



HeadsUp Forum # 35

www.HeadsUp.org.uk

The General Election...who would get your vote?

(26 April – 14 May 2010)

This forum was, not surprisingly, a very popular one with HeadsUp users. A general election is a particularly good time to run a political forum due to the high profile nature of politics prior to the election and the media attention that political parties receive. The election happened towards the end of the second week of debate. This meant that there was a good mix of discussion before, during and after the election.

Despite the fact that many politicians were focused on campaigning in their constituencies and were no longer MPs by the time the forum started, there was a good number of decision-makers involved in the forum. Six decision-makers pledged their support for the *General Election* forum and were involved in providing a statement for the Backup materials and/or took part in the debate. Their involvement and support was, as always, crucial to the success of the forum.

The decision-makers involved in this forum were:

- **David Blunkett MP** – Sheffield Brightside
- **Philip Davies MP** – Shipley
- **Linda Gilroy** – ex MP for Plymouth Sutton
- **David Kidney** – ex MP for Stafford
- **Clare Short** – ex MP for Birmingham Ladywood
- **Derek Wyatt** - ex MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey

www.headsup.org.uk is a safe, online space for under to debate the political issues important to them. **Young people** share viewpoints with their peers and **decision-makers** up and down the country. Through the forums, HeadsUp develops **young people's** political awareness and promotes active citizenship so they can play an effective part in the democratic processes that affect them.

HeadsUp enables **politicians** to consult with **young people**, to find out their ideas, experiences and opinions. There is ample background information to prepare **young people** for the debates, as well as **teachers'** notes and activities.

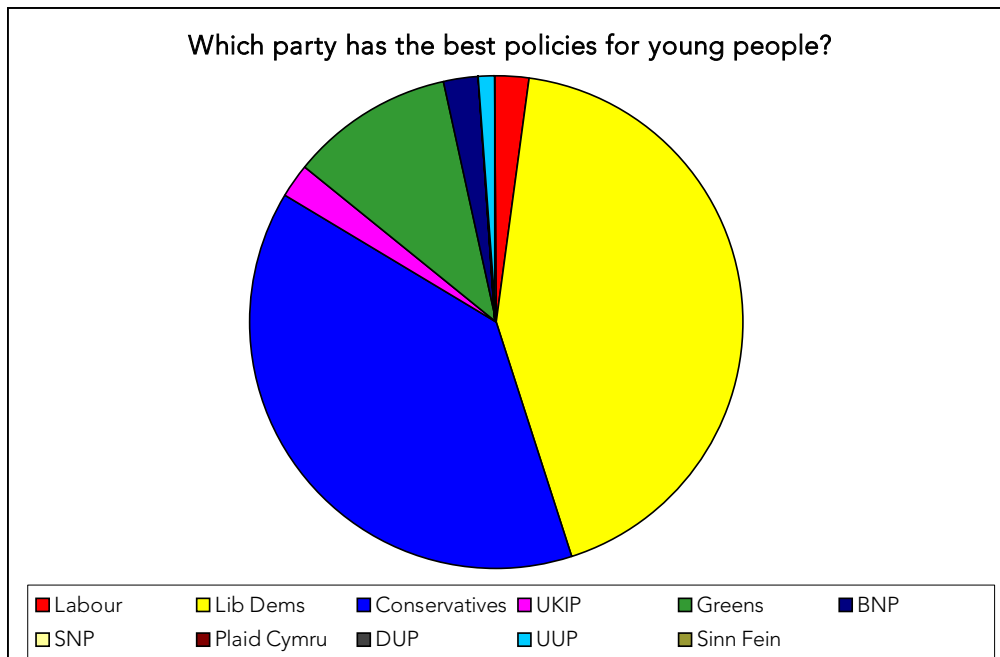
The General Election...who would get your vote?

Forum Summary

There were 769 comments posted[∞] from 120 student HeadsUp users - with 5884 unique visits to the site over the course of the forum.

The general themes and directions of the debate are highlighted in the pages below, along with specific suggestions given by forum users. The debate was split into four forum threads that focused on significant issues for young people around the general election and the different parties' policies. These were:

- **Who would you vote for?** - Which parties do you think have the best ideas and policies?
- **Do political parties speak to young people?** - What do the politicians need to do to get your attention?
- **Why do you think so few people vote?** - Do you care about politics?
- **My big issue...** - What's the issue of the election for you?



[∞] Includes: young people, moderators, teachers and decision-makers.

HeadsUp users voted for the party they thought had the best policies for young people and these results were collected the morning after the election, with 91 users casting a vote in the poll. They favoured the smaller parties with the Liberal Democrats (44%) and Green Party (11%) doing much better than in the general election - although the Conservatives (38%) came a close second to the Liberal Democrats in the HeadsUp poll. The Labour party (2%) was pushed into joint fourth with UKIP and the BNP as the party that is seen to have the best policies for young people.

Political Parties

Many of the young people on the forum were knowledgeable about the different parties' policies and were engaged with the policy arguments between them.[~] As the graph above shows the HeadsUp users that cast a vote were more impressed with the Conservative and Liberal Democrat policies for young people – however plenty of users felt that there wasn't enough to choose between the big parties.

think lib dems or conservatives should win because they seem to know more about children and think more about us.

I think everyone's being unfair about Labour and I bet if Conservatives had won the last election everyone would hate them now instead. People just think that another party would be better but really, they are all the same.

don't vote at all !!!!!!! whoever is in power doesn't make any difference.

*to be honest all the parties have faults Lib Dems - they will increase taxes Labour - Gordon Brown Conservative - David Cameron ... **to be honest I think that none of these parties should win but all work together***

A lot of HeadsUp users felt that the smaller parties had more to offer than the big two or three. They were disappointed that their campaigns were not highlighted more and that some of the smaller parties had such a small chance of winning.

None of the big three appeal to me. I'd like to hear more from the smaller parties

I am completely lost in the election. I don't really think that any of the three main parties are really speaking any sense. I would vote for the Green Party, other than I don't agree with their new policy to close down grammar schools and legalising drugs. I think drugs should just be completely illegal as they are dangerous and potentially life-threatening. Another good party would be UKIP, the only problem is that they won't actually win as they aren't entirely well known

I think the Greens should get to run the country! They are focused on the environment which is what we need right now!

Animals Count' would get my vote because I think they target the little things that are overlooked by the better known parties. I think that the main parties

[~] The comments in italics are direct quotations from student users and have not been altered.

have held the spotlight need to move out of the way to make room for other, smaller parties.

UKIP because every other party are going to do something stupid eg. lib dems=want to go to euro torys=going to take us into deeper recession labour=put us into recession and they can do it again!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I would choose Labour, who have invested well in schools and the NHS, and are securing the economic recovery. I like UKIP, the English Democrats, and the English Radical Alliance, so would vote for those. However, they have little chance of forming a government.

One of the things that HeadsUp users found really off putting during the election was the negative campaigning by some of the parties. They were much more interested in hearing about the positive things that the parties were standing for than what they were standing against.

Out of all the main parties i think the Lib dems. are the best. This is because the Lib dems have a more positive view of everything and they don't criticise the other groups like Labour and Conservatives./ Conservatives are always criticising other groups then changing their minds to make them sound good.

All three parties have campaigns that, rather than highlight their own good points as they should, highlight other parties flaws. If you want people to vote for you just explain your policies and let them choose!

The policies and issues that the parties were debating during the election campaign were paramount to young people's interest and support – as the next section details.

The Big Issues

HeadsUp users were asked what their big issue of the election was and what policy areas would make a difference to their support for parties' policies. Do under 18s have wildly different priorities from adults when it comes to the policies they think are most important? It seems that although there may be a similar level of concern on the economy for adults and under 18s, the other issues they think are important are prioritised very differently:

Rating [∞]	HeadsUp users ^Δ	Adults [◇]
1	Economy/Environment	Economy
2	Economy/Environment	Immigration
3	Education	Unemployment
4	Political Reform	Crime
5	Immigration	Education/Health/Inflation

[∞] Where multiple issues appear under one rating the issues received the same level of support

^Δ Analysis based on responses to 'My big issues' thread over the course of the forum

[◇] Taken from Ipsos MORI Issues Index (April 2010)

The chart above suggests how important it is that politicians listen to what under 18s think; the issues that affect their lives or interest them are quite different from those relevant to adults. As under 18s aren't able to vote, discussion on sites like HeadsUp is important for providing a channel of communication and a bridge between the different worlds of politicians and young people.

Economy: *My big issue right now has got to be the credit crunch. Due to the credit crunch there is a rising amount of unemployment in the country. The credit crunch is causing unemployment, poverty and homelessness and it needs to be sorted out. We live in a world where the rich just keep getting richer and the poor, poorer this needs to change and it needs to be sorted out... NOW*

Environment: *Not many of the parties seem to want to do anything for Global warming. I think a good thing to do is to restrict the number of free garbage bags and make sure all councils recycle all plastics and metals because at the moment some councils only recycle one type of plastic and that is just encouraging people to recycle less.*

Education: *I feel very strongly about education. Labour are so focused on the working class, and the underachievers that the achievers get forgotten. There's far too much focus on inclusion and trying to drag everyone up into scraping 5 A-C grades that the students who actually have potential get forgotten... Education needs a complete overhaul in my opinion.*

Political Reform: *My issue is the way the voting is. People are only allowed to vote for 1 party. I think that if people could vote their top 3 parties in order ... Then if they count up for the 1st party's votes and it is a draw then they can go onto Party number 2 and count up the votes for them .*

Immigration: *Immigration can have great benefits to our country, but the level at the moment is too high.*

Connecting with Young People

Politicians and young people are often seen as living in disparate worlds with different experiences, interests and political perspectives. Most of the students on HeadsUp felt that they wanted to be involved in politics but that politicians had to speak directly to them and engage with them on the issues they care about.

We should be able to interview politicians and members of parliament more. ... Usually you have to enter a campaign to be able to talk to a politician.

To get the children's attention I think the political parties need to speak to some children from different places in the UK and find out what the children want

In the election a lot of the time people don't vote! A majority of the people that don't vote are between the age of 18-25! This isn't good maybe the politicians should try to actually say stuff related to 18-25 year olds cause they don't most of the time!

We would probably find politics more interesting if we had a small part in it such as our ideas being listened to and actually considered by the politicians.

A lot of the discussion on the forum focused around age and the ability to vote. HeadsUp users felt that their voices were not listened to as much as adults because they couldn't vote. Many suggested that politicians should make more of an effort to listen to them so that they felt their views are taken into account more.

i dont think that politicians actually speak to children. they mainly go to visit childrens hospitals or places where there are youngish children. they do this to promote themselves ... however they never actually speak to us seriously, but they are patronising to us. they always say they have our best interests at heart, and while i don't think we should be allowed to vote, i do think that we should have some say in what goes on.

I think political parties don't really care about under because they cant vote and if they cant vote the politics dont really care about what they say.

They dont care about kids apart from their own because children(apart from looking cute and saying 'vote for them' on camera) are not gonna do anything for their career.

if the party leaders come to most of the school in a chosen county then the children would know what the election is about ! I think that chilren the age 13 or over should be able to vote !!!

There were a variety of ages at which HeadsUp users thought it was appropriate to vote – ranging from 12-18 years old. Not all students on HeadsUp had a problem with the voting age staying at 18 but most did feel that there should be other ways for politicians to hear what they thought and that they should take young people's views into account more regardless of whether they can vote.

When we get 2 secondary school we should be given information on elections that is set out clearly and be able 2 vote if we want 2

i think that 18 is the right age because younger people can be swayed by peer pressure and won't always know who they should vote for. I do want a say in how the country is run but i think that should happen by political parties asking young people and sending them surveys.

i think the age limit on the voting should be lowered to about 15 or 14

*I'm interested in politics, yes, but if i could vote, well; then **I'd be all over their manifesto's** finding who my vote would be for*

I think children should be able to vote. Maybe they should have an age limit of 13 or something instead of 18. Though instead a vote could be half (ie if 2 children voted for Labour it would only be 1 vote). This could work or you may have to take a test to see whether you should be able to vote.

i think the age limit should be 12 or 13, because if we are able to put intelligent comments on this forum, we are old enough to make a responsible decision.

Young people also felt that the lack of political education was a problem. If people were allowed to vote at a younger age there should be more information about politics and the parties' policies.

I have seen information on the election on YouTube and Facebook. These sites are very popular with young people and many young people I know are interested in politics. If information went on all of the popular social networking websites, such as Windows Live, Twitter and MySpace, more young people would be interested in politics.

we need to know what they are doing because on the news they talk only about the politicians and not about the actual policies so you have to search the internet.

Voter Apathy?

As has been mentioned above, the young people on the forum were neither uninterested nor ignorant about politics. There were plenty of issues that they were interested in and felt passionate about. What they wanted was politicians who were willing to talk to them about those issues.

Most were very interested in being able to vote and having their voices heard by politicians but were dubious as to how much their opinions counted whilst they were under 18 and couldn't vote.

children arent usually interested in something they cant take part in or do.I mean talking about it on this site is real cool and having mock elections in school is cool too but... That is all we can do untill we get to the age of 18 and by then... we might loose interest all together and not bother to vote!

I think political parties don't really care about under 18s because they cant vote and if they cant vote the politics dont really care about what they say.

i think they only speak to the over 18's because all they want is their votes so that they can be prime minister.

i agree with what many people are saying about childrens views are just as important as adults. I think they are possibly more important. After all, it is we who are going to be living in this world later on and it is we who will eventually have to make decisions about all the problems in the world (climate change, afghanistan war, etc).

What did they think were the reasons that were most likely to stop young people voting? The reasons given by most HeadsUp users was the lack of interest shown by politicians in speaking to young people as well as disillusionment with the political system and political parties. Simply, if young people felt their vote wouldn't make a difference, then they wouldn't vote.

the parties never get round to doing everything they promise to do before the election

If you need more votes then: -Be interested in the community -Talk to pensioners and teenagers

Lots of people can't be bothered to vote and they think their vote won't make much difference. But if no-one votes it will make a difference.

I think it's because they can't tell who's even going to actually run the country better, because they can just lie about their policies until they're in power

Other reasons given for the lack of young people voting were to do with education, unclear messages from the political parties, not knowing who to vote for or thinking the parties were too similar. TV and new media were highlighted as the places to engage young people with politics.

I think that the TV election debate can help get more young voters. Why? Because younger people like watching Telly. This will encourage younger voters to watch election debates.

I think there should be more programs showing the differences between the parties and the similarities, this may help the more confused voters.

The TV debates are a great idea because it makes this MUCH clearer as it puts the leaders on the spot and asks them about things that really count and you can compare their ideas.

I think people would vote more if more political parties were advertised. I think animal welfare is very important and the political parties that focus on that and other issues aren't as well known as they should be.

I think that politics is coming across to young people, especially on the internet and TV. I think that there should be information on more websites, popular with young children such as MySpace and Twitter.

No wonder why so many people didn't vote, as you can see nobody won, that is because nobody knew who to vote for because the parties' views weren't shown as they would have liked them to be and everyone was confused.

I think there needs to be more information guided towards younger voters so then they will find out what is going on but in a simpler way than it is on the news

even though some parties are good sometimes it is not the party you wanted and the party you wanted does not even exist

What is clear from this forum is that under 18s are not apathetic - contrary to media portrayals. They do care about politics, although very much through specific issues, and they do not see voting in an election or supporting a political party as a duty. In fact young people are often very rational in the way they approach politics and politicians. They weigh up how likely they are to get what they want if they vote or support a specific party. If young people think they will get something worthwhile from voting or engaging with politicians then they'll do it. It's therefore up to the politicians and the political parties to better state their case and speak directly to young people about the issues they care about, as well as explaining the outcomes and benefits of their policies.

Political Context

This forum took place during the election campaign and the election aftermath. It was a good time to seek the views of young people on party politics as the election campaign is not surprisingly when politics is highlighted most in the media. This meant they probably had a better understanding of the differences between the parties' policies and improved recognition of party leaders than they would at any other time. The unusual result of a hung parliament and the negotiations around them also gave the young people something different to discuss after the election was over – although there was not surprisingly a lot of confusion about what a hung parliament was and how a coalition government might work. As has been shown in the report, the young people on the forum were interested in the full range of issues and parties' policies, not just those traditionally seen to affect young people.

HeadsUp makes sure that young people's views on the election are sent to the appropriate policy-makers, journalists and politicians so they can take into account young people's views on the issues.

The HeadsUp team would like to convey our thanks and appreciation to the decision-makers, young people and teachers that got involved in this important debate. We would also like to extend an invitation to interested parties, particularly legislators and government, interested NGOs, academics and journalists to respond to the findings. Responses and requests for further information should be directed to:

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