Anti-Politics: A Long View

Some contemporary democracies appear plagued by anti-politics, a set of negative attitudes held towards politicians and the political process. In this seminar Gerry Stoker explains how and why anti-political sentiment has grown among British citizens over the last half-century drawing on research about to be published in a Cambridge University Press book co-authored with Nick Clarke, Will Jennings and Jonathan Moss. The book offers a range of conceptual developments to help explore how citizens think about politics and the issue of negativity towards politics and uses responses to public opinion surveys alongside a unique data source-the diaries, reports and letters collected by Mass Observation. The book reveals that anti-politics has grown in scope and intensity when seen through the lens of a long view of the issue stretching back over multiple decades. Such growth is explained by citizens’ changing images of ‘the good politician’ and changing modes of political interaction between politicians and citizens. The seminar will conclude by placing these findings in a broader comparative context and exploring the implications for efforts to reform and improve democratic politics.