Revision

Power and politics

Joan Garrod

You can use this task to aid your revision.

Task

Once you have thoroughly revised this topic, answer the following exam-style question, using the notes provided for guidance. Depending on how confident you feel, you can either answer the question using your notes and textbook, or you can try to answer it under timed conditions — allow a maximum of 50 minutes — with just your own knowledge.

Question

‘Over the past 30 years, there have been significant changes in both voting behaviour and other forms of political participation.’

To what extent is this view supported by sociological arguments and evidence?

Guidance

There are some important things about this question that you need to consider from the start:

The time period — 30 years will be an approximate time period, so you should think about the period from around 1980 to the present. Don’t waste time writing at length about other periods, although you may wish to bring in some information from before the 1980s in order to make valid comparisons.

The political behaviour — note that this is not just about voting behaviour. You should also write about ‘other forms of political participation’. You should also consider the word ‘significant’.

Sociological arguments — what do various sociologists say about why this is happening — or why it is not?

Sociological evidence — what needs to be considered as evidence to support or refute the view expressed in the question? This is an opportunity for you to display relevant knowledge, especially about recent or current events and trends.

Other points to consider

What kind of voting behaviour was there before the period in question? Think about class-based voting, the number and relative strength of political parties, levels of turnout, and how politicians were regarded.

What changes appear to have taken place? Think about the (possible) decline of the link between class and party, the changing composition of British society, the rise of parties other than the traditional ones (the Eastleigh by-election will help here), the role of the media (including televised debates), postal votes and turnout. You may also think of other changes. Obviously, anything you
mention will need a brief comment showing that you understand its significance — don’t simply make a list.

What other forms of political participation could you mention, together with any changes in these? You could consider levels of both party and trade union membership, the significance of social media, and mass demonstrations and protests.

What reasons have been put forward for any changes that have taken place? Think about the possible weakening of links between class and political identity, political movements that prey on people’s fears about issues such as immigration and the role of the European Union, the decline in manufacturing and its link with trade unionism, the apparent growth in political apathy among young people, disenchantment with politicians following various scandals — again, you may think of other reasons.

**Finally**

Make sure that you round off your discussion with a conclusion that arises from the arguments and evidence that you have put forward in your essay. Have you shown changes in voting behaviour and/or political participation? If so, would you consider that these have been ‘significant’ — and why? On balance, do you think that you have shown that there is or is not evidence for the view put forward in the question?