



**Young people and political
participation:**
**Defining the role of young
people in politics**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	4
CHAPTER 1	<u>Introduction</u>
	1.1 The world review: young people and political participation
	5
	1.2 What makes young people uninterested?
	7
	1.3 How to make young people interested
	8
	1.4 The research objectives
	8
	1.5 The research questions
	9
	1.6 Relevance and justification
	9
	1.7 Methodology
	10
	1.8 The outline
	11
	1.9 conclusions
	12
CHAPTER 2	<u>Young people and political participation: literature review</u>
	2.1 Defining young people
	13
	2.2 What is political participation?
	14
	2.3 The case of England
	16
	2.3.1 The case of the Caribbean
	18
	2.3.2 The case of Northern Ireland
	19
	2.4 The Variables
	20
	2.4.1 Religion
	21
	2.4.2 The influence of the parents
	22
	2.4.3 Youth focused
	22
	2.4.4 A politics focused system
	23
	2.4.5 Education
	23
	2.4.6 The media
	23
	2.4.7 The method : p/P
	24

	2.5 Conclusion	24
CHAPTER 3	<u>Suriname and politics: the history</u>	
	3.1 Introduction	25
	3.2 Young people and participation in politics: a retrospective view	27
	3.3 conclusions	28
CHAPTER 4	<u>The results: young people and participation in politics</u>	
	4.1 Introduction	29
	4.2 The media	30
	4.3 Education	31
	4.4 Influence of the parents	31
	4.5 Youth focused and a politics focused system	32
	4.6 Religion	33
	4.7 Conclusion	34
CONCLUSION		36
RECCOMENDATIONS		39
REFERENCES		40
NOTES		42

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCYD	CARICOM COMMISSION ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
WFDY	WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH
UNESCO	UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION
NYC	NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL
YP	YOUTH PARLIAMENT
NPS	NATIONALE PARTIJ SURINAME
DOE	DEMOCRATIE EN ONTWIKKELING IN EENHEID
NDP	NATIONALE DEMOCRATISCHE PARTIJ
PSV	PROGRESSIEVE SURINAAMSE VOLKSPARTIJ
VHP	VERENIGDE HERVORMINGS PARTIJ
KTPI	KAUM TANI PERSAUTUAN INDONESIA
PvF	POLITIEKE VLEUGEL VAN DE FEDERATIE VAN AGRARIERS EN LANDARBEIDERS
DA91	DEMOCRATISCH ALTERNATIEF 91
DNP 2000	DEMOCRATISCH NATIONAAL PLATFORM 2000
D21	DEMOCRATEN VAN DE 21STE EEUW
BVD	BASIS PARTIJ VOOR VERNIEUWING EN DEMOCRATIE
HPP	HERNIEUWDE PROGRESSIEVE PARTIJ
APS	AMAZONE PARTIJ SURINAME

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE WORLD REVIEW: YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Worldwide attention has been placed on young people and politics. This started in the years after the Second World War, both socialist and capitalist camps realized the power of young people in prosecuting the war and leading the struggle for peace (report CCYD 2009 11). After this period the following organizations were established: the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY) and the World Assembly of Youth and were sponsored by socialist and capitalist blocks (report CCYD 2009 11). In 1985 the UN adopted the World Program of Action for Youth to 2000 and beyond. The purpose of this program was to provide Member States with a policy framework for action especially for young people around ten areas: education, gender, poverty, drug abuse, environment, employment, health, delinquency, sports and leisure and participation in decision-making.

J. Mills (1999) mentioned that it is important that everyone has a voice in the government also young people. Having a voice in the government means participation. Participation is important because it contributes to the policy formulation process by increasing capacity to respond appropriately to the needs and aspirations of adolescents (report CCYD 2009 82). According to this report participation of young people is brought in relation with empowerment. For CCYD, empowerment of young people means the acknowledgement that young people have or can create choices in life, are aware of the implications and make informed decisions freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for actions (CCYD 2009).

Do young people worldwide have a voice in government?

According to T. Skelton (2009) some States perceive young people as competent, responsible and liable in some contexts, often in relation to criminal responsibility and in other cases as incompetent, irresponsible and unreliable for example to have sex, drive a car, vote in any elections, have a full-time job or leave compulsory education. With this

example Tracey Skelton wants make clear that there is a global inconsistency between young people's political rights and legally assumed responsibilities.

The report of CCYD acknowledges the fact that there is not a precise structure how to place the role of young people in politics. Pirie and Worcester (2000) mentioned that young people are apolitical, because they have little knowledge of politics. O'Toole, Marsch and Jones (2003) mentioned that young people are apolitical because they are excluded from or marginalized within mainstream politics. They also mentioned that the perspectives and concerns of young people are not represented in politics and that in some States central government does not listen to them.

The global development of young people did have some great impact in the formation of the countries policy. An example of this is the World Program of action for youth to 2000 and beyond, where certain topics such as education, gender, poverty and environment should been implanted in their policy framework. After all it did not change the fact that young people did not have a voice in government. The message of different researchers such as Marsch and Jones (2003), J.Mills (1999), T. Skelton (2009) and Pirie and Worcester (2000) is that young people do not have a voice in the decisions made by central government, which could lead to apathy of young people towards politics.

But there is also critic on the message of most of these studies and that message is that young people have apathy towards politics, because government and political parties do not engage them in politics. One of the critics is that most of these researchers have worked within a very narrow conception of formal politics. Formal politics mean politics that is concerned with the formal institutions of government, such as political parties and traditional forms of political behavior such as voting in elections, attending political meetings and membership of political organizations (Henn et al 2002). Roker and Eden (2002) and Roker et al (1999) mentioned that young do have a high level of volunteering, campaigning and participating in social activities, but these activities are not consider as political. This is why Roker and Eden (2002) developed a concept of constructive social participation. This concept encompassed a wide variety of social actions including formal voluntary work, informal community networks, neighborliness, informal political action, awareness-raising, and caring work at home and in the community through which young

people participate in their communities and influence policies and practices in the world around them.

Integrating the definitions of formal politics and constructive formal participation I formulated an integrated political/social concept for the recommendations for this research which is: young people should learn how to campaign and participate in social activities so they could integrate more in formal institutions of government, such as political parties, that this could lead to attending political meetings, voting in elections and membership of political party. With the end results of this research and answering the central question I integrated this concept and formulated the conclusions.

Nonetheless, the general message that youth in Suriname today are politically not interested seems to hold particular sway within academic and policy circles (Ministry for Internal Affairs, 2010). The biggest concern is how the older generations will be replaced by the younger generation, and that the legitimacy of the political system is itself therefore under threat (Mulgan and Wilkinson, 1997).

1.2 WHAT MAKES YOUNG PEOPLE UNINTERESTED

Henn, Weinstein and Wining (2005) mentioned that the reason that young people are not engaged with politics is because according to these writers politics does not reflect the perception of young people;

Pirie and Worcester (2000) wrote that young people of the present generation are an apolitical generation. They have little knowledge of politics at local and national level in relation to young people of the past generations;

O'Toole, Marsh and Jones (2003) mentioned that young people are excluded from or marginalized within mainstream politics because they are young; the perspectives and concerns of young people are not represented in politics; young people feel that anyone in authority, and especially in central government, is listening to them. They mentioned that they cannot influence politics, because they are poorly represented at national and local levels and with regard to decision and policy making. Young people are rarely consulted or listened to, even with respect to issues which directly affect them. Young people would not be taken seriously even if they were to participate in the discussions of decision making bodies.

1.3 HOW TO MAKE YOUNG PEOPLE INTERESTED

O'Toole, Marsh and Jones (2003): their advices were that politics should engage with young people and with the issues that affect and concern them. The Government should also listen more to young people.

Ginwirth and James (2002) advices the system of youth culture to involve youth politically. For example: integrate the message of politics in popular music like hip hop or create flyers with youthful graffiti art. These creations can encourage young people to vote and participate in the political process.

Tracey Skelton (2009) mentioned that young people must be accepted as political actors and not as political subjects 'in-waiting'. Tracey mentioned that there is **Political** and **political** and that young people have the capacity to blend and meld both types of politics simultaneously.

Cloonan and Street (1998), their advice was to use pop musicians and comedians to encourage young people to take part in politics. With this shift in thinking a new form was introduced which was 'Rock the Vote'; an example of the relationship between politics and popular culture.

1.4 THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main reason why I did this research is to examine the reasons why young people are interested or not interested in politics and in what ways could young people participate more in politics. The reasons are guidance for the contribution to widening the participation of young people in politics. The ultimate goal is to present advices to leaders of political parties and the government how to make young people participate in politics; because the dominant view shows that young people do not want to participate in politics.

The respondent 2¹ mentioned "that political leaders do not give you the spirit. They make promises they do not act up to them."

¹ The number of the respondent.

1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central question of this study is: *which indicators make that young people in Suriname or interested or uninterested to participate in politics?*

Sub-question: *what is the effect of these indicators for the participation of young people in politics?*

1.6 RELEVANCE AND JUSTIFICATION

In the past few years world wide many publications of important studies have been presented about young people's political participation. The reason behind this evolution is that there is a decline of young people in politics. Young people are becoming less interested in politics (wring et al, 1999; White et al, 2000; Henn et al, 2002). In Suriname the question of young people and their interest in politics is also a big issue, because in interviews with young people, most of them mentioned that they are not interested in politics. With the upcoming in elections on may the 25th 2010, the media and most political parties are presenting young leaders, with the ultimate goal to interest young people for politics, so that the young people could vote for them. But the question is, is that all? Are young leaders the answers? Could it be something else? What is it?

In an interview with several chairpersons of political parties of the youth division, I asked them to give an idea what they would have done to make young people interested in politics. As one interviewee said:

According to my opinion music is the key to make young people interested for politics.

Another interviewee said:

I think that you have to present leaders that have the same age as them and could understand and present their interests much better.

I am interested in this subject, because as a member of one of the political parties the *Nationale Partij Suriname (NPS)* I wanted to find out what the impact is of several reasons (education, religion, media, trust and confidence in members of the parliament and the influence of parents), on political participation and young people. The academic reason for this research is that there is not much research done about young people and their role in political participation in Suriname.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

The sources for this research are first of all the key persons which are the young people between 16-29 years, but a selection was made. What were the criteria for the selection?

- First of all the question was asked are you interested in politics? If the answer was yes then I wanted to know from which political party and then I did a small research² to find out if the answer was correct.
- The second criteria is if are not interested in politics, I asked the respondent how is opinion is on the issue politics. And there was certain information that I wanted to know and that is that in answer it was clearly stated that are not a member of a political party and that you are not interested to get involved in politics.
- The third criteria was if I asked the respondent if he wanted to participate as an key person in this research that is answer was yes and was willingly to participate.

The second sources are the indicative readings, which are published in the references. The readings materials are from the Internet and the library of Hans Lim A Po and the Anton de Kom University of Suriname.

The techniques which I used were: interviews, group interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were taken individually and the respondent has a number which starts with 1. The interviews were in-depth, what means that there was a question list, but during the interview there were questions asked which were derivative from the answer from the respondent. The identity of the respondents remains secret. The total amounts of respondents which are interviewed are 20.

The group interview was with 12 respondents. Six of them are interested in politics and six of them are uninterested in politics. There was a moderator who guided the group interview. The focus group discussion was with 6 respondents and was a mix of young people who are interested in politics and who are not interested. With this strategy I wanted to counter the answers of both groups (the interested and not interested in politics) and it was a success, because the presented ideas were interesting and useful.

The theoretical part of this paper is exploratory and descriptive. In this part different views of countries are presented, with these different views a framework is presented of

² I informed at the secretariat of the political party if the respondent is a member (Does he/she have a registered form) and if the respondent is an active member (is he/she participating in one of the formal structure of the political party).

the different variables which were used for the empirical research. The information found on the bases of the variables is used as basic information for the empirical part. The empirical part is a critical analysis of the theoretical part and the information of the interviews, the group discussions and the focus group. The backgrounds of the respondents are:

- Students of the Anton de Kom University
- Students of secondary senior
- Employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Young people of political parties

The limitations which occur during the research were that I came in a time squeeze, because I was very sick. One main aspect that came to my attention during the research of this study is that although I am an active member of a political party, the key persons were spontaneous and my active role did not form an obstacle instead of that it was the opposite. The respondent did not show any fear in answering the questions, they made clear what really interested them and on the other hand what uninterested them when it comes to political participation on the basis of the variables.

1.8 THE OUTLINE

The main issues that are discussed and describe are: the role of young people in politics in different countries, political participation, what drives young people to be interested or not interested in politics in Suriname. The variables are: the media, education, youth focused, politics focused, influence of parents and religion and are the key elements of this study. The subject capital **P/p** politics and lower case **p/p** politics is examined as a method. The result is that a structure could be made were young people could get the opportunity to structure the participation in politics.

At the end an answer is given on the central question and the recommendations are presented.

1.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter is about the role of young people in politics worldwide. This chapter also presents to you the different ideas of researchers when it comes to young people and their role in political participation. The conclusion is that the issue of young people and political participation is an issue which is important for the government, political parties, and society and in political science. What was not clear in most of these studies which are chosen for this research is if this issue (young people and political participation) is also very important for young people themselves. Are they interested in politics, do they want to be part of politics why and how. In this study this point was an issues, I wanted to know if young people wants to be part of politics, but I did not asked them in what way they wanted to be part. I did not do that because during preliminary research it came clear that although young people are interested in politics and or not interested their history of politics of Suriname is very poor. I presented an answer to the question. In what way do they have to get involved in politics in both cases (interested or not interested in politics).

CHAPTER 2

YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1 DEFINING YOUNG PEOPLE

There are lots of research done about young people and their interest in politics and different definitions have been presented in these researches, but the one that attracts me most is that of James (1986). Why is it important to state a definition for young people? The reason for this is that during the preliminary research it came to sight that in Suriname in political history and present politics there is not a concrete definition of what is meant by young people. There is also no clear reason why it was never clearly stated, but the empirical situation show that the question of young people and their role in politics is one which is very important for political science.

According to James (1986) the legal definition of young people (youth) varies considerably when considering political, sexual, employment and legal rights and responsibilities, and rarely corresponds to the way in which youth is studied by academics. In general the government in Suriname uses the definition of the UNESCO when it comes to defining young people and that is 12 to 25 years. The political parties in Suriname do not have a concrete definition about young people. Almost all political parties have an under age of 16 years. But there is not a specific upper age limit when it comes to defining who young people are. Some of the political parties uses 35 years, others 32 years and there are others were there is no upper age limit. With this unclear situation, which could lead to different interpretation what and who are young people, I chose to make use of the international development and stated an upper age limit. James (1986) stated in his research that the political parties in England have defined young people, because of the fact that young people need to learn the essence of politics and must be granted the opportunity to grow within the political system.

In an email conversation with Dr. Mark Weinstein (April 2010) he mentioned in his letter the following:

“If an organization is going to style itself as for ‘young people’ then it really is necessary to put some sort of upper limit on membership. Part of this is about organizing events that are likely to be particularly attractive to young people and part of it is about creating an environment where they feel safe in their ability to learn about politics (party politics). If there are highly experienced members in their 30s or above, then this wouldn’t really work”. Taking this remark of Weinstein as the main guide for the definition of young people in this research I presented the following definition:

The definition of young people is: young people between 16-29 years, who are interested or not interested in politics.

The definition of young people who are interested in politics is: young people between 16-29 years who are a member of a political party and who play an active role in political organizations. The definition of young people who are not interested in politics is: young people between 16-29 years who are not a member of a political party and who do not have an active role in political organizations.

2.2 WHAT IS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION?

Political participation is according to Quintelier (2008) a very important issue because political participation enhances equal representation and democracy, but also because it enhances citizenship, a feeling of belonging, personal and societal development. Quintelier also mentioned in his study that it is important that young people participate in politics, because it has been proved that the adolescence is the key period when political attitudes as political participation are shaped. Political participation is important because it has a positive influence on the values of democracy and the society, but it also has positive effects on the personal development and attitudes of people (Quintelier, 2008: 5).

According to Kovacheva there is a narrow and a broader understanding of political participation. The narrow understanding limits civic participation to voting and the broader understanding is linked to a broader range of citizens’ involvement in politics. According to Dalton the success of democracy is largely measured by the public’s

participation in the process of decision making and responsiveness of the system to popular demands.

Norris (2002) mentioned that political participation has undergone a significant transformation, from the involvement of interest groups to new social movements, from conventional repertoires to protest politics, and from state orientation to a multiplicity of target agencies, both non-profit and private. For Quintelier (2008) political participation leads to

- A better democracy³
- A legitimate political system
- A personal development and
- A more trustful society.

Why do persons participate in politics⁴?

There are three reasons:

- First of all party identification: the psychological attachment that a citizen may feel toward a particular political party
- The second one is political efficacy: a person's sense of being able to accomplish something politically
- And the last one is sense of duty: a motivating factor, felt by some citizens to get involved in politics. They may care less about the issues or be put off by politics, but they have been socialized to think that good citizens get involved in politics.

What makes that I wanted to do a research of political participation and young people?

The first reason is that political participation enhances representation and democracy, but also it enhances citizenship, a feeling of belonging personal and societal (Quintelier 2008). The second reason is that political participation makes people feel they are a part of the community and create a sense of generalized trust (Putnam 2000:31-47). The third reason is that political participation is a way for people to rise their needs, concerns and problems to the authorities, and when this can happen freely and autonomous it

³ Dahl (1990:5) 'democracy is a set of political institutions and practices, a particular body of rights, a social and economic order, a system that ensures desirables results or a unique process of making collective and binding decisions'.

⁴ From the article Chapter 5: public opinion and political participation. The Author is unknown.

strengthens the democratic character of the society (Quintelier 2008). To make these reasons clear and to present an answer on the central question I chose for the following variables, because for me these variables play a role how young people could get interested or uninterested in politics. The variables are:

- Religion;
- The influence of the family (parents);
- Education;
- Youth focused;
- Politics focused;
- Media;
- The capital P and lower case p politics.

The main idea and definition of these variables is presented with examples of different countries. The reason for this method is because I do not only want to define the different variables, but also present how these variables are experienced in different countries by young people, political parties and the government.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

2.3 YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF ENGLAND

The concerns over the fact that young people are not interested in politics started in England in the nineties. In 1992, only 61% of 18-24 years olds voted, compared to 75% of older age groups. It was established that young elector tends to be rather less interested in politics, somewhat less likely to turn out and vote, and somewhat volatile (Andrew Russell 2004). Other researchers such as Parry et al (1992 p 156) mentioned that there is no indication of a decline in political participation, only of party loyalty or of a commitment to party politics generally. According to Parry et al there is no problem with the notion that young people want to participate in politics, but is that true? In the 2001 and 2005 general elections researchers mentioned that youth appear to find the business of politics uninviting and irrelevant.

Young people in England mentioned that they are skeptical of the way the British political system is organized and led and are turned off by politicians and the political parties. In 2002 Russell draw a distinction between alienation and apathy. Alienation implies a positive dislike or distrust of politics, apathy implies ambivalence. According to Edwards et al (2001:6) the British youth are disengaged from politicians rather than from politics.

According to Andrew Russell (2004 p 350) the effect of the media on the politics of young people is a significant stream of the literature. Young people tend to be the most sophisticated consumers of media. However, they are not especially disposed to using the media for the digestion of politics. Young people do not watch programmes about political parties, but get most of their information about politics from television (Andrew Russell 2004). At the election campaign in 2001, when the news media touched on stories about youth, they invariably did so by mentioning apathy and disillusion (Harrison 2002). Andrew Russell (2004 p 353) concluded that by categorizing politics as dull at every opportunity, important youth media outlets run the risk of stigmatizing those who do not agree with the hegemonic view. If young people learn from the media that elections and politics are not for them than the media has a big part in widening the gap between young people and politics.

Matt Henn et al (2005 p 559) examined if there is any substance to the claim that youth in Britain are politically disconnected and apathetic. They did their research on youth focused and politics focused. What were the results? Matt Henn et al (2005 p 573 and 574) they uncovered that young people in Britain are sufficiently interested in political affairs. They are also still committed to the idea of elections and the democratic process. These findings serve to call into question the youth focused approach that implies that young people are politically apathetic, facing various start-up problems that ultimately limit their ability to connect with British politics. What they found out is that there is no evidence which shows that young people consider that the democratic process is open to them, and responsive to their needs. And that the political parties and professional politicians are perceived to be self-serving, unrepresentative and unresponsive to the demands of young people. The study found out that politics focused provides the greater contribution to understand young people's orientation to formal

politics in Britain. It was considered that at the hearth of young people's declining election turnout and their apparent disenchantment with Westminster politics is a strong sense of political alienation rather than political apathy. The political system in Britain is failing to provide the stimuli necessary to encourage young people to take a greater role in political life.

2.3.1 YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF THE CARIBBEAN

Tracy Skelton (2009) mentioned in her study that Political Geography should recognize that young people are political actors now; they are not political subjects 'in-waiting'. Many national and international institutions are actualizing this in terms of young people's participation. Tracey Skelton mentioned that young people can do more than act politically in the interstices of the binary of capital P politics and lower case p politics. They can in fact meld and blend both elements. She illustrated this model with a non-Western model of a Caribbean country: Montserrat. What is capital P politics? Within Political Geography, political is understood to relate to the state, nations, geopolitics, legal structures such as citizenship, enfranchisement, and legislation. This could be defined as formal, public, institutional; written has Political (Tracey Skelton 2009: 3).

What is lower case p politics? Lower case p politics is defined as informal, personal and related to participation. The lower case p politics is related to the stuff of everyday life, linked to the development of political identities. This type of politics is defined as more child-centred and focused on the actions and voices of children and young people. Young people clearly have a place in participation and engagement with discourses and taking action to change life situations (political, economic, social and cultural) (Tracey Skelton 2009:3).

Montserrat has a National Youth Council (NYC) and a Youth Parliament (YP). Young people aged 12-30 years can elect members to both organizations. The NYC tends to be associated with politics through its focus on youth empowerment, training and development within the spaces of their communities. The YP (linked to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association) is connected with Politics. It was established to educate and include young people in the electoral process and is structured in a more

formal way to shadow the ‘senior’ parliament. Both organizations attract young people who wants to talk politics and create a space for the inclusion and empowerment of youth on the island (Tracey Skelton 2009: 4). How are these two politics blended in the case of the young people in Montserrat? There are debating events. In Montserrat any young person with a yen for talking might get involved in debating activities and they have to do their own research and develop their own voice. This illustrates that young people can in fact perform through their **P/political** engagements and actions and articulate and conceptualize a melded and blended **P/politics** (Tracey Skelton 2009:6).

The report of the Caricom Commission on Youth Development (CCYD 2009) mentioned that the youth opinions on the politics of the Caribbean reveal a high level of idealism as well as the depth of their disappointment that their expectations are not matched by reality. The general sentiment expressed is that governments are unfair, unjust and only interested in financial gain at the expense of the citizens. Poor leadership and corrupt politics were seen as setting bad examples for youth and contributing to moral decay and the overall lack of confidence in leaders.

Their apathy, suspicion and distrust of the political system are therefore grounded in the actual realities of their political experiences as reflected below

- *“They have to realize we live in this country too and what they do effects us in the future so they should ask us”*
- *“Sometimes we think....the adults would not listen to... our ideas, they think that they are in charge and we are supposed to listen to them all the time”(CCYD 2009).*

2.3.2 YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: THE CASE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

When it comes to politics in Ireland then there is a long tradition of a strong religious influence. When it comes to young people and their involvement in politics in Ireland then there is a history. From 1972 until 1998 there were problems with the formation of the Parliament. After the Stormont Parliament was abolished there had been no elected Assembly or Parliament, until 1998 following the Belfast Agreement which made it possible that locally – elected Assembly was convened (Whyte and Schermbrucker -

2004: 606). According to Whyte and Schermbrucker because of this event young people in Ireland lag behind peers in other democratic Western states (2004:606). Because of the event in 1972 until 1998 many things were changed and one of them was especially the political involvement of young people (White and Schermbrucker 2004).

The variables which were used for the research were:

- Religion
- Education
- Family.

The conclusions of this study are:

- Religion has an impact on how interested and involved young people are in politics (White & Schermbrucker, 2004).
- Young people who are growing up in violent areas have limited political awareness in relation to young people who believe in God and go to church (Fields, 1973). Young people who are more highly educated, have reading material in the home, and generate family discussions are more likely to be politically aware (Lamare, 1974).
- Young people are quite dependent on their parents for political knowledge (Dennis, 1986).

2.4 THE VARIABLES

I adopted four approaches to make clear what is meant with the variables: media, religion, influence of parents, education, youth focused, politics focused and capital P and lower case p politics:

- Andrew Russel (2004), he mentioned the effect of the media on the politics of young people. He stated that the media has an effect on young people to make them interested in politics. *The question asked to the young people is: do the media in Suriname have an effect on young people and their interest for politics? Or do the media create apathy for politics?*
- Matt Henn et al (2005), they mentioned in their study that the subject's youth focused and politics focused are important issues in the case of young people and politics.

In order to test youth focused, the young people were asked the following questions:

- *Do they have interest in politics?*
- *Are there particular political issues which attract them?*
- *Do they participate in political activities?*

The subject politics focused is examined by the following questions:

- *How much trust and confidence do they have in political parties and their representatives?*
- *Do they consider that the representatives and political parties represent the interests of young people?*
- Tracey Skelton (2009) mentioned that there is the capital P politics and lower case p politics. Young people can in fact meld and blend both elements. With the concept of a politics focused system and the lower case politics and the capital P politics a method is formed to make young people participate more in politics.
- Whyte and Schermbrucker (2004) mentioned that young people's involvement in politics is dependent on religion, education and the influence (role) of parents. Is this also fact in the case of the Surinamese youth?

2.4.1 RELIGION

According to Bent et al (2001) religion is one of the cultural elements which have shaped modern European politics in crucial ways. Ireland is a country where their citizens are strong believers. The churches in Ireland are central to culture and society and they shape and form everyone's lives (Jean and Ian, 2004:605). In Ireland religion has an impact on how interested or involved young people are in politics. The history of Suriname indicates that religion had an impact in politics. Most political parties were formed on the basis of religion and ethnicity. What interested me to examine this variable is that I wanted to find out if nowadays young people are aware of what happened in history in regard to religion and politics and furthermore I wanted to find out if religion at anything to do with their choice to be interested or uninterested in politics.

2.4.2 THE INFLUENCE OF THE PARENTS

According to Torbig (2005), Greenstein mentioned in 1965 that parents and the family were originally seen to be the primary agent of political socialization. Whyte and Schermbucker (2004) mentioned in their study the importance of political discussions in the home and that this is important in motivating young people to become interested in politics. Dennis J (1986) mentioned in his study that young people are quite dependent on their parents for political knowledge. For this research the importance is to find out if the young people their engagement or disengagement for politics is also caused by the influence of the parents. The influence of the parents is examined by the level of family discussions about politics and if parents provide their children (the young people) with reading materials about politics.

2.4.3 YOUTH FOCUSED

This research wants to find out if the concept of youth focused is also an issue for young people in Suriname. Matt Henn et al (2005) mentioned in their study that in England youth focus is an important issue when it comes to how interested or uninterested young people are in politics and that politicians should take notice of youth focus when it comes to interesting young people in politics. For this research the definition for youth focus is: how interested or not interested young people are in politics when it comes to interest in politics, their interest for political issues and the participation in political activities (do young people even if they are uninterested in politics have interest in political activities?).

The main points for the research were:

- interest in politics
- the interest for particular political issues
- Participation in political activities

It wanted to find out from the respondent what is the reason why they are interested in politics and why they are uninterested in politics. What are they interested in and what kind of political activities do they

2.4.4 A POLITICS FOCUSED SYSTEM

The research of Matt Henn et al (2005) is also a guiding principle for this variable. Politics focused is about the political system and how it encourages young people to turn out and vote. The important issues which are linked with politics focused are:

- Trust and confidence in political parties and their representatives;
- Representation of the interests of young people by the representatives of the political parties.

During the interviews I was interested in opinions of the respondents in regards to trust and confidence in the representatives of the political parties and what was their statement in regard to this point.

2.4.5 EDUCATION

The research of Whyte and Schermbrucker (2005) mentioned that there is no specific link between young people's involvement in politics and their educational level, but what they certainly found out is that the level of interest in politics of someone is higher when their educational is low and lower if their educational level high. During the individual interviews with the respondents I wanted to know if education (education over politics) has something to do with their interest or uninterested view for politics. I also wanted to know if it is a fact:

That people with a higher degree are less interested in politics then those with a lower degree.

2.4.6 THE MEDIA

Chaffe & Yang (1990 in Torbig 2005) mentioned that researchers understand mass-media variables such as television-news watching and newspaper reading as "important outcomes as well as determinants of political education". Young people who watch television-news or read the newspaper acquire political knowledge, form political attitudes and orient themselves in the political world around them. Television in particular is a "bridge to Politics" (Chaffe & Yang 1997:10). I wanted to find out from the respondents what the role is of the media in regard to interested and uninterested

young people in relation to political participation. And I also wanted to know from the respondents if the role is negative how it could be change and if was positive what could be done better.

2.4.7 THE METHOD: THE CAPITAL P AND LOWER CASE p POLITICS

This variable is for this study the link that could be made between young people and making them interested in political participation. The objective of this research is that I want to present advices how to make young people interested to participate more in politics. For me it is important that young people, leaders of political parties and the government work together to make young people participate more in politics. I examined this variable as a method to solve the gap between young people and their participation in politics.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the analytical framework of this study. The chapter started with the two important elements of the research: young people and political participation. The conclusion which could be made is that for most countries it is a problem when it comes to young people and their participation in politics. There is one overall reason for me why they are uninterested to participate in politics and that is that young people do not find it interested to participate in politics, because political leaders do not speak their language. They do not listen to young people their voice. But is this also the same for Suriname? What are the reasons for young people in Suriname for not being interested or uninterested to participate in politics?

CHAPTER 3

SURINAME AND POLITICS: THE HISTORY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Immediately after the Second World War the design of an electoral system became a big political issue for the local political parties in Suriname. After the first elections in 1949 the majority system was changed step by step until a regional proportionate electoral system was achieved in 1987, which was accompanied by a constitutional reform (J.Menke 2010, 7). After the first general elections in 1949, a political system emerged that is known as ‘verbroederingspolitiek’ a Caribbean variant of consociationalism¹ (J.Menke 2010, 2). Like many third world countries, Suriname has a society consisting of incoherent groups. The distinction between these groups runs along ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and more or less economic lines (King, 1980). According to King (1980), Suriname is faced with two problems:

- The racial problem
- Politics

King (1980) indicates that in order to address the political problem of Suriname, the racial issue has to be dealt with, because over the years these have merged more or less. He also defines a racial problem as a problem where two or more different racial groups belong to a social system, and the one group considers the other as a threat or rival, no matter which level or social context (1980 19). The segmentation of the Surinamese society was reflected in the formation of political parties. According to King this is deduced from the colonial period, whereby Suriname was a colony of the Netherlands. In Holland, political parties were formed along religious lines, but in Suriname it was decided on the basis of race. In 1946, the first political parties appeared on stage. These were successively:

- the PSV (the Catholic Negroes)
- the NPS (the protestant Negroes)
- the VHP
- the KTPI.

According to King, these political parties have formed the basis for the existence of racial parties in Suriname. He indicates that all the other political parties which will be created in the future in Suriname have their origin in this political movement. The language and the religion, according to King, also caused the ethnic diversity to exist. From 1949 till 2005 politics in the plural Surinamese society has been divided in three segments. These are: the descendents from Africa called City Negroes, the descendents from India called *Hindostanen* and the descendents from Indonesia called *Javanen*. After the elections of 2005, Suriname has a fourth segment, which is that of the Bush Negroes called Maroons. In the 21st Century and in the politics of Suriname two kinds of political parties can be mentioned. These are: the established parties and the new ones (Menke: 2000).

TABLE

ESTABLISHED PARTIES	NEW PARTIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STRONG TIES WITH THE ELECTORATE ALONG TRADITIONAL LINES (ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS) • STRONG ATTACHMENT TO THE PARTY • HIGH PERCENTAGE WITH AMPLE CHOICE BEFORE THE ELECTIONS • RELATIVELY AGED SUPPORTERS • EXAMPLES: NPS, VHP, PERTJAJ LUHUR, KTPI AND THE NDP). 	<p>A. CHALLENGING PARTY:</p> <p>I. MOSTLY SECEDED FROM THE ESTABLISHED PARTY;</p> <p>II. COMPETING WITH ESTABLISHED PARTIES FOR VOTERS WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL ETHNIC/RELIGIOUS SEGMENT</p> <p>III. EXAMPLES: DNP 2000, D21, BVD, NAYA KADAM.</p> <p>B. MOBILIZING PARTIES:</p> <p>I. INTRODUCING NEW ISSUES TO GAIN SUPPORTERS;</p> <p>II. EXAMPLES: DA91, DOE, PvF en HPP</p>

Source: J. Menke (2000) Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie

3.2 YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS: A RETROSPECTIVE VIEW

After the independence, the youth of Suriname has occupied an important position. By the end of the 80s, Gessel, Vernooy and Kowsolea have indicated the following at a seminar regarding youth and politics:

- The Surinamese youth has been entangled in patronage and contradictions
- The younger generation has no say in matters, because, in general, the elders feel very awkward towards changes in conceptions, relations, and perspectives. The youth is there to continue the tradition
- The youth has resisted by engaging more in fashion, entertainment and sports. Thus, they did not focus on politics.

The youth has fulfilled an important role in politics through youth organizations on different occasions:

- 1975: establishment of the Constitution
- 1979: International year of the Child
- 1985: International year of the Youth
- 1986: Directorate of Culture, Youth and Sports with as follow up the Ministry of Sports and Youth
- 1997: Youth and Youth Council
- 2000: the establishment of the institute of the Caricom Youth Ambassadors
- 2004: establishment of the Youth Parliament and National Youth Institution
- 2005: National Youth Congress (every year in April).

According to Gessel and others, a clear awareness process has not been promoted among the youth. What has happened is that they have worked more with pupils and students, but this resulted in a mutual fight for power. In this regard the “Ormule”, an organization for pupils of the secondary schools at the end of the 60s, as well as “Mokro” can be mentioned as examples. The left oriented parties like *PNR*, *PALU*, and *Volkspartij* offered the opportunity to young intellectuals and progressive young people to unite them. Due to their structures and organs, traditional political parties offer practically no perspectives to the youth. Only the NPS and PSV offered some opportunity to the youth to gradually get acquainted with politics with clear social responsibility. Gessel and

others also state that in most cases the political choice is decided by the parents and family. They have observed that the youth have virtually no role in the politics of Suriname, even though they are the largest part of the Surinamese nation. The method used to educate the youth is an obstacle for their participation and awareness in politics.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Chapter four gives the reader an historical overview about politics in Suriname and the role of young people in politics. The crucial part of the political history of Suriname is that in the past years racial issues had played an important role. Furthermore young people did not have an important role, because the issue of age was never discussed and young people were not that interested in politics. Nowadays this situation had change. Because of international influence regarding the role of young people (there is a lower and upper age limit linked to this term) in society. Many things were change such as a constructive policy towards young people, more financial and educational investment in young people and they are an important aspect in today's politic.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESULTS: YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The attention on young people and political participation has been placed worldwide. A lot of research has been done on this issue and one central think can be mentioned about young people and politics, which is that it is an academic as well as a societal problem which calls for solutions. In Suriname the roles of young people in politics is not yet clearly define. Almost all political parties acknowledge the facts that young people are important for the continuation of the politics and that continuation of the management of the political party is important and that training young people to take over the management is one certainty for continuation.

This research has been focused on certain variables, which are the principle guidance for the answer of the central question, which is what are the reasons which make young people interested or not interested in politics?

To answer this question I chose for five (5) variables, which have been portray in the literature preview. In the empirical review these variables are described and the gathering of the findings is based on the different research methods which had been used.

In the following paragraphs I will described these variables. The description is based on the information which is found during the interviews, the focus group discussion and the group interview. The description is in writing down important statements of the respondent and presenting an overview of the various answers of the respondents.

4.2 THE MEDIA

The core of this variable was to know from the respondents if the media have a positive or negative impact on them when it comes to getting interested or uninterested to participate in politics. The majority of the respondents mentioned that media had a negative impact on them when it comes to their decision to participate in politics. They mentioned that when it comes to the information they get from the media about politics then it is based on sensation. The media mostly present information about the bad things political leaders mentioned about each others and information about their private life. And for the majority of the respondents this information does not encourage them to participate in politics.

There are respondents which mentioned that the media had a positive impact on them. They pointed out that the media had a positive impact on them and this impact was related to which political party they chose to participate in.

Respondent 6:

“The influence of the media on me was that the media inspired me to do a research to know more about politics and the media inspired me in which political party I wanted to participate.”

Respondent 7:

The media had a positive influence on me. You are getting the information about politics all the way in your living room. But the down side of the media is that most media companies are politically linked. For example: SCCN radio and television⁵ and Pertjajah television and radio⁶. This fact shows that when it comes to presenting political information through the media this information is mostly not objective.”

Chaffe & Yang (2005) mentioned that watching television and reading the newspaper are important outcomes of political education. Especially television is seen as

⁵ The director of this media company is the chairperson of the political party BVD.

⁶ The director of this media company is the chairperson of the political party Pertjajah Luhur

a bridge to politics. For most of the respondents the media has a bad influence on their choice to become politically interested, but for some it is a positive instrument to be politically interested. The outcome of this research however is that overall the media does not have a positive influence on young people. As Chaffe & Yang (2005) mentioned it, the media is an important outcome of political education, but in the case of Suriname the media is not an outcome of political education for most young people that participated in this research.

4.3 EDUCATION

What certainly came out during the interviews with the respondents and also during the focus group discussion was there is a lack off political education. All most all of the respondents who are interested in politics mentioned their interest in politics was not base on political education, but their interest was based on the fact that other friends interested them, or the influence of their parents. After their entrance in the political party, it attract the attention that there is no organize system which invest in political knowledge for young people and who guidance young people in the political system.

When it comes to what Whyte and Schermbrucker (2005) found out about that the level of interest in politics of someone is higher when their educational level is low and lower if their educational level is high, most respondents agree with this statement. The reason behind this interest in politics is because for most people is that they have certain needs, for example finding a job and that those people believe that political leaders will help them finding a job. For the respondents who disagree with what Whyte and Schermbrucker stated, mentioned that participation in politics has nothing to do with the level of education, participation in politics is based on believe and trust in the leaders of the political parties and the ideology of the political party.

4.4 INFLUENCE OF THE PARENTS

Dennis (1986) mentioned in his study that young people are quite dependent on their parents for political knowledge. In the case of the respondents that were interviewed most of them did not got any political knowledge of their parents. For most of them who did got information from their parents, they did not looked at is as positive influence, because

for them it was more that their parents wanted to influence them which political choice they should make rather than giving them information how they should participate in politics.

Respondent 8: “my parents encouraged me to exploit my talents and participate in organizations. This was for me one of the fundamental reasons to become interested in politics. Participation in politics means, having influence to solve the problems of young people.”

4.5 YOUTH FOCUSED AND A POLITICS FOCUSED SYSTEM

Respondent 2 (focus group discussion):” I am not interested to participate in politics, because for me there is not a single political party which listen to what young people wants and what they need. Political parties are promising too much, but are doing less.

These two variables are connected with each other because they have certain issues which overlap each other. For example: interested in politics is linked with trust and confidence in political parties. Most of the respondents mentioned that if they should participate in politics it is important that the leaders showed that they are trustable and confident.

Respondent 6 (focus group discussion):” I do not know who the political leaders are, so it is difficult for me to trust them.”

Respondent 19: “young people are interested in politics if political parties organize activities which attract them and if political parties give young people the opportunity to have fun.

Respondent 4: “I am interested in politics, because I want to contribute to create better policy issues, especially for young people.

Most respondents mentioned that most representatives of political parties do not listen to what young people really want. They mentioned that only when it is election

time and the political parties need votes of young people to win the election, then it is like all young people interests are important and that young people need to be heard, but after the election period when political parties win or lose, then it is like the interests of young people do not exist anymore. This point made by the respondents is experienced as a negative tool to be participated in politics.

Participation in political activities is experienced by the respondents as an activity to have fun. For most of the respondents they only participate in political activities if there is a music group.

Respondent 19: “According to my opinion young people are only interested to participate in political activities if they could have fun and enjoy their selves. Young people are not interested in too much lecture of political leaders.”

The interest for particular political issues is for a great number of respondents the reason to participate in politics. Issues like education, housing, and employment, health care and recreation are important issues for young people, because they mentioned that most problems young people have are with one of these issues. They also mentioned that political leaders are not paying enough attention for the problems young people have with some of these issues.

Respondent 3: “Political leaders are not active enough to fight for the problems young people have. It could be done better, that is why I became active in politics.”

4.6 RELIGION

The first question which I wanted to know from my respondents was if they were aware that in the past religion and politics had a close link in Suriname. All most all of them answered that they did not know that. I asked why they did not know that, is it because of a lack in information about political history or is it because they know it but it did not have any impact on them? Most of the respondents answered that it was a lack in information about political history, but another group of respondents know that certain political parties were developed on the basic religion, but nowadays it does not have any impact on them if they want to participate in a politics or become a member of a political party.

The respondents also mentioned that for them there is no connection between participation in politics and their religious background. The statement of White & Schermbrucker (2004) that religion has an impact on how interested and involved young people are in politics is not plausible for the respondents; because politics and religion should be considered as two separated conceptions.

Respondent 1 (focus group discussion): "there is no connection for me between politics and religions, because I am Christian and there are leaders which are promising too much and most of the time they are not doing anything. Furthermore many political leaders do not tell the truth."

4.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the various opinions of the respondents and some of the opinions were quoted. With this method I want to present the reader the real opinions of the respondents, their thoughts and their feelings behind the topic. Overall it can be said that every variable has an impact on the respondent's choice to be interested or uninterested to participate in politics.

Below there are two tables which show you how the group of young people who are interested and uninterested to participate in politics anticipated on the question. The purpose of these tables is to present an overview of how the respondents answered the questions and how the variables had an impact on young people their decision to be interested or uninterested in politics.

Table 1

Young people who are interested in politics. The influence of the variables on young people

INDICATORS	BETTER	GOOD	BAD
MEDIA		X	
EDUCATION			X
THE INFLUENCE OF THE PARENTS			X
YOUTH FOCUSED		X	
A POLITICS FOCUSED SYSTEM		X	
RELIGION			X

Table II

Young people who are uninterested in politics. The influence of the variables on young people

INDICATORS	BETTER	GOOD	BAD
MEDIA	X		
EDUCATION		X	
THE INFLUENCE OF THE PARENTS		X	
YOUTH FOCUSED			X
A POLITICS FOCUSED SYSTEM			X
RELIGION			X

CONCLUSION

The central question for this research is: which indicators makes that young people in Suriname are interested or uninterested to participate in politics?

The finding of this research shows that there is not one specific indicator which make young people interested or uninterested to participate in politics. Andrew Russel (2004) mentioned that media has an effect on young people to make them interested in politics. Chaffe & Yang (2005) stated that young people who watch television-news or read the newspaper acquire political knowledge, form political attitudes and orient themselves in the political world around them. For some of the respondents this is not the case, thy experienced the media as a negative indicator to make them interested in politics and for those respondents who are interested in politics, the media did not have that impact on them so that they could form political attitudes. The impact what the media certainly had on some of the respondents to make them interested in politics is that they could orient themselves in the political world around them. The statement of Andrew Russel is not valid in all of the cases of the respondents. This means that the media has an effect on some young people to make them participate in politics and on other respondent it does not have an impact.

Matt henn et al (2005) mentioned that youth focused and politics focused are a guide line that could make young people participate in politic. The key question here is why are young people interested or uninterested to participate in politics. Most of the respondents have little knowledge of politics; they feel that political leaders only use them as voting mob, and they are not taken seriously. For them who are interested in politics they mentioned that politics is there for young people, there are certain policy measures which are focus on young people, like the youth parliament and national youth council. They also mentioned that they see themselves as political actors and not as political subjects 'in waiting'.

Another point is that the influence of parents is very weak to make young people participate in politics. All most all respondents their point was that there parents did not have any influence on them to make them participate in politics. In other countries it shows that parents have influence on their children to make them interested in politics.

The overall conclusion is that the indicators media, youth focused, a politics focused system, education and the influence of parents are important indicators which make young people interested or uninterested in politics. Trust and confidence are important values for young people that should be inherent to political leaders to make them participate in politics. Religion does not have that impact on young people to make them interested or uninterested in politics. For the respondents religion and politics are two separate conceptions which can not be integrated and that religion is not a reason for them to be interested or uninterested to participate in politics. I leave the statement of fields (1973) open for discussion where he stated that young people who are growing up in violent areas have limited political awareness in relation to young people who believe in God and go to church.

RECOMMENDATIONS: CHANGING THE SYSTEM?

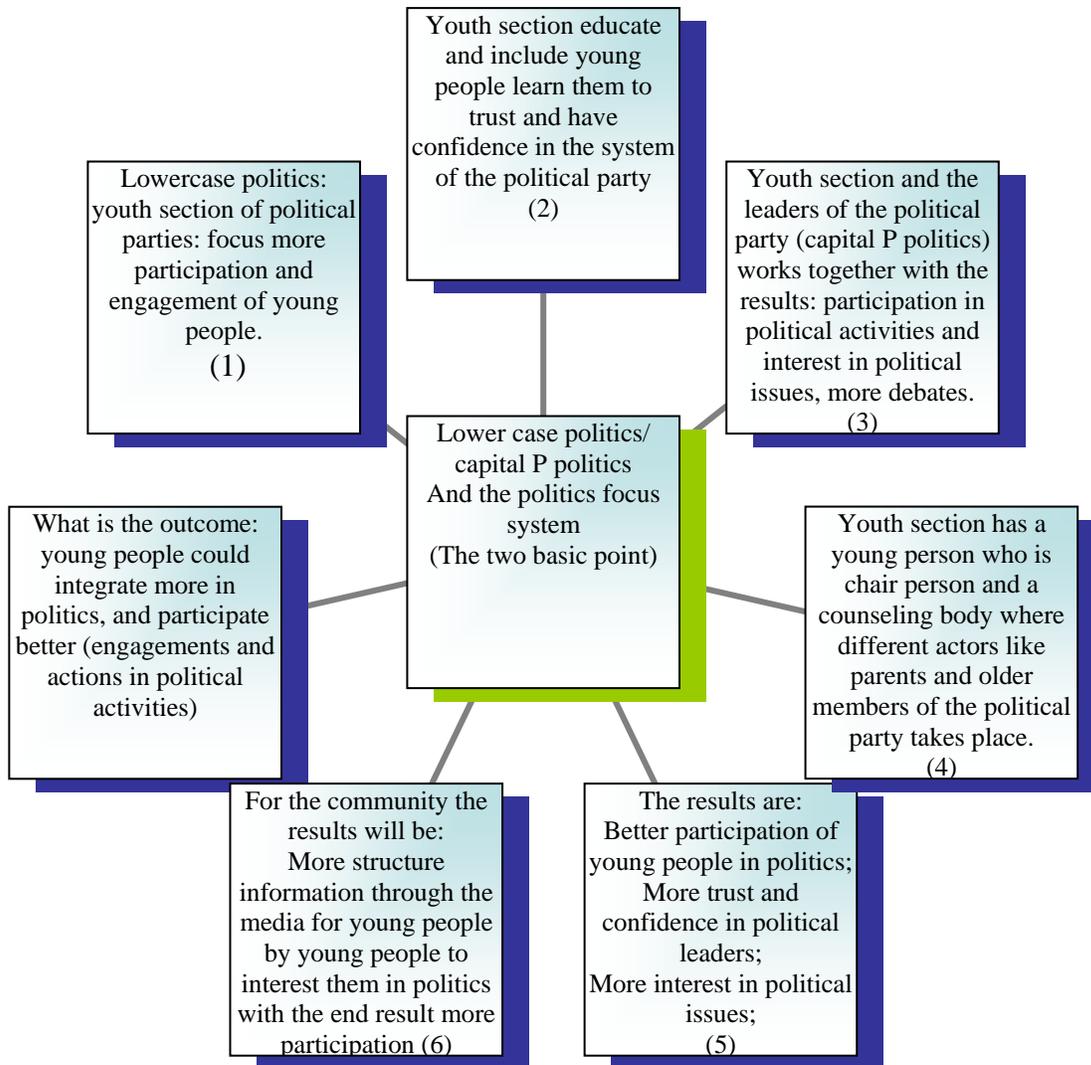
As I already mentioned there are certain variables which have great impact on young people to make them interested or uninterested in politics. But what could political leaders do to change the system that young people could get interested in politics and participate more. As I already mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the dominant view showed that young people mentioned that they are not that interested to participate in politics. But there are young people who mentioned that for them it is privilege to participate in politics and that they agree that something should be done to make more young people aware to participate in politics.

Tracy Skelton (2009) mentioned in her study the model lower case p politics and upper case P politics. Should the system be change? With the system is meant the structure how young people could be integrated to participate in politics. The answer is that there is no organize structure which integrates young people to participate in politics. Young people ho wants to participate in politics should follow their own way and if there are difficulties to integrate then there is no structure which could lead them in overcoming these difficulties like, learning more how to trust political leaders and have more confidence in them. The method of Tracey Skelton is for me a method to make young people participate in politics and that the different variables could integrate in this method.

What should is the solution? The solution is not that this is the perfect method and that this is the one method to make young people participate more in politics. This method is an added value to the development of the society, so that young people could participate more. The below diagram is a method how political leaders could start to bring a change in the question how to interest young people in politics, so that young people could participate more in organize system. The two important methods are:

The p/P⁷ method and the politics focused system. The abbreviation **yp** in the diagram stands for young people.

⁷ The lower case politics and capital P politics



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NOTES

¹ This model is characterized by a multi-party system of fair and free elections with a proportionate electoral and coalition principle based on the cooperation between the political elite's of parties affiliated with the major (ethnic) groups to govern on behalf of the electorate and these(ethnic) groups in particular.