Abstract: We consider how members of different generations evaluate democracy and political institutions and how they participate in the political process in 13 long-established democracies in Europe and Anglo-America. We find striking differences between the views of recent and older generations with respect to attitudes toward democracy. The youngest generation often stands out as especially inclined not to value democratic principles and practices. Cohort differences are much less systematic with respect to evaluations of institutions. Though the youngest generation has negative opinions about some of the nation’s key political institutions, these perceptions are broadly shared with those in the two generations that precede it. Political interest and voting were lowest in the youngest cohort, very likely due to life-cycle effects. Other kinds of political behaviour often show more activity by the youngest generation. But the differences are less striking than one might expect, as in many nations, respondents from the two prior cohorts have somewhat comparable levels of participation. All told, we find that the youngest generation’s engagement with democracy is a tenuous one. The question is whether that will later mature into active democratic citizenship and support for its principles and processes, or remain the hallmark of a new generational pattern of political discontent.
Representative democracy is now practiced in most nations of the world, but in many places it is a rather recent innovation. In newly emerging democracies many citizens must “learn” about democracy. They learn about democratic values and norms as democracy is being implemented, and many may do this while having previous experience with non-democratic forms of government.\(^1\) The situation is quite different in advanced democracies where representative democracy has been used for several decades or more. Most citizens in these nations likely have experienced nothing but democracy, and it may well be the only form of politics they know. Recent attitudinal trends, however, suggest that while citizens in emerging democracies struggle to introduce, learn about, and embrace democracy, for those in advanced democracies familiarity seems to have bred a contempt, or certainly indifference, to many democratic processes and institutions.\(^2\) Citizens in emerging and advanced democracies, then, may experience fundamentally different processes of “learning” about, evaluating, and engaging with democracy, though there may be a number of parallels in the attitudes and behaviours that those processes generate in these two different types of democracy.

In this paper we are interested in how members of different generations evaluate democracy in nations where it has been used for a long time and is most firmly established. One of our key working hypotheses is that people develop fundamental, enduring beliefs about and orientation to democratic politics at some formative point, early in life. These beliefs and attitudes may be the product of a standard political socialization process whereby each new generation learns from the ones that have gone before. Nonetheless, we are also aware that major short-term and long-term events (economic depressions, wars, social movements, long periods of prosperity, economic upheavals, changes in mass media, etc.) mean that the socialization process itself and the content of that process is likely to be different across unique generational cohorts. Views about democracy, like attitudes toward public policies and political leaders, may differ across generational cohorts that are defined by and distinguished from one another apart by what was occurring when the members of the cohort were in their impressionable years.

Studies of voting behaviour of the Depression generation (Miller and Shanks 1996), of the political participation of the Vietnam generation in the U.S. (Erikson and Stoker 2011), and of the post-materialist generation (Inglehart 1977; 1990) are cases in point. Likewise, concepts of enduring socialized loyalties to political parties (Campbell et al. 1960, Niemi and Jennings 1991; Campbell 2006; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009) and the hypothesis that previous patterns of socialization can be disrupted—or realigned—at rare moments in response to crises or significant events (Key 1955; Burnham 1970; Abramson 1976; Norpoth and Rusk 1982) share the assumption that generations have unique formative experiences with politics. These early life experiences affect not only orientations to a particular political party, but they may affect how engaged people are with politics (e.g., Dalton 2009; Prior 2010), and the manner of how and to what extent they participate in politics. In short, the distinctiveness of generational politics seems to be a reflection not only of recurrent patterns of change across individuals’ life-cycles,  

\(^{1}\) There is now a large and still growing body of literature on ‘learning democracy’—and, of course, that is what this panel is about. For references see other panel papers.

\(^{2}\) This is true in recent years, at any rate. Witness such titles about government in developed countries as: Congress as Public Enemy (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995); Why People Don’t Trust Government (Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997); “Down and Down We Go: Political Trust in Sweden” (Holmberg 1999); What Is It about Government that Americans Dislike? (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001), Citizens Adrift: The Democratic Disengagement of Young Canadians (Howe 2010); and so on. For a recent poll and journalistic account of youths’ attitudes, see Callick and Gosper (2012).
but also the unique effects of events that occur, and differentially affect, generations at different stages of the entrenchment of political attitudes and behaviour.

**Democratic Norms across Generations**

It is well known that some forms of political participation, such as voting (Blais 2000; Gray and Caul 2000), joining political parties (Dalton 2009), and attentiveness to the media (Howe 2010; Wattenberg 2012) have been in decline in most established democracies for decades. Similarly, there is also evidence of partisan dealignment—individuals’ identification with political parties dropping since the 1960s (Abramson 1976; Dalton et al. 1984; Crew and Denver 1985; Dalton 2000). At the same time, any cross-sectional study conducted in the 1960s or 2010s will yield life-cycle differences, with, for example, significantly higher voter among older people than younger. Yet there is evidence that the recent secular decline in voting (and we expect other forms of participation) is reflective of the age gap having widened over time (Franklin 2004; Wattenberg 2012) due to powerful generational effects. Blais et al. (2004), for example, find that members of the “post-baby boom” generation have lower levels of participation at any point in their life cycle. They conclude that recent generations participate less and pay less attention to politics, in part because they are less likely to have been socialized to believe that voting is a moral duty (also Blais 2000, 2006). Political socialization of recent generations in advanced democracies may also differ in that norms of deference to authority are less likely to be transmitted than in the past (Nevitt 1996; Inglehart 1990). In short, the socialization-based “learning” of democratic norms and processes in advanced democracies, along with the infusion of the fundamental requirement of active political engagement, increasingly appear to have parallels, if not necessarily the same patterns and explanations, with the problems of learning about self-government in emerging democracies. In several respects, the young in both sorts of societies are not whole-heartedly embracing an active, democratic citizenship.

All of this suggests that trends in such things as attitudes about how democracy should work, attachment to parties and other democratic institutions, and participation, reflect not simply life-cycle effects, but unique generational experiences. The meaning of citizenship, and views about what is good or bad for a democracy, thus differ across generations. Generational change in established democracies that has produced less sense of civic duty, less trust in authority, weaker attachments to traditional parties, lower levels of traditional political participation, and lower rates of membership in traditional social groups has been met with concern by some who see these as symptoms of a collapse of the norms (or diffuse regime support) and social capital required for democracy to thrive (e.g., Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997; Putnam 2000; Buchanan 2000; Macedo et al. 2005). Supportive of such a view is that growing cynicism about government and politics—a trend observed across many industrial nations (Dalton 2004)—has been linked to support for extremist parties (Craig and Maggioto 1981; Cheles, Ferguson and Vaughan 1991), and declining turnout at elections (Teixera 1992; Dalton 2008; Blais 2010).

Other observers suggest that changes in democratic norms need not herald a weaker version of mass democracy. Post-materialist values are defined in terms of a recent generation placing greater value on political expression and “giving people more say,” with less weight given to “materialist” concerns such as maintaining order and fighting inflation (Inglehart 1990). There is some debate about whether or not these values have become more ascendant across all
western democracies since the 1970s, and about whether or not post-materialism reflects change that is generationally driven (Abramson and Inglehart 1995: 11). Clarke and Dutt (1991) found a trend from 1976-1986 toward increasing post-materialist values in Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands, and West Germany, but contrary to Inglehart (1990), not in Belgium, France, Ireland, and Italy—about half of the nations. These scholars and others (Duch and Taylor 1993) argue that post-materialist survey responses reflect changes in economic conditions rather than a generational shift in political values. Abramson and Inglehart (1995: 15), in contrast, find a clear trend toward post-materialism from 1970 to 1993 in seven of the eight western European democracies they studied. Regardless of how trends are defined, post-materialist values such as “having more say” may manifest themselves in a different orientation to democratic politics, rather than as a retreat from democracy. In short, affluence and the meeting of material needs may prompt a rise in these citizens’ critical awareness and engagement in the political process (Norris, 1999).

Alternatively, deteriorations in economic conditions may prompt heightened criticism or cynicism about governing institutions, given their failure to “deliver.” If so, then advanced industrial societies with pervasive economic woes, which tend to hit the youngest generation the hardest (as is evident, for example, in the high youth unemployment rates currently afflicting countries such as Italy and Spain) may see generational patterns of political disaffection that are the product of economic failings, not the breakdown of socialized cues, or of political representation, as such. Thus, as Norris has claimed, the “tide of political cynicism and voter anger” in advanced industrial societies can perhaps best be seen as a fluctuating pattern of public confidence in government that reflects citizens’ frustration with the “actual performance of democratic governance” (Norris 2011, 83) and not an irreversible slide into political malaise and disdain for the democratic process itself.

Dalton (2009) advances a similar argument about generational change and democratic values, albeit applied to the American case. He finds that the generation that reached 18 by the end of World War II and the post-war boomer generation score highest on a “citizen duty” dimension of citizenship that reflects valuing voting in elections, paying taxes, serving in the military, and obeying the law. These values are less apparent among the 1960s generation, and are weaker still among the so-called “GenX” and “GenY” cohorts (2009: 38). Rather than rejecting democracy, however, these more recent generations score highest on what Dalton calls an “engaged citizen” dimension of citizenship. This dimension is characterized by valuing the helping of others who are worse off, choosing products for social and political purposes, being active in voluntary groups, and being active politically (though in different ways than older generations). Younger citizens may thus be less likely to affiliate with a political party, and less likely to vote, but their newer norms of engagement could make them more likely to attend demonstrations, sign petitions, and boycott products (Dalton 2009; Zukin et al. 2005). Norris (2011) presents similar ideas and argues that trends of growing cynicism toward government need not reflect a democratic crisis because basic democratic values (or, regime principles) remain widely held, and that cynicism on the part of informed citizens can in fact be healthy. These patterns, then, suggest the key to attitudes toward democracy in advanced industrial societies lies in citizens’ norms about political involvement and activities, not their attitudes toward government. Critical citizens may be disdainful about governing institutions (and especially about current office-holders), but be actively involved in alternative political roles that affirm their political citizenship.
Defining Generations as Age Cohorts

There are major challenges to testing for generational effects. These include defining what determines a given generation and, if possible, observing multiple generations across time in order to distinguish between life-cycle and generational effects. There are no agreed-upon, established definitions of where one generation starts and another stops—particularly not one that is portable across many different nations. In addition, observing people over their lifetimes is not strictly possible without decades-long panel studies. Given that our study employs cross-national survey data collected in each country at a single point in time, both of these challenges require that we make major assumptions about what we are observing. For the purpose of this study, we will by and large assume that differences observed across pre-determined birth cohorts, as measured in a cross-sectional survey, reflect some component of generational effects. We make no claims, however, about definitively isolating generational effects from life-cycle effects, but offer this analysis to illustrate potential differences in attitudes about democracy that may exist across political generations.

Our definition of distinct generations is similar to that found in Dalton (2009). We divide the populations of the nations we examine into five cohorts, each defined in terms of important events that occurred around the time that a substantial proportion of the cohort was between 18 and 30 years of age. The first, and oldest cohort are people who we assume had their formative political experiences prior to World War II (that is, many in the cohort were born before the Depression, and were 18 to 28 in 1938) or during World War II. A second cohort represents a generation in which a substantial proportion of people came of age politically soon after World War II (commonly known as the “boomer” generation in North America). Many in this cohort experienced military service, post-war reconstruction, and other factors that may be associated with a traditional sense of duty, service, and patriotism, including nation-building and increased affluence after a period of scarcity. The centre of gravity for this cohort consists of people who were between 18 and 30 in the 1950s and early 1960s.

A third cohort is defined in terms of formative experiences associated with the late 1960s and the 1970s, with many in this generation at age 18-30 in 1968 and soon after. People in this cohort matured in an era when economic scarcity was largely unknown, armed military conflict largely occurred only in distant places and was transformed from the hot to cold variety. This is also an era where social movements and peaceful protests increased, and when mass media transformed from radio and print-based, to a medium dominated by broadcast video. Our fourth generational cohort includes people who came of age politically during the late 1980s and 1990s. Members of this generation likely experienced a different political world than earlier generations, with the politics of nations transformed by the fall of the Soviet Union, anti-statist economic liberalization, and globalization promoted by figures such as Reagan, Thatcher, and Kohl. The final cohort in our analysis includes people who were 18 to 30 years of age between 2000 and 2006 (the final year of our surveys). The “global war on terror” may have been one of the major formative experiences for people in this generation.

These definitions of generations are admittedly somewhat arbitrary, but they seem clearly to reflect groups of people who quite likely experienced very different worlds at the times their political attitudes, behaviours, and orientation to democracy were being shaped. The different generational experiences and extant literature discussed here suggest some very general hypotheses about differences we might expect across cohorts. First, more recent cohorts may have less attachment to traditional institutions, less deference, and as a result less confidence in
authority. Second, following Dalton, we expect that recent cohorts will be less interested in voting, but more interested in boycotts and protests. Third, given the experiences of the 1960s generation, we expect that cohort in particular to be more inclined than others to engage in protest activity. Fourth, the discussion above suggests that people from generations that came of age closer to World War II should have a stronger sense of civic duty and acceptance of authority. We thus expect people in earlier cohorts to display the highest levels of confidence in government, parties, and democracy itself.

**Individual Level Forces**

Factors specific to the individual—regardless of a person’s formative generational experiences—also shape democratic attitudes. It is widely recognized that major attitudinal and behavioural differences are associated with education (Almond and Verba 1963). We expect that additional time spent in formal education increases attachment to democracy and democratic norms. Highly educated persons, regardless of the circumstances in which they matured, have been found to be more understanding and supportive of the perspectives and practices underlying democracy, such as tolerance, civil liberties, minority rights, deliberation, compromise (e.g., McClosky and Zaller 1984; Bobo and Licari 1989; Davis and Silver 2004). Education also corresponds with greater cognitive sophistication and political efficacy (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991)—traits that may make individuals more comfortable in the arena of democratic politics.

Numerous studies have also shown that level of education has a significant impact on individuals’ political interest and engagement, primarily because education increases individuals’ political skills and thereby reduces the information processing costs of political participation (e.g., Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Avey 1989). Margaret Conway (1991, 23) argues similarly that education is the “most important component of socio-economic status in influencing political participation” as it promotes cognitive skills, political interest, exposure to the mass media and sustains a set of political attitudes that propel political participation. Indeed, she presents patterns of U.S. electoral turnout from 1952-1988—an era that includes the Vietnam War and other crises seen as factors eroding political engagement in the U.S.—and shows that while electoral turnout declined across that 35 year period, the educational gap in turnout was virtually perfectly maintained: those with university education the most likely to vote; those with grade school educations the least likely to vote, and those with high school educations dividing the difference (1991, 22).

We also noted above that economic conditions may influence attitudes about governing processes and democratic institutions, and that this may be especially true for young adults, who have been particularly hurt in recent years by high unemployment and great uncertainty about future social welfare benefits. As a consequence, what appear to be generational differences might have their origins in individuals’ perceptions of their own economic well-being or their assessments of the economic situation of their country as a whole. In short, both economic and educational factors need to be considered, even in preliminary explorations of democratic values and practices, and we shall include them in our analysis here.

**Data and Measures**

Attitudes about democracy, confidence in democratic institutions, and political behaviour were measured in the World Values Survey (WVS), collected in 13 advanced democratic nations
(and numerous others) between 2005 and 2007. We limit our analysis to nations that had experiences with democracy prior to World War II. Our cases include Australia, Britain, Canada, France, (west) Germany, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States. Several WVS items are directly comparable to items used across the globe in Globalbarometer surveys, and thus allow our results to be compared to those from newer democracies. We will also include a few related items that were asked in the same set of developed democracies in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), Module 2.

A person’s general attachment to the concept of democracy is measured with responses to five questions. One WVS item asked respondents to rate “how important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?” on a 10 point scale, where 1 = “not at all important” and 10 = “absolutely important.” Four other WVS items asked, “Would you say [the following] is very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or a very bad way of governing this country”:  

- Having a democratic political system?  
- Having the army rule?  
- Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country?  
- Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections?  

Where needed, items were re-coded such that high scores reflect “very good” responses. Two CSES questions included that are similar are the “how satisfied with the way democracy works in your country” item, and an item that asks respondents how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement, “Democracy may have problems, but it’s better than any other form of government.”

Some of these seem on their face to be valid measures of pro- versus anti-democratic attitudes, specifically the “strong leader” and “having the army rule” items. That said, in advanced democracies it is not always clear what sentiments are measured here. A preference for experts may reflect not so much a rejection of democracy, but rather a preference for neutral bureaucrats over politicians influenced by “special interests” (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). Likewise, a preference for army rule may mean one thing in a nation with a well-regarded, highly professional army that had never been involved with politics (again, as an alternate to partisan bickering), but this may reflect a more anti-democratic sentiment when voiced in a nation that has experienced military rule. Nonetheless, this range of measures allows us multiple opportunities to assess attachment to democracy as a general principle—at the level of support for core principles of democratic regimes (Norris 1999), and democracy as an ideal (Mishler and Rose 2001), best possible form government (Fuchs 1995).

The WVS also provides several measures of confidence in political institutions. We suggest these measures tap assessments of the performance of (or satisfaction with) specific democratic institutions, or what Mishler and Rose (2001) calls “realist” views of democracy in practice. These were measured with a battery of questions, where respondents were asked, “tell me how much confidence you have in ____,” is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? Respondents were asked about “the government (in your nation’s capital), political parties, parliament, and the civil service. The CSES included a related item that asked, “how widespread do you think corruption such as bribe taking is amongst politicians?” It is likely that questions about “the government,” “politicians,” and “parliament” blur the line between measuring attitudes about regime institutions and the performance of specific political actors (e.g., the party/parties in parliament that formed government when the survey was conducted). However, we expect that questions about parties (generally) and the civil service are likely to tap
diffuse sentiments about democratic institutions.

We are also interested in how democratic participation varies across cohorts. The WVS included items asking about respondents’ interest in politics, whether they voted in a recent election, and about “forms of political action,” including whether they “have done,” “might do,” or “would never” sign a petition, join a boycott, or attend a peaceful [lawful] demonstration. These items were recoded such that higher scores reflect reporting having participated in the political action. The CSES included a similar question asking “have you ever taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?”, as well as an item asking “have you worked together with people who share the same concern?”

Models

We estimated models of each attitude and reported behaviour, separately, for each nation. Although this produces an overwhelming number of estimations (13 nations*14 survey items), it allows us to test whether there are generational differences that are similar across all nations, or whether there are generational effects in some advanced democracies, but not others. Results are summarized here with figures displaying the most important (generational) results for all countries. The full results are available from the authors upon request. Models were estimated with OLS regression, or where the dependent variable was dichotomous items, with logistic regression. Estimates were replicated with ordered logits, with substantive results remaining unchanged.

Responses to each survey item were estimated with the same basic model. Cohorts are represented by four unique dichotomous measures; one representing respondents from the generation that came of age politically in the Depression Era and during WWII, one representing the generation of the 1960s, one representing the generation that came of age after the cold war and economic liberalization, and one representing the most recent, post 9/11 generation. The post-WWII generation is the reference category in our models. The coefficient for each generation, then, reflects whether or not respondents from those cohorts reported attitudes or behaviours that were significantly different from those reported by respondents in the generation that came of age in the 1950s and early 1960s. The labels of these cohorts are somewhat arbitrary, but the age codings are consistent across countries and are adjusted for the year the survey was conducted (this varied across nations).

Each model also includes a measure of the respondents’ level of education and measures of gender, self-reported class, income, and satisfaction with household economic conditions. The last three measures were included to control, as much as possible, for the influence of economic considerations on citizens’ views. They are also important to include if we wish properly to assess the influence of education, as all three are likely to be correlated with educational attainment.³ Gender is included, as a number of studies of the gender gap have shown that women have historically had distinctively different political sensibilities from men, including lower levels of electoral involvement and inter-personal political engagement (Atkeson 2003; De Vaus and McAllister 1989) and lower levels of political interest, knowledge, and efficacy (see, e.g., Koch 1997, 125) Koch shows these differences in political attitudes have remained in recent years, despite controlling for generational effects and level of education (1997, 119). At the same time, a recent cross-national study has shown that women are less

³ We would also control for a “sociotropic” measure of economic conditions in the country as a whole, but no common measure is available in the WVS.
likely than men to feel their views are well represented by the political parties, and less likely than men to feel satisfied with the way democracy works in their country (Karp and Banducci 2008, 109). In short, pervasive significant gender differences in political engagement, efficacy, and satisfaction with democracy suggest that gender is an important variable to control in these models.

Results

Regardless of differences that may exist across generations, the WVS and CSES surveys find overwhelmingly strong support for democracy in principle in these nations. Table 1 shows that in every nation but the United States, over 90% of the respondents agree that having a democratic system is a good or very good thing. Approval of democracy in the U.S. is only slightly lower by this measure, at 87%. In each nation, no more than 3% say that democracy is very bad. The ordinal measure on which respondents were asked to rate the importance of living in a democracy on a 1-10 scale produces similar evidence of strong regime support, with the average scores in these nations ranging from 8.5 to 9.5. In most of these nations over 90% of respondents also agreed that democracy was the best form of government, despite its problems. Responses to the clearly anti-democratic item about military rule also reflect a deep commitment to democratic values. Very few respondents believed that having the army rule is a good or very good thing. Indeed, in no nation was there more than 14% support for military rule, and in 10 of the 13 countries, support for army rule was in single digits. In only one nation (Great Britain) did as many as 3% of respondents agree that army rule was very good (in most places only 1% responded this way).

Responses to other items displayed in Table 1 might be interpreted as showing weaker attachment to democratic principles. In three of the continental democracies, substantial proportions of respondents were dissatisfied with the way democracy was working. Only 39% of Italians and 51% of Germans were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with the way democracy is working in their country, while only Australia topped 80% in satisfaction with the way its democracy is working. In most nations, at least 20% of the respondents stated that “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” was good, or very good (although in each nation less than 10% said this was very good). Likewise, there is relatively high support for the idea that it is good or very good to have “experts, not government” make decisions “according to what they think is best” (again, in most nations fewer than 10% said this was very good).

However, one needs to be cautious in interpreting these measures. The CSES satisfaction with democracy item likely captures assessments about the performance, or “functioning” of democracy, rather than just a commitment to democratic norms (Anderson and Guillory 1997:70; Karp, Banducci, and Bowler 2003; Linde and Ekman 2003). A preference for a “strong leader,” for some, may not reflect a rejection of democratic values, as much as frustration with a fractious coalition government (e.g., the WVS Netherlands survey was in the field at the moment of crisis for a failing cabinet), or with divided government (e.g., the U.S.). Relatedly, support for having “experts” decide could reflect similar frustration with divisive partisanship (see Hibbing and Theiss Morse 2002) rather than rejecting the idea of using regular elections to select governments. In short, while we would argue these factors provide important profiles of attitudes toward democratic principles, there is the likelihood that some of citizens’ disaffection
reflects disillusionment with those holding office and their performance, rather than democracy and democratic systems of popular accountability themselves. If so, these percentages may well overstate popular discontent with democracy.

Table 2 illustrates cross-national variation in attitudes about democratic institutions, while Table 3 shows responses to questions about political engagement and participation. Consistent with Norris' (2011) results, we find less support for specific democratic institutions (Table 2) than for democracy as a way of government (in Table 1). In all but Switzerland, Finland, and Norway, a majority of respondents said they had “not very much” confidence in their government or “none at all.” Confidence in parliament specifically was on a par with the overall government, while confidence in political parties was considerably lower. Conversely, confidence in the civil service was higher, and, outside of France, Germany, and Italy, few respondents thought that corruption among politicians was “very widespread.” Again, items in Table 2 may well reflect specific, performance-based support, rather than diffuse attachment to democracy. As for citizen engagement with democracy, Table 3 suggests that involvement is robust. Most respondents in most nations reported voting and a significant portion said they are interested in politics. Protest, boycotting, and working with others who share concerns are less common political activities but are engaged in by more than a few citizens.

Tables 2 and 3 about here

But what of our expectations about variations across political generations? Responses to each question displayed in Tables 1-3 were tested using the multivariate model described above, with models estimated separately for each nation. Figures 1-8 display the estimated OLS or logit coefficients for each cohort, with the post-WWII generation (those born between 1926 and 1940) as the reference category. Asterisks in the figures indicate where respondents from a particular age cohort have responses that are significantly different from respondents in the post-war cohort. The figures allow us to see differences across generations within countries, as well as differences across countries. Countries are grouped in the figures, roughly, by region and/or linguistic categories. While the figures refer to varying generations, we emphasize again that our tests cannot truly determine whether the observed patterns are the product of different events and socialization processes or of life-cycle effects.

Regardless of their exact source, Figures 1-3 reveal some notable differences in attitudes about democracy within and across countries. On all measures, respondents in the Anglo-democracies from more recent cohorts were significantly more likely (than the post-war cohort) to offer responses reflecting weaker attachment to democracy as a principle. OLS coefficients are most readily interpretable in Figure 1A, as response options ranged from 1 (not at all important to live in a democracy) to 10 (absolutely important). Respondents in the youngest cohort from the U.S., Australia, and Great Britain, on average, had responses 1.5 units lower than people in the post-war cohort. The youngest respondents in most other nations scored lower than others in their respective countries on this item, but not as low as the youngest respondents in the English-speaking democracies. Figure 1B plots estimates to the WVS question about whether it is good to have a democratic system, and displays a similar pattern: the youngest generation consistently manifesting significantly lower levels of attitudinal endorsement of the democratic system as a good one.

The same pattern of young cohort negativism about democracy evident in the first two figures can be seen in Figures 2A, 2B and 3A, which report cohort differences in attitudes about having a strong leader who “does not have to bother with parliament and elections”, having the army rule, and having experts, not government decide things (Figure 3A). The general pattern is
one of weaker support for pro-democratic responses among young cohorts—especially evident in English-speaking nations. However, even in most European nations, respondents from the youngest cohorts were more likely to support having a strong leader, experts, or the army rule (as in The Netherlands, Finland, Germany and France), or were at least less likely to think these were bad ideas. Overall, then, these three figures provide support for the notion that the newest generation is broadly supportive of authoritarian alternatives to democratic decision making.

The final item in this set, Figure 3B, reports respondents’ satisfaction with the way democracy works in their nation. It, like the preceding figures, shows that young cohorts in the English-speaking countries are distinctly less happy with the way their democratic system is working (with New Zealand an exception). In European countries, the pattern is mixed, with the youngest respondents sometimes most satisfied with the current functioning of democracy (The Netherlands and Finland), but in other nations, insignificantly different from the other cohorts in their satisfaction with the working of their nation’s democracy.

Figures 4–5 display differences in attitudes about political institutions across the cohorts. Data in Table 2 showed that there was less uniformity in attitudes toward institutions than to questions about democracy in principle (shown in Table 1). Although there is greater variation in confidence in institutions, Figures 4-5 show that our markers for cohorts often do little to explain this variation. However, the figures also show several cohort-specific effects. Figure 4A shows confidence in government is significantly lower primarily among the 1960s and/or Liberalization cohorts (USA, Canada, Finland, and Australia). The only (marginally) significantly lower levels of confidence in government (p < .1) among the youngest cohort are evident in Australia and New Zealand. Likewise, confidence in political parties was significantly lower only among the Sixties and Liberalization cohorts, and only in the U.S., Canada, Britain, Finland, and Germany (Figure 4B). Put differently, in most nations the post-9/11 cohort has attitudes about democratic institutions that are not different from those of the post WWII “boomer” generation, which is thought to have a greater sense of civic duty.

Figures 5A and 5B, which report confidence in parliament and in the civil service, respectively, reveal only slightly different patterns. With respect to confidence in parliament, the youngest cohort has significantly weaker levels of confidence in three nations (Australia, New Zealand, and Norway), but is not dramatically different from the other generations in other nations. And with respect to confidence in their nation’s civil service, the youngest generation, though negative in most nations (Australia being a significant counter-example), but these sentiments are echoed in those of the Sixties and Liberalization cohorts. By and large it is the Great Depression-World War II generation that holds the strongest levels of confidence in the
civil service. Overall, then, in the context of attitudes toward various political institutions, these generational patterns suggest that the youngest cohort is not exceptional in its negativism. Rather, though it may harbour disaffection about the nation’s key political institutions, these perceptions are broadly shared with those in the two generations that precede it.

Figures 4 – 5 about here

Figure 6-8 display differences in self-reported political interest and political activities across the cohorts in each nation. As expected, political interest (Figure 6A) and voting (Figure 6B) were lowest in the youngest cohort. In most nations we see a monotonic relationship between age group and political interest, and between age group and having voted in the most recent elections. With each successive cohort respondents were generally less interested and less likely to vote than were members of the post-WWII generation.

However, though the youngest cohort has the weakest levels of political interest and commitment to voting, other political avenues seem to prompt engagement with the youngest citizens of many nations—patterns of alternative political involvement that are consistent with Dalton’s (2009) argument that the newest generations remain engaged with political activity, albeit in different forms than their predecessors. While younger cohorts were least likely to vote, in most of these nations, respondents from the Sixties, Liberalization, and Gen-9/11 cohorts were significantly more likely to have signed a petition, participated in a demonstration, and joined in boycotts than were members of the post-WWII generation. The differences across cohorts, moreover, are largely non-monotonic. In many nations, respondents from the 1960s cohort and the Liberalization cohort appear to have (roughly) similarly greater likelihoods of signing petitions, demonstrating, and boycotting than people in the post-WWII cohort. The oldest generation, coming of age before or during WWII, stands out as especially likely not to have participated in these ways.

We also see some notable differences across nations here. In Europe and Canada, respondents from the post 1950s cohorts appear systematically more engaged with these (non-voting, non-duty oriented) political activities than respondents from older cohorts. However, in the other English-speaking democracies examined here, people from the post-1950s cohorts were significantly less likely to sign petitions, no more likely to demonstrate, and in Australia, Britain, and New Zealand, no more likely to boycott. These results are interesting, given that Dalton (2009) described his “engaged citizen” dimension of citizenship in terms of younger cohorts observed in the U.S. Our results from Europe and Canada provide support for the idea that recent generations are engaged with politics in different ways, and using different avenues of expression and engagement than those used by previous generations. At the same time, results from most English-speaking democracies suggest that the decline in traditional political engagement, reflected in such things as political interest and voting, is not being offset by other, non-traditional, forms of political activity.

Figures 6 – 8 about here

When estimating attitudes about democracy, and political activity, the most robust effect we find is for formal education. With the attitudes reported in Table 1, in nearly every nation education is strongly associated with each pro-democratic response. The single exception to this is when we examine attitudes about having “experts” decide things. In Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S., education was not associated with opposition to having experts decide what is best. However, as noted above, it is not clear that item is well-suited for measuring anti-democratic sentiments, and may, perhaps, merely reflect an increasing desire for the complexities of such policies as economic stabilization and global climate change.
to be addressed by experts and not professional politicians. Education was also strongly and consistently associated with political interest and with every political activity reported in Table 3, with just one exception—higher education was not associated with signing petitions in New Zealand.

The relationship between education and confidence in political institutions (displayed in Table 2) is a bit less clear. In most nations, education was associated with greater confidence in government, parties, parliament, and the civil service. Recall, per Norris (2011), that these confidence items may reflect assessments of the performance of institutions more than acceptance (or rejection) of democratic principles. This may explain why education is less consistently associated with confidence in political institutions. In two nations (Germany and the U.S.), there was an inverse relationship between education and confidence in government, with no association in Italy, Australia, and Sweden. Americans and Germans with more education were also less confident in political parties, with no relationship between education and confidence in parties in Canada, Finland, and Sweden. Educated Germans were also less confident in the civil service and (along with Australians with higher education), less confident in Parliament. There was no link between education and confidence in the civil service in Italy, Switzerland, and the U.S., nor any link between education and confidence in parliament in Canada, France, Switzerland, and the U.S. Apart from these few exceptions, education was consistently the most consequential variable for predicting attachments to democracy and engagement with politics.

Conclusion

We began our analysis by taking note of the different circumstances faced by youth who come of age in emerging democracies and in long-established democracies. In the former, young people learn about democratic values and norms as democracy is being implemented; older generations, including the parents and grandparents of the youngest citizens, have typically experienced only non-democratic forms of government. In this situation, one would not be surprised to find marked contrasts in the views of the newest generation and those that came of age earlier. In contrast, most young people in established democracies have experienced nothing but democracy, suggesting that there should be no systematic differences in the views of older and younger individuals. Yet recent work has called this into question—suggesting instead that youths in developed democracies, at least in the 21st century world, have developed contempt for or certainly indifference toward democratic processes and institutions.

Our analysis of attitudes and behaviour in long-established European and Anglo-American democracies finds strong support for the view that the attitudes and behaviour of recent generations of youths differ in significant ways from those of their elders. The most striking differences are with respect to attitudes toward democracy—because of their magnitude and consistency and their possible implications, but also because there are suggestions that the differences are in fact generational rather than disguised life-cycle variations.

Whether with respect to general sentiments about the importance of democracy or approval of such anti-democratic ideas as army rule, respondents in more recent cohorts were significantly less likely than the post-World War II cohort to offer responses supportive of democracy. The general pattern of weaker support for pro-democratic responses among young cohorts is especially strong in English-speaking nations, though it characterises youth in European nations as well, with occasional exceptions (e.g., that the youngest respondents in The Netherlands and Finland are the most satisfied with the current functioning of democracy).
The youngest generation often stands out as especially inclined not to value democratic principles and practices. In some instances, the difference from the post-war generation to the youngest cohort changes almost linearly across the age groups. Primary examples are responses in the English-speaking democracies to the principles articulated in Figure 1A. Yet on many of the “democracy” items, this pattern does not hold, supporting the notion that the differences stem from coming-of-age and other effects rather than ordinary life-cycle factors.

With respect to confidence in institutions, cohort differences are much less systematic. There are occasional patterns that suggest cohort-specific effects, and the oldest generation often stands out as most positive in its judgments despite recognition of the post-WWII generation for its high sense of civic duty. The youngest cohort, in particular, is not exceptional in its views about democratic institutions. Though it has negative opinions about some of the nation’s key political institutions, these perceptions are broadly shared with those in the two generations that precede it.

Unsurprisingly, political interest and voting were lowest in the youngest cohort, an outcome that has been observed often and can be attributed mostly to life-cycle effects. Non-traditional and non-institutionalized forms of activity often show more activity by the youngest generation. But what is most significant is that the differences across cohorts are largely non-monotonic. In many nations, respondents from the 1960s cohort and the Liberalization cohort have somewhat comparable likelihoods of signing petitions, demonstrating, and boycotting, all of them greater than individuals in the post-WWII cohort. Moreover, results from most English-speaking democracies suggest that the decline in traditional political engagement (here, political interest and voting), is not being offset by other, non-traditional, forms of political activity. Modes of political behaviour have changed, to be sure, but the change has not come recently or only in the post-911 generation.

What overarching message can one draw from these results? That is far from clear, as predicting the future, even with presumed generational changes in view, is always hazardous. What is clear, however, is that new generations in established democracies cannot be presumed to have attitudes supportive of democratic values and in opposition to alternative views that are antithetical to democracy. Like the youth of emerging democracies, new adults in long-standing democracies may actively have to learn about democracy. We cannot count on young people absorbing democratic values simply because they have lived in a democracy their entire (pre-adult) lives. This may well have happened with previous generations. But the world has changed, and a thorough understanding of and deep-rooted commitment to democracy—even in countries with a long democratic tradition—may now require a more conscious effort if we are to pass it along to subsequent generations of new adults.
Figures 1A and 1B: Attitudes toward Democracy

Note: Each column represents the regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favorable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. Fig. 1A measures “importance of living in a democracy” using a 10-point scale; Fig. 1B uses four-point scale to measure attitudes about the democratic system, from “very good” to “very bad.”

Source: 2005 World Values Survey
* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figures 2A and 2B: Attitudes toward Authoritarian Alternatives

Note: Each column represents the regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. All items are on a four-point scale from “very good” to “very bad.”

Source: 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figures 3A and 3B: Attitudes toward a Non-Democratic Alternative and Satisfaction with Democracy

**Having Experts Rule is a Good Thing**

![Graph showing attitudes towards experts rule being a good thing](image)

**Satisfied with Democracy**

![Graph showing satisfaction with democracy](image)

**Note:** Each column represents the regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. Fig. 3A uses a four-point scale from “very good” to “very bad;” Fig. 3B uses a four-point scale, from “not at all satisfied” to “very satisfied.”

**Sources:** Fig. 3A: 2005 World Values Survey; Fig. 3B: 2005 CSES

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figures 4A and 4B: Confidence in Government and Political Parties

Confidence in Government

Confidence in Political Parties

Note: Each column represents the regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. All items are on a four-point scale from “none at all” to “a great deal.”

Source: 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figures 5A and 5B: Confidence in Parliament and the Civil Service

**Confidence in Parliament**

Note: Each column represents the regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. All items are on a four-point scale from “none at all” to “a great deal.”

Source: 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1

**Confidence in the Civil Service**

Note: Each column represents the regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. All items are on a four-point scale from “none at all” to “a great deal.”

Source: 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figures 6A and 6B: Interest in Politics and Vote in Last Election

Interest in Politics

Voted in Last Election

Note: Each column in represents the regression coefficient (in Fig. 6A) and the logistic regression coefficient (in Fig. 6B) for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. Fig 6A uses a four-point scale from “not at all interested” to “very interested.” Figure 6B uses a two-point reply: “yes” or “no.”

Source: 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figures 7A and 7B: Signed Petitions and Attended Demonstrations

**Note:** Each column represents the logistic regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favourable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. Both figures use a two-point response: “have done” or “have not done” in the last five years.

**Source:** 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Figure 8: Joined Boycotts

Note: Each column represents the logistic regression coefficient for a given cohort (based on the multivariate model described in the text). It represents the degree to which that cohort is more favorable than the reference cohort (Post-WWII) to the question in the figure heading. The figure uses a two-point response: “have done” or “have not done” in the last five years.

Source: 2005 World Values Survey

* = p < .05; + = p < .1
Table 1: Democratic Attitudes in Advanced Democracies

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Having a democratic system&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Important to live in a democracy&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Democracy best form of government&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Having the army rule&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Satisfaction with democracy&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Having a strong leader&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<sup>a</sup> WVS: Percentage saying this is a very good or good way of governing this country.
<sup>b</sup> WVS: Mean value on a 1-10 scale, where 1 = not at all important, and 10 = absolutely important.
<sup>c</sup> CSES: Percentage who agree strongly or agree.
<sup>d</sup> CSES: Percentage who are very satisfied or satisfied.

Sources: WVS = World Values Surveys, 2005-2006; CSES = Comparative Study of Electoral Systems
Table 2: Confidence in Political Institutions in Advanced Democracies

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<th>Government^a</th>
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</table>

^a WVS: Percentage saying a great deal or quite a lot of confidence.

^b CSES: Percentage who responded that corruption was very widespread.

Sources: WVS = World Values Surveys, 2005-2006; CSES = Comparative Study of Electoral Systems
Table 3: Political Engagement and Activities in Advanced Democracies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Signed a petition&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Demonstrate&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Boycott&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<sup>a</sup> WVS: Percentage very interested and interested  
<sup>b</sup> WVS: Percentage who reported voting in last election  
<sup>c</sup> WVS: Percent who have done this  
<sup>d</sup> CSES: Percentage responding yes

*Sources*: WVS = World Values Surveys, 2005-2006; CSES = Comparative Study of Electoral Systems
References


Dalton, Russell, Scott C. Flanagan, Paul A. Beck, and James E. Alt. 1984. Electoral Change in


Appendix
Variable Codes, Scales and Measures

Dependent Variables

Political Attitudes

DEMIMP A 10-fold variable for the respondent’s perceived importance of living in a country that is governed democratically. 0= not at all important; 10=absolutely important. (Original 2005 World Values Survey item: V138).

DEMGOOD A 4-fold variable for attitudes toward different types of political systems as a “way of governing this country:” “Having a democratic political system”. 1= very bad; 2=fairly bad; 3=fairly good; 4=very good. (V151).

STRONG A 4-fold variable for attitudes toward different types of political systems as a “way of governing this country:” “Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections.” 1= very bad; 2=fairly bad; 3=fairly good; 4=very good. (V148).

ARMY A 4-fold variable for attitudes toward different types of political systems as a “way of governing this country:” “Having the army rule.” 1= very bad; 2=fairly bad; 3=fairly good; 4=very good. (V150).

EXPERTS A 4-fold variable for attitudes toward different types of political systems as a “way of governing this country:” “Having experts, not government, make decision according to what they think is best for the country.” 1= very bad; 2=fairly bad; 3=fairly good; 4=very good. (V148).

Confidence in Political Institutions

GOV_CONF A 4-fold variable for confidence in the government (in the nation’s capital). 1= none at all; 2=not very much; 3=quite a lot; 4=a great deal. (V138).

PARTY_CONF A 4-fold variable for confidence in the political parties. 1= none at all; 2=not very much; 3=quite a lot; 4=a great deal. (V139).

PARL_CONF A 4-fold variable for confidence in parliament. 1= none at all; 2=not very much; 3=quite a lot; 4=a great deal. (V140).

CIVSER_CONF A 4-fold variable for confidence in the civil service. 1= none at all; 2=not very much; 3=quite a lot; 4=a great deal. (V141).

Political Interest and Activities

INTEREST A 4-fold variable for level of interest in politics. 1= not at all interested; 2=not very interested; 3=somewhat interested; 4=very interested. (V95).

PETITION A 3-fold variable for signing a petition “as a political action that people can take.” 1= would never do; 2=might do; 3=have done. (V96).

BOYCOTT A 3-fold variable for joining in boycotts “as a political action that people can take.” 1= would never do; 2=might do; 3=have done. (V97).

DEMONST A 3-fold variable for attending peaceful demonstrations “as a political action that people can take.” 1= would never do; 2=might do; 3=have done. (V98).
VOTE  A dummy variable for voted in the nation’s last elections.  1 = yes; 0 = no.  (V234)

Demographics

FEMALE  A dummy variable for respondent’s gender: 1 = female; 0 = male (V235)
EDUC  A 9-value variable for respondent’s level of education: 1 = no formal education; 9 = university education, with degree.  (V238)
V68  A 10-value variable for respondent’s satisfaction with “the financial situation of your household:” 1 = completely dissatisfied; 10 = completely satisfied.  (V68)
SUB_INCOME  A 10-value variable for respondent’s perception of what income decile their household income belongs in: 1 = lowest decile; 10 = highest decile.  (V253)
CLASS  A 5-fold variable for respondent’s self-identified social class: 1 = upper class; 2 = upper middle class; 3 = lower middle class; 4 = working class; 5 = lower class.  (V252)

Generations

For details on the five generational cohorts used in this paper, see Figure A (available from authors; to be presented at IPSA panel).