

## Political Literacy: An End to Apathy?

It has been an incredible time for politics. Pre-2016, we had the first coalition government to grace No.10 since the Second World War; we have witnessed the utter obliteration of the third largest party in the UK, the Liberal Democrats who, in 2015, shrank into irrelevance. We also witnessed the resurgence of the great left and right debate with the growth of right-wing movements like UKIP and the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. In 2016 alone, we saw two incredible anti-establishment votes, with Britain deciding to leave the European Union and Donald Trump being elected as the next US president, both occurring after two tumultuous campaigns. The referendum had a profound effect on the country and us, the British People. Yet were we qualified to make such a decision? The current fallout from Brexit would imply that we weren't.

We live in a society where most people gain their political information from their parents, whom vote Labour or Conservative because of their out of date belief in what the parties stood for years ago, the media, and vote due to vague social customs. Politics unfortunately has remained the playground of the financially better off and while the sons and daughters of the higher echelons of society are educated in politics, the rest of us are not, creating a division, which can be seen when looking at the background of MPs and the ever-expanding Oxbridge bubble in Parliament.

Yet, the issue becomes bigger because everyone in our democracy is entitled to a vote, hence, the divide not only secures the political industry for the elite, but it also lets loose a very politically illiterate populace during elections and referendums, leaving us vulnerable to decisions fuelled by misinformation, media spins, and ignorance. This can't carry on if we wish to have and continue to hold on to a healthy democracy. The real issue here is a lack of political education in all but the top end schools.

From my experience, people, especially young people, are interested in politics, but lack an understanding due to this society-induced ignorance. Currently, we assume that once we hit 18 years of age we suddenly become enlightened with all the political knowledge one needs to vote and engage. Of course, this not the case, it needs to be taught and understood in school as a compulsory subject. We treat English and Maths in very high regard, as two of the most important subjects. However, the one subject that allows us to be who we want to be, gives us a voice and creates a society we wish to live in, we give no time to in schools.

The issue is that political literacy would give us, the next generation, a clear understanding of what politics is, how our society works and why voting is relevant and important. There have been some incredible initiatives recently by the UK government around voter registration and getting young people to vote. Yet, screaming at us to vote without telling us why or how society and politics works seems a little premature. Like asking someone to run a marathon before being able to walk. You can't get an entire generation mobilized without first giving them the instruments to understand the system they are supposed to be influencing.

We, Shout Out UK, aim to combat this, and that's why last year we launched our Political Literacy course, which aims to get more young people interested and engaged in Politics, by teaching them about the processes in Politics, public speaking and debating. The young people we teach are more engaged and passionate about politics because they are taught it, they understand it now and even more important than that was longevity, they stuck with it rather than being involved sporadically over the course of one election or referendum. Politics takes time and only when you

are taught this, will you have the patience to stomach it.

This year, our goal is to attract even more young people to politics and enhance their political understanding through the launch of our new online Political Literacy course. Politics shouldn't be the reserve of the rich and privileged and reaching young people online is the natural next step to get them engaged in politics and the world around them.

Roisin Murray, a teacher at Bentley Wood High School, Harrow, said, "Understanding Politics is key to understanding how society works. Shout Out UK's Political Literacy Course supports students in developing their political awareness so they can take a more active role in society. After sitting in on several lessons with Shout Out UK and our students, I can honestly say it has been a fantastic opportunity for our students to develop their knowledge and awareness of current affairs as well as their ability to speak in public, debate and present a discussion coherently. This has also helped students to develop their self-esteem and confidence."

Maybe it's time we look at the issue seriously, rather than just around elections and referendums. The issue is not apathy itself, it's *why* apathy happens. Apathy amongst young people happens because the system has become so complex, that people no longer understand it and so get frustrated by it. We must give schools the tools necessary to deal with this issue because no matter how many times you scream at someone to vote, if that person does not understand the system or why you should vote, he or she will never be engaged in the long run, even though they may vote the one time you asked them to.

It's the modern equivalent to the old proverb, 'give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life time'. In a similar fashion, if we ask them to vote, they will do it once before getting bored or disillusioned, but if we give them the tools to understand the system they will remain engaged for a lifetime.

### ***About the Author: Matteo Bergamini***

Matteo Bergamini is a multi-award-winning entrepreneur and founder of Shout Out UK. He has a degree in Politics & History, as well as a Graduate Diploma in Law from the University of Brunel. He has worked on a number of projects from the Channel 4 Youth Leaders' Debate to the creation of a Political Literacy Course.

An avid promoter of political discourse and literacy amongst young people, he was invited to become a fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce for his work in encouraging political education amongst young people.

This year, Shout Out UK launched their political literacy course to local schools in order to better educate young people in politics and encourage a longstanding interest and understanding in politics. The course covers British Politics, International Relations as well as People Skills. Shout Out UK are registered with AQA for the delivery of the Unit Award Scheme (UAS). So upon successful completion of each unit of the Course, students will receive a UAS certificate from AQA.

**If you would like more information on the course please visit:**

<https://www.shoutoutuk.org/political-literacy-course/>

