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From data to decisions: statistical literacy and the democratic process

Topic 5 – Who uses statistics, what do they need and how should we engage with them?

Keywords: statistical literacy, decision making, policy influencing

Introduction

Data are a critical part of the democratic process. They are key in providing critical evidence on how our society and the economy are doing. Without proper evidence policy decisions will be misguided, and they risk steering our future in the wrong direction. The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) has, as one of its core strategic objectives, made significant efforts in engaging with the political and wider policy world in promoting the importance of data and statistics in decision-making. In the last year however, it has become clear that an awareness of statistical literacy alone is not enough to make the numbers count. The UK 'Brexit' referendum campaign, in which both sides of the debate openly abused numbers to advance their arguments, has been a sobering experience, and some commentators are now talking about a 'post-truth' era in western politics. This talk will set out some of the work the RSS is undertaking in the area of statistical literacy for policy making, and how we have been engaging with some of the recent debates on the importance of statistics in the democratic debate.