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The
Electoral
Commission

An audit of political engagement 3

Research report, March 2006

This is the third annual audit of political engagement undertaken jointly by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society.

Like the first, it measures the extent and nature of the UK public's political engagement and does so via our annual Political Engagement Poll, but it is a smaller, update audit and focuses on how political engagement has changed in the last 12 months.

This report and the previous audits are available at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk and www.hansardsociety.org.uk and in hard copy from the Electoral Commission or Hansard Society offices.

Translations and other formats

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The Electoral Commission is an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Our mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process.

The Hansard Society is an independent, non-partisan educational organisation, which exists to promote effective parliamentary democracy. We work to ensure that good government is supported and balanced by a strong Parliament, and that Parliament gains strength by being accessible to and connected with the public it represents.

MORI
social research institute

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Preface

This is the third audit of political engagement undertaken jointly by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society. It measures how central the UK public think politics is to their lives via our annual Political Engagement Poll.

Bucking the downward trend of recent years, voting turnout increased at the 2005 general election – although only by two percentage points. The long-term trend remains uncertain. Worryingly, post-election research by the Electoral Commission pointed to evidence of a cohort of young people who failed to participate in the 2001 election and are continuing not to vote as they get older.

Analysis of elections adds considerably to our knowledge of democratic participation. But political engagement is more than just voting and this year's audit provides a valuable adjunct to studies of voting behaviour. We have also extended the scope of the audit by, for example, using new survey questions aimed at increasing our understanding of the public's attitude towards, and expectations of, its elected representatives. We have also explored the extent to which people are willing to get involved in the political process and how, if at all, they would be prepared to do so.

As we continue to monitor the health of UK political life through our annual audits, we are conscious that the world of politics moves on. We will be fascinated to see in future audits whether political developments, such as changes in party leaderships, have any impact upon political engagement in the UK.

Our audits have proved to be important reference points for the Commission and the Society as we take forward our own respective programmes of work. We hope that others will equally draw on them to generate practical responses. Reflection and discussion are

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necessary preconditions of action. With this in mind, if you have any comments about what this research says or what might be done in response to it, please contact us by email at info@politicalengagement.org.uk.

Finally, we would again like to acknowledge the expertise and assistance provided by the Ipsos MORI team. While overall responsibility for the content of this report rests with us, we have drawn heavily on Ipsos MORI's own analysis of the survey data.

Sam Younger
Chairman
the Electoral Commission

Lord Holme
Chairman
Hansard Society

Executive summary

Overall, this year's audit found political engagement, as defined by six key indicators, to be little changed since the last audit in early 2005. Importantly, it further highlights the considerable disparities in the depth and breadth of political engagement among different social groups.

The dramatic slump in voter turnout between the 1997 and 2001 UK Parliamentary general elections prompted concerns about the health of UK democracy. Since then, considerable research has been undertaken by the Electoral Commission, the Hansard Society and many others into why growing numbers of people have become disconnected from the formal political process. The 61% turnout recorded at the 2005 general election, while a slight improvement on four years ago, remains historically low and underlines the continuing need for such research. This year's audit, like its predecessors, provides a broader analysis of political engagement.

According to our audit:

- Most UK adults do not feel they know much about politics.

- Just under four in 10 (39%) say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics, down from the 45% recorded by our previous audit.

- Over half say they are interested in politics and a similar proportion say they would be 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate general election.

- A third feel that the present system of governing Britain works well and that 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run'.

- Only a minority, 14%, are politically active.

The general election does not appear to have made an enduring impact on the national political consciousness. Certainly, it has left no obvious legacy in terms of political engagement – our indicators, for the most part, have returned to what now appears to be the 'normal' level of political engagement.

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One striking feature of this year's audit is that, beneath the headline figures, there are considerable disparities in levels of political engagement among certain social groups. In particular, political disengagement appears entrenched and widespread among those living in 'very deprived' areas.[1] Our findings add to the growing body of evidence that suggests social and political exclusion are strongly related and mutually reinforcing:

- Professional/non-manual workers (ABC1s) are much more likely to feel knowledgeable than manual workers/non-working people (C2DEs).

- Likewise, interest is twice as high among ABs than among DEs.

- Among those living in 'very deprived' areas, a minority say they are interested in politics and one-quarter appear unwilling to engage in any form of activity aimed at influencing decisions.

- Nearly seven in 10 ABs say they would be certain to vote at an immediate general election compared to less than half of C2DEs.

Among young people, levels of political knowledge, interest, action and participation are lower than among the population as a whole. There is also worrying evidence of the emergence of a cohort of young people who did not take part at the 2001 general election and who are not voting as they get older. However, our audit underlines that any attempts to re-engage people with politics ought to be addressed to society generally and not simply at the younger age groups only. It also underlines the necessity for political parties to recast themselves as creative forces in UK politics and to work to improve their public standing.

Finally, the audit provides some valuable insights about the extent to which people **want** to become involved in politics. It shows that while a majority of the public express a desire to have a say in how the country is run, they are less enthusiastic about the prospect of acting out this desire. Significantly, this is most true of people who are currently least engaged, suggesting that opening up new and more direct channels for involvement may be insufficient if the goal is to increase political engagement among the wider population.

The findings from our latest audit highlight some of the significant challenges facing those with an interest in creating an active and well-formed political culture in the UK. At the same time, they show that the prognosis for future political engagement is not entirely gloomy and there are several positives to build on.

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1   Our analysis uses the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which is an official classification of wards across England on the basis of their 'deprivation'. For a full description, see footnote 8.

1 About this report

This report provides detailed commentary on six key indicators of political engagement. They were designed by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society and collected in December 2005 via the annual Political Engagement Poll conducted on our behalf by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute.

The indicators

1.1 The six indicators featured in this report were selected from the original 16 used in the first audit, carried out in 2003. A full list of all indicators from the first audit is in Appendix A. The focus of this report is the six indicators that formed the basis of last year's survey, chosen on the basis that they provide salient core measures:

- **knowledge and interest**: percentage feeling they know about politics, percentage interested in politics

- **action and participation**: percentage 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate general election, percentage politically 'active'

- **efficacy and satisfaction**: percentage believing that 'getting involved works', percentage who think that the present system of governing works well

1.2 The detailed statistical analysis we conducted in 2003–4 and reported in our second audit provided a deeper understanding of political engagement and the factors that make people likely to vote and to take part in other political activities.[2] This has helped to inform our choice of which indicators should be repeated on a regular basis.

1.3 The six key indicators of political engagement have been supplemented this year by further survey questions including: measures of people's interest in issues; their desire to have a say; their perceptions of important qualities for

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2   MORI (2004) *Rules of engagement? Participation, involvement and voting in Britain*, available to download from www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/publications.cfm.

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MPs to have; and their understanding of the term 'politics.' Some of those asked were also surveyed in the first audit, enabling us to measure change in political engagement over time.

Research methodology

1.4 The Political Engagement Poll, undertaken for us by Ipsos MORI, involved interviews with a representative sample of 1,209 adults aged 18+ across the UK. Interviewing took place face-to-face, in respondents' homes between 1–5 December 2005 across the UK, including Northern Ireland. The data have been weighted to the known national population profile. The survey fieldwork took place shortly before the announcement of David Cameron's election as new Conservative Party leader, at a time when there was considerable speculation about the outcome of the leadership election.

1.5 The full topline survey results can be found in Appendix C of this report. Further technical information relating to the interpretation of the data and social class definitions is also provided.

1.6 The Political Engagement Poll was designed to provide data at a UK-wide level. As such, it cannot substitute for targeted research in particular parts of the UK. The Electoral Commission will be conducting research in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the year ahead as part of its preparatory work leading up to the elections scheduled for 2007.

1.7 Other Electoral Commission and Hansard Society research projects have looked in detail at political engagement among specific social groups. For example, the Society carried out

research into young people's views about the 2005 general election, hosting an online forum for pupils aged between 11–17 in 17 schools across the UK.[3] The Commission conducted extensive survey research among black and minority ethnic communities after the election and the sample size involved provides greater potential for robust analysis than is afforded by this audit.[4]

1.8 All survey findings and comparisons of findings between the first and second audits are subject to sampling tolerances depending, in part, on sample sizes. This means that not all differences are 'statistically significant' and, where they are not, we cannot be certain that there has been any real change. Full details are provided in Appendix B.

Next steps and future audits

1.9 Following publication of this report, we will log the full survey dataset at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) archive at the University of Essex, thereby making it available for others to use. As part of our respective research programmes, we may undertake further research projects investigating electoral and political engagement and will publish the findings from these on our websites.

We encourage others to use our datasets, and would also be grateful for information regarding research by others on this subject, via **info@politicalengagement.org.uk**.

3   HeadsUp Forum (2005) *Turnout or turn off? General election 2005*, available to download at www.headsup.org.uk.

4   See Ipsos MORI (2005) *Black and minority ethnic survey*, available to download from www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

1.10 Looking further ahead, we are planning a 'full' audit towards the end of 2006, similar in scale and content to the first and utilising all 16 original indicators of political engagement. This will be reported in our fourth audit to be published in spring 2007.
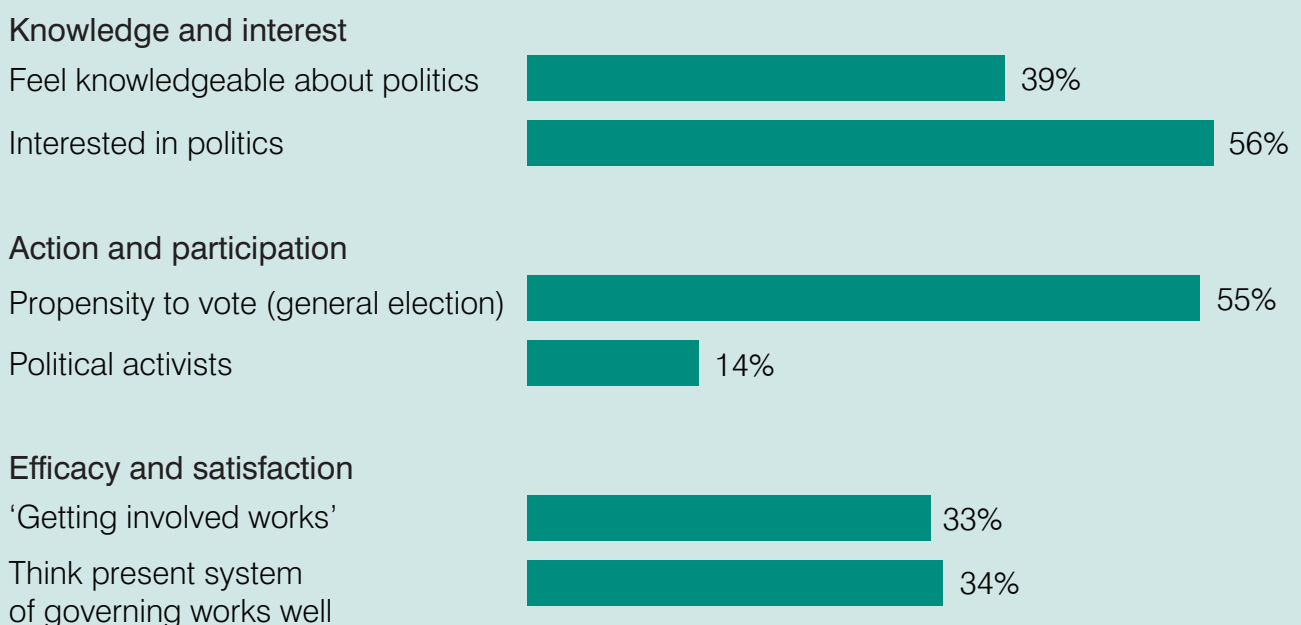
2 Political engagement indicators

This section of the report provides detailed information on the six core 'update' indicators of political engagement. There are two key indicators from each of the three broad groups: knowledge and interest, action and participation, and efficacy and satisfaction. In the next section, the findings are analysed and some conclusions drawn.

Summary of indicators

2.1 The six indicators used in this audit of political engagement are shown in Figure 1. As last year, most of the public do not feel they know much about politics and still only a minority of people are politically active. While just over half say they would be 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate UK parliamentary general election, political activism remains very much a minority pursuit. A third feel that the present system of governing Britain works well and a similar proportion believe that 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run'.

Figure 1: Political engagement indicators

Knowledge and interest

Feel knowledgeable about politics — 39%

Interested in politics — 56%

Action and participation

Propensity to vote (general election) — 55%

Political activists — 14%

Efficacy and satisfaction

'Getting involved works' — 33%

Think present system of governing works well — 34%

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Knowledge and interest

2.2 The first of the three groupings of indicators is people's knowledge of, and interest in, politics and as part of this year's audit we updated two indicators.

2.3 Perceived knowledge of politics (39%) is lower than it was in both 2004 (45%) and 2003 (42%) and this represents the most significant change among all of our six political engagement indicators. Interest in politics (56%) has not risen to a statistically significant degree compared to last year, essentially a finding of no change (full details of statistical significance are provided in Appendix B). However, it should be noted that the longer-term trend confined to our three December measures is one of increasing interest in politics: up from 50% in 2003 to 53% in 2004 and 56% in 2005.
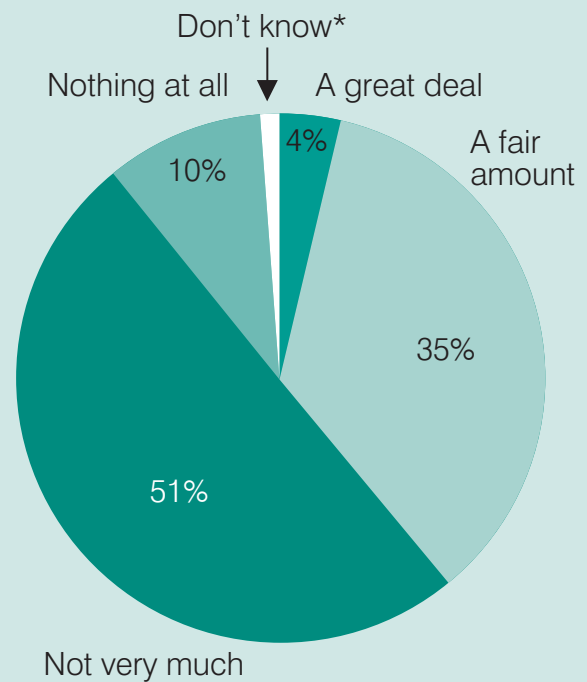
Perceived knowledge of politics

2.4 More than half of the public feel they know at best 'not very much' about politics (Figure 2, opposite). Just under four in 10 (39%) say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics, down from 45% last time. This fall is statistically significant but, at this stage, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the reasons behind it.

2.5 Men are much more likely to claim knowledge about politics (49%) than are women (30%), but this 'gap' has narrowed – the respective figures were 58% and 33% last time. There is also a certain amount of differentiation in the perceived level of knowledge between age groups. Older people tend to claim greater knowledge than their younger counterparts; 44% of those aged 55+ say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' compared to only 22% of 18–24-year-olds.

Figure 2: Perceived knowledge of politics

How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: *Less than 0.5%.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

2.6 Echoing findings from the second audit, there is a strong association between perceived knowledge and educational attainment. Those who have achieved academic qualifications at A-level or above are twice as likely as those with no formal qualifications to feel they know 'a fair amount' or a 'great deal' about politics (52% compared to 24% respectively). There is also a strong difference by occupational class. Professional/non-manual workers are more likely to feel knowledgeable than manual workers/non-working people: 60% of ABs, 22% of DEs.

Interest in politics

2.7 Just over half the public (56%) say that they are either very or fairly interested in politics (Figure 3, below). This is the highest level of interest in politics recorded in any of the three audits. It represents an improvement on the 50% recorded in 2003 and 53% in 2004. However, the year-on-year increase is not statistically significant and is lower than the levels of interest recorded during the 2005 general election campaign.

Figure 3: Interest in politics

How interested would you say you are in politics?
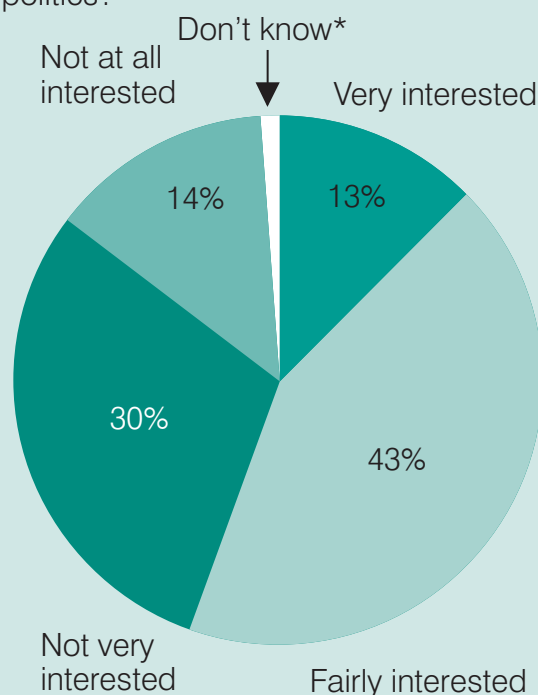
Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: *Less than 0.5%.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

2.8 Interest in politics is, unsurprisingly, closely associated with professed knowledge of politics and the same demographic patterns mostly apply as in previous audits (and for other indicators). Interest is higher among men than among women (62% as compared to 51%), with twice as many men as women 'very interested in politics'. It is also higher among ABs than among DEs (76% to 37%) and lower among people from black communities. It also increases with educational attainment.

2.9 In our last audit, we observed that while our December measures had found historically low levels of interest, the Electoral Commission's June 2004 measure, taken immediately after the European Parliamentary elections, found quite the opposite. These findings pointed to the existence of a seasonal effect and suggested that political engagement can be boosted with adequate stimulation, particularly at election time. This is again evident if we compare our December findings with data compiled during the 2005 general election campaign. At that time, an Ipsos MORI survey found 61% of British adults 'very' or 'fairly interested' – a figure that has since fallen back to 56% in our poll. It can be seen, then, that like the European Parliamentary elections the year before, the general election provided temporary stimulus but left no enduring legacy in terms of levels of political engagement. Although the level of interest in politics is higher in this audit than those recorded by the first and second audits, it has fallen back from the high-water mark achieved in the midst of the general election campaign.

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Action and participation

2.10 This year's audit focuses on two of the six indicators used in the first audit: being 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate general election and broad political activism. The overall impression from a comparison of the three audits is that there has been no significant change.

Propensity to vote

2.11 Just over half the public (55%) say they would be 'absolutely certain' to vote (10 on a 10-point scale) at an immediate general election, (Figure 4, opposite). This represents a slight, although not statistically significant, increase on the 52% who said the same in last year's audit. As previously, the percentage certain to vote increases significantly with age.

2.12 This applies equally if the strictness of the definition is relaxed: in the December 2004 survey, 67% rated their chances of voting at eight or better on a 10-point scale; now the figure is 69% (although it was as low as 65% in December 2003). Such a measure should not be seen as a prediction of future turnout levels – past experience suggests that the number 'certain' to vote will increase as an election approaches.

2.13 In terms of differences among demographic groups, older people and professional/non-manual workers are the most certain to vote. Younger age groups and black and minority ethnic communities are less certain (see Figure 4). Those aged 55+ are twice as likely as 18–24-year-olds to say they would be certain to vote (72% compared to 29%). Again there are large differences between those from

higher and lower socio-economic groups – 69% of ABs say they would be certain to vote compared to 45% of C2DEs. This is, however, one of the few political indicators where women score as highly as men (55% against 54%) and similar patterns can be found in evidence of actual turnout.
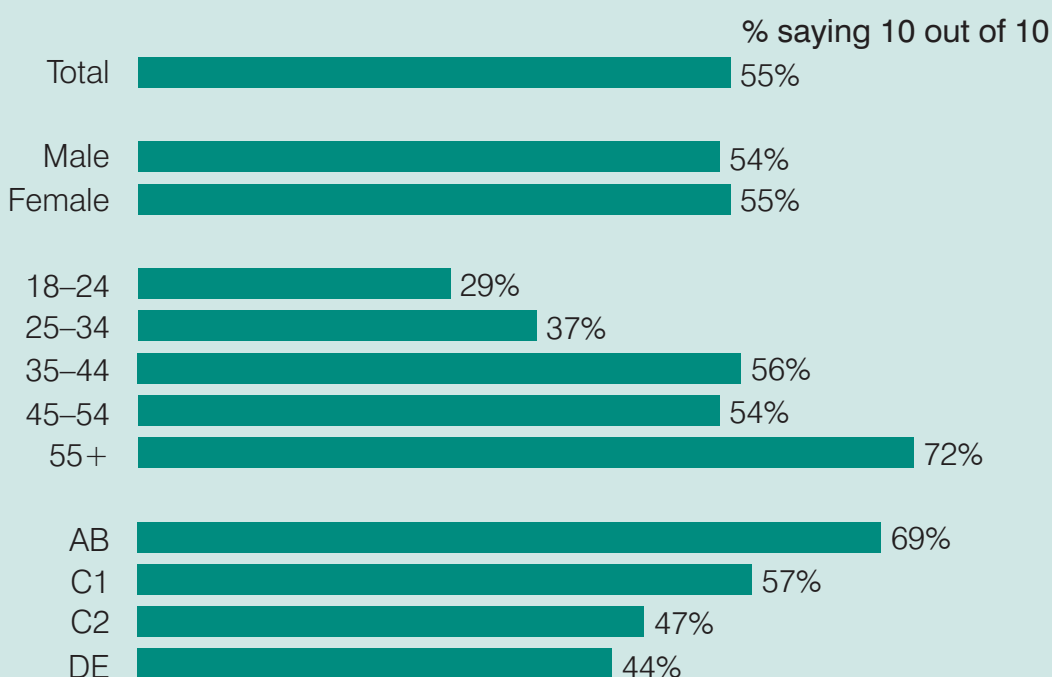
Political activism

2.14 One in every six adults (14%) is politically 'active' according to our definition, i.e. they have done at least three from a list of eight political activities (these are shown in Figure 5, page 16, and exclude voting and other directly election-related activities) in the last two or three years. This is down from the 16% we recorded in 2004 but the same as the 14% found in the first audit.

2.15 While there has been a small movement downwards over the past 12 months, there has been little change in any of the activities recorded since the second audit in 2004 (shown in Figure 5). There have been two percentage point falls in the proportions boycotting products and presenting their views to a councillor or MP. Meanwhile petition signing was the only activity for which there was an increase and it remains the most widespread of the eight activities, performed by 45%. The same proportion of the public has performed **none** of the activities listed.

2.16 There is no significant difference between men and women in terms of political activism: 14% of men are activists compared to 13% of women. However, there is certainly a notable age effect: 45–54-year-olds are the most politically active group (22% are political

Figure 4: Propensity to vote

How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?

% saying 10 out of 10

Total	55%
Male	54%
Female	55%
18–24	29%
25–34	37%
35–44	56%
45–54	54%
55+	72%
AB	69%
C1	57%
C2	47%
DE	44%

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

activists) while 18–24-year-olds are the least active age groups with only 9% classified as activists. Nonetheless, there is much less of a difference in political activism by age when we look at those who say they have signed a petition – the most widespread activity – in the last two or three years. As many as 40% of 18–24-year-olds have signed a petition, not far below the average of 45%, but none of the other political activities have been done by more than 6% of this age group.

Efficacy and satisfaction

2.17 The final two indicators are attitudinal; one measures the public's perception of the efficacy of political participation and the other assesses overall satisfaction with the way the system of governing Britain works. Neither has changed significantly in the past year.

Figure 5: Political activism

Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?

Three or more activities: 14%

Activity	Percentage	Change 2004/5
Signed a petition	45%	+1
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	18%	-2
Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	15%	-2
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	14%	-1
Been to any political meeting	6%	0
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	5%	-1
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3%	0
Taken part in a strike	2%	0
None	44%	+1

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
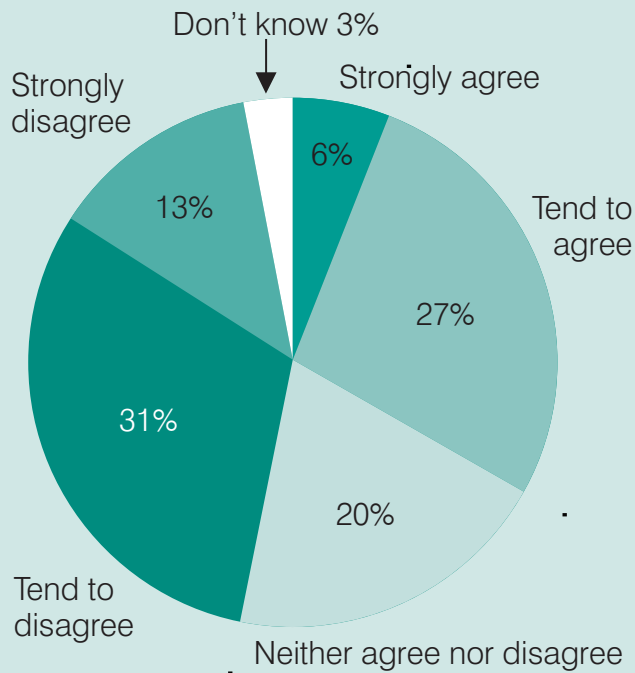Source: Ipsos MORI.

'Getting involved works'

2.18 Just one-third of the public (33%) feel that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run', and almost half (44%) disagree, see Figure 6, opposite. Comparison with the past two audits suggests there may be an emerging trend of declining belief in the efficacy of political participation: in 2003, 37% had agreed that 'getting involved works', roughly the same as in 2004 (36%).

2.19 As with our other indicators, responses differ according to social class, ethnicity and age group (although responses are less strongly distinguished by age than for other indicators). Some of the strongest differences are related to other feelings about the political system, for example, those who express an interest in politics are more likely to believe they can make a difference – 42% as compared to just 22% of those uninterested – as are those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable.

Figure 6: 'Getting involved works'

To what extent do you agree 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run'?

Don't know 3%

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

6%

13%

Tend to agree

27%

31%

20%

Tend to disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Ratings of the present system of governing the UK

2.20 Just a third of the public (34%) feel that the present system of governing the UK works well and only 1% see no room for improvement.[5] As in the past two audits, the majority – 62% this time – feel that the present system of governing needs improvement (see Figure 7, page 19). Since the last audit there has been an increase, albeit not a statistically significant one, in the number of people saying the system actually needs 'a great deal of improvement' – up from 18% in 2004 to 21% in 2005.

2.21 Table 1 (page 18) provides trend data for this indicator since 1973 and shows that the current level of approval is at the lowest level since April 1997. As we observed last year, opinion on the system of governing Britain is likely to be linked to support for the governing party. While three-quarters (75%) of those certain **not** to vote say that the system of governing the UK is in need of improvement, so too do 59% of those certain to vote. As we reported in 2005, political behaviour, knowledge and attitudes are not synonymous and do not work in a linear way.

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5   This question was asked as '…the system of governing Britain' in England, Scotland and Wales (to ensure consistency with past measures) and as '…the system of governing the UK' in Northern Ireland.

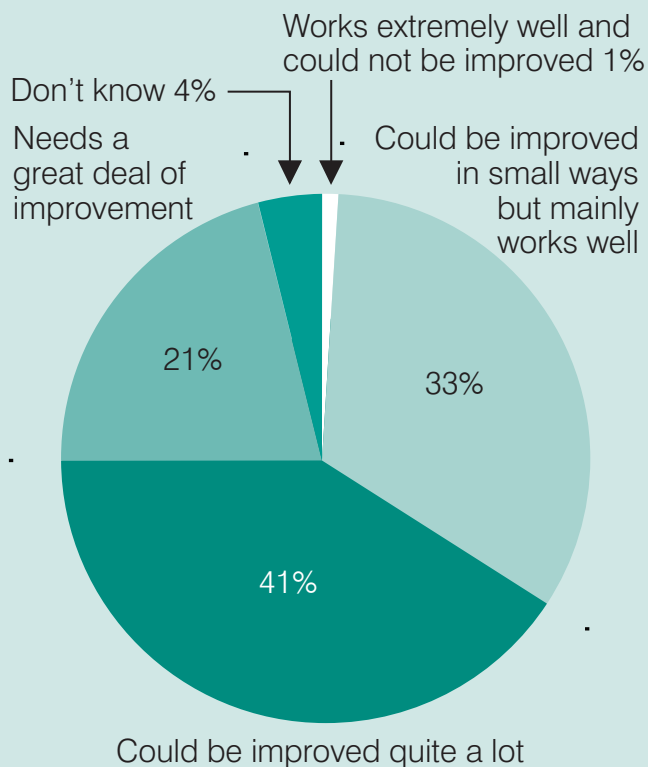## Table 1: Ratings of the system of governing the UK*

Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing the UK?

	1973 %	1991 %	1995 %	1997 %	1998 %	Apr 2003 %	Dec 2003 Audit 1 %	Dec 2004 Audit 2 %	Dec 2005 Audit 3 %
Works extremely well and could not be improved	5	4	3	2	4	3	2	2	1
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	43	29	19	26	37	42	34	32	33
Could be improved quite a lot	35	40	40	40	39	38	42	45	41
Needs a great deal of improvement	14	23	35	29	15	13	18	18	21
Don't know	4	5	3	3	5	3	4	3	4
Works well	48	33	22	28	41	45	36	34	34
Needs improving	49	63	75	69	54	51	60	63	62

Note: *All figures are based on GB adults, except December 2003, 2004 and 2005, based on UK adults.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Figure 7: Ratings of the system of governing the UK*

Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing the UK?

Works extremely well and could not be improved 1%

Don't know 4%

Needs a great deal of improvement

Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well

33%

21%

41%

Could be improved quite a lot

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: *Britain asked in England, Scotland and Wales. UK asked in Northern Ireland.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

2.22 Nearly two-thirds (64%) of people aged 55+ believe that the system could either be improved 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal', compared to 56% of 18–24-year-olds. Six in 10 (59%) 25–34-year-olds and the same proportion of 45–54-year-olds share this view. Those aged between 35–44 are slightly more negative – 63% think the system is in need of some improvement. Those from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to be satisfied with the system: 38% of ABs and 37% of C1s, compared to 32% of C2s and 30% of DEs.

3 Analysis

This third annual audit of political engagement presents a similar picture to that identified in previous audit reports. Most adults in the UK do not feel they know much about politics, many do not find it of interest and only a minority are politically active. The audit also suggests that the boost to political engagement provided by the general election has largely dissipated.

3.1 As last year, well over half the public, 61%, feel they know either 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics and still only a minority of people, 14%, are politically active. Just over half, 55%, say they would be 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate general election. A third, 34%, feel that the present system of governing Britain works well and a very similar proportion, 33%, believe that 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run'.

3.2 As Table 2, overleaf, shows, the headline findings suggest a broadly stable level of political engagement, but with some noteworthy fluctuations. Perceived knowledge of politics – the extent to which people consider they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics – has fallen from 45% in 2004 to 39% in 2005. It is difficult to draw conclusions about the reasons behind this fall but one possible explanation is that the general election in May 2005 and subsequent political events, including the prospect of party leadership changes, have sensitised some people to their perceived lack of knowledge. At the same time there has been a detectable increase in interest in politics and, albeit less pronounced, a rise in propensity to vote. At this stage it should be remembered that this is only the third in our series of audits, therefore it is difficult to judge whether such minor fluctuations are evidence of emerging trends or merely temporary blips in response to changes in the prevailing political climate. As things stand, the latter assessment seems more likely to be accurate.

Table 2: Political engagement indicators, audits 1–3				
	Audit 1 (survey: Dec 2003) %	Audit 2 (survey: Dec 2004) %	Audit 3 (survey: Dec 2005) %	Change since 2004 %
Knowledge and interest				
Feel knowledgeable about politics	42	45	39	-6*
Interested in politics	50	53	56	+3
Action and participation				
Propensity to vote (general election)	51	52	55	+3
Political activists	14	16	14	-2
Efficacy and satisfaction				
'Getting involved works'	36	36	33	-3
Think present system of governing works well	36	34	34	0

Base: 1,976 UK adults 18+, 2003; 2,065 UK adults 18+, 2004; 1,209 UK adults 18+, 2005.
Note: *This change is statistically significant. For further details see Appendix A of this report.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

3.3 As we said in last year's audit, the 'political pulse' of the body politic beats slowly and steadily, but responds to external stimulation. We have seen that the excitement generated during the 2005 general election prompted certain 'political indicators' to increase. For example, Ipsos MORI's polling found interest in politics to be much higher in April 2005 than in December 2005 and they recorded a sharp rise in propensity to vote. However, these indicators have since returned to what could be termed 'normal' levels.

3.4 It is clearly good news that people are as receptive to the general election as they have been in the past. Moreover, this audit, like its predecessors, continues to challenge the simplistic notion that the UK public is politically apathetic. It is also encouraging that the dramatic slump in turnout between 1997 and 2001 has not continued. Further, other forms of political engagement have remained broadly unchanged and in some cases there are positive trends – just as interest in politics following the 2005 general election was the highest recorded since 1974, this third audit found a higher level of interest than in both December 2003 and December 2004.

3.5 However, it is important not to overplay the positives. The 61% turnout at 2005's general election was barely an improvement on 2001 and is still low in historical terms (as recently as

1997, turnout was 71.4%). Post-election research undertaken by the Electoral Commission also reported 'something of a mismatch between people's expectations and what actually transpired',[6] while Professor John Curtice at the University of Strathclyde, a leading electoral analyst, concluded that the election appears to have been 'similar to 2001 in its failure to provide voters with a stimulus to vote'.[7]

3.6 Beneath the headline figures of our latest audit, we find considerable diversity – and an entrenchment of trends identified previously – in terms of who is politically engaged and who is not. Our audits have identified age and socio-economic status as being strongly associated with political engagement. Time and time again we find younger age groups and those groups categorised as socially excluded to be the least politically engaged. In our second audit report, we identified a section of the population who we labelled 'utterly disengaged', characterised by Ipsos MORI as a 'don't know, don't see the point' group. Similarly, our third audit continues to find evidence of a group of people who are not interested in politics, do not take part and do not want to do so:

- 14% are 'not at all interested' in politics
- 17% do not want to have a say in how the country is run
- 12% would not be willing to do any from a list of 10 different activities to influence or protest against a decision by a local or national government body

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6 The Electoral Commission (2005) *Election 2005: Turnout*, p53.

7 J. Curtice 'Turnout: Electors Stay Home – Again' in P. Norris (ed) *Britain votes 2005*.

3.7 More generally, our findings reveal serious disparities among social groups and convince us of the imperative need to look beyond averages and headline figures. For example, among those living in 'very deprived' areas, a minority say they are interested in politics and one-quarter appear unwilling to engage in any form of activity aimed at influencing decisions.[8] We also ought to be troubled by the growing evidence – present in the Electoral Commission's post-election analysis as well as academic studies by Alison Park, of the National Centre for Social Research, and Edward Phelps, of Sussex University, – of a 'cohort effect' with younger age groups apparently losing (or never gaining) the habit of voting and carrying forward their lack of interest in voting into older age.[9]

3.8 Such findings reinforce the need for organisations such as the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society to continue to work in concert with politicians and others attempting to reconnect politics with people and vice-versa,

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8 Our analysis uses the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) which is an official classification of wards across England on the basis of their 'deprivation', calculated by combining statistics from a number of different sources. For the purposes of analysing the Political Engagement Poll data by this variable, the deprivation scores of all of Ipsos MORI's sampling point base units were ranked, with the most deprived 10% classed as 'very deprived', the next 15% 'deprived', the middle 50% 'middle England/average', the next 15% 'affluent' and the least deprived 10% as 'very affluent'.

9 The Electoral Commission (2005) *Election 2005: Turnout*, pp35-36 (a trend subsequently labelled 'Generation no-X' by the Commission); A. Park (2004) 'Has modern politics disenchanted the young?' *British Social Attitudes – the 21st report*; E. Phelps (2005) 'Young voters at the 2005 British General Election' *The Political Quarterly*, Vol.76, No.4.

and to draw disconnected groups into the formal political process. To be effective, this needs to happen during **and between** elections. It means finding ways of helping people to see politics – generally viewed in dry mechanical terms, though encouragingly not as an overtly negative pursuit (see Table 3) – as an important activity directly relevant to the various issues about which they are concerned. It is significant that our audit found some 36% of those expressing an interest in local issues to say they are not interested in 'politics'. Making people aware of the connection between 'issues' and 'politics' is therefore paramount. This is something that informs the Hansard Society's work in helping Parliament with their outreach programme, and the Electoral Commission to develop its regular public awareness campaigns.[10]

3.9 Traditionally, political parties, as the prime mobilising agencies that connect people to the formal political process (and vice-versa), have provided the necessary stimulus and helped the population make the connection between abstract politics and political institutions, as well as the issues that matter to individuals, their families and the wider community. But these have, to some extent, fallen into disrepair. Parties have far fewer members than they once did and, consequently, fewer activists. This constitutes a significant problem as we know that political 'foot soldiers' play a pivotal role in mobilising voters (even in today's era of modern campaigning techniques). Moreover, it comes at a time when, as a result of devolution, parties have more

10 The Electoral Commission's 2004–5 campaign used the strapline 'If you don't do politics, there's not much you do do,' and sought to make politics personal and reconnect it with issues and with people.

elections to contest than ever before in some parts of the UK.

Table 3: What people understand by 'politics'	
Q. What do you understand by the term politics? (top 10 mentions)	
	%
What government does/running the country/way country is governed	37
Arguments between parties and/or politicians	14
Choices for society/how country should be governed	14
Parliament	11
Local government/councils	11
Elections/voting	10
Discussing issues/reaching agreement	10
Ways of making decisions	9
Public link with/control over government/representation	6
Sleaze/corruption	5

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Notes: Percentages do not total 100 as analysis was based on multiple responses.
The top 10 mentions only are illustrated in this table.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

3.10 The decline in numbers of members and activists is indicative of the wider loss of public esteem that parties seem to have suffered in recent years. In fact, anti-party sentiment in Britain is nothing new. Historians such as Jon Lawrence have traced it as far back as the nineteenth century and the very birth of modern political parties. Recent work has shown that, even in the 'golden age' of representative

politics during the 1940s and 50s, when party membership reached record levels and electoral turnout exceeded 80%, underlying scepticism towards parties remained.[11] Since then, profound changes in UK society and the way people work and live have created a more diverse population, serving to blur traditional perceptions of class and social identity on which political affiliations had previously been strongly based.

3.11 This has created a more complex and, in many respects, more difficult environment for parties to cope with and allowed deep-seated anti-party sentiment to bubble to the surface. This is illustrated by an Ipsos MORI poll at the 2005 general election which found a three-to-one margin of negative 'advocacy' of political parties – that is, three times as many people were pro-actively talking down a political party to other people than were talking them up.[12] While our third audit did not look specifically at people's perceptions of political parties, we have some evidence which does appear to confirm such trends. As Figure 8, overleaf, shows, we asked people to choose, from a list, which qualities they think are important for an MP to have. The most popular attribute (cited by 58% of respondents) was independent-mindedness, an increase from only 37% in 1983 and 48% in 1994. In contrast, but perhaps relatedly, people valued party loyalty less than they once did (39% in 2005 compared to 42% in 1983).

11 J. Lawrence (1991) *Speaking for the people: Party, language and popular politics in England, 1867–1914*; J. Healey; M. Gill and D. McHugh (2005), *MPs and politics in our time*.

12 R. Worcester, R. Mortimore and P. Bains (2005) *Explaining Labour's Landslip*, pp283–4.

3.12 Such findings pose some significant challenges for the political community. The formal, representative political system relies on political parties for its operation and parties clearly need to find ways of recasting themselves as a creative force. But this is a far from easy task. For one thing, parties face a diverse electorate that holds many contradictory views. Survey results that ostensibly suggest a majority of the public would prefer an independent-minded MP to a party loyalist might be viewed with scepticism given the poor electoral record of disunited parties.

3.13 Moreover, it is notable that respondents were almost as likely to say that party loyalty is important if they valued independence, as if they did not. Reinforcing our earlier point about the deep rooted nature of anti-party sentiment, it is worth noting that such contradictions are nothing new. Hugh Gaitskell, the former Labour leader, highlighted exactly the same ambiguities in popular attitudes in a lecture he gave in 1954, 'In Defence of Politics'. In this he noted how public condemnation of political parties took two completely opposing forms: some people complained that the differences between the parties 'are too great; there is too much back-biting, too much abuse, and the whole thing is a bear garden', while others expressed resentment that 'they really agree on almost everything, that the whole thing is much too like a tea-party; that it makes no difference who is in power; and that in consequence the electors are apathetic'.[13]
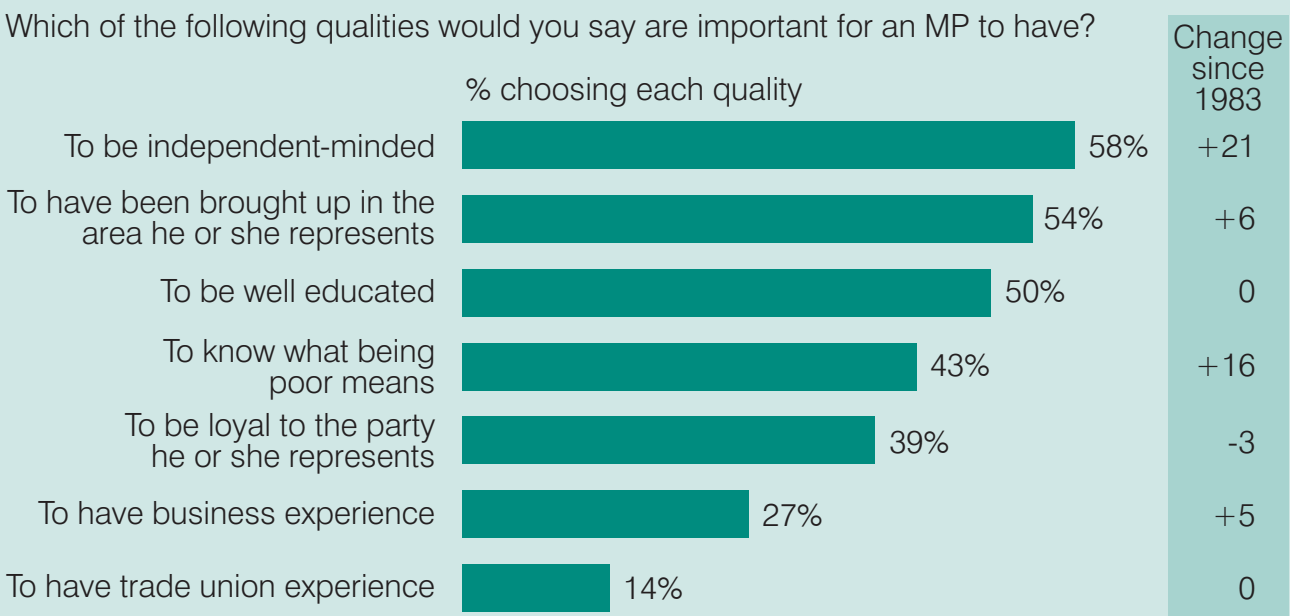
13 H. Gaitskell, 'In Defence of Politics,' lecture delivered at Birkbeck College, University of London, 2 December 1954.

3.14 The enduring nature of such inconsistent views suggests a need for the political community to 'explain and reconcile the public to its apparent imperfections'.[14] As constitutional researcher Meg Russell argued in *Must Politics Disappoint?*:

'Politics is fundamentally about difficult choices. It is the way in which complex societies weigh up competing demands and choose between them…The only real answer is to build a new culture of politics…rebuilding trust in politics requires us to admit that it is hard'.[15]

3.15 One aspect of the solution to rebuild trust and involvement in politics must be to increase people's familiarity with political institutions and actors. In our first audit we reported findings from our Political Engagement Poll which confirmed two wider principles that research has frequently found to apply to many areas of public life: that specific opinions of individuals tend to be more favourable than generalised views of institutions, and that familiarity breeds favourability, not contempt. That same poll

Figure 8: What people want from MPs

Which of the following qualities would you say are important for an MP to have?

% choosing each quality

Quality	%	Change since 1983
To be independent-minded	58%	+21
To have been brought up in the area he or she represents	54%	+6
To be well educated	50%	0
To know what being poor means	43%	+16
To be loyal to the party he or she represents	39%	-3
To have business experience	27%	+5
To have trade union experience	14%	0

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: Omits 'other' (6%), 'none' (2%), 'don't know' (2%).
Source: Ipsos MORI and British Social Attitudes surveys (NCSR) 1983.

14 The Electoral Commission (2005) *Audit of political engagement 2*.

15 M. Russell 'Time to speak up', *The House Magazine*, 20 June 2005. This summarised M. Russell (March 2005) *Must Politics Disappoint?*, The Fabian Society.

found 42% of people were able to correctly name their MP. This time, seven months after the 2005 general election, we found 44% able to do so (see Figure 9, overleaf).

3.16 This level of knowledge is consistent with other recent measurements. In May 2001, 41% of people could correctly recall the name of their MP and in December 2003 the figure was 42%. In December 2005 we recorded 44% (see Figure 9). It can be seen then that there is no noticeable difference between a mid-election measure (2001), a mid-Parliament measure (2003) and a post-election measure (2005). However, surveys up until the early 1990s regularly put recall of an MP's name at over 50%.

3.17 This fall has occurred despite the fact that information from and about MPs has increased exponentially in the meantime. The huge expansion of television and radio channels and the advent of 24-hour news have massively increased the amount of media coverage that MPs receive. In terms of direct personal communication, Members of Parliament today have more contact with their constituents – in the form of emails, letters, phone calls, faxes, blogs, surgeries etc. – than at any time in history.[16] Almost every MP now has a personal website, when 10 years ago none existed. In addition, numerous independent websites provide accessible information about MPs, their beliefs, background, attendance in Parliament, speeches and voting records. Yet awareness of elected representatives has fallen over the last decade.

16 J. Healey, M. Gill and D. McHugh (2005) *MPs and politics in our time*, pp28–29.

3.18 In line with other indicators, the least aware are the young, who are less likely to be able to name their MP than their older counterparts (22% of 18–24-year-olds, 54% of those aged 45 and over). Likewise, those in manual occupations or not working have a lower recall than managers and professionals. Also, recall was higher in England and Northern Ireland than in either Scotland or Wales, possibly reflecting devolution arrangements. Among those living in a constituency where there had been a change in MP, only 28% of people could come up with the right name some seven months after the election.
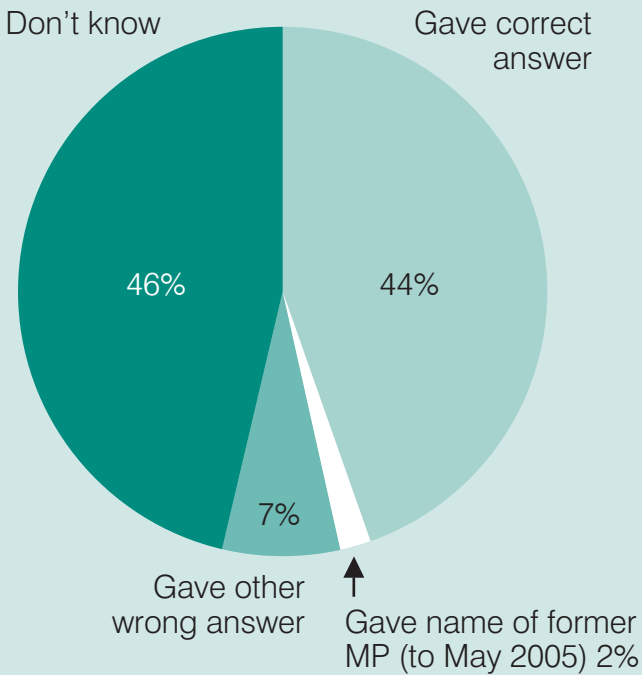
3.19 These are important findings. They do not simply represent a test of knowledge; they begin to tell us something about the relationship (or lack of it) between electors and representatives, and the reluctance of a growing number of people to make the effort to find out who their MP is and what they do. They may also indicate a potential change in the way some people view the function of their elected MPs, less as universal representatives and more as an extra layer of social services, for example; people to be approached in times of crisis. Outside such times, what need is there to find out who they are? Indeed, perhaps one of our most striking findings is that even among those adults making up 13% of the adult population who describe themselves as **very** interested in politics, only 54% can correctly name their MP.

3.20 As well as measuring public knowledge and expectations of MPs, our third audit sought further to investigate findings which suggested there is a strong aspiration on the part of most of the public to have a say in how the country is run.

Figure 9: Knowledge of own MP

What is the name of your local Member of Parliament for this constituency since May 2005?

Don't know

Gave correct answer

46%

44%

7%

Gave other wrong answer

Gave name of former MP (to May 2005) 2%

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

How deeply felt is this desire? What cost would people be willing to bear to 'have a say'? We thought it important to seek answers to these questions because some believe representative democracy is already in terminal decline and advocate the introduction of new, more direct methods of decision making under the banner of 'direct democracy'.

3.21 As Figure 10, opposite, shows, almost three-quarters of people, 72%, say they would be willing to sign a petition to influence or protest against a decision by a local or national governing body.

However, only half of these say that they have actually already done so. The next most popular activity to petition-signing was contacting a local MP or councillor (46%), although only a quarter have actually done this in the last few years.

3.22 This general unwillingness to actively raise concerns could create a need for government to consult with the public more directly if it wishes to be responsive to the people. Yet as only 13% of the public say they would be willing to take part in a government or Parliamentary consultation, this is not likely to prove an easy undertaking. Overall, the findings suggest that most people have limited enthusiasm for energy-intensive political action, preferring 'passive action' if they prefer any action at all.

3.23 As with our core indicators, there are some significant differences among different sub-groups on this issue. For example, 63% of ABs would be willing to contact their local councillor or MP, almost twice the proportion of DEs (32%). Younger people are also less likely to engage in any of the activities listed, but only 8% say 'none'. At the same time, there is evidence that once some people reach their mid-50s they are likely to be less willing to participate; 54% of 45–54-year-olds say they would do one of the activities listed but this drops to 45% of 55+ year olds.

3.24 Over-reliance on 'direct' mechanisms could therefore risk magnifying the voice of those who are already politically involved and are most willing to use additional methods of participation, while excluding older people and yet still failing to involve disengaged groups. This is something the political community ought to consider carefully when contemplating democratic reform. The importance of enhancing

existing representative decision-making democratic structures, rather than replacing them, should not be overlooked.[17]

3.25 This is not to say that additional opportunities for increasing public involvement in political decisions should not be provided. On the contrary, as we have said, innovative action is needed. These findings point clearly to the potential utility of, for example, developing the way Parliament handles public petitions (perhaps by studying the experience of the Petitions Committee in the Scottish Parliament) and building on recent initiatives such as the large deliberative consultation in Birmingham undertaken by the Department for Health.

Figure 10: Potential and actual political activity

Which of these, if any, do you think you might be willing to do to influence or protest against a decision by a local or national governing body? And which, if any, have you done?

Activity	Willing to do	Have done
Sign a petition	72%	50%
Contact your MP or local councillor	46%	24%
Vote against the party you normally would support	32%	15%
Write to a newspaper	31%	13%
Attend a demonstration	26%	13%
Contribute money to an organising campaign on your side of the issue	16%	10%
Present your case at a public inquiry	15%	4%
Take part in a governmental or Parliamentary consultation	13%	4%
Start a court case against the government or your local council	4%	0%
Stand for election to Parliament or your local council	3%	1%

■ Willing to do   ■ Have done

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: Omits 'none' (12%).
Source: Ipsos MORI.

17 This argument is further developed in D. McHugh and P. Parvin (Hansard Society 2005) *Neglecting Democracy*: *participation and representation in 21st century Britain*.

3.26 A post-general election survey of non-voters by Opinion Leader Research on behalf of the Power Inquiry found strong support for participative events and referendums.[18] However, our new evidence provides a dose of realism as to what can be achieved, particularly in terms of the number of people likely to participate. It is, perhaps, all too easy to overstate the public's willingness to take up opportunities for closer involvement in the political process: our findings show that some people simply do not have the appetite for active, energetic involvement in the political process.

Conclusion

3.27 Where then does this leave us in terms of the state of political engagement today? While this audit consolidates what we already know about political engagement, it also takes our understanding a little further. We have seen some movement in the different facets of political engagement during the middle part of the last 12 months – namely, the general election period – but year-on-year there is little significant change.

3.28 Our research has identified a number of key challenges facing political parties, politicians and representative institutions. At the same time, it has pointed to an apparent desire on the part of most people to become involved but a reluctance of many to actually do so. This is something Professor Gerry Stoker recently described:

> '[In Britain]…the idea of equal, democratic citizenship is taken far more seriously [than it once was]. That has raised expectations.

People believe that they are entitled to have their voice heard, yet for many reasons… fewer are prepared to make the effort to play a meaningful part in the increasingly technocratic arguments of formal politics. People expect a veto right over a game they no longer play… [They are] more demanding and more apathetic.'[19]

3.29 Democracy may be 'government of the people, by the people, for the people', but just how much do people want to be involved? If people want a more interactive, responsive type of politics, how far are they willing to play their part, if at all? Does it matter if they don't? More fundamentally, how can politics best adapt to the changing social environment and a more demanding public? Specifically, what can political parties do to recast themselves as creative forces?

3.30 These are important questions and ones we will return to in the year ahead (as well as asking others to give their views). Our findings seem to suggest that part of the solution to political disengagement must be to begin to manage expectations of politics, how it is done and what it can deliver. Also, if 'politics' is to be recast, it could usefully blend the best components of representative democracy with more direct, participatory mechanisms, provided that the direct forms of participation do not undermine or supplant established representative institutions. It is clear that more work still needs to be done in this area, and in the areas of political education, if we are to encourage not only **increased** political engagement, but also **informed** engagement.

18 www.powerinquiry.org/publications/documents/
   Non-Voterspoll-Summary_000.pdf.

19 G. Stoker 'Immature democrats', *Prospect*,
   January 2006.

Appendix A
Full indicators from the first audit

Below is the full list of the original 16 indicators of political engagement that were included in the first audit.

Knowledge and interest
Percentage of people who:

- feel they know about politics

- are interested in politics

- know their MP's name

- 'passed' a political knowledge quiz

- feel they know about the role of MPs

Action and participation
Percentage of people who:

- are 'absolutely certain' to vote at an immediate general election

- have discussed politics

- have contacted their MP or councillor

- are classified as electoral activists

- are classified as non-electoral activists

- paid money to or joined a political party

Efficacy and satisfaction
Percentage of people who:

- believe that 'getting involved works'

- think that the present system of governing works well

- trust politicians generally

- are satisfied with Parliament

- are satisfied with their own MP

Appendix B
Technical details

Survey methodology

The Political Engagement Poll, undertaken by Ipsos MORI, involved interviews with a representative sample of 1,209 adults aged 18+ across the UK. Interviewing took place face-to-face, in respondents' homes between 1 and 5 December 2005. The data have been weighted to the known national population profile.

Interpretation of the data

It should be noted that Ipsos MORI interviewed a sample, not the entire population of the UK. As a result, all survey results are subject to sampling tolerances, and where differences between sub-groups do occur these are not necessarily statistically significant – a guide to statistical reliability is included below. It is also important to note that the Ipsos MORI survey records public perceptions, which may, or may not, accord with reality and that it represents a snapshot of opinion at one particular moment in time.

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers. Throughout this report, we have noted where a value of less than 0.5% but greater than zero applies.

Statistical reliability

The respondents to the Political Engagement Poll are only samples of the total population, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the 'true' values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from a

knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range. Table B1, opposite, illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the '95% confidence interval'.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample or between different surveys, this may highlight differences. These may be 'real', or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if a difference is a real one i.e. if it is 'statistically significant', we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume the '95% confidence interval', the differences between the results of two separate groups must be greater than the values given in Table B2, opposite.

Table B1: Sampling tolerances			
Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90% +/-	30% or 70% +/-	50% +/-
100	6	9	10
500	3	4	4
1,000	2	3	3
1,209	2	3	3
Source: Ipsos MORI.			

Table B2: Sampling tolerances			
Size of samples compared	Differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels		
	10% or 90% +/-	30% or 70% +/-	50% +/-
100 and 400	6	9	10
400 and 400	4	6	7
500 and 1,000	3	5	5
1,000 and 1,000	3	4	4
1,000 and 2,000	2	4	4
Source: Ipsos MORI.			

Appendix C
Political Engagement Poll 'topline' findings

- *Audit of political engagement* (APE) *3* topline results are based on 1,209 adults aged 18+ in the UK.
- APE 1 results were based on interviews conducted face-to-face with 1,976 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain between 11–17 December 2003 and in Northern Ireland between 6–15 December 2003.
- APE 2 results were based on interviews conducted face-to-face with 2,065 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain between 2–6 December 2004 and in Northern Ireland between 14–21 December 2004.
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.
- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- Percentages do not add up to exactly 100%. This may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't knows' or to multiple answers.

Q1. How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?

	%
10 (absolutely certain to vote)	55
9	7
8	7
7	7
6	2
5	6
4	1
3	2
2	1
1 (absolutely certain not to vote)	10
Don't know	1

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q2. Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?

	%
Voted in the last general election	70
Helped on fundraising drives	22
Urged someone outside my family to vote	17
Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	15
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	14
Made a speech before an organised group	13
Been an officer of an organisation or club	9
Written a letter to an editor	8
Flown on business overseas	8
Flown on a business trip within the UK	5
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3
Stood for public office	1
None	20
Don't know	0

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q3. And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?	
	%
Voted in the last local council election	55
Signed a petition	45
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	44
Discussed politics or political news with someone else	39
Contacted my local council	28
Done voluntary work	22
Helped organise a charity event	20
Taken part in a sponsored event	19
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	18
Been to any political meeting	6
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	6
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	5
Taken an active part in a party's campaign at a general election	2
Taken an active part in a party's campaign at a local election	2
Taken part in a strike	2
Served as a school or hospital governor*	2
Served as a local magistrate	1
None	17
Don't know	**

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December, 2005.
Notes: *Hospital governor question not asked in Northern Ireland.
**Less than 0.5%.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q4.–Q7. How interested would you say you are in the following…?					
	Very interested %	Fairly interested %	Not very interested %	Not at all interested %	Don't know %
Politics	13	43	30	14	*
Local issues	30	51	13	5	*
National issues	23	52	18	7	*
International issues	18	47	26	9	*

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December, 2005.
Note: *Less than 0.5%.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q8. What do you understand by the term politics? (top 10 mentions)	
	%
What government does/running the country/way country is governed	37
Arguments between parties and/or politicians	14
Choices for society/how country should be governed	14
Parliament	11
Local government/councils	11
Elections/voting	10
Discussing issues/reaching agreement	10
Ways of making decisions	9
Public link with/control over government/representation	6
Sleaze/corruption	5

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Notes: Percentages do not total 100 as analysis was based on multiple responses.
The top 10 mentions only are illustrated in this table.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q9. How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?

	%
A great deal	4
A fair amount	35
Not very much	51
Nothing at all	10
Don't know	*

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: *Less than 0.5%.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q10. What is the name of your local Member of Parliament for this constituency since May 2005?

	%
Gave correct answer	44
Gave name of former MP (to May 2005)	2
Gave other wrong answer	7
Don't know	46

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q11.–Q13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %
When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run	6	27	20	31	13	3
I want to have a say in how the country is run	23	45	14	12	5	1
I have a say in how the country is run at the moment	2	21	14	33	30	1

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

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Q14. Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing the UK?*

	%
Works extremely well and could not be improved	1
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	33
Could be improved quite a lot	41
Needs a great deal of improvement	21
Don't know	4

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: *Britain asked in England, Scotland and Wales. UK asked in Northern Ireland.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q15. Which of these, if any, do you think you might be willing to do to influence or protest against a decision by a local or national government body?
Q16. And which, if any, of these have you ever done for that reason?

	Q15.	Q16.
Sign a petition	72	50
Contact your MP or local councillor	46	24
Vote against the party you normally would support	32	15
Write to a newspaper	31	13
Attend a demonstration	26	13
Contribute money to an organisation campaigning on your side of the issue	16	10
Present your case at a public inquiry	15	4
Take part in a governmental or Parliamentary consultation	13	4
Start a court case against the government or your local council	4	0
Stand for election to Parliament or your local council	3	1
Other	*	*
None	12	36
Don't know	2	1

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Note: *Less than 0.5%
Source: Ipsos MORI.

Q17. Which of the following qualities would you say are important for an MP to have? You may choose more than one, none, or suggest others	
	%
To be independent-minded	58
To have been brought up in the area he or she represents	54
To be well educated	50
To know what being poor means	43
To be loyal to the party he or she represents	39
To have business experience	27
To have trade union experience	14
Other	6
None	2
Don't know	2

Base: 1,209 UK adults 18+, 1–5 December 2005.
Source: Ipsos MORI.

The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Our mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process.

The Hansard Society is an independent, non-partisan educational organisation, which exists to promote effective parliamentary democracy. We work to ensure that good government is supported and balanced by a strong Parliament, and that Parliament gains strength by being accessible to and connected with the public it represents.

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