

Scouting Sunday topic paper: Youth participation in politics



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Topic 3: Youth participation in politics

Question: more young people would take part in politics if...?

In common with many European countries only [a minority of young people](#) in the UK now use their right to vote at national and local elections. The 2008 [Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement](#) showed that only 14% of 18 – 24 year olds were absolutely certain to vote at the next election which may happen in the near future. This falling interest in the party political process and elections is mirrored amongst the whole of the UK population – studies show that at the 2005 election more people voted against a political party rather than for one and whilst in the 1950s 1 in every 11 people joined a political party, now only 1 in every 88 do.

Are young people apathetic?

The low levels of participation by young people in politics have led some to suggest that they are 'apathetic' or not interested in political issues. However, this is disputed by those who point to the growing involvement of young people in political policy issues, if not political parties, through being part of social campaigning organisations and pressure groups. This is reflected in the rise in membership of these organisations – for example between 1971 and 2002 Friends of the Earth grew from 1000 members to 119,000. Research by Ipsos-MORI shows how 16 – 20 year olds much more interested in direct action than the democratic process in comparison to older people which may

explain why they find being involved in campaigns more fulfilling than the democratic process.

The last few years have also seen high levels of youth involvement in three of the largest public campaigns that have ever taken place in Britain: the Countryside Alliance demonstration in 2002, which drew 400,000 participants; the demonstration against the Iraq war in 2003, which gathered around 1, 500, 000 people; and the Live 8 event in 2005, which was attended by 150,000 people and involved far greater numbers in associated activities and demonstrations around the country, and, indeed, the world¹. In response to these issues, and the need to make sure young people's voices are heard in democratic decision making, the Government has now launched a consultation on how to encourage young people to become involved in the political process and this will report its findings in Spring 2009.

What Do the Political Parties think?

Labour is now considering [lowering the voting age to 16](#). The Conservatives have [opposed votes at 16](#) for in the past and the Liberal Democrats have supported it. The political parties all have youth wings which try to involve young people in their work – you can view [Conservative Future](#) here, [Young Labour](#) here and [Liberal Youth](#) here.

News

Testing the younger voters' mood

BBC, 29 July 2008

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7507533.stm

Younger viewpoints on politics

BBC, 29 July 2008

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7507259.stm

'We can have sex, so why can't we vote?'

The Guardian, 28 February 2006

http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/feb/28/vote_rapathy.comment

Pop Idol politics, it's a vote winner

The Times, 9 January 2005

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/article409958.ece>

Young people vote against politics

BBC, 28 January 2003

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/2699275.stm>

Forums

How do young people and politics interact?

Results of a BBC News debate

<http://newsforums.bbc.co.uk/nol/thread.jspx?forumID=5167&edition=1&ttl=20080820164429>

Resources

Political interest and engagement among young people

Report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and NatCen, May 2008

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859353096.pdf>

Academic paper on youth participation in the United States

<http://pcl.stanford.edu/common/docs/research/iyengar/2003/youthincentives.pdf>

Blog on the increased youth participation in US Presidential elections

<http://www.wikinomics.com/blog/index.php/2008/03/07/youth-participation-in-politics-on-the-rise/>