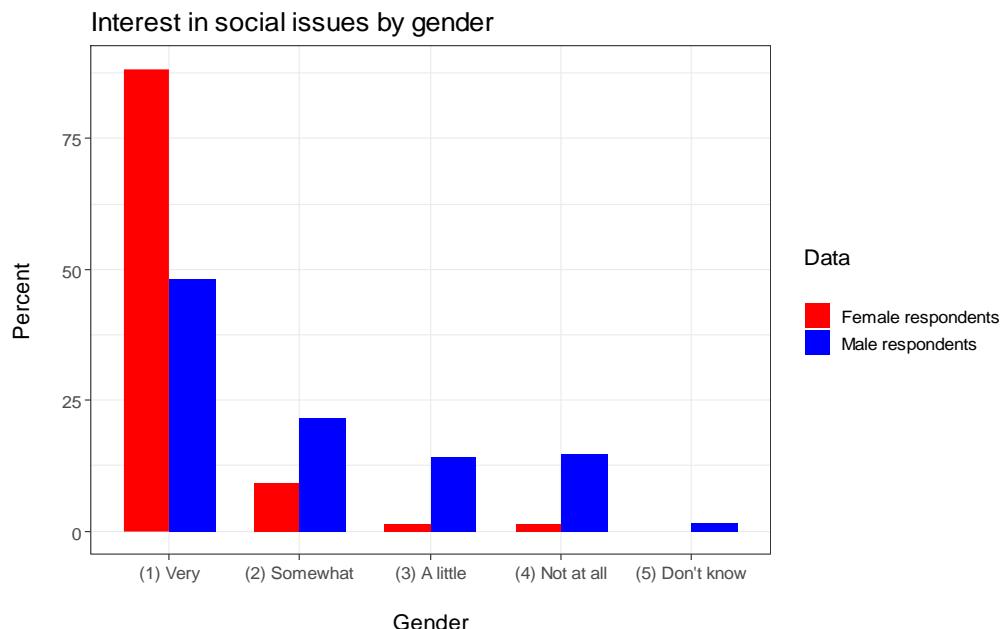


Figure 5.8. Interest in social issues by gender: female respondents (N = 461) and male respondents (N = 487)



5.3.1.1. Linking interest in politics and interest in social issues with participation in non-electoral activities

Since no intra-item correlation was found, the variables *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* can be placed into a model together. Missing values were imputed using the mean of the variables. The model summary shows an R^2 value of 23.1% with an adjusted R^2 of 22.5% and $F(7, 832) = 35.779$, $p < .001$. *Interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* were found to be statistically significant to predict the dependent variable. The test of H2a and H2b is reported in Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3. Explaining non-electoral activities with interest in politics and interest in social issues

Non-electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Interest in politics	.729***	.502	.955	.115	.195***
Interest in social issues	.690***	.552	.828	.070	.331***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.074*	.013	.134	.031	.084*
Male	-.942***	-1.234	-.651	.148	-.222***
University student	.175	-.114	.463	.147	.040
Middle class (self-assessed)	.244	-.008	.497	.129	.058
Non-white ethnicity	-.219	-.742	.303	.266	-.025
Constant	-1.552	-3.313	.209	.897	
Observations	840				
R^2	.231***				
ΔR^2	.225				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; $SE B$ = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
$*p < .05$ $**p < .01$ $***p < .001$					

The linear regression model found a statistically significant relationship between *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* and respondents' participation in *non-electoral activities*. *Interest in social issues* showed a greater positive effect on participation in non-electoral activities, with a standardised coefficient of .331, whereas the standardised coefficient for *interest in politics* was .195. The control variable *gender* indicated that being male had a negative effect on the number of non-electoral activities participated in, as reflected in the standardised coefficient of -.222. Figure 5.9 and Figure 5.10 represent visual depictions of marginal effects of each interest variable on the dependent variable of non-electoral activities. For an increase in each interest variable, the values predicted for the dependent variable also increased.

Figure 5.9. Marginal effect plot for interest in politics on non-electoral participation

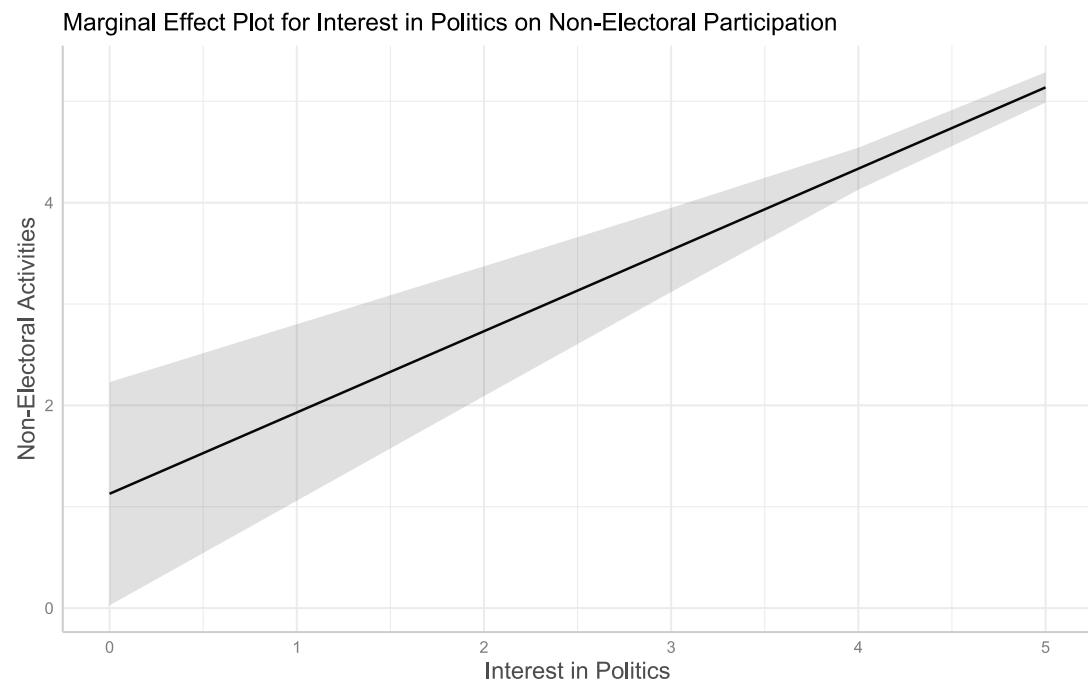
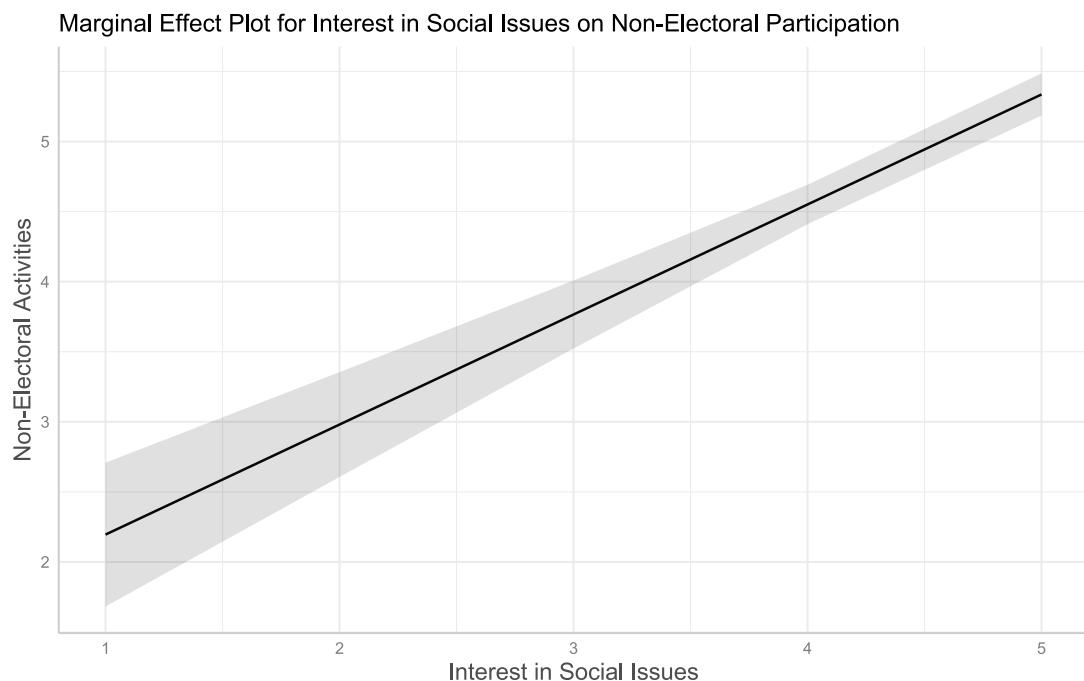


Figure 5.10. Marginal effect plot for interest in social issues on non-electoral participation



Two inferences can be drawn from the models above: First, being interested in social issues, rather than specifically in politics, is relevant for increased levels of participation in non-electoral activities. Based on findings that young people may be more involved in civic forms of participation rather than directly political ones (Norris, 2003; Pickard, 2019), this suggests that measuring interest in politics alone among young people may not be sufficient to capture their interest in social issues that are related to politics.

Second, gender stood out as a control variable. This indicates that female respondents were more active based on the number of non-electoral participatory activities asked for, but it may also be influenced by the pre-set lists of non-electoral activities the survey focused on. Previous studies have shown that women are more likely to prefer to engage in nonconfrontational activities than men (Dodson, 2015) and that, despite having higher levels of concern are less engaged in activism (Tindall, Davies and Mauboulés, 2003). As shown in the cross-tabulations (see Appendix 8), the data also suggested that female respondents tended to be less likely to state a strong interest in politics, although they were more likely to be strongly interested in social

issues. This confirms previous literature on women's reduced interest in politics due to a predominantly masculine framing of these activities (Fitzgerald, 2013; Ferrín *et al.*, 2020; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2021).

5.3.1.2. Young people's opinions on political and social issues

Participants in the focus groups displayed a wide range of interests in political and social issues and often converged in their opinions on issues they were passionate about. They thought the three topics of the *climate*, *anti-racism*, and *feminism and LGBT* received varying degrees of attention from the public. While participants agreed that climate change was generally taken seriously in the UK, feminism and the rights of people with different sexualities and gender identities were not considered enough in British legislation. For example, some participants felt that British politics was treating issues of gender equality and gender identity as virtue-signalling. The *Black Lives Matter* movement and efforts towards racial equality were not seen as receiving as much attention and even seen as being "brushed under the carpet", according to one participant. With the *Black Lives Matter* protests in the United States, many participants said that they had become more aware of the strong racial and ethnic inequalities, discrimination and racism in Britain.

On the issue of climate change, participants emphasised their general dissatisfaction with the political progress made, while also highlighting the small actions individuals could do to contribute to a more sustainable and eco-friendly living. Many participants appeared to be knowledgeable about the effects of climate change carrying elements of class, racism, and sexism, with people of lower economic background, people of colour and women being affected more severely by the consequences of climate change, especially (but not just) in the Global South. In the context of environmental activism, some participants reflected upon issues within the wider movement, in particular issues of social class and economic wealth. One young person explained that they felt that people of lower socio-economic class were being shamed for

purchasing from the so-called fast fashion industry, thus being accused of contributing to the negative impact of said industry on the environment:

“[Fast fashion] has massive environmental impacts and also massive human rights impact. However, it's incredibly hard to avoid. For most people, myself included, [shopping elsewhere] it's not affordable...you can't live off of not going to H&M every now and again. I do think there's a sort of competition that started, with people saying - if you ever buy from fast fashion - 'you understand what goes on there?' This can be really hard when you need clothes, but you feel like a terrible person for buying them and you just can't afford to get them elsewhere.” (Shirley, 17, *climate*)

In addition, some young people regarded the political actions from pressure groups like *Extinction Rebellion* as a middle-class response and the environmental youth movement around *Fridays For Future* as not inclusive enough towards young people from working-class households:

“Extinction Rebellion, at least to me, has this reputation of middle-class people just wanting to feel like they're doing something, but at least, they're doing something. Because clearly, protest, saying things online, or a petition isn't going to do something.” (Jayden, 17, *climate*)

These class issues were less prominent in the discussions on feminism and LGBTQ rights and immigration and racism in the UK. A related topic, capitalism, came up in all three thematic discussions. Companies were seen as using social and political issues frequently in their marketing with the aim to generate profit. Although carrying a responsibility towards sustainability and fair working conditions, the marketing campaigns were not seen by participants as bringing systemic change within their supply chains and treatment of workers and contractors' workers. Calling this out as 'greenwashing' and 'rainbow capitalism' in the context of environmental and LGBTQ activism, participants in the three groups on racism underlined that economic power also upholds racial discrimination and inequality, and that one could make a small contribution to change by making decisions to support businesses owned by

people of colour. Across all group discussions, young people demonstrated an intersectional approach in their thinking about inequalities, even though the term intersectionality was rarely mentioned. Their awareness of/in relation to different types of privileges was illustrated not just in the mentioning of class issues but also in discussions about the normalisation of casual sexism and rape culture and the existence of 'white privilege':

"We had an assembly [...] and my headteacher, he was like 'she was raped, instead of he raped her', and I think that narrative is damaging because it puts the blame on the woman, instead of the man who did it or the person who did it, which shouldn't happen." (Madeleine, 16, *feminism and LGBT*)

"I had a conversation with someone who essentially said, 'it's the woman's fault, because she's asking for it, it's because of what she was wearing then, what she was doing, and she's leading him on, and she shouldn't be out that late.' I think I knew that some people held those views, but having that said to my face, it's really shocking." (Lindsay, 17, *feminism and LGBT*)

"Yeah, white privilege is a massive issue, and it's very difficult because some people don't always know the line between activism, and then speaking over minorities and stuff, which is where a lot of people's problems become side-lined." (Yolanda, 16, *anti-racism*)

"[In my community], they put up a *Black Lives Matter* poster after lots of debate. It was in a very right-wing area, and it got set on fire. So, yeah, it was a real eye-opener as to how bad the racism actually is, because they literally set it on fire, and I just never ever thought that would happen in a tiny little village." (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

Other thoughts that were evident in all three thematic groups were worries about democratic freedoms, the tendency towards polarisation within young people and society and feeling overwhelmed by their issues of interest. Young people expressed concerns about the *Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts*

Bill and fears about personal consequences for their activism, such as being arrested or convicted. Many participants said that they were seeing a strengthening of the Alt-right scene, which was accelerated by spreading misinformation on the Internet and appealing to young people on social media. Feelings of being overwhelmed involved young people's experiences of feeling powerless, hopeless, or being pushed into roles of 'change makers' without having the power, the means, or the relevant education:

"[N]one of us have any qualifications, like the only qualification I have is that I'm not white. That's not viable. I haven't done a degree in this stuff. It's like getting someone who's been hit by a car to run a speed awareness course." (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

5.3.2. Internal efficacy and perception of personal agency

The perception of efficacy and agency are central elements of the RQ1. In this section, efficacy and agency are regarded from the individual perspective. The analysis seeks to examine the effect of one's own understanding of politics (*internal efficacy*) and perceived capacity to act (*personal agency*) on participation in non-electoral activities. Due to the assumption that these two variables may display collinearity, their corresponding hypotheses H3a and H4a were being tested together.

Whereas *internal efficacy* was measured by asking young people about their confidence in their ability to participate in politics, *personal agency* referred specifically to respondents' belief in their capacity to act with regard to political and social issues they cared about. Thus, the measurement for *internal efficacy* related more to a general 'politics' term, the measurement for *personal agency* related to respondents' perception of their own capacity to act with regard to subjective matters of concern. Both factors were investigated with regard to their effect on participation in non-electoral activities. A non-parametric correlation test showed that *internal efficacy* and *personal agency* were moderately positively correlated, with a Spearman's rho correlation

coefficient of .535 ($r_s(734) = .535$, $p < .001$). The following analysis tests the hypotheses stated below:

H3a: The more confident young people are in their ability to participate in politics, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

H4a: The stronger the belief of young people in their capacity to act for an issue they care about, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

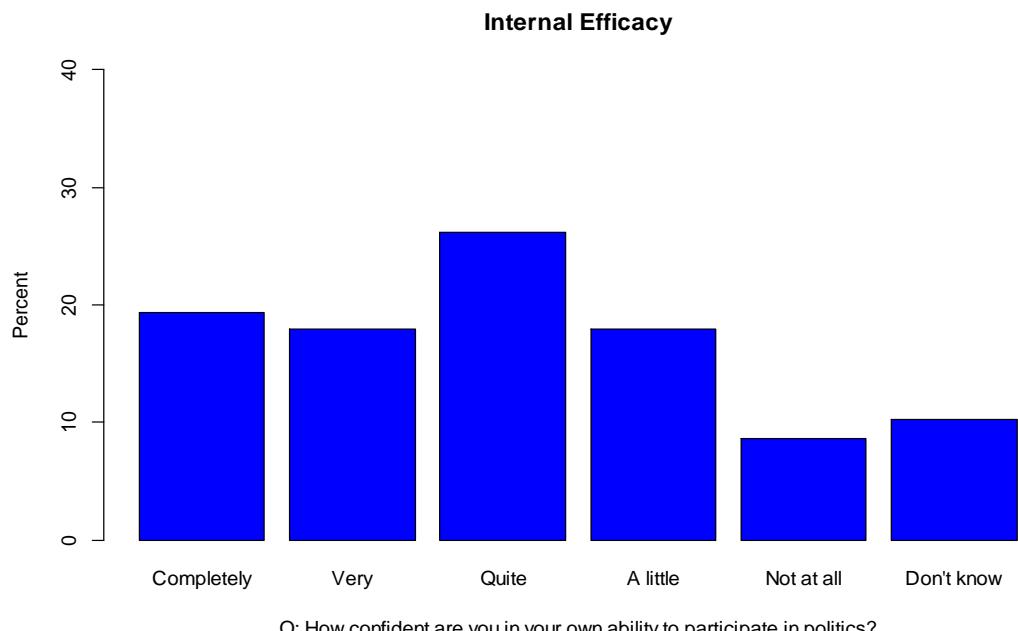
It was assumed that perception of *internal efficacy* and *personal agency* both display a positive relationship with non-electoral participation. The equation for the model was assumed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ *internal efficacy*} + \beta_2 \text{ *personal agency*} + \varepsilon$$

Y represents the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, with β_0 as the intercept or constant. ε stands for the error estimates.

The survey included two questions on *internal efficacy*. One asked for respondents' perception of their personal ability to take an active role in a group involved with political issues, the other one asked more generally about respondents' confidence in their own ability to participate in politics. Both questions showed very similar distributions. The question chosen to represent the variable *internal efficacy* in the following model stems from the question "How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?". The answer options consisted of a 5-step scale from *Not at all confident* (1) to *Completely confident* (5) (see Figure 5.11). More male respondents stated to be very or completely confident (37.2% of all male respondents) than female respondents (19.9% of all female respondents).

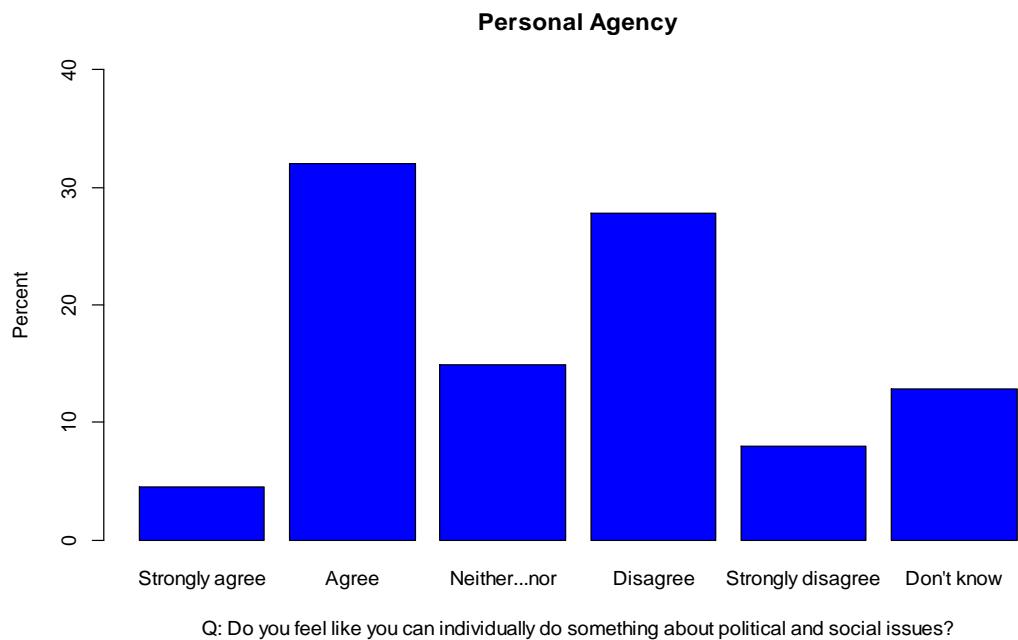
Figure 5.11. Perception of internal efficacy among survey respondents in %



The respondents' perception of *personal agency* was asked by posing the question "Do you feel like you can individually do something about political and social issues?". It is important to note that this question was posed after asking respondents about their levels of concern on a variety of issues. Therefore, it can be assumed that the responses to the question on the perception of their capacity to act, their personal agency, were at least partly influenced by the issues of concern already identified by each individual respondent. Answer options ranged from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (5) (see Figure 5.12).

Interestingly, respondents were split between disagreeing (35.8%) and agreeing (36.5%). The remaining 14.9% said they neither agreed nor disagreed that they could do something about political and social issues. Similar to the perception of *internal efficacy*, a gender divide could be observed for the variable *personal agency*: male respondents were more likely to state that they saw themselves capable of doing something about their social and political issues of concern than female respondents.

Figure 5.12. Perception of personal agency among survey respondents in %



5.3.2.1. Linking internal efficacy and personal agency with participation in non-electoral activities

Although there was a moderate correlation between *internal efficacy* and *personal agency* ($r_s(734) = .535, p < .001$), both variables were placed into the model. Potential issues of multicollinearity were checked for on the basis of the variance inflation factor and tolerance of the model. Missing values were replaced by an imputed series mean. The model summary had an R^2 value of 14.0% with an adjusted R^2 of 13.3%. Both *internal efficacy* and *personal agency* were found to be statistically significant to predict the dependent variable, with $F(7, 832) = 19.396, p < .001$. The test of H3a and H4a is reported in Table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4. Explaining non-electoral activities with internal efficacy and personal agency

Non-electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Internal efficacy	.237***	.125	.349	.057	.144***
Personal agency	.223***	.110	.335	.057	.129***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.064	.000	.128	.033	.073
Male	-1.572***	-1.867	-1.276	.150	-.370***
University student	.171	-.135	.476	.156	.039
Middle class (self-assessed)	.182	-.085	.449	.136	.043
Non-white ethnicity	.122	-.427	.671	.280	.014
Constant	4.345	2.925	5.765	.723	
Observations	840				
R^2	.140***				
ΔR^2	.133				

Note. Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; $SE B$ = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

The linear regression model including *internal efficacy* and *personal agency* showed a statistically significant positive effect of both variables on non-electoral participation, with similar coefficients of .144 and .129, respectively. Both factors affected the level of non-electoral activities positively, i.e. being more confident about one's ability to participate politically and feeling more confident about one's own capacity to act were associated with an increase in number of non-electoral activities partaken in. Plotting the marginal effects in Figure 5.13 and Figure 5.14 reveals almost identical increases in the dependent variable for both variables *internal efficacy* and *personal agency*.

Figure 5.13. Marginal effect plot for internal efficacy on non-electoral participation

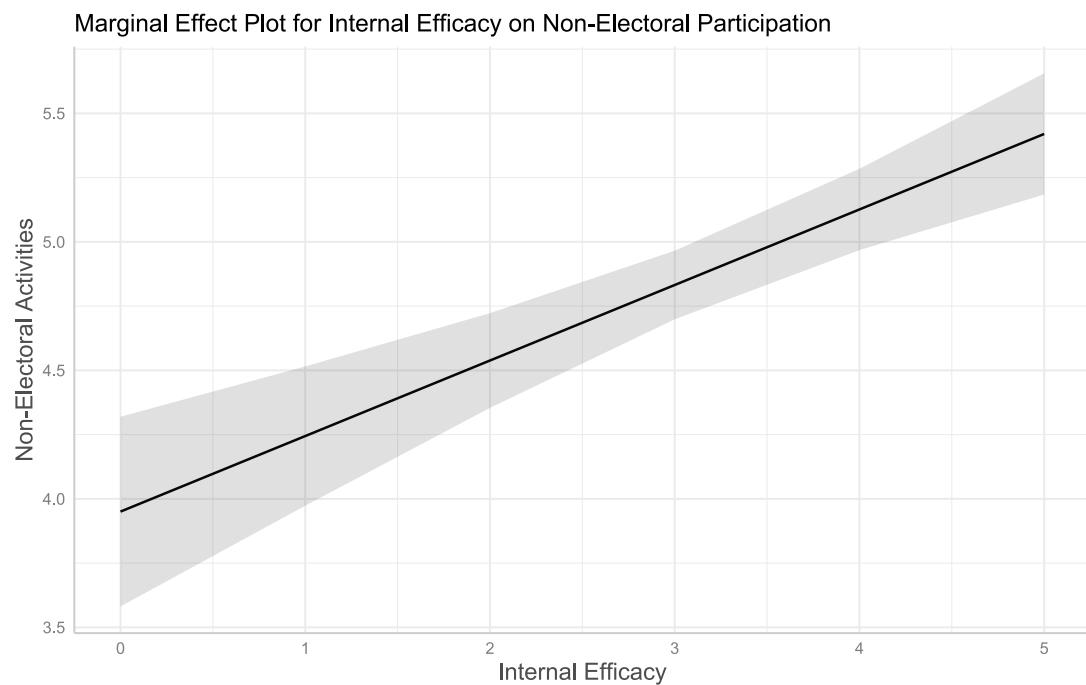
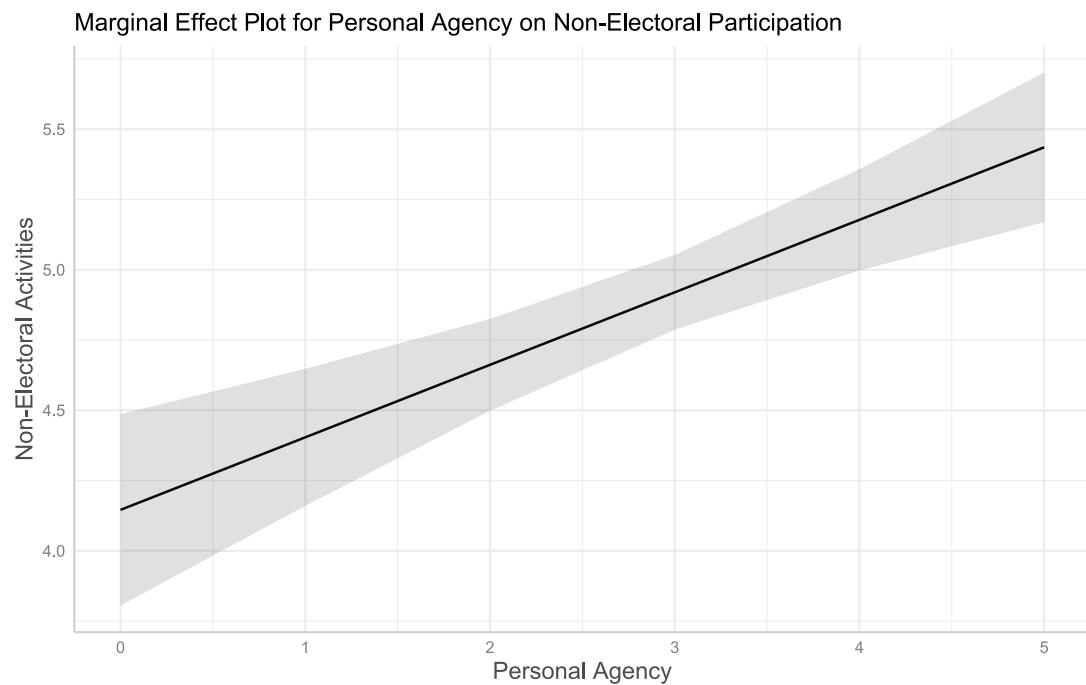


Figure 5.14. Marginal effect plot for personal agency on non-electoral participation



5.3.2.2. Young people's perceptions of personal agency

The perception of personal agency, the belief in one's ability to affect change, was a prominent theme across all eight focus groups. When young people started talking about their motivations to become involved with activism, they frequently referenced their personal experiences and views as a starting point for their engagement in political and social issues. In their accounts, taking part in various forms of activism followed as a consequence to these experiences and views, making activism an act on one's values. For some participants, this process of moving from values to action was shaped by their own identities and lived experiences. Frankie, for example, started becoming engaged against ethnic and racial discrimination after having experienced bullying when they were younger, due to their non-European ethnicity:

"I know that younger me would have wanted to have someone out there to be able to make a change, or at least seem like they're making a change. But also, part of me is just like 'it's not my responsibility, and there's only so much I can do' – and that's what's difficult. I would be betraying myself by not getting involved, but also by getting involved, I'm putting all this extra strain on myself." (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

Due to this aspect of self-realisation, acting on one's values and beliefs, taking part in activism gave a sense of empowerment to most participants in the focus groups. This empowerment involved both taking responsibility and the need to educate oneself on issues before expressing an opinion or taking action. Across all groups, the majority of people expressed strong positive emotions about taking action on issues they cared about. While self-realisation seemed to be a driving force, they showed an awareness of how certain issues affected people on a larger scale. Therefore, even personal actions were often experienced as acts of empowerment for a greater good, with young people taking responsibility for issues they themselves were part of or for issues which affected other people:

"The census this year [was] quite a big deal because I filled out my form. I filled it out myself obviously, and being able to put my sexuality down

was quite a big deal for me and being old enough to understand issues and do stuff about them, I found it quite a liberating experience." (Naomi, 17, *feminism and LGBT*)

"You don't have to do everything, but having that awareness and just making small changes, it shows that you care. No matter how much you can do or how little you can do, you are still showing that you can do something by just doing small things. I think that is the most important, showing care." (Jane, 16, *climate*)

Despite being associated with feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, being involved in activism was regarded as more commendable than staying passive but the notion of having other issues to worry about was also respected. Some young people, however, criticised the strong emphasis on individual actions, especially in the context of environmental protection. Although participants overall agreed that individual actions were needed to contribute to changes on a personal and local level (e.g. changing one's family views on LGBTQ topics or contributing to a more inclusive community within one's village or town), all participants agreed that these individual actions could not replace systemic change, i.e. changes within wider society, cultural customs and legal foundations.

There were also negative feelings identified as accompanying one's realisation of their capacity to act for certain issues. These arose from feelings of pressure (especially in identity-based activism) and hopelessness or disillusion. Some participants reported outside pressures or expectations (because of one's identity) or a perceived burden to be the 'activist voice' because of being part of a minority group. In relation to identity-based activism, young people reported being criticised for speaking up or being at risk of verbal, potentially physical, attacks:

"I have friends who are mixed race. [One of them] made the choice that she just doesn't want to get involved. She will do things on a very personal level, but she just doesn't want to get involved because she's had such a tough time because of racism, and it's been so much more

than what I've dealt with. It's been slurs and bullying, and she's just made the decision that it's just not for her, and that is something I completely respect." (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

In the context of agency, the group discussed incidents of peer pressure and personal gain and indicated that not all assumed responsibilities might stem from an intrinsic or even genuine interest but were influenced by social expectations and, to some extent, involved social transactions. Becoming politically active could thus be a response to social expectations or the desire to fit in in order to attain a certain reputation or to gain personal gratification:

"I think there needs to be quite a good sense of... 'give and take'. Because if you think about those school strikes - for young people, that was great because you've got the Friday off or at least a Friday morning. When you look at the protests as well, it's something that contains a lot of friendship groups, all of your friends are going, and you'll take pictures when you're there and all these pictures are online, and we are all posting them online and stuff like that. So, I think it needs the initial people to make it – it's awful – but like a trend." (Anne, 19, *anti-racism*)

While some of these reasons appear to be coined negatively, it also showed that taking part in activism is connected to being aware of other people. In the group discussions, people who were active wished to be supported and to support others – thoughts of being part of a group or a community influenced one's own motivation to become active. Thus, individual behaviour appears to be embedded in a collective context, as personal attitudes and behaviours are influenced by one's perceptions of consequences for others.

5.3.3. Collective efficacy and perception of collective agency

Considering that individual participation takes place in a collective context, the factors efficacy and agency were also being investigated in relation to how community is being perceived. The following analysis examines the effect of belief in community acts (*collective efficacy*) and perceived capacity to act of

a collective (*collective agency*) on participation in non-electoral activities. Similar to *internal efficacy* and *personal agency*, it was expected that collinearity may exist between the two variables. Thus, hypotheses H3b and H4b were tested together to determine the relationship between perception of *collective efficacy* and *collective agency*, before analysing their effects on non-electoral participation:

H3b: The stronger the belief of young people in that working together is important for making changes, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

H4b: The stronger the belief of young people in a perceived collective capacity to act for an issue they care about, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

The equation for the model was assumed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{collective efficacy} + \beta_2 \text{collective agency} + \varepsilon$$

Y represents the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, with β_0 as the intercept or constant. ε stands for the error estimates. *Collective efficacy* was measured using several statements with which the respondents could agree or disagree. To conceptualise the variable used in this analysis, the statement given to respondents was “Working together is important to make small changes”. The answer options consisted of a 5-step scale from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (5) (see Figure 5.15). The question for *collective agency* was “Do you feel like people as a group can do something about political and social issues?”, also including an answer range from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (5). The vast majority of respondents (88%) agreed or strongly agreed that people as a group have the power to influence political and social issues (see Figure 5.16).

Non-parametric correlation tests showed that perception of *collective efficacy* and *collective agency* were moderately positively correlated, with Spearman’s rho = .618 ($r_s(734) = .618$, $p < .001$). Therefore, potential multicollinearity was

monitored by considering the variance inflation factor and tolerance values within the model.

Figure 5.15. Perception of collective efficacy among survey respondents in %

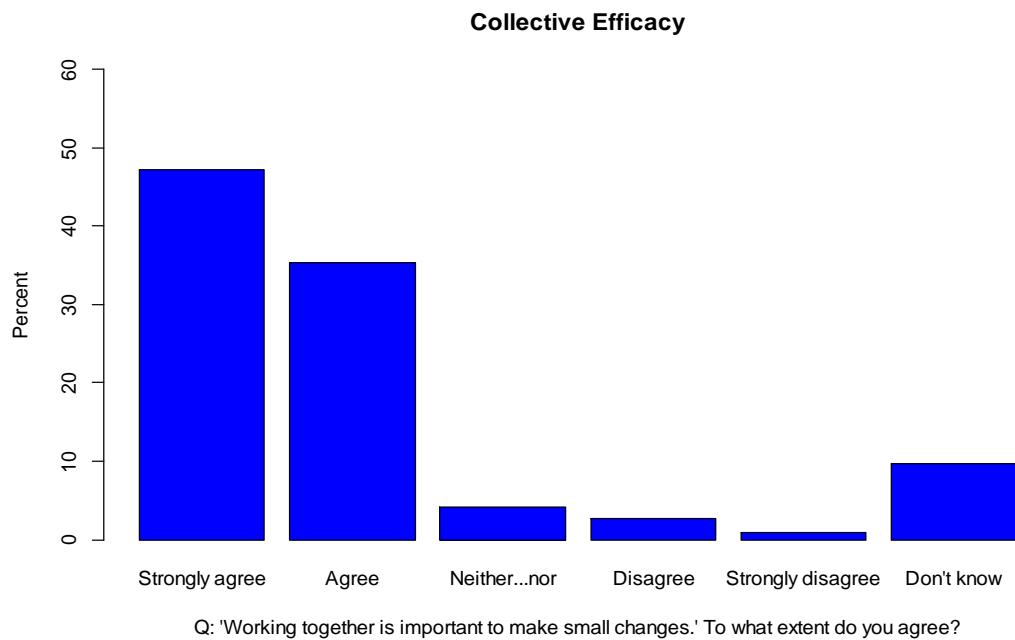
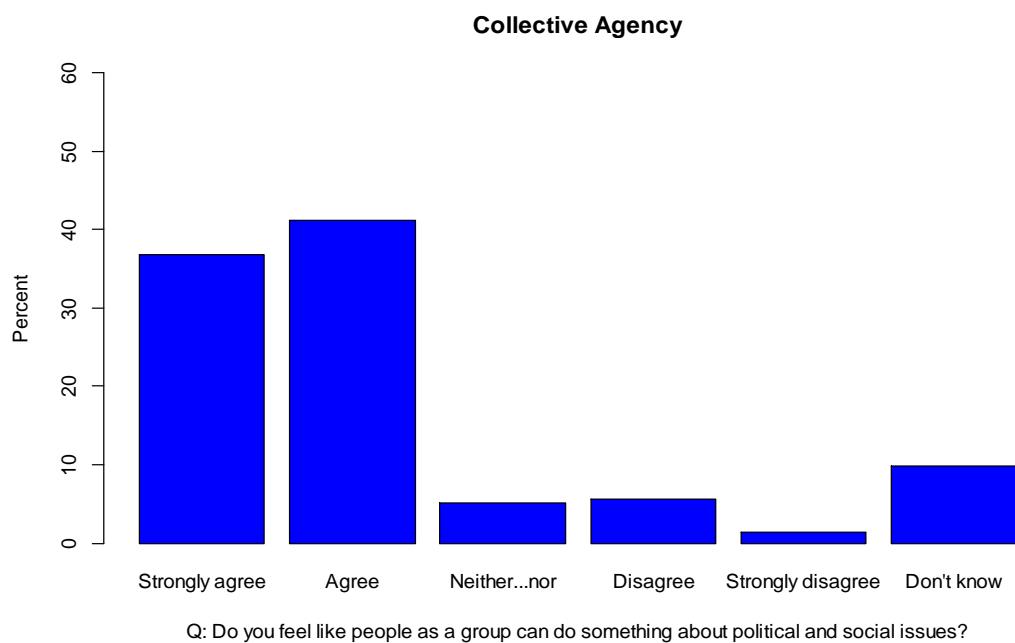


Figure 5.16. Perception of collective agency among survey respondents in %



5.3.3.1. Linking collective efficacy and collective agency with participation in non-electoral activities

The following model investigates the effect of *collective efficacy* and *collective agency* on the number of non-electoral activities taken part in. Missing values were replaced by an imputed series mean. R^2 for the model including *collective efficacy* and *collective agency* was 15.6% with an adjusted R^2 of 14.9%, and $F(7, 832) = 22.007$, $p < .001$. The test of H3b and H4b is reported in Table 5.5 below.

Table 5.5. Explaining non-electoral activities with collective efficacy and collective agency

Non-electoral activities	<i>B</i>	95.0% CI for B		<i>SE B</i>	β
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>		
Collective efficacy	.346***	.159	.533	.095	.128***
Collective agency	.415***	.260	.570	.079	.181***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.077*	.013	.140	.032	.088*
Male	-1.119***	-1.408	-.830	.147	-.264***
University student	.097	-.206	.399	.154	.022
Middle class (self-assessed)	.227	-.038	.491	.135	.054
Non-white ethnicity	.237	-.318	.793	.283	.027
Constant	1.414	-.345	3.174	.896	
Observations	840				
R^2	.156***				
ΔR^2	.149				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; <i>B</i> = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, <i>LL</i> = lower limit; <i>UL</i> = upper limit; <i>SE B</i> = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$					

Both *collective efficacy* and *collective agency* showed statistically significant effects on the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, with standardised coefficients of .128 and .181 ($p < .001$), respectively. The Spearman's rho correlation test indicated that the two variables have a medium strong relationship to one another, meaning that belief in collective

efficacy may be linked to the confidence in a perceived collective capacity to act. However, the inspection of the variance inflation factor and tolerance values did not indicate any issues of multicollinearity.

Figure 5.17. Marginal effect plot for collective efficacy on non-electoral participation

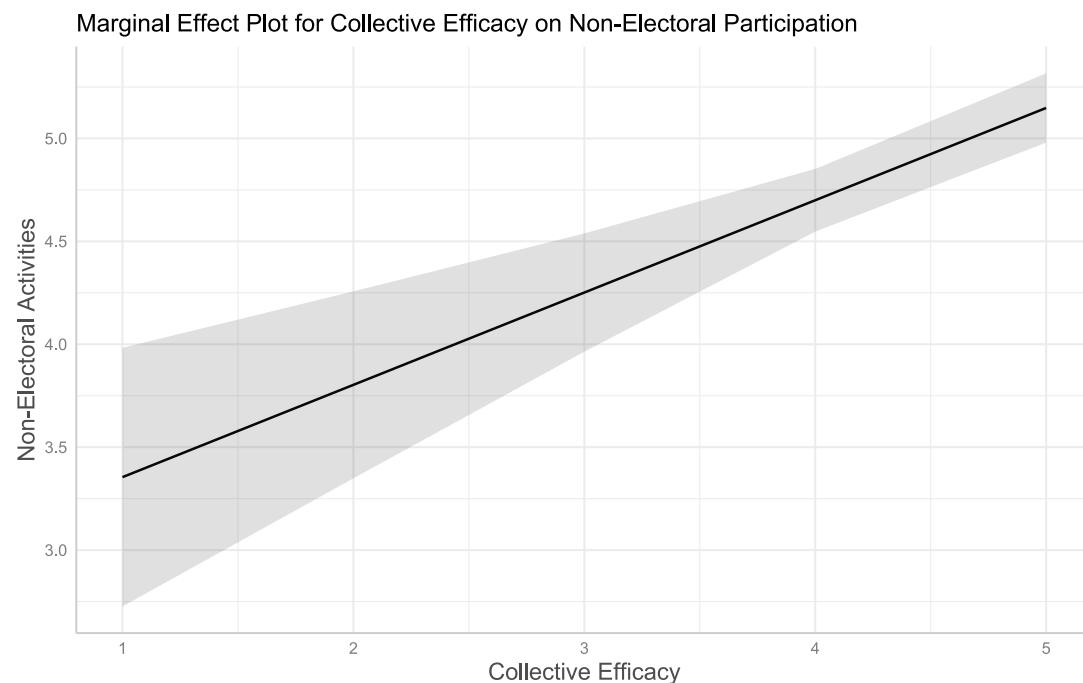
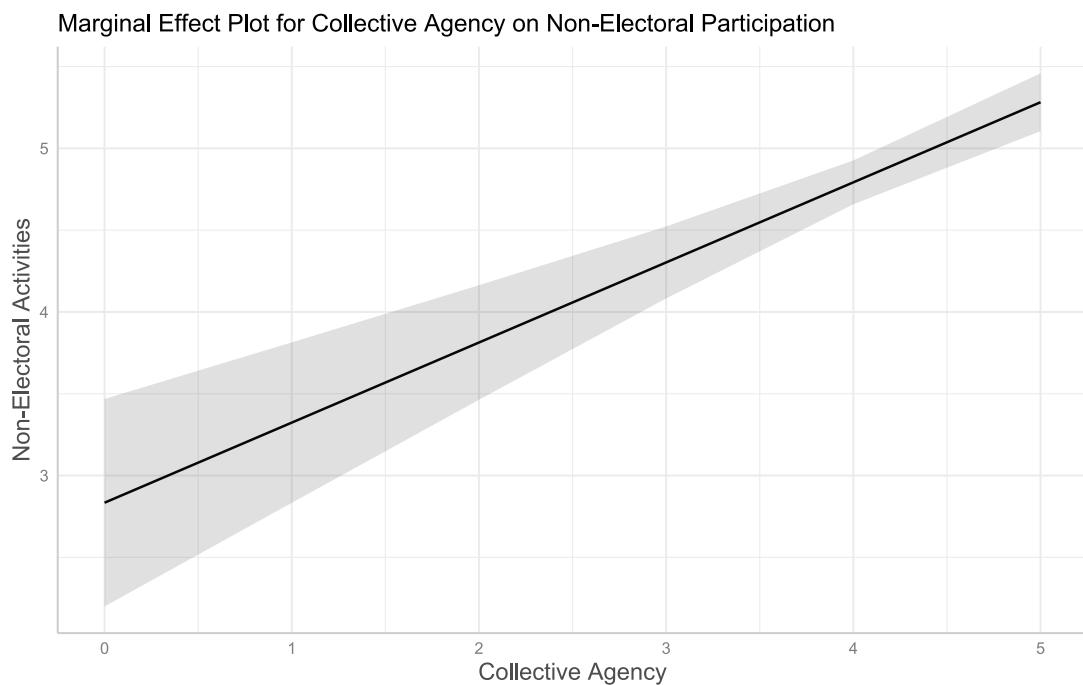


Figure 5.18. Marginal effect plot for collective agency on non-electoral participation



Similar to *internal efficacy* and *personal agency*, marginal effect plots visualise closely resembling graphs for increases in *collective efficacy* and *collective agency* associated with predicted increase in the level of non-electoral participation (see Figures Figure 5.17 and Figure 5.18).

5.3.3.2. Young people's perceptions of collective agency

In the focus groups, young people discussed collective agency under three distinct aspects: the assumption of responsibility as a group, collective action, and finding or building communities. Similar to personal agency, young people considered taking responsibility as part of a group as a form of empowerment. Collective agency is the result of people sharing the same or similar values coming together and organising themselves for collective actions.

While appreciating individuals' efforts against climate change, racism and other forms of inequality, most participants deemed collective actions to be more effective than actions done by separated individuals only, meaning they believed more in the power of the group than the individual person. Such power

of the collective was regarded as especially relevant to be able to demand accountability from political institutions or other public and economic actors. Some young people also showed doubts about the effectiveness of collective actions, expressing worries about the limitations of collective action to solve structural issues surrounding sexism, racism and discrimination, and the prevention of climate change:

"I think it's really important to talk about [climate change and the environment] because I want to show that the people who are responsible for making these decisions... that people do care and more than anything, it's about holding them accountable. Ten years down the line, people at least can look back and they say 'well it's not as if you weren't told', so that, hopefully, one day, we can look back on this period and say, 'well, they tried to hold our leaders accountable' and people at least tried to put up some resistance to all of this stuff which is happening to us." (Adrian, 20, *climate*)

Using collective action and pressure were described especially by young climate activists as means to effect change, which was seen as necessary for systemic change. Change is feasible through collective effort and action, relying on the belief that working together can lead to impact. Attributing significant responsibility to the 'collective' also seemed to be stemming from disappointment with how political institutions were handling certain issues:

"When you have politicians and people that have been elected who don't even believe in climate change, you start to think that, if these people in power don't care about it, what should we be doing then? I guess you get this sort of sense of community and sort of responsibility if my government, if my country, if the people that are most powerful in this world aren't going to do anything to fight it, then someone else needs to." (Carol, 18, *climate*)

While collective action as a consequence of taking on responsibility as a group was seen as a central part to enacting collective agency, the process of such centred around both finding and building communities of shared activist

interests and/or shared identities. Focus group participants expressed a sense of being part of a bigger community, with some naming their own local communities, while others saw themselves as being part of a specific community (identity-based or value-based) and some as part of a global society:

“My partner is non-binary and goes by he/they and it's only in the very recent stages of that journey that we've realised there is a community existing around that, and it's when you reach out for it, you realise that it's there, you realise a lot of information, a lot of togetherness exists.”
(Heather, 24, *feminism and LGBT*)

“So, particularly that with the *Black Lives Matter* movement – it wasn't just in America, it became a global thing, and it was really inspiring to see different countries of people marching through the streets. I feel only when we get to a point where people all over the world are going to be marching united, for environmental justice, that there really will be a change [...]. Whereas... if it's less communicative and it's just individual groups of people protesting, it seems to have less of an impact on governments, but if actually the entire world is saying ‘this needs to change and it needs to change now', there's a lot larger likelihood that something will actually end up happening about it.”
(Theresa, 17, *climate*)

For participants, social networks, specifically friends and family, were seen as important in their activism or in the decisions they take to become active. Participants referenced their own values in the context of their family ('my dad went with me to the protest', 'I wasn't allowed to go to the march', 'background of a working-class community and family', 'my family wouldn't or doesn't understand'). School networks often represented the main social circles participants lived within. Many young people pointed out that friendships (existing and new ones) had been relevant for their decision to join and stay within activist groups or to take up certain actions, such as going to a protest:

“So, I don’t know if you know what squatting is, but if there are empty buildings, you can go and live in them. And the idea is, you can create community spaces and spaces where people can live, where homeless people can live. We turn them into like bookshops and we’ve had some open mic nights and stuff, places where people can gather and do all sorts of things.” (Adrian, 20, *climate*)

Young people were seeking communities to be part of for their activism because of identifying with others and a desire to belong. Those communities could consist in specific activist group who met regularly to do activities together, such as described above, but identification could also take place with more aggregated groups, defined by either certain characteristics or by shared values and political views. One example was the frequent mentioning of belonging to the LGBTQ community by some participants. The LGBTQ community represents real people and constitutes an aggregated group of many communities. Overall, participants expressed a feeling of generational belonging and the perception that *Gen Z* is progressing different views and values than previous generations.

While the sense of responsibility as being part of a certain group elicited predominantly positive connotations, some participants also shared that they perceived the assumption of collective responsibility as putting in effort or bringing sacrifices. Often these negative connotations related to young people’s experiences in activism linked to their own identity, e.g. being female, LGBTQ or non-white. One participant said that they faced resistance and negative comments when becoming more involved in activism for racial equality in their local community. Another participant, Josephine, recounted an incident which had happened in her village:

“My family is part of a local faith community. They put up a *Black Lives Matter* poster after lots of debate in our community’s meeting house [...], and it’s in a very right-wing area, and [the poster] got set on fire. So, yeah, it was a real eye-opener as to how bad the racism actually is

because it was literally set on fire, and I just never ever thought that would happen in a tiny little village." (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

Engaging with and taking on collective agency may therefore strongly depend on one's own circumstances. Participants in the discussions on feminism and LGBTQ criticised the lack of men in the debate around sex-based and gender-based violence surrounding the *Reclaim These Streets* movement. In the group discussions around the *Black Lives Matter* movement and anti-racism activism, some participants reflected upon their whiteness and admitted that for some people their skin-colour offered the option to avoid racist discussions and confrontations.

5.3.4. Perceived opportunity of political and social influence

Essential to the first research question was also the perception of influence. Both *perceived opportunity of political influence* and *perceived opportunity of social influence* were expected to display a positive relationship with non-electoral participation. To examine the relationship of these two factors with non-electoral participation, the following hypotheses were tested:

H5a: The higher young people's perceived opportunity of political influence, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

H5b: The higher young people's perceived opportunity of social influence, the higher is their non-electoral participation.

The equation for the model was assumed as:

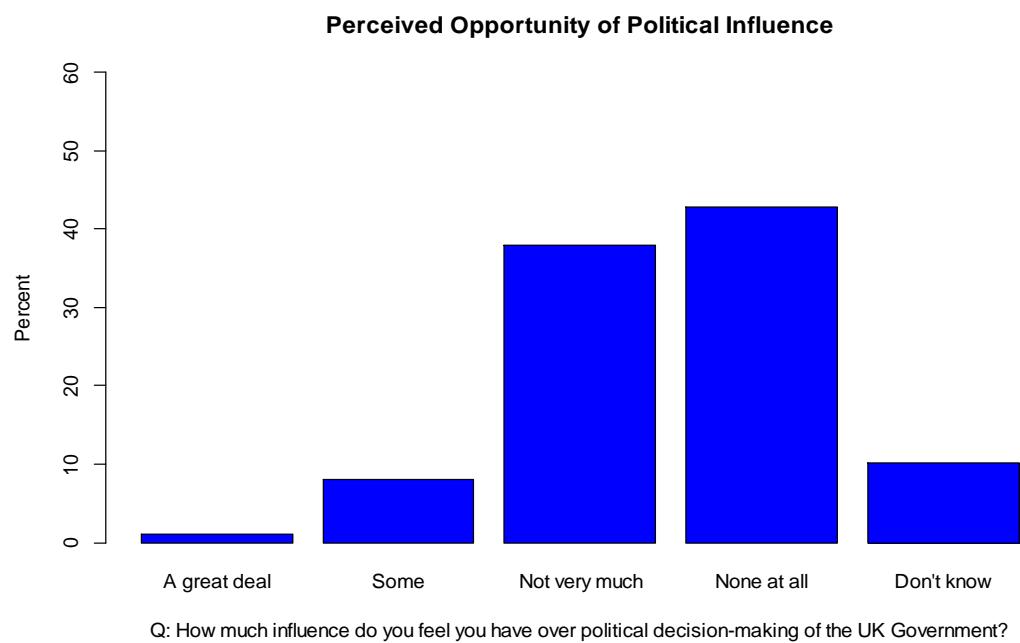
$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{perceived opportunity of political influence} + \beta_2 \text{perceived opportunity of social influence} + \epsilon$$

Y represents the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, with β_0 as the intercept or constant. ϵ stands for the error estimates.

To measure the *perceived opportunity of political influence* respondents were asked "How much influence do you feel you have over political decision-

making of the UK Government?". Answer options ranged from *No influence at all* (1) to *A great deal of influence* (4) on a 4-step scale. The vast majority (80.7%) said they felt they had not very much or no influence at all on the decision-making of the UK government. More male (13.5%) than female respondents (4.6%) felt that they had some influence or a great deal of influence over political decision-making of the UK government (see Figure 5.19).

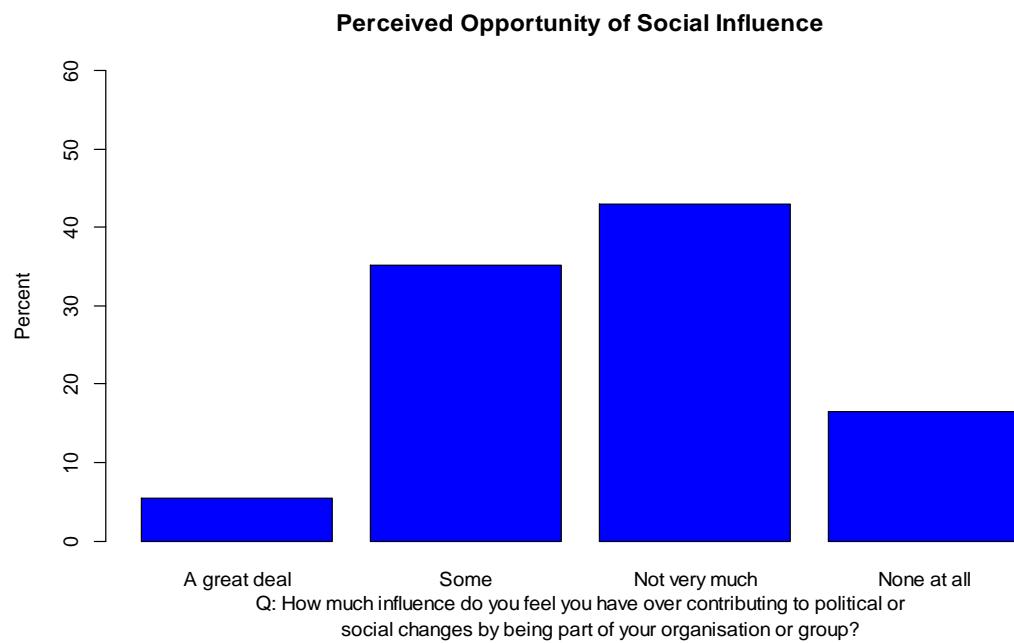
Figure 5.19. Perceived opportunity of political influence among survey respondents in %



For measuring the variable *perceived opportunity of social influence*, respondents were also asked about their membership or participation in organisations and groups. Those who indicated to be a member or regular participant of a civic or political group were asked "How much influence do you feel you have over contributing to political or social changes by being part of your organisation or group?" (N = 474). Similar to the question on the perceived opportunity of political influence, the answer options ranged from *No influence at all* (1) to *A great deal of influence* (4). While the majority still felt that they did not have very much influence or no influence at all (59.3%), a

third felt they had *some* influence (35.2%), and some even claimed to feel that they have *a great deal* of influence (5.5%) (see Figure 5.20). There were only small differences between gender groups on the question of perceived opportunity for social influence.

Figure 5.20. Perceived opportunity for social influence among survey respondents in % (N = 474)



5.3.4.1. Linking perceived opportunity of political influence and social influence with participation in non-electoral activities

The following model investigates the effect of *perceived opportunity of political influence* and *perceived opportunity of social influence* on the number of non-electoral activities taken part in. Missing values were imputed using the mean of the variables. Only *perceived opportunity of social influence* was found to be statistically significant to predict the dependent variable with $F(7, 832) = 31.535$, $p < .001$. The test of H5a and H5b is reported in Table 5.6 below.

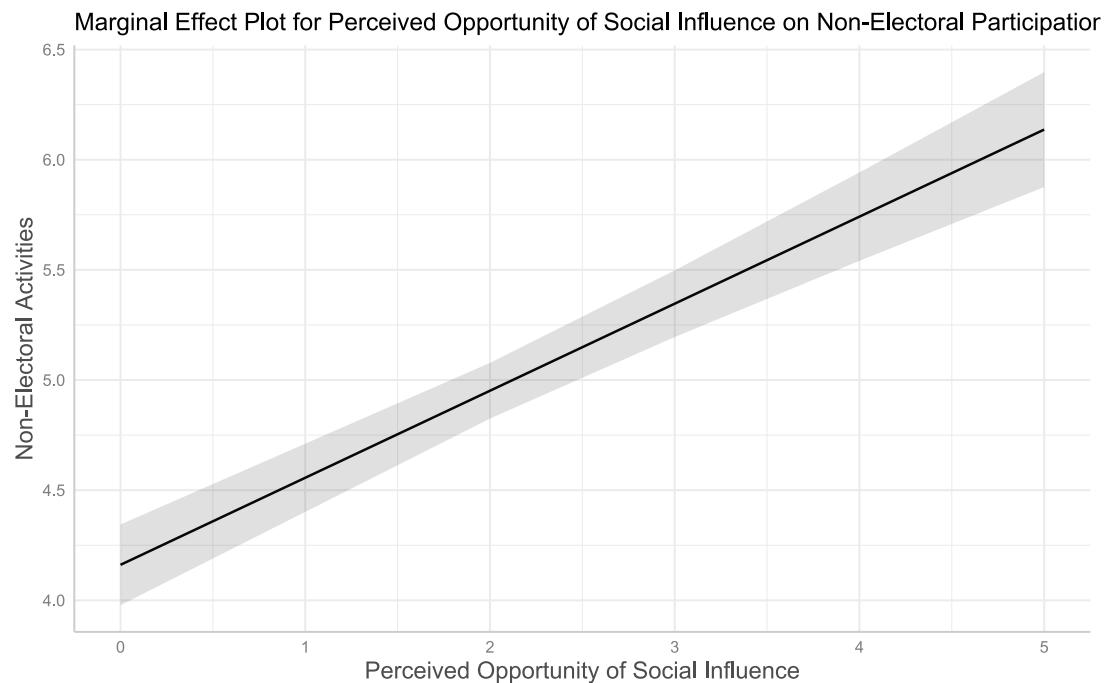
Table 5.6. Explaining non-electoral activities with perceived opportunity of political influence and perceived opportunity of social influence

Non-electoral activities	<i>B</i>	95.0% CI for <i>B</i>		<i>SE B</i>	β
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>		
Perceived opportunity of political influence	-.105	-.293	.083	.096	-.035
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.418***	.343	.494	.039	.347***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.045	-.017	.107	.032	.051
Male	-1.425***	-1.697	-1.152	.139	-.336***
University student	.099	-.195	.393	.150	.023
Middle class (self-assessed)	.039	-.218	.296	.131	.009
Non-white ethnicity	-.095	-.623	.434	.269	-.011
Constant	5.738	4.373	7.104	.696	
Observations	840				
<i>R</i> ²	.210				
ΔR^2	.203				
<p><i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; <i>B</i> = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, <i>LL</i> = lower limit; <i>UL</i> = upper limit; <i>SE B</i> = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; <i>R</i>² = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted <i>R</i>².</p> <p>*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001</p>					

The model showed a statistically significant effect of perceived opportunity of social influence on the number of non-electoral activities participated in, with an adjusted *R*² of 19.0%. *Perceived opportunity of social influence* showed a statistically significant positive effect on the dependent variable of non-electoral activities. The standardised coefficient of .311 (p < .001) indicated a positive effect on the perception of influence within and as part of a social group. *Perceived opportunity of political influence* was not proven as a statistically significant variable to explain the variation of the dependent variable. It can therefore be concluded that a positive perception of opportunity of social influence is likely to have an increasing effect on participation in non-electoral activities. The marginal effect plot in Figure 5.21 shows the predicted

change in number of non-electoral activities dependent on the increase of perception of social influence.

Figure 5.21. Marginal effect plot for perceived opportunity of social influence on non-electoral participation



5.3.4.2. Young people's views on young people in politics and on the future

Across all eight group discussions, the majority of young people appeared to be quite knowledgeable about British politics and most were aware of who their representative Member of Parliament was – despite many not being eligible to vote yet in many cases. Feeling less represented by politicians and unheard was a common complaint, with participants describing incidents of contacting their MP on a matter and not receiving an answer they were satisfied with or any answer at all.

"I found out that most of the activism is like emailing representatives, like MPs, and to ask them to fix things. I had recently heard about this campaign to ban conversion therapy, so I emailed my local MP and was

like, 'hey, can you take do something to take part in this, please?"'
(Gertrude, 16, *feminism and LGBT*)

"There was a local petition with – I think it was over 200,000 signatures saying, 'can we recognise non-binary as a legal gender identity?' and the Conservative Party was like 'no, but thanks for trying'. There's so much that needs to be done, but there's not a lot being done when less than ten years ago, I was told, 'no, you can't be gay because we say that's wrong', and less than a month ago the Conservative Party said 'we're not going to recognise a non-binary gender identity as legal, because we don't agree with that'." (Lena, 18, *feminism and LGBT*)

Even though young people felt disenchanted with institutional politics, they did not appear to be rejecting voting as a democratic tool. Instead, throughout the discussions, participants underlined that they would vote for parties that, according to them, would be more aligned with their views if they had the chance. As mentioned before, a large share of participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the first-past-the-post voting system in the UK, comparing this to other countries with representational voting systems where smaller parties had better chances to win seats in the parliament.

Participants were not just critical about politicians and political institutions, including the electoral system in the UK but also about the perceived strong influences of media and corporations. In contrast to individual actions, most participants saw the role of companies in relation to issues such as climate change as more significant than actions at a personal level. Capitalism was named as one of the main contributors to environmental pollution and in the face of these global economic structures, individual environmental activism seemed to them to be a drop in the ocean. At the same time, many young people pointed out that companies were increasingly using 'hot topics' such as environmentalism, the *Black Lives Matter* movement and *Pride* month to market their products and brands. Although the general sentiment of these marketing campaigns was appreciated by some, young people were quick to

observe that these were often not backed up by actual changes in the overall culture of a company or brand and were insufficient for long-term change.

“I don't feel strongly about [climate change], partly because I feel like it's not something that I'm contributing massively to. It's more like capitalism, big companies, like oil and all that jazz... but it is ultimately really important because it's the fate of our species, and what our planet looks like.” (Jayden, 17, *climate*)

“With the situation in the UK, people view it as a lot better than it is. That kind of view ‘oh, there is same-sex marriage, so you've covered a lot of the goals’. A lot of it is – I don't know it's probably not a very official term, but I always loved the term – ‘rainbow capitalism’. As soon as you get to June, every brand puts a rainbow on everything and suddenly everything's great for a month. There is no consideration for things like the remnants of Section 28 [of the Local Government Act 1988¹] in schools – that still is there and still having an effect, how a lot of people still wouldn't feel safe holding hands their partner in public.” (Naomi, 17, *feminism and LGBT*)

While young people across all group discussions understood their generation, or more broadly speaking younger people, as more open to change and generally thinking globally, a few people raised concerns about the ‘silent majority’ among young people – people who were staying quiet and passive – as well as those who might not share similar views as people in the focus groups. Some pointed out that it was not right and potentially even dangerous to recognise ‘young people’ or ‘the youth’ as a homogenous entity.

“I don't mean to be cynic, but I think that [social media] branched a new wave of ‘slacktivism’, where people are just posting things, especially in their story; it has become something that you should do to be seen as ‘you're with it’. The long-term change of that doesn't really do much.

¹ Section 28 refers to a series of laws prohibiting the “promotion of homosexuality” by local authorities in Britain. This legislation was repealed in Scotland in 2000, and in England and Wales in 2003 (Lee, 2019).

When you go to some accounts of a group or a community and go through their social media, you might think 'Oh my God, the youth, they are so politically minded, they're doing so much work!' But in reality, it's just sharing the same infographic and it is not really doing much else."

(Shirley, 17, *climate*)

"I hope I'm not the voice of negativity, but I think people underestimate [...] the less than PC (politically correct) sort of people. There is quite a not so woke culture, where 'fag' is being used as an insult, 'gay' is an insult, 'why bother about racism, feminism and stuff' view. I don't know how big it is, but there is an element of that 'lads, lads, lads' type, 'LGBT has gone too far', 'it's all woke nonsense', and all that. It's not all progressive, there is that other cultural thing among young people, too."

(Jayden, 17, *climate*)

Another concern regarding young people and politics was the perception of unjustified expectations of the younger generations projected by older generations. Participants shared that they did not think that their generation or young people today are necessarily more likely to be involved in activism than previous generations, but that – especially in the context of climate change – expectations are placed on younger generations to 'fix' a problem that they did not create. Instead of perpetuating this generational divide, many young people involved wished for more collaboration between the young and older generations. This was particularly commonly expressed by people in the discussions on climate change:

"I don't think that the feeling of activism is necessarily stronger or that much stronger in our generation than in others. There is definitely a heightened sense of awareness [in our generation], but I don't think we should just rely on us. There is this idea that that our generation could really do something, but just to assume that is going to be incredibly damaging to the movement as a whole, because you really can't rely on that." (Shirley, 17, *climate*)

“It's not all down to us, it's going to take a collaborative effort from across the generations, and it's not just young people who care about [climate change]. If anything, it's my mum's generation who I also find really enthusiastic about it, so it shouldn't just be down to us, and I think the majority of the electorate really does care about it.” (Jennifer, 18, *climate*)

When talking about their views on the future, the majority of participants showed signs of hope and optimism. These positive outlooks were less based on the observation of positive changes and more on the fact that participants felt a need to stay optimistic to remain motivated:

“It's important to be optimistic, otherwise no change will happen. I need to feel motivated to create that change.” (Elena, 16, *climate*)

Most focus group participants were generally positive about their own generation and coming younger generations. They perceived young people as “more open to thinking about things differently and [...] pushing for things that are important”. This perception was shared across all activism topics, and for many participants, being part of this generational effort contributed to their motivation to become politically active. Yet, in terms of actual change, many young people also had doubts about how much change is possible without greater structural reforms and how much of a contribution there really is from *Generation Z*.

“I think our generation tends to sit back unless they're asked to do it, so if they're directly told about it and they're directly encouraged to go, people will stand up and do what the right thing is, but if nobody actually directly engages with us, then people just don't seem to get involved in it. It's going to take people that are willing to spend their time doing that to make changes in the future.” (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

Young people especially worried about extreme right movements among the younger generations and how social media was increasingly used to recruit extremists on both sides of the political spectrum. At the same time, social

media and more diverse sources of media were regarded as useful for raising awareness:

“Social media can create this echo chamber where you just follow people who have the same beliefs as you, and then you believe that everyone has the same beliefs as you. Especially with the rise of the Alt-right nowadays, and how they seem to be dragging in younger members, I’m personally quite worried about that, because I know people who hold those sorts of very radical right-wing beliefs. Yeah, we are, as a generation, quite active politically and that’s something to be proud of and it is good foundation to build upon, and we need to be careful about generalising that Gen Z is this left-wing progressive generation.” (Lindsay, 17, *feminism and LGBT*)

Overall, ambiguity about the future was manifest among all eight group discussions, with some people being more positive and hopeful than others. It seemed that this optimism was ingrained in young people’s motivation to not just become activists but also to continue to stay involved in activism. This optimism was not an absolute one: participants pointed out the changes they had seen in their own lifetime (such as changing attitudes towards same-sex marriage, general acceptance of climate change as a scientific fact) but remained aware of existing issues and challenges to ending climate change, sexism and racism. They agreed that any change would not be without effort and, in some cases, not without sacrifices:

“I’m hopeful that my generation will change things, that representation will continue to be a thing, that there will be more representation as time goes on. I know people are supposed to become more conservative as they get older, but I hope that doesn’t happen and that my generation stays as they are at the moment: hopeful for the future and trying to be the best people they can be to help other people.” (Paula, 16, *anti-racism*)

“If you’re in a place of privilege, you have to make a conscious effort to change, which a lot of people don’t want to do. If it doesn’t affect them,

they don't care. It takes a lot more effort to fight against the system than it does to either stay silent or work with the system. So, there is a long way to go, even for our generation." (Yolanda, 16, *anti-racism*)

Young people felt torn between being hopeful about the future and feeling fearful due to perceived uncertainties. While being confident about their own actions, they were also largely aware of the potential downsides to social media activism, such as becoming a mere performative act, and the potential for young people to be co-opted by extremist groups.

5.3.5. Dissatisfaction with the government

This section examines the relationship between low satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the government and non-electoral participatory activities, expressed in the following hypothesis:

H6: The more dissatisfied with the performance of the government, the higher the non-electoral participation of young people.

The assumption was that *dissatisfaction with the government* would show a positive relationship with the level of *non-electoral activities* or, in other words, that *satisfaction with the government* demonstrates a negative relationship with *non-electoral participation*. The equation for the model was assumed as:

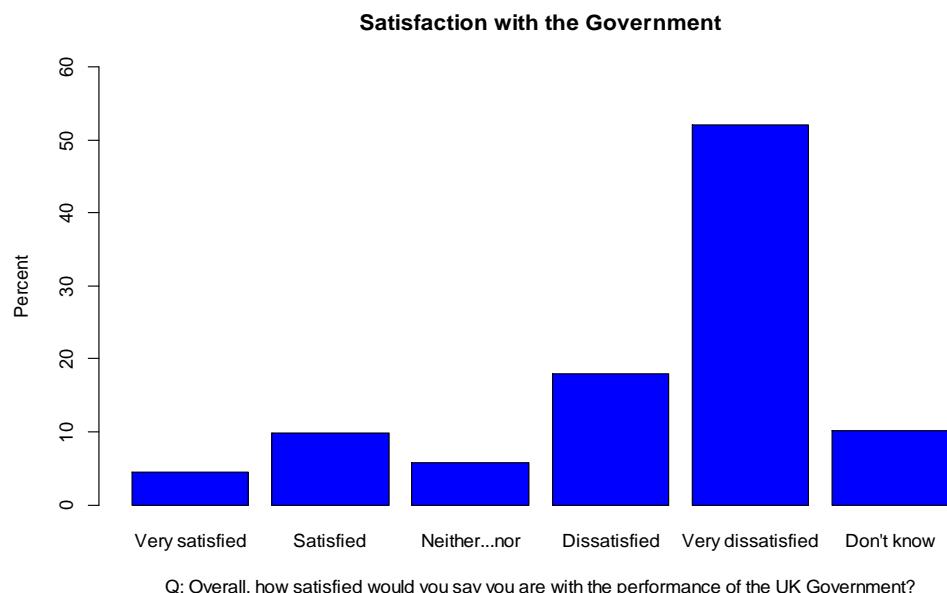
$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ satisfaction with the UK government} + \varepsilon$$

Y represents the dependent variable of non-electoral participation, with β_0 as the intercept or constant. ε stands for the error estimates.

The independent variable *satisfaction with the UK government* was measured on a 5-step scale, ranking from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = Very satisfied. The distribution of this variable is positively skewed, meaning that more people were reporting to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the UK government than would be expected in a normal distribution (see Figure 5.22). Since the sample size comprised of young people (16 to 24 years old) who predominantly indicated to (hypothetically) vote for the Labour Party, the

Green Party, and the SNP (in the case of Scotland), having a large share or respondents being dissatisfied with a Conservative government in the UK is not remarkable. The relationship between the number of non-electoral activities participated in and *satisfaction with the UK government* score showed a negative correlation.

Figure 5.22. Satisfaction with the UK government among survey respondents in %



5.3.5.1. Linking dissatisfaction with the government with participation in non-electoral activities

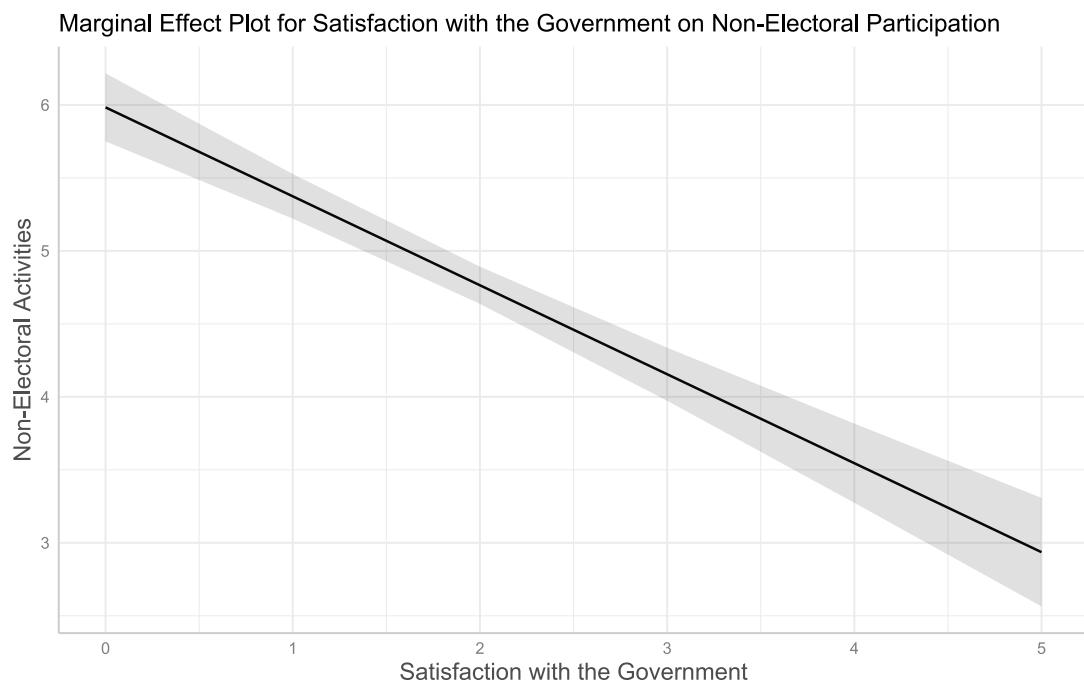
The following model investigates the effect of *Satisfaction with the UK government* on the number of *non-electoral activities* taken part in. Missing values were replaced by an imputed series mean. R^2 for the model was 21.1% with an adjusted R^2 of 20.6%. *Satisfaction with the UK government* was found to be statistically significant to predict the dependent variable, with $F(6, 833) = 37.230$, $p < .001$. The test of H6 is reported in Table 5.7 below.

Table 5.7. Explaining non-electoral activities with satisfaction with the UK government

Non-electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.618***	-.728	-.508	.056	-.354***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.074	.013	.136	.031	.085*
Male	-.957***	-1.238	-.676	.143	-.225***
University student	.030	-.261	.321	.148	.007
Middle class (self-assessed)	.196	-.060	.451	.130	.046
Non-white ethnicity	.158	-.367	.684	.268	.018
Constant	5.707	4.389	7.025	.671	
Observations	840				
R^2	.211***				
ΔR^2	.206				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; $SE B$ = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$					

The linear regression model showed that *satisfaction with the UK government* had a negative effect on the number of non-electoral activities participated in, i.e. the more satisfied a respondent was, the less likely they were to have participated in more non-electoral activities. The standardised coefficient was -.354 ($p < .001$). Low levels of satisfaction with the UK government contributed to an increased level of activity in non-electoral participation. Subsequent analysis indicated that these low levels of satisfaction with the UK government also influence increased participation in collective activities of non-electoral participation, specifically participating in protests and mobilising other people (see subsection 5.4.2.1). This provides a strong indication that dissatisfaction with the government constitutes a motivational source for young people's activism. Figure 5.23 illustrates the marginal effects of the variable *satisfaction with the UK government* on non-electoral participation.

Figure 5.23. Marginal effect plot for satisfaction with the government on non-electoral participation



5.3.5.2. Young people's views on the UK's political system and government

"I think people's opinions are being heard, I just don't think that they are being conveyed by the politicians. In many situations, you see politicians do these empty gestures of 'Oh yes, I stand with you', 'Oh yes, here is my performative activism'. If we were to go and look at their voting record, it would say something entirely different." (Paula, 16, *anti-racism*)

Focus group participants were very critical of the UK government, specifically in relation to the three main issues discussed. Although some progress was recognised in the areas of environmental policies, most young people felt that the political institutions in the UK did not fulfil their responsibility. Instead of meaningful actions, statements of British politicians on climate change, feminism, racial equality, and immigration issues were regarded as "lip service". In the context of young people's needs, politicians were seen as not

doing enough and deliberately choosing not to interact with young people. One participant talked about her attempt to schedule a meeting with her local MP on environmental issues and was disappointed to be turned down:

“[My MP] sent me back a list of everything the government was doing to help out with environmental issues and said we wouldn't need to schedule a meeting. Considering it's my right as a constituent to schedule a meeting, that was rather ironic.” (Jennifer, 18, *climate*)

There was a sense of frustration, disappointment and dissatisfaction with the UK government among the discussants, with an emphasis on criticising the Conservative government in power. However, criticism towards political parties also included Labour for not opposing the government enough and the Scottish National Party for their diverging views on gender identity, as a participant recalled the SNP being “called out for transphobia”. Although being disenchanted with the UK government overall, participants still attributed high responsibility to policymakers and continuously mentioned voting as an important route to achieve change within a democracy. However, many also expressed their dissatisfaction with the political system itself, as Adrian discussed:

“It's basically impossible for any party, the Labour Party included, to take enough meaningful action on climate change, because there are so many forces which work against them on that. If we want to tackle climate change, it doesn't rely on lobbying those in government, it doesn't rely on even changing the party in power; it's a case of reforming our political system and changing entirely our method of governance.”

(Adrian, 20, *climate*)

As the current voting system of first-past-the-post favours the two-party system, this was seen as preventing an accurate representation of the electorate, including minorities. Instead of addressing this faulty system, the UK government was seen as using tokenism to pretend multi-ethnic representation within political office and to disguise existing inequalities, in politics and society. Frankie, for example, said:

“The UK government goes like ‘we’ve got Priti Patel, we’ve got Rishi Sunak, how do we have any problem with racism?’. But it means nothing. It’s like literally, ‘we’re going to dismantle sexism by just putting women in CEO positions, but if the women in CEO positions are going to do exactly what a man would do in that position, then what’s the point in having them there at all? That’s the thing I found frustrating.” (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

For many young people in the group discussions, the discrepancy between attributing responsibility to the government and the perception that policies and politicians do not address issues of interest of young people enough or in the expected manner had fuelled feelings of dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction was often paired with one’s aspiration to act upon one’s convictions of what is right. Young people’s willingness to protest and the decision to become active appeared to be stemming from their wish to ‘hold the government and politicians accountable’, as much as standing up for their beliefs and views.

5.4. Identifying predictors of young people’s non-electoral participation

After having tested each of the hypotheses individually (see section 5.3), this section provides a full model for young people’s non-electoral participation. To this end, all previously tested variables are placed into the model. The purpose of a multiple linear regression model is to observe the effects of each variable in the context of the others. In terms of variables, the model includes primarily cognitive factors (interest, efficacy, agency and perceived influence) and the emotional factor of dissatisfaction with the government. Thus, by running a full linear regression model, its findings directly contribute to answering research questions RQ1 and RQ2.

The individual analyses of the hypotheses have shown that variables of interest, satisfaction with the government, agency, internal efficacy, personal agency, collective efficacy, collective agency and perceived opportunity of social influence demonstrate significant effects on the dependent variable of

non-electoral activities. *Interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* produced statistically significant results and showed a relationship with non-electoral participation, with *interest in social issues* displaying a larger standardised coefficient than *interest in politics*. The models examining the effect of *internal efficacy* and *personal agency* showed statistically significant positive effects of the variable on non-electoral participation but displayed overall lower R^2 values, meaning that they accounted for a lesser proportion of variance of the dependent variable than other tested factors.

Similar findings were made for the effects of *collective efficacy* and *collective agency* on levels of non-electoral participation, which raises the question of relationships between the individual and collective forms of belief in efficacy and confidence in capacity to act. While *perceived opportunity of political influence* was not proven to be a statistically significant variable to explain the variation of the dependent variable non-electoral activities, potentially affected by low levels of *satisfaction with the government*, an increase in *perceived opportunity of social influence* affected an increase in non-electoral activities.

As before, the control variables consist of *age* (scale data), *gender* (being male), *social class* (being middle class), *being in university* (being a university student) and *ethnicity* (self-describing as part of a non-white ethnic group). It was expected that *gender* displays a significant negative effect, since this has been a reoccurrence in previous models.

5.4.1. Full linear regression model for young people's non-electoral participation

The following linear model contains all variables from the previously tested hypotheses, i.e. *interest in politics*, *interest in social issues*, *internal efficacy*, *personal agency*, *collective efficacy*, *collective agency*, *perceived opportunity of political influence* and *perceived opportunity of social influence* (see Table 5.8). R^2 for the model using non-electoral activities as the dependent variable was 41.3% with an adjusted R^2 of 40.6%, with $F(14, 825) = 41.918$, $p < .001$.

Table 5.8. Full linear regression model explaining non-electoral activities

Non-electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Interest in politics	.428***	.212	.643	.110	.115***
Interest in social issues	.374***	.239	.508	.068	.179***
Internal efficacy	.120*	.017	.224	.053	.073*
Personal agency	.183***	.076	.289	.054	.106***
Collective efficacy	.226**	.068	.384	.080	.084**
Collective agency	.075	-.071	.220	.074	.032
Perceived opportunity of political influence	.047	-.132	.227	.091	.016
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.324***	.257	.392	.034	.269***
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.559***	-.667	-.450	.055	-.320***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.067*	.013	.121	.028	.076*
Male	-.844***	-1.109	-.578	.135	-.199***
University student	.238	-.019	.494	.131	.055
Middle class (self-assessed)	.118	-.105	.341	.114	.028
Non-white ethnicity	-.107	-.577	.363	.239	-.012
Constant	-.766	-2.563	1.032	.916	
Observations	840				
R^2	.416***				
ΔR^2	.406				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; SE B = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$					

Except for *collective agency* and *perceived opportunity of political influence*, all independent variables were found to have a significant effect. *Interest in politics* and *interest in social issues* displayed similar standardised coefficients of .155 and .179 ($p < .001$). The variable *satisfaction with the UK government* had a negative effect with a standardised coefficient of -.320 ($p < .001$), while *perceived opportunity of social influence* had the greatest positive effect with

a standardised coefficient of .269 ($p < .001$). *Internal efficacy* and *personal agency* demonstrated smaller positive effects, with coefficients of .073 ($p < .05$) and .106 ($p < .001$), respectively. Similarly, the model also produced a small coefficient for *collective efficacy* of .084 ($p < .01$). Among the control variables, *gender* showed a negative influence of -.199 ($p < .001$), an effect that could be observed throughout all previous models in this chapter. A smaller and positive effect was registered for the variable *age*, with a standardised coefficient of .076 ($p < .05$).

The residuals of the model showed a normal distribution, as assessed by a histogram and Normal P-P plot of the standardised residuals (see Figures A9.1 and A9.2 in Appendix 9). The close to normally distributed histogram with a mean of zero further indicated that the zero-bias assumption of the error term was met. Homoscedasticity was assessed by inspecting the scatterplot of predicted values and standardised residuals, which showed a random distribution of points with a relatively consistent spread of residuals (A9.3). Thus, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, reducing the possibility of biased or skewed results.

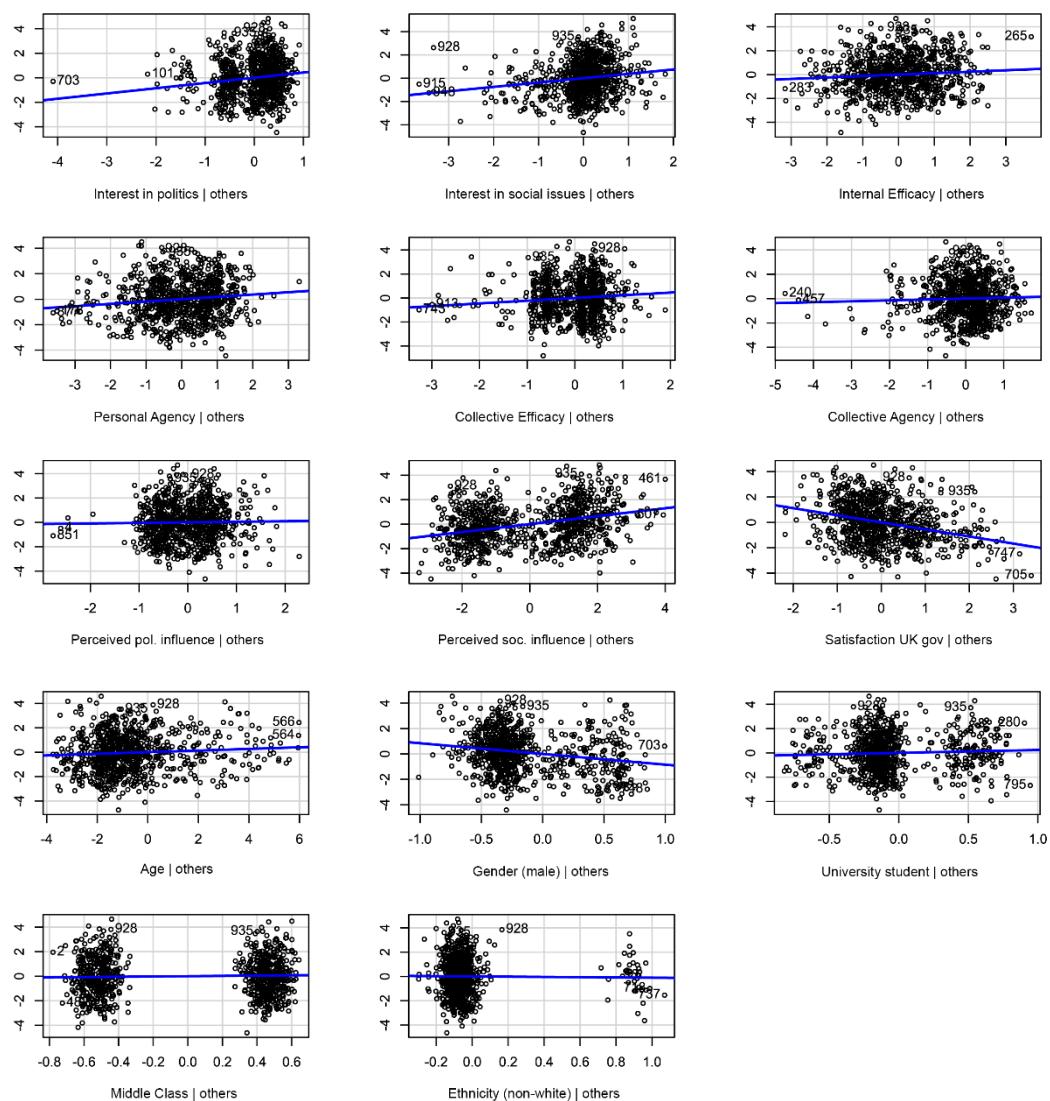
Based on the regression above, the equation for the full linear model for non-electoral participation was expressed as:

$$Y_{\text{Non-Electoral Participation}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{interest in politics} + \beta_2 \text{interest in social issues} + \beta_3 \text{satisfaction with the UK government} + \beta_4 \text{internal efficacy} + \beta_5 \text{personal agency} + \beta_6 \text{collective efficacy} + \beta_7 \text{perceived opportunity of social influence} + \varepsilon$$

As previously highlighted, the regression model, including the equation above, explains in particular that an increase in the independent variables leads to a likely increase in non-electoral participation for those respondents who had reported having partaken in at least one activity. When using the expansive dependent variable of non-electoral activities, ranging from 0 to 9 and thus including respondents who reported to have not participated in any of the listed non-electoral activities, the results maintain (see Appendix 10).

Figure 5.24 visualises the effect of each individual independent variable and the sociodemographic variables on the dependent variable of non-electoral participation of the complete model by presenting added variable (or partial regression) plots. It shows the relationship between the dependent and the predictor variable, while the additional predictor variables are being held constant. The steeper the gradient, the stronger the effect on the number of non-electoral activities participated in.

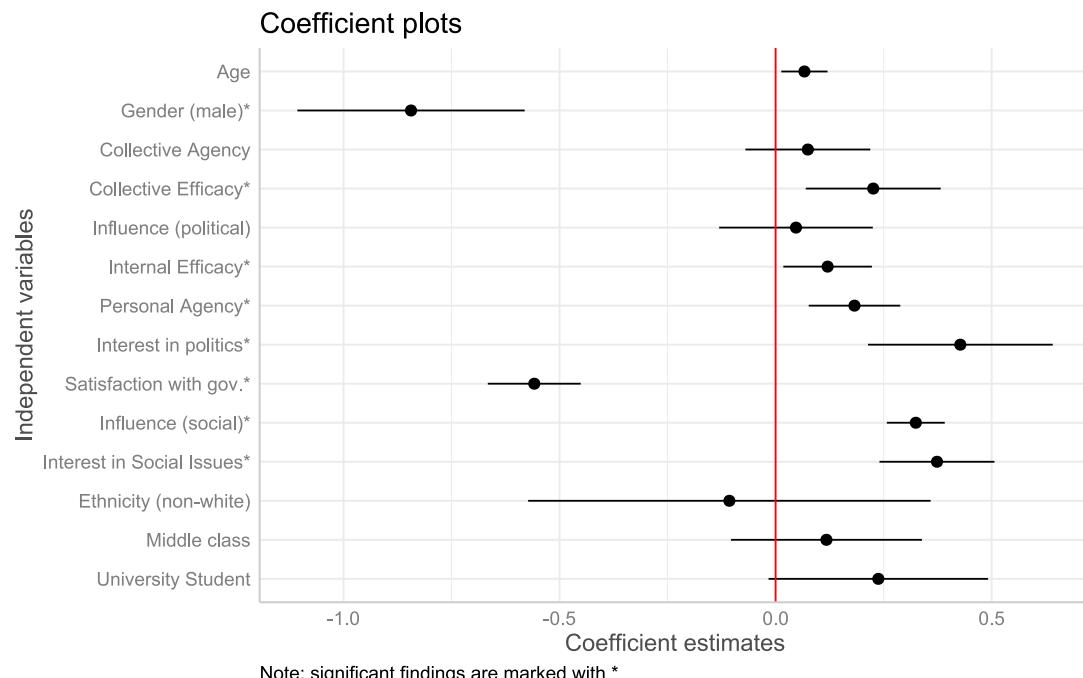
Figure 5.24. Added variable plots for the full linear regression model with non-electoral activities as dependent variable



5.4.2. Understanding the drivers for young people's non-electoral participation

The individual analysis of the effects of the cognitive factors interest, perception of efficacy, agency and influence and the emotional component of dissatisfaction with the government revealed that these factors contribute to increased levels of engagement in non-electoral activities among young people in the UK. Combined in the full linear regression model above, the analysis identified which of these factors can be regarded as predictors of young people's non-electoral participation. Figure 5.25 highlights the coefficients of the full linear model on non-electoral activities as the dependent variables, in which the largest coefficients were observed for the interest variables and satisfaction with the government, followed by the perceptual factors of agency, efficacy and influence.

Figure 5.25. Coefficient plots of independent variables on non-electoral participation levels.



Both being interested in politics and being interested in social issues was associated with an increase in non-electoral participation (H2a and H2b). This represents a specifically important finding, since no correlation was found

between *interest in politics* and *interest in social issues*. It could be concluded that non-electoral participation encompasses more civic forms of activities than electoral participation, thus, it makes sense to be driven by a heightened civic-mindedness. This was reflected in the focus group discussions, as participants were primarily stating their interest in or their passion for a specific topic as a reason to become politically active, rather than their interest in political institutions or actors. The survey data analysis also provided indications that different interest levels could be attributed to gender differences, with young men being more inclined to be interested in politics and young women to be more interested in social issues. One explanation of such gender-based difference could be the differences in associations with what is perceived as 'political' and what is perceived as 'social'.

Perceptions of efficacy, confidence in effectiveness of oneself and other, and perceptions of agency, the capacity to act of oneself and attributed to a community, were discovered to be linked to one another by correlation tests, while still covering different components. *Internal efficacy*, the belief in one's own understanding of politics, and *personal agency*, the perception of one's individual capacity to act on behalf of issues were found to affect non-electoral participation positively (H3a and H4a). Confidence in the effectiveness of working together, a positive perception of *collective efficacy* also positively affected the level of non-electoral participation (H3b). The result that *personal agency* is relevant for increased levels of non-electoral activities, as opposed to *collective agency* (H4b), could indicate that individual engagement depends on self-perception, which includes general confidence in understanding political issues (*internal efficacy*), believing in the possibility of communally affected change (*collective efficacy*) and attributing oneself the ability to act (*personal agency*). Perceptions of oneself and others were prominent themes across all focus group discussions.

While *perceived opportunity of political influence* did not hold up as a significant factor (H5a), *perceived opportunity of social influence* was identified as a strong influence on the level of non-electoral participation (H5b). The respondents' overall lack of confidence in their own ability to influence the

politics of the UK government is likely to be linked to the low levels of satisfaction with the government's performance. By contrast, a positive perception of social influence was found to increase the likelihood of being involved in more non-electoral activities. It is important to note that this variable was conceived of those respondents who were organised in groups of any sort, including civic organisations, political groups, and associations of leisure. Since civic participation has been found to increase political participation in previous literature, especially voting, a positive effect of perceived social influential power may also be observed in a subsequent model on electoral participation (see section 5.5).

Increased *satisfaction with the UK government* decreased the likelihood of engaging with non-electoral activities, conversely meaning that low levels of satisfaction are associated with an increased likelihood of participating in more forms of non-electoral activities (H6). This is interesting, as the satisfaction with a political body, such as the UK government, represents institutionalised politics, yet appears to influence non-electoral participation of young people. Discussions with young activists suggested that dissatisfaction with the government represents a contributing factor to become engaged in non-electoral participation as a counter-reaction to the perceived failure of political institutions.

Two control variables in the full model showed significant impact on the levels of non-electoral activities young people participated in. One was *age*, which indicated that the older respondents were, the more likely they had participated in more activities, a logical finding as older respondents simply had more lifetime to be engaged in non-electoral participation than young respondents, with the youngest respondents in the survey being 16-year-olds. The effect of age, however, appeared only to be minor, as demonstrated by the low regression coefficient (unstandardised and standardised). The other control variable *gender* consistently demonstrated a negative effect on non-electoral participation levels in all previous models, as well as in the full linear regression model. As indicated by large negative coefficient, male respondents were less likely to participate in more non-electoral activities. This result warranted

further analysis of potential gender differences within the factors for non-electoral participation.

Based on this summary of findings from analysing predictors of young people's engagement in non-electoral activities, three further lines of inquiry were being pursued. One, the differences between individual and collective types of activities were analysed, using a one-way ANOVA test to determine the statistical significance between differences in means of predictors (H7) and a subsequent binary logistic regression, to identify which factors are associated with being involved in both individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation (H8). Two, gender differences in non-electoral participation and the factors these differences are likely to be influenced by were explored (H9). Three, determinants of young people's non-electoral participation were contrasted with determinants of young people's electoral participation (H10).

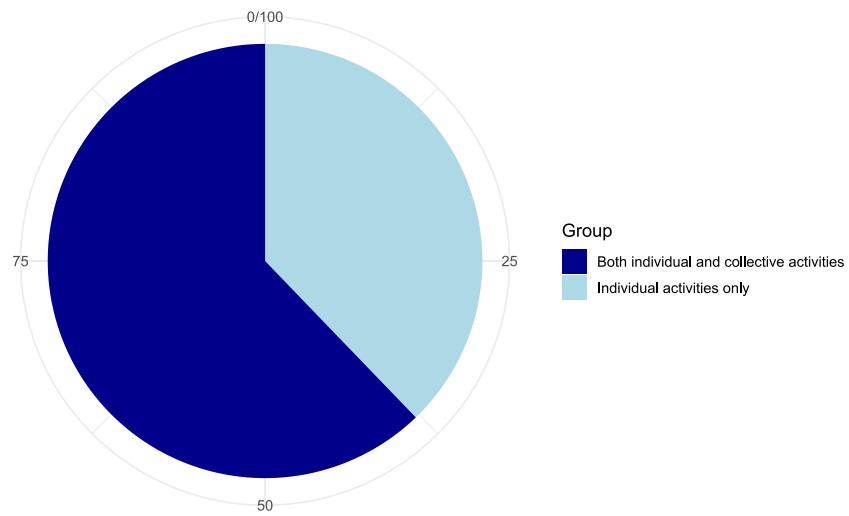
5.4.2.1. The drivers of individual vs. collective type of activities

Survey respondents were invited to indicate their participation in the following pre-selected individual activities: (1) Liking, sharing or posting political content online; (2) Signing a petition; (3) Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons; (4) Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons; and (5) Becoming a vegetarian (meatless diet) or going vegan (diet without any animal products), as well as the following pre-selected collective activities (activities that require a group or interacting with other people) encompass (1) Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes); (2) Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally; (3) Participating in or being a member of an activist group; and (4) Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally. While most respondents tended to say they were more involved in individual actions than collective ones (more than 80% of respondents said to have engaged in online political participation and signed a petition, while about a third reported to have taken part in a

protest march), almost two-thirds of respondents reported to have participated in at least one collective form of non-electoral activities (Figure 5.26).

Figure 5.26. Subgroups of respondents: participation in individual activities only and participation in both individual and collective activities

Subgroups of respondents by participation in individual and collective non-electoral activities



This subsection first investigates the difference in means between two specific groups, before running a binary logistic regression model to determine which factors are more likely to predict participating in both individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation. Respondents were assigned to two groups: group one included those who had only participated in individual activities ($N = 318$), while group two included those who had participated in both individual and collective activities ($N = 522$). A third group with those who had reported to have only participated in collective activities could not be introduced, since respondents who had participated in collective activities had also said they had taken part in at least one individual activity.

Using a one-way ANOVA test with contrasts between means, the following hypothesis (H7) examined whether there were statistically significant differences between these two groups in the previously identified as significant independent variables *interest in politics*, *interest in social issues*, *internal*

efficacy, personal agency, collective efficacy, perceived opportunity of social influence and satisfaction with the UK government:

H7: There are statistically significant differences in the associations of the independent variables between those respondents who only participated in individual non-electoral activities and those who participated in both individual and collective non-electoral activities.

Normality tests for the five independent variables indicated no normal distributions for either group, but the analysis was continued as ANOVA represents a robust test. The means of the tested variables increased from the group which said they “participated in individual activities only” to the group who “participated in both individual and collective activities”, except for the variable *satisfaction with the UK government*, for which the observation was inverse (see Appendix 11) A one-way Welch ANOVA confirmed that the means of the examined variables showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

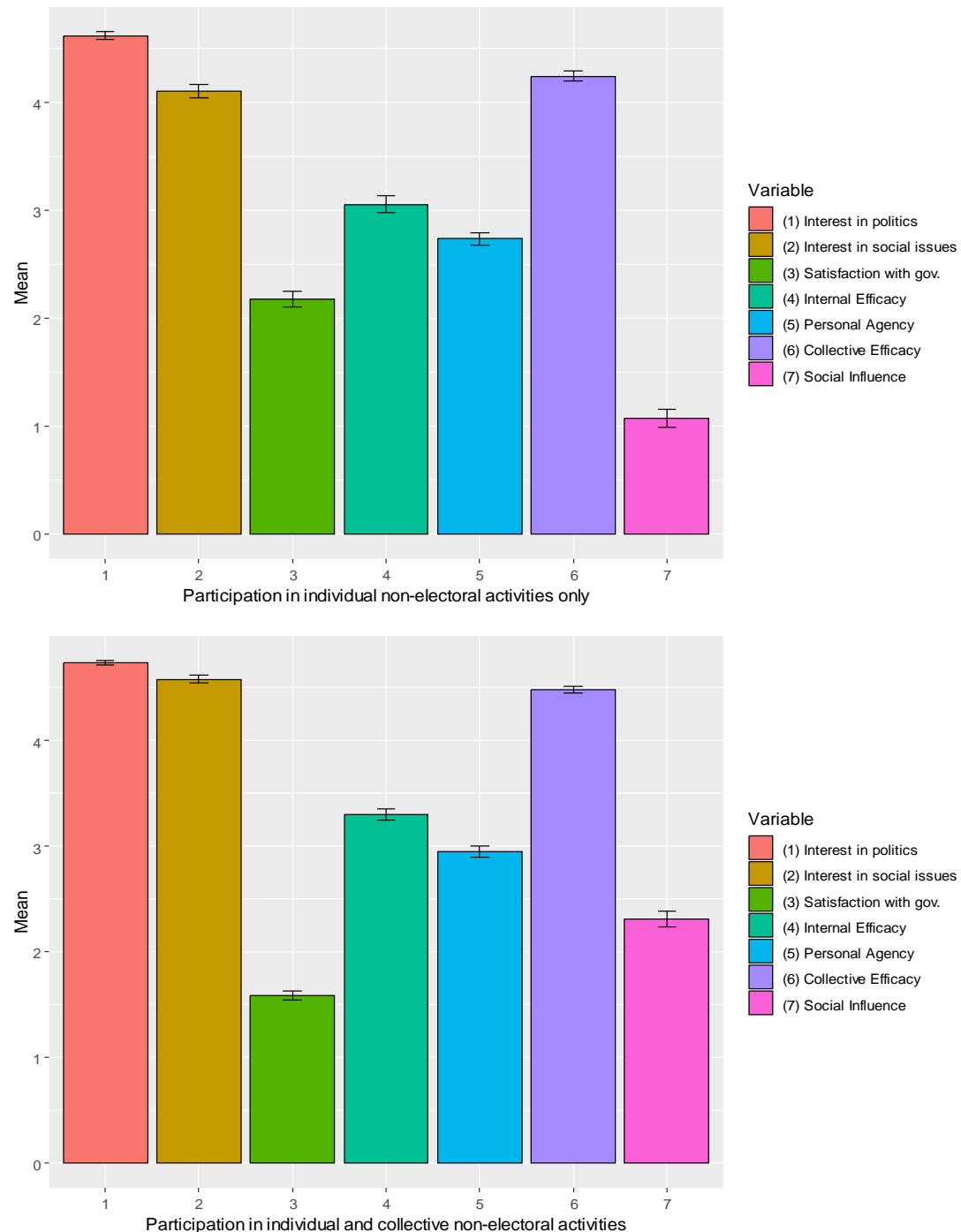
There were 10 outliers detected for *interest in politics*, 12 for *interest in social issues*, 6 for *satisfaction with the UK government*, 9 for *collective efficacy*, as assessed by boxplot inspection. Although data was not normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not met (except for *internal efficacy*), the Welch test confirmed the significance of differences in mean for the two groups. Subsequent contrast tests showed the following statistically significant values in mean scores for the seven tested variables (see Table 5.9).

Table 5.9. Contrast tests of means scores by activity subgroups

						95% Confidence Interval	
	Value of Contrast	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Lower	Upper
Interest in politics	-.11851	.04224	-2.806	557.782	.005	-.20148	-.03554
Interest in social issues	-.47939	.07479	-6.410	540.595	<.001	-.62631	-.33247
Internal efficacy	-.25219	.09091	-2.774	838	.006	-.43063	-.07375
Personal agency	-.21733	.08353	-2.602	751.938	.009	-.38131	-.05336
Collective efficacy	-.24348	.05860	-4.155	544.872	<.001	-.35858	-.12838
Perceived opportunity of social influence	-1.2417	.11265	11.023	746.232	<.001	-1.46286	-1.0205
Satisfaction with the UK government	.58993	.08778	6.720	566.117	<.001	.41750	.76235

The one-way ANOVA demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences in the means of the seven tested variables, showing that the group of respondents who had participated in both individual and collective non-electoral activities were, in comparison with the other group, more interested in politics and social issues, more dissatisfied with the performance of the UK government, and had stronger beliefs in their own and collective efficacy and in their personal capacity to act. Furthermore, they displayed a slightly more favourable view of being able to influence social issues (see Figure 5.27). Thus, hypothesis H7 was confirmed.

Figure 5.27. Differences in means between respondents who participated in individual activities only and respondents who participated in both individual and collective activities



After the significance of differences in means had been proven, the next step of analysis examined which of the independent variables were significant for predicting belonging to the group of those who had participated in both

individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation. In other words, which of the factors identified were more strongly associated with being involved with at least one form of collective non-electoral participation. Taking into account the differences of means between the two groups (1) individual activities only and (2) both individual and collective activities, which indicated the largest difference in mean in being dissatisfied with the government, and assuming that collective activities are driven by more socially coined perceptions, the hypothesis stated that:

H8: Increases in interest in social issues, dissatisfaction with the government, collective efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence are associated with a greater likelihood of participating in both individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation.

To this end, a binomial logistic regression was performed to examine the effects of previously as significant identified independent variables *interest in politics*, *interest in social issues*, *internal efficacy*, *personal agency*, *collective efficacy*, *perceived opportunity of social influence* and *satisfaction with the UK government* on the likelihood that respondents had participated in collective activities. Standard control variables were included in the model (see Table 5.10).

Table 5.10. Logistic regression predicting the likelihood of participating in collective non-electoral activities

	B	SE (B)	Wald	df	Sig.	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
						Lower	Upper
Interest in politics	.112	.154	.530	1	.467	.827	1.514
Interest in social issues	.281	.095	8.759	1	.003	1.100	1.596
Internal efficacy	.139	.075	3.426	1	.064	.992	1.332
Personal agency	.099	.071	1.969	1	.161	.961	1.268
Collective efficacy	.231	.106	4.735	1	.030	1.023	1.551
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.470	.052	80.935	1	<.001	1.444	1.772
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.418	.076	30.192	1	<.001	.568	.764
<i>Controls</i>							
Age	.055	.039	1.963	1	.161	.978	1.140
Male	.375	.195	3.682	1	.055	.992	2.133
University student	-.053	.189	.077	1	.781	.655	1.374
Middle class (self-assessed)	-.013	.163	.006	1	.938	.717	1.360
Non-white ethnicity	.039	.340	.013	1	.908	.534	2.024
Constant	-4.242	1.280	10.980	1	<.001		
Observations	840						
R ² Nagelkerke	.288						
<p><i>Note.</i> Model estimated: binomial logistic regression in SPSS Statistics; <i>B</i> = unstandardized regression coefficient; <i>SE (B)</i> = standard error of the coefficient; <i>Wald</i> = test statistic for the individual predictor variable; <i>df</i> = degree of freedom; <i>CI</i> = confidence interval, <i>Lower</i> = lower limit; <i>Upper</i> = upper limit; <i>R</i>² = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted <i>R</i>².</p>							

The logistic regression model was statistically significant and explained 28.8% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance and correctly classified 71.7% of cases. The sensitivity of the model was 52.4% and specificity was 83.4%. Prediction values for the category of "Participation in *individual activities only*" were 65.61% and for the category of "Participation in *both individual and collective activities*" was 74.28%. Of the seven predictor variables, four were statistically

significant: *interest in social issues, satisfaction with the UK government, collective efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence*. These findings confirmed hypothesis H8, stating that increases in interest in social issues, dissatisfaction with the government, collective efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence are associated with a greater likelihood of participating in both individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation.

5.4.2.2. Gender differences in drivers of non-electoral participation

Since the variable *gender* continuously showed significant effects on the dependent variable, indicating specifically that being male decreased the overall likelihood to have participated in more non-electoral activities, this subsection looks into potential differences in influential factors for male and female respondents' participation. First, the full linear regression model, as presented in section 5.4.1 was disaggregated by gender, to reveal potential differences in the coefficients and thus in the effect of particular independent variables. Second, interaction terms were introduced in the linear regression model to identify potential interrelationship between *gender* and further independent variables.

Previous research has consistently found that women show lower levels of interest in politics than men (Hayes and Bean, 1993; Verba, Burns and Schlozman, 1997) and that this gap may start early on during adolescence (Cicognani *et al.*, 2012). Attributed to be caused by different political socialisations (Fraile and Sánchez-Vitores, 2020), women tend to associate 'politics' with institutional politics and male-dominated topics (Fitzgerald, 2013). When women are asked specifically about their interest in topics with a societal connection, they are more likely to express interest (Ferrín *et al.*, 2020). These differences in political socialisation, with men being more inclined to be interested in institutional politics and women in latent-political topics, could also explain their different participatory patterns. Studies have found "a higher involvement of men in political participation and of women in

civic forms of participation" (Zani and Cicognani, 2019, p. 5) and that "women tended to volunteer more topics related to social policies" (Ferrín *et al.*, 2020, p. 481). Based on previous research, the assumption for hypothesis H9a was that young women's involvement with non-electoral participation is more strongly linked to being interested in social issues than in politics:

H9a: The more female respondents are interested in social issues, the more likely they are to participate in non-electoral activities.

Looking at the means of non-electoral activities reported, female respondents participated in 4.47 activities ($N = 461$), whereas male respondents participated in 4.17 activities ($N = 487$). When zero values were excluded, female respondents participated in 5.58 non-electoral activities ($N = 369$) and male respondents in 4.31 non-electoral activities ($N = 471$). Figures 5.28 and 5.29 depict the distribution of non-electoral participation by gender and the exclusion of zero values. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine whether this difference in non-electoral participation scores between female and male respondents was statistically significant. Distributions of the non-electoral participation scores for female and male respondents were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. Non-electoral participation scores for female respondents (mean rank = 410) were statistically significantly higher than for male respondents (mean rank = 280), with $U = 19366$, $z = -7.652$, $p < .001$. This demonstrated that among respondents who had been participating in at least one of the given non-electoral activities, female respondents were involved in more activities of non-electoral participation than male respondents.

Figure 5.28. Non-electoral activities participated in by female respondents, excluding zero values (N = 369)

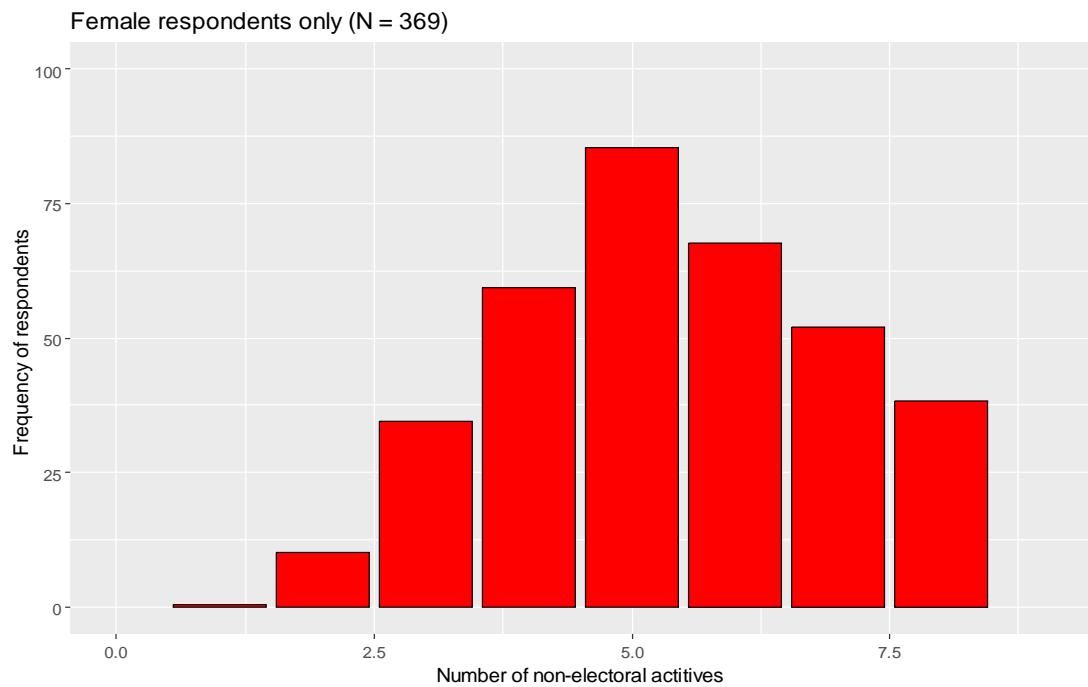
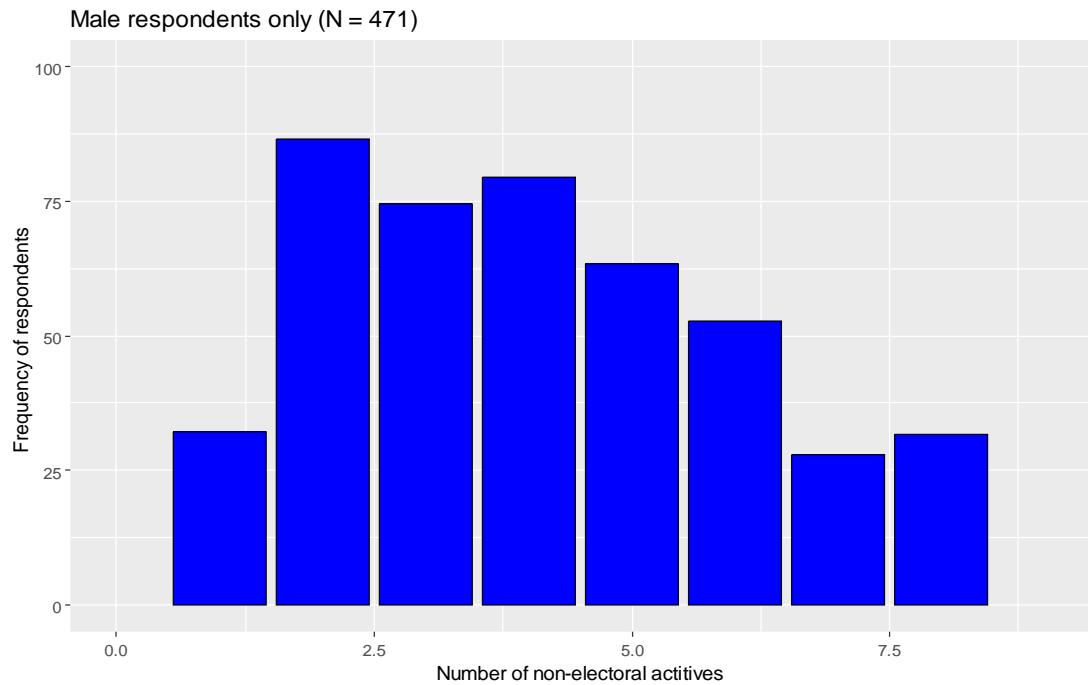


Figure 5.29. Non-electoral activities participated in by male respondents, excluding zero values (N = 471)



To conduct linear regression models disaggregated by gender, the values from the dependent variable non-electoral activities were considered without the

value zero, to minimise the distortion effect and aim for a more normal distribution of values. There were differences in the regression models when disaggregated by gender (see Table 5.11).

Table 5.11. Full linear regression models comparing male and female respondents

Non-electoral activities	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Interest in politics	.547***	.155	.281	.156
Interest in social issues	.313***	.077	.723***	.202
Internal efficacy	.057	.071	.218**	.078
Personal agency	.249**	.077	.118	.076
Collective efficacy	.375***	.100	-.250	.141
Collective agency	.062	.096	.090	.119
Perceived opportunity of political influence	.035	.124	.030	.136
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.351***	.050	.303***	.047
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.588***	.066	-.412***	.121
<i>Controls</i>				
Age	.071	.038	.053	.041
University student	.197	.173	.472*	.208
Middle class (self-assessed)	.199	.160	.054	.159
Non-white ethnicity	-.391	.373	.112	.302
Constant	-3.098	1.269	-.749	1.544
Observations	471		369	
<i>R</i> ²	.418***		.301***	
ΔR^2	.401***		.275***	
<i>Note.</i> Models estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; <i>B</i> = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, <i>LL</i> = lower limit; <i>UL</i> = upper limit; <i>SE B</i> = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; <i>R</i> ² = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted <i>R</i> ² .				
*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001				

The model with only male respondents (N = 471) showed that *interest in politics, interest in social issues, satisfaction with the UK government, personal*

agency, collective efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence were significant factors, affecting the number of non-electoral activities participated in. *Internal efficacy* was not found to be significant for the model which only looked at male respondents. The regression model looking only at female respondents (N = 369) identified only *interest in social issues, satisfaction with the UK government, internal efficacy* and *perceived opportunity of social influence* as significant factors on the dependent variable. Differences in the coefficients indicated that non-electoral participation levels of young male respondents were more likely to be affected by being interested in politics, whereas female respondents' levels of engagement in non-electoral activities were more likely to be affected by being interested in social issues, confirming hypothesis H9a.²

While a positive perception of one's own capacity to act (*personal agency*) and a general confidence in the effectiveness of working together (*collective efficacy*) demonstrated to be significant for an increase in non-electoral participation for male respondents, female respondents were more likely to participate in more non-electoral activities with an increased confidence in their own understanding of politics (*internal efficacy*). The R² and adjusted R² values were greater for the model with only male respondents. The robustness of the model with only male respondents was also greater as indicated by a larger F value of 25.213 (p < .001), compared to the F value of 11.756 (p < .001) for

² No statistically significant interaction effect was found for *interest in social issues* * *gender (female)* on the dependent variables of non-electoral activities using a two-way ANOVA, despite a visually observed intersection in the graphs of the estimated marginal means of *interest in social issues* for male and female respondents. The Tukey post hoc test results indicated that statistically significant differences exist between the highest levels of interest in social issues and all other levels, but not among these levels themselves. This means that both male and female respondents' non-electoral participation increased with interest in social issues and statistically significant variations may not be based on gender per se, but on the different levels of interest in social issues between male and female respondents.

the model with only female respondents. From this analysis, it can be concluded that there are gender-specific differences to what influences the level of non-electoral participation, specifically the number of non-electoral activities participated in. It is important to note that non-significance of certain variables, such as internal efficacy for male respondents and personal agency and collective efficacy for female respondents does not mean that they are devoid of such perceptions, but it simply shows that there is no significant relationship with their engagement in non-electoral participation. Based on the findings reported above, it was hypothesised that:

H9b: Male respondents with a high perception of personal agency and collective efficacy are more likely to participate in non-electoral activities.

The following linear regression model includes two interaction terms to examine the effects of (1) *gender (male)* and *personal agency*, and (2) *gender (male)* and *collective efficacy* (see Table 5.12).

Table 5.12. Full linear regression model explaining non-electoral activities, with interaction terms male * personal agency and male * collective efficacy

Non-electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Interest in politics	.413***	.198	.627	.109	.111***
Interest in social issues	.355***	.221	.489	.068	.171***
Internal efficacy	.126*	.024	.229	.052	.077*
Personal agency	.134	-.014	.281	.075	.078
Collective efficacy	-.226	-.515	.063	.147	-.084
Collective agency	.068	-.077	.213	.074	.030
Perceived opportunity of political influence	.044	-.134	.222	.091	.015
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.324***	.257	.391	.034	.268***
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.560***	-.669	-.451	.055	-.321***
Male * personal agency	.097	-.091	.285	.096	.079
Male * collective efficacy	.619***	.285	.954	.170	.646***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.068	.015	.122	.027	.078
Male	-3.935***	-5.490	-2.381	.792	-.927***
University student	.283*	.028	.538	.130	.065*
Middle class (self-assessed)	.135	-.087	.357	.113	.032
Non-white ethnicity	-.115	-.582	.351	.237	-.013
Constant	.749	-1.361	2.859	1.075	
Observations	840				
R^2	.427***				
ΔR^2	.406				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; SE B = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001					

While the interaction term between *gender (male)* and *personal agency* was not found to be significant, the interaction term of *gender (male)* and *collective*

efficacy increased the likelihood of participating in more non-electoral activities considerably, with a standardised coefficient of .646 ($p < .001$). This suggests that male respondents are more likely to be more involved with non-electoral participation when they are more strongly believing in the effectiveness of working together. This is an observation that exclusively applied to male respondents and that confirms H9 partially. Figure 5.30 illustrates that for young men an increase in the score for collective efficacy led to a predicted higher level of non-electoral participation; this outcome was not predicted for young women. In addition, Figure 5.31 shows each level of collective efficacy with 1 being very low and 5 being very high. For female respondents, there was little variance of activity level with regard to their belief in the effectiveness of collective action, whereas for male respondents, the number of non-electoral activities participated in rose with an increased belief in collective efficacy.

Figure 5.30. Two-way interaction of gender and collective efficacy

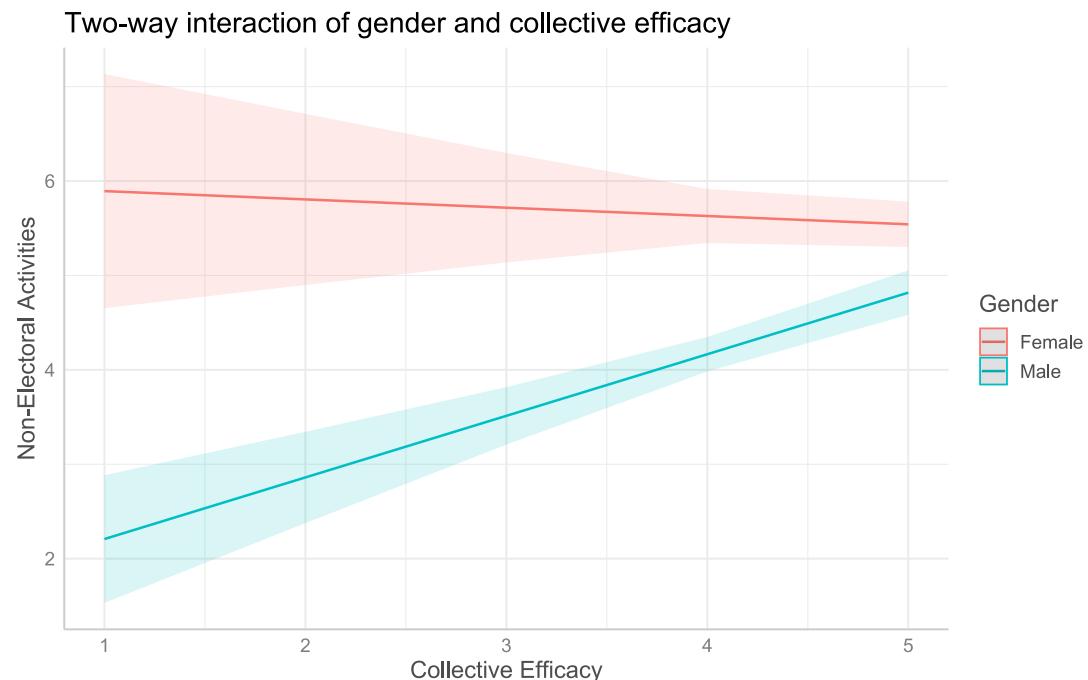
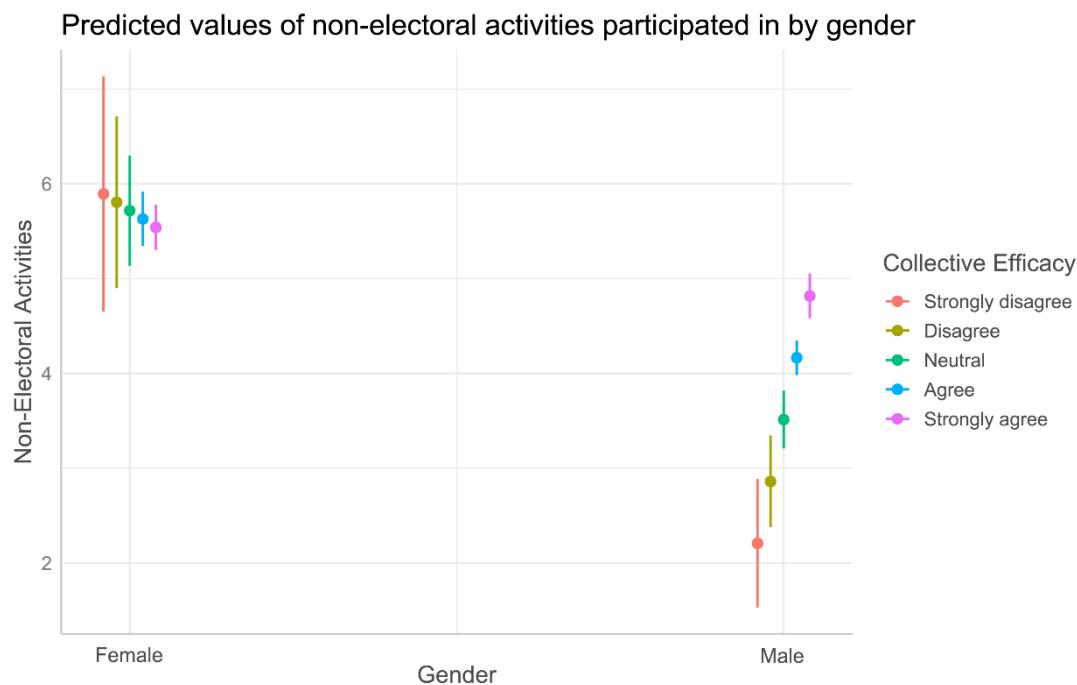


Figure 5.31. Predicted values of non-electoral activities participated in by gender



In conclusion, male and female respondents' participation in non-electoral activities is driven by some similar and some different factors. Overall, an increase in interest in social issues, a decrease in satisfaction with the government's performance and a positive belief in being able to effect social change are associated with an increase in reported non-electoral participation. Gender-specific differences were found in the implications of being interested in politics and perception of agency and efficacy. Young women tended to be more involved in non-electoral activities when they had a strong sense of their own understanding of politics. Their participation was also exclusively linked to being interested in social issues, rather than politics. Young men, in contrast, tended to be more involved in non-electoral activities because of an increased interest in politics, a positive perception of their own capacity to act and an increased general confidence in the effectiveness of working together. The latter, the effect of a positive belief in working together on the level of non-electoral participation, was directly dependent on being male.

5.5. Comparing determinants of non-electoral and electoral participation

Non-electoral participation revolves around activities outside of the formalised political institutions and structures. Electoral participation, by contrast, centres around activities influencing political structures and party politics, including voting. As described by Pickard (2019), the dichotomy of non-electoral and electoral participation is not meant as a fixed barrier between different modes of participation but rather as an expression of a wider repertoire of political activities. This repertoire can include actions of political consumerism (Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, 2005), civic engagement (Flanagan, 2013) and “lifestyle politics” (Giddens, 1991), which refer to life choices based on political beliefs and values being incorporated into everyday life (Bang, 2005, 2009). Being involved in civic activity and pursuing “lifestyle politics”, which are markers of non-electoral participation, may in turn also foster electoral participation (de Moor and Verhaegen, 2020).

Participation in electoral activities, primarily voting, has been found to be affected positively by interest in politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995), strong perception of one’s internal efficacy (Zukin *et al.*, 2006) and being civically active (Dalton, 2014). Other predictors of young people’s voting behaviour included holding postmaterialist values (Henn, Oldfield and Hart, 2018), education (Whiteley, 2012; Tenn, 2007), social class (Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, 2004) and ethnicity (Heath *et al.*, 2011). Non-electoral participation, as illustrated by the analysis above, is more strongly driven by interest in social issues (especially for young women), but also by interest in politics (especially for young men), a high sense of internal efficacy, collective efficacy and personal agency and a positive perception of one’s opportunity of social influence. Furthermore, being dissatisfied with institutionalised politics, i.e. the performance of the government, affects the level of non-electoral participation (Table 5.8).

This section compares and contrasts the factors influencing the level of involvement with non-electoral and electoral participation among active survey

respondents. It does so by creating a new dependent variable using a range of electoral activities, which is then run in a linear regression model using the independent variables from the previous models. 'Active' in this context means those respondents who said that they were participating in at least one electoral activity. Based on the assumption that there are differences in influential factors for increases in non-electoral and electoral participation, the hypothesis H10 sought to evidence that:

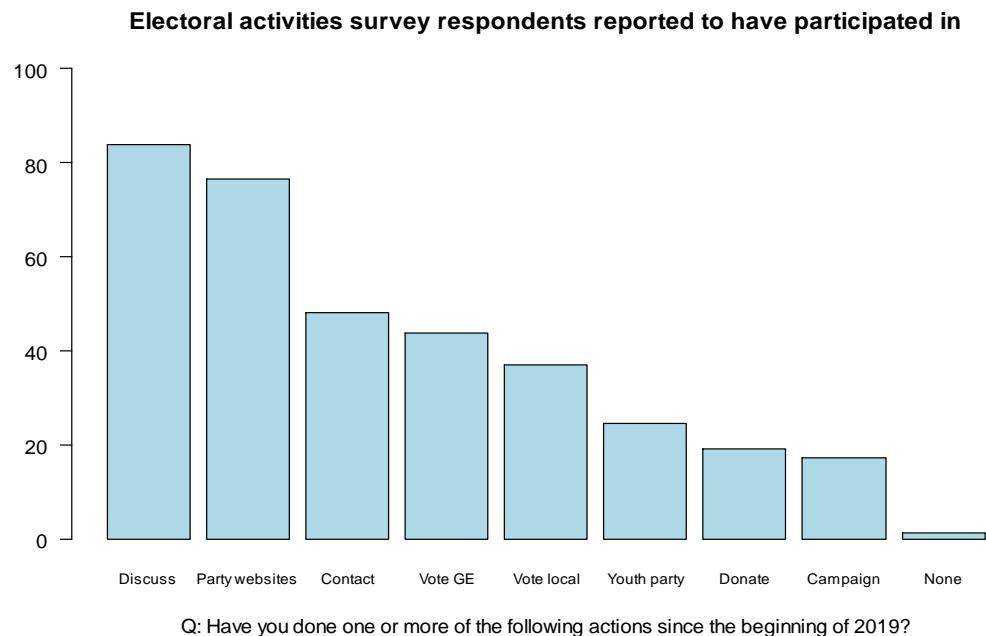
H10: Participation in electoral activities is, in contrast to participation in non-electoral activities, only influenced by interest in politics and not by interest in social issues.

In addition, the aim was to find out whether the same factors which were identified as predictors of non-electoral participation were also influential for young people participating in electoral activities. As this study focuses on non-electoral participation, the purpose of this section is to contrast this with electoral participation and to identify potential differences in what encourages one or the other.

5.5.1. Measuring young people's electoral participation

Respondents were asked about their involvement in electoral or institutionalised politics. The options included eight items: (1) engaging with political parties' content online, (2) voting in local and/or regional elections, (3) voting in general elections, (4) donating money to a political party, (5), discussing political issues, parties, politicians with friends, colleagues, family online and offline, (6) contacting a politician, (7) campaigning for a political candidate or political party, and (8) being a member of a political party, youth party or political party affiliated student group.

Figure 5.32. Electoral activities survey respondents stated to have participated in since 2019 (N = 839)



Most respondents said they had discussed political issues (83.9%) and had accessed the website or social media pages of a political party in the last two years (76.6%). Almost half of the respondents (48.1%) said they had contacted a politician directly. In terms of voting, 43.7% said they had voted in a General Election and 36.9% in regional or local elections. It is important to note that a large share of the respondents was not eligible to vote in the GEs due to their age. About a quarter of respondents (24.4%) claimed to be a member of a political party, youth party or party-affiliated student group. Supporting a party by donating money or by campaigning for a candidate or party were actions reported by only 17.3% and 19.1%, respectively. The table below shows the mean scores of non-electoral and electoral participation by age group and illustrates that while there were no notable differences in means between the younger (16-19 year olds) and the older (20-24 year olds) age groups for non-electoral participation, there was a stark difference in mean for electoral participation. One reason for this is the aforementioned age restriction for elections, another one could be that the access to more political party focused activities (such as campaigning for a political candidate or party; being member of a political party, youth party or political party affiliated student group) is

restricted and presents greater barriers to overcome than non-electoral activities.

Table 5.13. Mean scores of non-electoral and electoral participation by age group

Age group	Non-electoral participation		Electoral participation	
	Mean (including zero values)	Mean (excluding zero values)	Mean (including zero values)	Mean (excluding zero values)
16-19 year olds	4.25	4.90	2.33	2.78
20-24 year olds	4.37	4.85	4.33	4.72
N	948	840	948	839

To run a linear regression model using these *electoral activities* as the dependent variable, electoral activities were conceptualised as a count variable from 1 to 8, since including the zero value would have affected the distribution. Testing for normality showed that the distribution of electoral activities does not follow normal distribution (see Appendix 6). The positively skewed curve is most likely due to the age minimum required to vote. This means that respondents who had not been eligible to vote in 2019 and 2020 could not indicate that they had voted. To adjust for this, survey cases have been selected with respondents aged 20 and above (20-24) were selected in to examine the distribution of electoral activities of those who (presumably) were eligible to vote in the General Election 2019. With this sample drawn, the distribution of the variable electoral activities showed a near normal distribution (see comparison of Figure Figure 5.33 and Figure 5.34). Thus, to measure the effect of the independent variables on the number of electoral activities young people participated in, the linear model only contained selected cases of respondents aged 20 or above. This resulted in a reduced sample size of 508.

Figure 5.33. Distribution of electoral activities among respondents aged 16-24 (N = 839)

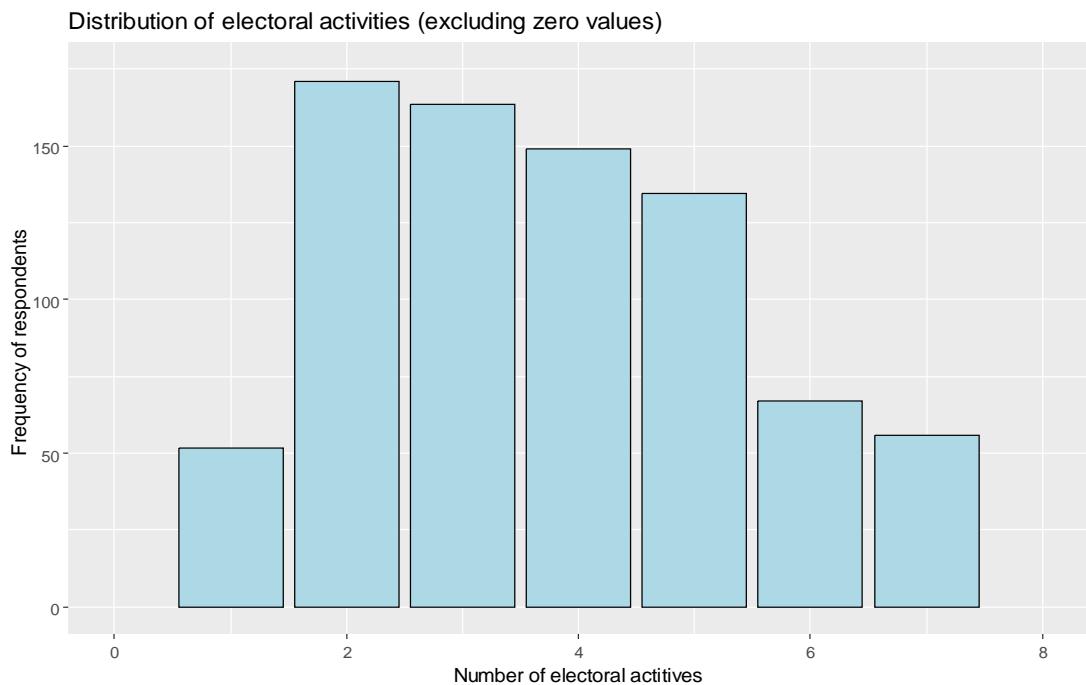
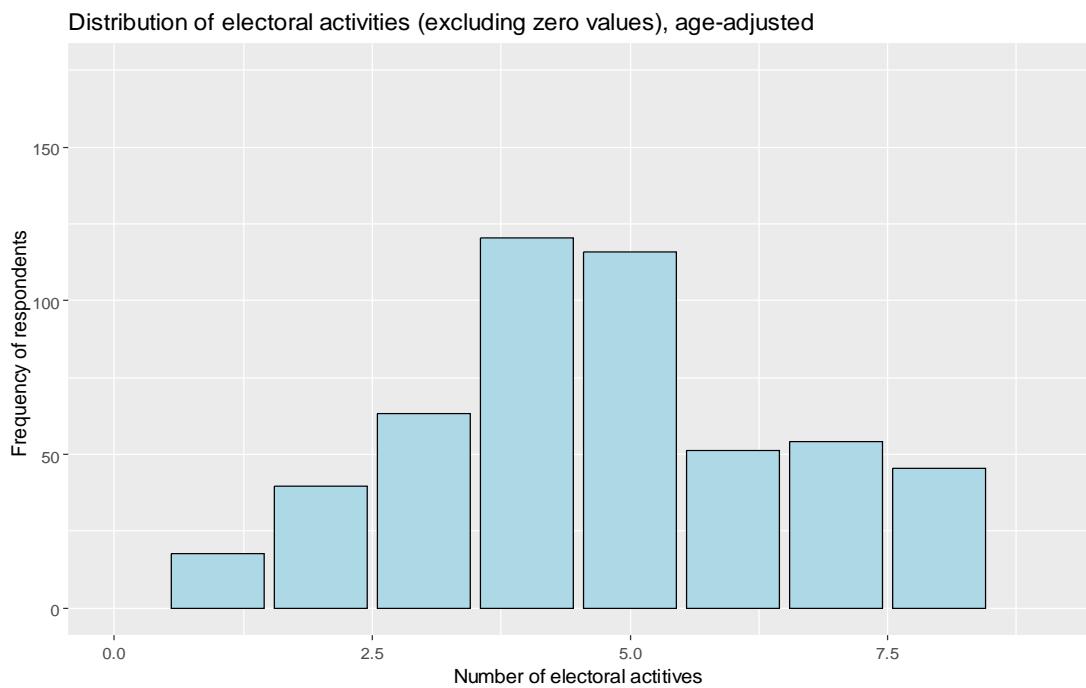


Figure 5.34. Distribution of electoral activities among respondents aged 20-24 (N = 508)



The figures above demonstrate the differences in distribution of participation in electoral activities between the complete active sample of 839 (including

respondents aged 16 to 24) and the sample of those active respondents eligible to vote in the General Election 2019 of 508 (only including respondents aged 20 to 24). By adjusting the sample for voting age, the distribution shifts towards the centre. Although it does not represent a normal distribution, this is near enough to run a linear regression model.

5.5.1.1. Differences in electoral activity levels based on who respondents shared their concerns with

Among all respondents (N = 948), the mean score of electoral participation was 3.5, meaning that the average number of reported electoral activities was between 3 and 4, out of the 8 activities listed in the survey. Among those who were active in at least one electoral activity (N = 839), the mean score was 3.9.

Table 5.14. Social groups of shared concerns and means of electoral activities (N = 839)

	<i>Who else do you think shares your concerns about these social and political issues?</i>					
	Friends		Family members		Other members of an organisation I'm part of	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
N	738	101	508	332	299	541
Percent of respondents	88.0	12.0	60.5	39.5	35.6	64.4
Mean of electoral activities	3.94	4.03	4.08	3.76	4.74	3.52

When comparing the means of participation in electoral activities between those who shared their concerns with their friends, only a marginal difference (0.09) was found (see Table 5.14). Larger differences in mean scores were found for those who believed they had shared concerns about social and political issues with their family (difference of 0.32) and with other members of organisations they were part of (difference of 1.22). Similar to non-electoral activities, being in an organisation seems to affect the overall level of activities taken part in. However, only marginal differences in mean scores of electoral participation were found between those who believed they shared concerns

with their friends and family. This suggests that young people's electoral participation may be less influenced by their social network of peers, unlike their involvement in non-electoral participation (see Table 5.2).

5.5.2. Full linear regression model for young people's electoral participation

The regression model with electoral activities as the dependent variable investigated the effects of:

- interest in politics and interest in social issues
- internal efficacy and personal agency
- collective efficacy and collective agency
- perceived opportunity of political influence and of social influence
- satisfaction with the UK government

The model serves to compare which of the factors influencing non-electoral participation have also had an impact on political activities of more institutionalised character. R^2 for the model using electoral activities as the dependent variable was 33.2% with an adjusted R^2 of 31.3%, with $F(14, 493) = 17.502$, $p < .001$.

Interest in politics, internal efficacy, perceived opportunity of social influence and *satisfaction with the UK government* were found to be statistically significant. With the exception of *satisfaction with the UK government*, these variables showed positive effects on the dependent variable, with standardised coefficients of .259, .196, and .266, respectively. This demonstrated that being interested in politics and perceiving opportunities of social influence have the largest effect on electoral participation rates, followed by one's perception of understanding politics. The standardised coefficient for *satisfaction with the UK government* was -.154, meaning that high satisfaction with the performance of the government was likely to reduce overall participation in electoral activities, while dissatisfaction with the performance of the government was likely to increase overall participation in electoral activities.

Table 5.15 reports the coefficients, standard errors and confidence intervals for the multivariate regression.

Table 5.15. Full linear regression model explaining electoral activities

Electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Interest in politics	.828***	.574	1.082	.129	.259***
Interest in social issues	-.066	-.211	.079	.074	-.042
Internal efficacy	.263***	.144	.382	.060	.196***
Personal agency	.064	-.061	.189	.063	.045
Collective efficacy	.048	-.134	.230	.093	.023
Collective agency	-.067	-.241	.107	.089	-.035
Perceived opportunity of political influence	.107	-.107	.320	.109	.044
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.272***	.190	.354	.042	.266***
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.209***	-.330	-.088	.061	-.154***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.015	-.086	.116	.051	.011
Male	.327	-.006	.661	.170	.082
University student	-.131	-.416	.154	.145	-.036
Middle class (self-assessed)	-.021	-.291	.248	.137	-.006
Non-white ethnicity	.729*	.032	1.425	.355	.085*
Constant	-1.826	-4.658	1.005	1.441	
Observations	508				
R^2	.332***				
ΔR^2	.313				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; SE B = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001					

The residuals of the model showed a normal distribution, as assessed by a histogram and Normal P-P plot of the standardised residuals (see Figures 9.4 and 9.5 in Appendix 9). The close to normally distributed histogram with a mean of zero further indicated that the zero-bias assumption of the error term

was met. Homoscedasticity was assessed by inspecting the scatterplot of predicted values and standardised residuals, which showed a random distribution of points with a relatively consistent spread of residuals (A9.6). The linear regression model using electoral participation as the dependent variable shows some overlap in statistically significant factors with the model using non-electoral participation as the dependent variable (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.16. Comparison of regression coefficients of full linear models with dependent variable non-electoral activities and electoral activities

	Non-electoral activities		Electoral activities	
	B	SE B	B	SE B
Interest in politics	.428***	.110	.828***	.129
Interest in social issues	.374***	.068	-.066	.074
Internal efficacy	.120*	.053	.263***	.060
Personal agency	.183***	.054	.064	.063
Collective efficacy	.226**	.080	.048	.093
Collective agency	.075	.074	-.067	.089
Perceived opportunity of political influence	.047	.091	.107	.109
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.324***	.034	.272***	.042
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.559***	.055	-.209***	.061
<i>Controls</i>				
Age	.067*	.028	.015	.051
Male	-.844***	.135	.327	.170
University student	.238	.131	-.131	.145
Middle class (self-assessed)	.118	.114	-.021	.137
Non-white ethnicity	-.107	.239	.729*	.355
Constant	-.766	.916	-1.826	1.441
Observations	840		508	
R^2	.416***		.332***	
ΔR^2	.406		.313	
<i>Note.</i> Models estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; SE B = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .				
*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001				

Similar to non-electoral participation, an increased engagement in electoral activities is influenced by confidence in one's own understanding of politics, being dissatisfied with the government and by believing in one's own social influence as being part of a group. The latter suggests that being a member of some sort of civic association affects levels of electoral participation positively, confirming previous research (Dalton, 2008; Evers and van Essen, 2019). Differences in what influences electoral and non-electoral participation concern interest in social issues, personal agency and collective efficacy.

When contrasting the results from the full linear regression model with non-electoral activities as the dependent variable and the one with electoral activities as the dependent variable, the differences between the determinants become clear (see Table 5.16). Coefficients indicated that young people's electoral participation is associated with an increased interest in politics, as opposed to an increase in interest in social issues, which was found to be the case for non-electoral participation. This confirmed hypothesis H10. One's perception of individual capacity to act and the belief in collective efficacy equally does not affect young people's levels of electoral participation. Instead, internal efficacy, one's perception of how understanding politics plays a greater role. Yet, increased electoral participation is also linked to positive beliefs in collective influence, as demonstrated by the factor *perceived opportunity of social influence*, and low levels of satisfaction with the government. The latter, however, has a stronger impact on non-electoral participating, strengthening the assumption that young people's activism is indeed an expression of discontent with institutionalised politics.

5.6. Identity and emotions in activism

This section focuses on the second research question (RQ2), which concerns young people's experiences of activism, including their emotional associations and the relation between activism and their personal identities and values. These aspects were primarily considered in the planning, implementation and analysis of the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were

centred around three broader themes: environment and climate change (3 groups), anti-racism activism and the *Black Lives Matter* movement, human rights and immigration (3 groups) and feminism and LGBTQ*+ rights, equality and social justice (2 groups).

The discussions with young people who were involved in activism for different causes included talking about their feelings connected to activism and how their own identity and values related to their participation. The analysis identified some commonalities of within emotional expressions and personal experiences across the focus groups, but also some differences within the focus groups as well as across these different thematic strands of activism. One key difference was that participation in identity-based activism was motivated by personal experiences of fear and discrimination, while issue-based activism for climate was characterised by feelings varying from hope to resignation, contributing to the motivation to wanting to make a change.

5.6.1. Positive connotations with activism: empowerment and belonging

Identity and emotions constituted a central focus of the group discussions. Participants shared their emotional attachments with their interests and forms of activism and displayed a range of both positive and negative feelings. These feelings were linked to personal experiences that also reflect issues of identity and belonging.

“You've got to pioneer yourself sometimes. And I think that's often the best way because people when they realise that other people are doing it are far more likely to get involved, and they feel like they have people to back them, people to go and do it with them.” (Hailey, 17, *climate*)

Taking the first step into being active often needed bravery and conviction. Participants pointed out their role models, including publicly known persons such as the environmental activist Greta Thunberg, but also family members and friends, including grandparents. Another catalyst for taking action was also seen in watching how other people are “doing activism” on social media, even

if this action then only consisted in speaking up about something when before one would have stayed quiet. For a large majority of the young people, their activism was an expression of their beliefs and values, thus taking action formed part of their integrity and identity. At the same time, some participants pointed out that there were limits to expressing one's values, for one's own protection:

“I think you don't have to devote your entire life to the cause, and I think some people do and that's great, but that shouldn't be something that everyone feels they have to do. You don't have to do everything all of the time to be an activist.” (Shirley, 17, *climate*)

For people across all three thematic groups, their activism was also linked to feelings of pride and confidence: pride of seeing other young people becoming more active and being part of a bigger picture, and confidence about being able, as a group of people, to actually make a change. Participants also hoped that these collective actions would draw in more support from groups that were not primarily affected by some of these issues, for instance, discrimination and racism.

“I'm just so proud of this [*Black Lives Matter* movement] in general. It's so nice to see people actually going out of their way to make change, but I do think it is a problem that only people who are affected by it see the need to go out there and change, when it could be easier for a white person to be doing exactly the same things and fighting for the same things, without the burden of suffering this aggression.” (Sadie, 24, *anti-racism*)

“I think some of you are right in saying that protests don't really get in the way of anything, but we've had – I don't know if you guys have seen the news coverage of Bristol a couple of months ago – we've had some 'Kill the Bill' protests which ended up very much inconveniencing people, as a police van got set on fire. Then over the next couple of protests, they set dogs on us and send in the mounted police, and it was pretty heavy.” (Adrian, 20, *climate*)

While taking action is connected to acting in line with one's values and preserving individual integrity, once being active, many young people reported about their experiences of finding solidarity and belonging. This sense of belonging was fostered by finding communities who have similar identities (based on ethnicity, race, sexuality, or gender identity), but also similar values (striving for sustainability, climate and social justice). These communities of shared identities and shared values often represented networks of support and friendship. Young people said they found these communities at school, university and through social media:

"I've definitely found that there is solidarity within people [and] there is a sense of understanding and even though I go to this ridiculously white school with ridiculously fancy people, [...] there is a sense of understanding, people are listening." (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

"I go off and live on protest camps, I did this last summer. Going into a few practice camps, you do like tree-sits. So, you can climb trees, build tree houses in tree, and they can't cut the trees down, which is lovely, really exciting, but all kinds of stuff like that. That's taken me in Bristol, we've got a local tree house occupation. [...] I'm in a lucky position to be able to do that, I am in a city where lots of that is going on. [...] If you get off to uni, have a look at that kind of stuff, it's great fun." (Adrian, 20, *climate*)

"In my experience as a woman, and also as a member of the LGBT+ community, it feels very isolating to be a feminist. I think participating in the conversation actually helps you become more involved with communities – it feels like you're not alone in a way." (Ella, 18, *feminism and LGBT*)

5.6.2. Negative connotations with activism: fears and burdens

Despite these positive aspects and emotions of their involvement with activism, young people in the group discussions also appeared to be

ambivalent about certain aspects of their participation and personal roles. Across all groups, ambiguity concerned worries about safety during protests – most participants rejected violence categorically as a method of protesting – and the reduction of democratic rights, such as protesting, by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (which had not been passed at the time of the focus group interviews):

“My parents are incredibly supportive, but not fans of direct action in any sense of the word. There's an element of them worrying about me, I think. We live near Bristol, and I know how some of the protests have gotten out of hand and become a bit dangerous for some people who are protesting. It's just they don't want me to be in those kinds of places, because they are obviously...they care about me and so that can be a real conflict of interest.” (Hailey, 17, *climate*)

In 2020 and 2021, the risk of catching the Coronavirus added to the issue of safety in a way that had not been an issue before. These worries resulted in feelings of anxiety and fear. Another element of activism which seemed to create anxiety in some people was the use of social media, especially when being overwhelmed with images of injustice and violence:

“I have that with TikTok, that is because I interact with a lot of stuff about activism, but the issue is then it can be too much as. I can't actually use the app just as to watch something that's relaxing or calm, because then all of my ‘for you’ page is one-minute videos of people talking about different issues. Then, I feel really guilty because I'm like ‘Oh, this is really unfair of me just skipping it because I'm not feeling great today’.” (Anne, 19, *anti-racism*)

“I deleted TikTok quite recently because it's just getting too much and there's too much not nice stuff on it. [...] I got a lot of people being really racist and really homophobic and really sexist on my feed, because obviously the algorithms work in a different way, so I deleted that. I'm not going on [Instagram], because it's all the hard-hitting topics, and that makes me feel negative about it because I do want to know it, but

sometimes after like I've been at school all day and I'm tired, I can't take it in." (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

Social media and the idea of always being engaged in imagery on topics of interest seemed to lead to mental exhaustion for some young people. Participants also pointed out that social media created false expectations and high standards for living certain lifestyles, such as an eco-friendly and more sustainable life:

"It can be disheartening, especially when online, you see people who are like... pushing that you have to have the perfect sustainable lifestyle and if you ever do one of these things, if you ever buy a plastic bag, once, because you forgot your bag, you are a terrible person and you're the worst person they've ever met and it's difficult. To me, it always feels like there's something more I could be doing and I'm never doing enough. But at the end of day, I'm doing something, and a lot of people aren't, so I need to focus on that and be hopeful that other people will do things, and it will get better." (Jane, 16, *climate*)

Although young people displayed a great sense of optimism and hope, overall, pessimism to the point of feeling depressed and resigned shone through, specifically when thinking about the actual impact of young people and social movements in general, and the future. This negative outlook on what could actually be done, and the real achievable progress was particularly noticeable in the debate around climate change. Identity-based activism, on the other hand, was more characterised by feelings of pressure and personal risks. The divide between people passing as white and those passing as non-white showed that participating in activism may not always be a free choice but an experience of others' expectations and even pressure from others and oneself:

"I feel like sometimes if I don't say something, then, does that make me as bad as them for saying it? Because, if you're not picking it up, because it doesn't actually affect you personally, it's kind of turning your back on your beliefs in a way. If it gets you into trouble or if it gets you into like a situation that could be harmful, is it something you should do?

That is a really tricky thing that goes in my head whenever anybody says that. [...] It's kind of a white privilege to be able to make that decision as well, because if you are not white in that situation, then you... it's obviously affecting them more, so by having that white privilege, it's another thing of guilt that I have it, so I think, I should always say something." (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

While some people whose identity and existence were not threatened have the opportunity to 'opt out' of certain discussions and conflicts, this was not seen as an option for those whose identity was being threatened and could be changed. Participants in the groups around the *Black Lives Matter* movement discussed how this white privilege meant that certain people could choose when to stand up for minority rights. In contrast, the non-white participants in the groups explained that people in their social network often looked to them to become active.

5.6.3. Commonalities and differences across different strands of activism

Participants within the three thematic groups (environment, anti-racism, and feminism) were not necessarily exclusively involved with just one issue in their activism. The discussions focused more on issue-based activism in the case of *environment and climate change*, whereas the groups discussing *anti-racism activism and the Black Lives Matter movement, human rights and immigration* and *feminism and LGBTQ*+ rights, equality and social justice* were framed as identity-based activism. The difference between issue-based activism and identity-based activism is that one stems from a specific issue which people are concerned about, but this issue does not constitute their personal identity. The other refers to activism that is rooted in one's personal identity, such as being or identifying as a woman, having a different sexuality or gender identity than conventionally normalised, or belonging to an ethnic group that is not white or the prevalent one in the country of residence (Curtin and McGarty, 2016; Curtin, Kende, A. and Kende, J., 2016).

Young people appeared to have different motivations for attending focus group and participating in the discussion. People in the *climate* groups expressed their disappointment about the UK government's failure in environmental politics, as well as the lack of international policy responses, and their perceived lack of power. The consequences of not responding adequately to climate change were regarded as severe for human life and the planet's biodiversity. Despite climate change being an evidenced phenomenon and generally widely accepted as reality in politics and society, actual policies were considered as not effective or ambitious enough. Some participants even questioned the political will of the current UK government to address climate change in a serious manner:

“Generally, I think it's pretty poor, we are still nowhere near on track to meet any of our commitments under the Paris Agreement. The Conservative government seems to be prioritising these parochial kind of cultural nonsense issues rather than anything that actually matters.”
(Felix, 23, *climate*)

“I also think the UK Government is very good at pushing off issues until they need to deal with them and just doing enough to satisfy people for now. For example, I think the target for net zero carbon emissions by 2050, which is 30 years from now, and I understand it will be difficult. It's a hard thing to do, but I do not think it needs to take 30 years. I think they are just sticking a number out there that is reasonably far, and, to be honest, most of the politicians in our government - I'm not going to say won't live to see that - but won't be in power at that point, so it won't be their problem anymore. I think that's a really bad thing to do because they are just saying they're doing things and then just pushing it further onto the younger generation.” (Charlotte, 16, *climate*)

Environmental activists also pointed out the intersections of inequality generated or fostered by climate change with other issues of racial, sex-based, and class-based discrimination. A central theme of speaking about their

activism in the focus group was holding politicians accountable and, on a personal and collective level, contributing to making a difference.

Participants in the *anti-racism* groups claimed their personal experiences as a main source of motivation to speak about issues of racism, discrimination and inequality based on one's race and ethnicity. Although young people saw these as major issues also occurring in the UK, they said that racism was not an issue that was often talked about.

"It's more of a personal thing because I'm mixed race. When it all came up, it was very personal, and it was weird because I have these experiences of - I guess, racism and stuff. It was really good that conversations were opening up, and I find it important because it is something that has affected me and my family on a personal level."

(Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

"For me, when the murder of George Floyd happened, and all the protests [were] going on in America, it seemed to highlight the racism that everybody sort of already knew was there in America to begin with, and then it took a while – I think, for me, anyway – via social media and everything to travel to the UK and to start picking up on the UK racism, rather than just focusing on America." (Josephine, 18, *anti-racism*)

Especially in comparison to the situation in the United States, the problems in Britain were seen as relativised and largely ignored. For many people, including those from non-white ethnic backgrounds, the *Black Lives Matter* protest in the US in the summer of 2020 had been an eye-opener about the situation in the UK as well as a gateway to engage more strongly with this topic, politically and culturally.

The groups on *feminism and LGBT* were exclusively attended by people who identified as female, non-binary and/or queer. Participants said that their own identity and life experience were central to being interested in speaking about the topics and to becoming active:

"I identify as queer and so just by that fact, I have to be interested in what's happening with my rights. And, also, looking feminine – feminism affects me, and a lot of my friends are part of the LGBTQ+ community as well." (Lindsay, 17, *feminism and LGBT*)

Despite understanding women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights as human rights, people in the groups described that they were living in an environment in which these rights were not normalised or sometimes not granted. While feminism was not seen as an important issue by British society, according to the participants, sex-based and gender-based discrimination and violence were still perceived threats and realities for women and people who identify as a non-binary gender or who have non-heterosexual orientations.

There were many commonalities between the groups discussions as well as differences. In the discussions on climate change activism, participants largely reported feelings of urgency and disenchantment with the political system and governance as a source for motivation. Participation in activities for women's and LGBTQ rights and against discrimination and racism were often driven by personal experiences or identification with groups who are at risk of unfair treatment and discrimination.

Across all group discussions, there was an awareness of intersectionality. Many participants pointed out how political and social issues, including climate change, racism and discrimination, and capitalism, affected people differently, based on their personal characteristics or geographical and economic situation. This was noticeable in discussion about social class differences with regard to climate justice and racial inequality, knowledge of the word 'privilege' and its meaning for social justice issues, and the awareness about a 'Global North' and 'Global South'.

"One of the primary things about climate change is that the more impoverished countries are more affected even though they are less contributing to the problem. Particularly near the Himalayas, there are a lot of big ice areas, and they're starting to melt, and it's causing loads of villages to flood, which you don't really feel, like from our position,

has anything to do with us. I feel a lot of the individual efforts could potentially help accumulate to change something, but a lot of the issues are made by these big countries; I think the top three are China, India and America. So, although things can change within the UK, it's not going to have that much of an impact if people don't like to join together to cause some form of change." (Theresa, 17, *climate*)

In all three thematic groups, participants expressed their dissatisfaction with structural discrimination and inequality. Social class was particularly mentioned in the discussions with young environmental activists. With regard to political actions on climate change, participants also discussed how working-class communities were not actively involved in processes such as de-industrialisation in the UK. Shirley mentioned the steel work industry as an example in which working-class communities were left without employment, even if the shutting down the factories was beneficial in an environmental sense. In another focus group on climate change, Elena and others talked about how having less economic resources contributed to being more environmentally friendly, but that this was often less a result of choice but more out of poverty:

"I think if you went on the streets and talk to every single person you saw and ask them how they felt about climate change, they would probably agree that it's real and probably agree that it's a big problem. [...] So you also have to think about making it more accessible and making sure that everybody can understand how it affects them and make sure that the people who might struggle from their factories or power plants being shut down and losing their jobs that they have the network to get involved in other communities, in other jobs." (Shirley, 17, *climate*)

"Working-class people are labelled as being more environmentally friendly, but they have to prioritise. And that's a big problem because it stands for a lot of other problems, like poverty in capitalism. If we try to fix those problems, capitalism, climate change will be fixed in time, like

not completely, but things will change people's abilities to be more environmentally friendly and things like that." (Elena, 18, *climate*)

In the groups on *anti-racism*, participants reflected upon their own experiences of being ethnically non-white and non-European but still 'passing' as white in most situations. They pointed out that people in the UK were subjected to being treated differently based on their appearance, such as one's skin colour. Frankie and Sadie talked about how they would receive insensitive comments for being from an ethnic minority but, at the same time, benefitted from 'passing as white' in other situations:

"In my year, there's about 150 people and I'm one of maybe 10 [British non-white] and that's been an odd experience because people will see me as British. They don't do that because I've lived in the UK my whole life, but because I've got a 'white' side in my family. [...] Most of the stuff I've dealt with here is more... not a naïve, but really stupid questions and insensitive comments, rather than people outright calling me slurs." (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

"Because we are from an ethnic minority, but we are not Black or we are not readily identifiable as I don't know Arab, or Indian or people who actually don't have a pale skin colour, we don't get the Alt-right slurs. It's a whole different treatment for people who are sometimes born here from generations, but they are Black and they will be treated more as an outsider than I am and some immigrants who are white. I don't face random people's insensitivity because random people don't know where I'm from. I look white, my surname is white. So, they think I'm European because I'm very pale." (Sadie, 24, *anti-racism*)

Gender, both being and identifying as female or identifying as a non-binary gender, and non-heterosexual sexuality were regarded by participants in discussions on *feminism and LGBT* as a contributor to social injustice and unequal treatment. Young girls reported that they would learn in school how to stay safe, but that there would not be a conversation on issues such as sexual assault and rape with boys of their age:

“I went to a boys and girls school, but I remember them having separate assemblies. Separate for girls and boys, and I remember discussing how to be safe, what to do, what to do if you go out, then, then you go to university when you move out by yourself, you just have to make sure you're safe. I don't think the same has been done to boys, which is very upsetting because I don't feel like I should be... I don't want to keep thinking about 'Oh, how do I keep myself safe how? Do I need to carry something with me, or send a satellite location to someone?'” (Jasmine, 18, *feminism and LGBT*)

It is important to underline that the participants in the groups did not represent a homogenous group of young people but rather showed converging views on a range of matters. Some participants were aware that large parts of young people constitute a ‘silent majority’ on the discussed issues, others pointed out that young people do not just adhere to more liberal or socially progressive views, but that conservative up to extreme-right views, were also present among young people.

The notion that being active is better than staying passive was a consensus across all groups. Participants tended to express both positive and negative emotions about their involvement in non-electoral participation. On the one hand, being active leads to feeling of empowerment, an increase in confidence and pride. ‘Doing something’ and ‘holding politicians accountable’ was regarded as source of satisfaction. Furthermore, taking part in collective actions (such as protests or community-based activities) or even knowing that other people were engaged in the same individual activities as oneself (sharing content, pursuing a sustainable way of living) were experiences of belonging. On the other hand, negative emotions accompanying the participants’ involvement with activism included being overwhelmed and feelings of fear, depression and resignation. These negative feelings were particularly voiced by participants discussing climate change and racial discrimination:

“Doing environmental work can be a lot more depressing than other forms of activism, sort of things like feminism or anything that is social

justice related; [in that] you can sort of feel like a human impact, but when you do everything you can as an individual for the climate, it can be really depressing, because you subconsciously always wonder whether it's not enough." (Shirley, 17, *climate*)

Personal values and beliefs were decisive for taking part in activism, as this represented a form of self-actualisation of these values and beliefs. One's personal identity also appeared to be playing a role, since the desire for belonging and, to a certain extent, for acceptance was motivating the search for finding people with the same or similar values and/or identities and shared lived experiences. One participant reported that they had set up a cultural discussion group for people of different ethnic backgrounds, while others talked about how they found communities of diverse sexualities and gender identities online. The desire to belong to a group, real or constructed, was also part of the discussions with environmental activists. Here, the notion of community was more strongly tied to being aware of the consequences of actions of ways of living of certain societies (particularly of the 'Global North') for people in other parts of the world. Some participants also pointed out that group belonging might also occur by taking part in actions that friends and peers were doing, in a way a form of 'trend activism'. This would contribute to social expectations, resulting in some participation being driven by implicit 'peer-pressure' and the underlying desire for personal gain, in the sense of social rewards.

Even though many feelings were shared across different strands of activism, there were specific differences between the experiences of those who were involved with identity-based activism and those who were involved with issue-based activism. In the case of activism relating to one's personal identity (for example, identifying as female or trans, belonging to a non-white ethnic group or identifying as LGBT), engagement in activism was more strongly experienced as a burden and an innate obligation. Individuals reported on their personal experiences of discrimination and racism and pointed out that their activism made them more vulnerable to discrimination:

“It can be so hard because you don't want to be the tone changer in the room, when everyone seems to think something's fine. A part of you wants to be the person that stands up and goes 'hang on, it's not fun anymore, I'm going to stop this conversation'. If something is really hurtful and brought up, it's still hard to do it, it's still a very brave thing to do. But if you're on the receiving end of how hurtful it is, you just wish that people would do step in more often, even if it is really complicated and hard.” (Heather, 24, *feminism and LGBT*)

“Our [activist] group received so much criticism, some of it aggressive, that we were being 'over-passionate and don't let all opinions be heard'. When they mean 'all opinions', they mean racist voices. I'm so fed up with hearing that sort of thing.” (Frankie, 16, *anti-racism*)

Participants involved with identity-based activism also expressed strong criticisms towards society, societal norms and social expectations. Although their personal identity was connected to these experiences of fear, discrimination and threat of violence, it also represented a strong source of motivation to become active in the first place.

Participants involved with issue-based activism (which does not exclude other forms of activism) showed stronger feelings about intra-generational belonging and cohesion. Their criticism was primarily addressing political institutions and economic actors, with 'capitalism' being named several times as having a strong negative impact on climate change. Young environmentalists also criticised that British politicians were placing an emphasis on individual actions to reduce climate change, instead of pursuing structural changes towards renewable and sustainable sources of energy. The central motivation for environmental activism stemmed from wanting to make a change, caring about others and personal interest.

Participants from both identity- and issued-based forms of activism were looking to support other young people with their actions. At the same time, many participants also voiced criticism towards their own generation or young people in general. Becoming active represents a way of taking responsibility,

especially in the face of the perceived lack of responsibility of the government and politicians. Despite high levels of dissatisfaction and disappointment with institutionalised politics, participants did not reject the democratic system itself. They were frustrated that the issues they cared about were not being (adequately) addressed and many young people were aware that structural and collective change would be needed to achieve long-term impacts. Overall, participants were ambivalent about the future, but hope was sought from the fact that political and societal change had been possible before (progress in gender and racial equality, advances in technology such as recycling, renewable energy; laws against chemical pollution, etc.).

5.7. Summary of findings

This chapter has presented the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data in the study, focusing on answering the two research questions:

- RQ1: How does the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's activism in the UK?
- RQ2: What are young people's experiences of activism, and how do feelings and personal identity relate to young people's involvement with activism?

Based on the theoretical conceptualisation of young people's activism as non-electoral participation following the 'Do-It-Ourselves Politics' concept (Pickard, 2019), the research questions aimed understand the cognitive, emotional and social factors influencing young people's activism.

The quantitative analysis of the weighted survey data consisted in descriptive and inferential analysis, such as a principal component analysis, correlation tests, multiple linear regression models and binomial logistic regression. The analysis of the survey data was structured around the testing of ten hypotheses, with the objectives of identifying clusters of non-electoral activities (H1), determining which factors influence non-electoral participation (H2-H6), exploring differences between individual and collective non-electoral activities

(H7-H8) as well as differences in predictors of male and female respondents' non-electoral participation (H9), and comparing determinants of non-electoral and electoral participation (H10). Table 5.17 shows an overview of the findings for the hypotheses H1-10.

Table 5.17. Overview of findings for hypotheses H1-10

No.	Hypothesis	Outcome
<i>Identifying clusters of non-electoral activities</i>		
H1	Individual activities of non-electoral participation are likely to be clustered together, as are collective activities.	Confirmed
<i>Determining which factors influence non-electoral participation</i>		
H2a	The more interested young people are in politics, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Confirmed
H2b	The more interested young people are in social issues, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Confirmed
H3a	The more confident young people are in their ability to participate in politics, the higher the non-electoral participation of young people.	Confirmed
H3b	The stronger the belief of young people in that working together is important for making changes, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Confirmed
H4a	The stronger the belief of young people in their capacity to act for an issue they care about, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Confirmed
H4b	The stronger the belief of young people in a perceived collective capacity to act for an issue they care about, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Rejected
H5a	The higher young people's perceived opportunity of political influence, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Rejected
H5b	The higher young people's perceived opportunity of social influence, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Confirmed
H6	The more dissatisfied young people are with the performance of the government, the higher is their non-electoral participation.	Confirmed

<i>Understanding differences in drivers of individual and collective non-electoral activities</i>		
H7	There are statistically significant differences in the associations of the independent variables between those respondents who only participated in individual non-electoral activities and those who participated in both individual and collective non-electoral activities.	Confirmed
H8	Increases in interest in social issues, dissatisfaction with the government, collective efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence are associated with a greater likelihood of participating in both individual and collective forms of non-electoral participation.	Confirmed
<i>Understanding gender differences in drivers of non-electoral participation</i>		
H9a	The more female respondents are interested in social issues, the more likely they are to participate in non-electoral activities.	Confirmed
H9b	Male respondents with a high perception of personal agency and collective efficacy are more likely to participate in non-electoral activities.	Partially confirmed
<i>Comparing determinants of non-electoral and electoral participation</i>		
H10	Participation in electoral activities is, in contrast to participation in non-electoral activities, only influenced by interest in politics and not by interest in social issues.	Confirmed

From the analysis, eight key findings could be drawn:

Finding 1: Young people who reported having participated in an individual non-electoral activity were also likely to have participated in additional individual non-electoral activities. Similarly, young people who reported having participated in a collective non-electoral activity were also likely to have participated in additional collective non-electoral activities.

Finding 2: The likelihood of participating in collective forms of non-electoral activities increased with an increase in interest in social issues, collective efficacy, perceived opportunity of social influence and dissatisfaction with the government.

Findings 1 and 2 are important because while they do not directly correspond to the research questions, they demonstrate that determinants of non-electoral participation are dependent on the type of non-electoral activity (individual and collective). While existing evidence theorises differences in predictors of individual and collective political participation (Huber, Goyanes and Gil de Zúñiga, 2021), no study has provided an empirical analysis dedicated to non-electoral participation based on Pickard's (2019) 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics. In the context of this study, it appears that the likelihood to participate in collective activities increases with an overall stronger socially coined perception, involving being interested in social issues, believing in the efficacy of collective action and the potential to influence as being part of a group.

Finding 3: Both interest in politics and interest in social issues positively affect young people's non-electoral participation. For women, interest in social issues is more strongly linked to an increase in non-electoral participation. This means that there are gender differences in how increased interest levels predict increases in non-electoral participation.

The level of involvement with non-electoral activities was found to increase with interest in politics and interest in social issues. While young men's non-electoral participation was affected by both, young women's involvement with non-electoral activities was exclusively linked to interest in social issues. This confirmed previous research on women being more likely to state to be interested in politics when directly asked for specific issues (Ferrín *et al.*, 2020; Tormos and Verge, 2022). Participation in non-electoral activities was also found to increase with decreased satisfaction with the performance of the government and a high level of perceived opportunity of social influence. The latter referred specifically to the perception of influence those respondents had as being part of a political or civic group or associations. This result validated existing evidence on the effects of membership-based associations on civic participation (Schussman and Soule, 2005; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Turner, Ryan and O'Sullivan, 2019). For increased non-electoral participation, positive perceptions of one's internal efficacy and personal agency played a significant role as well as the conviction of effectiveness of collective action.

Finding 4: The cognitive factors including perception of agency, efficacy and influence showed positive relationships with young people's non-electoral participation. In particular, positive perceptions of personal agency, internal and collective efficacy, and influence as part of a social group were associated with higher levels of non-electoral activities. Their effects differed between female and male respondents.

The effects of perception of internal efficacy (being able to understand and participate in politics), personal agency (one's own perceived capacity to act on issues of concerns) and collective efficacy (the belief that working together achieves small changes) proved to be different for female and male survey respondents. Young women's participation levels rose with increased confidence in their understanding of and ability to participate in politics (internal efficacy), whereas young men's participation levels raised with increased positive perceptions about their own capacity to act on issues of concern (personal agency) and about the effectiveness of collective action (collective efficacy). These findings first appeared to be counter-intuitive, since female respondents' involvement in non-electoral activities had been identified to be exclusively driven by interest in social issues, while male respondents' involvement in non-electoral activities had been found to be more strongly affected by an increased interest in politics. Yet, these results may indicate that confidence in understanding politics is essential for young women's non-electoral participation as it has been found to be for electoral participation. Various studies have shown that low internal efficacy and general lack of self-confidence is linked to lower electoral participation, voting in particular, and that this is an issue affecting women in particular (Condon and Holleque, 2013; Wolak, 2020). For young men, non-electoral participation stems less from an interest in social issues and more from a positive perception of being able to effectuate change as an individual and as part of a group. This may be a fundamental difference in how 'the social' is perceived by young women and men, that girls and young women are more influenced by being interested in a particular social issue and their perceived internal efficacy, and that boys and

young men are more influenced by being interested in politics, their beliefs in their own capacity to act and in the effectiveness of working together.

Finding 5: The determinants of non-electoral and electoral participation varied. Young people's engagement in electoral activities was linked to interest in politics, internal efficacy, perceived opportunity of social influence and dissatisfaction with the government. Focus group participants did not actively distinguish between non-electoral and electoral forms of participation, but tended to participate in those that were more accessible to them.

Compared to non-electoral participation, electoral activities were not found to be influenced by the same set of independent variables. When adjusted for age to only include respondents who had been eligible to vote within the time frame 2019 to 2021, being interested in politics, being dissatisfied with the government, having confidence in one's own understanding of politics and a positive perception of being able to effect social influence were associated with an increase in non-electoral participation. While these predictors also appeared to be of significance for young people's non-electoral participation, the main difference was identified to be the driving force of interest. Electoral participation was exclusively influenced by interest in politics, whereas non-electoral participation was also influenced by interest in social issues.

Finding 6: Activism is an expression of dissatisfaction with political institutions, which are being perceived as marginalising young people. Non-electoral participation represents an alternative to electoral participation.

The qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts was carried out using thematic analysis. The group discussions with young people who were involved with activism provided subjective contexts for the factors investigated in the models and enabled a deepened qualitative understanding of how young people's feelings and personal identity relate their involvement with activism. What young people were interested in was influenced by their social environments, including their educational background, family, friends, and

social class, and social media platforms. Many young people were also aware that their topics of interest, e.g. social equality and climate change, were being exploited for marketisation.

As indicated by the survey, young politically active people were strongly dissatisfied with the government and accused politicians of practicing 'tokenism' and delivering 'lip-service' or 'window-dressing' policies. In short, young people were dissatisfied with how their issues of concern, such as climate change, racial inequality, feminist and LGBT issues, were handled and with the lack of the political progress being made. In the focus groups, some participants were not just discontent with the performance of the government but also with the electoral system of first-past-the-post, expressing a desire for a more proportional voting system. Many young people who stated wanting to be more politically active in conventional ways, such as voting, were barred from participating because of age requirements. Therefore, non-electoral activities represented an alternative way of participation.

Finding 7: Enacting personal agency and becoming involved with activism are linked to the concept of empowerment but may also be perceived as a burden. Participating in collective action as part of collective agency is an expression of finding belonging within a community.

Personal agency was regarded with ambivalence. While on the one hand, becoming and being politically active was perceived as an act of empowerment, on the other it could quickly transform into a burden. This was the case for people engaged in activism connected to their own identity of belonging to a specific group based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, etc. Taking personal responsibility and acting upon one's values was generally seen as something positive and commendable but could be associated with negative emotions, such as anxiety and pressure. Personal agency, despite relating to oneself, held an underlying notion of caring about others, about being aware of being part of a bigger group or community.

Although collective agency was not identified as a factor which led to an increase in non-electoral participation, young people attributed great responsibility to the ‘collective’, which could refer to both concrete and imagined communities. The notion of being part of a community was associated with more meaningful actions to hold politicians accountable. Rather than being about the ‘collective’ itself, collective agency refers more to the process of finding belonging and identifying with others, by sharing the same values, similar identities, or advocating for the same cause. In that sense, this strongly positive perception of collective agency reflects on young people wanting to belong and trying to find their own identity and acceptance. Another aspect of collective agency is that young people, in both the focus groups and the survey, appeared to be more inclined to believe in small, local changes, as opposed to large-scale abstract ones.

Finding 8: Young people are motivated by personal experiences and associate feelings with their activism. These motivations and feelings differ across issue-based and identity-based activism.

Young activists disclosed a range of positive and negative emotions in connection to their political participation. The study looked into three broader themes of activism and found differences between issue-based and identity-based activism, especially with regard to personal trajectories of experiences with discrimination, racism and gendered violence. Environmental activism represented an issue-based form of activism, and anti-racist, feminist and LGBT activism represented identity-based activism. These differ by the first stemming from a specific external issue, while the others refer to activism that is rooted in personal identity. Environmental activism was characterised by feelings varying from hope to resignation. The central motivation originated from wanting to make a change and caring about others. Identity-based activism was accompanied by feelings of pressure and personal risks. Individuals reported that although their personal identity was connected to experiences of fear and discrimination, it also represented a strong source of motivation. These findings indicate that young people’s activism is driven by different emotional motivations and that personal identity influences interest in

and experiences with activism. Underlying all forms of activism discussed in the groups was the importance of identification as an individual with others. This identification could both consist in sharing a certain identity or group characteristics and having similar values and beliefs.

The following chapter discusses the theoretical implications of the quantitative and qualitative findings, and explains how the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's sociopolitical development. It also explores how feelings and personal identity potentially affect young people's preferences for issues of activism and links the importance of identification to the theoretical model of non-electoral participation.

6. Explaining young people's engagement in activism as part of sociopolitical development

6.1. Overview

This chapter revisits the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework of the study developed in Chapter 3 to contextualise the findings from Chapter 5 within the wider youth participation research and to frame the process of young people becoming engaged in activism using the sociopolitical development theory. The discussion of the finding's theoretical implications also acknowledges the limitations of this study and develops questions and recommendations for future research.

Research on young people's political participation has increasingly shifted beyond the boundaries of institutionalised actions, such as voting, and towards a more fluid and civic understanding of participation. In this context, Pickard's work (2019) on 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics illustrates that young people are turning towards non-electoral forms of political participation due to being dissatisfied with institutional politics and disillusioned by failing economic and political systems. Instead, young people care about issues of inequality and injustice and seek influence within their own personal and local spheres via forms of non-electoral activities. While these activities of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics are taking place outside traditional political institutions, they may still aim for political and social change. Young people who engage in non-electoral participation may become part of informal networks in either physical forms (such as through local activist groups) and/or aided by the use of social media and digital communication methods. The extent to which young people participate in either individual or collective forms of non-electoral activities may be influenced by personal preference, perception and external circumstances. Both individual and collective non-electoral activities are characterised by young people's self-reliance and agency.

This study has sought to understand what causes young people to move from caring about certain issues, from being aware of inequality and injustice, to becoming engaged in activism, conceptualised as forms of non-electoral

activities. Following on from studies by Diemer (2012), Moore et al., (2016) and Pickard (2019), the perception of one's own capacities was assumed as a central factor affecting young people's decisions to become involved with social and political issues. Young people's perceptions of their self-reliance and agency in the context of social and political issues are shaped by their surroundings and their personal characteristics. Following an intersectional line of reasoning, young people's perception of their own capacities is shaped by their multicategorical identities of gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic background. Thus, becoming involved in activism represents a process that is not equal for everyone since "the notion of empowerment is limited to the capacity, and the creation or perception of a capacity for effective action" (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 185). Capacity to be effective (efficacy), capacity to act (agency) and capacity to influence (social influence) – these capacities all depend on personal perception, which is affected by the internal self and by externally constructed realities.

By combining the findings from the survey and the focus group phases, this chapter explains how young people move from being aware of a specific issue to potentially experience a sense of empowerment due to positive perceptions of their personal capacities, and thus ultimately get involved in some form or activity of activism. Within this process of moving from the precritical stage to the critical stage and, eventually, the liberation stage of sociopolitical development, feelings and personal identity affect how young people perceive their personal capacities in relation to the issues of concern.

6.2. Understanding cognitive, social and emotional factors for activism as part of sociopolitical development

This thesis focused on answering two research questions by deploying a mixed-method approach to young people's activism in the UK. The first research question concerned how the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affects young people's engagement in non-electoral participation (RQ1), and the second one asked about young people's experiences of

activism and how young people's feelings and personal identity relate to their involvement with activism (RQ2). Thus, this study investigated the cognitive, emotional and social factors influencing young people's engagement in non-electoral participation, which following Pickard's 'DIO politics' are contrasting institutionalised and electoral forms of participation, and explored how young people's identities affected their involvement with different thematic activisms, specifically climate change activism, anti-racism activism, feminist and LGBTQ activism.

In response to RQ1, having a positive belief about efficacy in some form, with internal efficacy relating to the personal capacity of understanding politics and collective efficacy in relation to the belief that working together can contribute to change, is of significance for non-electoral participation. The conviction that one has the capacity to act towards change, the perception of personal agency, appeared to be only significant for male respondents and was found to be an ambivalent concept for focus group participants. Young people's non-electoral participation increased with their belief in the opportunity for social influence. The notion that non-electoral activities were strongly linked to a social dimension was also reflected in the group discussions, which uncovered that youth activism was not merely an expression of self-actualisation but was also driven by caring for others and understanding oneself as part of something bigger, such as specific as well as abstract or imagined communities.

In response to RQ2, the study found that young people's feelings are important for developing an awareness of injustice and inequality, while their personal identities affect not only the topics they engage in but may also impact their sense of empowerment. In identity-based activism, young people had either experienced marginalisation and discrimination themselves or been a witness to these occurrences. Thus, participating in activism represented a way against the experienced or witnessed marginalisation and self-actualisation was sought in the liberation of such marginalisation and oppression.

The study's theoretical model (see section 3.4.1) proposed that interest in politics and social issues and dissatisfaction with government represent strong

contributors to non-electoral participation, while identifiers of empowerment (perception of efficacy, agency and influence) play a lesser but also significant role. Concepts of social identification and belonging were conceptualised as part of the social setting in which non-electoral participation takes place and was theorised to affect the factors within. The theoretical model was informed by sociopolitical development theory (SPD), which describes the “process of growth in a person’s knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and capacity for action in political and social systems” (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 185). The following sections contextualise the findings identified by the data analysis (see section 5.7) to interpret and attribute the examined factors to different stages of sociopolitical development. By doing so, the study aims to define the stages of young people’s sociopolitical development in relation to non-electoral participation. Afterwards, the chapter presents the limitations of the study and highlights open questions for further research.

6.2.1. Becoming involved in activism as a response to perceived injustice

Sociopolitical development theory proposes that engaging with activism is a response to perceived or experienced oppression, which begins with developing an awareness. To reach and act on such awareness, individuals pass through five stages of sociopolitical development (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003). The first stage is the *acritical stage*, the assumption that injustice and inequality exist but are outside of awareness. During the second stage, the *adaptive stage*, issues of injustice and inequality may be perceived but are ignored for the benefit of maintaining a status quo. This demonstrated indifference is changed when the third stage, the *precritical stage*, is reached. During the precritical stage, concerns about perceived injustice and inequality become more prominent and the attitude of indifference is questioned. The fourth stage is the *critical stage*. Individuals engage purposefully in learning about issues of concern regarding perceived injustice and inequality. This can lead to the fifth and final stage, the *liberation stage*. Individuals start becoming

involved in political actions or social activities to address issues of perceived injustice and inequality.

The theory of SPD (see section 3.3.2) has two decisive limitations which need to be addressed before applying the framework to the findings of the study. The first limitation is that the key contributors to the SPD theory do not specify whether the process of sociopolitical development is linear or whether it may represent a more iterative trajectory during which an individual may move back and forth between certain stages (Watts, Griffiths and Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts and Flanagan, 2007; Moore *et al.*, 2016; Anyiwo *et al.*, 2020). In this regard, there is also no clarity on how discretely defined the stages of SPD are, i.e. how stages may overlap with one another. The second limitation is that SPD is an original theory that was first developed on the basis of community psychology research with young African American activists in the US. The theory thus bears a strong focus on racial oppression and frames SPD as a process towards liberation thereof. Although Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) acknowledged that there is room for exploring the theory in “continued empirical work that uses multiple methods for furthering our understanding of SPD” (2003, p. 193), the notions of ‘oppression’ and ‘liberation’ must be questioned in the context of research that does not primarily focus on racial oppression. Therefore, this study reframes experienced oppression as perceived injustice and inequality while acknowledging that the sociopolitical development of young people is subject to internally perceived and externally constructed power structures. It does not seek to challenge the original framing of the theory but adapts it for the purpose of explaining young people’s engagement in activism in the UK. In the following discussion, the findings of the study are contextualised within the stages of SPD, specifically the precritical stage, the critical stage and the liberation stage, corresponding to the concepts of awareness, empowerment and action.

6.2.1.1. Precritical stage: awareness

The precritical stage of sociopolitical development assumes that an awareness of injustice or inequality may affect motivation for taking action (Heberle, Rapa and Frago, 2020). In contrast to the preceding two stages characterised by acriticality and adaptation, the precritical stage “is the first instance where empowerment is relevant” as “[o]ne begins to look beyond facile explanations for events and an emphasis on their immediate causes” (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 188). In this phase, awareness is assumed to be generated by being interested in specific issues and being dissatisfied with how such issues are being handled by the political institutions or wider society.

In participation research, interest in politics is a standard variable and is assumed to be one of the main requirements for engaging in political activities (Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990; Soler-i-Martí, 2014). Corresponding to recent literature on gender differences within interest in politics (Ferrín *et al.*, 2020; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2021) and to accommodate for the fact that non-electoral participation also entails more civic forms of activities, this study included both the standard question on interest in politics as well as a question on interest in social issues. The individual linear models and the full linear model explaining non-electoral activities (see Tables 5.3 to 5.8) showed that both interest in politics and interest in social issues are relevant for young people’s participation in non-electoral activities, as the likelihood of participating in more non-electoral activities increased with being more interested in politics and with being more interested in social issues (*Finding 3*). The observed effects for being interested in politics and for being interested in social issues were very similar, and the slight differences in their effects are likely to be based on gender differences. Young women were more likely to express a strong interest in social issues, while young men reported higher levels of interest in politics. These findings confirmed existing research on the problem of measuring political interest via a survey by exclusively using a standard interest in politics question as the measure. Young women are more likely to state high levels of interest in the context of specific issues, often issues they may be able to relate to themselves or within their community. This

discrepancy between women and men has been found to be related to how politics are conceived, with a predominantly masculine framing of political actors and institutions. This study adds to this assumption and demonstrates that a wider interest definition is necessary for the context of examining young people's non-electoral participation.

The focus groups centred around topics survey respondents had indicated to be concerned about, thus including activism around climate change, racial inequality, and women's and LGBTQ rights. Being interested in and becoming aware of a particular matter represented a starting point for many young people to become active in relation to their issues of concern. One particular notion in the focus groups was that young people's interest in a specific issue shaped how they viewed this in a wider political and societal context, recognising and calling out perceived injustices and inequalities. It seemed that rather than being interested in a specific issue *per se*, the awareness was about the implications of this issue, as exemplified in their understanding of the severe consequences of climate change ("no one can escape the effects of climate change", Katherine, 17), worrying about what it means to not benefit from 'white privilege' ("it was a real eye-opener as to how bad the racism actually is, because they literally set [a *Black Lives Matter* poster] on fire", Josephine, 18) and questioning the framing of blame in the context of gender-based violence ("my headteacher, he was like 'she was raped', instead of 'he raped her', and I think that narrative is damaging because it puts the blame on the woman", Madeleine, 16). Interest and views merged together to become a concern, almost an urge to act upon.

Focus group participants' interests were also shaped by their own experiences related to their personal identities and by their exposure to information, predominantly via social media channels. Perceived injustice and inequalities were not just observed but often experienced by young people themselves due to characteristics of gender or gender identity and non-heterosexual sexualities, belonging to a non-white ethnicity, and social class, especially the affiliation with a working class background (*Finding 8*). For young women, interest in feminism often stemmed from first- and second-hand experiences

of discrimination and forms of violence. Participants who identified as non-binary or gay described how their interest in LGBTQ rights was fostered by feelings of alienation. Focus group participants involved in anti-racism activism were often driven by their own lived experiences of marginalisation, discrimination and racism, or – in the case of participants who described themselves as white – by the observation of injustice and oppression towards others. Social class, particularly the notion of working class, was less of a driving force itself to become engaged in topics and political actions but rather was regarded as a barrier in certain forms of activities. Some participants who would describe themselves as being part of the working class felt alienated by certain environmental activist groups. Individual participants pointed out the stigma surrounding being ‘working class’, especially with regard to their limited monetary power and how that affected their consumer choices.

Young people’s interests in specific topics were paired with feelings of dissatisfaction, leading to their sense of awareness about perceived injustices and inequality (*Finding 6*). As described before by Pickard (2019), young people are expressing their discontent not just with political actors and institutions but also with actors outside of the institutionalised politics sphere. Other actors that were mentioned as targets of their dissatisfaction were primarily companies, with regard to their marketisation of sustainability (specifically green-washing), racial diversity and inclusion, and their unreflective and inconsequential participation in *Pride* month. In addition, participants were quick to point out their dissatisfaction with how certain issues were handled by the wider society, often tending towards performative acts of activism and virtue-signalling instead of permanent change and structural progress.

Dissatisfaction was also found to impact non-electoral participation based on the analysis of the survey data. Survey respondents were specifically asked about their satisfaction levels with the performance of the UK government, which at the time of the survey, was a Conservative majority government under Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The survey revealed that a majority of respondents said they were either dissatisfied (18%) or very dissatisfied (52%)

with the British government. Since the survey respondents were above-average interested and active in political actions, it may be deducted that this strong display of dissatisfaction was also above-average. Linear regression models showed an inverse relationship between being satisfied with the performance of the government and being involved in non-electoral participation, meaning that the likelihood of participation decreased with increased satisfaction levels. In reverse conclusion, this meant that an increase in dissatisfaction was associated with a greater likelihood of participating in more non-electoral activities.

‘Being interested in politics and in social issues’ and ‘being dissatisfied with the government’ were strongly influential for young people participating in more non-electoral activities, based on the analysis of the survey data. The combination of interest in specific issues and dissatisfaction with how they were handled by political institutions and other actors was also a prominent theme in the group discussions, leading to the development of critical awareness and contributing to their motivations for taking action. The focus groups illustrated that the process of becoming aware of injustice or inequality is linked to personal identity and either own or observed lived experience. In that sense, it is difficult to measure individual awareness as it is tied to personal circumstances and networks. In terms of sociopolitical development theory, both interest in politics and in social issues appear to be a starting point towards potential engagement in activism, but to reach awareness, more than interest alone may be necessary. The recognition of injustice and inequality is substantiated by feelings of dissatisfaction with politics, as well as a general notion of discontent. Both interest and dissatisfaction can be regarded as markers of the precritical stage, as they provide a basis for engaging critically with issues of perceived injustice and inequality.

6.2.1.2. Critical stage: empowerment

The critical stage of sociopolitical development is characterised by a “desire to learn more about asymmetry, injustice, oppression, and liberation” (Watts,

Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 188). While there is little explanation as to what exactly this stage of development entails, the concept of critical consciousness is central to this stage and regarded as a prerequisite to engaging in political or social actions countering perceived injustice, inequality and oppression (Watts, Griffiths and Abdul-Adil, 1999). Critical consciousness describes “the capacity to critically reflect and act upon one’s sociopolitical environment” (Diemer *et al.*, 2006, p. 443). This critical reflection, thus, can “lead to critical actions that uproot oppressive systems for youth who are marginalized by racism, sexism, classism, or other forms of inequality” (Plummer *et al.*, 2022, p. 428).

In this study, the critical stage of sociopolitical development was conceived as the central stage of what Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003) describe as ‘empowerment’. The process of becoming empowered is fostered by the development of criticality of young people, which in turn is critical for participation. The theoretical considerations of empowerment, as discussed in Chapter 3, are complex and often diffuse. In essence, empowerment can be understood as a psychological construct “integrat[ing] perceptions of personal control, a proactive approach to life, and a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 581). However, in terms of empiricism, it is difficult to assess and contextualise experiences of empowerment, especially with regard to its subjectivity bound to specific situations and embedded in social structures. Empowerment does not constitute an equal process, despite its personal psychological nature, as it is influenced by “intersecting oppressions” (Banks, Smith and Neal, 2022, p. 104) and the production and reproduction of social inequality by dominant power structures (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003).

This study looked at empowerment by understanding how specific cognitive factors affect the process of an individual transcending beyond interest or awareness, as described as part of the precritical stage, towards this more preparative state ahead of participation. The theoretical assumption was that young people’s sense of empowerment was influenced by perception of efficacy (perception of one’s own understanding and relative effectiveness),

agency (perception of one's own capacity to act), and influence (capacity of relative influential power). As outlined above, efficacy, agency and influence are subject to internal perceptions of oneself and to externally constructed power structures. It is, therefore, not appropriate to understand young people's sense of empowerment in a normative way, as a lack of experienced empowerment may have manifold reasons rooted in social inequality or oppression.

Positive beliefs about efficacy have been found to affect participation levels (Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990; van Zomeren *et al.*, 2004; Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz, 2017). The results of the survey showed that increases in internal efficacy and collective efficacy were associated with an overall increase in non-electoral participation (*Finding 4*). The more confident young people were in their own ability to participate in politics, the more likely they were to participate in additional forms of non-electoral participation. Likewise, the younger people believed in the effectiveness of working together, the more likely they were to participate in additional forms of non-electoral participation. Interestingly, the effects of perceptions of internal efficacy and collective efficacy were indicated to be different between female and male respondents. Whereas young women tended to be more active in non-electoral forms of participation when they held a more positive belief about their own capacity to be effective, young men tended to be more active when they held a more positive belief about group effectiveness. This gender difference could be explained by young women's general tendency to be more doubtful about their own capacities to understand and participate in politics (Wolak, 2020), and thus, an increase in their perception of internal efficacy may affect their likelihood of participating in more activities. Due to women's generally stronger social-mindedness (Eagly, 2009; Cicognani *et al.*, 2012; Xiao *et al.*, 2019), beliefs in collective efficacy may not have additional effects as they are already quite manifested. Young men, on the other hand, have not been found to be generally affected by low levels of confidence regarding their understanding and potential participation in politics. Therefore, their non-electoral participation may not be driven by how they

perceive their own efficacy but rather by how they perceive the efficacy of a group.

While respondents' perception of collective agency did not affect their level of engagement in non-electoral participation, their perception of personal agency did. However, the disaggregation by gender suggested that believing in personal agency is more likely to influence young men's non-electoral participation rather than young women's. This means that male respondents' engagement in non-electoral activities increased with the belief of being individually able to do something about political and social issues, while female respondents' engagement did not. This difference between female and male respondents was unexpected. Although the perception of personal agency may not universally affect the number of non-electoral activities participated in, agency was a prevalent theme across all focus group discussions.

Young people described their perceptions of their own capacity to act with ambivalent feelings (*Finding 7*). On the one hand, engaging with issues of perceived inequality and injustice fostered feelings of empowerment. Personal agency was conceived of as taking small actions within one's own scope of action. These actions within personal scope appeared to be driven by both the desire for self-actualisation and the desire to support other people in advocating for a specific cause. On the other hand, personal agency was also perceived as linked to privilege, presenting itself as a burden to those who did not benefit from the same privilege and thus saw themselves almost 'forced' to participate in actions against perceived injustice and inequality. It was particularly discussed among those respondents who belonged to a specific group at risk of being discriminated against due to their race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality etc. This suggests that feelings of empowerment are influenced by intersecting forces of oppression or unequal treatment. In the group discussions, such perceived burdens related to one's personal identity were specifically centring around the notion of 'white privilege' and the consequences of the lack thereof, gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as the marginalisation of young people who felt that they did not conform to heteronormative standards of society.

In issue-based activism, represented by activism against climate change, personal agency was experienced as restricted due to possibly significant consequences of participating in protests and the limitations of personal actions. Some young climate activists reported being worried about or even intimidated by the UK government's increasingly repressive approach to protest culture. The desire to self-actualise values and beliefs was framed in constant tension with the evaluation of long-term personal consequences, such as a criminal record limiting opportunities for travel and work. Another prominent limitation to personal agency was the acknowledgement of the little scope individual actions have, as young climate activists concluded that aside from a few meaningful individual actions, "it's really kind of window dressing, it's dancing around the structural changes that have to happen" (Felix, 23, *climate*).

There was no ambivalence about how focus group participants viewed the capacity of a potential group of community to act, with all young people stating strong beliefs in the agency of the collective. The discussion revealed that young activists held a largely positive view about working together and using collective action to effect social and political change. Furthermore, their participation in activism appeared to be driven by desires to create political or social change but also provided an end in itself as it served to find other people with similar values and views to build and become part of communities. Although some participants pointed out the potential of peer-pressure effects, especially in forms of everyday activism, leading to performative actions, they overall still attributed great responsibility to both real and imagined communities.

This general positive perception of communities was also found in the survey in the form of positive perceptions of social influence. Young people were more likely to participate in more non-electoral activities when they held positive beliefs about being able to contribute to political or social changes by being part of an organisation or group (*Finding 4*). In line with the focus group discussions, young people who were politically active appeared to be more inclined to believe in the opportunity for small, local changes rather than in

large-scale, abstract overthrows of systems. The general lack of perceived political influence also illustrates this point, and it represents a logical consequence of the widespread general disenchantment with political institutions. Focus group participants attributed the lack of opportunities for young people to influence politics, in particular to the UK's electoral system of first-past-the-post, age barriers to voting, and general disinterest of politicians for the concerns of young people.

By understanding perception of efficacy, agency and influence as elements of empowerment, this study has found that overall young people's participation in non-electoral participation increases with internal and collective efficacy, personal agency, and positive perceptions about the opportunity of influence within social constructs, such as groups or organisations. The survey data also indicated gender-based differences regarding young people's perception of efficacy and agency, with female respondents being more likely to participate more when they were more confident about their own abilities to participate politically (internal efficacy) and male respondents being more likely to participate more when they held more positive beliefs about the effectiveness of collective action (collective efficacy) and their own capacity to act (personal agency). These findings indicate that young women's non-electoral participation increases with their confidence in their own understanding of politics, whereas young men's non-electoral participation increases with their perception of the effectiveness of social participation and their own part in such. In the focus groups, critical consciousness was connected to how young people perceived themselves in relation to others and how issues of perceived injustice and inequality affected them. Personal agency presented itself to be central to developing feelings of empowerment but, depending on the person and context, could equally be perceived as an impediment.

6.2.1.3. Liberation stage: action

According to SPD theory, awareness and critical consciousness cause salience of perceived injustice and inequality and can result in behaviour

towards liberation. Young people address perceived injustice and inequality by engaging in actions (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003). This study looked at young people's activism in the UK by defining activism as primarily consisting of non-electoral forms of activities based on Pickard's 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics concept (2019), and in the survey limited its focus to a specific individual and collective activities. Of those respondents who were active in non-electoral participation, roughly two-thirds had been involved with both individual and collective forms, and one-third had participated in individual activities only. Notwithstanding the context of the restrictions due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis suggested that participation in collective activities may be more likely to occur with increased interest in social issues and dissatisfaction with the government, and overall stronger beliefs in the effectiveness of collective actions and the impact of influence as being part of a social group.

The act of participating in an activity did not represent the end of a process, a finale to becoming aware of injustice and inequality, and critically engaging with an issue and with one's own capacities. Instead, both the survey and the focus groups strongly indicated that young people tended to be involved in more than one action once they became involved with an issue (*Finding 1*). Thus, the stage of *liberation*, or rather the *action stage*, is not a goal young people aspire to reach but is more likely part of a recursive process once engaged and passionate about an issue. In the discussions with focus group participants, young people framed being involved in some forms of political actions as commendable, even if those actions may seem small.

Focus group participants also appeared to have a wider action repertoire than the pre-selected list that was used in the survey, and they reported on their participation in activities of both non-electoral and electoral character without explicitly distinguishing between these forms (*Finding 5*). For instance, many individuals stated that they had been or had tried to be in contact with their constituency MP and that they had voted in elections or were sure to vote once eligible. The data analysis showed that age was a major factor for an increase in electoral participation, whereas age did not affect changes in the levels of

non-electoral participation. It can be assumed that the exclusion from elections due to age restrictions represents a barrier for young people to take part in these activities. In addition, due to the conceptualisation of the variable *electoral participation* revolving around activities for and within political parties, further barriers to such structures exist. In the linear model using electoral activities as the dependent variable, levels of participation rose with an increased interest in politics, dissatisfaction with the government, internal efficacy and perceived opportunity of social influence.

The survey analysis identified that increased levels of interest in social issues, dissatisfaction with the government and belief in the effectiveness and influence of social groups positively affected the likelihood of participating in collective non-electoral activities, such as volunteering, protesting, being part of an activist group and mobilising other people (*Finding 2*). Most individual activities reported by focus group participants centred around participating in everyday activities, such as sharing information online, recycling, engaging in conversations with friends and family about issues of perceived injustice and inequality, and trying to become a more sustainable consumer. Collective activities focus group participants reported to have been engaged in included attending protests, with some also involved in direct actions against climate change and setting up or joining local activist groups within their social circles, primarily at school, university, church or community centres. This demonstrates the trend towards wide and personalised action repertoires among young people who are politically interested and active, which do not exclude activities with others but represent a mix of 'life politics' (Giddens, 1991) and "issue-based participatory politics" (Vromen, 2017, p. 9). Thus, the action stage of sociopolitical development contains diverse accounts of young people's political participation, with a tendency towards non-electoral forms while not excluding engagement in institutionalised politics.

Similar to the previous stage, how young people perceive the significance and the impact of their actions is influenced by their own personal perceptions of agency, efficacy and influence, as well as by the external power structures defined by societal norms and political governance. Although focus group

participants were convinced that becoming politically active was necessary to effect social and political change whilst believing in the strength of collective actions, they were also doubtful about the impact their actions would have as individuals or even as part of a wider movement. These doubts addressed the seeming futility of personal actions, as well as the small scope protests were having. For some, this meant looking for more radical actions, even if it could mean participation becoming only a means to 'do something', to not just sit still and accept these injustices and inequalities. For others, the lack of hopeful prospects for the future, in combination with potential sanctions for political actions such as protesting, meant that they were more hesitant about engaging in non-electoral activities while experiencing feelings of depression and resignation. Such strong reactions indicated that it might be possible for young people to develop a strong awareness of perceived injustice and inequality but that the process from awareness to empowerment and then to action is anything but simple and linear.

6.2.2. Personal identity and belonging in issue-based and identity-based activism

Scholars of the theory of sociopolitical development have criticised the lack of an undifferentiated approach to understanding empowerment, as it risks producing the illusion that empowerment may be a universal and equal psychological process for everyone (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003). This study investigated how young people's feelings and personal identity relate to their involvement with activism. Since the focus group topics were generated on the basis of the survey, it was evident that young people's issues of concern at the time of the data collection were also influenced by the media coverage of the reemergent *Black Lives Matter* movement in the summer prior (in 2020), the news about the murder of a young woman in London (in 2021) and the overall situation of on-and-off restrictions to social life due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The topics that were selected on the basis of the survey included environmental activism representing an issue-based form of activism, and anti-

racist and queerfeminist activism representing forms of identity-based activism. These differ by the first stemming from a specific external issue, while the others refer to activism that is rooted in personal identity.

This study argues that the process of sociopolitical development, which accompanies the process of engaging with non-electoral participation, is affected by young people's personal and collective identities. Personal identity, shaped by intrinsic characteristics of individual, subjective socialisation experiences, and socially constructed norms, affects the stages of awareness, empowerment, and action (or the precritical, critical and liberation stages). Previous research into identity-based activism has shown that activism may be a coping measure against experienced racial discrimination and activism towards racial equality may be rooted in the "sense of belonging to one's racial group" and a "collective sense of self" (Hope *et al.*, 2019, p. 68). Participating in activism can be both an expression of identity as well as a shaping factor towards collective cohesion for LGBTQ youth (Schmitz and Tyler, 2018; Fu and Cook, 2021). However, while personal identity can refer to being Black or of an ethnic background that is 'non-white' to identifying as a non-binary gender or as transgender, or to being homosexual or any other form of sexuality that does not align with heterosexuality, that does not mean that is deterministic for young people's pathway into activism. Despite being considered an issue-based topic of activism, this study argues that climate change activism can also be influenced by one's identity, specifically someone's social identity.

The aforementioned markers of empowerment, the perception of efficacy, agency and influence, are influenced by young people's personal identities. In the examples of identity-based activism in this study, participants reported that their lived experience was a source of motivation for their engagement in issues of perceived injustice and inequality. For participants in the discussions on anti-racist activism, some shared that their upbringing in the UK as a person of self-described 'mixed race background' or their experiences as a migrant in the UK as a non-white person have contributed to their desires to learn more about issues such as "representation" and "race perception" (Sadie, 24, *anti-*

racism). Participants in the focus groups on feminist and LGBT activism also named their personal experiences as being a young woman and identifying as a member of a wider LGBT community as influential for their motivation to become more engaged in issues of injustice and inequality. At the same time, despite having these lived experiences of being othered, discriminated against and – in some cases – racially abused as non-white persons in the UK and of being marginalised in a male-dominated and strongly heteronormative society, various participants expressed that they noticed a discrepancy between their own experiences and how these were framed by others. In relation to personal experiences of racial discrimination, participants recalled how their own behaviour was often measured against their identity as a non-white person. As Frankie (16, *anti-racism*) described it, “the white friends that I do have, [...] they can opt out if they want to, but if I opt out, that's like a statement.” Equally, insensitive remarks, including from within one's own social circles would just be brushed off as ‘jokes’. Participants who identified as female, non-binary or LGBTQ pointed out that girls' socialisation was setting the norms for acceptable behaviour and that deviations from it were met often met with confusion, at a minimum, and even backlash. Furthermore, participants criticised that girls and women were being taught, often in schools, that it was their responsibility to stay safe and that victim-blaming of rape was something that occurred even within their social circles. As Clara (24, *feminism and LGBT*) summarised it, “the narrative is on blaming women for having these things happen to them and not actually people asking ‘Wait, why is this happening in the first place, why are men doing this?’ When women are told their whole lives to control ourselves, so we don't get assaulted.”

Engaging in identity-based activism as a person of lived experience illustrated that while it may spark interest to become engaged in activism, it also presents a specific constellation of not being able to choose to engage in an issue but being almost forced to think about injustice and inequality as it perceived by oneself. This explains why personal agency was regarded with ambivalence, specifically among those that participated in identity-based activism. Participating in activism bears the risks of exposure to further experiences of

marginalisation, discrimination and abuse based on one's identity, as the affected person has no way of changing their identity. This can be a different experience for those who engage in identity-based activism as a so-called 'ally'. Being an ally, i.e. supporting activism for the rights of a specific group while not belonging to this group oneself, includes both the notion of privilege and responsibility. In the focus group on anti-racism activism, young people were generally supportive of the idea that people join protests as allies. Yet, they also pointed out that allies benefit from being able to 'bow out' and have the option to retreat in difficult situations. Thus, the differences between those with lived experience and those supporting the cause as an ally are fundamental in how young people perceive their involvement in relation to their personal identity.

Engaging in issue-based activism, such as climate change activism, is not bound in the same way to personal identity as identity-based activism. However, issue-based activism is influenced by one's social identity, in particular by views and values. The experience with the issue does not stem from one's personal accounts of lived experience but rather from other sources, such as knowledge about global warming and environmental consequences in the case of climate change activism. In the respective focus group discussions, personal agency was regarded less ambivalently, but that did not exclude all risks from becoming involved with environmental protests and direct climate change actions. Since the issue of climate change was not rooted in young people's identity, they were not likely to experience discrimination and abuse as a consequence of their activism. Instead, young environmental activists felt that their capacity to act was contested by being framed as 'young'. Beyond framing young environmental activists as 'naïve', the UK government has been passing legislation which puts climate change protesters at risk of detention and criminal convictions. This affects how young people might need to balance their desire for action with other interests, such as future job prospects.

Participating in identity-based activism was both an expression of identity as well as looking for communities with similar identities. The desire for belonging

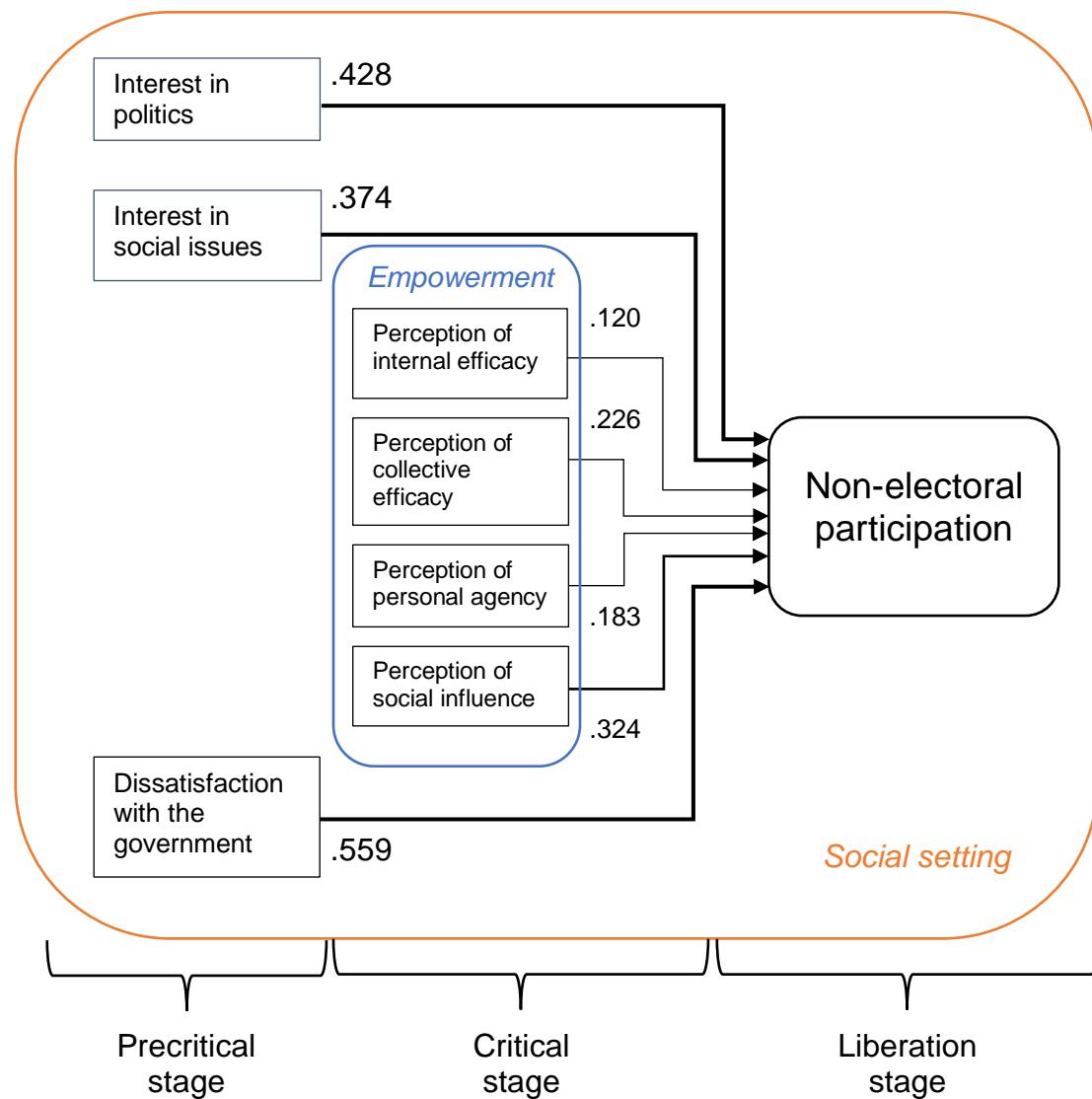
among young people who were involved with anti-racist activism as a person with lived experience or with queerfeminist activism as a woman or identifying as LGBT was reported to be driven by wanting to find understanding, solidarity and a safe space. Finding others, especially people their own age, to connect with was also important for young people to have their identity-related experiences validated. Those in the focus groups who described themselves as 'allies' also stressed that their role within was to support those who are marginalised and, in a way, contribute to the normalisation of discourse around racial injustice, gender inequality, and LGBT discrimination, so that it reaches wider society. The desire for belonging is also relevant to young people's activism against climate change. While not a form of identity-based activism, young people find communities based who have similar values and are unified in their views that climate change must be stopped or at least slowed. Thus, young people's environmental activism is based on social identity and, to some extent, also includes the notion of generation.

6.2.3. Activism as acts of empowerment and social identification

The previous sections discussed three stages of sociopolitical development, outlining the process from developing awareness about injustice and inequality to becoming critically conscious and, dependent on internal perceptions and external circumstances, feeling empowered to act upon such perceived issues of injustice and inequality, to taking part in actions addressing those. Cognitive factors of interest in politics and interest in social issues correspond to the precritical stage of awareness, as does the emotional factor of dissatisfaction with the government. The critical stage, the stage of empowerment, is characterised by cognitive factors such as perception of one's internal and collective efficacy, personal agency, and the opportunity for social influence. However, this stage is also strongly impacted by social factors, including personal identities and the desire for belonging. Lastly, the liberation or action stage represents the part of the process where awareness and subjective empowerment culminate in taking action against perceived injustice. Figure

6.1 visualises the application of the previously illustrated sociopolitical development stages to the empirical findings of the study, which include the unstandardised regression coefficients for the tested factors embedded within the explored concepts of *empowerment* and *social setting*.

Figure 6.1. Application of the sociopolitical development stages to the empirical findings of the study



The figure above combines the empirical results from the regression model (see Table 5.8) with the conceptualised stages of sociopolitical development leading towards participation in non-electoral activities. Interest in politics and social issues and dissatisfaction with the government are strong predictors of

increased non-electoral participation, whereas markers of empowerment – perception of internal and collective efficacy, personal agency and social influence – play a significant but less influential role for increased non-electoral participation. On the basis of the insights from the focus group discussions, these factors were attributed to the stages of sociopolitical development. The statistical analysis could not be used to evidence a causal chain between the conceptualised stages of awareness (pre-critical stage), empowerment (critical stage) and action (liberation stage).

Gender differences may be strongly influential in the critical stage of developing a sense of empowerment. Young women's levels of non-electoral participation were likely to increase with a more positive perception of their own efficacy (the capacity to understand politics), while young men's levels of non-electoral participation were more likely to increase with their belief in their own capacity to act (personal agency) and the effectiveness of collective action (collective efficacy). These gender differences were unexpected but may, in part, be explained by previous research that has found that women's lack of internal efficacy leads to a reduction in their participation (Lawless and Fox, 2010; Kanthak and Woon, 2015). Conversely, an increase in their own capacity to understand politics would increase their participatory behaviour. Boys and men have consistently been found to hold higher levels of internal efficacy overall, with studies indicating that these differences are likely linked to gendered political socialisation processes (Preece, 2016; Arens and Watermann, 2017). The more unexplained finding is that young men's levels of non-electoral participation rise with an augmented belief in their own capacity to act and in the effectiveness of collective action.

The focus groups also revealed that other elements of personal identity play a role in how empowerment is conceived of, with young people reporting that being part of a group that experiences marginalisation in some form has shaped how they view not just the government and society but also themselves. Thus, young people's perceptions of efficacy, agency and influence are multidimensional and dependent on internally perceived capacities and externally constructed power structures. Personal identity may

also predispose someone to specific topics of activism since lived experiences shape the interests of that person. In the context of this study, focus groups on feminism and LGBT issues were exclusively attended by young people who identified as female and/or LGBT, and focus groups on the *Black Lives Matter* movement and anti-racism activism were predominantly attended by young people who had experienced discrimination and racism due to not being a white person. These tendencies of people participating in political actions based on shared characteristics echo existing research into identity-based activism (Hope, Keels and Durkee, 2016; Hotchkins, 2017; Jones and Reddick, 2017; Kimball *et al.*, 2016; Vaccaro and Mena, 2011).

The notion of identity is not just relevant to the topics young people choose to engage in. Driven by the desire for self-actualisation of one's own values, finding other (young) people with similar beliefs and backgrounds appears to be one motivation to become and, especially when such a community is found, to remain involved with activism. Previous research has illustrated that sharing a social identity based on views, age or generation, or other characteristics promotes the feeling of belonging and being part of such a social network can incite positive emotions of friendship and general social affiliation (Charles *et al.*, 2018; Pickard, 2022). Finding such belonging and groups of shared social identities can comfort and strengthen the individual and, especially in the context of transitioning from youth to young adulthood, shape the individual's perceptions of their own empowerment (Curtin and Kende, 2016; Montague and Eiroa-Orosa, 2018). This study has shown that such desires for belonging were prevalent in the discussions with young activists, as they reported that their engagement in activism had brought them into communities in which they experienced solidarity and friendship and which lessened their feelings of isolation and anxiety.

In conclusion, the theoretical approach of understanding young people's engagement in DIO politics from a socio-political developmental point of view allows for a more nuanced understanding of how empowerment is conceived of subjective perceptions of capacities which are affected by multi-categorical identities of gender, race, ethnicity and socio-economic background and also

subject to external power structures. Thus, there is no universal trajectory of sociopolitical development. Participating in activism can be understood as taking action against perceived injustice and inequality. This stage of action requires both an awareness of such perceived injustice and inequality and an increased belief in one's own capacity to be effective, to act, and to influence.

Sociopolitical development theory provides a framework for understanding why young people engage in forms of non-electoral participation based on the concept of Do-It-Ourselves politics. The theory adds to the theoretical assumptions of DIO politics by tracing how "personalised politics" (Pickard, 2019, p. 392) are part of a process involving the development of empowerment and relating to oneself and others. This study investigated the influence of cognitive, emotional and social factors on young people's participation levels in non-electoral activities of political and social action. It further differentiated how factors corresponding to developing awareness and perceiving a sense of empowerment are affected by subjective experiences and perceptions due to identity-related characteristics. Therefore, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of why some young people engage in DIO politics and why some do not. While a lack of awareness or a reduced sense of urgency is the first hurdle to becoming more involved, young people's non-electoral participation also depends on subjective sensations of empowerment, which are linked to their perceptions of efficacy, agency and influence. Personal identity and sense of belonging play a role in both identity-based and issue-based activism, but identity-based activism involves greater conflicts around experiences of marginalisation and discrimination and around perceptions of personal agency. Issue-based activism is more strongly linked to being part of a social identity, and experiences of marginalisation in the case of environmental activism are more related to age discrimination and institutional trivialisation of climate change. In its adaptation of sociopolitical development theory, the study's original theoretical model explored factors and concepts related to young people's engagement in activism and provided insights into how empowerment is perceived and how it is affecting non-electoral participation.

6.3. Limitations of the study

There are a few limitations to the study, which include limits to the methodological approach and to areas of research which could not be covered in detail by the theoretical framework. These limitations do not undermine the overall findings of the study, but they primarily relate to issues which are beyond the scope of this research. The possibility of engagement in activism influencing the investigated predictors is also highlighted, as potential issues of reverse causality can pose risks to the validity of research results and conclusions.

The methodological limitations concern specific aspects of the collected data, the survey sample and the focus group participants, and the overall circumstances in which data collection took place. The original survey data, while substantial in sample size ($N = 1,094$), showed that respondents were above-average interested in politics and social issues as well as above-interested active in both electoral and non-electoral forms of participation. This was caused by the method of purposive sampling, i.e. respondents were attained via adverts leading to the survey via social media (Instagram and Facebook). Because of the framing of the survey as looking into 'young people's activism in the UK', respondents were likely to be young people who were generally interested in politics and forms of participation. The original sample also contained a larger proportion of female respondents, with 63.8% being female and 22.9% being male. Thus, the weighting of the data, which took into account four sociodemographic variables (age, residence, gender and ethnicity), led to a distortion of these proportions and to the omission of observations which were not clearly identifiable as 'female' or 'male' respondents. Although the weighting process had distorting effects on the survey sample, it also rendered comparisons with data on young people's participation from other sources possible.

A gender imbalance was also prominent in the focus groups. Among the 30 participants in total, 25 identified as female. Since the focus group participants were recruited via the survey, an imbalance towards female participants was

to be expected. The disproportionate representation of young women may in part reflect the findings that they are more likely to engage in non-electoral participation than young men. However, it is important to be aware of this gender imbalance in the qualitative data, as participants' views may have been shaped to some degree by the experience of being socialised as a girl and woman. Another issue in the recruitment for the focus group was that it turned out to be difficult to attract participants for the anti-racism theme. While more than 220 of 651 free-text comments collected by the survey stated racial inequalities in the UK as a matter of concern and saw great importance in the *Black Lives Matter* movement, few survey respondents were willing to sign up to participate in group discussions.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected online due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent restrictions on public life. Not only did the pandemic affect the data collection process, but it also likely affected the participatory patterns of young people, especially reducing opportunities for young people to meet in person or to go to protests during large parts of 2020 and 2021. Even though the survey questionnaire attempted to compensate for these temporary restrictions by asking for the participatory behaviour of young people including from before the pandemic started, the experience of COVID-19 undoubtedly affected young people's lives and potentially their interests, views of politics and opportunities for political and civic participation. As this study did not start out to be focusing on the effects of a global pandemic and its consequences for young people's activism, it only acknowledges them to some degree but emphasises that this context most likely will have lasting impacts on youth and general participation, with a trend towards online activities and hybrid meetings.

There are also a few theoretical limitations which concern the scope of sociopolitical development theory and its application to young people's activism in the context of this study. As proposed by Watts, Williams and Jagers (2003), sociopolitical development comprises five stages. This study explained how young people undergo the stages of awareness (precritical stage) to empowerment (critical stage) and action (liberation stage). However,

the first two stages of the SPD process, the acritical and adaptive stage, are not covered by the discussion of the findings. This is because the focus of the study was on explaining why young people become engaged in activism (rather than explaining the factors why they do not become engaged in activism) and the corresponding analytical approach to the relationships between cognitive and emotional factors and levels of non-electoral participation. The acritical and adaptive stages of SPD postulate that there is no awareness of perceived injustice and inequality or that perceived injustice and inequality may be acknowledged, but no critical engagement follows, and adaptive behaviour is adopted. In other words, the acritical and adaptive stages describe phases of general disinterest and provide indications that inactivity may also be caused by adapting to recognised injustice and inequality. Both stages are suitable for explaining why some people may not become engaged in activism, for either they do not recognise issues of asymmetry, or they do but accommodate those in order to "maintain a positive sense of self and to acquire social and material rewards" (Watts, Williams and Jagers, 2003, p. 188).

Sociopolitical development theory, despite being dependent on contextual settings and its emphasis on power structures, does not provide a clear link between activism, general participation, and the role of social networks. The focus group discussions, as well as previous research, have shown that young people's participation is influenced by their peer group (Dostie-Goulet, 2009) and that young people's participation in protest is particularly affected by their individual desire for belonging (Renström, Aspernäs and Bäck, 2021). In the study's theoretical framework, social factors, specifically the importance of personal identity and the desire for belonging, were acknowledged as the overall social setting in which young people's interests and their sense of empowerment, especially with regard to their perceptions of efficacy, agency and influence, are embedded.

Another limitation of the theoretical model presented by this study is the lack of a detailed explanation of the relationships between individual factors, such as the perception of personal agency, internal and collective efficacy, and

social influence. This is because the aim of the research was to examine the effect of cognitive, emotional and social factors on young people's participation in activism, or more specifically, in non-electoral activities, rather than the relationship between those factors themselves. It would be challenging to determine causality between the examined cognitive, emotional and social factors since they are of subjective nature, mainly constituting personal interest, perception, and issues of identity and identification, and because of their assumed interrelation with one another.

The main focus of the analysis of the survey data is on determining the relationship between these individual factors on young people's participation in non-electoral and electoral activities. While the analysis showed that there are linear effects between cognitive and emotional factors and an increased likelihood of taking part in additional non-electoral activities, there is a chance that these relationships may not be unidirectional. In other words, a reciprocal relationship between activism and predictors may bear signs of reverse causality. From a theoretical point of view, it is plausible that increased engagement in non-electoral activities affects the investigated factors of interest, dissatisfaction with the government and perception of agency, efficacy and influence. This assumption does not invalidate this thesis' results but needs to be considered when determining causality in the relationship between activism and these factors. This study framed its quantitative results within the accounts of young activists to explore how individual factors contribute to views on and attitudes about social and political issues. Its mixed method approach served as a way of triangulating the inferences drawn from the regression models based on the survey data.

6.4. Open questions and recommendations for future research

Following the limitations of the study, several open questions remain which could be addressed by future research. These questions concern the interrelation between the cognitive and emotional factors in the study's theoretical model and how they may overlap in the stages of sociopolitical

development, further research into specifically young people's perception of efficacy, agency and influence, and a specific differentiation between issue-based and identity-based activism to investigate whether they show differences in the influence of cognitive and emotional factors on young people's engagement in activism. Further research could also address the highlighted gender differences found with regard to self-reported interest levels, perception of agency and perception of efficacy.

The discussion of the findings attributed the examined factors of interest, dissatisfaction with the government, and the perception of internal and collective efficacy, personal agency, and perceived opportunity for social influence to the stages of sociopolitical development of young people's engagement in non-electoral participation. Taking action occurs with an increased awareness of a perceived injustice or inequality and requires a sense of empowerment which is based on increased levels of perceived capacities to be effective, to be able to act, and to influence social or political change. The interrelation between the factors themselves remains to be further investigated, as does the potential interrelation between the factors and non-electoral participation. In order to explore the possibility of reverse causality in the relationship between these examined factors and non-electoral activities, deploying statistical methods such as structural equation modelling or instrumental variable analysis could help produce evidence for causal relationships. Quantitative analysis of the relationships between efficacy, agency, and influence would be of interest, as well as the examination of further interaction and indirect effects other than those addressed in this study (gender and collective efficacy). Furthermore, the relationship between the components of awareness and the components of empowerment could be examined with the objective to determine causal relationships between interest and perception of efficacy, agency and influence.

Understanding how determinants of young people's activism, the perception of efficacy, agency and influence, are shaped as part of sociopolitical development also calls for further qualitative research. As this study emphasised, personal identity and the desire for social identification with other

young people were important topics of conversation with young people. Thus, future research could address how young people's socialisation and potential education impact not only their personal identity-building but also their development of personal capacities to understand issues of politics, to act and to influence, and their perception thereof. Social networks are assumed to play a part in this process, so potential avenues for research could investigate the role of family, friends, peer groups and other networks in young people's developing sense of empowerment.

With regard to the differences between issue-based and identity-based activism identified in the focus group phase, future research could accentuate differences in what influences different kinds of activism using both qualitative and quantitative methods and examine whether participation in issue-based and identity-based activism is influenced by the same or different factors as used in this study. Of special interest would be how external power structures affect young people's sense of empowerment and the question of whether one's perception of efficacy, agency, and influence remains mostly stable or is dependent on these specific power structures. With the current research focus predominantly on environmental activism, such further differentiation between issue-based and identity-based activism may also be useful to research intersectional aspects of youth activism against climate change and potential differences of empowerment amongst young climate activists. The objective of such future research would not be to discredit a topic of young people's activism but rather to understand personal preferences and issues of structural inequality and privileges, even within activist movements and communities.

As there is a growing body of literature investigating gender differences in political participation, it would be recommended to extend research towards non-electoral participation. Future studies could specifically address the question of why different perceptual factors display different effects for young women and men and explore the causes of these gender differences with regard to interest levels, perception of agency, and perception of efficacy. Based on the observation made in this study that women are more likely to participate in more activities of non-electoral participation, it may be an

interesting opportunity to dissect the reasons for this and deepen the research of causal interference between more socially-directed interest and these less politically institutionalised forms of actions. The interaction effect between gender and collective efficacy that led to a notable rise in non-electoral participation for young men prompts open questions about why this finding was only applicable to men but not to young women.

7. Contribution of the thesis

This thesis investigated young people's involvement with activism in the UK, conceptualised as participation in non-electoral activities following the DIO politics concepts by Pickard (2019, 2022), and analysed cognitive, emotional and social factors affecting young people's motivations to become involved by applying the theory of sociopolitical development. The study started with a review of definitions and conceptualisations of civic and political participation to outline activism as intentional actions towards social and political change within both civic and political dimensions of participatory behaviour. This operationalisation of activism considered Norris' (2007) research on changing action repertoires of political actors and social movements and included the more civic and individualised forms of participation coined as 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics (Pickard, 2019, 2022). DIO politics specifically refers to young people's political participation as a reaction to being dissatisfied by political actors and disenfranchised from institutionalised politics. Therefore, young people turn to actions that appear more meaningful and available. The literature review also contained different approaches to understanding youth and young adulthood and contextualised the situation of young people in the UK. Based on existing research, this thesis examined participatory behaviour and preferences for activist topics of young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK.

The knowledge gap this thesis addressed was an overall deeper exploration of cognitive and social-psychological motivations underlying young people's involvement with activism, focusing on two key aspects. One, the study addressed the gap of exploring the impact of agency, alongside other perceptual factors, such as efficacy and influence, on young people's engagement in non-electoral participation. Two, the study linked these factors with young people's feelings about social and political issues and their understanding of their identities to frame the notion of empowerment in young people's activism. By doing so, the thesis also aimed to fill an empirical gap of testing hypotheses based on the theoretical conceptualisation of non-electoral and electoral participation and providing an approach to measure the perception of agency and investigate the complexity of the broader term

empowerment, which has been only restrictedly empirically explored by previous research.

In developing an original theoretical framework to research young people's perception of themselves and the effects thereof on their engagement in activities of non-electoral participation, the thesis drew on integrative sociological and psychological theories of participatory behaviour. In particular, the study's theoretical model incorporated elements of sociopolitical development theory (SPD) to deliver a more individualised approach to explaining how a person transitions from being aware of an issue of perceived injustice and inequality to become engaged in these non-electoral activities. Whereas DIO politics is a general understanding of young people's activism, SPD theory adds a more subjective lens for analysing the impact of perception and identity in youth activism. Thus, the theoretical framework of this thesis builds upon SPD to explain the underlying motivations of non-electoral participation and offers a nuanced approach to contextualise lived experience, socialisation, and intersecting identities in young people's engagement and disengagement in activism. Therefore, this study adds to the theory of young people's sociopolitical development by investigating cognitive, emotional and social factors affecting youth activism and contextualising these factors corresponding to the stages of SPD. By developing a theoretical framework based on SPD, the study also widened the application scope to general youth involved with various forms and activism topics in the UK. In previous studies, the theoretical approach had mostly been used to explain participatory behaviour processes of Black and Latin youth in the US, with a primary focus on civic participation and community development (Watts, Griffith and Abdul-Adil, 1999; Kornbluh et al., 2015; Anyiwo et al., 2020).

By collecting quantitative and qualitative data using an online survey with a sample size of 1,094 (unweighted) and 948 (weighted) and eight focus group discussions with 30 young people involved in activism on the issues of climate change, anti-racism, and feminism and LGBTQ rights, this thesis produced both comprehensive and detailed findings to its research questions. The results depicted the importance of interest in social issues as a factor for young

people's involvement with non-electoral activities, particularly for young women to engage. The linear model using non-electoral participation as the dependent variable also showed that apart from interest and dissatisfaction with the government, the perception of agency, efficacy and influence impact the likelihood of becoming more active in non-electoral forms of participation. An increase in perceived personal agency, internal and collective efficacy, and the perceived opportunity to achieve social influence were found to have an increasing effect on non-electoral participation. These factors were conceived of as markers of empowerment, dependent on subjective perception. They showed differences across genders, with young men being more affected by personal agency and collective efficacy and young women being more affected by perceptions of their internal efficacy. The data from the survey also demonstrated that age is a central dividing line between non-electoral and electoral participation (in line with Grasso, 2018), indicating that non-electoral activities are more accessible to young people than electoral ones. In addition, the participants in the focus groups did not consciously differentiate between non-electoral and electoral activities, suggesting again that the former may be more accessible to young people and that preference for one does not consequently exclude or rule out the other.

The focus groups revealed that these markers of empowerment are dependent on subjective perceptions of one's capacity to understand politics (internal efficacy), of one's capacity to act (personal agency), of one's belief in the effective of collective action (collective efficacy), and the opportunity for change as being part of a group (social influence) are shaped by personal identity and lived experiences of perceived injustice and inequality. In particular, the concept of personal agency was discussed by young people, expressing both positive associations with taking action for an issue, such as self-actualisation, pride, and empowerment, and negative associations, such as perceiving their activism as a burden, a social expectation and a personal obligation. Young people's personal identity and identification with others of similar identities and values underpinned their motivations to become involved with activism. Their identity was often intersecting with the type of activism they

were participating in, e.g. young women tended to be interested in feminist issues because of their gender, people who identified as LGBTQ were active in relation to the rights of this group, and people who described themselves as non-white were mainly engaged in activism against racism and discrimination. However, one's identity is not deterministic regarding the issues they engage in. Across all focus groups, young people recognised the need to act against climate change, and there was a sense of solidarity that reached beyond the focus of their own activist topic.

In conclusion, this thesis has built upon the concept of 'Do-It-Ourselves' politics to frame young people's activism as participation in non-electoral activities as a result of several cognitive, emotional and social factors, differing from those that affect participation in electoral activities. These factors can be assigned to different stages of sociopolitical development, presenting young people's activism as a complex process of perceived inequalities and subjective perceptions of personal capacities. The study's mixed-method design uncovered that cognitive perception of personal capacities matters for increased levels of non-electoral participation and that interest and dissatisfaction alone provide limited explanations for young people's non-electoral participation. Personal experiences and the sense of identity shaped how young people interacted with different issues and understood themselves within their activism.

With greater positive beliefs in one's capacities, such as internal and collective efficacy, personal agency and social influence, young people's likelihood to participate in activities of non-electoral participation increased. Gender differences affected the perception of agency and efficacy, and the data indicated that young women's non-electoral participation was more likely to be affected by being interested in social issues rather than politics. This confirmed existing research on gender differences in political interest and gender-differentiated perceptions of politics. The qualitative research phase suggested that one's personal identity and socialisation affect the perception of personal agency, in particular, but also potentially perceptions of efficacy and influence. Personal identity may affect preferences within activism due to the desire for

social belonging. Still, both issue-based and identity-based activism is based on the self-actualisation of values and social identification processes. This means that young people's motivation to become involved in political actions and their engagement in activism is rooted in how they experience inequality and perceive empowerment. Social settings and personal identity influence both experiences of inequality and perceptions of empowerment.

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Appendix 1: Survey - questionnaire and codebook

Code	Question	Variable
DD00_Age	Calculated with birth year	Age
DD01_BirthYear	Which year were you born in?	Year of birth
DD02	Where do you currently live? <input type="radio"/> England (1) <input type="radio"/> Wales (2) <input type="radio"/> Northern Ireland (3) <input type="radio"/> Scotland (4) <input type="radio"/> Outside of the United Kingdom (5)	Country of residence
Social Interest and Activities		
SQ01_InterestSocialIssues	Recently, there have been many protests on the issue of climate change and racial inequality. To what extent would you say you are interested in informing yourself about these current social issues? (Ordinal scale) <input type="radio"/> Very interested (1) <input type="radio"/> Somewhat interested (2) <input type="radio"/> A little interested (3) <input type="radio"/> Not at all interested (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (6)	Interest in social issues
SQ02a SQ02a_1_Globalisation SQ02a_2_Poverty SQ02a_3_Unemployment SQ02a_4_COVID SQ02a_5_ClimateChange SQ02a_6_Brexit SQ02a_7_CrimeViolence SQ02a_8_Immigration SQ02a_9_Finances SQ02a_10_ConflictWar	At the moment, how worried are you about the following issues on a scale from 1 (not worried at all) to 10 (very worried)? Please use the comment box to add any additional issues you worry about. (Randomised order of answers) 1. Globalisation 2. Poverty 3. Fear of not finding a job or losing a job 4. Worsening of the COVID-19 situation 5. Climate change 6. 'Brexit' and the future of the UK-EU relationship 7. Crime and violence 8. Immigration 9. Financial insecurity 10. Conflict or war	Perceived threat or insecurity
SQ02b_TextWorries	Please add any other issues you are worried about at the moment here:	Free text comment
SQ03a_PersonalAgency SQ03a_CollectiveAgency SQ03a_InstitutionalAgency	If you think about those issues you worry about, do you feel like... (Scale) a) ...you can individually do something about them. b) ...people can do something about them together. c) ...politicians and the government can do something about them. <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree (1) <input type="radio"/> Agree (2) <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree (3) <input type="radio"/> Disagree (4) <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (7) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (8)	Perception of personal agency Perception of collective agency Perception of institutional agency
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) SQ03b_AgencyUKGovernment SQ03b_AgencyRegionalGovernment SQ03b_AgencyPoliticians SQ03b_AgencyPeopleInBritain SQ03b_AgencyOrganisationsPressureGroups SQ03b_AgencyIndividualsLikeMe SQ03b_AgencyNoOne SQ03b_AgencyDontWantToSay	Who do you think needs to assume responsibility to address these issues? (multiple choice) <input type="radio"/> The UK Government <input type="radio"/> The regional government (respondents from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland receive additional and specified answer option)	Perception of agency

SQ03b_AgencyIDK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Politicians in general <input type="radio"/> People living in Britain <input type="radio"/> Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) <input type="radio"/> Individuals like me <input type="radio"/> No one <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	
SQ03c_ConcernsFriends SQ03c_ConcernsFamily SQ03c_ConcernsOtherOrgMembers Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) SQ03c_ConcernsPoliticalPartyPeers SQ03c_ConcernsAcquaintances SQ03c_ConcernsNoOne SQ03c_ConcernsDontWantToSay SQ03c_ConcernsIDK	<p>Who else do you think shares your concerns over the issues you selected? (<i>multiple choice</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Friends <input type="radio"/> Family members <input type="radio"/> Other members of an organisation I'm part of <input type="radio"/> Political party peers <input type="radio"/> Acquaintances <input type="radio"/> No one <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	Attribution of shared concerns → opinion-based identity (Curtin <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) SQ04 Liking, sharing, posting political content online SQ04 Signing a petition SQ04 Buying certain products or brands SQ04 Avoiding buying products or brands SQ04 Becoming vegetarian or vegan SQ04 Volunteering SQ04 Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally SQ04 Participating in or being a member of an activist group SQ04 Mobilising other people SQ04 None of these SQ04 Dont want to say	<p>Have you done one or more of the following actions since the beginning of 2019? (<i>multiple choice</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Liking, sharing or posting political content online <input type="radio"/> Signing a petition <input type="radio"/> Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons <input type="radio"/> Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons <input type="radio"/> Becoming a vegetarian (meatless diet) or going vegan (diet without any animal products) <input type="radio"/> Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes) <input type="radio"/> Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally <input type="radio"/> Participating in or being a member of an activist group <input type="radio"/> Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally <input type="radio"/> None of these <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	Non-electoral political actions (done) since 2019
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) SQ05 Liking, sharing, posting political content online SQ05 Signing a petition SQ05 Buying certain products or brands SQ05 Avoiding buying products or brands SQ05 Becoming vegetarian or vegan SQ05 Volunteering SQ05 Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally SQ05 Participating in or being a member of an activist group SQ05 Mobilising other people SQ05 None of these SQ05 Dont want to say	<p>Thinking back to your topics of interest and the issues that you are worried about, which of the following actions would you be prepared to do? (<i>multiple choice</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Liking, sharing or posting political content online <input type="radio"/> Signing a petition <input type="radio"/> Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons <input type="radio"/> Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons <input type="radio"/> Becoming a vegetarian (meatless diet) or going vegan (diet without any animal products) <input type="radio"/> Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes) <input type="radio"/> Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally <input type="radio"/> Participating in or being a member of an activist group 	Non-electoral political actions (considered)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally <input type="radio"/> None of these <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) SQ06a A sports club or organisation SQ06a A youth club, leisure-time club or any kind of youth organisation SQ06a A cultural organisation SQ06a A political organisation SQ06a A political party SQ06a A local organisation SQ06a An environmental organisation SQ06a A human rights organisation SQ06a Any other non-governmental organisations SQ06a Other SQ06a No participation in voluntary activities SQ06a Dont want to say SQ06a IDK	<p>Since the beginning of 2019, did you participate in any voluntary activities organised by one or more of the following organisations? (multiple choice)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> A sports club or organisation <input type="radio"/> A youth club, leisure-time club or any kind of youth organisation <input type="radio"/> A cultural organisation <input type="radio"/> A political organisation <input type="radio"/> A political party <input type="radio"/> A local organisation aimed at improving your local community and/or local environment <input type="radio"/> An environmental organisation <input type="radio"/> A human rights organisation <input type="radio"/> Any other non-governmental organisations <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify): <input type="radio"/> No, I did not participate in any voluntary activities <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	Organisational involvement (taken from Eurobarometer 319a, 375, 408, 455)
SQ06a_TextOrgInvolvement	Free text for Other (please specify)	Organisational Involvement (write-in)
SQ06b_TimeOrgInvolvement	<p>ONLY DISPLAY IF Q05a is not 'No, I did not participate in any voluntary activities' or 'no answer'</p> <p>How often would you say you participate in these voluntary activities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Weekly (1) <input type="radio"/> Monthly (2) <input type="radio"/> Every three months (3) <input type="radio"/> Every six months (4) <input type="radio"/> Once a year (5) <input type="radio"/> Less than once a year (6) <input type="radio"/> Never (7) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (8) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (9) 	Temporal scope of (organised) social and/or political participation
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) SQ07a A sports club or organisation SQ07a A youth club, leisure-time club or any kind of youth organisation SQ07a A cultural organisation SQ07a A political organisation SQ07a A political party SQ07a A local organisation SQ07a An environmental organisation SQ07a A human rights organisation SQ07a Any other non-governmental organisations SQ07a Other SQ07a No participation in voluntary activities SQ07a Dont want to say SQ07a IDK	<p>Are you currently a member of any organisation or group of the following categories? Please indicate which ones, you can choose multiple.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> A sports club or organisation <input type="radio"/> A youth club, leisure-time club or any kind of youth organisation <input type="radio"/> A cultural organisation <input type="radio"/> A political organisation <input type="radio"/> A political party <input type="radio"/> A local organisation aimed at improving your local community and/or local environment <input type="radio"/> An environmental organisation <input type="radio"/> A human rights organisation <input type="radio"/> Any other non-governmental organisations <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify): <input type="radio"/> No, I am not a member of any of these kind of organisations <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	Organisational membership
SQ07a_TextOrgMembership	Free text for Other (please specify)	Organisational membership (write-in)
SQ07b_TextOrgName SQ07b_TextOrgPurpose	ONLY DISPLAY IF Q06a is not 'No' or 'I don't know'	Write-in

	<p>Could you indicate the name of the organisation(s) and its purpose(s) of which you are a member of? If you prefer not to say the name of the organisation and/or its purpose or field, please leave the text boxes empty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the organisation: • Purpose/field: 	
SQ08a_OpportunityInfluence	<p>ONLY DISPLAY IF Q06a is not 'No' or 'I don't know'</p> <p>How much influence do you feel you have over contributing to political or social changes by being part of your organisation or group? (<i>Ordinal scale</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> A great deal of influence (1) <input type="radio"/> Some influence (2) <input type="radio"/> Not very much influence (3) <input type="radio"/> No influence at all (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) 	Perceived opportunity of influence (civic)
SQ08b_GeoScope	<p>ONLY DISPLAY IF Q06a is not 'No' or 'I don't know'</p> <p>Did the voluntary activities you took part in focus on any place or region in specific?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Your local community or area (1) <input type="radio"/> Your country (2) <input type="radio"/> Another European country (3) <input type="radio"/> Another part of the world (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) 	Geographical scope (taken from Eurobarometer 319a, 408, 455)
SQ09a_CoronavirusImpact1	<p>Have your voluntary activities been impacted by the outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus pandemic) and the lockdown situation? (Y/N?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes. The outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus pandemic) and the lockdown situation have increased my engagement in volunteering (1) <input type="radio"/> Yes. The outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus pandemic) and the lockdown situation have decreased my engagement in volunteering (2) <input type="radio"/> No. The outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus pandemic) and the lockdown situation have not changed my engagement in volunteering (3) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (5) 	Impact of the Coronavirus/lockdown situation
SQ09b_CoronavirusImpact2	<p>Due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus pandemic), my engagement in voluntary activities has shifted towards...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> More online activities (1) <input type="radio"/> More offline (or face-to-face) activities (2) <input type="radio"/> There has been no change (3) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (5) 	Impact of the Coronavirus/lockdown situation

SQ10a_CollectiveEfficacy1 SQ10b_CollectiveEfficacy2 SQ10c_CollectiveEfficacy3 SQ10d_CollectiveEfficacy4	To what extent would you agree with the following statements? (Scale) a) Working together is important to make small changes. b) Each person can make a difference in the world with their own individual actions. c) Volunteering and participating in local communities can change the world. d) Volunteering and participating in local communities cannot replace the political actions needed to tackle specific issues. <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree (1) <input type="radio"/> Agree (2) <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree (3) <input type="radio"/> Disagree (4) <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7)	Collective efficacy
SQ11_UseFacebook SQ11_UseTwitter SQ11_UseInstagram SQ11_UseTikTok	How often do you use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok? (Scale) <input type="radio"/> Daily (1) <input type="radio"/> A few times a week (2) <input type="radio"/> About once a week (3) <input type="radio"/> About once a month (4) <input type="radio"/> Never (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7)	Use of social media (→ differentiated by social media platform)
SQ12a_SocialMediaRole1 SQ12b_SocialMediaRole2 SQ12c_SocialMediaRole3 SQ12d_SocialMediaRole4	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Scale) a) Social media platforms are giving a voice to people who would not normally take part in political debate. b) Social media platforms facilitate interaction between voters and political parties. c) Social media platforms are making the political debate more divisive than it used to be. d) Social media platforms are making the political debate more superficial than it used to be. <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree (1) <input type="radio"/> Agree (2) <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree (3) <input type="radio"/> Disagree (4) <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7)	Role of social media (taken from Audit of political engagement)
Political Interest and Activities		
PQ01_PoliticalInterest	To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? (Ordinal scale) <input type="radio"/> Very interested (1) <input type="radio"/> Somewhat interested (2) <input type="radio"/> A little interested (3) <input type="radio"/> Not at all interested (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (6) <input type="radio"/>	Political interest
PQ02_PolKnowledge	How much do you feel you know about politics? (Ordinal scale) <input type="radio"/> A great deal (1) <input type="radio"/> A fair amount (2) <input type="radio"/> Not very much (3) <input type="radio"/> Nothing at all (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (5)	Political knowledge

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> I don't know (6) 	
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) PQ03 Accessing a political party's website etc PQ03 Voting in local and/or regional elections PQ03 Voting in general elections PQ03 Donating money to a political party PQ03 Discussing political issues PQ03 Contacting a politician PQ03 Campaigning for a political candidate or political party PQ03 Being a member of a political party, youth party or political party affiliated student group PQ03 IDK PQ03 Dont want to say PQ03 None of these	Have you done one or more of the following actions since the beginning of 2019? <i>(multiple choice)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Accessing a political party's website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, blog, etc. <input type="radio"/> Voting in local and/or regional elections <input type="radio"/> Voting in general elections <input type="radio"/> Donating money to a political party <input type="radio"/> Discussing political issues, parties, politicians with friends, colleagues, family online and offline <input type="radio"/> Contacting a politician <input type="radio"/> Campaigning for a political candidate or political party <input type="radio"/> Being a member of a political party, youth party or political party affiliated student group <input type="radio"/> None of these <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	Electoral political actions (done) since 2019
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) PQ04 Education and prospects on the labour market PQ04 Workers' rights PQ04 Access and stability of the NHS PQ04 National sovereignty and independence PQ04 Britain's future relationship with the EU PQ04 Foreign Policy and British relations with other countries PQ04 Peace and disarmament PQ04 Environment and climate change PQ04 Immigration and human rights PQ04 Gender equality and women's rights PQ04 LGBTQ+ rights and topics PQ04 Other PQ04 IDK	Speaking about politics in general, which issues do you consider particularly important at the moment? You can choose multiple options. <i>(Multiple choice, with option to add another reply)</i> (Randomised order of answers) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education and prospects on the labour market 2. Workers' rights 3. Access and stability of the health care system (NHS) 4. National sovereignty and independence 5. Britain's future relationship with the European Union 6. Foreign Policy and British relations with other countries 7. Peace and disarmament 8. Environment and climate change 9. Immigration and human rights 10. Gender equality and women's rights 11. LGBTQ+ rights and topics 12. Other (please specify) 13. I don't want to say 14. I don't know 	Themes/topics
PQ04_TextPolTopics	Free text for Other (please specify)	Themes/topics (write-in)
Binary (1 = Yes, 0 = No) PQ05 Accessing a political party's website etc PQ05 Voting in local and/or regional elections PQ05 Voting in general elections PQ05 Donating money to a political party PQ05 Discussing political issues PQ05 Contacting a politician PQ05 Campaigning for a political candidate or political party PQ05 Being a member of a political party, youth party or political party affiliated student group PQ05 None of these PQ05 Dont want to say PQ05 IDK	For those topics which are important to you, which of the following actions would you be prepared to do? <i>(multiple choice)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Accessing a political party's website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, blog, etc. <input type="radio"/> Voting in local and/or regional elections <input type="radio"/> Voting in general elections <input type="radio"/> Donating money to a political party <input type="radio"/> Discussing political issues, parties, politicians with friends, colleagues, family online and offline <input type="radio"/> Contacting a politician <input type="radio"/> Campaigning for a political candidate or political party <input type="radio"/> Being a member of a political party, youth party or political party affiliated student group <input type="radio"/> None of these 	Electoral political actions (considered)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say <input type="radio"/> I don't know 	
PQ06_ExternalEfficacy1 PQ06_ExternalEfficacy2	<p>To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (<i>Ordinal scale</i>)</p> <p>a) Politicians in Britain do not listen to the opinions and concerns of people like me. b) Politicians in Britain do not consider my generation's future enough.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly agree (1) <input type="radio"/> Agree (2) <input type="radio"/> Neither agree nor disagree (3) <input type="radio"/> Disagree (4) <input type="radio"/> Strongly disagree (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7) 	External efficacy
PQ07_SatisfactionWithUKGov (all respondents) PQ07_SatisfactionWithWelshGov PQ07_SatisfactionWithNIExec PQ07_SatisfactionWithScotGov	<p>Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with the performance of...? (<i>Ordinal scale</i>)</p> <p>a) ...the UK Government b) ...the Welsh Government c) ...the Northern Ireland Executive d) ...the Scottish Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Very satisfied (1) <input type="radio"/> Somewhat satisfied (2) <input type="radio"/> Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3) <input type="radio"/> Dissatisfied (4) <input type="radio"/> Very dissatisfied (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7) 	Satisfaction with the government
PQ08_InfluenceUKGov (all respondents) PQ08_InfluenceWelshGov PQ08_InfluenceNIExec PQ08_InfluenceScotGov	<p>How much influence do you feel you have over political decision-making... (<i>Ordinal scale</i>)</p> <p>a) ...the UK Government b) ...the Welsh Government c) ...the Northern Ireland Executive d) ...the Scottish Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> A great deal of influence (1) <input type="radio"/> Some influence (2) <input type="radio"/> Not very much influence (3) <input type="radio"/> No influence at all (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (6) 	perceived opportunity of influence (political)
PQ09_InternalEfficacy1	<p>How able do you think you are to take an active role in a group involved with political issues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Completely able (1) <input type="radio"/> Very able (2) <input type="radio"/> Quite able (3) <input type="radio"/> A little able (4) <input type="radio"/> Not at all able (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7) 	Internal efficacy
PQ09_InternalEfficacy2	<p>How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Completely confident (1) <input type="radio"/> Very confident (2) <input type="radio"/> Quite confident (3) <input type="radio"/> A little confident (4) <input type="radio"/> Not at all confident (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (6) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (7) 	Internal efficacy
PQ10_PartyIdentification	<p>Do you identify with a particular political party? If so, which one?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conservative (1) <input type="radio"/> Labour (2) 	Political party affiliation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) (3) <input type="radio"/> Green Party (4) <input type="radio"/> UK Independence Party (5) <input type="radio"/> British National Party (6) <input type="radio"/> Other (specify): (7) <input type="radio"/> No, I don't identify with a particular political party (8) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (9) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (10) <input type="radio"/> Plaid Cymru (Wales only) (11) <input type="radio"/> Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (NI only) (12) <input type="radio"/> Sinn Féin (NI only) (13) <input type="radio"/> Scottish Nationalist Party (Scotland only) (14) 	
PQ10_Text PartyIdentification	Free text party affiliation England	Write-in
PQ11_GEVote	<p>If a General Election was to be organised this week, which party would you vote for? Regardless of whether you are eligible to vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Conservative (1) <input type="radio"/> Labour (2) <input type="radio"/> Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems) (3) <input type="radio"/> Green Party (4) <input type="radio"/> UK Independence Party (5) <input type="radio"/> British National Party (6) <input type="radio"/> Other (specify): (7) <input type="radio"/> No, I don't identify with a particular political party (8) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (9) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (10) <input type="radio"/> Plaid Cymru (Wales only) (11) <input type="radio"/> Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) (NI only) (12) <input type="radio"/> Sinn Féin (NI only) (13) <input type="radio"/> Scottish Nationalist Party (Scotland only) (14) 	Political party vote
PQ11_TextGEVote	Free text GE vote England	Write-in
PQ12_VotingAge	<p>Currently, the minimum age for voting in the General Election in the UK is 18. What do you think about lowering the voting age for the General Elections to 16?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> I'd support lowering the voting age to 16 (1) <input type="radio"/> I'm against lowering the voting age to 16 (2) <input type="radio"/> I'm indecisive about that (3) <input type="radio"/> I don't want to say (4) <input type="radio"/> I don't know (5) 	Opinion on voting age
Sociodemographic Variables		
DD03_Gender	<p>Which gender are you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Female (0) <input type="radio"/> Male (1) <input type="radio"/> Transgender (2) <input type="radio"/> Other (3) <input type="radio"/> Prefer not to say (4) 	Gender
DD04a_InEducation	<p>Are you currently in education?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes (1) <input type="radio"/> No (0) 	In Education
DD04b_EducationStatus	<p>If previous yes, then: What kind of education are you currently in?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> School (1) <input type="radio"/> College (2) <input type="radio"/> University (3) <input type="radio"/> Internship/work placement (4) <input type="radio"/> Other education or training (5) <input type="radio"/> I don't know/I don't want to say (6) 	Educational status
DD04c_HighestEdLevel	<p>What is the highest level of education you have completed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> left school before completing secondary education (1) 	Highest educational level

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary school/GCSEs (2) Secondary school/A-Levels (3) College (4) University (undergraduate) (5) University (postgraduate) (6) 	
DD05_EmploymentStatus	<p>Are you currently in paid work? This can be full-time or part-time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, full-time (1) Yes, part-time (2) Seeking work (3) Not seeking (4) Don't know/Don't want to say (5) 	Employment status
DD06_CurrentEmployment	<p>If DD05 yes, then:</p> <p>How would you describe your current occupation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-employed (1) Working in an office (2) Working in manufacturing (3) Without professional activity (4) I don't know/I don't want to say (5) 	Current employment
DD07_SocialClass	<p>Do you see yourself and your household belonging to...?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The working class of society (1) The middle class of society (2) The higher class of society (3) Other (4) I don't want to say (5) I don't know (6) 	Social class affiliation
DD08_Ethnicity	<p>How would you describe yourself? (dropdown-menu)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> White (English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British) White (Irish) White (Gypsy or Irish Traveller) Any other White background White and Black Caribbean White and Black African White and Asian Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background Asian / Asian British Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese Any other Asian background African Caribbean Any other Black / African / Caribbean background Arab Other ethnic group Prefer not to say 	Ethnicity
DD09_BritishNationality	<p>Are you a British citizen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes (1) No (0) Prefer not to say (2) 	Nationality

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet for Survey

Participant Information Sheet for the survey on 'Young People's Activism in the UK'

Name of department: School of Social Work & Social Policy, Faculty of Humanities & Social Science

Title of the study: Young People's Activism in the UK

Researcher: Silvia Behrens, PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

Introduction

This survey on 'Young People's Activism in the UK' is part of my doctoral research at the Social Work and Social Policy School at the University of Strathclyde. This survey has been approved by the School's ethics committee in the Faculty of Humanities & Social Science at the University of Strathclyde.

What is the purpose of this research?

The survey aims to find out how and why young people in the UK participate in social and political matters, how they feel about politics and political representation in the UK, and in which ways they take part in political activism. The study is also gathering information on the topics that concern young people living in the UK and with which voluntary and political organisations and networks they are involved.

Do you have to take part?

If you are between the ages 16 and 34 and currently living in the United Kingdom, you are welcome to take part in the survey. You do not need to have British citizenship in order to participate in the survey. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Your responses will be kept anonymously. At the end of this survey, you have the opportunity to submit your e-mail address in case you would like to participate in a future research phase on young people's activism which will consist in focus group discussions. If you choose to submit your e-mail address, it will not be paired with your responses to the survey questions, so your answers remain entirely anonymous.

What will you do in the project?

Your participation consists in filling in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, you are asked about your views on topics that may concern you and activities you might be engaged in. In the second part, you are asked about your views on politics in the UK and your own political interests and activities. Apart from the first two questions on your year of birth and country of residence in the UK, you are free to refuse to answer any question. At the end of the survey, you will be asked to fill in information on your sociodemographic background (gender, education, ethnicity, etc.). This information will not be paired with your name and e-mail address in any way and is only used for statistical analysis.

Why have you been invited to take part?

Anyone between the ages 16 and 34 and who is living in the UK at the time of completing this survey is welcome to take part. You do not need to have British citizenship in order to participate in the survey.

What information is being collected in the project?

The survey collects data on your interest in social and political issues and involvement in voluntary and political activities. Sociodemographic data is collected on gender, education, employment situation, ethnicity and nationality, for the purpose of statistical analysis only.

Who will have access to the information?

No confidential data will be shared outside of the University. Access to data is limited to the researcher and the project's supervisors. Anonymised survey data will be deposited in the University of Strathclyde's internal virtual storage space.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

All survey response data will be stored on the University of Strathclyde's virtual storage space. Submitted e-mail addresses of those participants who are interested in receiving further information about the study will be deleted after the research project has been completed.

Results from the survey will be used primarily for the completion of my doctoral research, for academic publications and for presentation in academic or public environments. in academic journals. The survey outcome will also be published in forms of blogposts and articles on the project's website youngpeoplesactivism.org.

What happens next?

In case of questions about this survey, the research project or any data concern, please contact me, Silvia Behrens, contact details below.

Researcher contact details:

Silvia Behrens
silvia.behrens@strath.ac.uk
Doctoral Researcher, Social Policy
School of Social Work and Social Policy
University of Strathclyde

Chief Investigator details:

Professor Daniela Sime
daniela.sime@strath.ac.uk
Professor of Youth, Migration and Social Justice
School of Social Work and Social Policy
University of Strathclyde

This research was granted ethical approval by the Social Work & Social Policy Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Dan Heap
Chair of Ethics Committee
School of Social Work & Social Policy
University of Strathclyde
E-mail: dan.heap@strath.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form for Focus Groups

Participant Information Sheet for participating in a focus group discussion on 'Young People's Activism in the UK'

Name of department: School of Social Work & Social Policy, Faculty of Humanities & Social Science

Title of the study: Young People's Activism in the UK

Researcher: Silvia Behrens, PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

Introduction

The focus group on 'Young People's Activism in the UK' is part of my doctoral research at the Social Work and Social Policy School at the University of Strathclyde. A focus group is a discussion of several people on a given topic.

What is the purpose of this research?

The research project aims to find out how and why young people in the UK participate in social and political matters, how they feel about politics and political representation in the UK, and in which ways they take part in activism.

Do you have to take part?

If you are between the ages 16 and 34, currently living in the United Kingdom and consider yourself interested and/or active in social and political issues, you are invited to take part in the focus group discussions. You do not need to have British citizenship to participate in this research. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.

What will you do in the project?

Your participation consists in taking part in an online group discussion. You will be part of a group of 6-8 people who are all interested and/or active in similar political issues. The discussion will be moderated by me, but the idea is to listen to what you have to say and contribute. The discussion will be based on respectful communication and in a supportive and fair environment.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You receive this information because you have indicated interest in participating in this research project. If you do not want to take part in this research project, you can choose to opt out, without any consequences.

What information is being collected in the project?

The group discussion will be recorded during the meeting and transcribed into a written document afterwards. Personal data, such as names or any information that could lead to the identification of any individual, will be pseudonymised, that means no actual names or personal information will be used later in the study. In addition, you will be asked to fill in a form on sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender identification, status of being in education/employment, etc.).

Who will have access to the information?

No confidential data will be shared outside of the University. Access to data is limited to the researcher and the project supervisors.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

A pseudonymised transcript of the group discussion will be deposited in the University of Strathclyde's internal virtual storage space. Results from the research project will be used primarily for the completion of my doctoral research, for academic publications and for

presentation in academic or public environments, like in academic journals. The survey outcome will also be published in blogposts and articles on the project's website youngpeoplesactivism.org.

What happens next?

In case of questions about the research project, or any data concerns, please contact me, Silvia Behrens, contact details below.

Researcher contact details:

Silvia Behrens
silvia.behrens@strath.ac.uk
Doctoral Researcher, Social Policy
School of Social Work and Social Policy
University of Strathclyde

Chief Investigator details:

Professor Daniela Sime
daniela.sime@strath.ac.uk
Professor of Youth, Migration and Social Justice
School of Social Work and Social Policy
University of Strathclyde

This research was granted ethical approval by the Social Work & Social Policy Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Dan Heap
Chair of Ethics Committee
School of Social Work & Social Policy
University of Strathclyde
E-mail: dan.heap@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for participating in a focus group discussion on 'Young People's Activism in the UK'

Name of department: School of Social Work & Social Policy, Faculty of Humanities & Social Science

Title of the study: Young People's Activism in the UK

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
 - video and audio recordings of interviews that identify me;
 - my personal information from transcripts.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being audio recorded as part of the project and that the pseudonymised transcripts of the project will be kept in the University's online repository.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.

Yes

No

(PRINT NAME)

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Appendix 4: Focus group schedule

Interview Schedule for Focus Group Discussions

Overview

This is the interview schedule for focus group discussions which are part of the doctoral research project 'Young People's Activism in the UK'. The focus groups take place online in a password-secured Zoom meeting room which is provided by the researcher.

The focus group discussions present the second phase of the data collection for the project. After an online survey, quantitative and qualitative findings from the questionnaire provide a basis for the discussions, alongside the research questions. The purpose of the focus group discussions is to have in-depth conversations with young people in the UK and to learn about their perspectives on specific subjects (see below under 'Questions'), their involvement with social and political issues, and their reasons and motivations for taking up and for not taking up forms of activism.

- RQ1: How does the perception of agency, efficacy and influence affect young people's activism in the UK?
- RQ2: What are young people's experiences of activism, and how do feelings and personal identity relate to young people's involvement with activism?

Before the focus groups discussions take place, participants will be asked in advance to sign a Consent Form, which is part of the Participant Information Sheet and covers the following points:

- an explanation of the nature and purpose of the study;
- how participation in the group discussions will work, the rules of the discussion, and the rights the participants have;
- the contact details of the doctoral researcher and the supervisors of this project;
- clarification that the participants may withdraw themselves and their data at any time, without consequences;
- agreement to have the recorded data made available for research, after the completion of the focus group discussion, with the clarification that none of the research outputs will contain personal data which could lead to the identification of a participant.

This interview schedule covers the following aspects of the focus group discussions:

- Welcome and introduction
- Rules of the group discussion
- Overview of the discussion

- Group Discussion Questions
- Concluding debriefing

Welcome and introduction

Welcome everyone! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group session on 'Young People's Activism in the UK'. This is one of several focus group sessions in which young people who currently living in the UK are invited to discuss their views on issues of social justice, politics and their perspectives on participating politically and/or socially.

My name is Silvia and I'm a PhD student at the University of Strathclyde. Being a PhD student means that I am a 'researcher in training'. I will lead the discussion, however this session is mainly about your opinions and views, so please join in and share your ideas openly. We will have some discussion rules, so that everyone is treated with respect and that everyone will be heard.

I'd also like to remind you that I am going to record the group discussion to help me type up a transcript of it later on, as it is hard to take notes while you are talking. The video will be deleted after the transcripts have been written and will not be available anywhere. Please keep in mind to speak clearly, so the recording will work and the other people in this meeting can understand you well.

Rules for the group discussion

[These rules will be sent out via e-mail to the participants who have agreed to take part in the focus groups and will be shown as a PowerPoint slide at the beginning of the group discussion.]

Before we begin, I would like to remind you of the rules for the group discussion today. These rules are part of your Participant Information Sheet.

1. Confidentiality

This meeting is a confidential space. This means that what we discuss here should stay within the group. If you choose to talk about our meeting later, please do not use the real names or any information that would reveal other people's identity. That also includes posting about this group discussion on any social media.

There is one exception to this, that is the disclosure of risk of harm. That means you tell me and the group that either you or someone else is at the risk of harm. Harm can mean many things – you or someone you know may be at the risk of harm due to violence or discrimination or mental illness. In that case, I will offer you or the person in question help by giving you helpful contacts and resources. And, because I am personally not qualified, I would support you or the person in question to receive help.

2. Respect

Please be respectful and understand that other people may hold different views. Let a person finish speaking and try not to interrupt. Everyone will have the chance to speak. Please do not use offensive language or make racist, sexist or discriminatory remarks.

3. Communication

If you do not understand something, please ask. If there is a topic you do not want to talk about, that is okay. If you, at any point, want to leave this conversation, that is okay. The focus group is intended as a discussion in which you decide what you would like to share.

Do you agree to continue on the basis of these rules?

Overview of the discussion

I'm very grateful to you all for taking the time today to talk about your views on social justice, politics and activism. The purpose of this focus group is to discuss which social and political topics are important to you and your own involvement with activism. I would like to start the discussion with a short introduction round, so that we can be a little more familiar with each other. Then, we will start with the discussion questions, let's make this a conversation between all of us as much as possible. The discussion should last no longer than an hour from now. So, without further ado, let's get started!

[Introductions]

[To enable a more informal setting, the respondents will be asked to share an interesting fact about themselves while introducing themselves to the group.]

Group Discussion Questions

[Questions in bold are prioritised questions.]

1. Themes

- What issues do you think of when hearing about:
 - Environment and climate change
 - Anti-Racism activism and the *Black Lives Matter* Movement
 - LGBTQ*+ rights and feminist issues
 - Human Rights, Equality and Social Justice

[The focus group discussion will all be centred around activism but there will be different sessions regarding different fields or areas of activism. That means that only one of the broader themes above will be subject of a single session.]

- **How do you feel about them [these issues]?** Why do you think these issues exist? (follow-up question)
- **Have you taken any action on [that issue]?** What sort of action was it? [prompt for petition signing, organise demo, protest online/offline etc.]
- **Can you tell me about a time when you felt like you wanted to do something about this [issue]?**

2. Taking Action

- **Do you do things you would consider political?** / Do you consider what you do activism/political action?
- So, would you consider yourself an activist?
- Was there a particular moment that made you decide to become politically active?
- **If not:** Is there a reason why you don't feel like becoming active?
- **What was your motivation to do something about [x]?**
- Have you ever joined in any social movement or protest demonstration?
- Are you active in any organisations or groups?
- What sort of organisation are you involved with?
- What do you value about being part of this organisation/group?
- **What are some of the problems or barriers you face in your activism?**
- Do you receive support for your actions? From whom? Have there been negative reactions or lack of understanding?
- **Has your engagement in politics changed since COVID-19 and the restrictions?** Have you become more interested or less? Has your interest changed because of anything in particular?

3. Views on current politics & hopes for the future

- **Do you think that the opinions of young people are heard by politicians in the UK?**
- Do you think there are issues that are not being taken seriously enough by politicians? If so, what are those issues?
- **Are there any other obstacles to participate in politics in the UK?**
Maybe for young persons in particular?
- Do you think social class is still an issue today? Do you need to be of a particular social class to participate in politics?
- **Do you think young people have a responsibility for society?** Does everyone have a responsibility for society? Or are there differences?

- **Can young people have an impact on politics?**
- **If yes:** How can they have an impact? **If not:** Why not? Should young people still try to strive for changes?
- **What role do you think does social media play in activism? Can it change politics or is it 'just clicks'?**
- What do you think are the biggest challenges for your generation?
- **What would you recommend to other young people who want to become active in relation to pressing social issues?**
- **What would you recommend politicians to do – if you could and if they listened?**

Debriefing

We reached the end of our discussion today. Thank you for your time and your participation. [Here a short summary of the discussion can be included.]

Is there anything you would like to add at this point? How did you find the discussion?

[The discussion will end on a PowerPoint slide with a list of support organisations (such as the UK's leading charity fighting for children and young people's mental health, *Young Minds*, and the anti-hate crime organisation, *Stop Hate UK*) participants can turn to in case they have experiences racism, abuse, violence and/or struggle with their mental health.]

Appendix 5: Descriptive data analysis

	Unweighted	Weighted	Population percentages*	Weights used
Residence				
England	873	798	84.352	.84352
Wales	81	45	4.769	.04769
Northern Ireland	46	27	2.832	.02832
Scotland	94	78	8.197	.08197
Age group				
16-19	815	395	41.616	.41616
20-24	279	553	58.384	.58384
Gender				
Female	698	461	48.616	.48616
Male	250	487	51.384	.51384
Transgender	52	-	-	0
Other	69	-	-	0
Prefer not to say	25	-	-	0
Ethnicity				
White	840	804	84.8	.848
Non-White	124	144	15.2	.152
Prefer not to say	130	-	-	0
Total	1094	948		

A5.1 Unweighted and weighted sample comparisons with population figures.

Raked weights: Residence, Age Groups, Gender and Ethnicity

* Population figures are based on ONS mid-year estimates.

	Unweighted dataset		Weighted dataset	
Category	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Country of residence				
England	873	79.8	798	84.2
Wales	81	7.4	45	4.8
Northern Ireland	46	4.2	27	2.8
Scotland	94	8.6	78	8.2
Age group				
16-19 years	815	74.5	395	41.6
20-24 years	279	25.5	553	58.4
Gender				
Female	698	63.8	461	48.6
Male	250	22.9	487	51.4
Transgender	52	4.8	-	-
Other	69	6.3	-	-
N/A	25	2.3	-	-
Education status				
Still in education (school, college, or university)	896	81.9	659	69.5
Not in education	198	18.1	289	30.5
Socio-economic class				
Working class	413	37.8	346	36.4
Middle class	515	47.1	437	46.1
Higher class	8	0.7	5	0.5
N/A	158	14.4	160	17
Ethnicity				
White background	840	76.8	702	75.1
Mixed background	52	4.7	48	4.0
Asian background	40	3.6	31	3.4
African or other Black background	17	1.6	8	0.8
Arab Background	3	0.3	4	0.5
Other	5	0.5	5	0.5
N/A	137	12.5	150	15.9
Nationality				
British national	944	86.3	783	82.6
Non-British national	144	13.2	162	17.0
N/A	6	0.5	4	0.4
Total	1094	100.0%	948	100.0%

A5.2 Profile of survey respondents: unweighted dataset (sample = 1094) and weighted dataset (sample = 948).

Gender		Non-electoral activities	Non-electoral activities (excluding zero values)	Interest in social issues	Interest in politics
Female respondents (unweighted)	Mean	4.79	5.46	3.86	3.60
	N	698	613	698	698
	Std.	2.40	1.72	.43	.54
	Deviation				
Male respondents (unweighted)	Mean	4.11	4.24	3.13	3.78
	N	250	242	250	250
	Std.	2.23	2.14	1.07	.51
	Deviation				
Transgender respondents	Mean	5.77	5.77	3.88	3.67
	N	52	52	52	52
	Std.	1.82	1.82	.32	.51
	Deviation				
Other respondents	Mean	5.90	5.90	3.84	3.59
	N	69	69	69	69
	Std.	2.15	2.15	.44	.69
	Deviation				
Prefer not to say gender	Mean	4.64	4.64	3.84	3.64
	N	25	25	25	25
	Std.	1.70	1.70	.47	.64
	Deviation				
Total	Mean	4.75	5.19	3.69	3.65
	N	1094	1001	1094	1094
	Std.	2.36	1.94	.70	.55
	Deviation				

A5.3 Comparison of means of interest variables and participation in non-electoral activities among gender groups (unweighted data)

Question: "At the moment, how worried are you about the following issues on a scale from 1 (not worried at all) to 10 (very worried)?"			
	Female respondents	Male respondents	Total
Globalisation	4.57	5.29	4.94
Poverty	7.95	6.02	6.96
Unemployment	6.85	6.09	6.46
COVID-19	7.87	5.76	6.78
Climate Change	8.89	6.31	7.57
Brexit	7.09	4.88	5.95
Crime and violence	5.49	5.64	5.56
Immigration	3.54	4.97	4.27
Financial security	6.92	6.25	6.58
Conflict and war	5.96	4.51	5.21

A5.4 Means of worry scores of female and male respondents

Question: "At the moment, how worried are you about the following issues on a scale from 1 (not worried at all) to 10 (very worried)?"			
	16-19 year-olds	20-24 year-olds	Total
Globalisation	4.53	5.23	4.94
Poverty	7.42	6.63	6.96
Unemployment	6.60	6.37	6.46
COVID-19	7.44	6.32	6.78
Climate Change	8.25	7.08	7.57
Brexit	6.52	5.55	5.95
Crime and violence	5.72	5.45	5.56
Immigration	3.98	4.48	4.27
Financial security	6.59	6.56	6.58
Conflict and war	5.52	4.99	5.21

A5.5 Means of worry scores of 16-19-year-olds and 20-24-year-old respondents

	"Have you done one or more of the following actions since the beginning of 2019?"	"Thinking back to the issues that you are worried about, which of the following actions would you be prepared to do?"
Liking, sharing or posting political content online	83.0	86.2
Signing a petition	81.7	85.9
Avoiding buying products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons	67.8	79.6
Buying certain products or brands because of ethical, moral or political reasons	54.8	70.8
Taking part in a protest march, demonstration or rally	32.5	71.8
Volunteering in a non-profit organisation, community or group (for political or communal causes)	30.9	73.1
Becoming a vegetarian (meatless diet) or going vegan (diet without any animal products)	28.5	44.9
Participating in or being a member of an activist group	26.8	69.7
Mobilising other people to take part in a protest march, demonstration or rally	25.6	59.0
None of these	1.4	11.2

A5.6 Comparison of non-electoral activities done and considered by survey respondents (N = 948) in percent

Type of organisation	Percentage of respondents	Comparison with Eurobarometer 455
A sports club or organisation	19.4	28
A youth club, leisure-time club or any kind of youth organisation	24.3	20
A cultural organisation	12.0	10
A political organisation	19.4	NA
A political party	18.1	9
A local organisation aimed at improving your local community and/or local environment	22.1	16
An environmental organisation	16.5	6
A human rights organisation	12.5	4
Any other non-governmental organisations	8.8	9
No, I did not participate in any voluntary activities	23.3	50

A5.7 Comparison of organisational involvement of survey respondents (N = 948) with UK data from the Eurobarometer 455 (2017, N = 401)

	Current Research	Audit of Political Engagement 2018	Current Research	Audit of Political Engagement 2018
	“Social media platforms are giving a voice to people who would not normally take part in political debate.”		“Social media platforms are breaking down barriers between voters and political parties.”	
Strongly agree	38.6	18	17.7	9
Tend to agree	36.8	36	40.1	31
Neither agree nor disagree	5.8	30	9.3	36
Tend to disagree	4.8	7	15.5	14
Strongly disagree	3.1	5	6.3	8
Don't know/NA	10.9	3	11.2	3

A5.8 Survey respondents' (N = 948) views on social media (1) compared to data from the Audit of Political Engagement 2018 (not adjusted for age; N = 1,230) in percent

	Current Research	Audit of Political Engagement 2018	Current Research	Audit of Political Engagement 2018
	“Social media platforms are making the political debate more divisive than it used to be.”			“Social media platforms are making the political debate more superficial than it used to be.”
Strongly agree	35.8	17	25.5	16
Tend to agree	26.0	32	24.1	29
Neither agree nor disagree	9.4	35	17.0	37
Tend to disagree	11.4	7	12.9	9
Strongly disagree	3.8	5	3.4	5
Don't know/NA	13.6	4	17.0	3

A5.9 Survey respondents' (N = 948) views on social media (2) compared to data from the Audit of Political Engagement 2018 (not adjusted for age; N = 1,230) in percent

	Current Research			Audit of Political Engagement 2019		
	Interest in Politics			Interest in Politics		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Very interested	51.4	79.9	66.0	10.4	17.1	13.9
Fairly/somewhat interested	26.0	14.4	20.0	37.3	35.7	36.5
Not very interested	2.8	5.5	4.2	20.9	27.1	24.1
Not at all interested	0.0	0.0	0.0	31.3	20.0	25.5
Don't know/NA	19.7	0.2	9.7	-	-	-

A5.10 Interest in politics among survey respondents (N = 948), compared to interest in politics among 18-24-year-olds in the Audit of Political Engagement 2019 (N = 137) in percent

	Current Research			Audit of Political Engagement 2019		
	Knowledge about Politics			Knowledge about Politics		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
A great deal	10.9	40.0	25.9	4.4	14.3	9.1
A fair amount	57.0	53.2	55.0	35.3	34.3	34.6
Not very much	12.4	6.0	9.1	47.1	32.9	40.0
Nothing at all	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.2	18.6	16.3
Don't know/NA	19.8	0.8	10.0	-	-	-

A5.11 Self-ascribed knowledge about politics among survey respondents (N = 947), compared to self-ascribed knowledge about politics among 18-24 year-olds in the Audit of Political Engagement 2019 (N = 138) in percent

	“Have you done one or more of the following actions since the beginning of 2019?”	“Thinking back to the issues that you are worried about, which of the following actions would you be prepared to do?”
Discussing political issues	83.9	88.6
Accessing a political party's website, etc.	76.6	84.7
Contacting a politician	48.1	70.9
Voting in general elections	43.7	83.7
Voting in local and/or regional elections	36.9	82.8
Being a member of a political or youth party	24.4	60.1
Donating money to a political party	19.1	35.5
Campaigning for a political candidate or party	17.3	52.2
None of these	1.2	9.0

A5.12 Comparison of electoral activities done and considered by survey respondents (N = 948); in percent

	Current Research			Audit of Political Engagement 2019		
	Political Influence			Political Influence		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
A great deal	0.0	2.0	1.1	0.0	1.4	0.5
Some influence	4.6	11.5	8.1	23.9	20.0	21.6
Not very much influence	36.7	39.1	38.0	31.3	40	35.8
No influence at all	38.7	46.7	42.8	44.8	38.6	42.1
Don't know/NA	20.0	0.6	10.0	-	-	-

A5.13 Perceived political influence among survey respondents (N = 948), compared to perceived political influence among 18-24 year-olds in the Audit of Political Engagement 2019 (N = 137); in percent

	Current Research			Audit of Political Engagement 2019		
	Would vote for...			Would vote for...		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Conservative	1.1	26.4	14.1	8.3	6.3	7.5
Labour	48.8	26.8	37.5	12.5	6.3	10.0
Lib Dem	5.4	4.7	5.1	4.2	0.0	2.5
Green Party	12.8	7.0	9.8	NA	NA	NA
Would not vote	0.7	4.9	2.9	4.2	0.0	2.5
Undecided	26.0	5.6	15.5	70.8	81.3	75.0
Refused	1.3	1.0	1.2	0.0	6.3	2.5
Other	3.9	23.6	13.9	-	-	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

A5.14 Intention to among survey respondents (N = 947), compared to intention to vote among 18-24-year-olds in the Audit of Political Engagement 2019 (N = 40); in percent

Appendix 6: Dependent variables - normality tests and intra-item correlations

Dependent Variable	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Deviations
Non-electoral activities	948	4.316	0	9	2.516
Non-electoral activities (excluding zero values)	840	4.869	1	9	2.108

A6.1 Descriptive statistics of dependent variable non-electoral activities.

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test			
	Statistic	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) ^a	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed) ^b
Non-electoral activities	.093	<.001	.000
Non-electoral activities (excluding zero values)	.120	<.001	.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction. b. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 2000000.			

A6.2 Tests of normality for the dependent variable non-electoral activities.

Dependent Variable	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Deviations
Electoral activities	948	3.500	0	8	2.171
Electoral activities (excluding zero values)	839	3.953	1	8	1.879
Electoral activities (excluding zero values), age-adjusted	508	4.721	1	8	1.806

A6.3 Descriptive statistics of dependent variable electoral activities.

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test				
	Statistic	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) ^a	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed) ^b	
Electoral activities	.110	<.001		.000
Electoral activities (excluding zero values)	.126	<.001		.000
Electoral activities (excluding zero values), age- adjusted	.140	<.001		.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction. b. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 2000000.				

A6.4 Tests of normality for the dependent variable electoral activities.

	Online posting	Petition signing	Buy certain brands/ products	Avoid certain brands/ products	Change to vegetarian or vegan diet	Volunteer	Protest march	Activist group	Mobilise others
Online posting	1.000	.590**	.424**	.498**	.224**	.228**	.288**	.283**	.293**
Petition signing	.590**	1.000	.501**	.549**	.273**	.259**	.282**	.218**	.228**
Buy certain brands/ products	.424**	.501**	1.000	.633**	.533**	.252**	.372**	.286**	.335**
Avoid certain brands/ products	.498**	.549**	.633**	1.000	.400**	.222**	.325**	.211**	.279**
Change to vegetarian or vegan diet	.224**	.273**	.533**	.400**	1.000	.207**	.378**	.207**	.259**
Volunteer	.228**	.259**	.252**	.222**	.207**	1.000	.310**	.430**	.294**
Protest march	.288**	.282**	.372**	.325**	.378**	.310**	1.000	.466**	.663**
Activist group	.283**	.218**	.286**	.211**	.207**	.430**	.466**	1.000	.515**
Mobilise others	.293**	.228**	.335**	.279**	.259**	.294**	.663**	.515**	1.000
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									

A6.5 Spearman's rho correlation coefficients for non-electoral activities.

Appendix 7: Independent variables - descriptives and frequencies

Independent Variable	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. Deviations
Interest in Politics	948	1.19	0	4	.657
Interest in Social Issues	948	1.55	0	4	.953
Internal Efficacy	948	2.48	0	5	1.457
Personal Agency	948	2.64	0	5	1.458
Collective Efficacy	948	1.46	0	5	.892
Collective Agency	948	1.64	0	5	1.016
Perceived Opportunity of Political Influence	948	3.02	0	4	1.208
Perceived Opportunity of Social Influence	948	1.35	0	4	1.468
Satisfaction with UK Government	948	3.73	0	5	1.711

A7.1 Descriptive statistics of independent variables.

Interest in Politics		
Question: To what extent would you say are you interested in politics?		
	N	%
Very interested	627	66.1
Somewhat interested	190	20.0
A little interested	39	4.1
Not at all interested	0	0
Don't know	92	9.7
Total	948	100.0

A7.2 Frequency table of independent variable Interest in Politics.

Interest in Social Issues		
Question: To what extent would you say are you interested in social issues?		
	N	%
Very interested	641	67.6
Somewhat interested	148	15.6
A little interested	75	7.9
Not at all interested	77	8.1
Don't know	7	0.7
Total	948	100.0

A7.3 Frequency table of independent variable Interest in Social Issues.

Internal Efficacy		
Question: How confident are you in your own ability to participate in politics?		
	N	%
Completely confident	183	19.3
Very confident	170	17.9
Quite confident	248	26.2
A little confident	169	17.9
Not at all confident	81	8.6
Don't know	97	10.2
Total	948	100.0

A7.4 Frequency table of independent variable Internal Efficacy.

Personal Agency		
Question: Do you feel like you can individually do something about political and social issues?		
	N	%
Strongly agree	43	4.5
Agree	303	32.0
Neither agree nor disagree	141	14.9
Disagree	263	27.8
Strongly disagree	76	8.0
Don't know	122	12.8
Total	948	100.0

A7.5 Frequency table of independent variable Personal Agency.

Collective Efficacy		
Question: "Working together is important to make small changes." To what extent do you agree?		
	N	%
Strongly agree	447	47.2
Agree	336	35.4
Neither agree nor disagree	40	4.2
Disagree	25	2.7
Strongly disagree	9	0.9
Don't know	91	9.6
Total	948	100.0

A7.6 Frequency table of independent variable Collective Efficacy.

Collective Agency		
Question: "Do you feel like people as a group can do something about political and social issues?"		
	N	%
Strongly agree	349	36.8
Agree	390	41.2
Neither agree nor disagree	50	5.2
Disagree	53	5.6
Strongly disagree	13	1.4
Don't know	94	9.9
Total	948	100.0

A7.7 Frequency table of independent variable Collective Agency.

Perceived opportunity of political influence		
Question: How much influence do you feel you have over political decision-making of the UK Government?		
	N	%
A great deal	10	1.1
Some	77	8.1
Not very much	360	37.9
None at all	406	42.8
Don't know	95	10.1
Total	948	100.0

A7.8 Frequency table of independent variable perceived opportunity of political influence.

Perceived opportunity of social influence		
Question: How much influence do you feel you have over contributing to political or social changes by being part of your organisation or group?		
	N	%
A great deal	26	2.7
Some	167	17.6
Not very much	203	21.4
None at all	78	8.3
Don't know	474	50.0
Total	948	100.0

A7.9 Frequency table of independent variable perceived opportunity of social influence.

Satisfaction with UK Government		
Question: Overall, how satisfied would you say you are with the performance of the UK Government?		
	N	%
Very satisfied	43	4.5
Somewhat satisfied	93	9.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	54	5.7
Dissatisfied	169	17.9
Very dissatisfied	493	52.0
Don't know	96	10.1
Total	948	100.0

A7.10 Frequency table of independent variable Satisfaction with UK Government.

Appendix 8: Cross-tabulations of interest in politics and interest in social issues

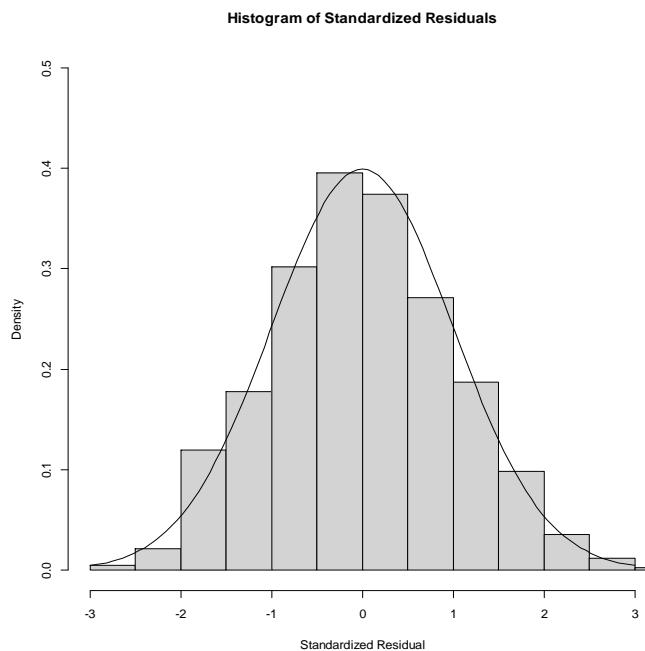
		Interest in Social Issues					
		Very interested	Somewhat interested	A little interested	Not at all interested	NA	Total
% within Interest in Politics	Very interested	85.7%	7.7%	2.2%	4.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	Somewhat interested	69.7%	12.4%	6.7%	10.0%	1.1%	100.0%
	A little interested	57.4%	24.7%	14.2%	3.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	Not at all interested	43.6%	41.0%	7.7%	7.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	Total	67.7%	15.6%	7.8%	8.1%	0.7%	100.0%

A8.1 Interest in Social Issues by Interest in Politics (N = 947).

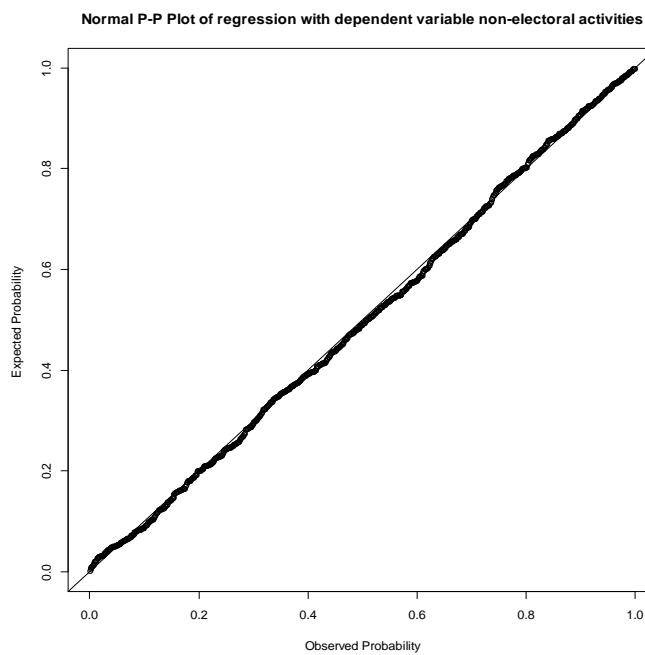
		Interest in Politics					
		Very interested	Somewhat interested	A little interested	Not at all interested	NA	Total
% within Interest in Social Issues	Very interested	68.2%	17.0%	2.7%	0.0%	12.2%	100.0%
	Somewhat interested	52.7%	31.8%	10.8%	0.0%	4.7%	100.0%
	A little interested	56.8%	36.5%	4.1%	0.0%	2.7%	100.0%
	Not at all interested	81.8%	9.1%	3.9%	0.0%	5.2%	100.0%
	Total	66.2%	20.1%	4.1%	0.0%	9.6%	100.0%

A8.2 Interest in Politics by Interest in Social Issues (N = 947).

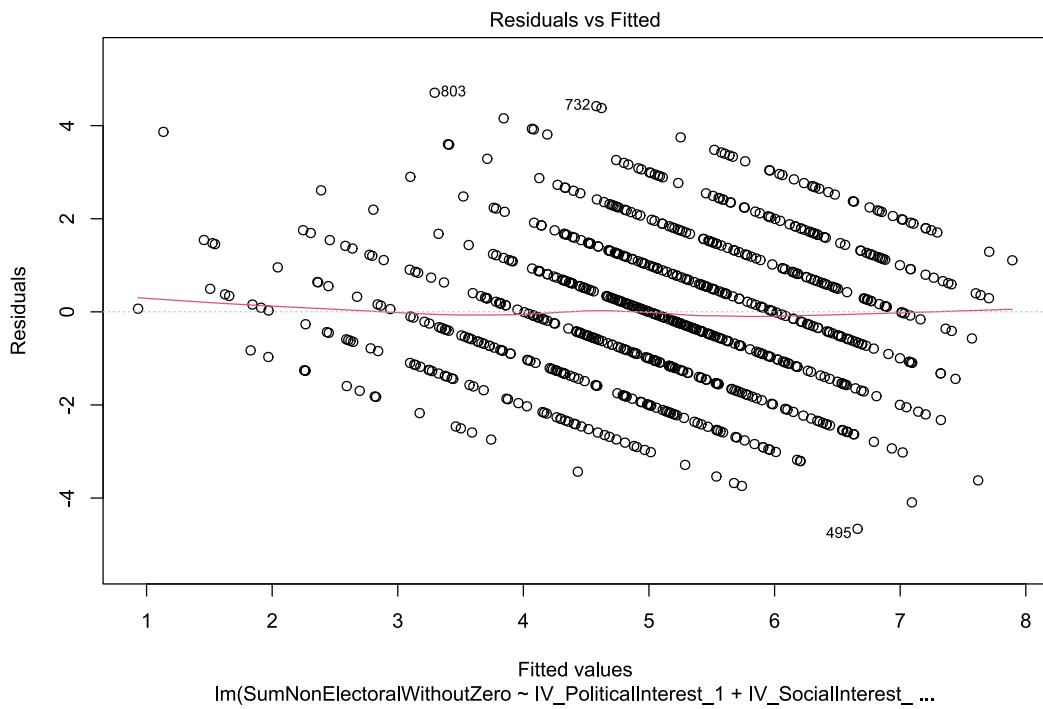
Appendix 9: Testing normality and homoscedasticity of residuals



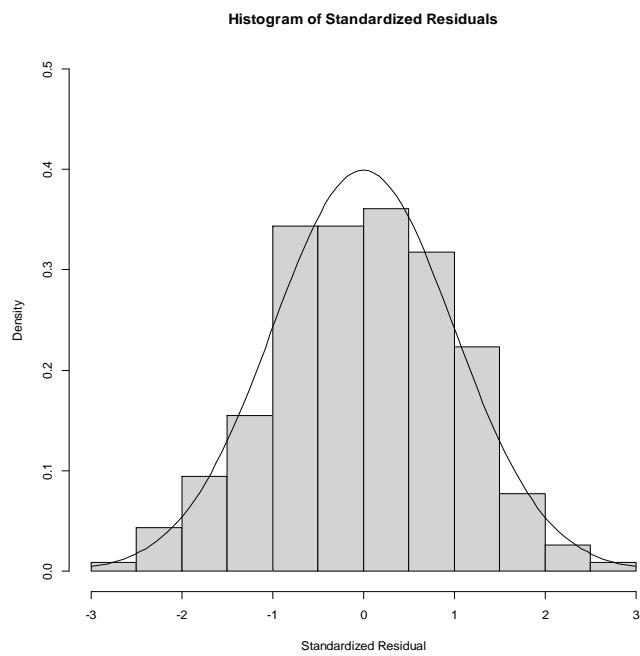
A9.1 Histogram of standardised residuals of linear regression model with non-electoral activities as the dependent variable



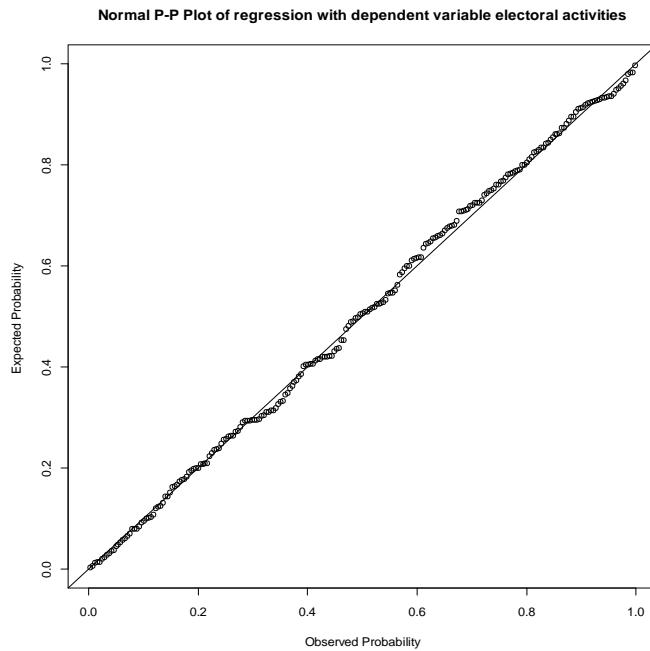
A9.2 Normal P-P plot of standardised residuals of linear regression model with non-electoral activities as the dependent variable



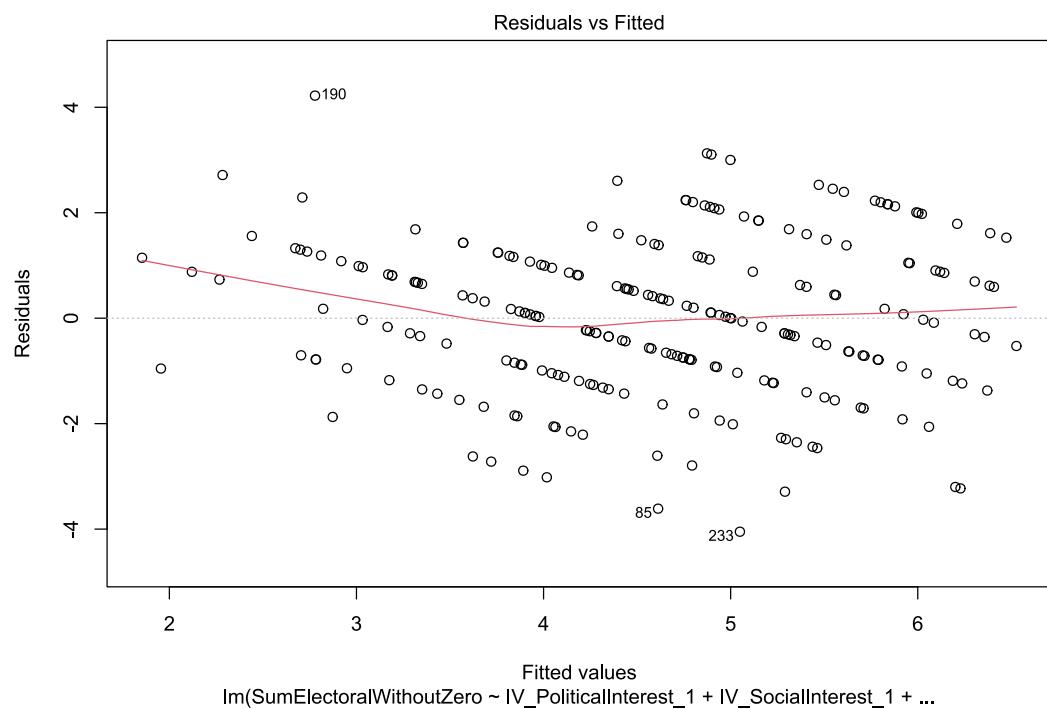
A9.3 Scatterplot of standardised predicted values and standardised residuals of linear regression model with non-electoral activities as the dependent variable



A9.4 Histogram of standardised residuals of linear regression model with electoral activities as the dependent variable



A9.5 Normal P-P plot of standardised residuals of linear regression model with electoral activities as the dependent variable



A9.6 Scatterplot of standardised predicted values and standardised residuals of linear regression model with electoral activities as the dependent variable

Appendix 10: Linear regression model using an expansive conceptualisation of non-electoral activities (inclusion of zero values)

Non-electoral activities	B	95.0% CI for B		SE B	β
		LL	UL		
Interest in politics	.602***	.457	.747	.074	.356***
Interest in social issues	.359***	.237	.482	.062	.145***
Internal efficacy	.099*	.003	.196	.049	.061*
Personal agency	.204***	.103	.305	.052	.117***
Collective efficacy	.261***	.122	.399	.071	.155***
Collective agency	.089	-.043	.221	.067	.054
Perceived opportunity of political influence	.078	-.089	.245	.085	.032
Perceived opportunity of social influence	.330***	.266	.395	.033	.229***
Satisfaction with the UK government	-.587***	-.689	-.486	.052	-.302***
<i>Controls</i>					
Age	.055*	.007	.102	.024	.052*
Male	-.877***	-1.129	-.625	.128	-.174***
University student	.309	.071	.547	.121	.058
Middle class (self-assessed)	.178	-.033	.389	.108	.035
Non-white ethnicity	-.163	-.599	.273	.222	
Constant	-2.395			.713	
Observations	948				
R^2	.618				
ΔR^2	.613				
<i>Note.</i> Model estimated: linear regression in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; $SE B$ = standard error of the coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = adjusted R^2 .					
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$					

A10.1 Full linear regression model explaining non-electoral activities with weighted data using variable non-electoral activities including zero values

Appendix 11: Participation in individual non-electoral activities only and participation in both individual and collective non-electoral activities

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interest in politics	Participated in individual activities only	318	4.6181	.03589
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	4.7367	.02228
Interest in social issues	Participated in individual activities only	318	4.1016	.06424
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	4.5810	.03830
Internal efficacy	Participated in individual activities only	318	3.0530	.07711
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	3.3052	.05318
Personal agency	Participated in individual activities only	318	2.7325	.06151
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	2.9498	.05651
Collective efficacy	Participated in individual activities only	318	4.2421	.05019
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	4.4856	.03023
Perceived opportunity of social influence	Participated in individual activities only	318	1.0674	.08341
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	2.3091	.07571
Satisfaction with the government	Participated in individual activities only	318	2.1750	.07419
	Participated in both individual and collective activities	522	1.5851	.04693

A11.1 Mean scores of Interest in Politics, Interest in Social Issues, Satisfaction with the UK Government, Internal Efficacy, Personal Agency, Collective Efficacy and Perceived Opportunity of Social Influence assorted by activity subgroups