
Abstract

This chapter starts from the claim that the state is plagued with problems of political short-termism: excessive priority given to near-term benefits at the expense of benefits further in the future. One possible mechanism to reduce short-termism involves apportioning greater relative political influence to the young since younger citizens generally have greater additional life expectancy than older citizens and thus it looks reasonable to expect that they have preferences that are extended further into the future. But the chapter shows that this is unlikely to make states significantly less short-termist: no empirical relationship has been found between age and willingness to support long-termist policies. Instead, the chapter proposes a more promising age-based mechanism. States should develop youth citizens' assemblies that ensure accountability to future generations through a scheme of retrospective accountability.

Keywords

political short-termism, youth empowerment, youth assemblies, retrospective accountability, intergenerational justice

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Empowering Future People by Empowering the Young?

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A number of recent writers have argued that the obligations of modern states to people who will exist in the future may far outstrip their obligations to their present citizens, given the vast number of people who will exist in the future and whose livelihoods depend on our actions (Beckstead 2013; Greaves and MacAskill 2019; Tarsney 2019; John 2022). And yet modern states do

precious little on behalf of future generations, choosing to allow and incentivize destructive practices such as the widespread burning of fossil fuels while failing to take preventative measures that could deter global pandemics and other catastrophes.

The state is plagued with problems of political short-termism: the excessive priority given to near-term benefits at the cost of future ones (González-Ricoy and Gosseries 2016b). By the accounts of many political scientists and economists, political leaders rarely look beyond the next two to five years and into the problems of the next decade. There are many reasons for this, from time preference (Frederick et al. 2002; Jacobs and Matthews 2012) to cognitive bias (Weber 2006; Johnson and Levin 2009; Caney 2016) to re-election incentives (Mayhew 1974; Tufte 1978; Arnold 1990; Binder 2006)¹ but all involve foregoing costly action in the short term (e.g. increasing taxes, cutting benefits, imposing regulatory burdens) that would have larger moderate- to long-run benefits.² Such behaviour fails not only the generations of people who are to come but also the large number of existing citizens who still have much of their lives left to lead.

One type of mechanism for ameliorating political short-termism that receives much attention these days involves apportioning greater relative political influence to the young. As the story goes, younger citizens generally have greater additional life expectancy than older citizens, and it therefore looks reasonable to expect that they have preferences that are extended further into the future. If we apportion greater relative political influence to the young, it therefore seems that our political system as a whole will show greater concern for the future.

¹ For a contrary view, see Beck (1982).

² For a general overview of the causes of short-termism and some mechanisms for ameliorating it, see recent work from Caney (2016); González-Ricoy and Gosseries (2016b); John and MacAskill (2021).

In light of this story, a number of particular mechanisms have been proposed for apportioning greater relative political influence to the young, including lowering the voting age (Piper 2020), weighting votes inversely with age (Van Parijs 1998; MacAskill 2019), disenfranchising the elderly (Van Parijs 1998), and instituting youth quotas in legislatures (Bidadanure 2016; MacKenzie 2016).³

In what follows, I argue that merely apportioning greater political power to the young is unlikely to make states significantly less short-termist, but underexplored age-based mechanisms may be more successful. In particular, states might mitigate short-termism by employing age-based surrogacy and liability incentives mechanisms within a deliberative body of young people charged with representing the young.

In [section I](#), I state precisely the argument for apportioning greater political power to the young on grounds of combating political short-termism. In [section II](#), I argue that the extant empirical literature on the relationship between ageing and short-termist policy support suggests that there is little relationship between the two, and so the argument for apportioning greater political power to the young fails. In [section III](#), I identify age-based strategies which are better supported by existing political science research and advocate combining these strategies in a novel youth assembly.

1. Youth empowerment, efficiency, and justice

According to a common view, a political system that is influenced by the elderly will tend to have a more short-term focus than a political system that evades or counteracts such influence

³ Bidadanure (2016) does not accept this story and justifies youth quotas on other grounds.

(Van Parijs 1998). This is because the young can generally expect to live for a much longer period of time than the elderly and, so the argument goes, they will therefore generally have preferences that extend much further into the future. Younger people tend to have more remaining years of well-being, younger friends and families, and more personal goals in the years ahead of them. Thus, we may reasonably expect that younger people will be more concerned that the future goes well over longer time horizons. On the assumption that voters, policymakers, and other political actors are at least somewhat rational in acting on their preferences, we could infer that younger political actors will tend to support policies with a more long-term focus than older political actors. Thus, we should expect to find that political systems in which older age groups have more political influence are more short-termist.

This common view provides the starting point for a powerful argument for increasing the influence of the young on politics. Short-termism has extremely deleterious effects on political decision-making, and so even any modest amelioration of political short-termism is a morally urgent priority. While it is somewhat difficult to measure precisely the harms of excessively prioritizing the near term, they appear to be substantial in aggregate. Hundreds of billions of US dollars are spent annually on global disaster relief despite studies finding regularly that investment in disaster preparation provides between 6 and 15 times as much benefit as the same size of investment in disaster relief (Healy and Malhotra 2009; Multihazard Mitigation Council 2017). The UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (2015) reports further that ‘an investment of \$6 billion annually in disaster risk management would result in avoided losses of \$360 billion over the next 15 years’. The US health-care system wastes between \$88.6 billion and \$111.1 billion each year by failing to adopt sufficient preventative care measures and instead adopting excessively

reactive medical practices (Shrank et al. 2019). Net mitigation costs of global climate change, estimated at several hundred billion US dollars per year, increase, on average, by approximately 40 per cent for each decade of delay (US Council of Economic Advisers 2014). The failure of governments to adequately prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic—including by failing to accurately forecast its reproduction rate in 2020 and by failing to make sufficient investments in pandemic preparedness in years past—is estimated to cost the United States over \$1 trillion per month along with millions of lives globally (Makridis and Hartley 2020). Certainly, failure to prevent future, more serious global catastrophes such as biological terrorism and nuclear war could cost us much more (Ord 2020).

Short-termism has numerous causes and is exacerbated by global coordination problems and more. So no simple institutional fix will resolve all of these problems. And attending to short-term costs is clearly important. Global gross domestic product (GDP) trends indicate that our descendants will be wealthier than us, which may justify our borrowing some resources from the future to address near-term problems. Yet, the available indicators tell us that short-termism costs the global economy many billions and perhaps trillions of dollars annually and leads directly to millions of deaths from disasters and suboptimal spending. The exchange rate at which we are borrowing from our descendants and from our future selves clearly cannot be sustained. If we can identify institutional repairs to some of short-termism's sources, we should doubtlessly pursue them.

1.1 Challenge of legitimacy

The common view implies that it is both possible and desirable to ameliorate short-termism by distributing greater political power to the young. This idea is based on utilitarian efficiency: all else being equal, we should not choose smaller welfare benefits for humankind over larger benefits. But this is arguably not the only moral consideration relevant to assessing such proposals.

Many strategies for increasing the formal political power of the young entail the provision of unequal formal political power to members of the demos and unequal opportunities for influence. There is a sense in which giving the young disproportionate formal political power amounts to giving them power *over* the elderly, raising questions of political legitimacy: there are weighty moral reasons against giving greater formal political power to some citizens than to others.

There are, however, at least three reasons why such legitimacy concerns are not sufficient grounds for dismissing proposals such as age-weighted voting, which give greater formal political power to the young.⁴ First, in a society where the elderly control a great deal of *informal* political power (such as social and economic influence), providing greater *formal* political power (such as votes) to the young may, in fact, lead to an increase in the equality of the political system overall, making it more egalitarian than a system in which all members of the demos have equal formal political power.

Second, apportioning formal political power based on age is consistent with treating people equally across their whole lives. If younger people are apportioned greater voting power, this is a privilege allocated to everyone who will ever live in that political system, during the period in which they are young (MacAskill 2019). Total formal political power across people's lives remains equal among the demos.

⁴ For a contrary view, see Karnein and Roser (2015).

Third, inequalities in power must be rectified not only within a generation but also between generations. The current generation wields immense power over future generations. Future citizens are subjected to our laws and the causal fallout of all of our decisions. A political system that allows unequal power relationships between some of its present members in order to give a greater say (by proxy) to future generations over the laws by which they are governed may therefore be a more legitimate system than one that ensures equal power relationships between its present members and leaves future generations disempowered (González-Ricoy and Gosseries 2016a; Gosseries 2016; John 2022).⁵

So we have what appears to be a promising argument for apportioning greater political power to the young, such as by weighting votes with age or instituting legislative youth quotas. Intuitively, people are likely to have more near-term-orientated preferences as they age and will therefore generally support more short-termist policy. Redistributing political power to younger citizens is therefore likely to make political systems less short-termist. Given that short-termism causes immense harms, both fiscal and material, this would have extremely good results, and considerations of legitimacy do not clearly prohibit us from redistributing political power in this way.

2. Why the common case for youth empowerment fails on current evidence

⁵ A fourth consideration is this: political legitimacy is fungible with other values. It is widely accepted that we may sometimes use undemocratic procedures to avoid costly errors (Halstead 2017). For example, most constitutions rightly protect people's fundamental rights from overrule by the majority. It is sometimes morally laudable to accept costs to the democratic equality of a decision procedure to achieve large welfare and other benefits, if this is the best way to achieve those benefits.

When we look at the empirical literature on short-termism and ageing, we do not find confirmation for the intuitively plausible hypothesis that older people support more short-termist policy. It turns out that the common view is flawed in its core assumption: the empirical literature does not show *any* systematic correlations between ageing and shorter time-horizons.

2.1 Subjective discount rate

The standard method of measuring intertemporal trade-offs or ‘time preference’ is the subjective discount rate (SDR). The SDR measures the extent to which people discount the value of goods the longer they must wait to receive those goods. In studies of SDR, participants are typically offered a series of choices between receiving some amount of good (such as money) or burden (such as required effort) at a time in the near future or a larger amount of that good or burden in the more distant future. After several choices, researchers can derive a discount function which maps participant willingness to discount goods across varying periods of time.

The argument for increasing the political power of the young assumes that younger people will tend to have a lower SDR. It is based on the assumption that older people, given their smaller remaining lifespan, are less interested in receiving goods in the future (given the risk of dying beforehand) and more interested in pushing burdens into the future than younger people. Some work in economic theory predicts that the SDR will be a little more complicated than this. The SDR might be a U-shaped function: the youngest people have a high discount rate because they lack self-control, their SDR decreases throughout life as they gain self-control and have children whose futures they must care about, and people’s SDR then increases towards the end of life when they have fewer remaining life-years (Read and Read 2004; Chu et al. 2010; Chao et al.

2009). If this picture were accurate, we might instead empower the middle-aged rather than the young to secure intergenerational justice.

Surprisingly, extant empirical research on ageing confirms neither the hypothesis that SDR increases monotonically with age nor that SDR is a U-shaped function of age. Instead, we find an assortment of mixed results. Several studies have, indeed, found that SDR increases with age (Green et al. 1994; Read and Read 2004; Liu et al. 2016; Seamen et al. 2016; Vanderveldt 2016), although studies are equally likely to find that SDR decreases with age (Harrison et al. 2002; Trostel and Taylor 2001; Löckenhoff et al. 2011; Eppinger et al. 2012; Halfmann et al. 2013; Bixter and Rogers 2019) or that there is no relationship between the two (Chao et al. 2009; Roalf et al. 2011; Rieger and Mata 2015). This variability persists if we exclude studies with small sample sizes ($N < 268$) or reduce cultural variation by including only studies with sample populations in the United States. Only one study has found an SDR that is a U-shaped function of age (Read and Read 2004), and only one study has found an SDR that is a U-shaped function of health and survival expectations (Chao et al. 2009). Several other studies contradict these results (Green et al. 1994; Harrison et al. 2002, Trostel and Taylor 2001; Löckenhoff et al. 2011; Rieger and Mata 2015; Liu et al. 2016; Seamen et al. 2016).

A limitation of these studies is that many elicit discount rates over timescales shorter than a year, significantly reducing the hypothesized effect of a shorter life expectancy on one's SDR. But even in the three studies with a time horizon of at least 10 years, we find no univocal take-away (Green et al. 1994; Read and Read 2004; Vanderveldt 2016).

The best explanation for this variability appears to be that SDR is a highly multifaceted phenomenon that is mediated by numerous factors other than age, including wealth, retirement, and

political ideology, and which varies in direction and magnitude from one decision context to another. We therefore need more nuanced research on SDR to isolate and measure the various psychological processes and determinants which underlie its complex structure. This explanation is supported by a 2002 review of three decades of literature on intertemporal choice, which finds subjective discount rates ranging from negative integers to infinity (Frederick et al. 2002). The study concludes that there is no empirical support for the idea that intertemporal choice should be modelled with a single discount rate that is consistent across choice situations.

The argument that a smaller additional life expectancy leads to a higher discount rate appears to have assumed too naïve a picture of decision psychology. We need a better way to find out what, if any, relationship holds between age and short-term policy preference.⁶

2.2 Values

The most direct way to assess the relationship between age and short-term policy preference is to look at the policy preferences that people actually have, expressed in voting. The common view described in section I implies that younger people will tend to have less short-termist policy preferences. Once again, the empirical literature presents us with mixed findings. The effect of

⁶ An additional obstacle for the move from intertemporal trade-offs in personal losses and gains to voting behaviour is *the vote-buy gap* (Norwood et al. 2019; Paul et al. 2019). Across a range of policy areas, such as green energy, for-profit prisons, and caged eggs, citizens regularly take political action that is in apparent conflict with their consumer behaviour: raising their taxes to fund green energy while failing to source their own electricity from windmills, banning prison practices which they support with their banking, and even banning products which they regularly consume. It appears that looking at people's personal consumer and financial habits is a bad way to predict the policies they will support.

age on short-term policy preference appears to be minimal or non-existent. Cohort effects, social cohesion between voters and other groups, ideological identity, and policy uncertainty appear to be much bigger drivers of short-termism in voter behaviour. As such, simply apportioning greater political power to the young will do little to reduce political short-termism.

Two recent studies of 305 Swiss and 82 international referenda offer strong *prima facie* support to the idea that age is correlated with preferences for more short-termist policy. These studies, conducted by Gabriel Ahlfeldt and colleagues, categorize the answers to referenda questions according to the generational interests that they most promote (young vs elderly), analysing the extent to which younger and older voters support referenda decisions that are in their generational self interest, and come away with the strong conclusion that referenda ‘voters make deliberate choices that maximize their expected utility conditional on their stage in the lifecycle’ (Ahlfeldt et al. 2018, 2019). They find that younger voters ‘tend to be less conservative, attach higher priorities to the protection of the environment, and are more supportive of policies that, in relative terms, benefit the young’. In the Swiss study, these values are shown to swing free from cohort effects as well as the effects of status quo habituation.

If the findings of Ahlfeldt and colleagues are accurate and generalizable to most countries and times, then they provide some support for the idea that older voters in fact support more short-termist policies. However, their findings are of limited significance. A key limitation is that many of the policy areas in which Ahlfeldt and colleagues find generational conflict are areas of *intratemporal* generational conflict rather than *intertemporal* generational conflict. For decisions about issues such as end-of-life care, school spending, sports facilities, retirement, unemployment, and transportation (the majority of the referenda studied), generational differences in atti-

tudes likely correspond to people's different preferences in their current stage of life rather than their different preferences over longer timescales. Finding that working people want better unemployment benefits does not indicate that they have longer time horizons in view but rather that they are at greater present risk of unemployment.

The studies' findings of significance for our purposes, then, are exclusively the effects of age on environmental and energy policy. In the international study, Ahlfeldt et al. (2019) find that age is not an unambiguous determinant of voting decisions on environmental legislation.⁷ In the Swiss study, which is much larger and better controlled, Ahlfeldt and colleagues find that age is a significant determinant of pro-environmentalist attitudes, to the point that a 20-year-old voter is 10 per cent more likely to vote favourably to the environment than an 80-year-old voter (Ahlfeldt et al. 2018: 16).

The other major study on the effects of ageing on support for more short-termist policy comes from Alan Jacobs and J. Scott Matthews, who survey 1,213 voting-age US citizens about their preferences on hypothetical US Social Security policy (Jacobs and Matthews 2012). The study asks participants to vote on a Social Security reform proposal that would impose taxes and benefit cuts for the next 5 or 40 years in order to prevent taxes and benefit cuts that were much larger when the period had ended. Jacobs and Matthews introduce two experimental manipulations, varying both the timing of the policy benefits and the causal complexity of the reform. Strikingly, Jacobs and Matthews find that time preference is not a major driver of short-termism in policy preferences. Measurements of participants' subjective discount rate in fact *inversely*

⁷ Findings on the relationship between age and support for green energy in this study are omitted because the particular referenda analysed are also included in the 2018 study.

correlated with participants' willingness to forego more distant future benefits. Importantly, Jacobs and Matthews find no discernible effect of age on participant decisions about long-term policy investment. Instead, they find that the primary drivers of short-term political decision-making are uncertainties about whether (i) policies will, in fact, have their intended long-run effects; and (ii) future political leaders will act on the commitments we make today rather than renegeing.

2.3 Implications

The existing data on the relationship between age and short-termist political decision-making is ambiguous. No stable relationship has been found between age and SDR, and the direct effect of age on short-termism appears relatively small (10 per cent less likely to support green policy over the lifespan) or non-existent.

Empowering the young by merely allocating them more formal political power may yet help combat political short-termism. In some countries and times, a small percentage increase in green policy support may be enough to shift energy policy. Depending on cohort effects, some groups of young people may be especially orientated towards the long term, making the contingent effect of proposals to empower the young much stronger. But given that young people's voting behaviour does not appear to be significantly less short-termist than that of older people, simply giving young people additional votes is not a robust way to ameliorate political short-termism.

3. A forward-looking assembly

On present evidence, we have little reason to believe that the young will use additional votes or legislative seats in a more prudent way than the elderly. But in this section, I argue that there are novel and powerful ways to harness young people's greater remaining life expectancy for the advantage of future generations which do not rely on younger people having less short-termist policy preferences. The basic proposal is to create a novel youth assembly, a permanent, soft-power institution whose members are randomly selected from among the young, which rewards assembly members for successful policymaking 30 years in the future, based on its later effects. Youth, here, is being exploited centrally to extend the time horizon over which assembly members can expect to reap future rewards.

3.1 Futures assemblies

'Citizens' assemblies' have been employed for consultation and information-gathering purposes throughout the world. These randomly selected groups of citizens provide deliberative and non-binding advice to the government in consultation with recognized experts. One of the most high-profile initiatives was Ireland's 100-member Citizens' Assembly, which was established in 2016 and tasked with considering questions related to abortion, fixed-term parliaments, referenda, population ageing, climate change, and gender equality. The deliberations of the Irish assembly provoked a referendum to remove Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion and substantially shaped Ireland's Climate Action Plan (Coleman et al. 2019).

The success of the Irish assembly and of citizens' assemblies around the world reveals the promise of citizens' assemblies tasked with the explicit mandate to represent future generations, or 'futures assemblies', for ameliorating short-termism. A general futures assembly, constituted

by a stratified random sample of the general population, would have numerous features that predict success at combating short-termism (John and MacAskill 2021). Being an unelected and publicly funded body, a futures assembly would be insulated from perverse election and fundraising incentives that pressurize elected officials to focus on near-term, visible issues that can help them gain re-election. Being randomly selected, it would be statistically representative of the general population and not chosen or excessively influenced by elected officials. And citizens' assemblies have a demonstrated aptitude in laboratory and real-world experiments for reducing the deleterious effects of partisanship on careful, long-term deliberation (Fishkin and Luskin 2005; List et al. 2013; Fishkin et al. 2017). In the most recent major assembly, the Climate Assembly UK, 98 per cent of assembly members claimed to have understood almost everything that those in their deliberation groups had said, and 94 per cent felt respected by their fellow participants under disagreement (with none feeling disrespected) (Climate Assembly UK 2020). Finally, citizens' assemblies are more informed than ordinary voters due to their deliberations with experts, reducing the deleterious effect of policy uncertainty on short-term policy support as found by Jacobs and Matthews' (2012) Social Security reform experiment.

Most importantly, a general futures assembly may need no incentive to reflect carefully on the interests of future generations beyond an explicit mandate to do so. Some limited evidence from the Kochi University Research Institute for Future Design suggests that when parents are explicitly asked to cast votes on behalf of their children, they vote for different parties than they normally would vote for in a sizable minority of cases (Aoki and Vaithianathan 2012). This is a promising sign that those who are asked explicitly to represent the younger generation do not simply use this opportunity to promote their own agenda but rather aim to promote the interests

of the young and thereby adopt longer time horizons for political decision-making. This is further supported by evidence that actors within institutions tend to be compelled to follow norms and perform roles that are consistent with the established culture of their institution (Goodin 1995; Steiner et al. 2005: 127; MacKenzie 2016). Put simply, people who are asked explicitly to vote on behalf of another group seem to do so.

So, a general futures assembly, tasked with representing future generations and giving non-binding advice to the government, would likely do well at ameliorating political short-termism. But it is possible to improve upon the assembly in two ways: first, by better aligning the incentives of the deliberating body with the interests of future generations and, second, by making its non-binding advice more difficult for the government to ignore.

3.2 Mechanism design

An explicit mandate may be sufficient to motivate futures assembly members to adequately consider future generations in their recommendations.⁸ But there remain concerns of value drift, irrational time discounting, and capture by political elites and industry. One promising and underexplored mechanism for aligning incentives with the interests of future generations involves *retrospective accountability*. The most central problem of representing the interests of future generations in government is that of making political actors accountable to future generations. Future generations cannot vote in our elections, nor can they sanction or protest the decisions of their forebears. Retrospective accountability solves the accountability problem by rewarding policymakers many years into the future in proportion to the effects of their policy on the long run. A

⁸ These mechanism design issues are discussed at much greater length in John (2022: Chapter 2).

simple mechanism of retrospective accountability would involve empowering a body of future auditors—say, 30 years from now—to decide on the pension bonus of the decision-makers today based on how successfully these decision-makers promote the interests of future people. This would provide decision-makers today with a positive financial incentive to look to the future—at least 30 years from now—when making any decisions. Such a mechanism would yield a significant advance on the time horizons of present institutions.

A more sophisticated retrospective accountability mechanism (and the one I favour) would exploit strategic iteration of this mechanism to extend the time horizons of government much further again. On the iterated variant, the future auditors who decide on the later bonuses of present decision-makers *themselves* face a financial incentive to look again into the future. For their own financial situation will be tied to the evaluations of the *next* generation of auditors, who will determine their pension bonuses.⁹ To get a nice retirement bonus, future auditors have an incentive to evaluate present decision-makers in accordance with the preferences of the next generation of auditors, and so present decision-makers have an incentive to satisfy the preferences of the auditors two generations—60 years—from now. And so iterated, until we have extended the horizons of government to the longest time period relevant for political decision-making. On the simplest implementation of such accountability measures, each assembly decides on the bonus of the assembly 30 years prior.

Because a futures assembly is a soft-power institution, with no formal powers of censure, a second obstacle it must overcome is ignorance by elected officials. If elected officials do not se-

⁹ For a discussion of related formal models of intergenerational bargaining, see [Heath \(1997\)](#), who develops and extends a model by [Gauthier \(1986\)](#).

riously consider the advice of the assembly, the latter will have no power whatsoever. To overcome this barrier, futures assemblies should have two key features. First, they should be empowered to require reading and response from the legislature, ensuring that their advice is actually read. Second, they should be designed to be highly public and high-status institutions. All of their deliberations and reports should be public-facing, with a strong media team and minimal institutional complexity to ensure that the institution is well understood by the public. The assembly should be well paid and highly informed by experts and should be constituted by a demographically stratified random sample of the population. These features together will help to ensure that the assembly has high perceived legitimacy so that the neglect of the institution by elected officials will be unpopular among voters.

Tempting though it may be, we should, at the given political moment, resist giving futures assemblies any stronger formal powers than this since the major reason that future-orientated institutions are repealed is that they have too much formal power (Jones et al. 2018). Citizens' assemblies avoid repeal through their soft-power approach.

3.3 A novel youth assembly

Two central considerations favour the adoption of a futures assembly constituted by the young (i.e. eligible voters under 40 and perhaps younger) rather than by the general populace. The first and simpler reason is that younger people can generally expect to live longer, allowing for much greater time horizons for a retrospective accountability mechanism. The older the assembly members are, the sooner they will need to receive a bonus for it to be valuable and the less valuable to them it will be. The second and more speculative reason is rooted in the finding that

group deliberation creates greater empathy and solidarity between participants (Grönlund et al. 2017). There is evidence that such social cohesion makes voters more likely to act on the preferences of the larger group (Berkman and Plutzer 2004). Such social cohesion formed part of the explanation, in section II, for the minimal effect of age on short-term policy preference. If group deliberation succeeds in partly breaking down their cohesion with other ideological identities and interest groups and causes assembly members to form a more strongly youth-based political identity, they may, in turn, be more inclined to support the (long-term) interests of the young than ordinary voters.

4. Conclusion

Political short-termism costs the global economy many billions and perhaps trillions of dollars annually and leads directly to millions of deaths from disasters and suboptimal resource allocation. This chapter has considered one popular set of proposals for ameliorating political short-termism rooted in the plausible thought that younger people will be more motivated to consider the long term in political decision-making given their longer remaining life expectancy. It has been shown that this *prima facie* plausible thought is severely lacking in empirical support. Younger people are not significantly more motivated to consider the long term in their voting behaviour, and this greatly weakens the case for simple systems of formally empowering the young.

However, there are promising signs that alternative mechanisms for empowering the young would more significantly ameliorate short-termism, such as those incorporating retrospective lia-

bility. I have defended a ‘Youth Futures Assembly’, which incorporates such a mechanism and can be implemented to significant long-term beneficial effect. Further experimental evidence about the policy preferences of political surrogates, the incentive effects of retrospective accountability, and the relationship between group cohesion and policy preference could significantly strengthen or weaken the case for such a youth assembly, as could further, experimental evidence on the relationship between age and policy preference and on alternative mechanisms for ameliorating political short-termism. As the discussion in this chapter has shown, given the high costs of short-termism and the severity with which it plagues modern institutions, investigation into such matters are vital to the future livelihoods of people everywhere, from those who are our contemporaries to the myriad heirs of posterity.

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