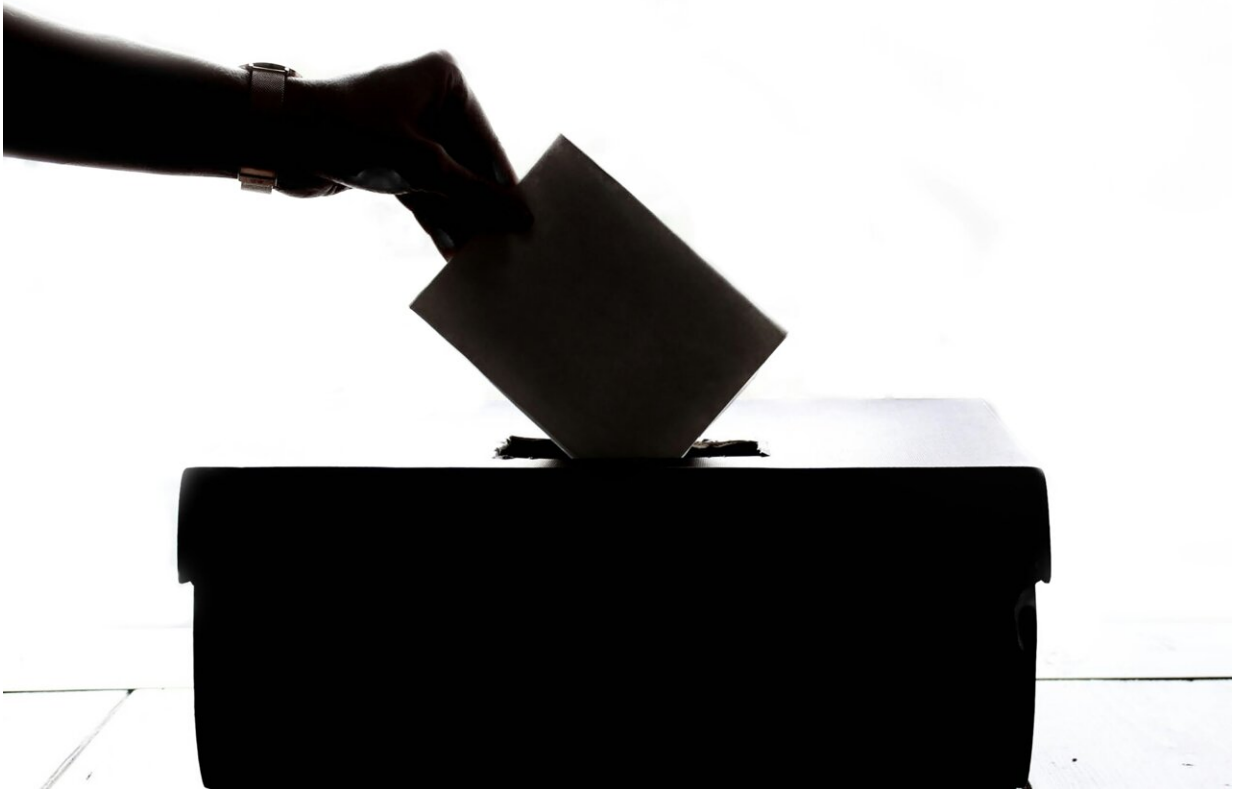


Young people in the UK say they are less likely to vote if their parents report depressive symptoms

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With a U.K. General Election approaching, new research has found that parental history of depression can predict whether a young person is

likely to intend to vote.

The research, led by the Department of Politics at the University of Liverpool, found that, at age 26, people were less likely to intend to [vote](#) if they had grown up with a parent experiencing high levels of [depressive symptoms](#).

Published in the journal *Electoral Studies*, the [research](#) used the British Cohort Study (BCS), which followed more than 16,000 babies born across a single week in 1970 from early childhood to midlife.

The BCS asked cohort members at ages 26, 30 and 34, "If there was a general election tomorrow, which [political party](#) would you vote for?" Cohort members could select the option "would not vote." Both cohort members and their mothers were also asked about the occurrence of some of the depressive symptoms (along with other physical and mental complaints).

Using regression analysis of BCS data, the research found that there was a significant association between a parent's mental health and whether the cohort were likely to say they would vote at age 26. This association was not found to be significant at age 30 and no longer observed at age 34.

The [regression analysis](#) used in the research also showed that cohort members' symptoms had less of an impact on whether they would intend to cast a vote at age 26 than their parents' symptoms.

The researchers from the Universities of Liverpool (Luca Bernardi), Leicester (Emma Bridger) and Helsinki (Mikko Mattila) speculated that this pattern was because growing up with a depressed parent during [early childhood](#) operates as a form of social learning in which children copy their parents' behavioral tendencies which include a decreased likelihood

to be politically engaged.

Dr. Luca Bernardi, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Liverpool said, "This research shows that the [political engagement](#) consequences of depression extend not only to the individual who lives with depression, but also to their children.

"These are the first results we have in this area and next, it would be useful for us to examine datasets in other countries. However, looking at this initial data, policymakers should consider mental health improvement strategies that specifically target parents, which may have beneficial consequences not just for their children's mental health but also for their political engagement."

More information: Luca Bernardi et al, Voting propensity and parental depression, *Electoral Studies* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2024.102800](#)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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