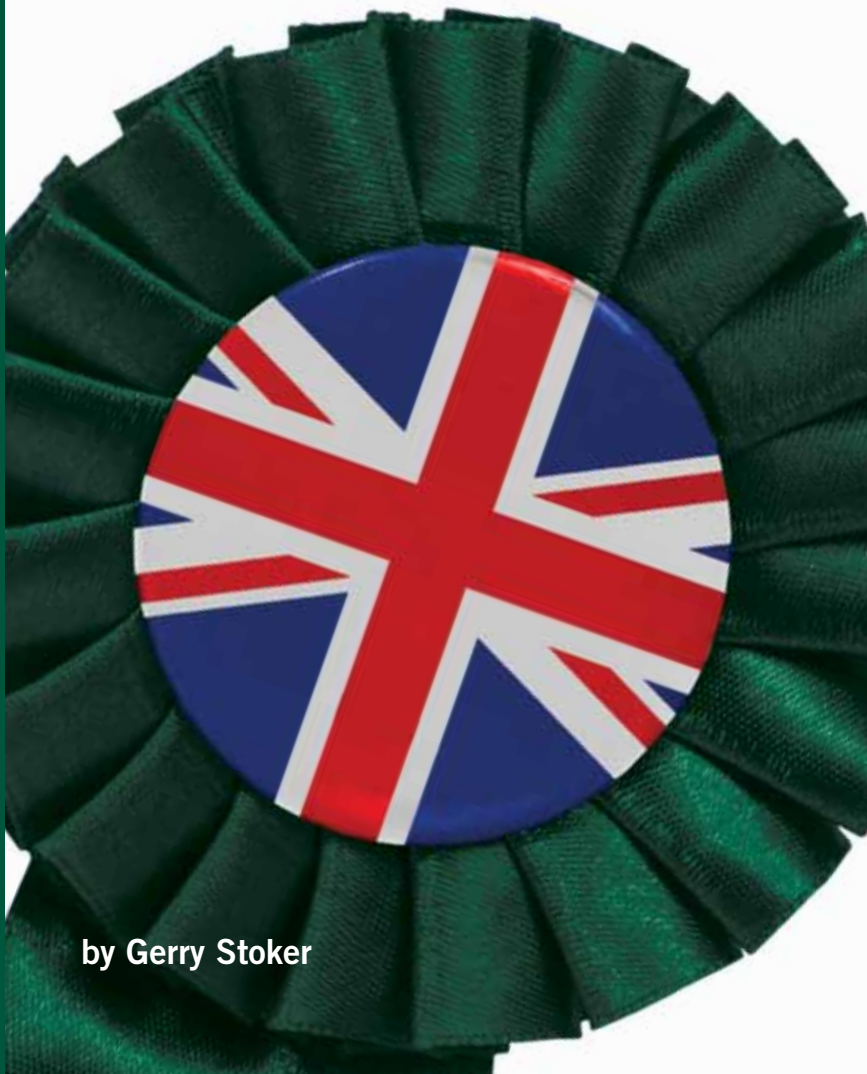
NEW PARADIGMS IN PUBLIC POLICY

Building a new politics?



by Gerry Stoker

BRITISH ACADEMY
POLICY CENTRE

BUILDING A NEW POLITICS

A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE BRITISH ACADEMY

by Gerry Stoker

NEW PARADIGMS IN PUBLIC POLICY

Chair: Peter Taylor-Gooby FBA

Working group:
Andrew Gamble FBA
Ian Gough
Tariq Modood
Anne Power
Gerry Stoker
Pat Thane FBA

BRITISH ACADEMY
POLICY CENTRE

THE BRITISH ACADEMY
10-11 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AH
Web site: www.britac.ac.uk

Registered Charity: Number 233176

Published November 2011

ISBN 978-0-85672-596-8

Typeset by Soapbox
www.soapbox.co.uk
Printed by Repropoint

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FOREWORD

Governments face many challenges and, after all, this is what they are there for. Commentators identify problems facing public policy in the UK on many levels. Two themes are perhaps striking in the current context. One is the assumption that radical changes are needed. For a number of reasons we can't go on as we are. The other is that we are failing to find new ways forward that offer the potential to solve our problems. Public policy is stuck and it is much easier to state the problems that to answer them.

The immediate scandals of parliamentary expenses, lobbying and ministerial buck-passing mask a longer-term decline in political trust. Many people have little confidence in politicians or in the political system. In this paper Professor Gerry Stoker raises fundamental questions about the quality of our democracy and about how to rebuild it. This requires an intellectual approach that is itself more democratic and engaged in understanding how people think about political institutions and their own role within them.

The papers in this series, *New paradigms in public policy*, to be published throughout 2011 and 2012, review some particularly difficult issues in public policy: climate change, recession and recovery, population ageing, neighbourhood problems and the Third Sector, rebuilding democratic engagement and managing the demands of an increasingly assertive public. The series reviews current understanding of the issues, situated within academic theory-building, and discusses possible ways forward. Rather than advocating one best solution to these problems, we analyse a range of feasible scenarios. We also consider how the framing of an issue in current debate affects the chances of success in tackling it. Some problems benefit from being approached in new and different ways. The guiding assumption is that analysing and re-framing is what academics do best,

and is the most helpful contribution they can make in the policymaking process.

Peter Taylor-Gooby FBA
University of Kent and Chair of the *New paradigms in public policy* project
November 2011

KEY MESSAGES

British society has become, for the most part, disengaged with politics. There are longstanding issues with the construction of politics in Northern Ireland that create particular questions that are not addressed here. Rather the focus is on the health or otherwise of British politics. How might the process of public debate, political organization and decision-making be changed so to promote a democracy that delivers more of its promise to citizens? Broadly, there are two approaches to this question: policymakers should focus on restoring citizen faith in existing representative processes, or they should aim to get citizens more actively involved through new participatory and deliberative processes.

Political or constitutional engineers, one of two groups of academics who study this problem, want to improve the existing, central features of a liberal democracy such as elections, political parties and power-sharing. They believe that citizens do not necessarily want to be more active within the political process; simply that they want to be able trust politicians to make decisions on their behalf.

In the other direction, the second group, democratic designers, want to create new mechanisms for citizen activism, to tap into the potential for greater citizen participation and decision-making. These mechanisms would normally develop away from conventional politics but could be grafted onto existing structures at a later point.

This report calls on social scientists to develop these insights and take on the challenge of designing a way of tackling anti-politics. We need to understand the problem – why citizens are so negative about politics – and create a solution by extending a better experience of politics to all.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE DISAPPOINTED CITIZEN AND POLITICAL DISENGAGEMENT

- Not everyone 'hates' politics and not everyone is disengaged from it, but there is undoubtedly substantial anti-political sentiment in British society.
- Hansard 2011 survey shows:
  - Only one third believe the system of governing Britain works well.
  - Only just over a quarter are satisfied with the working of Parliament, the lowest figure so far recorded in the Hansard surveys.
  - Only one in three of us now agree with the statement 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run'.
- However, we should not assume that there was some prior British golden age of politics. British citizens did not universally enthuse about politics and politicians in the 1950s but according to the evidence available eight out of ten British citizens felt they could influence local decisions and six out of ten felt that national decisions were within their span of influence. This sense that the political system is working for them is what many citizens appear to have lost, to be replaced by a stable and stubborn alienation from politics.
- Most citizens are not actively engaged in politics and despite media portrayal of large-scale demonstrations in recent years, protest remains an act for a very small minority of people. The most popular political acts have an individual flavour and involve relatively little effort, such as signing a petition or boycotting a product.
- While gender and ethnicity lead to differences in level of disengagement, it is the divide based on social class and

occupation that is the starkest. Those in professional and managerial jobs are twice as likely to express an interest in politics and knowledge of political issues, and almost twice as likely to definitely vote, as those in less skilled work or without a permanent job.

EXPLORING ANTI-POLITICS: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TWO PARADIGMS

Protective paradigm

- From a protective democracy perspective the emergence of anti-politics reflects a loss of faith in the political system among citizens. A successful democracy is one where elected leaders are trusted by citizens to govern in their interests.
- Anti-politics may in part be a result of the (perhaps unrealistic) expectations about fairness, ethical veracity and support for the common good that are loaded on to politicians by citizens.
- The focus of explanation for anti-politics is on systems of party and interest representation that lead the public to conclude that decisions are made at the behest of special interests rather than in the general or public interest.
- Effort should be more focused on restoring faith in elected and group representative processes, by cleaning up politics, through citizen education and by making representative politics work better; not on various forms of direct engagement.

Developmental paradigm

- The developmental paradigm rests on the view that, for democracy to be sustainable, it needs to engage citizens on an active basis.
- Citizens have been made to feel powerless and the disadvantaged in particular have lost the mobilisation mechanisms that previously got them more involved in politics.

- The solution is to construct new deliberative and learning mechanisms so citizens can engage in politics, have a sense of influence and have opportunities to share ideas and experiences with fellow citizens, while contributing to collective challenges.
- More direct involvement of citizens in political decisions is seen as the key to successful reform.

Judging what to do: Learning from both perspectives

- One reaction to the evidence and argument produced is to declare that citizens have been doubtful about politics and politicians for decades and yet our democratic polity survives. We should just learn to live with it.
- A counter argument points out that the anti-political sentiment that grips our society carries considerable costs. From the protective democracy perspective it creates a climate for reduced effectiveness in policymaking, as leaders lack legitimacy to tackle difficult issues. From the developmental perspective it removes the very rationale for democracy from the perspective of citizens, as too many feel they have no say over issues that matter to them. Doing nothing is not an option, so the question then becomes: what to do?

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: REDESIGNING DEMOCRACY

- Solutions require an increased recognition of the need for political reforms and an understanding of how to design better governance.
- There are two main groups of academics who offer solutions on how to improve citizen engagement: they can be described as political or constitutional engineers, and

democratic designers.

- Neither political engineers nor democratic designers would be entirely convinced by the reforms suggested by the coalition government; they might be seen as a step in the right direction but not sufficient in themselves to tackle the scale and depth of anti-political sentiment.

Political engineering

- Engineers believe that the key to meeting the challenge of anti-politics is to take forward more seriously – and without allowing the vested interests of political parties to stand in the way – a programme to reinvigorate representative democracy.
- The dominant preference among political engineers is for electoral systems that favour proportional representation, party systems that allow for the representation of a wide range of interests and identities and constitutional power-sharing arrangements that facilitate the spread of decision-making centres.
- Through the devolved arrangements in Scotland one can already see the playing out of a different politics. A proportional election system has delivered a greater choice to voters and a wider representation of parties all adding up, according to Norris (2008), to a healthier political system. The crucial thing would be to extend the principles of electoral reform, wider party representation and devolved government to England. A referendum has already been held and lost on changing the voting system for general elections, pitting Alternative Vote against the established system, in May 2011.
- A programme of reform for England would probably not be focused on creating a parliament, but rather a more sustained commitment to devolution through existing local government institutions or to more city-region based institutions.

Democratic designers

- While not rejecting the goals of stability or inclusion, democratic designers focus on citizens governing themselves through reforms that support citizen activism and create new opportunities for citizen participation.
- Within the democratic design group a distinction can be drawn between those who celebrate civil society and self-organisation (Drysek 2000) and those who argue that the state can have a role in designing democratic innovations (Smith 2009).
- For the first group the new politics is most likely to develop away from formal politics, government and established institutions. The internet, for example, is often seen as a potential carrier of a new politics.
- The second group see the emergence of a new politics as something that, with innovative commitment and design, can be grafted onto existing political institutions.
- Democratic designers believe that there is enough evidence to suggest that if the design is right then better outcomes can be achieved.

CONCLUDING NOTE

- Anti-politics in culture and behaviour in Britain weakens the practice of democracy but the potential is there for greater involvement.
- Political engineers focus on changing the core features of the political system: elections, parties and power-sharing.
- Democratic designers spotlight the need to innovate and create new and meaningful ways for citizens to engage.
- Choosing between options will require some further research and focused analysis.
- It may be possible to combine their two sets of insights to steer Britain way from the malaise of anti-politics that

threatens to undermine its capacity to have the collective discussions and make the collective choices needed to meet policy challenges.

- We need further work to understand what drives anti-politics but also work to examine what new practices might shift anti-political sentiment and create engagement.
- To move between an understanding of the problem and a solution requires a social science that is better at analysing how to turn existing conditions into preferred ones: it needs a design arm.

1 INTRODUCTION

If the social and economic challenges faced by Britain are going to be met – challenges outlined in many of the other papers in this series – it might reasonably be thought that citizens would need to believe that they lived in a country with an effective system of democratic governance and a vibrant politics. There are considerable doubts as to whether such a situation pertains at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We are helped to come to that judgement through findings that come from the Hansard Society's *Audit of Political Engagement* series which have been published annually since 2004.[1] There is substantial anti-political sentiment in Britain expressed through attitudes that indicate a lack of trust and faith in the politicians and the political system and behaviour which indicates that large numbers of British citizens do not engage much at all with formal politics. Moreover there is strong evidence that political alienation and disengagement is not evenly spread among all sections of society and indeed appears to be concentrating among some of the most disadvantaged in society. While denying there was a previous golden age of politics – looking back fifty years earlier – we can note that despite rising education levels, expanded media coverage of politics, and evidence that citizens are more confident in their own abilities, the sense that citizens can influence politics and governing decisions appears to have declined and the numbers not turning out to vote has increased. This evidence is explored in more depth in the first section of this paper.

The middle section of the paper asks: does it matter that some citizens are alienated from politics? Broadly, we can look at the disaffection with politics through two understandings of the workings of liberal democracy labelled as protective and

1 For further information visit www.hansardsociety.org.uk.

developmental perspectives. The protective perspective focuses on the working of democracy as a protection for individual freedom. It does not necessarily expect large-scale citizen participation in politics but rather just enough engagement to grant the system legitimacy. From this perspective it is important not to overreact to evidence of anti-politics but, given the scale of concern over the issue, to devise interventions that help to restore faith in politics. The developmental perspective, in contrast, seeks greater citizen participation both as a fuller expression of individual humanity and as a way of achieving better decision-making that is more effective in tackling collective problems. From this perspective, the negativity that surrounds politics tends to be seen as evidence that citizens have not been provided with a rich or deep enough democratic experience and, as such, should spark a major set of interventions to change how politics is done. Both perspectives, then, are paradigms that take a particular line on 'what is' happening but are also imbued with assumptions about 'what should be'. We explore the arguments of the advocates of both paradigms and test the quality of the evidence they offer. We conclude that both have something to offer when it comes to diagnosing the problems confronting British politics and thinking about solutions. Moreover, although our polity has learnt to live with a substantial degree of political disenchantment over decades, it is clear that disenchantment costs the quality of policymaking and democracy. Given the scale of policy challenges we face, leaving the issue alone is not an option.

The last section of the paper turns to the issue of how to design solutions. It contrasts the approach of political engineers with that of democratic designers. Political engineers are guided more by insights from the protective perspective and try to use changes in electoral, party and intergovernmental systems to help representative democracy work more effectively;

meanwhile, democratic designers are guided more by the developmental perspective and focus on new forms of citizen based activism and citizen-oriented participation. In conclusion, we ask what further work social scientists might contribute to understanding and exploring the challenge of building a new politics.

2 THE DISAPPOINTED CITIZEN AND POLITICAL DISENGAGEMENT

We should not assume that there was some prior golden age of vibrant politics in Britain. Here are some key findings from a survey about British attitudes to politics:

- Three in ten claim 'to never follow' accounts of political and governmental affairs.
- Two in ten can name no party leader or any government ministry.
- Three in ten 'never' talk about politics with friends and acquaintances.
- Only two in one hundred would regard involvement in politics as a preferred non-work activity.
- Eight in ten are doubtful of the promises made by candidates in elections.

These figures may not be surprising, until it is noted that the survey from which they are taken was conducted, not in 2011, but in 1959. Indeed, it was the first major academic study that looked in depth at public attitudes to politics. Its findings were published in 1963 in a comparative study of democracies by two American academics, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, although the final finding was not included in the book itself but was reported later by Dennis Kavanagh (Almond and Verba 1963: 89, 96, 116, 263; Kavanagh 1980: 145). These findings suggest disengagement from formal politics and cynicism about politicians are not recent phenomena.

Looking at the evidence about citizens' attitudes towards and engagement with politics in Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is clear there is substantial anti-political sentiment expressed in negative attitudes towards politics and disengagement from it formal operations. It is difficult to argue

that we have suddenly reached a crisis point, but the problems do appear to be deep-seated. What eight annual surveys from the Hansard Society (first undertaken in December 2003) tell us is that the average citizen in Britain could today be described as disappointed and disengaged by politics: disappointed by the practitioners, practice and outcomes of politics, and not actively engaged in the regular processes of politics. The scandal over MPs' expenses in 2009 did not create that disenchantment, but simply confirmed it.

The picture painted of the beginning of the twenty-first century by Table 1 suggests the overall pattern is relatively stable but negative in terms of the story it tells, providing a less than ringing endorsement of the British political system. Norris (2011) is right to claim that in Britain and in other advanced democracies there has been no collapse in faith in democracy but is mistaken in not recognising the scale of disenchantment and disengagement from politics at least in Britain (Stoker 2006; Hay 2007). There is no great trend towards decline to point to rather signs of a stable and stubborn alienation. Citizens remain convinced by the benefits of democracy but are unconvinced by the role of politics in delivering that democracy. The annual Hansard survey results tells us that at the beginning of the twenty-first century in Britain, consistently, two thirds believe the system of governing Britain needs a great deal or a lot of improvement. It would appear that seven in ten of us have little or no trust in politicians in general. Few of us have a strong sense of political efficacy, with only a third agreeing with the statement 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run'. When it comes to the UK Parliament, perhaps reflecting the impact of the expenses row, the number of those satisfied with it has dropped from just over a third to just over a quarter since the Hansard survey was first undertaken in 2003. About half of citizens say they are interested in politics and about half claim a respectable

level of knowledge about it. But less than two in ten could be described as an activist in terms of undertaking a modest range of political actions.

What people do as opposed to what they think about politics is explored more fully in Table 2. Most citizens are not regularly politically engaged when measured by acts aimed at the formal processes of politics. The most popular political acts offered by citizens who were asked to remember what they had done over the last two or three years have an individual flavour and involve relatively little effort, such as voting, signing a petition or boycotting a product. Collective political action, such as going to a meeting, appears to be something that few citizens can remember undertaking. Online political engagement, which is seen by some as a driver of new opportunities for politics (Gibson 2009), is only undertaken by less than one in ten; and protests and demonstrations engage relatively few despite the media coverage that such action can attract. Indeed, according to the 2011 Hansard Society audit, over half of all citizens in 2010 engaged in no political activity in the previous two or three years, as measured against a rather modest range of political actions beyond the act of voting.

Table 1: Political attitudes and engagement, 2003-10

Year % Citizens	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Great deal or fair amount of knowledge claimed about politics	42	45	39	49	44	48	51	53
Perceived sense personal political efficacy	37	37	33	33	31	31	37	30
Generally trust politicians not much or not at all	70			70			73	
Interested in politics	50	53	56	54	51	52	53	58
Satisfied with UK Parliament	36			36			33	27
Believe governing system needs improving quite a lot or a great deal	60	63	62	61	62	64	69	64
Activist (three or more political acts)					12	11	16	13

Source: Developed from data in the Hansard Society's *Audit of political Engagement 8: The 2011 report* and *Audit of political Engagement 7: The 2010 report*.[2]

2 For the 2011 report Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,197 adults in Great Britain aged 18 or over, face-to-face, at home, between 3 and 9 December 2010. For the 2010 report Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,156 adults in Great Britain aged 18 or over, face-to-face, at home, between 3 and 9 December 2010.

Table 2: Political activity, 2003-10

	Year/ % respondents	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
A	Voted in the last local council election	51	50	55	53	50	47	49	58
B	Discussed politics or political news with someone else	38	38	39	41	41	40	41	42
C	Signed a petition	39	44	45	47	40	37	40	36
D	Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	41	45	45	39	37	37	42	39
E	Done voluntary work	23	28	22	27	23	22	29	25
F	Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	19	21	18	21	19	18	19	16
G	Expressed my political opinions online	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	8	9	8
H	Been to any political meeting	5	6	6	9	6	4	8	6

	Year/ % respondents	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
I	Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	5	6	6	5	4	3	5	3
J	Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	5	6	5	5	4	3	4**	4
	None of these	17	16	17	19	20	20	23	19
	Don't know	–	*	*	1	2	1	*	1

* Please note that the list of activities is different in Audits 1-4, and therefore comparisons with Audits 5-8 should be seen as indicative only.

** APE 7 wording for half the sample '…march or strike'.

Source: Developed from data in the Hansard Society's *Audit of political Engagement 8: The 2011 report*.[3]

Does Table 2 present a fair portrait of Britain's political activity? After all, this is a Britain that has seen large-scale demonstrations in recent years involving many young citizens over many issues stretching from the Iraq war in 2003 and plans to increase students' fees in 2010. Marsh *et al.* (2006), using non-survey techniques, claim young people are interested in politics but just turned off by the way that formal politics works. In these growing protests and social movements, others see the seeds for an alternative politics (Dryzek 2000; della Porta *et al.*

3 Methodology as above. Respondents were asked which of these activities had they done in the last two or three years.

2006; Stoker *et al.* 2011: 51-70[4]). Yet as Marsh and colleagues admit, their young respondents might have talked in a way that could be defined as political but few were actively engaged in formal politics or active protest. Evidence about whether the amount and extent of protest is increasing needs to be treated with caution as the survey data uses different questions, and sometimes fails to distinguish between lifetime and more recent political acts (for a further analysis see chapter three in Stoker *et al.* 2011). Protest remains an act for a very small minority of citizens. Surveys are good at capturing in broad terms how a representative sample of citizens behaves, but we should remain open to the idea that, under different circumstances, their behaviour might change.

Survey evidence also confirms that alienation from politics is not equally spread throughout all social groups. Given that socio-economic factors are widely seen as a key driver in participation (see Verba *et al.* (1995) for the classic statement), this is not surprising. Those with higher income, education and status in their employment are much more likely to participate in politics (see Stoker 2006: 93-99 for an analysis). In British politics there are noteworthy differences to be observed among diverse social groups in terms of their political engagement and attitudes, along lines of gender, ethnic background and socio-economic status (see Table 3).

Men and women appear equally likely to vote and be in the political activist category. Similar proportions have a sense of political efficacy. The larger differences emerge when it comes to claims about political knowledge and interest, with men being more certain about their knowledge and more categorical about their interest. Responses to knowledge questions, however, may

4 The lead author for Chapter 3 in Stoker *et al.*, 2011 is my Southampton colleague Clare Saunders. The book is a combined effort from colleagues at the Centre for Citizenship, Globalisation and Governance at the University of Southampton (www.soutampton.ac.uk/c2g2).

be gender-linked and reflect assumptions of confidence rather than major differences in knowledge (Dolan 2011). Differences between the white groups and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups emerge when it comes to political engagement. The latter are much less likely to vote, engage in multiple political activities or express an interest in, or knowledge about, politics. Only when it comes to felt personal political efficacy does the response from the BME group match and go beyond that of the white group.

It is the divide based on social class and occupation that is the starkest. The figures for those in professional and managerial jobs (social grade AB) compared to those in less skilled work or without a permanent job (social grade DE) are startling in many ways. The former are twice as likely as the latter to express an interest in politics and claim knowledge of political issues and almost twice as likely to be certain to vote. Social grade AB has five times as many in the political activist category as social grade DE. Only when it comes to felt sense of political efficacy do the groups match up. On the surface this last finding is difficult to explain but it may be that citizens from social grade DE may still hold that they could act politically in a range of ways even if they do not do so currently.

The evidence points, then, to extensive disengagement from politics and its concentration in certain subsections of society and these differences are reflected in attitudes to the political system. According to the Hansard Society Survey conducted in December 2010 (2011: 22, 37-9), a third of social grade AB are satisfied with the way Parliament works compared to only one in five of social grade DE. In response to the statement 'the UK Parliament is working for you and me' 40% of Social Grade AB agree and only 31% disagree. For all other social grades those that disagree outweigh those that agree. For Social Grade DE only 21% agree and 51% disagree. Just over one third of social grade AB think the governing system works well or needs only

small improvements whereas only one in five of social grade DE hold that view. Some 69% of social grade DE think that the system is in need of substantial improvement.

When comparing white groups with BME groups a similar proportion say the current system of government works well (30% of white people and 37% of BMEs) and white people and BMEs are similarly satisfied with the way Parliament works (27% and 30% respectively). Differences in attitudes to the political system emerge between men and women. More men are satisfied with the working of Parliament than women (30% to 24% respectively) and men are more likely than women to think the present system of government works well (39% to 23% respectively).

To conclude: our review reveals that anti-political sentiment and disengagement from political activity is widespread among British citizens at the beginning of the twenty first century. Consistently seven in ten do not trust politicians, six in ten want major reform of the political system and at best only two in ten engage in a modest range of political activity regularly and only three in ten think it would make a difference if they got involved. Is this situation worse than in the past? The answer is that it is difficult to say with certainty because the data we have is thin, and making comparisons between one point in time and another point is fraught with difficulties. Table 4 presents the findings from a careful study by John *et al*. (2010: 17-18) that concludes that British citizens as a whole 'show increasing political interest, but falling efficacy' when the Almond and Verba survey data of 1959 is compared with that of 2004. Within the population they note an improved position for women, but also that education continues to influence figures: its absence does not necessarily block access to politics, but its presence drives the likelihood of engagement. A review by Stoker (2010: 55) came to a similar judgement and concludes that 'the picture of confident British citizens at ease with their democratic polity

– which may have been slightly exaggerated in the account provided by Almond and Verba – is no more'. We also know the turnout in general elections has fallen. Typically, a fifth of citizens failed to vote in the 1950s (Stoker 2010: 53), but in 2010 over a third failed to vote in a tightly-contested and high profile election which had been given an additional boost in public attention by the first ever televised leadership debates. What evidence we can muster suggests then that the standing of politics has declined over the last fifty years and when it comes to the beginning of the twenty first century the position is clear: many citizens are disaffected with and disengaged from politics. The situation for some sub-groups of society is worse than it is for others. Those who could be considered the most disadvantaged in society are also those with the least positive attitudes towards the political system and who are least likely to engage in political activity.

Table 3: Subgroup analysis of political engagement and attitudes, 2010

		Social class comparison		**Gender comparison**		**Ethnicity comparison**
Political factor % of	Social grade AB	Social grade DE	Men	Women	White	BME
Interest	77	36***	63	53***	60	41***
Knowledge[5]	73	29***	63	43***	54	39***
Activist[6]	25	5***	12	15 ns.	14	5***
Voting	72	43***	57	59 ns.	60	44***
Efficacy[7]	31	30 ns.	31	29 ns.	29	38***
Number of respondents interviewed	**265**	**296**	**591**	**600**	**968**	**225**

Chi-square test undertaken for social class, gender and ethnicity comparisons where ***p≤0.001 **p≤0.01 *p≤0.05 and ns. not significant (see Appendix A for a further analysis).

Source: Developed from data in the Hansard Society's *Audit of political engagement 8: The 2011 report*.[8]

5 This is claimed knowledge. There is, however, evidence that women view political knowledge differently from men (see Dolan 2011).

6 Measured by engagement in three or more political acts as detailed in Table 2.

7 A claimed sense that you could influence decisions.

8 Methodology as before. In order to make comparisons between the white and BME populations more statistically reliable additional booster interviews were conducted with BME adults giving a total of 225 BME interviews. My thanks to colleagues from the University Iceland where I was a visiting professor in September 2011, as part of their University centenary celebrations, for help with this analysis.

Table 4: Changing political attitudes over time

Question[9]	1959	2004	Difference
talking about public affairs/ politics[10]	23.0	45.1	+22.1***
belief in own ability to change a law	16.5	18.0	+1.5
feeling of having a say in Government	41.1	32.5	-8.6***
likelihood one would attempt to change a law[11]	42.7	40.7	-2.0

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Source: Adapted from data in John *et al.* (2010).

9 Full question wording available in John *et al.* (2010), Appendix 1.
10 The cells report regular talk about politics.
11 The cells present all 'likely' responses.

3 EXPLORING ANTI-POLITICS: THE PERSPECTIVES OF TWO PARADIGMS

It is helpful to think about political disaffection by differentiating between two broad paradigms that have been fundamental in driving the analysis of politics for a long time: the protective vision of democracy and the developmental vision of democracy (Held 2006). Like other paradigms reviewed in this series, there is a normative element underlying each perspective but there is also a contrasting focus on evidence as it is seen through two different lens. The protective paradigm does not necessarily look to large-scale engagement by citizens in politics and sees the key to effective democracy as having accountable and trusted elites, whereas the developmental paradigm would regard greater direct involvement in politics and decision-making as essential to making a viable democracy for the twenty-first century.

Both paradigms have evolved over a number of decades to provide complex and sophisticated understandings but they can also provide useful catch-all frameworks for reflecting on anti-politics. We offer only the sketchiest of reviews here. On the basis of the empirical evidence we have, it is difficult to judge which of the perspectives offers the better diagnosis of disaffection with politics in the UK – in part because of a lot of the more detailed recent empirical work has been done in the United States rather than in the United Kingdom. Crucially, neither perspective would be sanguine about the state of British politics. For the protective perspective, the lack of faith in the operations of elite politics might not make the case for participative reforms but it does argue for a cleaning-up and potentially radical reform of representative politics, in order to build greater faith. From the developmental perspective, new measures are required to give citizens a real sense that they can

influence political decisions; for it is exclusion from influence, above all, that explains why they are turned off politics.

A PROTECTIVE PARADIGM

A protective vision depicts democracy as a mechanism for choosing and replacing leaders where the role of citizens between elections is expected to be one of 'democratic self-control' (Schumpeter, 1976). Its modern founding form is provided by Schumpeter (1976) in a book first published in World War Two amid fears about how mass democracy might in turn stimulate intolerant and illiberal politics. Democracy is defended not as a means to mass participation but instead promoted as a system where competitive groups of leaders vie for electoral support in the context of broader respect for individual freedoms and liberties. Such a position allows politicians to get on with their role, avoids excessive criticism of that role and recognises the need to tolerate differences of opinion. A variant of this argument stresses less fear about ordinary citizens' involvement and more admiration for their rationality in staying relatively unengaged since there is little that their individual intervention could do. Citizens need to be able only to read the cues from those that are involved and know just enough about who to back or oppose (Goodin 2005; Conover and Feldman 1989).

For success, the protective model requires a broad social consensus to underlie its workings, a civic culture that combined elements of activism and deference (Almond and Verba 1963; see also Stoker 2010 and Chapter 1, in Stoker *et al.* 2011 for further discussion). It is crucial that politicians are perceived to be of high calibre, that there is a bureaucracy that is viewed to be effective and of good standing, and that there is a political competition that is limited within the bounds of reasonable

conflict, and not subject to deeply driven divisions in interest or ideology. Political inequality is a complex issue from a protective perspective since citizens may simply be uninterested, focused on other matters than the multiple political decisions taken each day, rather than disempowered in some way. Given the diverse interests of citizens, and therefore their differential willingness to participate over any one issue, it is difficult, as Verba *et al.* (1995: 14) put it, 'to specify what political equality would look like' since it would be absurd to expect that all citizens would participate all the time. Rather, what we should expect is participation according to intensity of preference.

The idea of intensity of preference has emerged strongly in a pluralist perspective on democracy that allows for greater group participation to complement the role of elected political leadership. Citizens' diverse interests would best find expression through a varied and complex set of organised lobby and pressure groups that would both articulate their demands and push government to respond, so that liberties and rights would be more directly protected. By the 1950s, pluralism had become the dominant paradigm. In its classical form it viewed the government processes as a site of group conflict and as a positive democratic practice (Smith 2006). Groups were relatively free to compete with one another to influence policy. Power as such was dispersed, which led to a government that was responsive to the organised wishes of its citizens and able to predict what demands from the unorganised might be in order to create in practice a working democracy. Later variations took a more jaundiced view and expressed concern about the capture of the state by vested networks, the uneven competition between different interests, and the potential dominant position of business.

The recent account of democracy offered by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001; 2002) remains within the protective vision of democracy, but criticises the classic pluralist vision. They

describe a 'stealth democracy', where the main cause of citizens' disenchantment with politics is the fear that government will be captured by vested interests. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse argue, from evidence in the United States, that what citizens want is a democracy that does not require them to be actively engaged or even to actively monitor most decisions made by the political system. However, they feel forced to participate and engage because they see too cosy a relationship between elected leaders and a range of special organised interests. The goal of stealth democracy is 'for decisions to be made efficiently, objectively, and without commotion and disagreement' (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002: 143). What citizens want is not necessarily more direct involvement in decision-making but latent representation; an assurance that decisions are taken on grounds of general interest and not at the behest of specialist interests. Generally citizens are uneasy about over-involvement in politics (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Some fear the conflict that is inherent to political decision-making. Crucially on the majority of issues citizens have no opinion and no particular desire to make a decision. However, they are concerned about being taken for fools. Those responsible for making decisions need to be seen to do so in the public interest and not with any obvious self-interest at stake.

Interestingly, research by Birch and Allen (2009) suggests that the British public believe MPs should be more ethical than the general public, with nearly two in three citizens arguing that politicians should be held to higher standards than ordinary members of the public. As this suggests, anti-political sentiment may in part be a result of the (perhaps unrealistic) expectations about fairness, ethical veracity and support for the common good that are loaded on to politicians by citizens. The issue of a concern about special interests also appears to have a resonance in Britain. In the backwash created about concern over former Defence Secretary Liam Fox's connections to lobbyists David Cameron

has been reminded that when in opposition he predicted that 'secret corporate lobbying, like the expenses scandal, goes to the heart of why people are so fed up with politics... It is the next big scandal waiting to happen' (Cameron 2010).

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) are clear about what not to do about anti-political sentiment. Given that most citizens do not care to engage in politics on a regular basis then the last reform that is appropriate is to demand more participation. It would be worse still if it were to be offered in the form of half-hearted consultation that delivers no real increased say over the decisions that do matter to citizens (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Even calls for greater transparency, freedom of information and sunshine laws may not be getting to the heart of issue – valuable as one could argue they might be – because they play to the attention-rich world of special interest groups rather than to the inattentive, average citizen. To be told that one is going to have to work harder still to track political decision-making is not the offer most citizens want. They want to see decisions made in the public interest, not at the behest of special interests. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002: 216-28) offer two suggestions about what could be done. The first proposes a range of measures to reduce opportunities for politicians to be self-serving by reducing their salaries and perks, limiting finances provided to the political system by special interests, and curtailing the activities of lobbyists. The second idea is to promote better citizenship education so that citizens recognise that conflict is inherent to politics and the endless bickering they seem to despise reflects the real choices and differences of interest that ultimately stem from them. However, Theiss-Morse and Hibbing appear doubtful these reforms will work. Even if the reforms could be made to stick, it would be an uphill struggle to convince citizens who do not want to be engaged in politics that those who are engaged and making decisions are doing so for the right reasons.

What would a UK reform programme look like from a protective democracy perspective? Many might share Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's scepticism about the naïve expansion of ill-judged and half-hearted public consultation and participation schemes as a response to anti-political sentiment, and almost all would support their plans for a clean-up of politics and better citizenship education but still judge a radical reform of representative politics to be necessary as well. Although its programme is broad and diverse this thinking appears to be at the heart of the Power Inquiry (2006) which does advocate innovations in democratic engagement but concentrates on a radical overhaul of the way representative politics works in response to anti-political sentiment in the UK. It calls for a reformed electoral system; a substantially elected rather than appointed House of Lords; more power for Parliament and less for the Executive; less power for central government and more power to local and devolved government; the capping of donations to political parties; and generally greater transparency and more freedom of information about how decisions are made. From the protective perspective, the evidence presented in this paper about political disenchantment and disengagement among large sections of the population should not be viewed as making the case for a more participative democracy which would demand even more from citizens. The direction of reform should rather be about supporting a renewal of faith in a system where representation and leadership are the dominant features over active citizen engagement. Those reforms might stretch from measures to clean up politics, to a more radical restructuring of representative processes and institutions.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PARADIGM

The developmental understanding of politics rests on the view that, for democracy to be sustainable, it needs to engage

citizens on an active basis. Engagement will not only protect their freedoms but lead to a higher expression of citizenship, based on informed and tolerant exchange between people. This perspective can be traced through the writings of J. S. Mill in the nineteenth century and onwards to the case for a participatory democracy that was extended in the 1970s (Pateman 1970; Macpherson 1973). The 1980s witnessed an emphasis on the importance of deliberation, so that participation was informed and based on reason-giving and concerns about the public or general interest, rather than on a narrow and debilitating focus on defending immediate self-interest (Saward 2003; Goodin 2003; Dryzek 2000). A range of writers began to identify ways in which citizen participation could be advanced through institutional innovations (Fung and Wright 2003; Smith 2009).

This perspective requires opportunities for all citizens to engage, to learn and to grow into the practices of politics. This would achieve not just a more open and engaging political system, but also a more equal society that addresses gender and class inequalities in access to politics. Free sharing of information would be essential, as would multiple opportunities for political engagement. This developmental perspective is built on a faith that ordinary citizens could engage if they were given the knowledge and opportunity to do so. Through that engagement they would grow as individuals and in their capacity to find solutions to the collective problems of society.

The defining explanation of political alienation from a developmental perspective is that citizens have been made to feel powerless. As Neblo *et al.* (2010: 568) argue, this perspective, especially in its deliberative form, holds that 'a significant amount of citizen apathy is actually a *consequence* of frustration with and disempowerment in the current system'. There are a number of different versions of the empowerment argument. Some place greater emphasis on individual empowerment and on liberating the individual from unnecessary state interference,

whilst others concentrate more on greater opportunities for collective engagement in decision-making. Some favour more popular or direct forms of citizen engagement such as petitions or referenda, and others prefer forums in which citizens are encouraged to become better informed and to debate, deliberate and judge what is in the common good.

A further concern from a developmental perspective is the issue of differential access to politics. This concern is shared with some from a protective perspective, notably the more critical pluralists. Keaney and Rogers (2006: 9) argue that the issue is worthy of attention in Britain on the back of empirical work showing that while electoral turnout in Britain has dropped across the board, it appears to have dropped more among the most disadvantaged groups:

> We have seen, in other words, not just a fall in voter turnout, but a rise in turnout inequality. An across-the-board fall in electoral turnout would have been a troubling phenomenon even without this added dimension. If nothing else, democratically elected governments depend for their legitimacy on voters turning out to vote for them. Low turnout is likely to undermine public support for the political system and governmental effectiveness. But a rise in turnout inequality is arguably much more troubling. It suggests that, for whatever reason, certain parts of the electorate do not feel that they have a stake in their democracy – a good indication that society is not treating those groups fairly. Worse still, it threatens to give those who do vote unfair influence over the political system.

The political system is failing to deliver equal access to all groups and that failure is both a driver for anti-politics and one of its worst impacts.

The developmental perspective offers, then, a diagnosis of anti-politics that shares some ground with the protective

democracy perspective, but it has a much more robust concern with non-participation, which is seen as a problem in itself, undermining the legitimacy of, and potential for, collective choice. Whereas within the protective perspective the assumption is that citizens are relatively unwilling participants in politics, the argument from the developmental perspective is that given the right opportunities, and a sense that the political system was open to influence, citizens would be willing to engage to a much higher degree. Apathy among the most disadvantaged reflects not so much an active choice on their part but a choice structured by a sense of powerlessness. The problem that accompanies political disenchantment and disengagement is that some interests always tend to dominate over others, and some citizens may find their concerns systematically ignored by the political system. In Britain mobilising institutions such as parties, trade unions or churches were once able to address some aspects of that bias -hence the relatively positive political culture identified in Almond and Verba's (1963) study. However, as the influence of these forces has declined, so our political system has become more unequal in terms of those engaged and feeling the system works for them. The solution is to construct new ways for citizens to engage in politics which give them a sense of influence and opportunities to share ideas and experiences with fellow citizens and to construct, through deliberation and learning, solutions to shared collective challenges.

JUDGING WHAT TO DO: LEARNING FROM BOTH PERSPECTIVES

If we take the evidence and argument presented so far in this paper it might be possible to still react by arguing neither the evidence of decline nor its potential impact is sufficiently strong to lead to the view that anti-political sentiment threatens

Britain's democracy. Given that we know some alienation towards politics and disengagement from political activity has been a central feature for decades, it would appear that British democracy has survived and could continue to survive. But such a position, while plausible, needs to be weighed against the potential hidden costs of political alienation. As Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002: 211) comment: 'the polity will not crumble in the face of public distaste for politics but this not mean the consequences of such distaste are harmless'. These authors – congruent generally with a protective perspective on democracy – go on to identify three negative issues created by political disenchantment. First, sensitivity to their lack of legitimacy may discourage policymakers from tackling difficult issues. Second, the opprobrium heaped on politics may limit the range of citizens willing to stand for elected office to the detriment of the quality of leadership available. Third, if the processes of decision-making are viewed as illegitimate then citizens may be less inclined to follow laws or support reform plans.

One might question each of these concerns, but given the focus of this series of papers on the scale of the policy challenges faced by Britain – global warming, financial meltdown, future housing needs and so on – it would appear that if political disenchantment weakens the system's capacity to make good policies and make them stick, then it should be a cause for concern. If, as other papers in this series and the tenor of recent discussion (2020 Public Services Commission 2010) suggest, the future of our public services – driven by funding pressures and the achievement of more subtle goals about enabling citizens to achieve their full capabilities – require in turn a shift of responsibility from the state to the individual, then a political system that can engage becomes less of a luxury item and more an essential requirement.

From the developmental and deliberative perception of politics, the case for doing something could be even clearer

cut: citizens do not engage because they have not been offered a democracy worthy of the name. Moreover, given that the most disadvantaged are those most likely to be frustrated and disengaged, then issues about the equality of individuals at the heart of enlightenment and democratic thought are at stake if practice diverges too far from principle. If you believe in democracy, at least as understood from a developmental perspective, then the case for reform is made because the current form and practice of politics actively alienates and discourages far too many citizens, and certainly, to an unacceptable degree, deters citizens from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in society from becoming engaged with politics.

Both protective and developmental perspectives lead to recognition that anti-political sentiment and political disengagement should be a cause for concern. Where they disagree is over the diagnosis of the problem and the potential solution. From a protective viewpoint the issue is not that citizens want to participate more, but rather that they want to be able to trust political leaders to make decisions in the public interest. If they could trust them they could leave them to get on with it. From the developmental perspective, the argument is that citizens do want to be more involved, both in giving direction to their elected representatives, and in political decision-making more generally, if given the right kind of opportunities and if they can believe that the system is not rigged. One line of reform in tune with the protective perspective would push towards cleaning and improving representative democracy. The other from a developmental perspective would push towards new forms of participation.

4 SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS: REDESIGNING DEMOCRACY

Paradigms such as those outlined in the previous section can give reformers a broad sense of direction but what is also required is an understanding of how to design better governance. Having a goal to aim for is valuable; knowing how to achieve it is another thing. It would be fair to say that among political elites there is an increased recognition of the need for political reforms, however, their response has been modest and fragmented given the scale of the critique that emerges from either a protective or developmental perspective. The search for solutions could be aided by a greater awareness of the design approaches that are emerging in the social science literature.

Drawing on but developing the framing of the discussion in terms of protective and developmental paradigms there is a way that social science can help in exploring the redesign debate. One literature comes from those that style themselves as political or constitutional engineers (Sartori 1994; Norris 2008; Reynolds 2010). Political engineers generally set themselves the goal of designing political systems to achieve stable and inclusive democratic governance. They embrace a protective view of democracy and look at how that can be promoted. Another perspective comes from those described as the democratic designers (Fishkin 1995, 2010; Fung and Wright 2004; Smith 2009) who take a more developmental perspective on democracy and explore in depth the institutions that might help deliver democratic renewal and more citizen participation. Table 5 sets out the two perspectives that will be explored in more depth in this section of the paper.

Table 5: Political engineering and democratic design perspectives

Perspective/Feature	Political engineering	Democratic design
Design goal	Stable and inclusive representative governance	Democratic renewal through citizen participation
Weapons of reform	Electoral systems, party organisation and power-sharing arrangements	Civic activism and innovations in public engagement
Favoured mechanism	Organisational incentives to change elites' behaviour	Institutional and cultural reform to reframe responses from citizens
Understanding of democracy	Protective	Developmental

THE RESPONSE FROM POLITICAL ELITES TO ANTI-POLITICS?

All the main parties offered substantial programmes of reform in the 2010 election to respond to the 'crisis' in our politics and political culture. It was a strong theme, for example, in the televised debates in the 2010 election campaign. The immediate framing of the issue by political elites was at least in part in terms of the context set by damaging revelations about MPs' expenses in the spring of 2009 but the option of various constitutional reforms has been part of thinking of all parties for some time. Labour when in power acted on those concerns with its devolution and other constitutional reforms and returned to them afresh again in the Brown premiership (see McLean 2010 for a critical analysis). The two coalition parties also have shown

a sense that they need to reconnect governors and citizens in a different way. The title of the Conservative Party 2010 manifesto was *An invitation to join the government of Britain*. The coalition government has placed the issue of anti-politics firmly on its agenda with Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg, as deputy prime minster, choosing the theme of political reform for his first solo speech and declaring that the new government 'is going to persuade you to put your faith in politics once again' (Clegg 2010).

The reform agenda favoured by the coalition government is extensive (HM Government 2010). Acts have already been passed that will reduce the number of MPs in the House of Commons from 650 to 600, change the way the UK is divided into parliamentary constituencies and lead to more equally-sized constituencies, and provide for five year fixed-term Parliaments. A referendum has been held and lost on changing the voting system for general elections, pitting Alternative Vote against the established system, in May 2011. A website has been established to collect e-petitions which can be on any subject chosen by members of the public and if they reach the target of 100,000 signatures will force a debate in Parliament (http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/). Other reforms are also in the offing, including plans to move towards an elected upper chamber, opportunities for primaries to help in the selection of party candidates in national elections, and moves to increase transparency over lobby practices.

Given the analysis presented in this paper it would appear that the reform package, as it stands, is unlikely to resolve the issue of public disenchantment and disengagement from politics. From the perspective of protective democracy the reform strategy makes some worthwhile steps to clean up politics but it does not focus enough on a reinvigoration of representative politics and misses out reform to the more powerful mechanisms of change. Amongst constitutional engineers the classic weapons

of reform to advance representative democracy are changes to the electoral system, shifts in the formation of parties (broad-based or narrower), or various forms of power-sharing among political institutions, such as changes to the legislative-executive balance or devolution and decentralisation. The coalition proposals have failed on the first front, are silent on the second and weak in the third. A few modest powers for backbench MPs or citizens, reforms to institutions that are not a strong focus of public attention – such as the House of Lords – are an unlikely answer to anti-politics, although they may be worthwhile reforms for other reasons. Doubts about the coalition programme would also emerge from the perspective of a developmental understanding of democracy because the level of proposed empowerment for most citizens is modest and there is no attempt to grapple with the issues of unequal access to politics. Citizens have access to some very modest new powers to raise issues with their political masters, or involve themselves in the selection of candidates, but few new capacities to make a difference to decisions or politics.

So neither political engineers nor democratic designers would be convinced by the reform on the table, but can social science go beyond criticism to offering positive alternatives, and if so what would those be?

POLITICAL ENGINEERING

From an engineering perspective the key to meeting the challenge of anti-politics is to take forward more seriously, and without allowing the vested interests of political parties to stand in the way, a programme to reinvigorate representative democracy. That programme would fundamentally shift the incentives for performance among elites through a set of technical changes in the election system, through the creation

of a more open party system and by facilitating a more devolved sharing of power across the country. Engineering involves changing the incentive structures for elites so that they conduct politics in a way that is perceived as legitimate by citizens. For example, a proportional representative voting system, all other things being equal, usually provides incentives for party fragmentation (because votes more closely match seats allocated to parties), so citizens are provided with a more plural and diverse set of parties with which to identify and engage.

The underlying goal of political engineers is to create a sense among citizens that they are included in the political system. This objective could be pursued in a variety of ways but following Lijphart (1977) the dominant preference among political engineers (for example Norris (2008)) is for electoral systems that favour proportional representation; party systems that allow for the representation of a wide range of interests and identities; and constitutional power-sharing arrangements that facilitate the spread of decision-making centres. There are constitutional engineers (for example Reilly (2006)) who point to other ways in which inclusion could be achieved through election systems that consolidate support around a few parties and by constructing party systems that make it more difficult for outlier minority parties. At the heart of the political engineering literature there is a debate about how to deal with difference. Lijphart (1977) and followers favour mechanisms that create multiple opportunities for diverse interests to be included or even veto decisions, and others argue for mechanisms that force citizens to recognise their shared or joint interests, and join together in wider coalitions. There is also a powerful arm of the political engineers' manifesto that examines how to ensure gender equality in access to representative institutions and influence on policymaking (Squires 2007).

Most of the practice of political engineers has taken place in developing democracies (Reynolds 2010) but there is no

reason in principle that the practice could not be applied to an established democracy such as Britain. In a full-scale treatment of a country, the political engineer would need to spend time diagnosing what had ailed democracy in a country and then look to shifts in the election system, party arrangements and power-sharing to prescribe the changes necessary to reinvigorate representative democracy. The evidence presented so far in this paper would be sifted, with a potential focus on indications that traditional partisan loyalties have broken down; on a sense that the parties, as they stand, are failing to attract sufficient membership and citizen engagement; and suggestions that power is too centralised around the decision-making of Westminster and Whitehall.

What would a political engineer propose for Britain? Norris (2008) shows how in the case of the devolved arrangements in Scotland one can already see the playing out of a different politics. A proportional election system has delivered a greater choice to voters and a wider representation of parties all adding up, according to Norris, to a healthier political system. Moreover, as the survey findings reported in Table 6 suggest, British citizens appear to be willing to give more credence to their local MP and devolved institutions such as the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly. So we may be witnessing not so much a rejection of politics as a rejection of a particular form of politics that has developed around the 'Westminster village'. The implication of this is that devolving power to more local and regional institutions, for example, might create a politics with which citizens would be more comfortable and which they might see as more legitimate. Despite the rhetoric of localism from the coalition government, its decentralisation plans are weak (see Stoker (2011) for an analysis). Paradoxically, the unintended consequences of devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under the previous Labour government, and the rise to power of the Scottish National Party in Scotland,

may have more effect in pushing reforms to our political system in the right direction than the reform programme agreed by the coalition and promoted by Nick Clegg. The crucial thing would be to extend the principles of electoral reform, wider party representation and devolved government to England.

Table 6: Trust and satisfaction in politicians and institutions beyond Westminster

	% Public that trust	
Year	**Local MP**	**MPs in General**
2004	47	27
2006	48	30
2009	40	20
% Public	**Satisfied**	**Dissatisfied**
With Scottish Parliament		
2001	54	21
2009	49	35
With National Assembly for Wales		
2001	39	29
2009	70	26

Source: Data from IPSOS/MORI survey (2009)

What would a programme of reform for England look like from the perspective of political engineers? It would probably not be focused on creating a parliament for England but rather a more sustained commitment to devolution – either to existing local government institutions or to more city or region based institutions. If five million citizens in Scotland can have significant decision-making authority given to them, then why not give similar capacity to five million citizens around greater Birmingham, stretching into the West Midlands? A shift to proportional elections for in local government would support a wider pluralisation of representation and give more scope to a

wider range of parties. The basics of a reform plan can at least be imagined.

DEMOCRATIC DESIGNERS

The second strand of thought outlined in Table 5 provides a rather different take on how to redesign democratic politics. While not rejecting the goals of stability or inclusion, it would add one more as a key focus: the more active engagement of citizens in governing themselves. This perspective might support the electoral and other reforms of political engineers, aimed at elites, but it would add a focus on reforms that supported citizen activism and created new opportunities for citizen participation. Like political engineers, democratic designers take institutional design as central to their work but frame it in terms of looking at incentives, as well as the broader normative or cultural underpinnings that institutions can provide by, for example, encouraging deliberation or focusing on the general interest in collective decisions. Actors are socialised and influenced in their behaviour not only by incentives but also by ideas, social norms and moral imperatives supported or enabled by institutional rules. Institutions do more than structure choices: they can provide identities, values and indeed even define interests. Above all, institutions – formal and informal – give us rules by which to live (Mahoney and Thelen 2010).

Within the democratic design group a distinction can be drawn between those who celebrate civil society and self-organisation (Drysek 2000) and those who argue that the state can have a role in designing democratic innovations (Smith 2009). From the former perspective the new politics is most likely to develop away from formal politics, government and established institutions. The internet, for example, is often seen as a potential carrier of a new politics (Gibson 2009), the seeds

of which are emerging in at least three ways. First, the narrow agenda-setting of the media is being challenged by the rise of the internet. Second, the control and manipulation of information, statistics and analysis by governments and their experts is giving way to a world of multiple gatekeepers in which informed citizens can increasingly and effectively hold government agencies to account. So people are becoming informed, better educated and, with the arrival of interactive internet exchange, on the cusp of a new politics. Third, the old politics with its technologies of formal organisation and mass media are giving way to a new politics of blogs, social networking and video-sharing sites that lower the costs of campaigning and radically pluralise the political process by providing multiple options for the expression of interests and ideas.

There are grounds for caution even among those who see the potential of the internet to heal our anti-politics culture. Context matters, as Gibson (2009) notes, and technology without better political content perhaps would make no difference. The internet and these new forms of campaigning do appear to be attracting a wider range of participants – especially younger people – but there is still concern that there is a digital divide. The internet may not be an attractive tool for all, so it may reinforce problem of political inequality rather than offer a solution. Moreover, it may not support the collective civic culture favoured by the developmental perspective. Sunstein (2007) argues against the over-personalised approach to information and politics that the internet can encourage. An effective democracy, he argues, requires that people encounter some new information or experience without pre-selection or choice on their part. These haphazard encounters are vital to divert citizens from simply talking to like-minded people who reinforce each other's views, creating more fragmentation and extremism. Careful research does indeed suggest that that construction of online deliberation is challenging and difficult

(John *et al*. 2011). Furthermore, all democracies require some shared common experiences and, although the internet can deliver on that to some degree, it runs the risk of creating a series of specialised ghettos where citizens live in separate worlds divorced from each other. Politics is inescapably an act of collective decision-making (Stoker 2006; Crick 2000; Flinders 2010). The internet does not offer a magic solution, although it may have a part to play in lowering the barriers of entry for ordinary citizens into politics.

The second strand of democratic designers see the emergence of a new politics as something that can be grafted onto existing political institutions providing that the commitment to innovation is deeply enough held among policymakers and the design for engagement is radical and able to create a combination of institutional incentives and broader cultural framing. The key point emphasised by these authors is the extent and depth of experiments and practice that is already happening and the need to learn lessons about what works from that experience. It is not possible to capture the full range of innovation but the *Participedia* web site aims to do so.[12] Let us briefly focus on two innovations. First, there has been considerable experience in Europe, North America and even in China of using deliberative polling on the design lines developed by Fishkin (1995; Fishkin *et al*. 2010). Participants are randomly chosen from within the population to reflect on an issue with others, and in the light of evidence and information. The development of participatory budgeting, which began in Brazil (Smith 2009) but has spread around the world, has in some cases proved a very powerful tool for getting those who are relatively disadvantaged to make a difference to decisions about the allocation of public funds.

12 For further information visit: http://www.participedia.net/wiki/Welcome_to_Participedia.

These various innovations on public engagement, as Graham Smith (2009) argues, show how a more participative form of governance could work. This shift requires the right mix of institutional framing to not only give incentives to citizens but also to frame discussion in a way that encourages people to regard others. Various myths about the limitations of participation are nailed. Firstly, there are a variety of mechanisms for overcoming inequalities in participation; secondly, design can support an orientation to the common good; thirdly, innovation can be designed so that when citizens intervene they do so with real impact; and fourthly, if the design is right then citizens are willing to bear the burden of participation. As Stoker et al (2011: 46) argue:

> Our analysis suggests that we can design political citizenship, in the sense that new opportunities to increase and deepen citizen involvement in political decision-making can be embedded effectively. But there is a caveat. Rhetoric is not enough: institutional design matters. Public authorities need to exhibit the willingness and imagination necessary to invest in democratic innovations. These emerging democratic practices offer actually-existing examples of how the relationship between governed and those who govern can be recast. Democratic innovations can be part of the strategy for reinvigorating political citizenship – and potentially re-imagining democracy itself.

The point the democratic designers would make is that although they may be only at the beginnings of their endeavours, there is enough evidence to suggest that if the design is right then better outcomes can be achieved. Democratic renewal is therefore not some utopian ambition but a combination of political will matched by learning the effective lessons about designs that work.

5 CONCLUDING NOTE

Anti-politics in culture and behaviour in Britain threatens the practice of democracy, not so much in the sense that the polity will crumble but more because a breakdown in the relationship between governors and governed undermines the capacity to make the right policy choices and develop new practices and programmes that will be needed to meet the challenges of the future. Those who study politics, therefore, have a pressing need not only to understand its causes but also to help design solutions that could support better systems of democratic governance, or ones that at least will be more engaging for a wider range of citizens (Stoker 2010). The framing of the issue, in terms of protective or developmental understandings of politics and democracy as provided in this paper, illuminates competing ways of approaching the phenomenon. It indicates different reform trajectories and provides templates against which to assess what progress is being made but it does not provide detailed and positive guidance in the search for solutions.

To move from understanding the problem to finding a solution requires a social science that is better at analysing how to turn existing conditions into preferred ones; in short it needs a design arm. In the present discussion we contrast the design dynamics of political engineers and democratic designers. The engineers focus on changing electoral, party and power systems to make them more legitimate to citizens. The democracy designers engage in the search for innovations in democratic practice coming from the bottom-up in terms of emerging practices in civil society or, alternatively, coming from public authorities taking the issue of public engagement seriously. For the political engineer the issues are straightforward. Does the combination of election system, party organisation and power-sharing deliver the best capacity for the emergence of a stable

democracy? Are the incentives sufficiently strong and aligned to get the system to the preferred destination so that it does not matter if other processes or dynamics are also driving the outcomes? Democratic designers frame the challenge in a more complex way. To push institutional reform in the circumstances of already established institutions hints at a process of change that is more ambiguous, involving the layering of some practices on top of those that are established, or displacing some practices rather than directly overthrowing them (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Political engineers tend towards replacing one system with another; the processes of democratic design are more about gradual institutional change, as new practices of citizen engagement and participation become embedded and established.

So engineers focus on changing the core features of political system – elections, parties and power-sharing – and democratic designers spotlight the need to innovate and create new and meaningful ways for citizens to engage. It would seem possible to combine their two sets of insights to steer Britain away from the malaise of anti-politics that threatens to undermine its capacity to have the collective discussions and make the collective choices that to meet the challenges outlined in other papers in this series. But it is important to recognise that the play of power remains a constraining feature when designing democratic reform. It would be naive to overlook the possibility that powerful interests or forces may block reforms or lead to the neglect of evidence and analysis. Equally it is clear there are gaps and a need for further work from the world of social science.

We need to understand reform options in all their variety and intricacy. The complexity of the context in which design interventions take place limits the effectiveness of those interventions. There may be areas of politics where we lack the understanding to offer effective solutions. At the very least

we need to understand more about why citizens think so negatively about politics. Good design begins with a plausible representation of the problem (Simon 1996). We know a fair amount about what kinds of political activity people engage in and what factors drive that activity. But political science and social science, in general, is less good at understanding and explaining what politics means to citizens at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We need to spend more empirical effort in trying to find out what our fellow citizens understand by the practice of politics. We also need to know more about the kinds of politics that citizens might hypothetically embrace if they were offered. A survey conducted in 2000 asks not only about political acts undertaken but also what potential acts citizens in Britain would undertake to influence rules, laws or politics (Pattie *et al.* 2004: 78). Looking at questions matching those asked in Table 2, we find that 42% had signed a petition in the previous year but 76% said they would be willing to do so; 5% had attended a political meeting but 26% indicated they would be willing to do so; 13% had contacted a politician but 53% said they might; and finally, 5% had taken part in a public demonstration but 34% indicate they would be willing to do so. Moreover further analysis suggests that the gain from actual to potential political activity is consistently a greater multiple for those one the lowest income compared to those on the highest income. Pent-up demand may be out there if the offer of engagement is right. An intriguing study (Neblo *et al.* 2010) of hypothetical prospects for citizen engagement in the United States indicates that many citizens might be attracted to political decision-making, especially in deliberative non-partisan forms, and many of those who are attracted are precisely those who do not engage in traditional politics to the same degree and are drawn in by institutional offerings that provide a partial alternative to politics as usual. Indeed the study followed up its survey work with a field experiment to trial if engagement

could be delivered in practice by offering a deliberative discussion with members of Congress. Again, it achieved positive results. We need many more examples of this kind of political science.

This report aims to challenge the relative reluctance of political and other social scientists to take on the design challenge: to move from inquisitive to purposive inquiry. Of course that reluctance is not entirely misplaced. In addition to the technical challenges of doing design there is an entirely appropriate set of concerns about the normative implications and claims of design. Who decides what constitutes 'better politics'? Where do the goals, purposes and objectives of design come from? How can one balance claims from designers for technical expertise with the demands of modern democracy for all to have an equal say? What does design imply in terms of not only a new orientation from social scientists but also a new outlook from elected politicians, the media, citizens and stakeholders? These are important questions but it is better they are addressed than neglected. We need social scientists to contribute to debate about change not as normative advocates or activists but as scientists who take seriously the issue of design and how to get to an intended goal – a better experience of democratic politics for more of our fellow citizens.

APPENDIX A: SUB-GROUP ANALYSIS: CONFIDENCE INTERVALS

	Social grade AB	95% CI	Social grade DE	95% CI
Interest	77	5.1%	36	5.5%
Knowledge	73	5.3%	29	5.2%
Activist	25	5.2%	5	2.5%
Voting	72	5.4%	43	5.6%
Efficacy	31	5.6%	30	5.2%
	265		**296**	

	Men	95% CI	Women	95% CI
Interest	63	3.9%	53	4.0%
Knowledge	63	3.9%	43	4.0%
Activist	12	2.6%	15	2.9%
Voting	57	4.0%	59	3.9%
Efficacy	31	3.7%	29	3.6%
	591		**600**	

	White	95% CI	BME	95% CI
Interest	60	3.1%	41	6.4%
Knowledge	54	3.1%	39	6.4%
Activist	14	2.2%	5	2.8%
Voting	60	3.1%	44	6.5%
Efficacy	29	2.9%	38	6.3%
	968		**225**	

If two confidence intervals overlap there is not a significant difference between groups.

Example: The confidence interval for white activists is between 11.8% and 16.2% (14 ±2.2%) and for BME activists it is between 2.2% and 7.8% (5±2.8%). These intervals do not overlap hence there is a significant difference between the groups.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The arguments presented here have been helped greatly by comments from co-authors involved in the broader British Academy project. They also reflect thinking from colleagues involved in the ESRC funded project: RES-000-22-4441 *Anti-politics: Characterising and accounting for political disaffection*.

REFERENCES

Almond, G. and Verba, S. (1963), *The civic culture: Political attitudes and democracy in five nations* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press).

Birch, S. and Allen, N. (2009), 'How honest do politicians need to be?', *The Political Quarterly,* 81: 49-56.

Cameron, D (2010) *Rebuilding trust in politics* Speech delivered February 8 2010. Available at http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/02/David_Cameron_Rebuilding_trust_in_politics.aspx Downloaded 17/10/11

Clegg, N. (2010), **'**Full text: Clegg reform speech', *BBC News*, 19 May 2010 [online], http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8691753.stm (Accessed on 19 May 2010).

Conover, P. J. and Feldman, S. (1989), 'Candidate perception in an ambiguous world: Campaigns, cues, and inference' *American Journal of Political Science*, 33: 912-940.

Conservative Party (2010), *The Conservative manifesto 2010* [online], http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Manifesto.aspx (Accessed on 05 August 2011).

Crick, B. (2000), *In defence of politics*, fifth edition (London, Continuum).

della Porta, D., Andretta, M., Mosca, L. and Reiter, H. (2006), *Globalization from*

Below: Transnational Activists and Protest Networks (Minneapolis, MN: University

of Minnesota Press).

Dolan, K. (2011), 'Do women and men know different things? Measuring gender differences in political knowledge', *The Journal of Politics*, 73: 97–107.

Dryzek, J. (2000), *Deliberative democracy and beyond: Liberals, critics, contestations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Flinders, M. (2010), 'In defence of politics', *The Political Quarterly*, 81: 309-326.

Fishkin, J. S. (1997), *The voice of the people*: *Public opinion and democracy (*New Haven CT, Yale University Press).

Fishkin, J. S., He, B., Luskin, R. C. and Siu, A. (2010), 'Deliberative democracy in an unlikely place: Deliberative polling in China', *British Journal of Political Science*, 40: 435-448.

Fung, A. and Wright, E. O. (2003), *Deepening Democracy: Institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance* (London, Verso).

Gibson, R. (2009), 'New media and the revitalisation of politics', *Representation*, 45: 289-300.

Goodin, R. (2003), *Reflective Democracy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of political engagement 7: The 2010 report* (London, Hansard Society).

Hansard Society (2011), *Audit of political Engagement 8: The 2011 report* (London, Hansard Society).

Hay, C. (2007), *Why we hate politics* (Cambridge, Polity).

Held, D. (2006), *Models of democracy*, third edition (Cambridge, Polity).

Hibbing, J. and Theiss-Morse, E. (2001), 'The means is the end', in J. Hibbing and E. Theiss-Morse (eds.), *What is about government that Americans dislike?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 243-250.

Hibbing, J. and Theiss-Morse, E. (2002), *Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work* (New York, Cambridge University Press).

HM Government (2010), *The coalition: Our programme for government* [online], http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100623141734/http://programmeforgovernment.hmg.gov.uk (Accessed on 25 August 2011).

Ipsos MORI (2009), *Expenses poll for the BBC, J26434* [online], http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2349 (Accessed on 25 August 2011).

John, P., Liu, H. and Fieldhouse, E. (2010) *The Civic Culture in Britain and America Fifty Years On*, working paper from the Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester available at http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/socialchange/publications/working/documents/TheCivicCultureinBritainandAmerica.pdf

John, P., Cotterill, S., Liu, H., Richardson, L., Moseley, A., Nomura, H., Smith, G., Stoker, G. and Wales, C. (2011) *Nudge, nudge, think, think: Using experiments to change civic behaviour* (London, Bloomsbury Academic).

Kavanagh, D. (1980), 'Political culture in Great Britain: The decline of the civic culture', in G. Almond and S. Verba (eds.), *The civic culture revisited* (Boston MA, Little, Brown and Company), 124-176.

Keaney, E. and Rogers, B. (2006), *A citizen's duty: Voter inequality and the case for compulsory turnout*, London, Institute of Public Policy Research [online], http://www.ippr.org/ecomm/files/a_citizen's_duty.pdf (Accessed on 25 August 2011).

Lijphart, A. (1977), *Democracy in plural societies: A comparative exploration* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press).

Macpherson, C. B. (1973), *Democratic theory: Essays in retrieval* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Mahoney, J. and Thelen, K. (2010), 'A theory of gradual institutional change' in Mahoney, J. and

Thelen, K. (eds.), *Explaining institutional change* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 1-38.

Marsh, D., O'Toole, M. and Jones, S. (2006), *Young people and politics in the UK: Apathy or alienation* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).

McLean, I. (2010) *What's Wrong with the British Constitution?* (Oxford, Oxford University Press)

Neblo, M.; Esterling, K., Kennedy, R., Lazer, D., Sokhey, A (2010) Who Wants to Deliberate-And Why? *American Political Science Review* 104:3, 566-583

Norris, P. (2008), *Driving democracy: Do power-sharing institutions work?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Norris, P. (2011), *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Pateman, C. (1970), *Participation and democratic theory* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Pattie, C., Seyd, P. and Whiteley, P. (2004) *Citizenship in Britain: Values, participation and democracy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Power Inquiry (2006), *The report of Power: An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy* [online], http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/documents/PowertothePeople_002.pdf (Accessed on 19 June 2010).

Reilly, B. (2006), *Democracy and diversity: Political engineering in the Asia-Pacific* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Reynolds, A. (2010), *Designing democracy in a dangerous world* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Sartori, G. (1994), *Comparative constitutional engineering: An inquiry into structures, incentives, and outcomes* (London, Macmillan).

Saward, M. (2003), *Democracy* (London, Wiley-Blackwell).

Schumpeter, J. (1976), *Capitalism, socialism and democracy* (London, George Allen and Unwin).

Simon, H. (1996), *The sciences of the artificial*, third edition (Cambridge MA, MIT Press).

Smith, M. (2006) 'Pluralism' in C. Hay. M. Lister and D. Marsh (eds), *The State:*

Theories and Issues (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

Smith, G. (2009), *Democratic innovations: Designing institutions for citizen participation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Squires, J. (2007), *The new politics of gender equality* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).

Stoker, G. (2006), *Why politics matters: Making democracy work* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan).

Stoker, G. (2010), 'The rise of political disenchantment', in C. Hay (ed.), *New directions in political science* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan), 43-63.

Stoker, G. (2011), 'If town halls don't pay the piper they can't call the tune', *Parliamentary Brief Online* 17 January 2011 [online], http://www.parliamentarybrief.com/2011/01/if-town-halls-dont-pay-the-piper-then-they-cant (Accessed on 05 June 2011).

Stoker, G., Mason, A., McGrew, A., Armstrong, C., Owen, D., Smith, G., Banya, M., Saunders, C. and McGhee, D. (2011), *Prospects for citizenship* (London, Bloomsbury Academic Press).

Sunstein, C. R. (2007) *Republic.com 2.0* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press).

Theiss-Morse, E. and Hibbing, J. (2005), 'Citizenship and civic engagement' in *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8: 227-49.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. and Brady, H. (1995), *Voice and Equality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

The author: Gerry Stoker

Gerry Stoker is Professor of Politics and Governance at the University of Southampton. He has previously held professorships at the Universities of Manchester and Strathclyde. His research interests include democratic politics, public participation, public service reform, local and regional governance, and urban politics.

The author or editor of more than twenty books, Professor Stoker was the founding chair of the New Local Government Network, has advised governments in the UK, Europe and further afield, and has won prestigious awards from the Political Studies Association for his work and its impact.

The chair: Peter Taylor-Gooby FBA

Peter Taylor-Gooby is Professor of Social Policy at the University of Kent and is chair of the British Academy's *New Paradigms in Public Policy* project. He is also a Founding Academician at ALSiSS, a fellow of the RSA, and co-director of the Risk Research Institute at Beijing Normal University. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2009. He chairs the Research Assessment Exercise Social Work and Social Policy and Administration panel.

Previous roles have included State-appointed Visiting Foreign Expert to China (2008-2011), President of the Sociology and Social Policy section of the British Association of American Studies (2005-2006), and chair of the Social Policy and Social Work Research Assessment Exercise Panel (2005-2008). He has also published 22 books, 114 articles and 110 book chapters, and has advised governments in the UK and abroad.

BRITISH ACADEMY POLICY PUBLICATIONS

Squaring the public policy circle: Managing a mismatch between demands and resources, a report for the British Academy project *New paradigms in public policy,* November 2011

Economic futures, a report for the British Academy project *New paradigms in public policy,* September 2011

Climate *change and public policy futures*, a report for the British Academy project *New paradigms in public policy*, July 2011

History for the taking? Perspectives on material heritage, a British Academy report, May 2011

Language matters more and more, a position statement by the British Academy, February 2011

Stress at work, a British Academy report, October 2010

Happy families? History and family policy, a British Academy report, October 2010

Drawing a new constituency map for the United Kingdom: The parliamentary voting system and constituencies bill 2010, a British Academy report, September 2010

Choosing an electoral system, a British Academy report, March 2010

Social science and family policies, a British Academy report, February 2010

Language matters, a position paper by the British Academy, June 2009

Punching our weight: The humanities and social sciences in public policy making, a British Academy report, September 2008

The British Academy, established by Royal Charter in 1902, champions and supports the humanities and social sciences across the UK and internationally. As a Fellowship of 900 UK humanities scholars and social scientists, elected for their distinction in research, the Academy is an independent and self-governing organisation, in receipt of public funding. Its Policy Centre, which draws on funding from ESRC and AHRC, oversees a programme of activity, engaging the expertise within the humanities and social sciences to shed light on policy issues, and commissioning experts to draw up reports to help improve understanding of issues of topical concern. This report has been peer reviewed to ensure its academic quality. Views expressed in it are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily endorsed by the British Academy but are commended as contributing to public debate.

BRITISH ACADEMY

POLICY CENTRE

The average UK citizen is disengaged and disappointed with politics. Seven in ten of us have little or no trust in politicians; only half of us claim to be interested in politics; and only an approximate quarter of us are satisfied with the UK parliament. Here, Gerry Stoker argues that citizens have to get more involved if the UK government is to effectively confront problems facing British society and find democratic, representative solutions.

Academics fall into two established camps on the approaches we can take: one group suggests that policymakers should focus on restoring citizen faith in existing representative processes while the other urges them to get citizens more actively involved through new participatory and deliberative processes. We need social scientists to draw on and develop these insights, and take on the challenge of designing a new way to tackle anti-political attitudes.

The new and evolving political, economic and societal challenges in twenty-first century Britain require policymakers to adapt and change the way they consider their craft. New paradigms in public policy, a series of reports published by the British Academy Policy Centre, examines a range of policy issues, explaining the current situation and policy approaches and making suggestions as to why and how concepts should be adapted, reformed or reinvented.

SPONSORED BY

Arts & Humanities Research Council

E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

ISBN: 978-0-85672-596-8

10–11 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AH
Telephone: +44 (0)207 969 5200
Fax: +44 (0)207 969 5300
Registered Charity: Number 233176