

# Why are high levels of political participation important in a democracy and how could participation be increased in the UK?

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The principle of democracy is that the people eligible to vote in a country can vote for who runs the country, so that they get a say in the running of their country. Therefore, high levels of political participation are extremely important, otherwise, not only could the people feel underrepresented, but it would be a waste of their right to vote, especially when remembering that not all countries in the world are democracies, so the citizens do not get to have their say and so live under dictatorships. An example of this underrepresentation is that, after the UK's 2010 General Election, no Party had the overall majority of votes, so two Parties had to combine. This resulted in a Conservative/Liberal Democrat Government that many people complained about not voting for, even those who did not vote in the first place. Perhaps, if they had, that situation would not have arisen. Rates of political participation in Britain have mostly decreased over the years, for example the percentage of people who voted in 2001 was 62%, just over half, compared to 84% in 1950. There are many reasons for this, and the rest of this essay is going to be dedicated to explaining some of them.

There are many ways in which people can get involved in politics. Watching the news and keeping abreast of things going on in politics is a form of participation, albeit not a direct or "out there" one, but it shows that people are actively interested in what is going on in their country. Debating, even on a small in-household scale, is another form of participation, as is signing a petition, and the Government has been trying to encourage political participation in this way by creating the new e-Petitions website where people can go and create and sign petitions. Pressure groups such as Greenpeace exist, too. Contrary to popular belief, joining a pressure group does not mean that

accountability  
+  
legitimacy.

✓

coalition

✓ good.

✓

✓

✓ good

people have to take direct action—someone could just donate a few pounds a month and support the group's cause in that way. Yet another form of participation that is becoming increasingly popular with the increasing amount of people using the Internet is blogging and the use of social media such as Twitter to post short but powerful criticisms or praises of various things going on in the world that may be political, or to encourage activism. ✓

With all of those ways—and more—to get involved in politics, why are participation rates declining, especially at elections? Many people may have been involved in the past but may have emigrated to other countries which would mean that they could not vote here or, practically, be members of a political Party. The numbers of immigrants in this country has increased dramatically, so even with population figures going up, because of potential language barriers, political participation could go down. Also, the immigrants may feel like their community is enough and they do not have to worry about the wider politics of the country in which they live, and they (or anyone) could feel underrepresented by their local MP—they might feel that he or she no longer represents their views as he or she has too much power in Westminster: this is an example of Statism. ✓

don't ask,  
just move

- You used the ideas of wider scope of participation well here

- You could have thought a little more about both halves of the question before commencing

estimated AS grade: C/D.