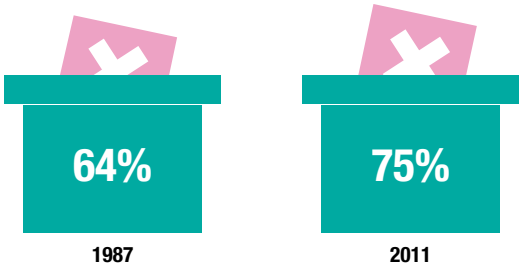
# Politics

## A disengaged Britain? Political interest and participation over 30 years

There is common concern that the British public is increasingly becoming disengaged with politics. Only a small majority now turns out to vote, and fewer than ever before identify with a political party. This chapter examines trends in attitudes towards politics over the past 30 years, exploring differences among the electorate, and considers what this might mean for the future health of British democracy.

## Declining engagement?

**Overall we see a downward trend in engagement: compared with 30 years ago fewer people identify with a political party, and fewer feel that the political system works for them. However, slightly more people are interested in politics than in the mid-1980s (although still a minority), and more feel they can influence government.**



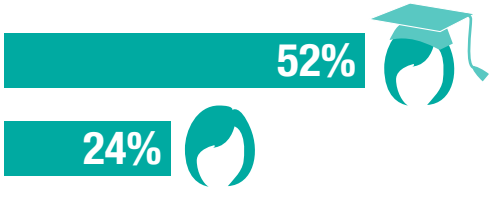

A majority feel the political system is not working for them. In 2011 75% agreed that **parties are only interested in votes**, up from 64% in 1987.


However, the percentage who feel they **have no say in what government does** has fallen from 71% in 1986 to 59% now.

## The changing electorate

**Younger people are less likely to identify with a political party, less likely to believe it a civic duty to vote, are less interested in politics and less likely to have undertaken conventional political activities than younger people in the past. The more highly educated remain more engaged with politics.**


Two-thirds of those in their 20s or early 30s **identify with a particular political party**, compared with 85% of the same age group back in 1983.




Although the gap between the highly educated and less well educated in terms of their **interest in politics** is narrowing, it does persist: 52% of those with a degree or higher education are interested in politics, compared with 24% of those with no qualification.

# Introduction

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In the last general election in 2010, a majority of people in the United Kingdom – 65 per cent – turned out to vote (UK Political Info). And in 2012, seven in ten (72 per cent) Britons say they identify with a particular political party. Thus, it seems that the majority of the British public today is engaging with our democratic system. So why is there so much discussion about the declining health of Britain's representative democracy? We use 30 years of data from British Social Attitudes to address this question. We ask whether there is evidence of a decline in public engagement with how Britain is governed and, if so, why that might be. And we consider what the trends over the past 30 years can tell us about the likely future of Britain's democratic system.

It has been argued that a decline in class, as well as partisan identities, and a shift away from collective feelings of being part of a society to taking a more individualist approach, have all been linked to a reduced participation in conventional democratic routes (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000, Clarke et al., 2004). (In fact our latest British Social Attitudes findings in the Social class chapter do not support this theory of decline in class identity, but do support the decoupling of class identity and political partisanship.) More recent attempts by government to engage the public in electoral reform seem to attract minority interest. When British Social Attitudes asked the public about the proposed electoral reforms designed to increase participation and accountability, we found lukewarm support (Curtice and Seyd, 2012). This lack of interest was reflected in the very low turnout of 15 per cent for the 2012 police crime and commissioner elections in England (The Electoral Commission, 2013). The only potential reform of majority attraction to the British public appears to be more direct forms of democracy (such as referenda and the ability to recall errant MPs).

In addition to these wider societal changes, during the last two or three decades, there have been a number of high profile political scandals and perceived major errors on the part of governments. We know these have affected the British public's confidence with politicians, and government more generally. With the 'cash for questions' scandal in the 1990s, followed by the MPs' expenses scandal in 2009[1], high profile U-turns following the 2010 election on student fees and the NHS, it is perhaps no surprise that the British public has recently been labelled "disgruntled, disillusioned and disengaged" in relation to political life in this country (Fox et al., 2012: 9).

With three decades' worth of information about public attitudes to politics, government and politicians, British Social Attitudes has a wealth of data to allow us to address the question of how far the public's engagement with politics has actually changed, reflecting changes in society and a history of political problems and scandals. We track people's engagement with politics across a range of dimensions: identification with political parties, interest in and understanding of politics, feelings of civic duty, political trust, and engagement with conventional and alternative routes of democratic participation. We ask whether a decline in turnout at general election time reflects a reduced interest in politics and in influencing the way in which the country is run, or whether other things are at play. In particular, we look at the views and participation of the young electorate and ask what British Social Attitudes can tell us about the future of our democracy – in the 2015 general election and beyond.

## Is there need for growing concern?

With a majority of the public participating in general elections, and most people feeling that they identify with one of the political parties involved, why are there discussions about an increasingly disengaged electorate? Across three key measures, we find a decline over the past 30 years in public participation with the conventional democratic process.

### Voting

Voting is crucial to the health of democracy. Low turnout raises the question as to whether the outcomes of elections reflect the views of the British public as a whole. Although the majority of the British public turned out to vote at the last general election, it was by no means everybody: a third of eligible voters did not do so. Clearly, there is a section of society who chose not to exercise its right to vote on that day. Fewer people have voted in the last three general elections than they ever have in the past: the worry is that we are now on a downward trajectory (Figure 3.1). Official records for general elections between 1922 and 1997 show turnout never fell below 70 per cent (and reached a high of 84 per cent in 1950). In 1983, the year in which British Social Attitudes started, 73 per cent of the population turned out to vote, returning Margaret Thatcher with a sizeable majority. In contrast, when the Labour Party was re-elected in 2001, the proportion who voted was only 59 per cent. Although turnout was higher again in 2010, it was still lower than traditional levels. We know there are many reasons why people might turn out to vote, including the perceived difference between parties and how closely run the race is (Curtice, 2010). However, the closely fought election of 2010, while an improvement on turnout earlier this century, still did not attract participation levels as high as general elections in the 1990s and earlier. This is coupled with the fact that voting in local elections has always been comparatively low and that, too, has dropped over time. After a peak in 1990, local election turnout dropped dramatically to a low in 2000, though since then shows some small signs of recovery (Rallings et al., 2005).

### Party identification

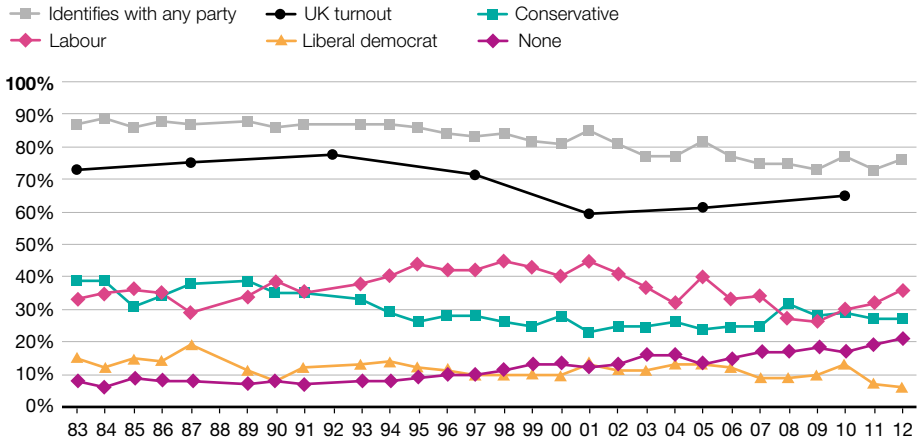
**21%**

**do not identify with a political party, up from 8% in 1983**

Identifying with a political party is known to increase significantly the likelihood of voting for that party at election time (Clarke et al., 2004). Traditionally party identification was rooted in social class (Butler and Stokes, 1969). At the same time the Labour and Conservative parties took distinct positions on issues, mirroring their class-based support. As class self-identifications have changed and parties have reached out to non-core voters, we see a decline in partisanship and the power this once held when voting (Clarke et al., 2004).

The proportion of people who identify with a particular political party has also declined over time. Over the past 30 years, we have asked people about this using a series of questions.[2] Figure 3.1 shows an overall decline in people saying they identified with a political party from around nine in ten people (87 per cent) in 1983 to under eight in ten (76 per cent) now. In 2012, one in five people (21 per cent) say they do not identify with any political party.

**Figure 3.1 Voting in general elections and party identification, 1983–2012**




*In this figure no party identification ('None') only includes those who explicitly deny that they identify with a party. It excludes those saying "don't know", or giving some other answer other than naming a party*
*Liberal Democrat 1983–1987 includes those who answered Liberal or Social Democratic Party*
*Source: UK turnout figures from UK Political Info*
*The data on which Figure 3.1 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter*

**Among party identifiers, fewer say this attachment is strong than in the late 1980s**

Coupled with this, there has been a drop in the proportion of people who claim to have a strong affiliation with a particular party (Table 3.1). When those who identify with a party were asked whether their attachment is "very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong", in 1987 almost half (46 per cent) of the British public said they had a "very strong" or "fairly strong" identification. By 2010, only around a third (36 per cent) of the public said this. So, not only do fewer people feel they identify with any political party, but among those who do, fewer are expressing a strong engagement.

**Table 3.1 Trends in strength of party identification, election years between 1987 and 2010, and 2012**

| | 1987 | 1997 | 2001 | 2005 | 2010 | 2012 | Change 1987–2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Strength of party identification** | % | % | % | % | % | % | |
| Very strong | 11 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6 | -6 |
| Fairly strong | 35 | 28 | 29 | 28 | 29 | 25 | -10 |
| Not very strong | 40 | 47 | 49 | 46 | 41 | 47 | +7 |
| None | 8 | 10 | 12 | 13 | 17 | 22 | +14 |
| *Weighted base* | *2847* | *3620* | *3287* | *2847* | *3294* | *2985* | |
| *Unweighted Base* | *2766* | *3620* | *3287* | *2766* | *3294* | *2983* | |

## A civic duty to vote?

A decline over time in the proportion of people feeling attached to any one political party does not necessarily mean that there has been a decline in people feeling that they have a civic duty to vote, an issue which may be more strongly related to feelings around the rights and freedoms associated with being a British citizen than allegiance to a political party. However, British Social Attitudes shows that there has been a decline in numbers thinking that they have a duty to vote (Figure 3.2). Since 1987 (asked most recently in 2011), we have asked which of the following statements came closest to someone's views about general elections:

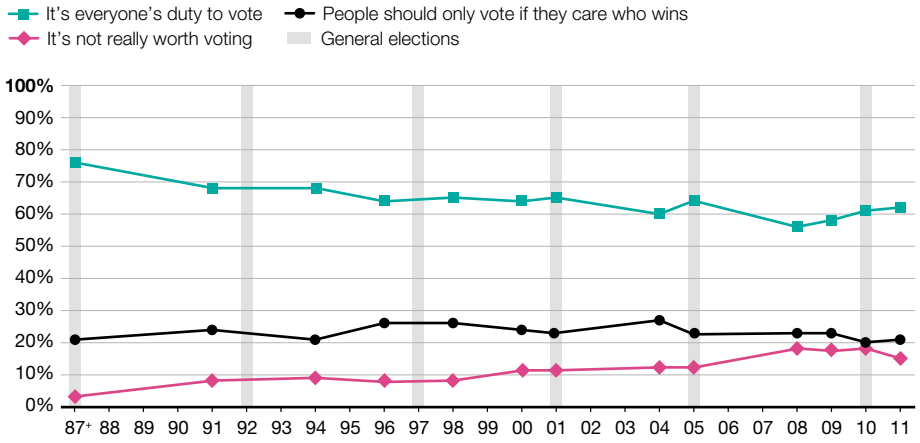
*In a general election …*

*It's not really worth voting*
*People should vote only if they care who wins*
*It's everyone's duty to vote*

**62%**
**say it's everyone's duty to vote; down from 76% in 1987**

There has been a long-term decline in the proportion saying "it's everyone's duty to vote", from 76 per cent in 1987 to 62 per cent in 2011. That said, there has been an upturn since 2008 in the proportions saying this: perhaps the decline has halted, and is possibly reversing. Certainly, others have shown that a sense of duty to vote is one of the strongest predictors of why people cast their vote (Clarke et al., 2004), and a higher turnout in 2010 has coincided with a small increase in the proportions saying that voting is a civic duty.

**Figure 3.2 Duty to vote, 1987–2011**




*+Source: British Election Study*
*The data on which Figure 3.2 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter*

## Is there less interest in having a say in how the country is run?

We see that over the past three decades participation in conventional politics has declined. Does this mean that the British public is actually less interested in politics per se than it used to be? Or perhaps that people are now less interested in engaging with central government politics, but rather express their views on how the country should be run in different ways?

### Interest in politics

Firstly, we see that, no, people are not less interested than before. Table 3.2 shows people's responses to the following question, asked by British Social Attitudes since 1986:

*How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics*

*... a great deal, quite a lot, some, not very much, or, none at all?*

**The majority of the British public has never been very interested in politics**

In fact, the majority of the British public has never reported being very interested in politics. In 1986, three in ten people (29 per cent) said they were interested "a great deal" or "quite a lot", and the pattern was very similar through the 1990s and 2000s. Recently, there are signs of slightly *more* people being interested in politics than before (although still only a minority): in 2012, 36 per cent of people say they are interested.[3] While this has fluctuated over time (data not shown), our latest reading is seven percentage points up on our 1986 results. So, the fact that fewer people have been voting in recent general elections does not appear to be simply a function of reduced levels of interest in politics.

**Table 3.2 Interest in politics, 1986, 1996, 2003 and 2012**

| | 1986 | 1996 | 2003 | 2012 | Change 1986–2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Interest in politics** | % | % | % | % | |
| Great deal/quite a lot | 29 | 31 | 30 | 36 | +7 |
| Some | 31 | 33 | 33 | 32 | +1 |
| Not much/none at all | 39 | 37 | 37 | 32 | -7 |
| *Weighted base* | *1548* | *3620* | *4432* | *1099* | |
| *Unweighted base* | *1548* | *3620* | *4432* | *1103* | |

That said there certainly is an association between someone being interested in politics and whether they vote in a general election (Clarke et al., 2004) and the recent increase in turnout occurred mainly among the interested (Curtice, 2010). In the 2010 British Social Attitudes survey 86 per cent of those with a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of interest in politics reported voting in the May general election, compared with only 53 per cent of those with "not very much" interest or "none at all".[4]

## Other ways of engaging in the political process

Turning to the next question, of whether people are engaging in different ways in the political process, we look at the public's responses to the following question (last asked in 2011), covering both conventional and unconventional forms of engagement:

> *And have you ever done any of the things on this card about a government action which you thought was unjust and harmful?*
>
> *Contact my MP or MSP*
> *Speak to an influential person*
> *Contact a government department*
> *Contact radio, TV or a newspaper*
> *Sign a petition*
> *Raise the issue in an organisation I already belong to*
> *Go on a protest or demonstration*
> *Form a group of like-minded people*
> *None of these*

Table 3.3 shows that non-electoral participation has largely increased over the past 30 years. People are more likely now to report, for example, signing a petition (37 per cent) and contacting their MP (16 per cent) than they were in 1983 (when the figures were 29 per cent and 10 per cent respectively), though

**Non-electoral participation has increased over the past 30 years**

this is lower than our reading from the early 1990s and 2000s. And while the proportions remain small, we have also seen increases in the reporting of other activities such as going on a protest or contacting the media. In part, some of this is likely due to the increasing ease of signing petitions and contacting officials through online channels, widening the public's opportunities for engaging with political debates. Given that over the past few years e-petitions have become increasingly available, and recognised as a channel for putting public pressure on the government[5] we might expect this activity to significantly increase over the coming years.

**Table 3.3 Undertaken political activity, 1983, 1991, 2002 and 2011**

| | 1983 | 1991 | 2002 | 2011 | Change 1983–2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **% saying undertaken activity** | | | | | |
| Signed a petition | 29 | 53 | 43 | 37 | +8 |
| Contacted your MP | 10 | 17 | 17 | 16 | +6 |
| Gone on a protest or demonstration | 6 | 9 | 12 | 8 | +2 |
| Contacted a government department | 2 | 4 | 5 | 6 | +4 |
| Spoken to an influential person | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | +2 |
| Raised an issue in an organisation you belong to | 7 | 5 | 6 | 5 | -1 |
| Contacted radio, TV or newspaper | 2 | 4 | 6 | 5 | +3 |
| Formed a group of like-minded people | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | +1 |
| None of these | 62 | 37 | 46 | 55 | -8 |
| *Weighted base* | *533* | *1422* | *2285* | *2198* | |
| *Unweighted base* | *549* | *1445* | *2287* | *2215* | |

*Respondents could choose more than one answer and so columns do not add to 100 per cent*

## Do fewer people think that they can make a difference?

Given the British public appears no less interested in politics – and in fact is potentially more interested – and more people are turning to less conventional forms of political participation than in the 1980s, another question we look at is whether falls in electoral turnout and belief in voting as a civic duty can be linked to disillusionment with the current democratic process. Do fewer people trust governments, or politicians more specifically? Are they less likely to think the current political system is able and willing to meet its citizens' needs – sometimes referred to as 'system efficacy' (Almond and Verba, 1965)? And are people perhaps less likely to feel that they themselves have leverage over what the government does – or, in other words, what are their feelings about their personal 'political efficacy'? While there has been increasing public distrust in government, it does not appear to have led to disillusionment in the ability for the public to influence the democratic process. In fact, there is some evidence of an increase in personal efficacy.

## Political trust

Since 1986, British Social Attitudes has been asking people:

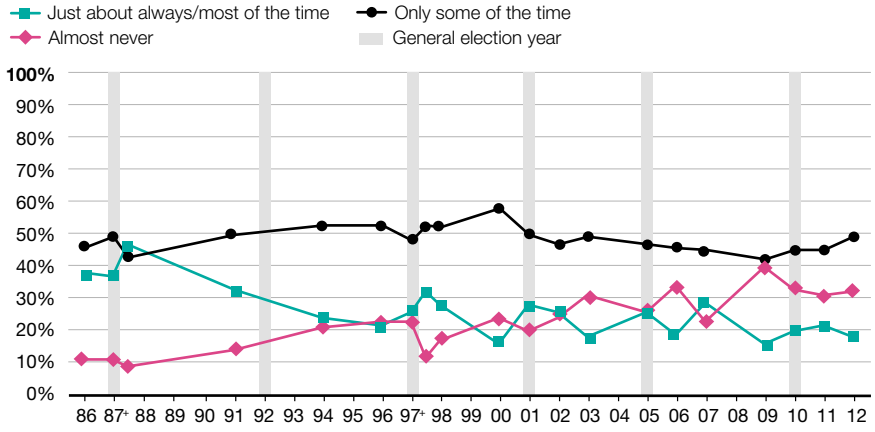
> *How much do you trust British governments of any party to place the needs of the nation above the interests of their own political party?*

**32%**

**almost never trust government, up from 11% in 1986**

Figure 3.3 shows public levels of trust in governments declining between 1986 and 2012, similar to the decline in turnouts, partisanship (allegiance to a particular political party) and in the proportion of the population feeling that it is their civic duty to vote. In 2012, three times as many people say that they "almost never" trust governments as did in 1986 (32 per cent in 2012, up from 11 per cent in 1986). At the same time the proportion who "just about always" or "most of the time" trust government has almost halved (18 per cent in 2012, down from 38 per cent in 1986). Although the overall trend is that levels of trust have reduced, it is not linear: traditionally trust recovers in the wake of general elections (these years are shown in the figure), but is shown to be short-lived (Bromley and Curtice, 2002). There are also indications of the impact of 'sleaze' allegations surrounding the 1992–1997 Conservative government, and the spike in distrust in 2009 when the MPs' expenses scandal hit and a high of 40 per cent of the public said they "almost never" trusted government. Again, there is some indication of improved levels of trust in very recent years, an issue to which we return in our conclusions. Given the link between trust in government and likelihood of turning out to vote this is an important finding.[6]

**Figure 3.3 Trust in government, 1986–2012**




*+Source: the second readings for 1987 and 1997 are from the British Election Study. These readings, along with those in 2001, 2005 and 2010 were taken shortly after an election had been held*
*The data on which Figure 3.3 is based can be found in the appendix to this chapter*

We found a similar pattern in relation to the question:

> *And how much do you trust politicians of any party in Britain to tell the truth when they are in a tight corner?*

**Trust in politicians has never been high**

In fact, trust in politicians to tell the truth when in a tight corner has never been particularly high in Britain, and is consistently below levels of trust in government as a whole. British Social Attitudes first asked this question in 1994 when 49 per cent "almost never" trusted politicians; in 2009, when the expenses scandal broke, we saw the highest ever reading in distrust, with 60 per cent of the public "almost never" trusting politicians to tell the truth. Since then there has been some recovery, with the latest reading at 54 per cent, and an increase in the proportion saying they trust politicians "only some of the time" to 40 per cent.

## System efficacy

There are three widely-used questions which help to provide an answer to the question of whether people think the political system can work for the citizens it serves. In essence, there has been little change in the views of the British public on this issue, at least since the mid-1990s. We ask respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree that:

*Parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions*

*Generally speaking, those we elect as MPs lose touch with people pretty quickly*

*It doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go on much the same*

**Throughout the period high proportions express low feelings of political efficacy**

Table 3.4 shows the proportion of people who "agree" or "agree strongly" to each of these three statements. As each statement expresses doubts about the political system's responsiveness to voters' needs, the *higher* the proportion the *lower* the level of political system efficacy. Throughout the period, high proportions of people express low feelings of political efficacy: that their vote and involvement in the political process is not going to make much difference. However, historically, such feelings have not changed much. There was a shift – in a negative direction – from 1994, with the lower levels of efficacy remaining since then.

**Table 3.4 System efficacy, 1987, 1994, 2002 and 2011**

| | 1987 | 1994 | 2002 | 2011 | Change 1987–2011* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **% agree** | | | | | |
| Parties only interested in votes | 64 | 72 | 75 | 75 | +10 |
| MPs lose touch quickly | 71 | 72 | 73 | 73 | +2 |
| Doesn't matter which party is in power | n/a | 57 | 69 | 71 | +17 |
| *Weighted base* | *1375* | *1140* | *2285* | *2198* | |
| *Unweighted base* | *1410* | *1137* | *2287* | *2215* | |

*n/a = not asked*
**'Doesn't matter which party is in power' change measured is 1994–2011*

## Political efficacy

Our final question in this section was whether people now are more or less likely to feel they have any say over how governments run the country. British Social Attitudes asks how much people agree or disagree that:

*People like me have no say in what the government does*

*Voting is the only way people like me can have any say about how the government runs things*

*Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on*

The first statement is about whether people think that they can influence government decisions. The second statement measures whether people think

**There has been an increase in personal political efficacy**

they have any say beyond their right to vote. And the last one taps into whether the running of the country is seen as something elusive, beyond the reach of the ordinary person. On all three measures, the last 30 years has actually seen a perceived *improvement* in how far the public can influence the running of government and a greater understanding of the parliamentary system (Table 3.5). In 1986, seven in ten people (71 per cent) agreed that they had no say in what government does, but this proportion is now six in ten (59 per cent), almost the lowest reading across the time period and a marked improvement on the late 1980s. The proportion who agree that voting is the only way to have a say is down eight percentage points from 73 per cent in 1994 to 60 per cent now. On the third statement, with rising education levels, we might expect the population as a whole to feel more able to understand politics and government now than when British Social Attitudes began in 1983. Overall, this is the case, with a decline of 12 percentage points between 1986 and 2012 in the proportion saying that government is too complicated to follow (from 69 per cent down to 57 per cent). While it is encouraging that feelings of personal political efficacy have improved on earlier readings, there is still a way to go to empower certain groups to feel that they can influence government.

**Table 3.5 Personal political efficacy, 1986, 1994, 2003 and 2012**

| | 1986 | 1994 | 2003 | 2012 | Change 1986–2012* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **% agree** | | | | | |
| People like me have no say in what government does | 71 | 64 | 64 | 59 | -12 |
| Politics is too complicated to understand | 69 | 70 | 60 | 57 | -12 |
| Voting is the only way to have any say | n/a | 73 | 64 | 60 | -8 |
| *Weighted base* | *1548* | *1140* | *4432* | *1099* | |
| *Unweighted base* | *1548* | *1137* | *4432* | *1103* | |

*n/a = not asked*
**'Voting is the only way to have any say' change measured is 1994–2011*

So, there has been an overall decline in the extent to which the British public trusts governments to act in the interests of the country. But, with very little change in attitudes to system efficacy and improvements in terms of personal political efficacy, we look to other explanations as to why there has been a gradual decline in engagement with conventional politics, and what that might mean for the future. We look to who votes – and thinks it is important to vote – in general elections, and consider how the views and behaviour of the young electorate (those who will be participating in elections in the medium to long-term) might shape engagement with democracy in the future.

## The younger electorate: what's the future?

The fact that fewer people appear to be engaging with conventional politics – measured in terms of voting behaviour, party political identification and thinking that voting is a civic duty – may be related to changes in the make-up of the British population or, more specifically, to differences across the generations. In Table 3.6 we see that, in nearly every aspect of political engagement reported,

younger people lag behind older members of the electorate. Younger people are less likely to feel it a civic duty to vote (45 per cent compared with an average of 62 per cent of the population, and 73 per cent of those aged 65 or over) and less likely to have reported voting in the last general election when we asked in 2010 (45 per cent compared with 69 per cent of everyone, and 88 per cent of those aged 65 or over, though we should be wary of the small sample size for our youngest group). Six in ten (61 per cent) of 18–24 year olds identify with a political party, again, below the average of 72 per cent for everyone, and three in ten (32 per cent) are interested in politics – not that dissimilar to age groups upto 55, though again we should be wary of the small sample size here.

**Table 3.6 Political engagement, by age**[7]

| | 18–24 | 25–35 | 35–44 | 45–54 | 55–64 | 65+ | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| % identifying with a political party | 61 | 65 | 71 | 68 | 73 | 83 | 72 |
| % saying it's everyone's duty to vote (2011) | 45 | 57 | 57 | 61 | 70 | 73 | 62 |
| % with great deal/quite a lot of interest in politics | 32 | 24 | 30 | 34 | 44 | 49 | 36 |
| % saying voted in 2010 general election (2010) | 45 | 48 | 67 | 75 | 84 | 88 | 69 |

If the relative lack of interest among young people is simply a factor of their age (and they will become more engaged as they get older), we might be less concerned than if we are looking at a generational change, with younger generations generally less engaged than their parents and grandparents. Certainly, with the drop in turnout in the 2001 and 2005 elections, concerns have been raised about this generational shift: if a sense of voting duty is not acquired soon after someone reaches voting age, they seem less likely to develop this and thus ensure they vote throughout their lives (Butt and Curtice, 2010); they do not acquire the 'habit' of voting (see, for example, Plutzer, 2002, Gerber et al., 2003). So, we turn now to look at the differences between younger and older people across a range of questions we have discussed earlier in the chapter – party political identification, civic duty, interest in politics, and political activity. In particular, we unpick the question of whether differences across age groups seem likely to lead to long-term change in the public's engagement with politics. (See the Technical details chapter for further explanation of this type of analysis.)

## Identification with a political party

If we look at the proportion of people across different age cohorts who identify with a political party, what light does that shed on whether the decline in identifying with a political party that we have seen since the mid-1990s is likely to continue? Table 3.7 shows the proportion of people saying that they identify with a particular political party. If we look along each row we can establish how each cohort's allegiance to a political party changed as it grew older. For instance, of our cohort born in the 1930s, 90 per cent identified with a political party in 1983, and 84 per cent did so in 2012. Meanwhile, if we read diagonally upwards from left to right we can compare the proportions of people with a party allegiance among similar age groups in each year. It is this diagonal comparison which tells us whether there are generational differences, with each successive cohort entering the electorate with a different viewpoint on politics.

**Younger cohorts are more likely to have lost their party allegiances than older ones**

We can take a number of key points from this table. Firstly, looking across each row, it seems that there has been a drop in the proportion of people with a party allegiance across *all* age groups. So, there are changes at a societal level (a period effect) causing certain people across the age spectrum to dis-align themselves from a political party, resulting in fewer people overall connecting with any party. For instance, among those born in the 1950s, 85 per cent entered the electorate with a political allegiance but only 75 per cent of them still have one in 2012. This runs counter to evidence published in the 1960s that partisanship increases with age, as one builds on continuing support for one party (Converse, 1969): this seems no longer to be the case. Secondly, the younger cohorts seem to be more likely than older cohorts to have lost their allegiances (shown by the percentage point differences in the right hand column). So, mixed with the period effect, is a lifecycle effect, differentially affecting younger cohorts. This leads us to our third point: by looking diagonally upwards from left to right, we see that, since 1991, each successive cohort of young voters has entered the electorate less likely to identify with a political party than its predecessor. So, there is a 'generational' change. For instance, in 1983, 85 per cent of 24 to 33 year olds had an allegiance with a political party; by 2002 only 75 per cent of 25 to 34 year olds did, and by 2012 that figure has dropped further to 66 per cent.

As a result of these period, lifecycle and generational effects, there is a widening gap in partisanship between young and old. In 1983 and 1991 there was very little difference across the age spectrum, with our youngest group only three percentage points behind our oldest group in 1983, and no difference in 1991 in terms of the proportion with a party allegiance. Young people were as likely as their older counterparts to enter the electorate with a party allegiance. By 2002, the gap was 16 percentage points, and by 2012 it is 25 percentage points.

**Table 3.7 Identifying with a political party, by cohort, 1983, 1991, 2002 and 2012**[8]

| % identify with party | | | | | 1983 | 1991 | 2002 | 2012 | Change 1983–2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | | | | | 87 | 87 | 81 | 72 | -16 |
| **Cohort** | **Age in 1983** | **Age in 1991** | **Age in 2002** | **Age in 2012** | | | | | |
| 1980s | | | | 23–32 | | | | 66 | |
| 1970s | | | 25–34 | 33–42 | | | 75 | 69 | |
| 1960s | | 22–31 | 35–44 | 43–52 | | 84 | 79 | 69 | |
| 1950s | 24–33 | 32–41 | 45–54 | 53–62 | 85 | 86 | 84 | 75 | -11 |
| 1940s | 34–43 | 42–51 | 55–64 | 63–72 | 88 | 88 | 87 | 83 | -5 |
| 1930s | 44–53 | 52–61 | 65–74 | 73–82 | 90 | 86 | 89 | 84 | -6 |
| 1920s | 54–63 | 62–71 | 75–84 | | 92 | 89 | 87 | | |
| 1910s | 64–73 | 72–81 | | | 89 | 89 | | | |
| 1900s | 74–83 | | | | 83 | | | | |
| Difference youngest–oldest | | | | | -3 | 0 | -16 | -25 | |

*Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year*

**These findings suggest partisanship will continue to fall**

So, what can we conclude about the future of partisanship? Overall, these findings imply that partisanship will continue to fall, if all other things remain equal. However, one issue that we cannot factor in is the character of the political parties. Over the period since British Social Attitudes began, there has been a convergence towards the centre of the three main parties, resulting in the public differentiating less between their policies and values. Should one or more parties move away, towards the left or the right, or should parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) move further to the fore, then the nature of the parties may influence trends in partisanship.

## Duty to vote

Table 3.8 uses the same format as Table 3.7, showing the British public's views on whether it is their civic duty to vote, which we first asked on British Social Attitudes in 1991. Just as older people are more likely to vote, they are also more likely to say that it is their civic duty to do so: in 2011 50 per cent of 22 to 31 year olds and 70 per cent of people aged 72 to 81 said that it was. But, our interest is in whether this is simply a factor of people's life stage, with people's sense of duty increasing as they get older, or whether there are generational shifts in people's views on the issue, and whether the overall decline in feelings of civic duty has happened across all, or only certain, age groups (that is, whether there is a period effect).

**The trajectory in terms of future levels of civic duty is unclear**

The answer seems to be that there are lifecycle, generational and period effects going on here. At the top of Table 3.8, we repeat the figures showing an overall decline in the proportion of people saying it is everyone's duty to vote that we showed in Figure 3.2. Looking across the table rows, at each age cohort, we find a mixed picture, with some age cohorts showing a fall in feelings of civic duty as they age, and others showing an increase. There is limited evidence to suggest that, among more recent cohorts, their feelings of civic duty increase as they age, but the picture is by no means clear. The difference between our youngest and oldest groups at each time point shows a fairly consistent difference (of between 20 and 26 percentage points) in the proportions who believe it a civic duty to vote. So, while the gap between oldest and youngest is not widening, we have seen that younger people entering the electorate have been less likely to believe in this civic duty than their predecessors 20 years ago, but no different to those a decade ago. The trajectory in terms of future levels of civic duty is currently unclear.

**Table 3.8 Duty to vote, by cohort, 1991, 2001 and 2011**[9]

| % saying "it's everyone's duty to vote" | | | | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | Change 1991–2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | | | | 68 | 65 | 62 | -6 |
| **Cohort** | **Age in 1991** | **Age in 2001** | **Age in 2011** | | | | |
| 1980s | | | 22–31 | | | 50 | |
| 1970s | | 22–31 | 32–41 | | 49 | 58 | |
| 1960s | 22–31 | 32–41 | 42–51 | 57 | 61 | 61 | +5 |
| 1950s | 32–41 | 42–51 | 52–61 | 65 | 66 | 64 | -1 |
| 1940s | 42–51 | 52–61 | 62–71 | 68 | 74 | 75 | +6 |
| 1930s | 52–61 | 62–71 | 72–81 | 79 | 80 | 70 | -9 |
| 1920s | 62–71 | 72–81 | | 79 | 75 | | |
| Difference youngest–oldest | | | | -22 | -26 | -20 | |

*Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year*

## Interest in politics

**The gap between young and old has widened in terms of political interest**

We noted earlier that, while levels of public interest in politics have fluctuated over the past 25 years or so, they are higher now than in 1986 (36 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). Given the link between interest in politics and voting, what is happening here in terms of the younger and older electorate, and what can that tell us about the young and future electorates? Table 3.9 shows the proportions saying they have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of interest in politics. We can see that young people are less likely to be interested in politics than older people: in 2012, 23 per cent of 23 to 32 year olds are interested, compared with 39 per cent of those aged 73 to 82, and 51 per cent of those aged 63 to 72. We can see that this gap between young and old has widened: in 1986 the gap between the proportions of our interested youngest and oldest groups was seven percentage points, while our latest reading is more than double this at 16 percentage points. Most of the increased interest in politics overall (seven percentage points up on 1986) can be attributed to the older electorate – becoming more interested in politics over their lifetime (shown by the percentage point differences in the right hand column).

**Table 3.9 Interest in politics, by cohort, 1986, 1994, 2003 and 2012**[10]

| % interested in politics | | | | | 1986 | 1994 | 2003 | 2012 | Change 1986–2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | | | | | 29 | 32 | 30 | 36 | +7 |
| **Cohort** | **Age in 1986** | **Age in 1994** | **Age in 2003** | **Age in 2012** | | | | | |
| 1980s | | | | 23–32 | | | | 23 | |
| 1970s | | | 24–33 | 33–42 | | | 24 | 28 | |
| 1960s | | 25–34 | 34–43 | 43–52 | | 30 | 25 | 31 | |
| 1950s | 27–36 | 35–44 | 44–53 | 53–62 | 27 | 34 | 33 | 43 | +16 |
| 1940s | 37–46 | 45–54 | 54–63 | 63–72 | 33 | 37 | 36 | 51 | +18 |
| 1930s | 47–56 | 55–64 | 64–73 | 73–82 | 34 | 36 | 38 | 39 | +5 |
| 1920s | 57–66 | 65–74 | 74–83 | | 31 | 41 | 38 | | |
| 1910s | 67–76 | 75–84 | | | 32 | 32 | | | |
| Difference youngest–oldest | | | | | -5 | -2 | -14 | -16 | |

*Data are only presented for those cohorts with an unweighted base of at least 100 in a given year*

## Other ways of engaging in the political process

**Younger people are less likely to undertake non-electoral activity than older people**

We have established that young people are less likely to turn out to vote, they are less likely to identify with a particular political party, they have less of a feeling of civic duty about voting and they are less interested in politics. We also have (albeit mixed) evidence that things are getting worse over time, with the young electorate increasingly disengaged with the democratic system. One thing we established earlier (from Table 3.3) is that less conventional forms of engagement with politics are slighty on the rise. So, we wondered whether, perhaps, this was being dominated by young people, deciding to attempt to influence the way the country is run by alternative routes. Table 3.10, showing what people of different ages report having done in 2011, indicates that this is in fact not the case. People over the age of 30 were more likely than their younger counterparts to have done things like sign a petition or contact their MP.[11]

**Table 3.10 Undertaken political activity, by age, 2011**

| % saying undertaken activity | 18–29 | 30–59 | 60+ | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Signed a petition | 33 | 39 | 36 | 37 |
| Contacted your MP | 5 | 17 | 20 | 16 |
| Gone on a protest or demonstration | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| Contacted a government department | 2 | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| Spoken to an influential person | 3 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Raised an issue in an organisation you belong to | 3 | 7 | 5 | 5 |
| Contacted radio, TV or newspaper | 3 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Formed a group of like-minded people | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| None of these | 64 | 53 | 52 | 55 |
| *Weighted base* | *407* | *1132* | *656* | *2198* |
| *Unweighted base* | *297* | *1122* | *794* | *2215* |

*Respondents could choose more than one answer and so columns do not add to 100 per cent*

However, it is possible that the British Social Attitudes question does not adequately capture the range of political activities with which younger people engage. Commentators such as McCaffrie and Marsh (2013: 114) talk about the fact that younger people think less about politics as things that happen within formal institutions and processes and more about "politics as occurring more broadly in society, both within and outside formal institutions and processes". So, for example, it may be that young people buy fair trade or environmentally friendly products rather than boycott 'bad' ones. Added to this is the notion of the 'Everyday Maker' (see Bang and Sorensen, 1999), whereby political identity or allegiance is associated with a particular problem or project; once the problem is solved the participant may not engage again in politics until something else comes along which they feel strongly about (McCaffrie and Marsh, 2013).

## The effect of a more educated electorate

Over the past 30 years the proportion of people going on to higher education has increased dramatically. For instance, in 1983, seven per cent of the people interviewed in the first British Social Attitudes survey had a degree level qualification. In the 2012 survey, that percentage is 21 per cent, with younger people far more likely to have a degree than older people.[12] Traditionally, those with higher levels of education turn out to vote in higher numbers than those who are less well educated: 76 percent of British Social Attitudes respondents with degree level qualifications or above reported voting in 2010, compared with 63 per cent with O levels or equivalent (though we should note that 73 per cent of those with no qualifications also reported voting).[13] Given this, there are some interesting questions about likely future voting patterns, taking into account the traditional disengagement of youth and engagement of the more educated.

**The better educated are more likely to vote**

**Any positive changes in engagement are driven by the less well educated**

In 2012, across a range of measures, people with higher levels of education are engaging in politics more than those who have lower or no qualifications. Table 3.11 shows the proportion of people interested in politics, feeling they have a civic duty to vote, that politics are too complicated to understand and that they have no say in government, split by their highest educational qualification.

**Table 3.11 Engagement in politics, by educational qualification**[14]

| | % interested in politics | % saying everyone's duty to vote (2011) | % agreeing politics is too complicated to understand | % agreeing have no say in government |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | 36 | 62 | 57 | 59 |
| **Educational qualification** | | | | |
| Degree | 52 | 77 | 38 | 39 |
| Higher education below degree/ A level | 34 | 64 | 56 | 54 |
| O level or equivalent/CSE | 31 | 51 | 59 | 68 |
| No qualification | 24 | 56 | 77 | 71 |

So, with rising education levels, we might have expected a long-term increase over time in the proportion of the public engaged in the political system. But, apart from a slight increase in interest in politics, we have shown this not to be the case. In fact, where we do find differences over time between the education levels, these suggest that any positive changes are being driven by the less rather than better educated sectors of the population. For instance, Table 3.12 shows the proportion of the population expressing an interest in politics over time. Comparing 1986 with 2012, the increased interest in politics comes from those with O levels or equivalent (up five percentage points) and those with no qualifications (up four percentage points).

**Table 3.12 Interest in politics, by educational qualification, 1986, 1996, 2003 and 2012**[15]

| % great deal/quite a lot of interest in politics | 1986 | 1996 | 2003 | 2012 | Change 1986–2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | 29 | 32 | 30 | 36 | +7 |
| **Educational qualification** | | | | | |
| Degree | 61 | 64 | 55 | 52 | -9 |
| Higher education below degree/ A level | 41 | 39 | 33 | 34 | -7 |
| O level or equivalent/CSE | 26 | 24 | 21 | 31 | +5 |
| No qualification | 20 | 23 | 21 | 24 | +4 |

This might be a feature of increased media coverage and accessibility to following politics now than in the past. However, it may also be to do with the fact, with the relatively recent rise in levels of people entering higher education, that those with degree level qualifications are now younger on average than they were in the early 1980s. So, we may be seeing the interaction between younger people's tendency to be less engaged in politics with the more educated's tendency to be more engaged.

## Conclusions

The key questions we have examined in this chapter are whether the health of British representative democracy is in trouble, and whether today's young people are more disengaged than previous generations. As politicians and the parties begin to prepare for the 2015 general election, they will want to keep in mind the following four key points from our findings.

**There are signs of increasing engagement with politics**

Firstly, a majority of the British public does engage with the political system: they vote in general elections, they affiliate themselves to a particular political party and they feel a civic duty to vote. True, there are concerns about a medium-term trend in declining participation, with lower turnouts at general elections, reduced partisanship and less of a belief that it is one's duty to vote. But still more people engage than not. That said most people remain resolutely uninterested in politics itself.

Secondly, there are signs of increasing engagement with politics: interest in politics has fluctuated over the last 30 years, but is now higher than in 1986; overall people are reporting increased political activity, such as signing a petition; after a long period of steady decline, people's belief in their duty to vote has risen slightly over the last few years; and the long-term trend in people's belief that they can make a difference is upwards, even if most people still feel they cannot do so.

However, in contrast with some of the positive messages above, trust in politicians remains at very low levels, and has shown no real signs of recovery. People continue to believe that MPs lose touch quickly, and that it does not make much difference who is in power.

Lastly, there are large differences in engagement levels between the young and the old, and between those who have more educational qualifications and those who have fewer. So high level concerns about the future of representative democracy must remain, especially as the signs are that the older, more engaged cohorts of the electorate are being replaced by a generation less engaged: on key measures such as affiliation to any political party, today's young people are more detached than yesterday's young people. However, increasingly, even today's older cohorts are now also showing some decreased affinity with political parties over time.

With the next general election two years away at most, our evidence of some small signs of increased public interest in politics offer an important opportunity to the political parties. In this respect, we raise four further points:

- A large majority of the public still identifies with a particular political party, but we are seeing a downward trend in party identification. As such, the group of non-aligned voters (always important) are becoming disproportionately influential. Politicians have always been conscious of 'wooing' the floating voter, often risking alienating their core vote. But the dominant modus operandi continues to involve spending a good deal of time criticising other political parties. An increasing consequence is that, as the major parties attack one another, they also risk turning off the non-aligned voters who are considering voting for the other party, but who could be persuaded to vote in a different way. There is a challenge for politicians to manage their communications to show more respect for the public by respecting their right to choose.

- We know from earlier British Social Attitudes chapters that the only constitutional changes that command wholesale popular support are those which hand power directly to voters, such as referenda, and the ability to recall errant

politicians. Governments of all parties have legislated to increase openness and transparency but it appears these reforms have not resulted in increased trust or respect. Politicians may want to consider further shifts towards direct democracy.

**The long-term decline in trust is corrosive**

- While many of the long-term trends represent a shift towards increasing mistrust of and cynicism about government and politicians, there are actually many positive signs. The long-term downward trend in duty to vote may be reversing. People feel they have more say than they used to. Interest in politics, while still low, is a little higher than it used to be. And more people are actually engaging in political activity (beyond party membership) than before. There are questions about how politicians can capitalise on this trend, and perhaps inculcate a sense that voting really does matter.

- Finally, as in any line of business, reputations are hard won and easily lost. The long-term decline in trust in politicians is corrosive, and politicians pay a heavy price for any actions that reinforce the public's mistrust. This means that politicians need to think carefully about the promises and behaviours they guarantee to abide by as they head towards the next general election. Ultimately, this is about authenticity: avoiding the pitfalls of broken promises, and living up to the highest standards of integrity.

## Notes

1. Following failed attempts by Parliament to block Freedom of Information requests, it emerged that politicians across the board had taken liberties in the expense claims they submitted, many profiting substantially from the taxpayers' purse. This was followed by a number of resignations, sackings, de-selections and retirement announcements, as well as a handful of prosecutions for false accounting. All MPs' expenses and allowances in 2004–2008 were examined and around £500,000 has been requested back so far. www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/may/09/mps-told-repay-profits-homes.

2. The *direction* of someone's party identification is ascertained via a sequence of questions as follows: first, all respondents are asked

   *Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a supporter of any one political party?*

   Those who do not name a party in response are then asked

   *Do you think of yourself as a little closer to one political party than to the others?*

   Those who still do not name a party are then asked

   *If there were a general election tomorrow, which political party do you think you would be most likely to support?*

3. This finding is sharply at variance with that reported by the Hansard Society's annual Audit of Political Engagement in 2012 and 2013, which found that there had been a marked decline in interest in politics. We would note that the change in the level of reported interest in that survey coincided with a change in the contractor undertaking it and thus perhaps might be a consequence of a change in how the survey was conducted (Hansard Society, 2013).

4. Data are as follows:

**Voting by interest in politics, 2010**

| | % voted in 2010 | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Interest in politics** | | | |
| A great deal/quite a lot | 86 | *335* | *333* |
| Some | 71 | *369* | *369* |
| Not very much/none at all | 53 | *365* | *365* |

5. The Labour government hosted such a page on its Number 10 website, and the coalition government launched a directgov webpage in 2011 to house all e-petitions (which repeatedly crashed on its first day as it received more than 1,000 unique visits a minute) (www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/aug/04/government-e-petition-website-crashes). Any petition with more than 100,000 signatures is assured a chance to be debated and voted in the House of Commons.

6. Data are as follows:

**Voting by trust in government, 2010**

| | Voted in 2010 | Did not vote in 2010 |
|---|---|---|
| **Trust government** | % | % |
| Just about always/most of the time | 22 | 16 |
| Some of the time | 50 | 39 |
| Almost never | 28 | 45 |
| *Weighted base* | *768* | *294* |
| *Unweighted base* | *741* | *324* |

7. Bases for Table 3.6 are as follows:

| | 18–24 | 25–35 | 35–44 | 45–54 | 55–64 | 65+ | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Identifying with a political party | | | | | | | |
| *Weighted base* | *385* | *551* | *575* | *571* | *236* | *250* | *3248* |
| *Unweighted base* | *220* | *415* | *577* | *530* | *243* | *289* | *3247* |
| Saying it's everyone's duty to vote (2011) | | | | | | | |
| *Weighted base* | *204* | *298* | *344* | *336* | *294* | *413* | *1890* |
| *Unweighted base* | *121* | *288* | *343* | *334* | *324* | *498* | *1909* |
| With great deal/quite a lot of interest in politics | | | | | | | |
| *Weighted base* | *117* | *200* | *202* | *183* | *169* | *227* | *1099* |
| *Unweighted base* | *69* | *155* | *201* | *167* | *182* | *327* | *1103* |
| Saying voted in 2010 general election (2010) | | | | | | | |
| *Weighted base* | *126* | *206* | *201* | *169* | *154* | *224* | *1083* |
| *Unweighted base* | *76* | *160* | *211* | *164* | *180* | *286* | *1081* |

8. Bases for Table 3.7 are as follows:

**Identifying with a political party, by cohort, 1983, 1991, 2004 and 2012**

| | 1983 | 1991 | 2004 | 2012 | 1983 | 1991 | 2004 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Weighted base* | | | | *Unweighted base* | |
| **All** | *1719* | *2836* | *3435* | *3248* | *1761* | *2918* | *3435* | *3247* |
| **Cohort** | | | | | | | | |
| 1990s | | | | *273* | | | | *147* |
| 1980s | | | *384* | *544* | | | *273* | *393* |
| 1970s | | *187* | *631* | *571* | | *161* | *627* | *546* |
| 1960s | *186* | *578* | *712* | *578* | *177* | *531* | *731* | *552* |
| 1950s | *316* | *493* | *581* | *499* | *317* | *514* | *518* | *519* |
| 1940s | *337* | *475* | *507* | *458* | *346* | *482* | *510* | *587* |
| 1930s | *261* | *427* | *335* | *234* | *281* | *445* | *391* | *345* |
| 1920s | *257* | *376* | *226* | | *269* | *414* | *302* | |
| 1910s | *232* | *226* | | | *241* | *276* | | |
| 1900s | *113* | | | | *112* | | | |

9. Bases for Table 3.8 are as follows:

**Duty to vote, by cohort, 1991, 2001 and 2011**

| | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 | 1991 | 2001 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | *Weighted base* | | | *Unweighted base* |
| **All** | *1207* | *2821* | *1890* | *1224* | *2795* | *1909* |
| **Cohort** | | | | | | |
| 1980s | | | *270* | | | *241* |
| 1970s | | *411* | *335* | | *384* | *328* |
| 1960s | *256* | *636* | *358* | *229* | *636* | *354* |
| 1950s | *217* | *492* | *288* | *223* | *467* | *299* |
| 1940s | *213* | *498* | *281* | *214* | *473* | *328* |
| 1930s | *182* | *341* | *174* | *192* | *372* | *207* |
| 1920s | *153* | *226* | | *172* | *277* | |

10. Bases for Table 3.9 are as follows:

**Interested in politics, by cohort, 1986, 1994, 2003 and 2012**

| | 1986 | 1994 | 2003 | 2012 | 1986 | 1994 | 2003 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Weighted base* | | | | *Unweighted base* |
| **All** | *1548* | *2282* | *4432* | *1099* | *1548* | *2302* | *4432* | *1103* |
| **Cohort** | | | | | | | | |
| 1980s | | | | *181* | | | | *139* |
| 1970s | | | *757* | *201* | | | *743* | *192* |
| 1960s | | *480* | *847* | *190* | | *496* | *889* | *179* |
| 1950s | *304* | *405* | *828* | *173* | *296* | *401* | *743* | *175* |
| 1940s | *293* | *398* | *718* | *163* | *299* | *360* | *694* | *206* |
| 1930s | *228* | *303* | *503* | *74* | *242* | *303* | *560* | *113* |
| 1920s | *194* | *252* | *335* | | *199* | *294* | *426* | |
| 1910s | *135* | *155* | | | *139* | *197* | | |

11. Arguably the British Social Attitudes question is biased against young people, given it asks whether someone has "ever" done something. A better question might be whether an individual had undertaken an activity in the past 12 months (this is asked on the International Social Survey Programme, see Martin, 2012).

12. In 2012 the figures reported on British Social Attitudes were:

| Age | % with degree level qualification or above | % with higher education below degree level/A level | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All | 21 | 29 | *3248* | *3248* |
| 18–24 | 16 | 50 | *385* | *220* |
| 25–34 | 35 | 31 | *551* | *415* |
| 35–44 | 29 | 37 | *576* | *578* |
| 45–54 | 19 | 30 | *571* | *530* |
| 55–64 | 16 | 24 | *486* | *532* |
| 65+ | 11 | 13 | *674* | *967* |

13. In 2010 our data showed:

| Highest educational qualification | % voted in 2010 | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* |
|---|---|---|---|
| All | 69 | *1083* | *1081* |
| Degree | 76 | *223* | *213* |
| Higher education below degree/A level | 72 | *276* | *255* |
| O level or equivalent/CSE | 63 | *254* | *236* |
| No qualification | 73 | *212* | *253* |
| DK/Refusal/NA | 55 | *105* | *112* |

14. Bases for Table 3.11 are as follows:

| | Interested in politics | | Saying everyone's duty to vote | | Agreeing politics is too complicated to understand | | Agreeing have no say in government | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* |
| All | *1099* | *1103* | *1890* | *1909* | *1099* | *1103* | *1099* | *1103* |
| **Educational qualification** | | | | | | | | |
| Degree | *237* | *202* | *415* | *388* | *237* | *202* | *237* | *202* |
| Higher education below degree/A level | *327* | *303* | *481* | *455* | *327* | *303* | *327* | *303* |
| O level or equivalent/CSE | *247* | *240* | *469* | *473* | *247* | *240* | *247* | *240* |
| No qualification | *189* | *249* | *328* | *387* | *189* | *249* | *189* | *249* |

15. Bases for Table 3.12 are as follows:

| | 1986 | | 1994 | | 2003 | | 2012 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* | *Weighted base* | *Unweighted base* |
| All | *1548* | *1548* | *2282* | *2302* | *4432* | *4432* | *1099* | *1103* |
| **Educational qualification** | | | | | | | | |
| Degree | *117* | *113* | *246* | *221* | *705* | *674* | *237* | *202* |
| Higher education below degree/A level | *307* | *309* | *570* | *560* | *1223* | *1163* | *327* | *303* |
| O level or equivalent/CSE | *422* | *419* | *601* | *596* | *1301* | *1284* | *247* | *240* |
| No qualification | *685* | *689* | *827* | *885* | *1100* | *1208* | *189* | *249* |

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## Appendix

The data on which Figure 3.1 is based are shown below.

**Table A.1 Voting in general elections and political party identification, 1983–2012**

| | 83 | 84 | 85 | 86 | 87 | 89 | 90 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Party identify with** | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Conservative | 39 | 39 | 31 | 34 | 38 | 39 | 35 | 35 | n/a | 33 | 29 |
| Labour | 33 | 35 | 36 | 35 | 29 | 34 | 39 | 35 | n/a | 38 | 40 |
| Liberal Democrat | 15 | 12 | 15 | 14 | 19 | 11 | 8 | 12 | n/a | 13 | 14 |
| Identifies with any party | 87 | 89 | 86 | 88 | 87 | 88 | 86 | 87 | n/a | 87 | 87 |
| None | 8 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | n/a | 8 | 8 |
| *Weighted base* | *1719* | *1645* | *1769* | *3066* | *2766* | *2930* | *2698* | *2836* | | *2930* | *3469* |
| *Unweighted base* | *1761* | *1675* | *1804* | *3100* | *2847* | *3029* | *2797* | *2918* | | *2926* | *3469* |
| UK turnout (%) | 72.7 | | | | 75.3 | | | | 77.7 | | |

| | 95 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 04 | 05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Party identify with** | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Conservative | 26 | 28 | 28 | 26 | 25 | 28 | 23 | 25 | 25 | 26 | 24 |
| Labour | 44 | 42 | 42 | 45 | 43 | 40 | 45 | 41 | 37 | 32 | 40 |
| Liberal Democrat | 12 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 13 |
| Identifies with any party | 86 | 84 | 83 | 84 | 82 | 81 | 85 | 81 | 77 | 77 | 82 |
| None | 9 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 16 | 13 |
| *Weighted base* | *3633* | *3620* | *1355* | *3146* | *3143* | *3426* | *3287* | *3435* | *4432* | *3199* | *4268* |
| *Unweighted base* | *3633* | *3620* | *1355* | *3146* | *3143* | *3426* | *3287* | *3435* | *4432* | *3199* | *4268* |
| UK turnout (%) | | | 71.4 | | | | 59.0 | | | | 61.4 |

| | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Party identify with** | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Conservative | 25 | 25 | 32 | 28 | 29 | 27 | 27 |
| Labour | 33 | 34 | 27 | 26 | 30 | 32 | 36 |
| Liberal Democrat | 12 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 7 | 6 |
| Identifies with any party | 77 | 75 | 75 | 73 | 77 | 73 | 76 |
| None | 15 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 17 | 19 | 21 |
| *Weighted base* | *4290* | *4124* | *4484* | *3420* | *3294* | *3309* | *3072* |
| *Unweighted base* | *4290* | *4124* | *4483* | *3419* | *3294* | *3309* | *3074* |
| UK turnout (%) | | | | | 65.1 | | |

*n/a = not asked*
*Source: UK turnout figures from UK Political Info*
*No party identification ('None') only includes those who explicitly deny that they identify with a party. It excludes those saying "don't know", or giving some other answer other than naming a party*
*'Liberal Democrat' 1983–1987 includes those who answered Liberal or Social Democratic Party*

The data on which Figure 3.2 is based are shown below.

**Table A.2 Trends in civic duty, 1987–2011**

| | 87+ | 91 | 94 | 96 | 98 | 00 | 01 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Attitude to voting** | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| It's not really worth voting | 3 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 11 | 11 |
| People should only vote if they care who wins | 20 | 24 | 21 | 26 | 26 | 24 | 23 |
| It's everyone's duty to vote | 76 | 68 | 68 | 64 | 65 | 64 | 65 |
| *Weighted base* | *3414* | *1207* | *986* | *993* | *1657* | *2015* | *2821* |
| *Unweighted base* | *3414* | *1224* | *970* | *989* | *1654* | *2008* | *2795* |

| | 04 | 05 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Attitude to voting** | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| It's not really worth voting | 12 | 12 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 16 |
| People should only vote if they care who wins | 27 | 23 | 23 | 23 | 20 | 21 |
| It's everyone's duty to vote | 60 | 64 | 56 | 58 | 61 | 62 |
| *Weighted base* | *2610* | *1732* | *1007* | *1022* | *930* | *1890* |
| *Unweighted base* | *2609* | *1732* | *990* | *1017* | *921* | *1909* |

*+Source: British Election Study*

The data on which Figure 3.3 is based are shown below.

**Table A.3 Trust in government, 1986–2012**

| | 86 | 87 | 87+ | 91 | 94 | 96 | 97 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Trust government** | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Just about always/most of the time | 38 | 37 | 47 | 33 | 24 | 22 | 26 |
| Only some of the time | 46 | 49 | 43 | 50 | 53 | 53 | 48 |
| Almost never | 11 | 11 | 9 | 14 | 21 | 23 | 23 |
| *Weighted base* | *1548* | *1375* | *3414* | *1422* | *1140* | *1171* | *1355* |
| *Unweighted base* | *1548* | *1410* | *3413* | *1445* | *1137* | *1180* | *1355* |

| | 97+ | 98 | 00 | 01 | 02 | 03 | 05 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Trust government** | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Just about always/most of the time | 32 | 28 | 16 | 28 | 26 | 18 | 26 |
| Only some of the time | 53 | 52 | 58 | 50 | 47 | 49 | 47 |
| Almost never | 12 | 17 | 24 | 20 | 24 | 31 | 26 |
| *Weighted base* | *3615* | *2067* | *2293* | *1108* | *2285* | *3305* | *3161* |
| *Unweighted base* | *3615* | *2071* | *2293* | *1099* | *2287* | *3299* | *3167* |

| | 06 | 07 | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Trust government** | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Just about always/most of the time | 19 | 29 | 16 | 20 | 22 | 18 |
| Only some of the time | 46 | 45 | 42 | 45 | 45 | 49 |
| Almost never | 34 | 23 | 40 | 33 | 31 | 32 |
| *Weighted base* | *1077* | *993* | *1141* | *1083* | *2198* | *1099* |
| *Unweighted base* | *1077* | *992* | *1143* | *1081* | *2215* | *1103* |

*+Source: British Election Study*

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