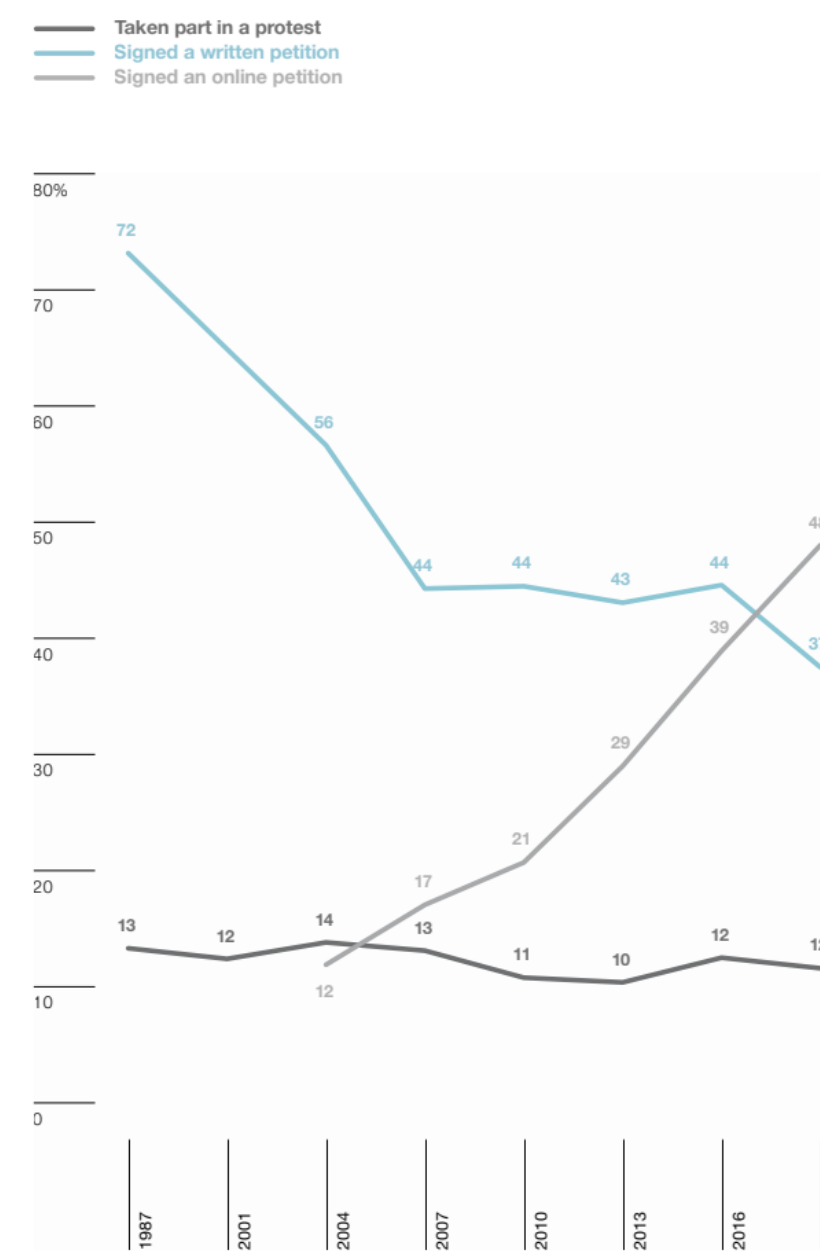


CHANGES IN FORMS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

Simon Raivid

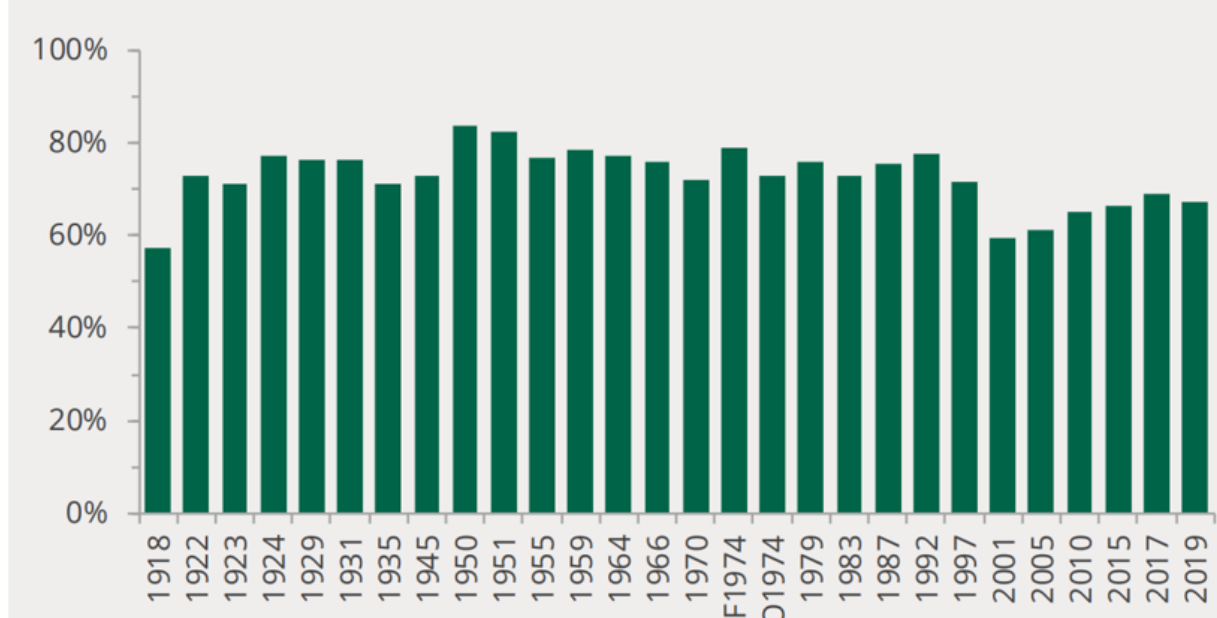
The nature and scope of this dissertation is a comparative case study analysis of voter apathy and alternative political participation methods between the United Kingdom and Australia. The research contributes new knowledge on this subject by juxtaposing two advanced democracies, exhibiting voter apathy trends while utilising different electoral systems. A comparative case study method was undertaken, gathering data from academic literature, official statistics, and news sources to analyse voter turnout, alternative participation methods, and relevant case studies in each country's context. The main argument and findings are that while voter apathy is rising globally, citizens are finding alternative ways to engage politically through avenues like social media and pressure groups. However, the efficacy of these alternative methods varies between the UK and Australia. Key pressure group examples like Jamie Oliver's healthy school meals campaign in the UK, highlight these contrasts. In conclusion, citizens are increasingly apathetic towards formal voting but remain engaged through alternative participation methods, underscoring the need for democratic processes worldwide to adapt accordingly. The analysis of specific case studies

Political participation in the past five years



(Cameron & McAllister, 2019:75)
Cameron, S. & McAllister, I. (2019) Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2019. Available at: [Trends-in-Australian-Political-Opinion-1987-2019.pdf](https://www.aec.gov.au/elections/federal_elections/voter-turnout.htm) (Accessed on: 09/01/2024)

Graph 1: Turnout at UK general elections, 1918-2019



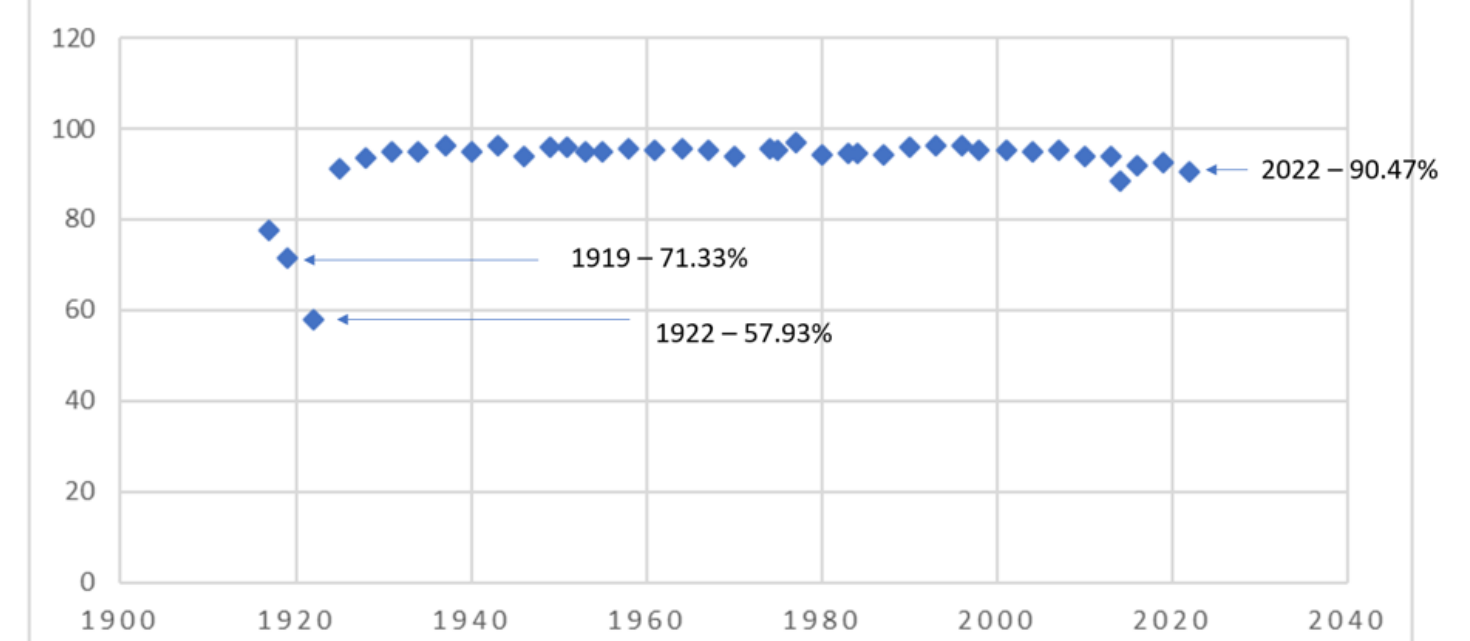
(Uberoi, 2023:5)
Uberoi, E. (2023), 'Turnout at elections', House of Commons Library, Available at: [CBP-8060.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk) (Accessed on: 03/01/2024)

Objectives

Change.org in Australia provides

In my dissertation, I aimed to demonstrate that voter apathy is a global phenomenon extending beyond the UK. I intend to identify diverse forms of political participation employed by the electorate. Through a comparative analysis of participation methods in the UK and Australia, my third objective is to assess their effectiveness and potential variations. My fourth aim is to explore instances where repercussions fail to ensure voter turnout, especially by examining alternative methods. Finally, I will delve into the future of voting in liberal democracies, questioning whether traditional methods will persist or whether alternative means will become the predominant.

Graph 2: AUSTRALIAN SENATE VOTING FIGURES 1917-2022



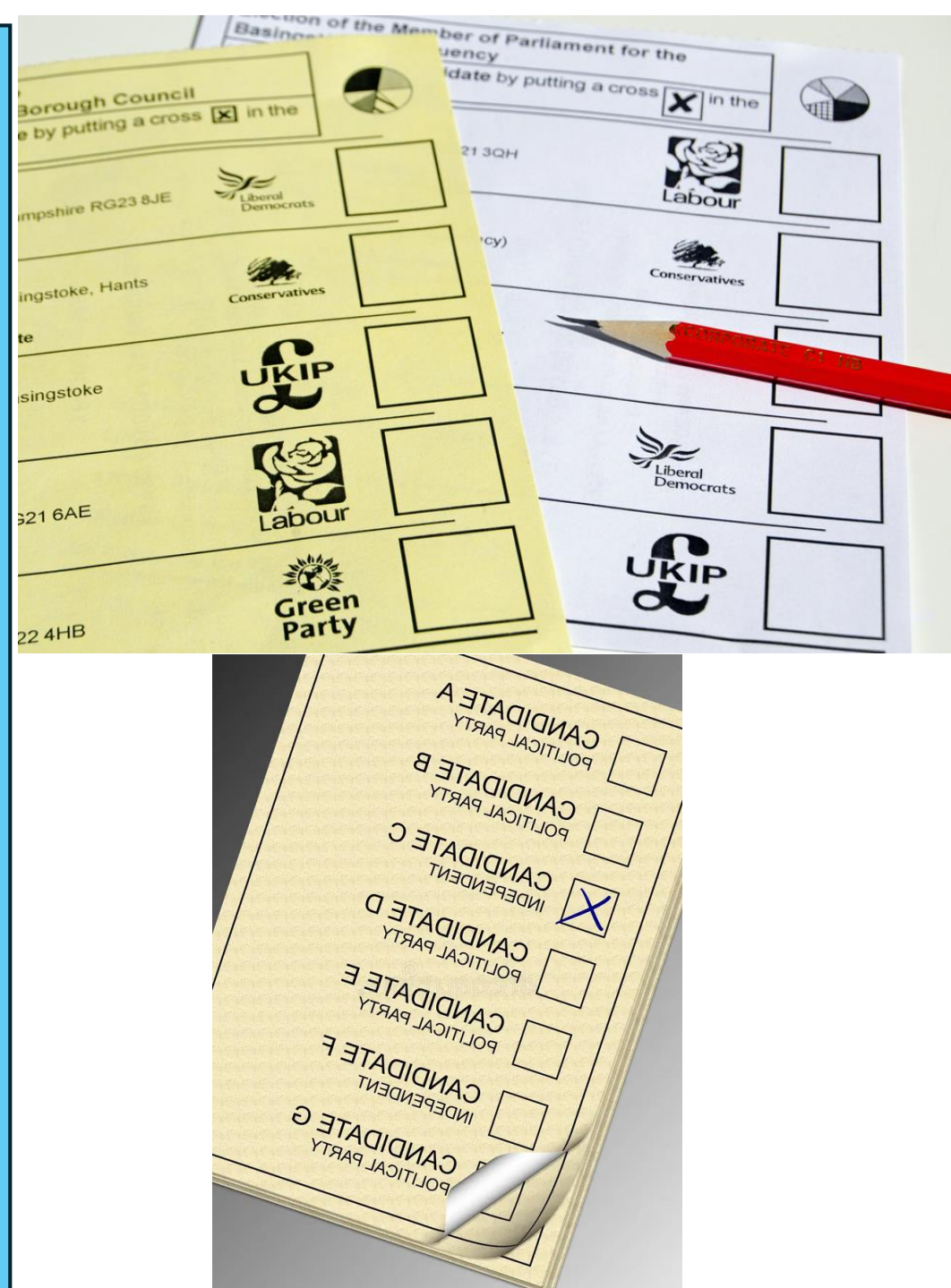
(Anonymous, 2022)
Data adapted from: Anonymous, 2022 'Voter turnout - previous elections', Available at: https://www.aec.gov.au/elections/federal_elections/voter-turnout.htm, (Accessed on: 10/12/2023)

Results

- We know that electorates are becoming more apathetic globally and are turning more to alternative methods of participation to express themselves politically.
- Nevertheless, we can see through figures that due to Australia having compulsory voting it forces more members of the electorate to turn up to the polls, with the hope that this would reduce the electorates apathy.
- Subsequently this does lead to more members of the electorate turning up to the polls, however, we have seen an increase in spoilt or blank ballots, allowing members of the electorate to exercise their democratic right in a manner that does not affect the result of the election while also preventing themselves from receiving a fine.
- While this is the case in Australia, in the UK we are seeing an even greater decline in turnout, while a strong increase and uptake in alternative methods of political participation, rather than attending the polls.
- Consequently, we can see that compulsory voting does have an impact on turnout while in turn also encouraging members of the electorate

Australian Case Study; Change.org:

Change.org utilises online petitions to advocate for change in Australia, amassing significant support since its 2011 launch. With 792,000 petitions created by October 2023, it has influenced substantial social changes, such as abolishing the 'gay panic' defence in 2012. By mobilising citizens through free email sign-ups, it fosters political engagement, though its impact on voter turnout remains uncertain. Despite challenges in aligning political agendas, its affordability and accessibility make it a crucial tool for grassroots activism, offering an alternative to traditional voting and sustaining public involvement in pressing issues.



United Kingdom Case Study; Feed Me

Jamie Oliver's "Feed Me Better" campaign successfully lobbied for healthier school meals outside of elections, prompting government action within five years. Oliver's continued advocacy, exemplified by meetings with the education secretary in 2022 to address post-pandemic child obesity, underscores ongoing engagement despite periods of apathy. Contrasting with groups like Extinction Rebellion, whose broad goals may alienate some, Oliver's targeted approach highlights effective pressure group tactics. However, sustained success can lead to voter disengagement when issues are resolved, emphasising the mixed effectiveness of such methods.