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# Preface

This is the fourth audit of political engagement undertaken jointly by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society. Like the previous three reports, it measures the nature and extent of political engagement in the UK.

The audit series has given us valuable insights into the public's political behaviour and attitudes beyond the simple measure of voting in elections. The Hansard Society and Electoral Commission actively encourage participation in the political process. We are aware that improving engagement requires a realistic starting-point and an honest appraisal of what motivates people to become involved and, correspondingly, why others choose not to participate.

This year's audit offers a full update on the 16 indicators of engagement used in the first audit (published in 2004). It considers the barriers to greater political participation; what people want from MPs and from political parties; and what, if anything, people are prepared to do to be involved in politics.

We have previously considered the degree to which engagement varies according to the political landscape. While external events undoubtedly have an effect on people's actions and attitudes, this audit, like its predecessors, has found little in the way of significant annual changes in any of our indicators. It seems that, in the short term at least, political engagement in the UK is not subject to significant change.

As always, we hope that this report will prove to be a valuable source of information and debate for all those who are concerned with the health of our democratic system. We welcome comments or ideas concerning the audit, and these can be sent to [info@politicalengagement.org.uk](mailto:info@politicalengagement.org.uk).

# 4

Finally, we would like once again to acknowledge the help of the Ipsos MORI team in conducting and analysing our Political Engagement Poll. While overall responsibility for this report rests with us, Ipsos MORI's own analysis of the survey data has been invaluable in writing this report.

Sam Younger  
Chairman,  
the Electoral Commission



Lord Holme  
Chairman,  
Hansard Society



# Executive summary

Although many people display an interest in local or national issues – while showing less enthusiasm for ‘politics’ – far fewer are actually willing to become politically active. However, there is no evidence of any decline in political engagement in the UK in recent years. Despite fears to the contrary, the latest figures show levels of engagement holding steady. Over the four audits of political engagement, written annually from 2004 to 2007, the majority of our key indicators have fluctuated only marginally.

This report draws primarily on 16 indicators of political engagement, which fall into three broad categories: action and participation, knowledge and interest, and efficacy and satisfaction. The results provide an insight into the state of current political engagement in the UK and are a useful starting point for considering how more people can be engaged with both formal and less formal political mechanisms.

A number of key findings emerge from this audit and from a comparison with earlier reports. Firstly, political engagement has remained relatively stable since the first Political Engagement Poll was carried out in late 2003.<sup>1</sup> This stability, at least in the short-term, may offer some cause for optimism that engagement is not on an inevitable downward slope.

The term ‘politics’ still suffers from an image problem and is not widely connected by the public to the issues they care about, with 60% claiming not to have discussed politics or political issues in the past two or three years. Yet it is simply not the case that political discussion has been absent from the majority of the country’s dinner tables, workplaces and pubs. Only 6% of the public say that in the last year or so they have not discussed any of a list of 17 local, national and international political issues presented to them, with clear majorities having discussed issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour, Iraq, terrorism in the UK or the quality of health services.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Political Engagement Polls’ refers to UK-wide public opinion surveys undertaken to inform the audits of political engagement. The first Political Engagement Poll was conducted in December 2003 for the 2004 audit.

# 6

Nevertheless, it is perhaps striking that a significant proportion claim they have not discussed many of the topics that have dominated politics and the news agenda since the last audit. Indeed, political and electoral activism, beyond the simple act of voting, remain minority activities. The majority of the public agree that they want to have a say in how the country is run, but there is often a gap between what they say they might be willing to do and what they have actually done. When asked about what prevented them from becoming more involved in politics, a sizeable proportion of respondents cited apathy or a lack of interest in politics.

Where people **are** taking part in political activities such as signing a petition, contacting a local representative or attending a demonstration, these activities emerge as a supplement to voting rather than an alternative to it, with those who are politically active more likely to vote than those who are not.

When asked about what they want politicians to be doing, people give a broad spread of answers. There is an emphasis, however, on their Parliamentary duties (making good law, representing constituents and holding the government to account) and dealing with the problems of constituents.

Some of the topline findings from the three groups of audit indicators follow.

## Knowledge and interest

Just over half the public (54%) say they are either very or fairly interested in politics, a slight rise on the first audit in 2003 (50%).

Almost half the public (49%) report that they know either a great deal or a fair amount about politics. This is the highest level of self-reported knowledge since the audit series began.

Forty-four percent of people can correctly name their Member of Parliament – a figure that has remained consistent over the last three years.

## Action and participation

We found 55% of people saying they would be absolutely certain to vote in the event of an immediate UK Parliamentary general election,<sup>2</sup> a slight rise on 2003 (51%). In contrast, 11% of people said they would be absolutely certain not to vote.

Two in five people say they have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years.

Fourteen percent of people are considered to be political activists, having undertaken three or more political activities from a list in the recent past.

## Efficacy and satisfaction

A third of the population believe that 'When people like me get involved in politics they can really change the way the country is run'. One in four people strongly agree or tend to agree that 'Being active in politics is a waste of time'.

A third of the public believe that the present system of governing the UK works extremely well or mainly works well. Sixty-one percent

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<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as a general election.

believe the system could be improved quite a lot or needs a great deal of improvement. Thirty-five percent of respondents are satisfied with the way that Parliament works. People's satisfaction with the way their own MP is doing their job is higher, at 41%.

### The indicators

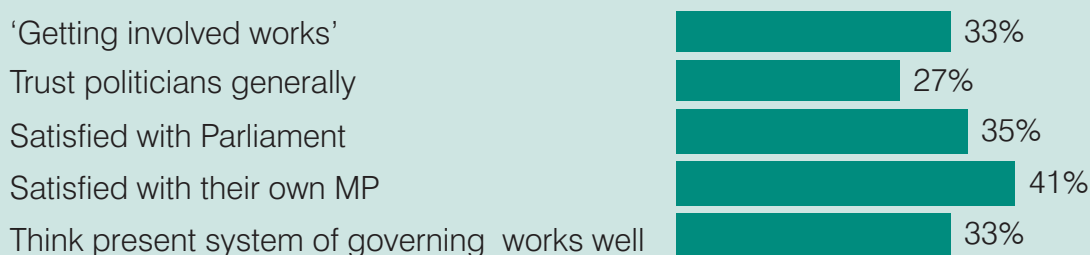
#### Knowledge and interest



#### Action and participation



#### Efficacy and satisfaction



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006. Source: Ipsos MORI.

## Conclusion

The Hansard Society and Electoral Commission actively encourage participation in the political process. We are aware that improving engagement requires a realistic starting-point and an honest appraisal of what motivates people to become involved and, correspondingly, why others choose not to participate.

Our audit of political engagement is a barometer of public involvement and interest in the political process. The findings provide a statistical context to everyday speculation about the state of political engagement. We hope that this body of evidence will not only provide a background for discussion of issues around political engagement but also help to address some of these issues.



# 1 About this report

This report provides a detailed commentary on the 16 indicators of political engagement designed by the Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society and collected via the Political Engagement Poll, conducted by Ipsos MORI (their research methodology follows below). The poll also contained additional questions that are relevant to the subject of engagement.

**1.1** The indicators were designed with the intention of exploring diverse aspects of political engagement. Surveys can measure five distinct elements – behaviour, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and values – and all of these are incorporated within the indicators.

**1.2** The indicators fall within three broad groups:

- There are five indicators which consider public knowledge of, and interest in, politics.
- There are six measures of behaviour, which together set out the extent to which the public have participated in or are willing to participate in a broad range of political activities.
- A further five attitudinal indicators examine public satisfaction with the political system and the efficacy of participating.

**1.3** Additional survey questions explore barriers to greater participation; what people want from MPs; what factors influence how people vote; and what, if anything, people are prepared to do to become involved in politics.

## Research methodology

**1.4** The Political Engagement Poll, undertaken by Ipsos MORI, involved interviews with a representative sample of 1,490 adults aged 18+ across the UK.

**1.5** Interviewing took place face-to-face, in respondents' homes, between 23–28 November 2006. The data have been weighted to the known population profile.

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

**1.7** The Political Engagement Poll was designed to provide data at a UK-wide level. While statistically significant differences in results between different demographic groups are explored in this report, it cannot substitute for targeted research among particular sub-groups of the population. Nor does it seek to explore in detail differences by part of the UK or issues surrounding devolution. The Electoral Commission has published two reports: *Scotland – poll position* and *Wales – poll position*, exploring attitudes in the run-up to this year’s devolved elections.<sup>3</sup>

**1.8** All survey findings and comparisons of findings between this and previous audits are subject to sampling tolerances depending, in part, on sample sizes. Full details are provided in Appendix A.

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<sup>3</sup> The Electoral Commission, *Scotland – poll position* (2006) and *Wales – poll position* (2006).

# 2 The background to this research

Low levels of voter turnout at the 2001 general election sparked concerns about declining public involvement in the political process. Since 2003, the Electoral Commission and Hansard Society have measured public attitudes and behaviour in order to monitor changes in levels of political engagement. Our audits look at people's attitudes towards politics and their activities at the ballot box and beyond.

**2.1** Turnout at the 2001 general election, at 59.4%, was the lowest recorded since 1945. There were concerns that voting at elections was in permanent decline in the UK, but the 2005 general election saw a slight recovery in turnout, to 61.4%. Similarly, the last year has offered some hope that electoral participation will rise again, with 36% voting in the 2006 local elections in England, compared to 32.8% in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

**2.2** This audit offers an opportunity to gauge people's political involvement when not undertaken against the background of headline-making causes, such as the protests against the Iraq war (2003) or the campaign on global poverty organised around the G8 summit (2005).

**2.3** However, the period since the last audit took place has been a busy one in domestic politics. Both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties have elected new leaders, and there has been extensive media speculation as to when the Labour Party will do likewise.

**2.4** Since our audits began in 2003, political engagement in the UK has remained remarkably stable from year to year. Last year's audit found that knowledge of, and interest in, politics had fallen slightly since 2003, but that measures of political activity and of people's satisfaction with the political system had barely changed from year to year. The following chapters explore how political engagement developed over the 12 months that followed the third audit.

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<sup>4</sup> Aggregate turnout figures reported at [www.research.plymouth.ac.uk/elections/elections/2005\\_results\\_content.htm](http://www.research.plymouth.ac.uk/elections/elections/2005_results_content.htm) (accessed 6 February 2006). Local elections were combined with other elections in 2005 and 2004, and 2002 represents the last year which is easily comparable with 2006.



# 3 Knowledge and interest

The first five indicators of political engagement are concerned with the public's knowledge of and interest in politics. In order to measure actual levels of political knowledge, we set respondents a political quiz. Alongside this, we asked how much people feel they know about politics and political institutions.

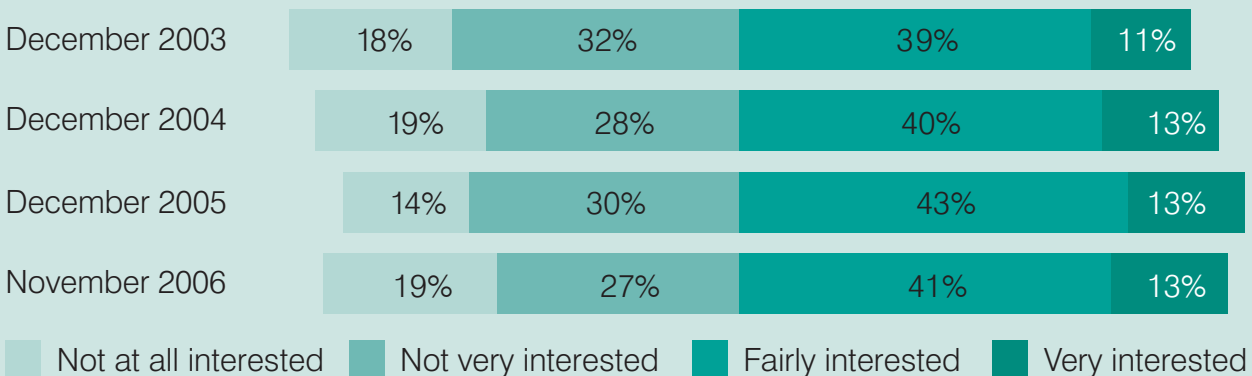
**3.1** Whether people participate in politics can be dependent on their attitudes towards the process and their knowledge of the system. For this reason, the audits have emphasised the importance of measuring the degree of public interest in politics and levels of self-reported knowledge.

## Interest in politics

**3.2** Just over half the public (54%) say they are either very or fairly interested in politics. This figure has fluctuated marginally over the last few years, as illustrated in Figure 1 (overleaf), and is now down from a high of 56% last year, but up from 50% in 2003. The audits have not seen interest in politics outside an election period rise to the level of 60% recorded by MORI in the early 1990s. Almost a fifth of respondents (19%) say they are not at all interested in politics.

Figure 1: Interest in politics

Q. How interested would you say you are in politics?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006. Source: Ipsos MORI.

**3.3** Declared interest in politics is higher among men than women (60% against 48%) and increases with age. Around two-fifths (41%) of 18–24-year-olds have an interest in politics, compared to nearly three-fifths (59%) of people aged 55 and over. However, there are encouraging signs where engagement among younger people is concerned. The 46% of 18–34-year-olds declaring an interest in politics for this audit represents an eight point increase on the figure from the first audit.

**3.4** In keeping with the findings of the first audit, there are significant differences in interest in politics according to education and social class. Just over 40% of people with no formal qualifications declare themselves interested in politics compared to almost 70% of those with A-levels or above. Similarly, 65% of people in social classes ABC1 claim an

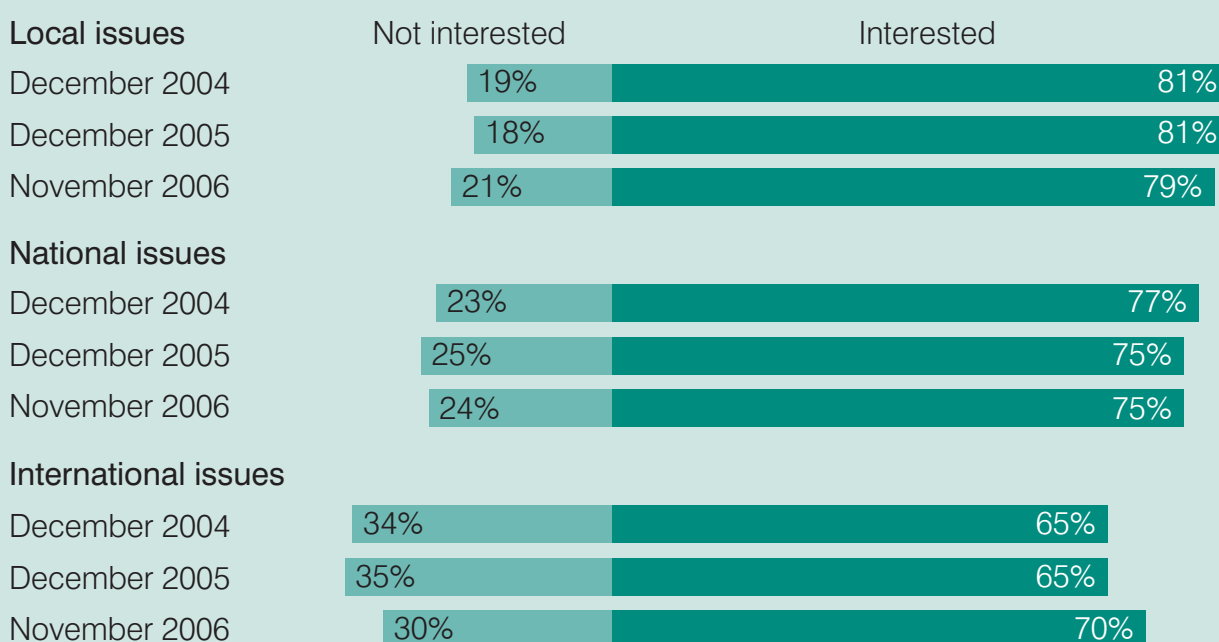
interest in politics compared to 41% of those in classes C2DE.<sup>5</sup>

**3.5** As Figure 2 (facing page) shows, significantly more people express an interest in local, national and international issues than when asked about ‘politics’ in general – so much so that almost two-thirds of those who say they are not interested in politics nevertheless express an interest in local issues. As in previous audits, and as Ipsos MORI generally finds, people are more interested in issues that affect them at the local level, with lower levels of interest in relation to national and international issues, from which they may feel more removed. The exception to this is the 18–24 age group, among whom broadly the same proportion are interested in local, national and international issues.

<sup>5</sup> A guide to social class definitions is provided in Appendix B.

Figure 2: Interest in political issues

Q. How interested would you say you are in ... ?\*



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: \*This question was not asked on the first audit in 2003. Where percentages do not add up to 100% this is due to rounding and/or exclusion of respondents answering 'Don't know'.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

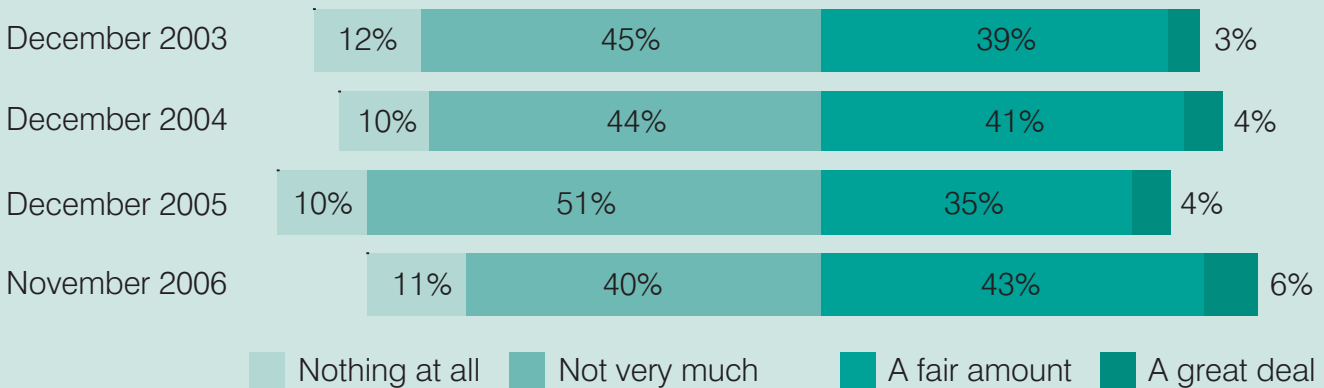
**3.6** Although levels of interest are higher for national issues and international issues than for politics, the patterns of interest observed among demographic subgroups are broadly the same. However, in relation to interest in local issues, patterns across subgroups are slightly different: men and women are equally likely to be interested in local issues, and level of education is also less important as a predictor of level of interest.

### Perceived political knowledge

**3.7** Almost half the public (49%) report that they know either a great deal or a fair amount about politics. This represents a 10% rise from the last audit and is the highest level of self-reported knowledge since the audits began in 2003 (see Figure 3, overleaf). The sudden increase in levels of knowledge is unlikely to indicate an established trend, as this measure appears to be particularly prone to fluctuating.

**Figure 3: Perceived knowledge of politics**

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



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: Where percentages do not add up to 100% this is due to rounding and/or exclusion of respondents answering 'Don't know'.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

**3.8** The socio-demographic trends apparent in people's perceived knowledge of politics are in line with previous audit surveys and with many of the other findings from this audit. Earlier audits have noted the close relationship between interest in politics and perceived knowledge of politics and, as would be expected, this correlation has continued.

**3.9** A significantly higher proportion of men claim to be politically knowledgeable than women (62% against 37%), while older age groups claim greater knowledge than younger people (54% compared to 33%). Again, there are large differences by qualification and socio-economic class. Those with A-levels or above are more than twice as likely to say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics as those without formal qualifications (67% versus 31%)

and 61% of people in classes ABC1 claim to be knowledgeable compared to 35% of those in classes C2DE.

## Perceived knowledge about MPs and political institutions

**3.10** More people now claim that they know either a great deal or a fair amount about the role of MPs (47%) and the Westminster Parliament (38%) than in 2003, the last time the audit asked this question. Yet while almost four in five people report having an interest in local issues, the proportion who feel they know a great deal or a fair amount about their local council is actually 47%.



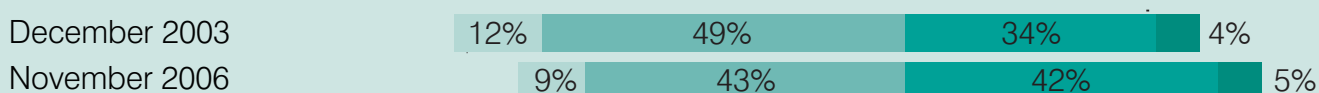
**Figure 4: Perceived knowledge of political issues**

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

**The European Union**



**Your local council**



**The Westminster Parliament**



**The role of MPs**



Nothing at all
  Nothing very much
  A fair amount
  A great deal

Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: Where percentages do not add up to 100% this is due to rounding and/or exclusion of respondents answering 'Don't know'.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

**3.11** Since 2003, there has been an increase in perceived knowledge about the role of MPs, the Westminster Parliament, local councils and the European Union (EU). The rise in levels of knowledge is most marked in relation to local councils, where the number of people claiming to be knowledgeable has risen by nine points since 2003 (from 38% to 47%). Levels of knowledge about Parliament and the EU have seen more modest rises, each up by five points since 2003. The increase in people feeling they

know a great deal or a fair amount about the role of MPs is more marginal (from 45% to 47%), as Figure 4, above, illustrates.

**3.12** In relation to subgroups of the population, perceived knowledge of a person's local council seems to be a great leveller. But where knowledge of the role of MPs, the EU and the Westminster Parliament are concerned, there are large differentials between men and women, between people in social classes ABC1 and C2DE and

between those people with A-levels and above and those with no formal qualifications, with the former group in each pairing feeling far more knowledgeable. For example, there is a 30 point gap between people with A-levels and above and those without formal qualifications feeling they know at least 'a fair amount' about the EU (46% compared to 16%). When it comes to knowing about the local council, the gap is narrowed to just six points (53% against 47%). Similarly narrow gaps between two groups can be seen for gender and social class, though a large gap is maintained between the youngest and oldest age groups.

## Knowledge about own MP

**3.13** Eighteen months after the 2005 general election, 44% of people can correctly name their local Member of Parliament. This figure has remained relatively stable over the last few years, following a steep decline in the proportion who could name their local MP between 1991 and 2001 (see Figure 5, facing page).

**3.14** In *An audit of political engagement* (published in 2004) we speculated that a drop in the proportion of people able to name their MP might be due to the length of time (12 years) spent under one party prior to 1991, and the high turnover of MPs in 1997.<sup>6</sup> However, after almost 10 years of Labour government, the figure remains eight points lower than in 1991, suggesting a medium-term decline rather than a short-term political effect.

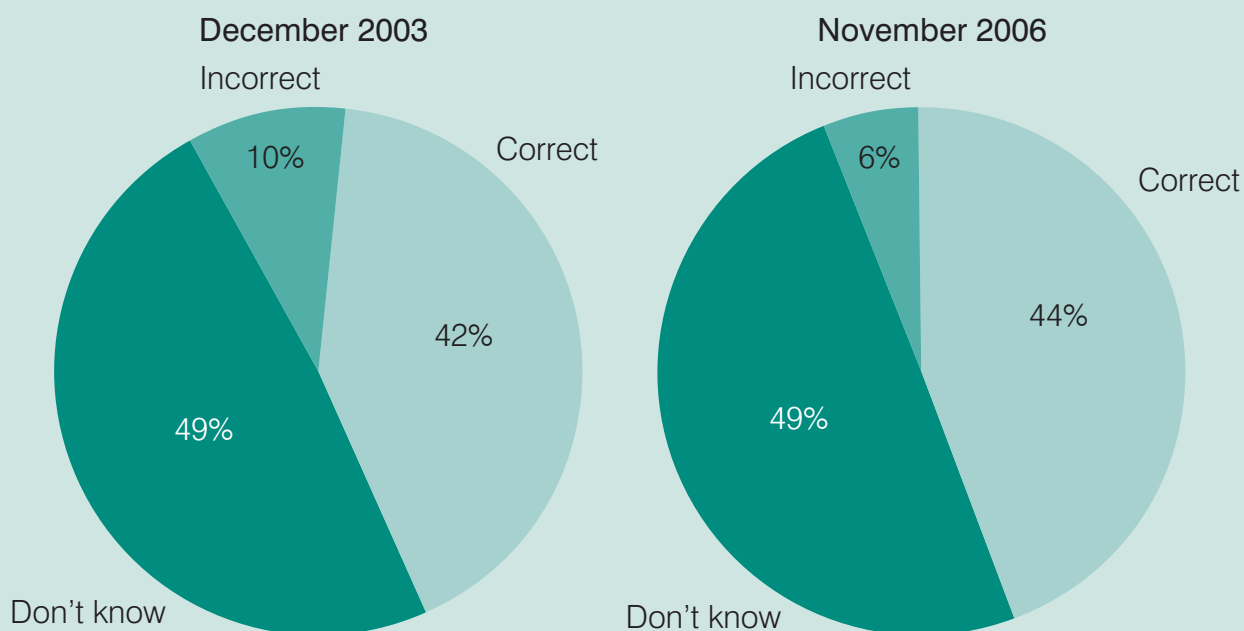
**3.15** Our findings suggest that feeling knowledgeable about, and interested in, politics does not always equate to holding actual political knowledge. This is most apparent when considering how this question defies many of the demographic trends found more widely in this audit. The percentage of men reporting a great deal or a fair amount of knowledge about politics is 25 points higher than that of women, yet the proportion that can name their MP is only 6% higher (47% to 41%). Perceived knowledge of politics among those with A-levels or above is more than double that among those with no formal qualifications, but the proportion of the former who can name their MP is only four points higher (47% to 43%). Similarly, claimed knowledge is 20% higher among people in social classes ABC1 than those in classes C2DE, but the former are only marginally more likely to be able to name their MP (45% to 42%).

**3.16** When looking at this fairly simple measure, it appears that some groups tend to overestimate their actual political knowledge, while others are more inclined to underestimate their knowledge. For example, 67% of people with A-levels or above claim to be politically knowledgeable, compared to only 31% of people with no formal qualifications. The figures for people in both these groups who can name their own MP, at 47% and 43% respectively, fall somewhere in between the two numbers.

<sup>6</sup> The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, *An audit of political engagement* (2004), pp.17–18.

Figure 5: Demonstrated political knowledge

Q. What is the name of your local Member of Parliament for this constituency since May 2005/since the last by-election?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: Percentages total more/less than 100% due to rounding.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

## Political quiz

**3.17** To test the public's knowledge of the political system, we created a quiz based on eight relatively straightforward statements about issues at the local, national and European levels. Respondents were asked whether each statement was true or false. Half the public gave six or more correct answers, while four in five people selected the right answer to at least four out of the eight statements.

**3.18** Three-quarters or more of respondents correctly answered that the minimum voting age is not 16, that not every problem a constituent takes to an MP will be debated in the House of Commons, that local councils do not have the power to set the school leaving age in their own area and that the Prime Minister is an MP. However, levels of knowledge about the size of the Cabinet, the power of the House of Commons and the way in which MEPs are selected are more limited. Figure 6 (overleaf) shows that 51% of respondents or fewer gave the correct answers to these questions.

**Figure 6: Demonstrated political knowledge – political quiz**

Q. Please tell me if you think that the following statements are true or false



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.

**3.19** While overall comparisons cannot easily be made between the results of this political quiz and the one included in our first audit, it is worth considering the three questions that have been repeated.<sup>7</sup> The proportions of people correctly answering these questions have not moved in a single direction. On the one hand, there has been a five point fall since 2003 in the percentage of people who know that the House of Commons has more power than the Lords – possibly a reflection of quite high profile government defeats in the House of Lords over recent years. In contrast, the number of people who actively assert that MEPs are not directly elected has dropped, while the proportion of correct responses to the question on the school leaving age has remained stable.

**3.20** Using four or more correct answers as a benchmark, there are differences by demographic group in relation to this indicator of political knowledge. Here, many of the trends which seemed not to apply to people's knowledge of their MP reassert themselves. Men are more likely than women to give four or more correct answers (83% to 76%), albeit not in the proportions that their claimed knowledge might suggest. Scores improve with age (88% of those aged 55 or over scored four or more compared to 67% of those aged 18–24) and the proportion scoring four or more among those with A-levels is 14 points higher than among those with no formal qualifications (86% against 72%).

**3.21** There is no relationship between knowledge displayed in the political quiz and levels of satisfaction with either a person's local MP or the political system more broadly. Those who are satisfied or dissatisfied with their MP were equally likely to score four or more (85%) in the quiz and the difference between those who think the political system needs improvement (81% scoring four or more) and those who think it works well (84%) is small. The next chapter of this report considers in more detail whether there is a continued link between familiarity with political institutions and individuals and favourability towards them.

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7 Following possible confusion among respondents with one of the questions on the original political quiz it was decided to alter a number of questions for this audit.



# 4 Action and participation

Political engagement can be measured in terms of what people think, but also in terms of what they do. The indicators below measure action and participation by recording what political activities are undertaken by the public. The actions covered range from the fairly straightforward, such as voting or discussing politics, to the rather more involved, such as standing for public office.

**4.1** Levels of participation have changed little over the last few years, with action and participation indicators tending to fluctuate less than attitudinal measures. People's political habits and behaviour appear to be more ingrained and slower to alter than their attitudes.

## Propensity to vote

**4.2** Respondents assessed their likelihood of voting on a 10-point scale, with 10 representing being absolutely certain to vote. Fifty-five percent of the public say they would be absolutely certain to vote in an immediate general election, whereas 11% say they would be absolutely certain not to vote.

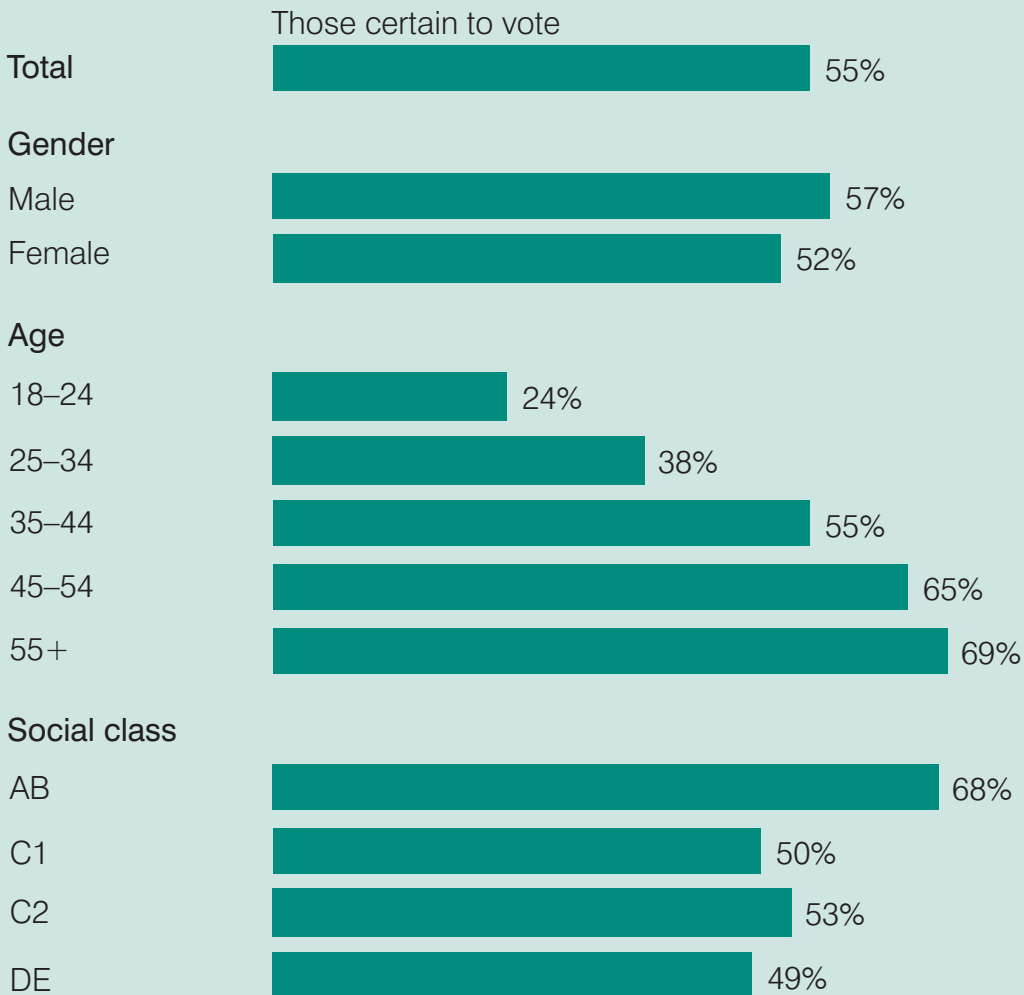
**4.3** People's propensity to vote is one area in which political behaviour has changed fairly rapidly, although not necessarily permanently, in the last 10 years. Turnout in UK general elections did not drop below 70% between 1945 and 1997, but then dipped below 60% in 2001, making only a small recovery to 61% at the 2005 election.

**4.4** The future direction of turnout in the UK has been the subject of much speculation. It may be affected by a range of political circumstances, not least the perceived closeness of any given election. It was suggested in a report to the Electoral Commission on the 2006 local elections in England that, 'The slump in voter turnout [at local elections] now appears to have eased, at least in most types of authority.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> C. Rallings and M. Thrasher, *Local Elections 2006: Report to the Electoral Commission* (The Electoral Commission: London, 2006).

**Figure 7: Propensity to vote**

Q. 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?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.



**4.5** Turnout at the last general election indicates that the decline in voting may have been stemmed at the national as well as the local level and the proportion of people saying that they would be absolutely certain to vote in an immediate general election has risen slightly. At 55%, the figure is slightly higher than that recorded in 2003 (51%). Correspondingly, during 2006, Ipsos MORI's fortnightly measures of propensity to vote never found less than 54% of people certain to vote – a level not reached in 2003 or 2004, years similarly lacking in a general election, except in the immediate run-up to other elections. This figure is not, however, an accurate predictor of turnout, as interest in an actual election would be expected to boost voting levels. Indeed, the audit prior to the 2005 general election found only 52% of people saying that they would be certain to vote in an immediate general election, whereas 61% actually voted.

**4.6** As Figure 7 shows, men are more likely to say they would vote in an immediate general election than women (57% to 52%). This is not an established pattern, as the balance between the genders has fluctuated from year to year and estimated turnout at the 2005 general election showed little gender variation (62% to 61%).<sup>9</sup> Propensity to vote increases steeply with age. Less than a quarter of those aged 18–24 say that they would be absolutely certain to vote compared to 69% of those aged 55 and over. At the 2005 general election it was estimated that 37% of 18–24-year-olds and 75% of people aged 65 and over voted.<sup>10</sup>

**4.7** People who have no formal qualifications claim to be significantly less interested in and knowledgeable about politics than those with A-levels or above, yet they have almost exactly the same propensity to vote (58% against 57%).

**4.8** The belief in having a duty to vote is one of the most powerful motivators for voting. More than three-quarters of the public (77%) believe they have a duty to vote and 92% of those who would be certain to vote in an immediate general election strongly agree or tend to agree that it is their duty to vote. In contrast to knowledge of and interest in politics, considering voting to be a duty also varies very little according to level of qualification, with 80% of those with no formal qualifications and 81% of those with A-levels or above agreeing that it is their duty to vote. Twenty-nine per cent of those who are absolutely certain not to vote nevertheless feel that it is their duty to vote, so evidently this feeling of duty is not always binding.

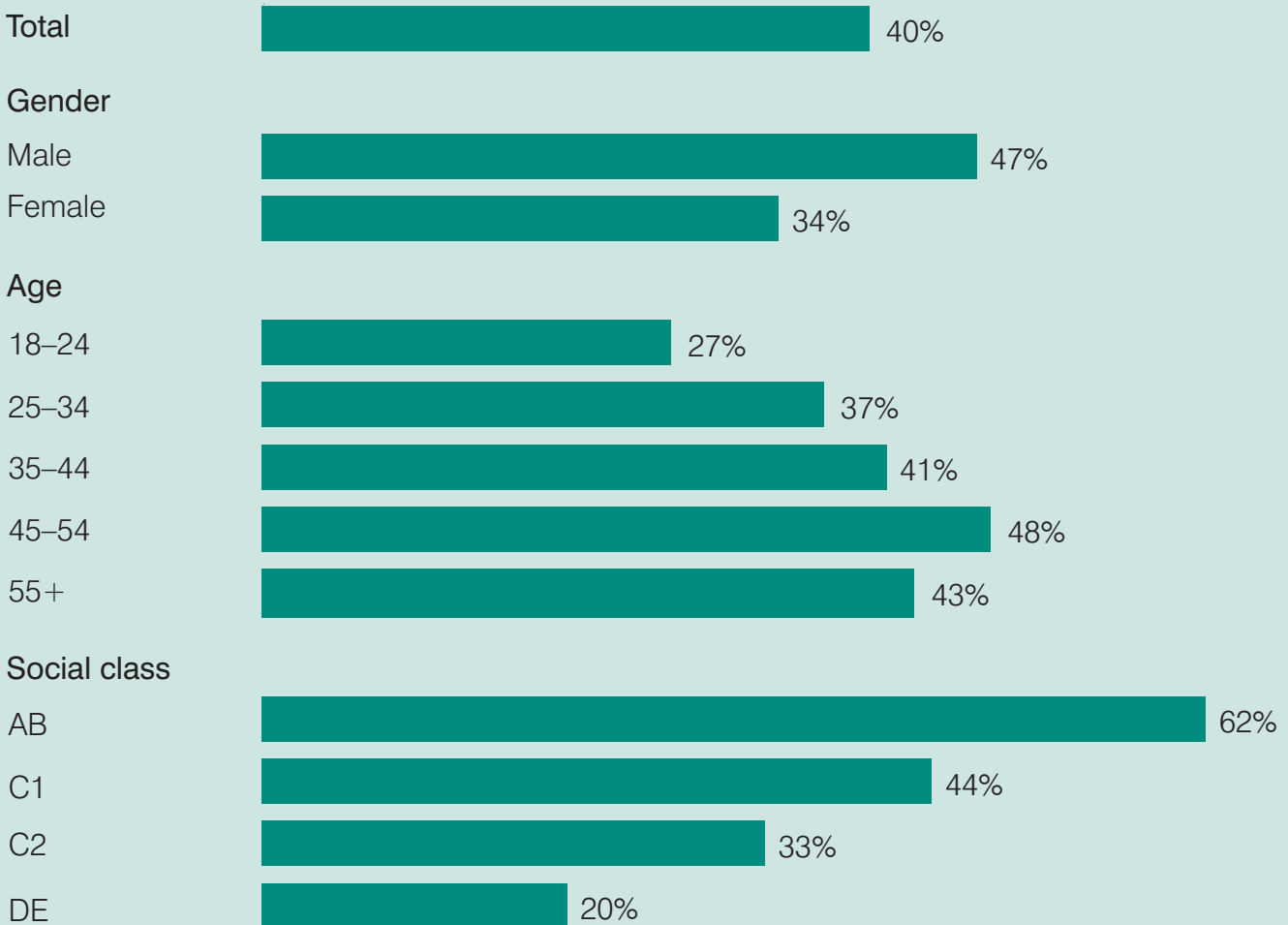
**4.9** The picture for propensity to vote by levels of deprivation is more complicated. People in wards rated as 'very deprived' have the lowest propensity to vote (37%) but people in areas classified as 'deprived' (57%) have broadly the same propensity to vote as those in 'middle' (55%) and 'very affluent' (55%) areas. People in 'affluent' areas have by far the highest propensity to vote, at 76%. Those living in rural areas are more likely to say they would definitely vote than those in urban areas (67% versus 53%).

9 MORI estimates from The Electoral Commission, *Election 2005: turnout* (2005), p.25.

10 Ibid.

**Figure 8: Discussing politics**

Q. Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?  
 'Discussed politics or political news with someone else'



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

## Discussing politics

**4.10** Two in five people (40%) say they have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years, suggesting that this is a minority activity. This would indicate that a considerably higher proportion of the public actually voted in the last general election than talked about it.

**4.11** The variance between talking about politics and voting may be partly accounted for by people using narrow definitions of politics and attaching negative connotations to the term. Earlier Electoral Commission research has found that people often fail to associate the word ‘politics’ with issues that affect their everyday lives.<sup>11</sup> Even among people who seem well-disposed towards politics (those who declare themselves very or fairly interested in politics), many (40%) claim not to have discussed it in the last two or three years.

**4.12** As Figure 8 (facing page) shows, middle-aged and middle-class people are the most likely to discuss politics. There also appear to be significant geographical variations to this indicator.

## Electoral activism

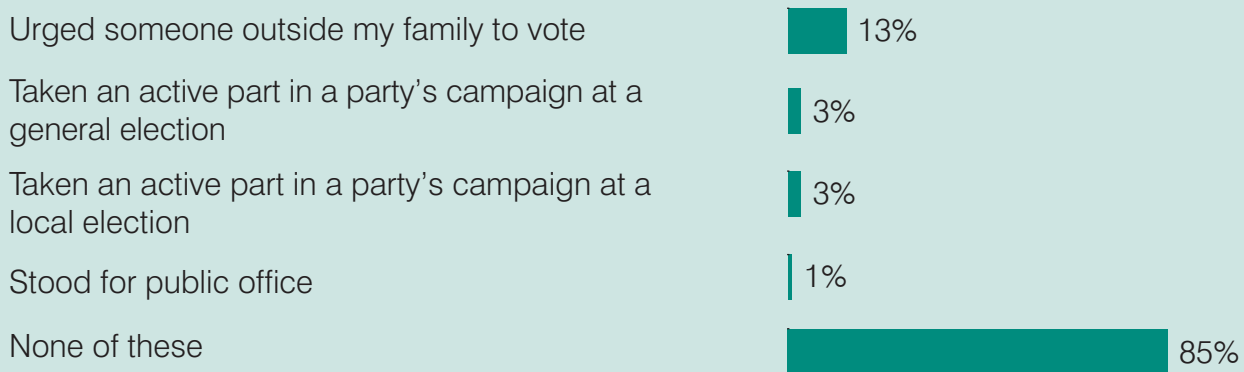
**4.13** Only 15% of the public have taken an active part in the electoral process beyond voting. This figure has remained relatively stable since the first audit, with a slight dip in the percentage who urged someone outside their family to vote (13%).

**4.14** As would be expected, people who consider themselves to be strong party supporters and those who are interested in politics are more likely to be electoral activists than others. The 25–34-year-old age group is the least active, with only 9% claiming to have done at least one of four electoral activities identified in Figure 9 (overleaf). By contrast, 18% of the youngest age group – usually the least politically engaged – claimed to have undertaken an active part in the electoral process.

<sup>11</sup> See for example, The Electoral Commission, *Public opinion and the 2004 elections* (2003).

**Figure 9: Electoral activism**

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



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.

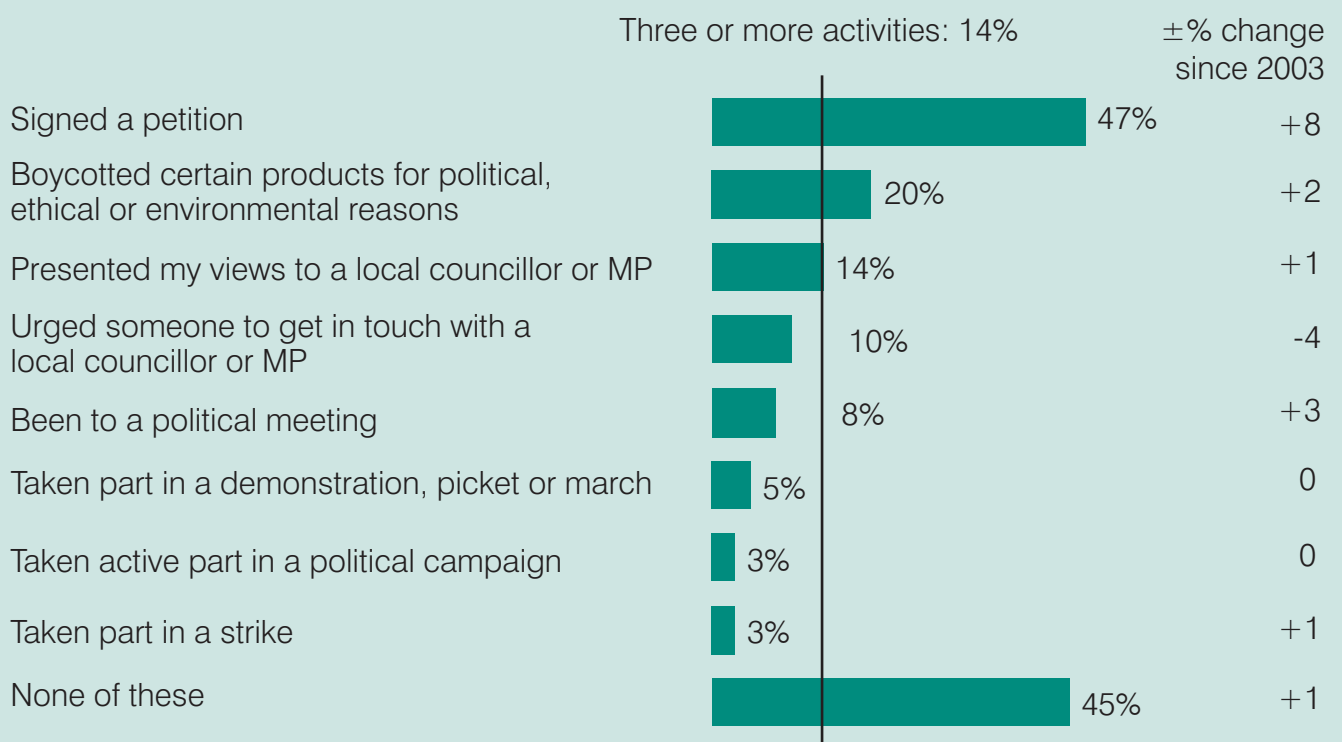
**4.15** Unsurprisingly, strong party supporters tend to be linked to political activism – with only 6% of people claiming to be strong party supporters. Very or fairly strong party supporters are more likely than non party supporters to urge someone to vote (by a margin of 18% to 5%). Worryingly for the political parties, only 6% of people claiming to be very or fairly strong supporters have been active in campaigning. This suggests that a small minority are carrying the burden of electioneering.

## Political activism

**4.16** We define ‘political activists’ as those who have done at least three of a list of eight political activities in the recent past, excluding voting and the electoral activism measured by other indicators. One in every six adults (14%) is politically active, although over half the public (55%) have undertaken at least one of the activities identified in Figure 10 (facing page). Political activism is emerging as a supplement to voting, rather than an alternative.

Figure 10: Political activism

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



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

**4.17** Despite the fact that women are less likely than men to say they are interested in, and knowledgeable about, politics, they are equally likely to be political activists. In line with other audit indicators, people in social classes ABC1 are more than twice as likely to be political activists as people in classes C2DE (19% as opposed to 8%) and those aged 45 and over are three times as likely to be activists as those aged 18–34 (18% against 6%).

**4.18** The first Political Engagement Poll, in 2003, found 18–24-year-olds were most likely to have taken part in a demonstration and were more likely than average to have signed a petition. This caused us to speculate, in line with earlier research, that ‘the younger generation often view such activities as more effective than working through the ballot box’.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, *An audit of political engagement* (2004).

**4.19** However, the validity of this now appears to be in doubt, as this year the youngest age group scored lowest on every measure of political activism. Consequently, it would seem that for most people, political activism is a supplement to voting rather than an alternative to it. Seventy-three percent of political activists declared themselves certain to vote at an immediate general election.

**4.20** The eight point rise in petition signing (from 39% to 47%) seems to represent a broadening of interest among people who are often already politically engaged rather than the emergence of single-issue activism among the newly interested. The change is predominantly among people in older age groups, with a rise from 35% to 48% among those aged 55 and over. Signing petitions may broadly be seen as showing a type of political engagement, since it often shows a willingness to express political opinions. Petitions can be directed at a huge array of people and institutions, but in many instances signing a petition involves attempting to engage with politicians or political institutions through a method other than the ballot box.

### Contacting elected representatives

**4.21** Fourteen percent of people say they have presented their views to a local councillor or MP in the last two or three years. This figure has been fairly steady since 2003, hovering between 13% and 17%.

**4.22** Overall, around one in 10 of the public have presented their views to a councillor and one in 12 an MP over the last two or three years (see Figure 11, facing page). These figures are similar to those recorded for the first audit in 2003. Of those people who had presented their views to an elected representative, 41% had contacted a local councillor, 29% had contacted an MP and 29% had contacted both.

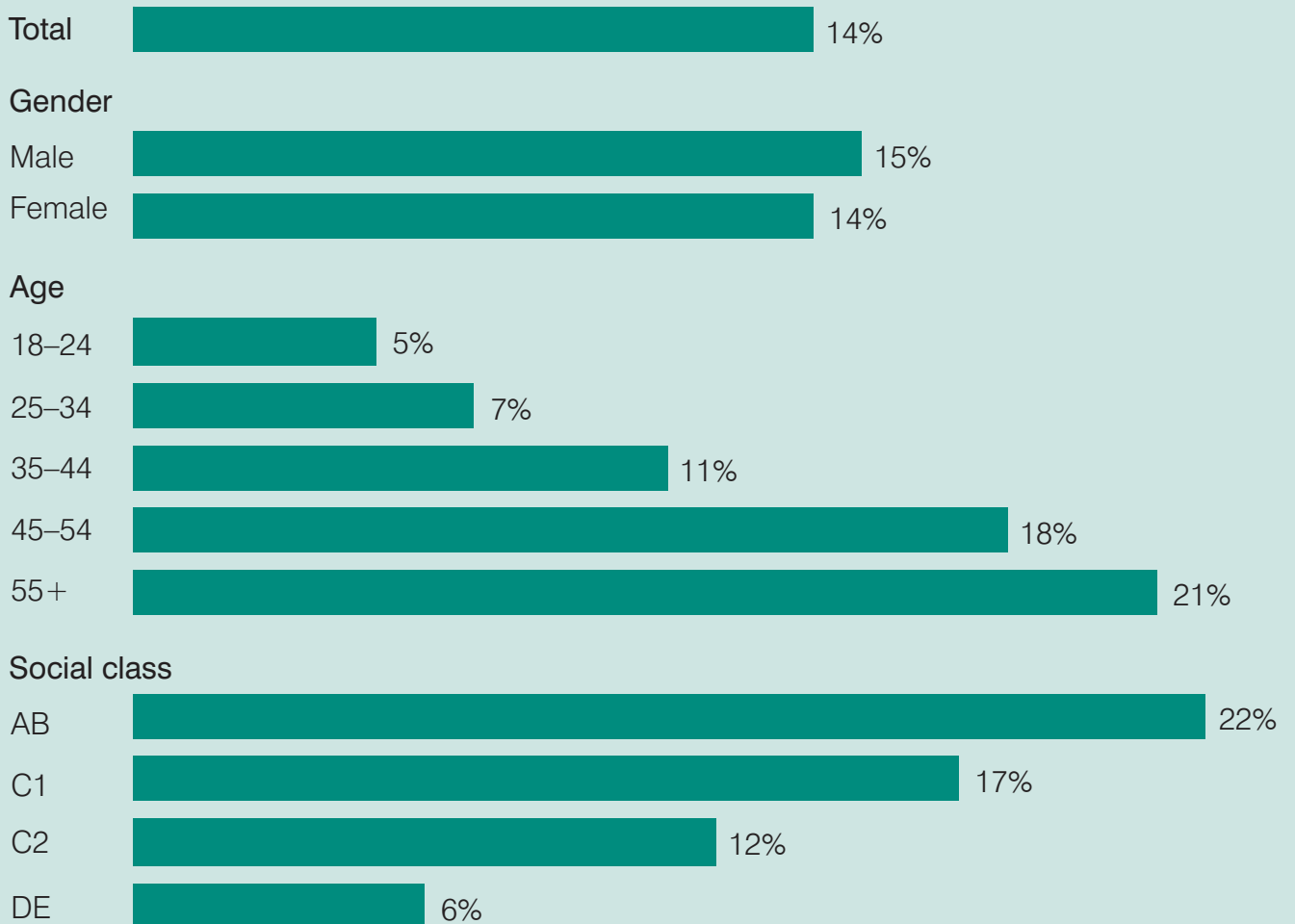
**4.23** The picture of who contacts their elected representatives is similar to that of other indicators. The number of people making contact with elected representatives increases steeply with age, with 21% of people aged 55 and over having made contact in the last two or three years against 5% of 18–24-year-olds. There is also a major differential by social class. Twenty-two percent of people in social classes AB have made contact, compared to only 6% of people in social classes DE. This variation is likely to shape the type of correspondence that MPs receive and the issues they are asked to respond to.

### Political membership and giving

**4.24** As previous audits found, charitable giving is far more widespread than giving to political parties. The proportion of people donating or paying membership dues to a party has remained constant since 2003 at 5%. There has been some decline in giving to charitable or campaigning organisations in the last year, with the proportion dropping from 44% to 38% (Figure 12, overleaf).

**Figure 11: Contacting elected representatives**

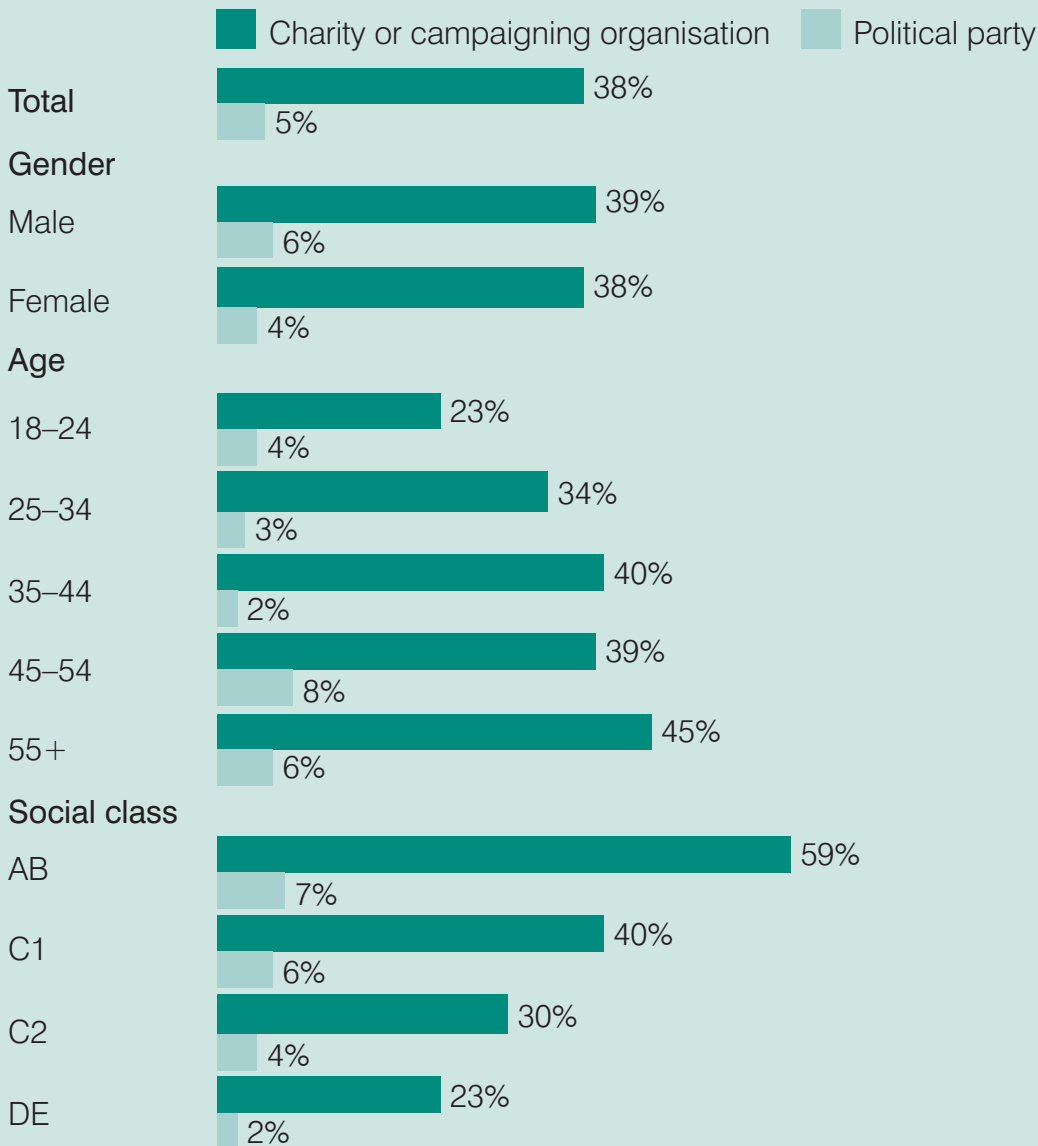
Q. Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?  
‘Presented my views to a local councillor or MP’



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.

**Figure 12: Political membership and giving**

Q. And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?  
 Donated money or paid a membership fee to... a charity or campaigning organisation?  
 ... a political party?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
 Source: Ipsos MORI.



**4.25** There is no clear explanation for this year's decline in charitable giving, but variations of this sort of giving can be dependent on people's economic circumstances and external events, including the scale of global crises and subsequent charitable appeals. The proportion of people who donate money to a political party is likely to become a subject of greater interest in future years. The reports on the funding of political parties from both the Constitutional Affairs Committee in the House of Commons (in December 2006) and Sir Hayden Phillips (in early 2007) indicate the prospect of changes to the party funding arrangements currently in place.

**4.26** While people's political and charitable giving continues to increase in relation to social class, there has been some shift over the last three years. The first audit noted that giving to parties seemed to be more classless than donating to charitable or campaigning organisations. This time around, however, there was a small social class variation among those giving to political parties – 3% of people in social classes C2DE against 6% of those in classes ABC1.



# 5 Efficacy and satisfaction

Our third set of indicators measure the extent to which people are satisfied with the political system and the degree to which they believe involvement in politics to be worthwhile. Low scores on some of the previous indicators covered in this report, particularly those concerning action and participation, may be taken as evidence not of disengagement but rather of broad satisfaction with the political system – the efficacy and satisfaction indicators put this to the test.

**5.1** Five indicators are used to measure the extent of satisfaction with the political system. We have found that levels of satisfaction and perceived efficacy have shifted little over the last three years. Two principles have frequently underpinned many of the indicators in this section; namely, that specific opinions about individuals tend to be more favourable than generalised views of institutions and that familiarity breeds favourability, not contempt.

## Efficacy of participation 'Getting involved works'

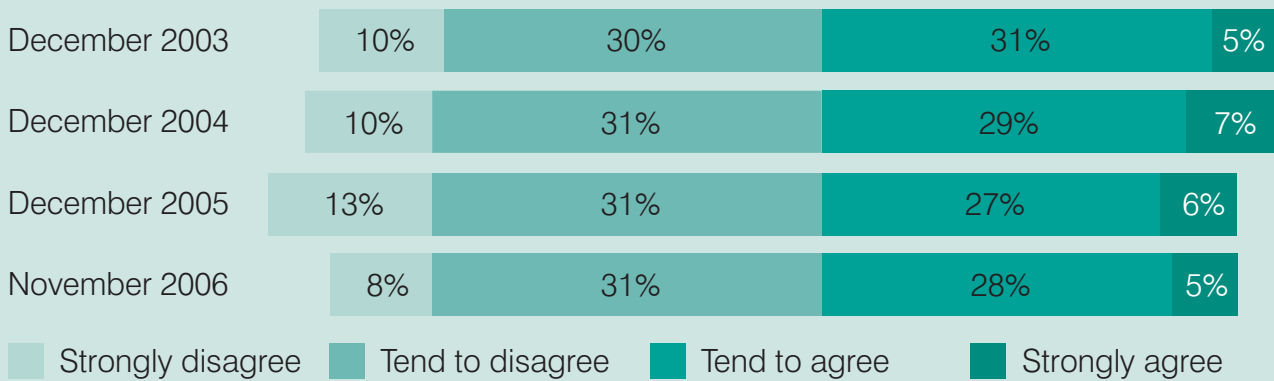
**5.2** As Figure 13 (overleaf) shows, a third of the population believe that 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run'. Correspondingly, one in four people strongly agree or tend to agree that 'Being active in politics is a waste of time'.

**5.3** Two in five people tend to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way the country is run' (39%). A further 24% neither agree nor disagree with the statement. This indicator has remained relatively stable over the last few years, with a marginal fall of three points in those agreeing since the question was first asked for the first audit.

**5.4** Demographic differences are apparent, although not as wide as those identified for some indicators. One identifiable variation is between those who live in rural and urban areas. While people in these areas are equally likely to agree with the statement about getting involved in politics, those in rural areas are

**Figure 13: Perceived political efficacy**

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
 'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run'



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: Where percentages do not add up to 100% this is due to rounding and/or exclusion of respondents answering 'Don't know'.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

significantly more likely to disagree with it (46% compared to 37%). This echoes earlier research by Ipsos MORI, which found that people in rural communities in England were considerably more likely than those in urban areas to agree that 'the people who make the big national decisions which affect your local area' rarely or never 'understand the needs and circumstances of the people who live here'.<sup>13</sup>

**5.5** There is some cause for surprise in considering the relationship between political activism and the belief that getting involved works. Activists and non-activists – as defined by our political activism indicator – are equally

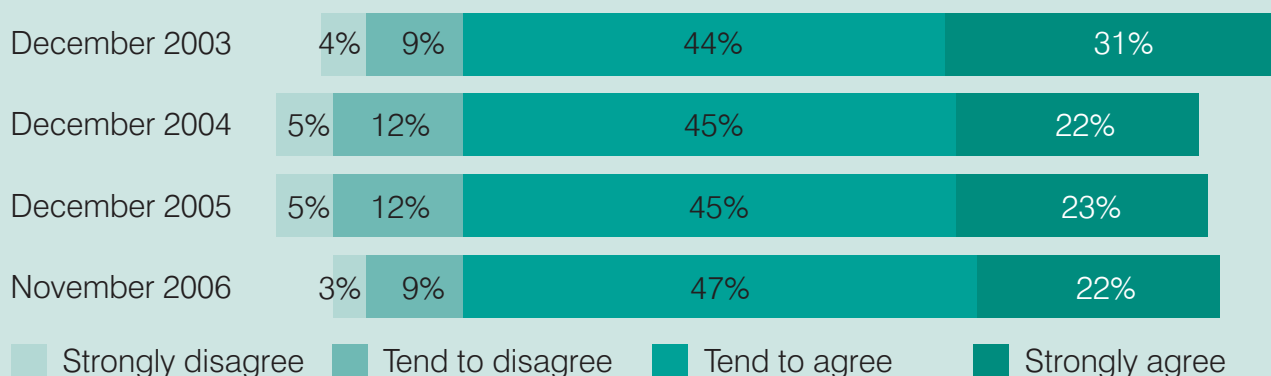
likely to disagree with the statement that getting involved works (39%). However, this is tempered somewhat by non-activists being less likely actively to agree than activists (31% as opposed to 47%). This finding suggests that there is a significant pool of political activists who persevere regardless of a degree of scepticism about the impact they can make.

**5.6** Indeed, despite a significant degree of doubt about what can be achieved when 'people like me get involved in politics', only a minority of people believe that 'being active in politics is a waste of time' (25%). Fifty-one percent of the public still tend to disagree or strongly disagree with the latter statement, a fall of 4% since the first audit.

<sup>13</sup> The Commission for Rural Communities, *Rural Insights* (Cheltenham, 2006), p.29.

**Figure 14: Wanting a say in how the country is run**

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?  
‘I want to have a say in how the country is run’



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: Where percentages do not add up to 100% this is due to rounding and/or exclusion of respondents answering ‘Don’t know’.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

**5.7** Some surprising demographic differences arise here in terms of age and deprivation. Just 20% of people aged 18–24 agree with the statement compared to 27% of those in the oldest age group (although more young people also have no opinion). In terms of deprivation, people in areas rated as ‘very deprived’ are more likely to disagree that being active in politics is a waste of time than those in ‘very affluent’ areas (48% against 41%).

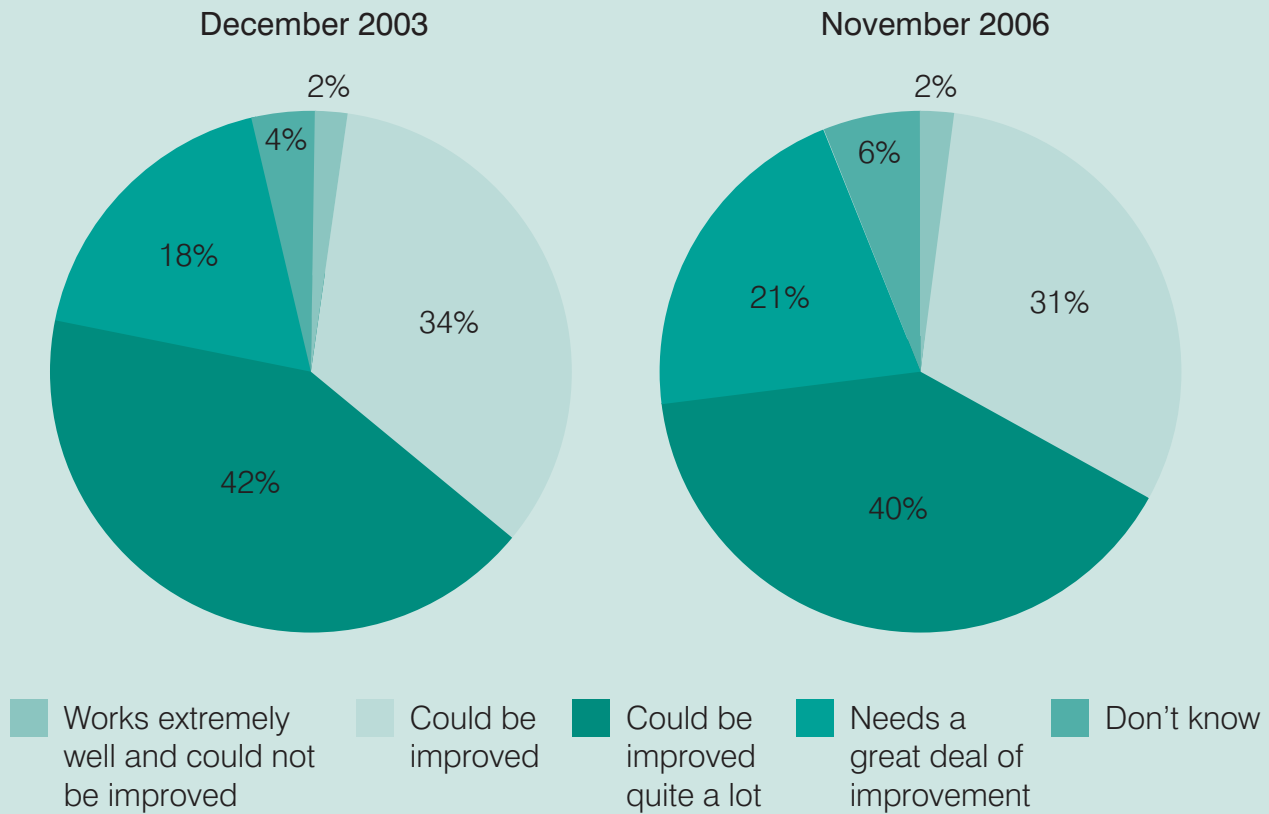
### Having a say in how the country is run

**5.8** Almost seven in 10 people want to have a say in how the country is run (69%), while 27% believe they do have a say in how the country is run at the moment.

**5.9** Only 12% of the public tend to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement ‘I want to have a say in how the country is run at the moment’ – as Figure 14 (above) shows. When this figure is broken down, it leaves only 3% who have no desire whatsoever to have a say. The proportion of people wanting to have a say in how the country is run has declined since the first audit (75%) but is in line with the findings from the last two years. As previous audits found, there is a significant difference between this figure and the percentage who believe they currently have a say.

**Figure 15: The present system of governing**

Q. Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?\*



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: \*This question was asked as '... the present system of governing the UK' in Northern Ireland.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

**5.10** There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy in addition to possible failings with our political systems. Chapter 6 considers this in more detail, by exploring the variation in what people say they would be willing to do and what they have actually done. This shows that while people indicate that they want a say, in many instances they may not act upon this general feeling.

**5.11** Men are more likely than women to want a say (73% versus 64%) but equally likely to believe they currently have a say (27%). The age group 45–54 are most likely both to want a say (74%) and to believe that they currently have a say (33%) while the youngest age group, the 18–24-year-olds, are least likely to want a say (58%). The youngest age group are not, however, the least likely to agree that they do have a say; rather, only 23% of 35–44-year-olds believe they have a say in how the country is run at the moment, compared to 27% of 18–24-year-olds.

**5.12** People in classes ABC1 are significantly more likely than those in C2DE to want a say (75% to 60%) and, although more narrowly, to believe they currently have a say (30% to 24%). People in rural areas are more likely to disagree than those in urban areas both that they want a say (20% against 10%) and that they have one (57% against 49%). People's perception of their influence also varies according to deprivation, with 26% of people in very deprived areas believing they have a say compared to 37% in very affluent or affluent areas. The difference is smaller for wanting to have a say (63% and 69% respectively).

## Rating of the system of governing

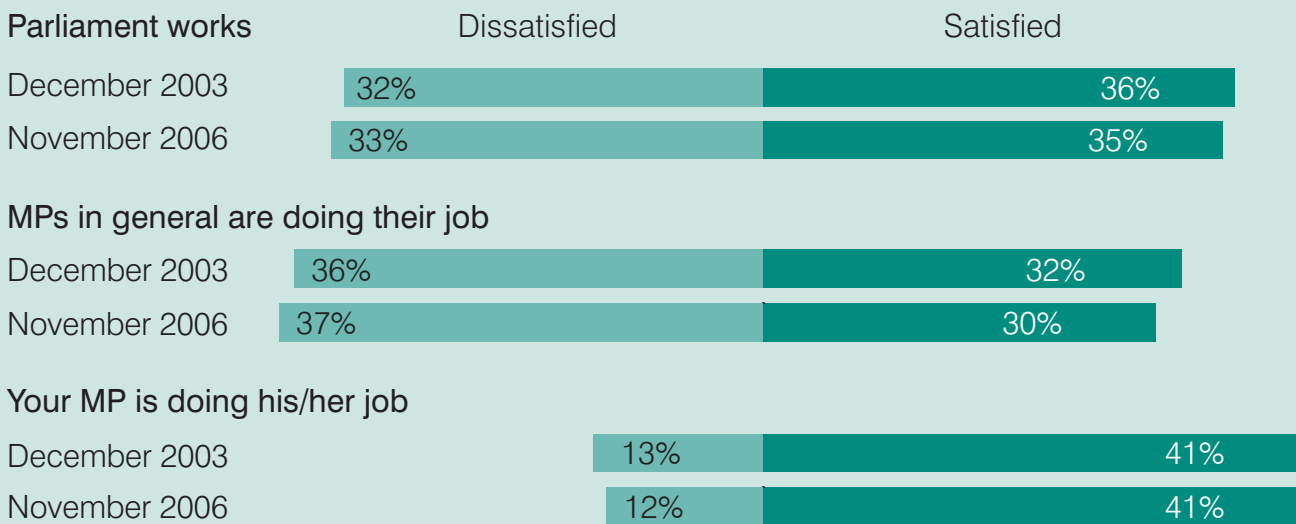
**5.13** Views on the present system of governing have remained relatively stable over the last few years. A third of the public believe that the present system works extremely well or mainly works well, down three points since the first audit. In contrast, 61% of the public believe the system could be improved quite a lot or needs a great deal of improvement. This is higher than the proportion of people who actually reported that they felt knowledgeable about politics (49%) or the Westminster Parliament (38%).

**5.14** Satisfaction with the present system of governing is related to other indicators of engagement, both attitudinal and behavioural. Those who claim to be interested in politics are more satisfied than those who are not interested (39% against 26%) and those who are certain not to vote feel the system needs improving in greater proportions than those who are certain to vote (67% against 59%).

**5.15** As with many of our other indicators, responses differ according to gender, educational attainment and social class. While there are also variations between the age groups, they are somewhat at odds with trends identified in earlier questions. The proportion of people aged 18–24 expressing dissatisfaction with the system is lower, at 52%, than that of people in any other age group, with older people the most dissatisfied at 65%. It seems that in considering explanations for lower turnout among young people, we need to look at factors other than outright hostility to this country's system of governing.

**Figure 16: Satisfaction with Parliament and MPs**

**Q. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that...?**



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Note: Percentages total less than 100% due to the exclusion of respondents answering 'Don't know' or 'Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

## Satisfaction with Parliament

**5.16** Thirty-five percent of respondents are satisfied with the way that the Westminster Parliament works, while a third say they are dissatisfied. Levels of satisfaction with the way Parliament works have barely changed since the first audit recorded them in 2003.

**5.17** Satisfaction with Parliament is related to both knowledge of and interest in politics, in that people who are more knowledgeable and interested are more likely to have an opinion either way. Those who are interested in politics are more likely than those who are not interested to declare themselves satisfied with

Parliament (44% to 26%), but also marginally more likely to say they are dissatisfied (34% to 31%). The difference is made up both by people who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied or who fall into the 'Don't know' category.

**5.18** The belief that familiarity breeds favourability therefore appears to be more nuanced than is sometimes implied. In many cases, familiarity encourages the public to form opinions, whether they are positive or negative.

**5.19** People aged 18–24 are almost as likely to be satisfied with Parliament as those aged 55 and over and considerably less likely to be dissatisfied (22% against 38%).



## Satisfaction with MPs

**5.20** Satisfaction with the way MPs in general are doing their job has remained virtually unchanged since 2003, with 30% of people very or fairly satisfied. Figure 16 (facing page) shows that satisfaction levels are higher when people are asked about how well their own MP is doing his or her job (41%).

**5.21** The greatest distinction between MPs in general and individual MPs relates to levels of dissatisfaction. Whereas 37% of the public are fairly or very dissatisfied with MPs in general, only 12% are dissatisfied with their individual MP. Some of this variation can be accounted for by low levels of knowledge about constituency MPs, as only 6% did not have an opinion about MPs in general, compared to 17% for local MPs.

**5.22** We can see more evidence to support the belief that familiarity breeds favourability when a comparison is made between those who express satisfaction with their MP and those who can correctly name their MP. Fifty-nine percent of those who named their MP correctly were satisfied with the job they were doing, compared to only one in four of those who did not know their MP's name.

**5.23** These figures virtually mirror our findings from the first audit, when we suggested that 'greater knowledge seems to promote only positive, and not negative, reactions.'<sup>14</sup> This audit seems to support this supposition in the case of people's own MPs. However, 41% of

those who can name their MP are dissatisfied with MPs in general compared to 32% of those who answered 'Don't know.'

**5.24** When it comes to assessing a person's own MP, differences by gender and social class virtually disappear. People aged 18–24 are less likely to be satisfied with their MP; rather, they are more likely not to express an opinion. People without formal qualifications are more likely to be satisfied than those with A-levels and above.

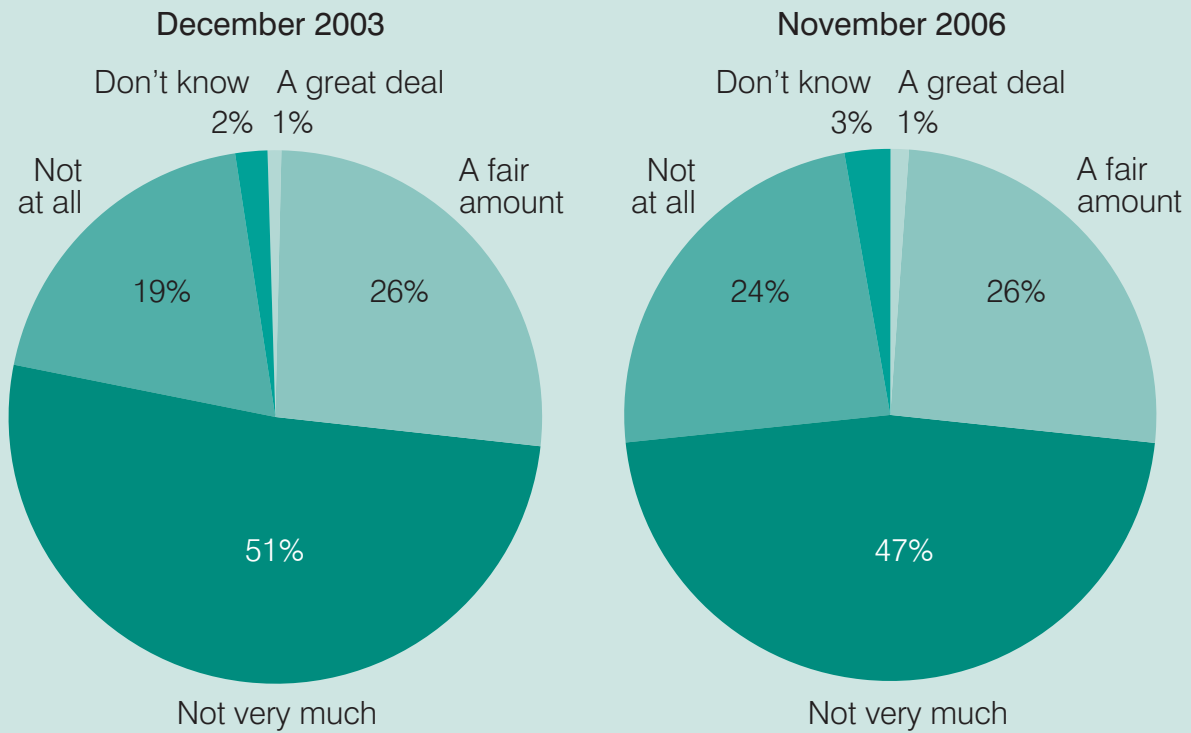
## Trust in politicians

**5.25** Levels of trust in politicians have remained fairly stable since we last asked the question in 2003 (see Figure 17, overleaf). Just over a quarter of the public say they trust politicians a great deal or a fair amount (27%), while 71% say they trust them not very much or not at all. Since the first audit, there has been a five point rise in the proportion of people saying they do not trust politicians at all.

14 The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, *An audit of political engagement* (2004), p.41.

Figure 17: Trust in politicians

Q. How much would you say you trust politicians generally?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
 Note: Percentages total more/less than 100% due to rounding.  
 Source: Ipsos MORI.

**5.26** Surveys consistently find that politicians are among the least trusted of professions. In October 2006, Ipsos MORI asked the public who they trusted and found that politicians generally and government ministers were trusted second and third least out of a list of 16 types of professions, with only 20% and 22% of people respectively saying that they trusted them to tell the truth. By contrast, 92% said the same of doctors.<sup>15</sup>

**5.27** People aged 35–54 are somewhat less trusting of politicians than both the younger and older age groups. People in social classes C2DE and those without formal qualifications state lower levels of trust and higher levels of distrust than people in classes ABC1 and those with A-levels or above.

**5.28** Trust in politicians proves to be linked to other indicators of engagement. People who are very or fairly interested in politics are more likely to trust politicians a great deal or a fair amount (35%), as are people we have classified as political activists (30%) although there is only a two point difference between activists and non-activists in terms of how much they distrust politicians (69% to 71%).

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<sup>15</sup> Ipsos MORI survey for the Royal College of Physicians (2006). Details available at [www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2006/rcp.shtml](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2006/rcp.shtml).



# 6 Analysis

The views of the public towards the political process have remained fairly consistent since the findings of the first *Audit of political engagement* were published in 2004. Despite widespread concerns of a downward spiral of public interest and engagement with the formal political process, attitudes and behaviour have remained relatively consistent over the last three years.

**6.1** The public's assessment of their own level of knowledge of and interest in politics has risen modestly since this question was asked for the first audit in 2003. Almost half the public (49%) now report that they know a great deal or a fair amount about politics, compared to 42% in 2003, while 54% of the public report that they are very interested or fairly interested in politics, up from 50%. However, the proportion of the public who believe that 'Being active in politics is a waste of time' has also risen, from 22% to 25% and the number who believe that 'When people like me get involved in politics, they can really change the way the country is run' is down from 36% to 33%.

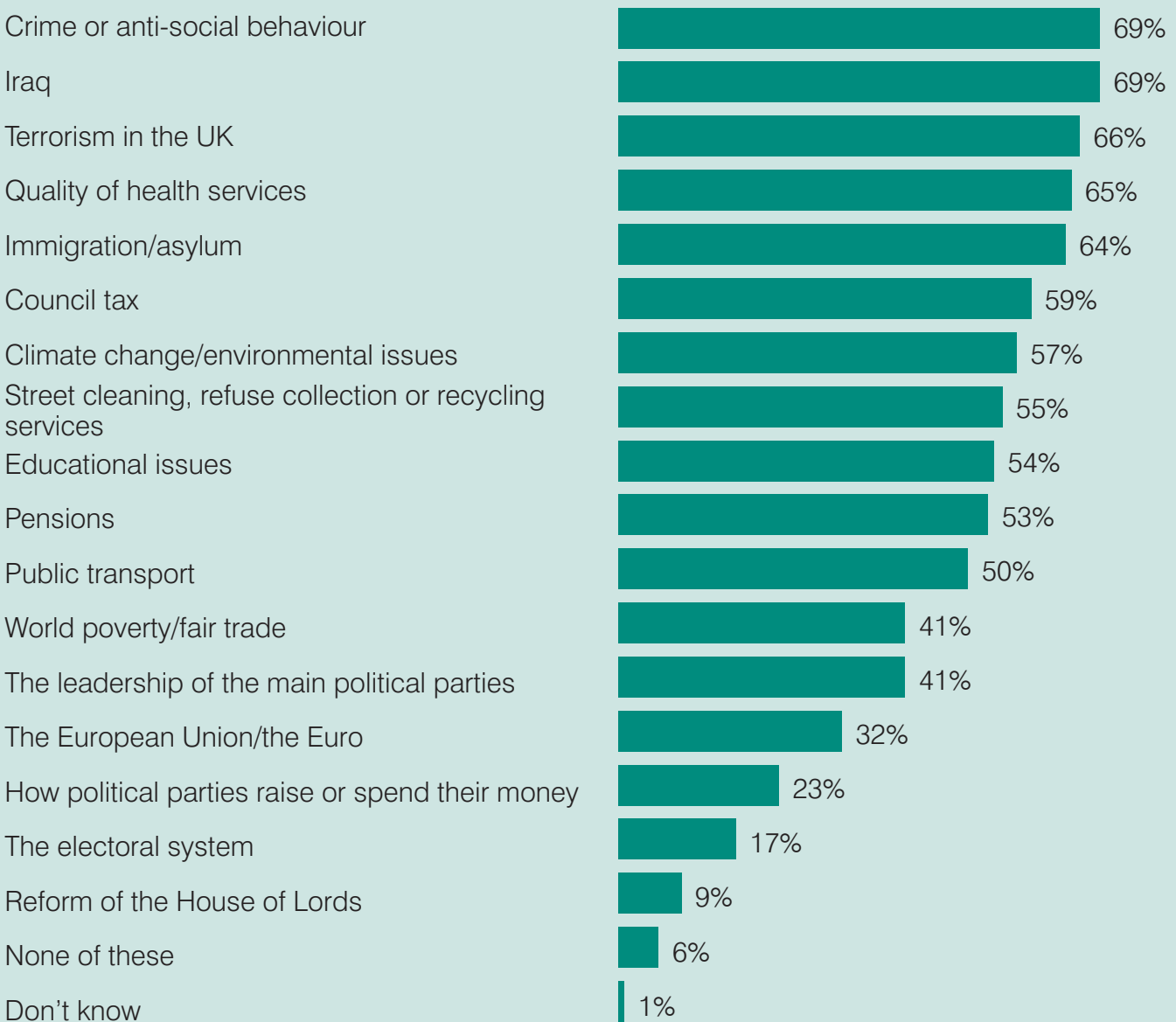
**6.2** The relative stability of the findings should not obscure the fact that a small, yet statistically significant, proportion of the public do not want to have a say in how the country is run or express no interest in politics:

- 19% are 'not at all' interested in politics.
- 11% are absolutely certain not to vote in an immediate general election.
- 15% would not be willing to do anything from a list of 12 different activities to express their opinion on issues that are important to them (see page 71).

This 'hard core' of people who are completely disengaged from the political process, representing many millions of citizens, has remained fairly stable.

**Figure 18: Discussion of political issues**

Q. Which of these local, national and international issues, if any, have you discussed with your family or friends in the last year or so?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Source: Ipsos MORI.

## Discussing the issues

**6.3** It is probably unrealistic to expect a sizeable proportion of the public to have an active part in a political party's campaign at a general election and unlikely that significant numbers would take part in a demonstration, picket or march on any regular basis. However, given that more than half of the public report having an interest in politics, it may be expected that the majority of people would have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years; in fact, only 40% report having done so.

**6.4** Yet it does not seem that political discussion has been absent from the majority of the country's dinner tables, workplaces and pubs. Rather, the public are likely to be failing to associate many of the issues that matter to them with the political process. They are taking the 'politics' out of the 'issues'. While 60% claim not to have discussed politics or political issues in the past two or three years, only 6% say that in the last year or so they have not discussed any of a list of 17 local, national and international political issues presented to them – as Figure 18 (facing page) shows. This illustrates the public's narrow conception of the term 'politics', and suggests that levels of discussion about and interest in political and policy issues may be significantly higher than other indicators have found. Nevertheless, it is perhaps striking that significant proportions of people claim they have not discussed many of the topics that have dominated politics and the news agenda over the last year.

**6.5** As well as discussing policy issues, significant – and perhaps comparatively surprising – proportions of the public claim to have discussed issues relating to the political and governmental process itself, such as the leadership of the main parties (41%), party funding (23%), the electoral system (17%) and reform of the House of Lords (9%).

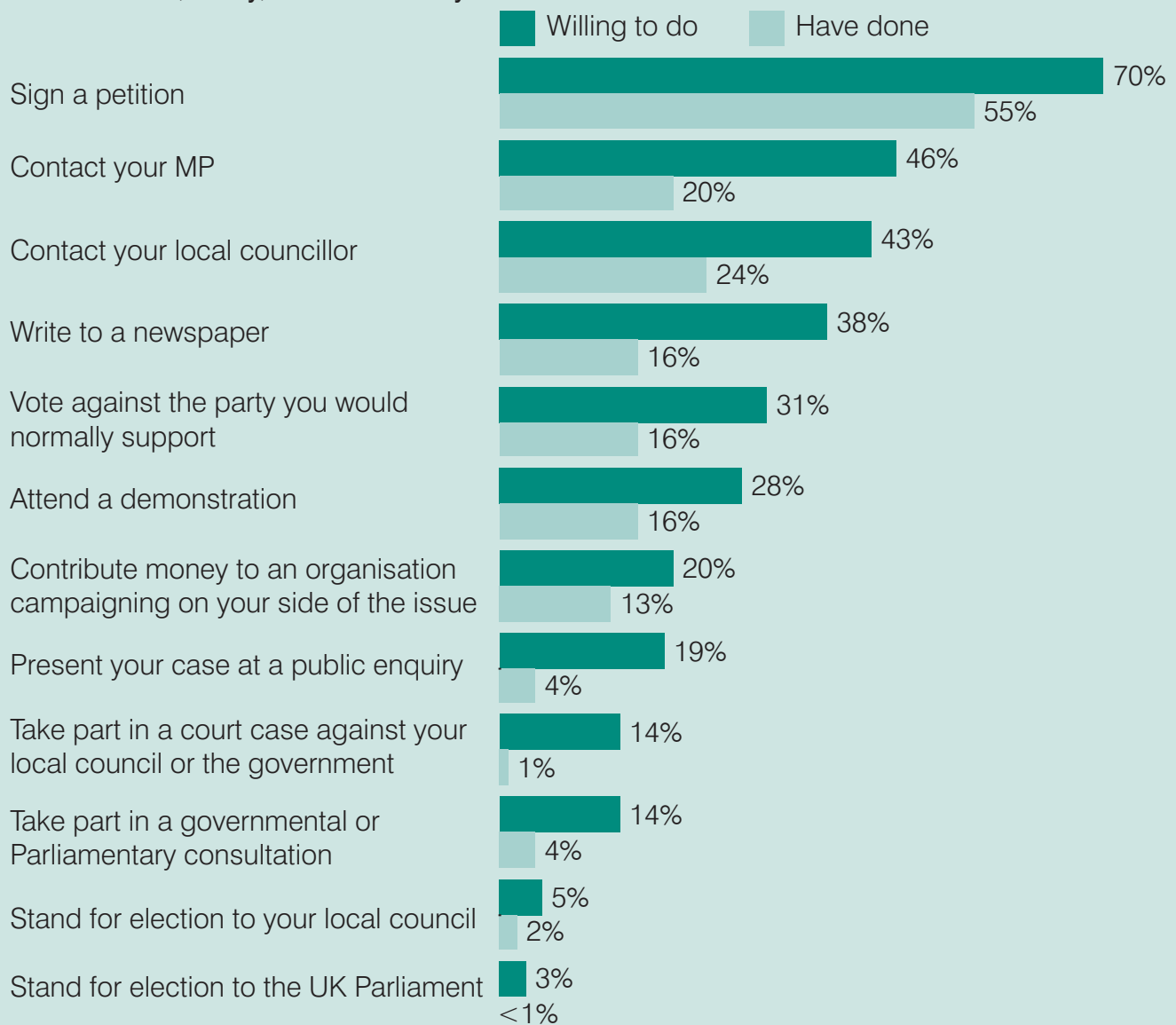
**6.6** Demographic patterns emerge for all the political issues set out above and are apparent in the breadth of issues discussed. The average number of issues discussed is higher among men than women and increases with age, social class and level of education. Unsurprisingly, those who report having an interest in politics are more likely to talk about these issues. More specifically, 60% of those with an interest in politics talked about the leadership of the political parties, compared to 18% who do not have an interest in politics, while 35% of those interested in politics talked about how political parties raise or spend their money, compared to 10% who do not have an interest.

**6.7** Given that only 40% of the public say they had discussed politics or political issues in the last two or three years, there is clearly a widespread perception that discussing issues such as Iraq, crime or the quality of health services is not 'discussing politics or political news'. Nearly half of those who have discussed Iraq, the quality of health services, crime, terrorism in the UK and immigration/asylum did not mention 'discussed politics or political news with someone else' as something they have done in the last two or three years.

**Figure 19: Political influence**

Q. Which of these, if any, do you think you might be willing to do in order to express your opinion on an issue that is important to you?

Q. And which, if any, of these have you ever done for that reason?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Source: Ipsos MORI.



**6.8** However, the discrepancy cannot simply be attributed to the public taking a restricted view of what ‘politics’ is. Even in the case of unmistakably political issues such as the leadership of the political parties, the electoral system and reform of the House of Lords, a quarter or more of those who admit having discussed these do not say they have discussed ‘politics’. This may indicate that it is ‘politics’ as a brand that is off-putting to individuals. Perhaps the general impression of ‘politics’ is so negative or undefined for many people that they instinctively assume it is not the sort of subject that they spend time discussing, even though when prompted they may well realise that they have indeed talked about issues they would consider political.

**6.9** Earlier audits have emphasised the need to raise awareness of the connection between ‘issues’ and ‘politics’. The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society believe that this will promote public understanding of how politics affects our daily lives and may also encourage broader engagement in the political process. Indeed, the Electoral Commission’s public awareness campaign ‘If you don’t do politics, there’s not much you do do’ sought to address this by seeking to make politics personal, reconnecting it with issues and with people.<sup>16</sup>

## Intentions and actions

**6.10** Last year’s audit warned how easy it is to overstate the public’s willingness to take up opportunities for closer involvement in the political process when, in reality, many people simply do not have the appetite for active, energetic

involvement. Since that time, debate about public participation in our democratic processes has continued in earnest. Yet, as Figure 19 illustrates (facing page), there is a large discrepancy between what people say they might be willing to do and what they have actually done.

**6.11** There have been no especially significant changes since last year in what people say they are willing to do to express their opinion and what they have actually done.<sup>17</sup> The findings show that people are in principle willing to take action on an issue they feel particularly strongly about, but in practice have tended not to act on this.

**6.12** The only single activity that more than half the public say they would be willing to undertake is signing a petition. This relatively undemanding political act is both the most commonly cited action that people would be willing to take and that they have done (78% of those who would be willing to sign a petition have done so). There is a significant gap between the proportion who say they would be willing to sign a petition and the next most popular possible actions (contacting your MP at 46% and your councillor at 43%), and less than a quarter have actually done either of these things (20% and 24% respectively). Standing for election to the local council or Parliament are by far the least commonly cited actions that people would be prepared to take, and standing for election to the local council is only considered two percentage points more feasible than standing for Parliament (5% against 3%).

<sup>16</sup> For further information see The Electoral Commission, *Public opinion and the 2004 elections* (2003).

<sup>17</sup> The wording of the questions on political influence is slightly different from those asked in 2005, but the two questions are sufficiently similar to allow a broad comparison between them.

**6.13** The 15% who say they would be unwilling to take any of the actions listed are, as one would expect, over-representative of some of the demographic groups which the audit consistently finds to be less likely to be politically engaged: 18% of women; 20% of 18–34-year-olds; 23% of those in social classes DE; and 25% of those with

no formal qualifications. In commenting on such differences between subgroups, last year's audit noted that over-reliance on 'direct' mechanisms could 'risk magnifying the voice of those who are already politically involved and are most willing to use additional methods of participation'.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 20: Barriers to greater involvement in politics**

Q. What factors, if any, prevent you from getting more involved in politics?	%
Lack of time/too busy/other commitments/priorities	32
Not interested/lack inclination/apathy/laziness/can't be bothered/lack of motivation	22
Disillusioned/cynical/politicians are untrustworthy	6
Wouldn't achieve/change anything/make a difference/waste of time	6
Lack knowledge/understanding/education/ability	6
Age (unspecified)	5
Too old	4
Poor health/disability	3
Wouldn't be heard/listened to	2
Unhappy with party/electoral system	2
Lack confidence	2
Disagree with government/policies/way the country is run	1
Parties are all the same/don't represent my views	1
Lack money/resources	1
Too young	*
Unsafe	*
Political situation in Northern Ireland	*
Other	5
Refused to answer	2
None	4
Don't know	17

<sup>18</sup> The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society, *An audit of political engagement 3* (2006) p.28.

**6.14** It seems that significant proportions of the public are unwilling to take more than basic actions to express their views on issues that are important to them. To find out more about low levels of engagement, as well as the discrepancy between what people may be willing to do and what they actually do, this year's audit included an open question on what factors prevent people from becoming more involved.

**6.15** As Figure 20 (facing page) shows, the explanations given by the public pose a challenge to current discourse on the solutions to the problem of political disengagement. While only 6% attribute not being more politically involved to the belief that it would not make a difference, almost a third of the public (32%) cite a lack of time and other commitments as a reason why they are not more involved in politics and more than one in five (22%) cite a lack of interest in politics or a lack of motivation. The most widespread obstacle to greater activism, then, is apparently neither hostility to politics or a complete dismissal of its value, but a low assessment of its importance by people who perhaps might be more active were it a higher priority for them. The same is true of those who are activists already: 49% of them say that it is lack of time, other commitments or priorities that prevent them getting (even) more involved.

**6.16** For the majority, therefore, becoming more involved in politics is not a priority or of interest. As Gerry Stoker notes in his 2006 book, *Why Politics Matters*:

Most citizens want only to engage in politics occasionally and not as specialists: they want to be political amateurs, not professionals...

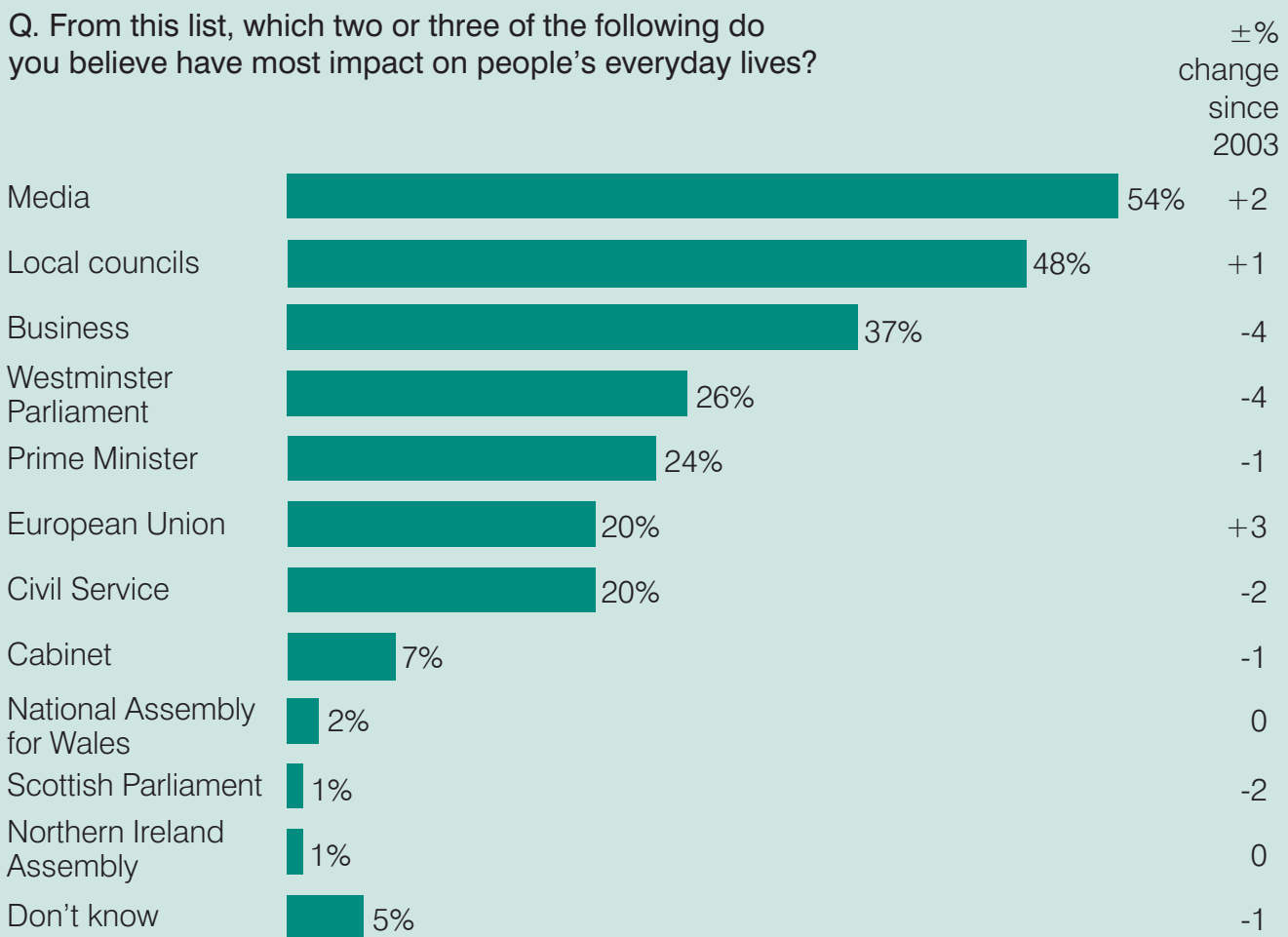
they are comfortable with the division of labour. They want to engage directly over the issues that are most salient to them but would prefer to rely on the judgements of representatives and activists over most issues, most of the time.<sup>19</sup>

**6.17** This does not mean that our democratic structures and political parties should not strive to be more inclusive, but it does set the terms of debate for considering how to involve a greater proportion of people in politics. The audit findings illustrate that apathy is a key factor for a significant portion of the public; acknowledging this is therefore an important starting point in tackling low levels of participation. Moreover, another 17% of the public cannot identify what factors prevent them becoming more involved in politics.

**6.18** The findings are ambiguous as to whether reforming the political system will assist in redressing current levels of lack of interest. The audit found that people who believe the system works well are equally likely to cite apathy as a factor that prevents them from becoming more involved in politics as those who believe the system needs improving (22%). This is an indication, perhaps, that there may always be a section of the public who have no desire to become more involved, irrespective of how the system functions. However, the audit also found that those who think the present system works well are more likely to be certain to vote in an immediate general election (62% to 53%).

<sup>19</sup> G. Stoker, *Why Politics Matters: Making democracy work* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2006) pp.150–151.

Figure 21: Perceived impact of institutions



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.

**6.19** Smaller proportions of the public cited cynicism as a barrier to further involvement (6%) and the belief that they would not be listened to (2%). Similarly, only 2% mentioned unhappiness with the party/electoral system, while 1% blamed parties being all the same. Those who are dissatisfied with their MP are more likely to mention disillusionment as a factor (by a margin of 10% to 5%) that stops them from becoming more involved. Political activists are also more likely (by a margin of 10% to 5%) to say they are not more involved because it wouldn't achieve change.

**6.20** People aged 18–24 are more likely than other age groups to say they are not more involved in politics because of a lack of interest. Those aged 18–24 are also likely to report lower levels of knowledge about politics and Parliament, with only 23% saying they know a great deal or a fair amount about Parliament, compared to a national figure of 38%.

## Impact and information

**6.21** Awareness about the work of Parliament is likely to be related to people's perceptions of the importance of the institution. The low levels of awareness discussed above may be linked to the fact that only a quarter of the population feel that Parliament is one of the two or three institutions to have most impact on people's everyday lives – only about half as many as cite the media (as Figure 21, facing page, shows).

**6.22** However, despite a four point fall in the perceived influence of Parliament, it continues to be rated as having a greater influence on people's lives than the Prime Minister –

although the gap has narrowed from 5% in the first audit to 2% in the fourth. Indeed, in the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust's *State of the Nation 2006* survey, 80% of people believed that Parliament has 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of power over government policies. This was higher than large companies (67%), the media (65%), trade unions (54%) and ordinary voters (17%).<sup>20</sup>

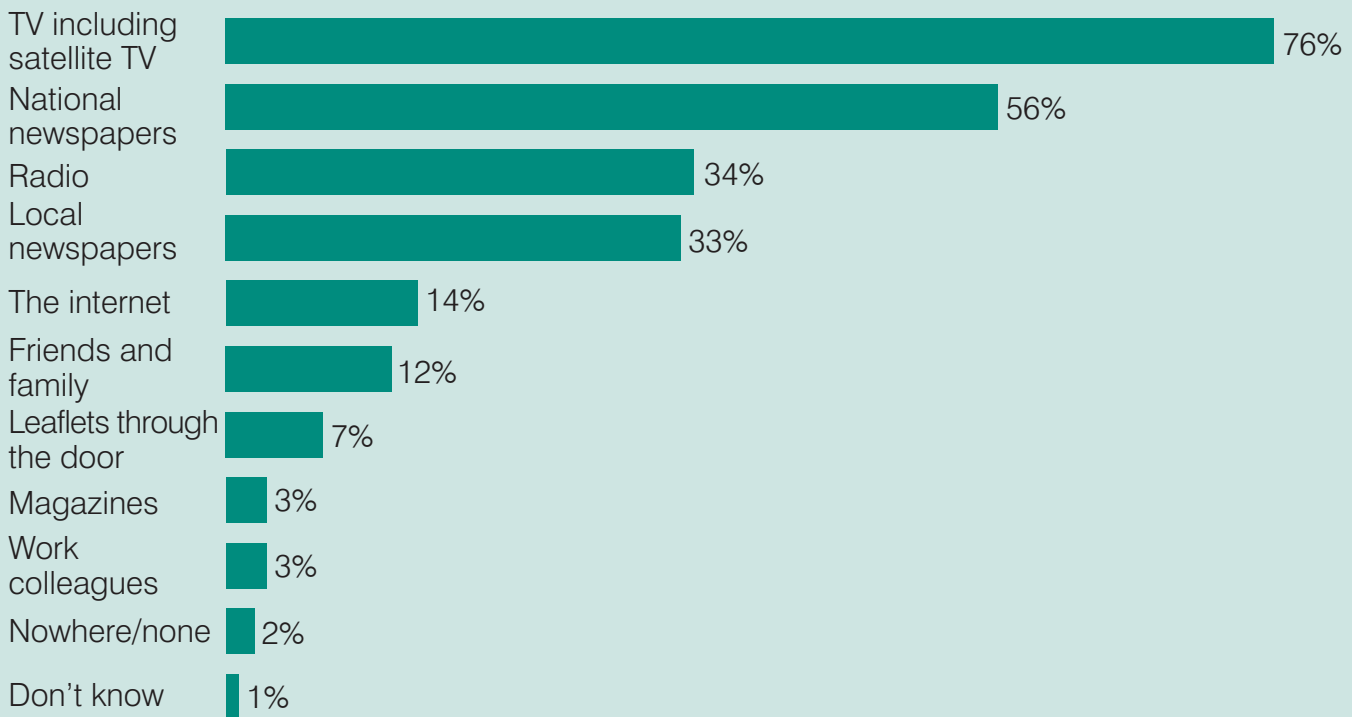
**6.23** The perceived influence of the media is emphasised by its dominance as the main source of news about political and current issues. The most striking demographic difference in media consumption is between different age groups. Young people are less reliant on television and newspapers as sources of news than older age groups. Two thirds of 18–24-year-olds cite television as one of their main sources of news and 42% mention newspapers compared to 82% and 56% respectively among 45–54-year-olds. Conversely, young people are more dependent on the internet, with it being cited as a major source of political and current affairs coverage by 25% of 25–34-year-olds, compared to just 4% of those aged 55 and over.

**6.24** The main difference between the information sources used by those who are certain to vote and those who are certain not to is that the non-voters are much less likely to obtain information from national newspapers (33% compared to 64%). Similarly, 65% of those who are interested in politics but only 45% of those who are not say national newspapers are one of the main sources from which they obtain

<sup>20</sup> The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, *State of the Nation 2006: Summary Findings* (2006), question 11.

**Figure 22: Information sources**

Q. From which two or three of the sources I am going to read out do you obtain most information and news about politics and current issues?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.

information. On the other hand, those who are not interested in politics are more likely to pick local newspapers as an information source (37%, compared to 29% of those who say they are interested in politics). Consequently, those who choose to read those daily newspapers which are lighter on political coverage are more likely to look elsewhere for information – so they are a little more likely than ‘broadsheet’ readers to cite both television and local newspapers as an information source.

**6.25** Research from the EU has found that radio and television are the two most trusted mediums in the UK.<sup>21</sup> The UK is the EU Member State with the lowest level of trust in printed media, at 19%. The press is criticised for encouraging cynicism towards the political process, but readers of national newspapers are only marginally more likely to be dissatisfied with how the system operates; those who think the present system works well get roughly the same amount of their news from national newspapers as those who think the system needs improving (57% to 59%).

## What the public want

**6.26** This year, the audit has also sought to gauge what the public want from those who represent them, as a means to address disengagement and to better inform political representatives.

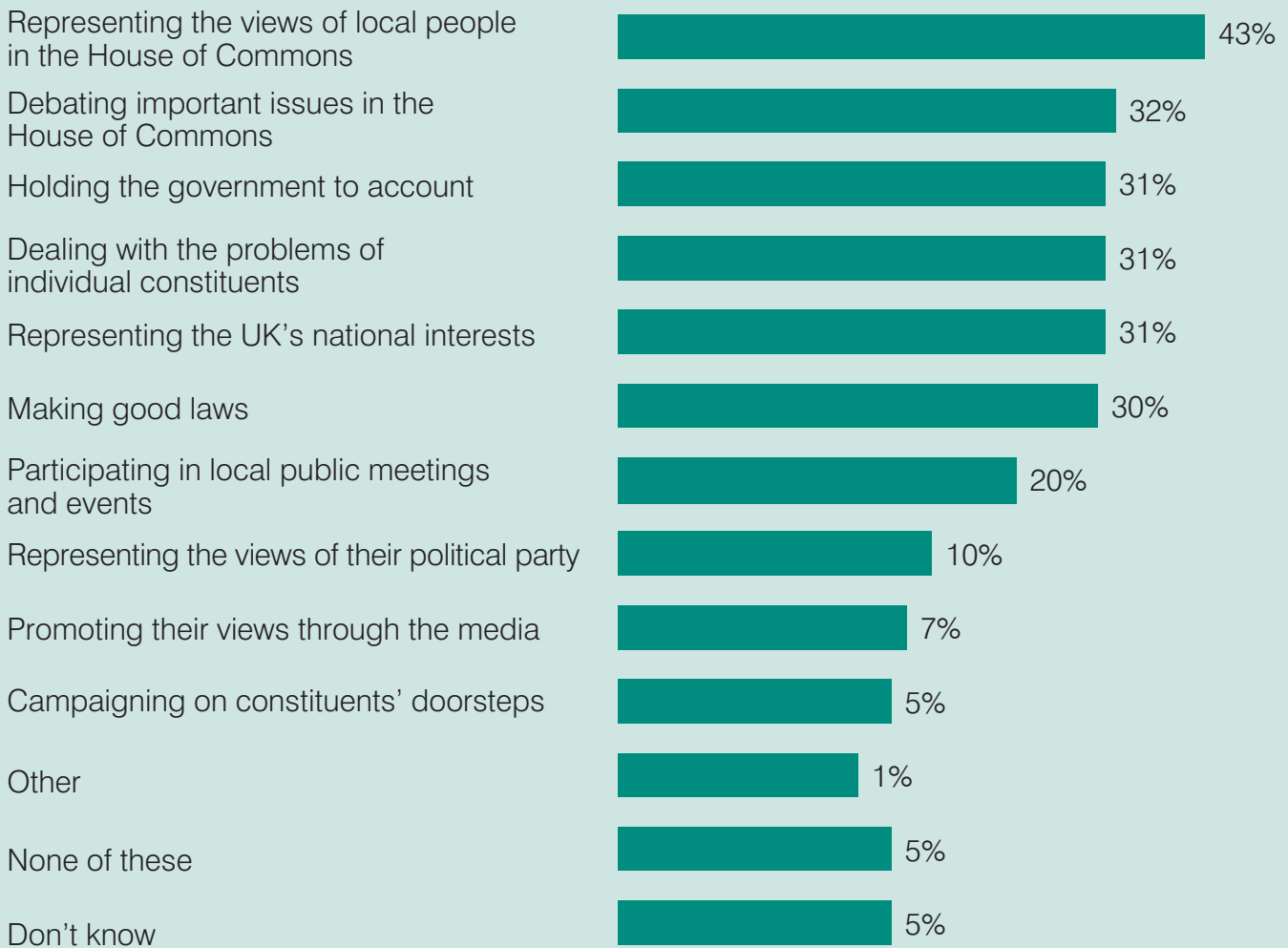
**6.27** While 52% of the public say they know not very much or nothing at all about the role of MPs, the majority of the public are able to express an opinion about how MPs should spend their time.

It may be useful to note these views as part of any drive to increase interest in and satisfaction with Parliament and MPs. The most commonly cited activity is representing the views of local people in Parliament, with 43% of people mentioning this. As Figure 23 (overleaf) shows, around a third of people mention each of the five next most commonly cited activities, suggesting that there is support for MPs undertaking a broad range of activities.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, *Standard Eurobarometer 66, Autumn 2006, National Report United Kingdom (2006)*.

**Figure 23: How MPs should spend their time**

Q. Which two or three, if any, [of the following] do you feel are the most important ways that MPs should spend their time?



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.

Source: Ipsos MORI.



**6.28** In the absence of a standard job description, MPs have significant scope to interpret their role. Correspondingly, however, they often have little guidance on how their constituents want them to spend their time. MPs can spend much of their time reacting to the casework demands of individual constituents or become engaged in a ‘permanent campaign’ in the constituency rather than, for example, scrutinising legislation. There is little evidence about the extent to which the public want their representatives to divide their time between helping individuals and sitting on the green benches. However, the findings illustrate that the public want their representatives to find a workable balance.

**6.29** Low levels of knowledge about the role and actions of MPs set out earlier in this report indicate that the public are likely to be unaware that they share the same perspectives and priorities as those they elect. The public place representing the views of constituents (43%) above representing the nation as a whole (31%) and representing the views of a political party (10%). This corresponds to a 2006 Hansard Society report, which found that new MPs, in carrying out their role as representatives, ranked their constituents above their party and the nation.<sup>22</sup> After a year in the job, 90% of new MPs said that representing their constituents was their most important role. This poses a challenge for individual MPs – they not only have to respond to the priorities of those they represent; they also have to raise public

awareness of how they meet these expectations. As MPs represent an average of 68,000 constituents, getting this message across will never be straightforward.

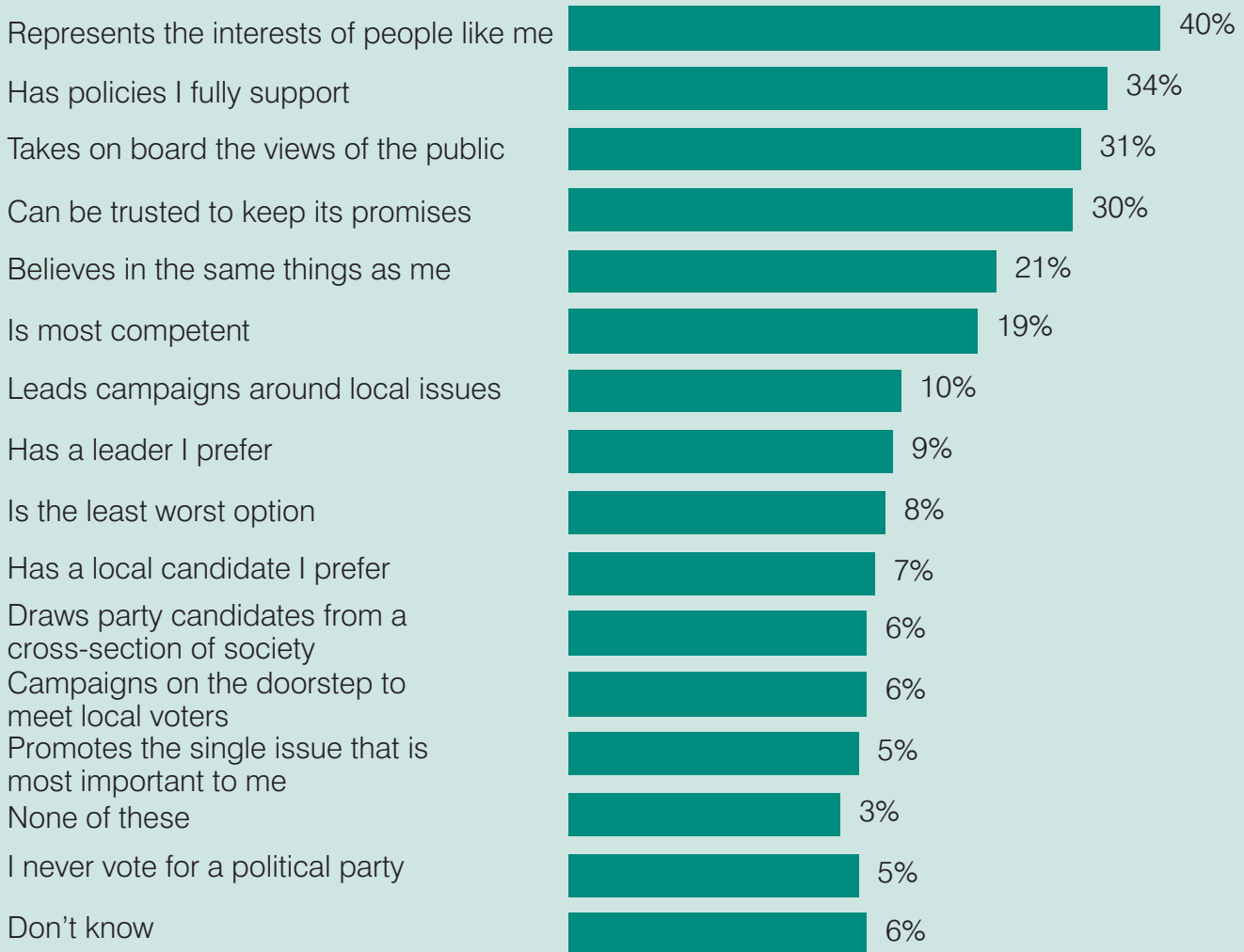
**6.30** In line with the high proportion of people who cite representing the views of local people as the most important task for MPs to undertake, when asked which factors are important when deciding which party to vote for, the most commonly cited choice is that the party ‘represents the interests of people like me’ – as Figure 24 (overleaf) shows.

<sup>22</sup> G. Rosenblatt, *A Year in the Life: From member of public to Member of Parliament* (Hansard Society: London, 2006), pp.44–45.

Figure 24: Factors in deciding which party to vote for

Q. Thinking generally, which two or three of these, if any, are usually most important to you in deciding which political party to vote for?

Whether the party...



Base: 1,490 UK adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23–28 November 2006.  
Source: Ipsos MORI.

**6.31** More than a third (34%) of people say they select a party on the basis of its policies, compared to just 9% who say the party having a leader they prefer is an important factor. Such a low figure appears to contradict a key element of conventional wisdom, which is shared by the political parties and commentators alike, that leadership of political parties is of paramount importance. Nevertheless, the policies of a particular political party can rarely be wholly detached from the party's leader. Policies and leadership are not two separate entities, as the former is strongly shaped by the influence and direction given by the latter. The low level of importance given to party leadership should be viewed in context of the extent to which a party's leader not only shapes policy, but also shapes perceptions such as whether a party 'represents the interests of people like me', whether it 'can be trusted to keep its promises', or even whether it is 'the most competent'.

**6.32** Low levels of trust in politicians are reflected by three in 10 saying that trusting the party to keep its promises is one of the most important factors influencing how they cast their ballot. Interestingly, given all three main parties' concern in recent years to select candidates from a cross-section of society, only 6% say this is an important factor in deciding how to vote.

## Conclusion

**6.33** Public engagement is firmly on the political agenda. It is a source of concern to all who want our democratic processes to operate effectively and with legitimacy.

**6.34** The audits have examined indicators of engagement that encompass both public behaviour and attitudes vis-à-vis the political process and institutions. There are two ways to consider the relative significance of these factors to the overall political engagement of the public. On the one hand, it could be argued that behavioural factors are only a (possibly unreliable) symptom of attitudes – and it is these underlying attitudes that really constitute the health of the system. On the other hand, some behavioural elements are integral to the continuation of our current political system.

**6.35** Behaviour not only relates to voter turnout, but also concerns the action and participation of political activists and of the politically interested public. Public involvement is essential to political parties, which are dependent on their supporters to enable them to carry out their functions. Beyond the parties, debate about the issues of the day and consideration of the direction in which the government is taking the country are essential in motivating the public to vote at election time. It therefore matters whether the public are interested in politics, whether they discuss it and feel they understand it; and all of these processes can be reinforced if more people are active in politics. Moreover, such activism should not be confined to single issue groups, as Paul Webb explains:

While interest groups or media actors may be equally (or more) effective in articulating sectional demands and placing issues on the political agenda, the fact remains that it is only the political parties that can legitimately perform the key function of aggregating demands into more or less coherent programmatic packages in democratic contexts.<sup>23</sup>

**6.36** We are often told about a public that is disengaged from the political process and political parties. The 59.4% turnout for the 2001 general election was the origin of much of this concern, while the 61.4% turnout for the 2005 general election represented only a modest recovery. Although levels of such formal engagement have dropped, this audit shows that the decline has not continued inexorably. If it is true that political engagement is not currently declining then there is some cause for optimism. However, it is still too early to judge whether these findings represent long-term stability.

**6.37** Each of the four audits of political engagement has provided a statistical context to everyday speculation about the state of political engagement. In doing so, the audits indicate the degree to which attitudes and behaviour change year-on-year and allow a fuller picture of the state of engagement. In the longer term, we hope that this body of evidence will not only provide a background for discussion of issues around political engagement but also help to address some of these issues.

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<sup>23</sup> P. Webb, *Democracy and Political Parties* (Hansard Society: London, 2007), p.8.

# Appendix A – Statistical reliability

The respondents to the questionnaire are only samples of the total population, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if the whole population had been interviewed (the 'true' values). For a random probability survey 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 A1 (below) illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the 95% confidence interval.

For example, with a sample size of 1,490 where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the true value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of three percentage points more or fewer than the sample result.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be 'real', or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if the 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 a '95% confidence interval', the differences between the results of two separate groups must be greater than the values given in Table A2, overleaf.

**Table A1: 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 interviews	+/-6	+/-9	+/-10
500 interviews	+/-3	+/-4	+/-4
1,000 interviews	+/-2	+/-3	+/-3
1,500 interviews	+/-2	+/-2	+/-3

Source: Ipsos MORI.

**Table A2: 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 1,500	+/-2	+/-4	+/-4

Source: Ipsos MORI.

# Appendix B – Guide to social class definitions

A brief list of social class definitions follows, as used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. These groups are standard on all surveys carried out by Ipsos MORI.

- A** Professionals such as doctors, surgeons, solicitors or dentists; chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior editors, senior civil servants, town clerks, senior business executives and managers, and high ranking grades of the Services.
- B** People with very responsible jobs such as university lecturers, hospital matrons, heads of local government departments, middle management in business, qualified scientists, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades of the Services.
- C1** All others doing non-manual jobs; nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, people in clerical positions, police sergeants/constables, and middle ranks of the Services.
- C2** Skilled manual workers/craftsmen who have served apprenticeships; foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as long distance lorry drivers, security officers, and lower grades of the Services.
- D** Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, including labourers and mates of occupations in the C2 grade and people serving apprenticeships; machine minders, farm labourers, bus and railway conductors, laboratory assistants, postmen, door-to-door and van salesmen.
- E** Those on lowest levels of subsistence including pensioners, casual workers, and others with minimum levels of income.

# Appendix C – Political Engagement Poll topline findings

- *Audit of political engagement 4* topline results come from the Political Engagement Poll which had a base of 1,490 adults aged 18+ in the UK. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face, at home, from 23–28 November 2006.
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.
- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- An asterisk (\*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- Where 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.
- The source for all these results is Ipsos MORI.

Q.1 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	6
8	7
7	6
6	3
5	5
4	1
3	2
2	2
1 (absolutely certain not to vote)	11
Refused to answer	1
Don't know	0



### Q.2 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	69
Helped on fundraising drives	18
Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	14
Urged someone outside my family to vote	13
Made a speech before an organised group	11
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	10
Been an officer of an organisation or club	7
Written a letter to an editor	6
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3
Stood for public office	1
None of these	24
Don't know	0

### Q.3 You said that you have presented your views to a local councillor or MP. Was this to a local councillor, an MP or both?

	%
Local councillor	41
MP	29
Both	29
Don't know	1

Base: All who have presented views to councillor or MP (203).

#### Q.4 And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?

	%
Voted in the last local council election	53
Signed a petition	47
Discussed politics or political news with someone else	40
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	38
Contacted my local council	33
Done voluntary work	27
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	20
Taken part in a sponsored event	20
Helped organise a charity event	19
Been to any political meeting	8
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	5
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	5
Taken an active part in a party's campaign at a general election	3
Taken an active part in a party's campaign at a local election	3
Taken part in a strike	3
Served as a school or hospital governor	3
Served as a local magistrate	1
None	19
Don't know	1

#### Q.5–Q.8 How interested would you say you are in...?

	Very interested %	Fairly interested %	Not very interested %	Not at all interested %	Don't know %
Q.5 Politics	13	41	27	19	*
Q.6 Local issues	28	51	14	7	*
Q.7 National issues	23	52	15	9	*
Q.8 International issues	19	51	19	11	1

**Q.9 Which of these local, national and international issues, if any, have you discussed with your family or friends in the last year or so?**

	%
Crime or anti-social behaviour	69
Iraq	69
Terrorism in the UK	66
Quality of health services	65
Immigration/asylum	64
Council tax	59
Climate change/environmental issues	57
Street cleaning, refuse collection or recycling services	55
Educational issues	54
Pensions	53
Public transport	50
World poverty/fair trade	41
The leadership of the main political parties	41
The European Union/the Euro	32
How political parties raise or spend their money	23
The electoral system	17
Reform of the House of Lords	9
None of these	6
Don't know	1

**Q.10 How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...?**

	A great deal %	A fair amount %	Not very much %	Nothing at all %	Don't know %
A Politics	6	43	40	11	*
B The European Union	3	26	52	17	2
C Your local council	5	42	43	9	1
D The Westminster Parliament	4	34	46	15	1
E The role of MPs	5	42	41	11	1

**Q.11 What is the name of your local Member of Parliament for this constituency since May 2005/since the last by-election?**

	%
Gave correct answer	44
Gave name of former MP	1
Gave wrong answer	5
Don't know/no answer	49

**Q.12 Please tell me if you think that the following statements are true or false. If you don't know, just say so and we will move on to the next question.**

	True %	False %	Don't know %
A The Cabinet is usually made up of around five government ministers ( <b>false</b> )	15	51	33
B Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by voters like you and me ( <b>true</b> )	50	27	23
C The Prime Minister is not an MP ( <b>false</b> )	13	75	12
D The House of Commons has more power than the House of Lords ( <b>true</b> )	44	32	24
E Every problem a constituent takes to an MP will be debated in the House of Commons ( <b>false</b> )	8	77	15
F The minimum age for voting at a general election is 16 ( <b>false</b> )	14	79	7
G Local councils have the power to set the school leaving age in their own area ( <b>false</b> )	7	76	17
H You are automatically registered to vote if you pay council tax ( <b>false</b> )	21	64	15

### Q.13–Q.15 Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way...?

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied %	Fairly dissatisfied %	Very dissatisfied %	Don't know %
Q.13 That Parliament works	2	33	24	24	9	8
Q.14 MPs in general are doing their job	2	28	27	26	11	6
Q.15 Your MP is doing his/her job	11	30	30	9	3	17

### Q.16 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither/nor %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	Agree %	Disagree %
Being active in politics is a waste of time	5	20	22	39	12	3	25	51
I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote	15	38	21	16	6	5	53	22
It is my duty to vote	41	36	10	7	3	2	77	10
I want to have a say in how the country is run	22	47	16	9	3	3	69	12
I have a say in how the country is run at the moment	4	23	19	36	16	3	27	52
When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run	5	28	24	31	8	4	33	39

### Q.17 Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?\*

	%
Works extremely well and could not be improved	2
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	31
Could be improved quite a lot	40
Needs a great deal of improvement	21
Don't know	6

Note: \*This question was asked as '... the present system of governing the UK' in Northern Ireland.

### Q.18 From this list, which two or three of the following do you believe have most impact on people's everyday lives? You can select up to three options.

	%
Media	54
Local councils	48
Business	37
Westminster Parliament	26
Prime Minister	24
Civil Service	20
European Union	20
Cabinet	7
National Assembly for Wales*	2 (30% in Wales)
Scottish Parliament**	1 (15% in Scotland)
Northern Ireland Assembly (Stormont)†	1 (24% in Northern Ireland)
None	0
Don't know	5

Notes: \*Base: All in Wales (85).

\*\*Base: All in Scotland (85).

†Base: All in Northern Ireland (208).

### Q.19 How much would you say you trust politicians generally?

	%
A great deal	1
A fair amount	26
Not very much	47
Not at all	24
Don't know	3

### Q.20 Which of these, if any, do you think you might be willing to do in order to express your opinion on an issues that is important to you?

### Q.21 And which, if any, of these have you ever done for that reason?

	Q.20 %	Q.21 %
Attend a demonstration	28	16
Contribute money to an organisation campaigning on your side of the issue	20	13
Present your case at a public enquiry	19	4
Sign a petition	70	55
Stand for election to your local council	5	2
Stand for election to the UK Parliament	3	*
Take part in a court case against your local council or the government	14	1
Vote against the party you would normally support	31	16
Write to a newspaper	38	16
Contact your MP	46	20
Contact your local councillor	43	24
Take part in a governmental or Parliamentary consultation	14	4
Other	*	*
None	15	32
Don't know	3	2

**Q.22 Which two or three, if any, [of the following] do you feel are the most important ways that MPs should spend their time?**

	%
Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons	43
Debating important issues in the House of Commons	32
Holding the government to account	31
Dealing with the problems of individual constituents	31
Representing the UK's national interests	31
Making good laws	30
Participating in local public meetings and events	20
Representing the views of their political party	10
Promoting their views through the media	7
Campaigning on constituents' doorsteps	5
Other	1
None of these	5
Don't know	5



**Q.23 Thinking generally, which two or three of these, if any, are usually most important to you in deciding which political party to vote for? Whether the party...**

	%
Represents the interests of people like me	40
Has policies I fully support	34
Takes on board the views of the public	31
Can be trusted to keep its promises	30
Believes in the same things as me	21
Is most competent	19
Leads campaigns around local issues	10
Has a leader I prefer	9
Is the least worst option	8
Has a local candidate I prefer	7
Draws party candidates from a cross-section of society	6
Campaigns on the doorstep to meet local voters	6
Promotes the single issue that is most important to me	5
Other	*
None of these	3
I never vote for a political party	5
Don't know	6

**Q.24 Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong, not very strong, or not a supporter at all of any political party?**

	%
Very strong	6
Fairly strong	30
Not very strong	38
I am not a supporter of any political party	24
Don't know	1
Refused to answer	*

**Q.25 From which two or three of the sources I am going to read out do you obtain most information and news about politics and current issues?**

	%
TV including satellite TV	76
National newspapers	56
Radio	34
Local newspapers	33
The internet	14
Friends and family	12
Leaflets through the door	7
Work colleagues	3
Magazines	3
Nowhere/none	3
Other	*
Don't know	1

Q.26 What factors, if any, prevent you from getting more involved in politics?*	
	%
Lack of time/too busy/other commitments/priorities	32
Not interested/lack inclination/apathy/laziness/can't be bothered/lack of motivation	22
Disillusioned/cynical/politicians are untrustworthy	6
Wouldn't achieve/change anything/make a difference/waste of time	6
Lack knowledge/understanding/education/ability	6
Age (unspecified)	5
Too old	4
Poor health/disability	3
Wouldn't be heard/listened to	2
Unhappy with party/electoral system	2
Lack confidence	2
Disagree with government/policies/way the country is run	1
Parties are all the same/don't represent my views	1
Lack money/resources	1
Too young	*
Unsafe	*
Political situation in Northern Ireland	*
Other	5
Refused to answer	2
None	4
Don't know	17

Note: \*This was an open question: multiple responses were permitted.