

Political Apathy

Aims:

- To critically review statistical evidence about political engagement in the UK
- To consider how age affects political engagement
- To find evidence for and against sociological theories of political disengagement

Key Reading:

Review the tables from the Democratic Audit of Political Participation and British Social Attitudes

Read: Colin Hay (2007) chapter 1 'Political Disenchantment' in *Why We Hate Politics*, Cambridge: Polity.

Are young people politically disengaged?

In this workshop we review statistical evidence about political engagement in the UK. We focus in particular on the impact that age has on: 1. levels of political participation (e.g. voting, signing petitions, writing to MPs), and, 2. political attitudes (e.g. apathy, skepticism, trust in politicians). On the basis of this evidence, is it fair to say that young people are especially disengaged with politics? Does the evidence support or challenge the sociological theories we have looked at?

What you need to do:

You have been given a series of tables about political participation and attitudes by age group. Information about the data-sources is attached. In your group, look at these tables and discuss the following questions:

- On the basis of your interpretation of this data, how would you sum up the trends in political engagement in the UK?
- What influence does age have on political engagement? Are young people especially disengaged? In what ways?
- Can you see any problems with these statistics? How far can we rely upon them? (think about the questions asked in the survey, the way 'engagement' is measured, the sample sizes)
- Does the data support or challenge the theories we have looked at in the lecture? (Habermas and the indifferents, the resource model, Putnam and social capital)



Instructor notes

Provide the tables in advance of the class and ask students to prepare by reviewing the main trends.

In addition to the data provided, students can also be encouraged to find their own evidence about political engagement in advance of the class by searching the British Social Attitudes Survey themselves online. Go to www.britsocat.com/Home