

## Appendix J – Summary Of Oral Evidence Submission: Dr Simon Griffiths, Senior Lecturer in Politics at Goldsmiths, University Of London (5<sup>th</sup> March 2019)

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### Rise Of Anti-Politics

Much of the recent debate around democracy has focused on the rise of ‘anti-politics’ (Clarke et al) or at least a crisis in representative democracy. Examples include:

- Voting. Low point in 2001 (59% voted in general election – it was 71-84% between 1945 and 1997). In local elections turnout is even lower (e.g. 33% in 2016). However, turnout has risen recently in general elections and has been relatively high in referendums. Overall, turnout is lower among BME groups and younger people
- Party membership. The Conservatives had a membership of 3 million and Labour had 1 million in the 1950s. Labour has seen a massive revival since 2015, but only to the post-war consensus average. The Conservative Party membership has fallen to around 124,000 (est. 2018). Only around 1.6% of the electorate were members of political parties in 2018
- Attitudes. In 2001, 30% of people were ‘dissatisfied’ with the Westminster parliament. By 2009, this had risen to 63%. Rise in populism and support for those who reject ‘mainstream politics’ – Trump, Farage, Corbyn and Syriza.

Two explanations for the rise of anti-politics:

#### 1. It's the fault of elected officials/the system/the 'political class'

This covers a variety of different explanations:

- Voters feel powerless (e.g. Power Inquiry, 2006) – what difference does involvement make, given the system we have? The Power Inquiry called for local democratisation and electoral reform
- Voters are turned off by the process (e.g. the rhetoric of conflict)
- Voters feel disconnected from the existing political parties (e.g. they no longer fit the society they were set up to represent)
- Proficiency – politicians aren't good enough to solve our problems
- Voters don't believe traditional democracy can ‘perform’ (i.e. traditional political structures are no longer able to solve the most pressing problems). Why?
  - In modern society, government can only ‘steer not row’ (Osborne and Gaebler, 1993) – local democracy can't do much
  - Local government has become ‘hollowed out’ (Rhodes, 1994) by the pressure to contract out services and by cuts

#### 2. It's the fault of voters: social capital theory

Putnam in *Bowling Alone* (2000) and elsewhere, argues we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbours, and our democratic structures. He talks of a decline in social capital (both the ‘bonding capital’ that links us to our local communities and

the and 'bridging capital' that links us to others not necessarily like us – authority figures, including politicians)

### **Anti-Politics: Two Counter Claims**

There are plenty of arguments that there is not a rise in 'anti-politics', merely a lack of faith in traditional, representative democracy. We still 'do politics', we just do it differently e.g. activism, pressure groups, volunteering (Hay, 2007).

It's also worth noting, as Stoker (2006) and Crick (2002) have done – 'in defence of politics' – that politics is an innately disappointing activity. It's about compromise. In a world where we act like consumers who expect to get what we want, of course the compromises of politics are disappointing.

### **Comments On The Local Democracy Review**

#### Openness & Transparency

Need to build trust (O'Neil, 2002) – trust doesn't come from openness and transparency. It comes from scrutiny and accountability: 'enthusiasm for ever more complete openness and transparency has done little to build or restore public trust. On the contrary, trust seemingly has receded as transparency has advanced ... if we want a society in which placing trust is feasible we need to look for ways in which we can actively check one another's claims'

#### Public Involvement In Decision-Making

Go where voters are (place-based decision making)

#### Effective Decision-Making

Providing clarity about the role, workload and responsibilities of a councillor. Link this to debates about why women and BME citizens are less likely to put themselves forward (Campbell, 2018).

### **Conclusions**

- Politics is being done differently
- Need to reach out to alienated groups, respond to technological changes and go to where people are
- Limits to what can be done. Many of the problems are structural and need democratic reform
- Build new structures where you can – in local communities etc

## References

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