

# To what extent does democracy in the uk suffer?

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Politics Essay To what extent does democracy in the UK suffer from a participation crisis? (25 marks) There are a lot of ways in which citizens can participate in politics in the UK without necessarily having to vote for example: joining a political party, boycotting, and even signing petitions and fund raising. However, there is an argument that there has been a participation crisis over the past years in the UK. A participation crisis is when less and less citizens take part in political activities; this can be shown in the decrease of voter turnout and the level of participation.

On the other hand, there is an argument that there is in fact not a participation crisis because the turnout of voting is increasing and specific forms of participation are also on the rise. In this essay, I will be arguing whether or not the UK is suffering from a participation crisis and if we are suffering to what extent. The main concern about democracy in the UK comes from evidence of rising political apathy. Some people have seen this as nothing more than a ' participation crisis'.

Can democracy be classed as healthy when more and more voters every year seem to be unconcerned or reluctant to engage in political life? Deteriorating rates of voter turnout and falling levels of party membership despite there being opportunities for participation show evidence. There are three main reasons to show why there is a participation crisis in the UK. The first reason is the public. Due to people's interest in materialism, individualism and lack of community, citizens fail to pull together and look out for each other, which decreases the interest and connection they have in politics.

Decreasing rates in party membership and electoral turnouts is part of a process that's seen less interest in political affairs as citizens seem to care more about themselves and family rather than their neighbours and society as a whole. The voting turnout over the past years has been inconsistent. During 1945 to 1992, the average turnout rate in the UK general elections was above 75 per cent. However in the 2001 general election, the turnout rate was 59 per cent, the lowest the turnout rate has ever been since 1918. This shows the interest citizens had in political affairs decreased drastically.

The turnout rate did increase however, by the 2010 UK general election the turnout rate was at 65 per cent due to the first ever UK TV debate with the three party leaders: David Cameron, Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg even though it was still below the average turnout rate during 1945 to 1992. Similarly, party membership in the UK has also decreased over the years. For example the number of people that were registered to Labour party has fallen from over one million members in the mid 1950's to around 166, 000 members in 2009. Conservatives party membership has also fallen.

The number of people that were registered to Conservative party has fallen from approx. 2. 8 million members in the 1950's to around 250, 000 members in 2009. By 2007, less than 1 per cent of people across the UK belonged to political parties, from 7 per cent 50 years ago. This shows a decline in party membership which is caused by a decline in the voters' loyalty towards political parties. Another reason why there is a participation crisis in the UK is the media. The media has a big impact and influence on citizens and the way they vote and support political parties.

The media focuses on the political scandals, allegations, incompetence and policy failure of the parties which means that the good things about the leading politicians are forgotten about and the negative tend to be more popular. For example, the Sun newspaper has seemed to influence citizens about which party should be in power as each party the Sun has supported over the years has won in the general elections. This shows that the media has had an impact on citizens and their preferred party which could be another reason why there is a participation crisis.

The final explanation why there is a participation crisis in the UK is the politicians themselves. Politicians have been known to lack vision, and only really care about being elected in modern politicians and political parties as it is seen as just another professional career. Politicians have also been known to be over-concerned with the media and how they are portrayed rather than being concerned on how things are at the moment and what they can do to make things better.

This creates an impression to citizens that politicians are less trustworthy and are all about presentation which causes turnout rates and party membership to decline. The growing idea for politicians to target key voters and citizens they feel might change parties is also a contribution to declining voter turnout rates as other citizens may feel like they aren't as important or cared about and so decide to not vote or vote for a different party because the political parties are ignoring the voters in the majority of seats.

The decline in participation rates may also be because of politicians and political parties being too similar to each other, which doesn't give citizens much choice if both parties are appealing to the same targets and have the

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same policies. In previous years there were clear divides in the different parties and policies, which made it easier for citizens to choose which party they wanted in power. However for example, the Labour and Conservative parties have distanced themselves away from their traditional policies and targets and are now both focusing on Middle English citizens.

In my opinion, there is much evidence for a participation crisis, although single issue politics is growing and pressure groups add to the democratic process as they give a voice to those who are ignored by the majority system. Party memberships have declined however pressure group memberships are growing. Voter turnout is declining, fewer people feel naturally inclined to a particular party and even less take an active interest in politics due to rising income levels blurring class lines. Because pressure group membership, e petitions and direct action have increased I think this contradicts the idea of a participation crisis.

To conclude, the British people have always been reluctant to get involved in democracy. Although forms of participation are constantly evolving; with the small minority who take a strong interest in politics turning more to action groups at the cost of parties, nothing has occurred since 1918 to change the fact that the majority give more priority to work, home, recreation and their private lives instead of public concerns. Many changes can be made to improve democracy however it may not work because Britons do not have an active involvement in politics.

There are three main factors that could explain declining turnouts at election time, the electorate- society has become more materialistic, the media- they have caused enormous problems for the public to trust and put their faith in

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politics, and lastly politicians- they have done nothing to restore faith back into politics. The cause of participation crisis lies within the physical act of voting being out of touch with the public. Many of us are tied with jobs social life family life to find time to vote. Therefore voting becomes a burden.