



The Kids Aren't All Left

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Last week Elin Ersson, a 21-year-old Swedish student, halted the deportation of an Afghan asylum seeker from Sweden by refusing to sit down on a plane.

Not shy of the publicity, Ersson broadcast the affair live on Facebook and subsequently received substantial international media attention. The usual suspects have held Ersson up [as a hero](#) and a welcome [sign of growing activism](#).

Emma Taylor-Collins, a PhD candidate at the University of Birmingham, wrote [an article in *The Conversation*](#) with the headline 'Nearly 60 per cent of young children are social justice activists – a future full of Elin Erssons'.

Let's unpack this claim. Are 60 per cent of young people really 'social justice activists'?

The answer is a resounding *no*.

Taylor-Collins cites a [2017 survey by Ipsos MORI](#), commissioned by the British government, which found that 58 per cent of 10-20-year-olds have taken part in ‘practical action in the service of others to create positive change’. What Taylor-Collins does not mention is that this included a range of activities including ‘fundraising, campaigning, tutoring/mentoring and giving time to charity’.

Taylor-Collins gives the example of the ‘children [who] participated in the recent protests during Trump’s visit to London’. But the survey does not capture the ideological tinge of their social action, nor does it exclusively relate to political change. They could have been campaigning for the Conservative Party or fundraising to help a pro-Brexit campaign. They could have been volunteering for a homeless charity or mentoring a disadvantaged kid. None of this makes them a social justice warrior.

There are broader problems in claiming that all young people are like Elin Erssons.

Youth activism tends to be confined to the higher socioeconomic social strata. Ipsos MORI found that the most affluent young Brits are 60 per cent more likely to participate in regular social action. Youth activism is, therefore, most representative of elite social justice values, not broader views held by young people.

When people like Ersson speak out – which they, of course, are welcome to do – they are only speaking for the views of a segment of their generation. They are not speaking for the thousands of young people attending Jordan Peterson events across the world, quietly listening to David Rubin podcasts between their lectures, or coming to IPA Generation Liberty events across Australia. Although it is true that young people tend to veer to the left, they are not exclusively of one mindset and are more open to different ideas than usually claimed.

The IPA’s [Growing Freedom survey](#) found that 60 per cent of young Australians are interested in starting their own business one day – indicating less of a social justice tinge and more of an aspirational self-starter generation. The survey also found that the majority of young Australians (52 per cent) who have entered the workforce support smaller government, fewer services and lower taxes. This finding shows that once young people have skin in the game, that is, they are paying taxes themselves, their social justice views diminish.

The Conversation, which is Melbourne based and primarily funded by the Victorian government and universities, uses the tagline ‘Academic rigour, journalistic flair’. Taylor-Collins’s article certainly shows a lot of flair (read: nonsense); it doesn’t show much academic rigour.

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