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The 21st century has been described as the golden age of democracy. Today, more nations have become, or strive to be, democracies than ever before. Democracy's rivals have lost their legitimacy, and support for democratic principles is greater than ever. At the same time, however, citizens are becoming critical of democratic political institutions, and dissatisfied with their performance. These trends have been interpreted in quite different ways. Some scholars argue that political dissatisfaction and the growing number of 'critical citizens' can be beneficial for democratic functioning. Others, by contrast, are worried about widespread political dissatisfaction and apathy. The controversy is most vividly apparent in debates about young people. On the one hand, they are viewed as an asset to democracy, since they engage in politics in new ways and question political authorities. On the other, they are regarded as a potential threat to democratic functioning, due to their withdrawal from traditional forms of politics and their political dissatisfaction. It is argued that such dichotomization is not fruitful for gaining a better understanding of the diversity of young people's democratic citizenship. Consequently, an effort is made to offer a middle-ground between the two approaches, so as to enhance understanding of young people's political significance, particularly with regard to their political dissatisfaction. Focusing on different aspects of political dissatisfaction provides new insights into the ongoing debate. The results reveal that young people constitute a heterogeneous group, with different roles and profiles in terms of political dissatisfaction, that range from the healthy to the more threatening. Further, it is shown that fair teachers play a crucial role in linking young citizens to the wider political system. The findings have important implications for political socialization research and the debate over the democratic significance of young people.

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