

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Royal Holloway, University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Political inclusion among low participation groups in British Democracy: Transforming the political agenda to change government policy		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Oliver Heath James Sloam	Professor of Politics Professor of Politics	2008-date 2005-date
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Democracy rests on the ideal of political equality. Yet in British democracy some groups receive more attention than others: research from the Democracy and Elections Centre shows that working class, low income and young people have been marginalized and alienated from the political process in general and electoral politics in particular. Heath and Sloam have collaborated extensively with NGOs (including Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Intergenerational Foundation and BitetheBallot), political parties (Labour and Conservative), and government officials at the National and Regional level to put the concerns of low income voters and young people on the formal political agenda. These efforts transformed public and civil society debate, re-ordered the formal political agenda, and helped change government policy: (i) the Greater London Authority (GLA) introduced new initiatives to enhance youth voice in the Mayor's Young Londoners Fund [worth GBP45,000,000 per annum]; and (ii) the Conservatives lifted the benefit freeze at the 2019 General Election, directly affecting 500,000 people at risk of poverty.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>This impact case study draws on core research centred on inequalities in political participation and representation from the Democracy and Elections Centre at Royal Holloway University of London. Heath and Sloam's complementary research, published in leading national and international peer-reviewed journals, shows how low participation groups (with particular reference to the working class, those on low incomes, and young people with low educational attainment) are incorporated within the political system; how and why they vote, the level, type, and effectiveness of their political participation, how their interests and needs are represented and responded to by policy-makers, and how these dimensions of political participation and representation have changed over time.</p> <p>Heath's research into the political marginalization of the working class [R.1, R.3] established an important milestone: that in 2010 class was more important in determining whether people voted or not than it was in determining which party they supported. While an age-gap in turnout is widely recognised [R.5, R.6]; the class-gap (of similar magnitude) had received far less attention. This challenged the old idea that a decline in class voting signified 'the successful resolution by political systems of deep-seated conflicts of social interests', and showed that the working class had not become incorporated within the political system but instead become more marginalised from it. This research also showed that growing working class alienation represented 'fertile territory for populist parties' - which if harnessed could see working class turnout increase again. In the wake of Brexit, the political implications of this became more widely apparent as turnout was highest, and support for Brexit greatest, in places where these groups were most numerous [R2]. Building on this research, to investigate how mainstream parties could reconnect with working class voters, Heath with Matthew Goodwin (Kent) authored five reports for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF; 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020) based on original data analysis of high-quality survey data from the British Election Study. These reports developed 'key</p>		

messages' for JRF to deploy the new empirical data in their campaigns aimed at political parties in Britain.

Sloam's research focuses on youth political engagement and the relationship between education and political participation [R.4, R.5 and R.6]. Whilst previous research had focussed on inter-generational inequalities in political engagement, Sloam's research identified sharp intra-generational inequalities in participation. It further highlighted very low levels of engagement amongst young people of low socio-economic status, and a lack of 'contact' between young people and politicians and officials in the UK (in contrast to elsewhere in Europe). Subsequent work provides examples of how youth engagement could be fostered through political contact and new forms of political communication [R.4 and R.6] – the mobilisation of younger generations through citizen-to-citizen contact and engagement with issues that hold meaning for their everyday lives (rather than broad policy agendas). Furthermore, this research demonstrated that participatory research, using young people as researchers, can facilitate deeper understandings of youth issues (particularly amongst disadvantaged groups) through providing deliberative spaces for civic learning [R.5 and R.6]. These insights have led to co-produced original research with NGOs, such as the Intergenerational Foundation, BitetheBallot, and with the GLA.

### 3. References to the research

- R1. Heath, O. (2018) 'Policy alienation, social alienation and working class abstention in Britain, 1964-2010' *British Journal of Political Science* 48 (4): 1053-1073. [published online in 2016]. Q1: Google scholar 47 citations. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123416000272](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000272).
- R2. Goodwin, M., and Heath, O. (2016). 'The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate-Level Analysis of the Result' *Political Quarterly* 87 (3): 323-332. GS 502 citations. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123413000318](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000318).
- R3. Heath, O. (2015) 'Policy representation, social representation and class voting in Britain' *British Journal of Political Science* 45 (1): 173-193. [published online in 2013]. Q1: 52 citations. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123413000318](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000318).
- R4. Sloam, J., & Henn, M. (2018). *Youthquake 2017: The Rise of Young Cosmopolitans in Britain*. Palgrave. 36 citations. Available from HEI on Request.
- R5. Sloam, J. (2014). 'New voice, less equal: The civic and political engagement of young people in the United States and Europe'. *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(5), 663-688. Q1: 163 citations. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453441>.
- R6. Sloam, J. (2018). '# Votebecause: Youth mobilisation for the referendum on British membership of the European Union'. *New Media & Society*, 20(11), 4017-4034. Q1: 9 citations. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818766701>.

The outputs are published in leading national and international peer-reviewed journals, with very low acceptance rates and have been widely cited. All co-authored work was produced equally.

### Funding 2016-2020

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Commissioned research on low income voters. Total value of projects: GBP100,000
- London Sustainable Development Commission funding to support research on 'Young Londoners and Sustainability' project: GBP7,000
- Research England Funding to support research (with the GLA) on 'Youth, Sustainability and Democracy' to follow-up on the previous collaboration: GBP19,200

### 4. Details of the impact

Research undertaken by Heath and Sloam at Royal Holloway has (i) co-produced new knowledge with NGOs over a sustained period of time and redirected NGO activities that (ii) transformed public and civil society debate and reordered the formal political agenda so that it pays more attention to the concerns of working class people, those on low incomes and young people, (iii) through these new debates and NGO activities, affected political actors so that they pay more attention to the concerns of people on low incomes and young people, and (iv) in two instances influenced significant policy change: the GLA introducing major new initiatives to enhance the youth voice in the Mayor's Young Londoners Fund [GBP45,000,000 funding 200 projects across London] and the Conservatives lifting the benefit freeze before the 2019 General Election, directly affecting 500,000 people at risk of being driven into poverty.

#### 4.1 Co-Production of new applied knowledge - and redirection of NGOs' activities.

A key impact of this research has been the co-production, with NGOs, of new applied knowledge leading to a re-direction of organisational focus and strategic priorities within social change organisations. As a leading expert on socioeconomic inequalities and political participation, Heath's sustained relationship with the JRF started with an invitation to join the JRF Advisory board in 2016; and developed over time, culminating with his work underpinning the launch of an influential new JRF campaign in 2019. This campaign **increased political interest in people on low incomes and at risk of poverty**, and highlighted the issues that they cared about in order to encourage parties to reconnect with them [E.2]. Prior to this campaign, there was no non-partisan movement for people in poverty to articulate their needs and interests on the national stage, resulting in political parties claiming to speak for them. JRF were keen to address this mis-representation [E.2]. Heath produced five original research reports for the JRF which provided a new evidential base for the political attitudes and voting behaviour of people on low incomes [E.1], published after the 2016 EU Referendum, the 2017 GE (including a separate report on Scotland), and before and after the 2019 GE. The JRF Executive Director states: these reports have 'been completely central to the campaign' to make a significant public intervention by JRF to persuade the UK political parties to focus on voters on a low income and the policies that would make a difference to their lives [E.2]. And 'the fact that JRF was able to engage senior politicians and commentators in this as a field...needed really high-quality research to add something new into the debate [E.2].

Similarly, working with NGOs Sloam has directly **shaped the practices and priorities of youth-centred organisations to foster youth engagement in politics**. He has written reports for the United Nations (World Youth Report 2017) and the Intergenerational Foundation (also serving on the advisory board since 2010) and co-produced research with BitetheBallot (who nominated him as a research fellow for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation, on which he served (2015 to 2019)). Sloam led the BitetheBallot Voter Advice Application (VAA) steering group, and his research played an essential part in the development of a VAA (with the think-tank, Demos) used by over [text removed for publication] of those between the ages of 18 and 25) in the run-up to the 2015 General Election. His research also underpinned the development of a BitetheBallot App to gamify key sustainability-related issues to better develop young Londoners' understanding of these issues, which attracted approximately [text removed for publication] (young) users in the Greater London area in 2019 [E.8]. Sloam's work also empowered young people in a new GLA project through the development of ideas for peer networks amongst young Londoners (e.g. through youth mayors) and participatory research (using young people as researchers). Sloam's sustained interaction with the GLA, keynotes to policy makers and meetings with the Peer Outreach team, led to the development of a youth-led methodology (including in-depth interviews and deliberative focus groups) run by young people with fellow young Londoners from deprived backgrounds, and captured the diversity of youth opinion through a bespoke n=2,002 survey of 16 to 24 year olds (no such large-scale survey of youth opinion had been previously carried out in the capital). The [text removed for publication]."[E.6]

#### 4.2 Changing public, civil society, and political debate to give more attention to low participation groups

Heath and Sloam's research has made a significant contribution to the national conversation, pushing the issues facing people on low incomes and young people further up public and political agendas. Research on youth political engagement [R4] **played a central role in the 'youthquake' debate** after the 2017 UK election. The [text removed for publication] of the Intergenerational Foundation described the research as '[text removed for publication]' [E.3]. Research into working class representation [R1, R3] and the under-representation of working class MPs was reported in *The Guardian* [circulation: 127,000], the *New Statesmen* [c. 37,000] and discussed on BBC Radio 4 – media fora that connected with politicians and provoked political debate. The senior Labour MP Angela Rayner MP responded by saying "people will get

more and more angry at the price of democracy that they see doesn't affect them." A Parliament full of "solicitors, barristers" will appear "an exclusive club" [E4]. With Jonathan Ashworth MP stating that Labour need to do more to connect with voters: "the Labour party needs to increase its efforts to find candidates who come from the communities we want to represent. That is more working-class, female and more black and ethnic minority candidates [E.4]". The co-produced reports with the JRF were referenced over 300 times in the media [E.4], including in outlets such as the *BBC* [online readership 438,000,000 per week], *Sky*, *The Sun* [circulation 1,200,000 million], *The Daily Mail* [c. 1,100,000 million], *The Daily Telegraph* [c. 360,000], *The Daily Mirror* [c. 509,000] and *The Daily Express* [c. 290,000] [5.2] and informed journalists' coverage of the 2019 election. The political columnist at *The Times* [c. 360,000] used the research to make the case that 'low income voters will decide the next election' and that the 'Tory message must move beyond Brexit' [E.9].

#### 4.3 Changing the political agenda to increase attention to the concerns of people on low incomes and young people

Through these pathways, Heath and Sloam's research has made a significant contribution to high level policy debate and pushed the **political inclusion of people on low incomes and young people** up the political agenda. In the run up to the 2019 General Election, JRF used Heath's findings in a number of activities to campaign for policy change [E.2]. These included fringe events on 'low income voters' at party conferences in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (with ConHome and Labour List), along with private briefings for senior Conservative politicians and advisers including those drafting the 2019 manifesto, a briefing for centre-right journalists and thinkers to disseminate the findings, and a briefing for Labour MPs in parliament on the research findings [E.2]. The JRF conclude that this messaging was successful and that there was 'more attention during the 2019 GE campaign on the topic of low-income voters' and that without the JRF's intervention party targeting of voters 'could have been to the exclusion of people on a low income' [E.2]. Heath also gave briefings to Scottish Labour MPs in Westminster in 2017, Labour MPs in Westminster in 2019, and Keir Starmer's leadership team on zoom in 2020. A senior Labour MP said '[text removed for publication]' [E.5]. Heath's research was also cited in the Labour Together 2019 Election Review, reflecting on the causes of their defeat.

The group have also influenced youth engagement strategies. Sloam's research report for the Intergenerational Foundation was presented to a cross-party group of MPs in Westminster. This led Conservative MP Ben Bradley (then, Conservative Party vice-chair with responsibility for youth policy) to declare that the Conservatives had a lot of work to do in their appeal to young people. Sloam's research was also "[text removed for publication]" [E.8]. Sloam's youth-centred research has also transformed policy debate and practitioner behaviour in the GLA. According to the [text removed for publication], the research played a 'central role' in putting youth voice on the political agenda and 'convinced' the GLA to offer **youth-oriented solutions to pressing sustainability policy challenges** [E.6]. This directly resulted in the production of a youth engagement Handbook for GLA policy-makers [E.6]. The Handbook provides a detailed training manual on how to integrate young people's views into the policy-making process so that their participation is not tokenistic. In citing the importance and influence of this work, senior policy makers from the GLA note '[text removed for publication]' [E.6]. Sloam's research is also shaping the GLA's response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. In June 2020 and October 2020, he delivered keynote addresses to audiences of approximately 100 policy-makers in the GLA. Senior policy makers in the GLA said: '[text removed for publication]' [E.6].

#### 4.4 Changing government priorities and policies towards people on low incomes and young people

Heath and Sloam's research changed government policy. Sloam's research has made a significant difference to policies that affect young Londoners lives; empowering them in the decision making process by enhancing youth voice in the Mayor's Young Londoners Fund. Sloam's 2019 research project with the GLA led directly to the invitation of young Londoners to City Hall to shape the priorities for the Young Londoners Fund and discuss what they felt was

missing in the youth sector (using the same deliberative methods from Sloam's project). The Peer Outreach Team, then, invited 15 young Londoners from youth organisations to help evaluate proposals. Based on Sloam's policy briefings the GLA adopted Sloam's recommendations for **improving youth voice amongst young Londoners** more generally. The cornerstone of these changes is the use of young people in the co-production of policy-making in 'a collaborative work plan' to ensure that the fund is 'youth centred'. This involved setting up discussion networks of young Londoners to evaluate proposals and projects co-ordinated by the Peer Outreach Team (supported by the Handbook referred to above) [E.6]. As a result of this work, Sloam is collaborating with the OECD on a new international project to enhance youth voice in government decision making more widely [E.7].

JRF Executive Director says that **Heath's research has 'been absolutely central' to one of their most successful ever policy interventions [to lift the freeze on welfare benefits]** and that they feel that it is a reasonable claim that the research contributed to party positioning and policy impact [E.2]. The JRF took a leading role in the campaign to lift the benefits freeze and was cited in 49 different debates on the topic in the House of Commons and House of Lords [E.10]. Labour MP Margaret Greenwood MP said "The benefit freeze increases poverty. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the freeze is set to drive almost 500,000 more people into poverty by 2020" [E.10]. The JRF had well-established relationships with senior Conservative politicians; what they lacked was the high-quality research - and a campaigning message - to add something new into the debate [E.2]. The low-income voter briefings based on Heath's reports that JRF carried out in October 2019 was the critical opportunity to raise the issue with politicians in a position to act. On 3 November the government announced to the Sunday media that it would be lifting the benefit freeze [E.2]. According to the JRF Executive Director, here was 'a positive indication that we can use curated research and engagement to highlight the action that would make a difference now, and to see action, that makes a difference to people on low incomes' [E.2]. This line of impact is ongoing and the political value of the research is evident in JRF's most recent 'Keep the Lifeline campaign', which argues for a permanent extension of the increases to Universal Credit brought in as a response to Covid, with early indications being that the Government is now actively considering the move in response to pressure from MPs that JRF cultivated by referring back to Heath's research [E.9].

##### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- E1. The five reports are published on the JRF website available at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/contact/oliver-heath> and formed the cornerstone of the JRF campaign 'Every vote counts: winning over low income voters'. Available at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/every-voter-counts-winning-over-low-income-voters>
- E2. Written testimony from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Executive Director.
- E3. Written testimony from the Intergenerational Foundation [text removed for publication]
- E4. Media reports and coverage of Heath's work
- E5. Private correspondence from a senior Labour MP
- E6. Written statements from the GLA, including the [text removed for publication] of Health, Education and Youth, and Peer Outreach Workers at the GLA
- E7. Written testimony from OECD Public Governance Team.
- E8. Written testimony from Bite the Ballot and the APPG on Democratic Participation.
- E9. Written testimony from JRF Deputy Director of External Affairs
- E10. Written transcripts from Hansard between 2016 and 2020