

# Young people and politics: Off-line social actions and digital activism

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/05/13/young-people-and-politics-off-line-social-actions-and-digital-activism/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/05/13/young-people-and-politics-off-line-social-actions-and-digital-activism/)

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**Jessica Di Paolo on the “Digital Activism” session from Polis 2015 Conference, 27 March.  
Speakers: Bart Cammaerts (chair), Laura Townshend, Michael Sani and Will Moy**

Engaging young people and making them more enthusiastic about politics has been one of the main topics discussed during #GE2015. The lack of confidence in politicians and the general apathy towards UK politics have led to the rise of interactive tools that aim at making politics more appealing and connected with the real needs and voices of younger citizens.

During the panel ‘Digital activism and information project’ at the LSE Polis conference, Michael Sani, Laura Townshend and Will Moy outlined both offline strategies and digital projects to inspire young voters to participate in the political process.

What I found interesting is the idea of combining social platforms with offline social actions. As pointed out by Michael Sani – co-founder of [Bite The Ballot](#) – the internet can be a powerful tool to encourage citizens to participate but, at the same time, there remains the need for offline social actions.

## Verto

[Verto](#) is a web application that helps potential voters to understand the political parties’ policies and values, as well as the key points of the most discussed issues of the 2015 election. But, most importantly, it makes politics easy: by simply answering to some questions about relevant topics such as education, health, jobs and works, users are able to better understand their own political orientation as well as gain a broad overview of the values and policies of the parties in competition. Through an interactive infrastructure that recalls the social networks’ design – like, dislike, share, comment – Verto both informs and guides young people into the political process in a fast and digital way. “I think that digital tools act as catalyst of the democratic evolution. The problem is not apathy – people do care about politics – it is the lack of education”, explains Sani by describing how the application works.

“Young people’s voices matter”, #beheard, “Empowering young people” all may seem just abstract slogans. But through the combination of digital tools and face-to-face conversations, the risk of not being heard online will be minimised. This is why Sani underlines the need of setting up off-line meeting points around the country. Discussing politics in coffee shops, cafes, or pubs might increase the sense of community engagement that, according to Sani, “is essential to engage people”.

## Power at 38 Degrees

While Verto is focused on engaging younger citizens in the political process, [38 degrees](#) provides a new concept of campaigning. With the Web 2.0 revolution and the high level of online politics mediatisation, traditional forms of political participation have completely changed their nature in order to fit the new digital age. And 38 degrees is an example. As Laura Townshend rightly says:



*“This election is different from 2010 and the past elections because of the media multi-channel presence. Especially social media is used to both help people to have local meetings with politicians and to give members the chance to push their concerns and issues.”*

38 Degrees philosophy is to make people feel that they have the power and the right to be heard regardless of social and political status. Being a member of the 38 Degrees community means discussing, voting, and deciding which issues to campaign for and how to take action: signing petitions, emailing or phoning MPs, or organising face-to-face conversations with politicians about specific issues. The internet is an amazing and effective tool in facilitating social and community engagement. But still, offline social actions need to be considered as a crucial element to increase participation.

### **Why we need fact-checkers**

But who is going to check what the media and politicians say online? The information project [Full Fact](#) aims at fact-checking politicians' and journalists' claims in order to give people the chance to judge for themselves if they can trust them or not. In the age of information overload when it is difficult to check all the information available – especially after the spread of new media platforms – I believe we need more projects like Full Fact. If we keep complaining that politicians are liars, that the media provide a distorted view of reality, and that journalists are clever manipulators, we don't see the solutions that could help to create a more transparent and fair information society. Also, as the director Will Moy underlines, to stop the spread of inaccurate information, it is necessary to combine digital tools that check potential mistakes with the work of journalists and editors to ensure that all mistakes will be quickly corrected.

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### **Digital activism and information projects**

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