

# Audit of Political Engagement 9

## The 2012 Report: Part One

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The Audit of Political Engagement is the only annual health check on our democratic system. Now in its ninth year, each Audit measures the 'political pulse' of the nation, providing a unique benchmark to gauge public opinion across Great Britain with regard to the political system.

This year marks a departure for the Audit as it is being published in two parts. The second part, to be published separately, will focus on public attitudes to politics and the media. This first part explores public attitudes in relation to levels of knowledge and interest, action and participation and efficacy and satisfaction with the political process. It finds that coalition politics does not appear to have been good for public engagement. A number of the trends have declined, dramatically so in some instances, suggesting a public that is turning away from national politics. The report also explores to what extent an eventful period of parliamentary activity throughout 2011 has left its mark on public attitudes and the degree to which the public have different perspectives on local and national politics.

This report is an invaluable source of information and debate for all those who are concerned with the health of our democratic system.



The Hansard Society is the UK's leading, independent, non-partisan political research and education charity. We aim to strengthen parliamentary democracy and encourage greater public involvement in politics.

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THE 2012 REPORT: PART ONE



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## Preface

The annual Audit of Political Engagement is one of the most important, and widely-quoted, publications produced by the Hansard Society. It provides a mine of information about what the public is thinking about the political process, rather than just its immediate response to events in the headlines. This year's Audit is one of the most interesting, and worrying, so far, in pointing to a growing alienation from national politics.

This Audit, the ninth in the annual series dating back to 2004, is the fifth published solely by the Hansard Society. We are, as before, very grateful for the funding and support provided by the House of Commons and the Cabinet Office. TNS-BMRB undertook the interviews for the quantitative surveys while the Economic and Social Research Council funded qualitative research for an associated project into public attitudes to politics on which this Audit also draws. Like its predecessors, the Audit provides a guide to underlying trends about the public's knowledge of politics, its varying degree of interest in it, level of satisfaction, and attitudes to engagement and participation.

The format and design of the Audit have changed considerably over the last few years to achieve greater clarity and to discuss in greater depth the significance of the findings in a broader political context. In addition, the structure is different this year since the findings are being published in two parts. A second report will follow during the summer focusing on public attitudes to politics and the media.

A year ago, Audit 8 reflected on a growing sense of indifference to politics. The greater levels of interest in and perceived knowledge of politics in an election year had not been matched by greater satisfaction with, or a greater engagement in, the political process beyond a slight increase in turnout itself. This year's Audit suggests that indifference has hardened into something more significant, and disturbing. Trends in interest and knowledge are downward, sharply so in some cases.

For instance, the proportion of the public that say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics plummeted by 16 points in 2011 down to just 41%, by far the lowest ever during the whole Audit series. Moreover, knowledge has declined by nine points, while the number of people discussing political news has dropped by seven points.

These changes are much larger than can just be explained by the electoral/parliamentary cycle. In virtually every case, apart from knowledge of Parliament, this year's results are below the median for the Audit series. In particular, there has been a rise to three-quarters in the proportion of the public saying that the system of governing needs 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of improvement, up from a previous trend level of about two-thirds.



This Audit contains a particularly interesting discussion of the effects of ageing on political engagement. There are two broad conclusions. First, that there is no discernible difference between the views of young people now compared with 2004-05, apart from a sharp decline in satisfaction with the system of governing and a smaller drop in the number saying that getting involved in politics can change things. Second, as young people age they become more politically engaged, mainly via an increase in knowledge about politics.

As before, this Audit underlines the importance of the Hansard Society's broader work in promoting understanding of, and participation in, representative democracy. This is the last Audit with which I will be associated directly as Hansard Society chair before I step down after five years. I would like to thank the dedicated staff of the Society who work so hard to produce a consistently improving publication.

Rt Hon Peter Riddell  
Chair, Hansard Society

## Executive summary

The growing sense of indifference to politics highlighted in the last Audit report appears to have hardened into something more serious this year: the trends in indicators such as interest, knowledge, certainty to vote and satisfaction with the system of governing are downward, dramatically so in some instances, suggesting a public that is increasingly disengaged from national politics. The increased negativity of public attitudes in respect of key aspects of political engagement appears to be strongly linked to public attitudes to the current government. Coalition politics does not appear, thus far, to have been good for political engagement.

### 1. Knowledge and interest

- The proportion of the public that say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics has plummeted by 16 percentage points and now stands at just 42%; the first time interest levels have dropped below 50% in the entire Audit series.
- Perceived knowledge of politics has also fallen to 44%, a decline of nine percentage points, and more people than ever – 15% – claim to know 'nothing at all' about politics.
- Levels of interest and knowledge vary considerably along party lines.
  - Those who voted for Labour or the Liberal Democrats in 2010 are now markedly less likely than Conservative voters to profess a fair or higher degree of interest in politics (52% Labour voters, 53% Liberal Democrat voters, and 62% Conservative voters).
  - Interest in politics among Liberal Democrat supporters has dropped dramatically – by 22 percentage points – in the last year.
  - Perceived knowledge about politics amongst people who currently support the Conservative party outstrips knowledge levels amongst supporters of other parties: 61% of Conservative supporters claim to know at least 'a fair amount', compared with 45% of Labour supporters and 46% of Liberal Democrat supporters.

### 2. Action and participation

- The number of people who, in the event of an immediate general election, say they would be certain to vote, has dropped by 10 percentage points to 48%, and is now three percentage points lower than the previous low recorded in the first Audit.

- 16% of the public now say they are 'absolutely certain not to vote', a rise of six percentage points in a year and the highest ever recorded level in the Audit series.
- The number of people who claim that they have 'discussed politics or political news with someone else' has dropped to its lowest ever level at 35%, seven percentage points below that recorded in Audit 8.
- The number of people who report having signed a petition, once the most popular political activity aside from voting, has declined by nine percentage points to 27%, the lowest level ever recorded in the Audit series.
- There has been a striking decline over the past two years in the proportion of the public undertaking voluntary work: this has dropped by eight percentage points to 21% compared to the 29% recorded in Audit 7.

### 3. Efficacy and satisfaction

- For the first time in the Audit series less than a quarter (24%) of the public think the system of governing works reasonably well, a decline of seven percentage points in a year. Overall satisfaction with the system of government now stands 12 points lower than it did in the first Audit.
- As in previous Audits, levels of satisfaction with the system of governing almost perfectly reflect levels of satisfaction with the incumbent government. The increase this year in the number of people who believe that the system of government needs 'a great deal' or 'a lot of improvement' is mirrored by a decline in satisfaction with the government.
- The gap in satisfaction with the system of governing between supporters of the two main parties has widened to 39 percentage points (56% approval among Conservative supporters, and 17% among Labour supporters). However, satisfaction with the system of government among Liberal Democrat supporters has remained relatively stable at 29%.

### 4. Perceptions of Parliament

- Over a third of the public (36%) claim to know 'a fair amount' about the UK Parliament, and a further 4% feel they know 'a great deal' about it.
- The proportion of the public reporting at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge about politics has always been higher than the proportion saying the same specifically about Parliament. However, since knowledge about politics has fallen this year, this difference is much less apparent (44% compared with 40%).
- Knowledge levels about Parliament have remained stable over time amongst most groups, but have particularly grown amongst 18-24 year olds, with those claiming at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge rising gradually to 31% from 17% in Audit 1.

- When considering the role and function of Parliament, the public prioritise, by a significant margin, the representation of ‘the UK’s national interests’ (40%).
- Representing the views of ‘local communities’ and ‘individual citizens’ is prioritised by over a quarter (28%) and a fifth of the public (20%), respectively. Disproportionately large numbers of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters say they value Parliament’s role in representing the views of local communities.
- Only 23% of the public prioritise ‘holding the government to account’ and even fewer, 13%, prioritise Parliament’s role in ‘scrutinising proposed new laws’.
- Two-thirds of the public (66%) acknowledge the crucial part that Parliament plays in our democratic system. However, only half the public (49%) agree that the issues debated and decided in Parliament have relevance to their own lives; only 38% agree that the government is being held to account by Parliament; and only 30% agree that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics.
- There has long been concern that MPs are increasingly taking on a ‘social worker’ role at the constituency level, prioritising local concerns that could and perhaps should be dealt with by locally elected representatives. When faced with a hypothetical scenario of dissatisfaction with local health services, a quarter of the public (25%) say they would contact their MP for assistance with their problem. This places them second only to GPs (44%) as a source of support and places them significantly higher in the hierarchy of support than friends or family, local advice services or Citizens Advice Bureau, or their local council.

## 5. Civic and political involvement

- Almost three-fifths of the public (56%) agree that ‘when people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run’. In contrast, only 32% say the same about their potential to influence the country as a whole, suggesting that it is at the local rather than national scale that people feel the most potential to make a difference.
- Most members of the public simply do not think that if they, or people like themselves, were to get involved in politics they could have any impact on the way the country is run. On this issue there is a clear convergence of attitudes across the population, regardless of levels of interest, knowledge, and satisfaction with the system, and of differences in age, gender and social class.
- The public’s sense of the efficacy of local involvement has increased by five percentage points in a year. Driving this shift is an increase in perceived local efficacy among people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds: from 13% to 21% this year.
- Although an increasing proportion of the population (56%) now believe that their participation can make a difference to the way their local area is run, as yet, there has

been no apparent growth in the public's appetite for greater involvement in decision-making at the local level. Only two-fifths (38%) say they are willing to actually become involved in local decision-making.

- A sizeable difference has now emerged between the proportions of the public who say they want to be involved in decision-making locally (38%) and nationally (33%).
- Desire for involvement in the local community is, at 38%, less common than in previous Audits: there has been a decline of five percentage points in a year and a decline of 10 percentage points since Audit 6.
- The public is twice as likely to feel that they have a perceptible impact on decision-making at the local level than at the national level. While 24% feel they have some influence in the decisions taken in their local area, only 12% feel the same about decisions concerning the country as a whole.
- Almost three-quarters of the public (72%) agree that referendums should be used more often to determine important questions.

## 1. About this report

The Audit of Political Engagement is an annual health check on our democratic system. Now in its ninth year, the study measures the 'political pulse' of the nation, providing a unique benchmark to gauge public opinion across Great Britain with regard to politics and the political process.

Based on the results of an opinion poll conducted by TNS-BMRB in December 2011 amongst a representative sample of adults in Great Britain, it explores public attitudes to a range of political engagement indicators that track knowledge of and interest in the political system; the degree of public action and participation in politics; and the public's sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the democratic process. A number of 'core' questions are asked in each poll, enabling us to track responses from year to year and so chart the direction and magnitude of change over the course of the Audit lifecycle. In addition to this quantitative survey, we have also been able to draw this year on the findings of 14 focus groups held across the country between November 2011 and March 2012 exploring public attitudes to politics and the democratic process.<sup>1</sup>

The core survey is traditionally supplemented by a number of additional questions that explore an issue or theme of topical interest. Audit 5 focused on the constitution, Audit 6 on political participation and citizenship, Audit 7 on MPs and Parliament, and Audit 8 on civic engagement. This year, however, marks a departure from past practice as the Audit has been split into two parts. This report contains the first half of this year's Audit study and takes a closer look at some of the key issues that formed the special theme in the previous two studies, namely public attitudes to Parliament and civic engagement locally and nationally. Part two of the Audit will be published later in 2012 and will explore public attitudes to the media and politics and democracy.

The next chapter of this report outlines the events – political, economic, social and international – that shaped and defined the year. It sets out the essential context against which public attitudes should be considered.

Chapter three explores a number of the key themes that emerge from this year's data, focusing on the apparent downward trend in several of the engagement indicators, particularly public interest in politics and certainty to vote and the extent to which disillusionment appears to be linked to dissatisfaction with the system of government. It highlights the convergence of public attitudes around the efficacy of political involvement

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<sup>1</sup> ESRC funded project RES-00-22-4441, 'Anti-politics: Characterising and accounting for political disaffection'. See Appendix C for more details about the focus groups.

and the continuing divergence of attitudes in relation to local and national politics. Finally, consideration is given to the effects of ageing on political engagement.

The results of the core survey are set out in chapter four. It explores the engagement indicators related to 'knowledge and interest', 'action and participation', and 'efficacy and satisfaction', measuring current levels of political engagement and comparing and contrasting them with the findings recorded in the Audit over the previous eight years.

Changes in public perceptions of and attitudes to Parliament are the focus of chapter five. It explores the public's perceived knowledge about Parliament, the importance they attach to its various roles and functions and the extent to which they believe it is relevant to their daily lives.

Chapter six explores the public's appetite for involvement in the political process. It considers how the public view the efficacy of involvement, the influence they perceive they can have on the process, and the extent to which they are willing to get involved in local and national decision-making.

A detailed examination of demographic and sub-group differences in political engagement is then set out in chapter seven. The engagement levels of different genders, age groups, social grade categories, and ethnic groups, as well as residents in Scotland and Wales are presented and compared.

Finally, the report concludes with a series of appendices which set out the methodology for both the quantitative and qualitative research used in this study. Appendix A describes the methodology used to collect the data for the ninth political engagement poll, and provides a note on the statistical reliability of the reported findings. Appendix B presents the topline results of the poll in tabular format. Appendix C details the timing, location and demographic make-up of the 14 focus groups held across the country to supplement this study.

Following publication of each Audit report, the full dataset is made available on the Hansard Society website ([www.hansardsociety.org.uk](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk)) in order that others may use it for research purposes. It is also lodged at the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex for the same purpose.

Public engagement is a key strand of the Hansard Society's research programme and we will therefore be undertaking further work linked to and derived from the results of this and previous Audits in the future. Reports emanating from this further research will also be published on our website.

## 2. The political context

Public attitudes and behaviours are not shaped and defined in a vacuum. Any measurement of public engagement must take account of the political context – the actors and forces at work – that may have had an impact on public perceptions over the course of the year.

After the momentous events of 2010 it might have been expected that 2011 would be quiet by comparison. In fact it proved to be one of the most tumultuous years in recent history.

### Economic crisis

Once again economic problems were the dominant story at home and abroad. The New Year began with disappointing news for the government when it was revealed that the economy had contracted by 0.5% in the last quarter of 2010, largely due to the severe weather conditions across the country in the run-up to Christmas. This was followed by a record monthly increase in inflation, largely driven by the rising cost of food and oil. At 3.7%, inflation was now well above the Bank of England's target rate and it consequently faced ever-greater pressure to raise interest rates. Announcing a 'pro-growth' Budget, Chancellor George Osborne acknowledged in March that growth forecasts were being revised downwards. When the first quarter reports indicated a 0.5% growth rate it was greeted on opposite sides of the political spectrum as either a sign of recovery or confirmation of stagnation. When in April the government recorded the highest ever monthly borrowing figure, the wisdom of the government's strategy came under even greater pressure. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) warned that the government's deficit-cutting plans might have to be watered down if the economy remained sluggish. The merit of and need for an alternative to the deficit cuts strategy – an economic 'Plan B' – in order to stimulate the economy became the focus of the political debate between the government and opposition. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement in late November indicated that the government's austerity programme would have to continue beyond 2015, suggesting that economic recovery of any kind was some way off.

As the cuts began to bite, young people and children's services were particularly affected. Graduate unemployment reached its highest level since 1995 and rose faster – from 10.6% to 20% – than unemployment for the UK as a whole. Students protested the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year olds and proposed increases in university tuition fees. In March hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets of London to oppose the government's public sector cuts but when activists associated with the tax avoidance protest campaign, UK Uncut, occupied and attacked bank buildings in and around Oxford Street the protest message was inevitably drowned out by coverage of



the violence. In November, it was the turn of public sector workers who went on strike in protest against the government's proposed reform of their pension provision.

Concern about the conduct of banks, particularly the continued payment of large bonuses to senior staff, was a constant theme throughout the year. The government negotiated a deal – 'Project Merlin' – with the leading banks, linking directors' pay to lending targets, particularly to small businesses, and requiring bonuses to be paid in delayed share deals rather than in cash. But many deemed it an insufficient response given the scale of the crisis. Problems in the banking sector were compounded towards the end of the year when the government agreed to sell Northern Rock to Virgin Money for £747 million; as taxpayers had provided £1.4 billion in support of Northern Rock since 2008, the deal was widely criticised as a fire-sale and the National Audit Office announced a value-for-money inquiry.

In a protest against the 'robber capitalism' that had brought about the worldwide recession the UK supporters of the international Occupy movement directed their ire at the London Stock Exchange setting up a temporary encampment outside nearby St Paul's Cathedral in mid-October. When the Cathedral consequently closed for the first time since the Second World War, ostensibly on health and safety grounds, differences within the church hierarchy about how to handle the protest, particularly whether to support the City of London in seeking a court order to remove the protestors, were laid bare, prompting the eventual resignations of both the Dean and the Canon.

In the latter half of the year the economic focus was once again on the international stage as concerns about the crisis engulfing the Eurozone deepened. Italy, Ireland and Greece – with unmanageable levels of debt and each facing the prospect of default – had to be 'bailed out' by international institutions with their EU counterparts fearing the risk of contagion and the destruction of the single currency amidst a financial meltdown. Although outside the Eurozone, the UK was not immune: as Ireland was its fifth biggest export market, the government acknowledged that sterling would offer scant protection in the event of an economic meltdown.

In November, a Stability and Growth Pact was agreed by EU leaders giving the European Commission the power to vet member state budgets and impose fines if their recommendations to tackle economic imbalance were not implemented. A month later, in pursuit of greater fiscal integration and improved financial governance, a further inter-governmental agreement was negotiated. It proposed that budgets must be in balance or in surplus, annual structural deficits in member states must not exceed 0.5% of GDP, automatic sanctions would apply if deficits exceeded 3%, and corrective mechanisms should be written into each state's legal or constitutional framework. A new monetary regime was also proposed to enforce this fiscal compact, with each member state required to submit future national budgets to a form of pre-legislative review by EU officials before being put before the domestic parliament. These new commitments to budgetary surveillance were widely criticised as anti-democratic. But for the UK government the proposal to impose a new Europe-wide tax on financial transactions was a step too far. Believing that the terms of the financial services protocol would disproportionately damage the City of London, the Prime Minister insisted on an opt-out.

## Summer riots

Over three days and nights in August the nation was transfixed as rioting, looting, and arson swept across London and other major English cities and the police appeared, for a time, to lose control of the streets. Triggered by the police shooting and subsequent death of a man during an attempted arrest in north London, an initially peaceful protest in Tottenham descended into violent chaos. Riots and looting spread throughout the city to areas such as Brixton, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield and Hackney before spreading, in copy-cat form, to other cities including Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Liverpool. All police leave was cancelled and forces from across the country were brought in to supplement local forces in London and other cities in a bid to quell the violence. London bus services were disrupted after vehicles were set on fire and sporting fixtures, including the England vs. Netherlands international football match, were cancelled at the request of the police. By the time the violence was brought under control, five people had died, dozens of police officers and ordinary citizens had been injured, and arson had gutted homes and businesses at a cost of hundreds of millions of pounds. Over 3,000 people were arrested and over 1,500 charged with criminal offences. Such was the scale of the disorder that the courts had to sit for extended hours in order to hear the volume of cases. What shocked the country – public and politicians alike – was that so many of the offenders were unabashed by their actions, openly looting shops and setting fire to properties in full view of television camera crews, while others later proudly displayed their loot in photographs and video recordings on social media sites such as Facebook. The Prime Minister cancelled his holiday and hurried back to London as Parliament was recalled to discuss the situation. In the weeks that followed there would be much debate, research and soul searching about the causes and consequences of the violent disturbances but no clear answer as to why they had happened and why only English cities had been affected.

## Phone hacking

The media was subjected to unprecedented levels of scrutiny throughout 2011, following revelations that the phone messages of hundreds of celebrities and victims of crime had been hacked over several years by journalists at the News of the World newspaper and allegedly at other tabloids. When it was revealed that the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler's mobile phone messages had been hacked, possibly causing interference with the police investigation and lending false hope to her distressed parents, public revulsion followed. Yet, day after day the allegations got worse as more evidence and an ever-growing list of alleged victims – including the families of deceased servicemen and the victims of the 7/7 bombings – emerged. Particularly damaging was the revelation that the mobile phone voicemail messages of the mother of the murdered schoolgirl, Sarah Payne, had also been hacked; a phone apparently given to her by Rebekah Brooks, then the editor of the News of the World, and subsequently Chief Executive of News International, as part of the paper's support for her campaign for 'Sarah's Law' to allow parents controlled access to the sex offenders register.

Rupert Murdoch flew into Britain in a bid to quell the crisis and demonstrated clear public support for Brooks, but just a few days later she would resign. Amidst rising public outrage Murdoch and his son James opted to close the 168-year old News of the World completely, donating the proceeds of the final edition to charities and running full-page apologies in rival weekend newspapers. Meanwhile, the Secretary of State for Culture announced that

the proposed acquisition of BSkyB by News Corp would now be referred to the Competition Commission. When the opposition tabled a debate in the House of Commons calling for the company to withdraw its bid altogether, News Corp pre-empted the likely embarrassing outcome by announcing it would no longer proceed with the purchase.

In Parliament, the House of Commons Select Committees on Home Affairs, and Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) launched new inquiries. The former concentrated its attentions on the conduct of the earlier police investigations into the allegations of phone hacking and possible inappropriate contact between Metropolitan Police officers and journalists. Its inquiry would have serious repercussions, claiming the resignations of the two most senior officers, the Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson, and his deputy, John Yates.

The CMS Committee called several senior officials at News International to account, and summoned Rupert and James Murdoch, as well as Rebekah Brooks, to appear before them on 19 July, just two days after the police had arrested Brooks in connection with their investigation. The committee's grilling of the Murdochs was relatively uneventful until a member of the public, a self-proclaimed 'comedian' and 'political activist', hit Rupert Murdoch with a 'foam pie' prompting the session to be temporarily halted and the public removed from the sitting. Within weeks, however, as more evidence emerged, James Murdoch would be recalled by the committee to give further evidence amidst growing scepticism about the veracity of his recall of events. Over the following months, numerous arrests would follow and News International would reach large out-of-court settlements with dozens of victims including a £2 million agreement, part paid to charity, with the Dowler family.

Having employed the former editor of the News of the World, Andy Coulson, as his communications chief, and having regularly socialised with Rebekah Brooks, David Cameron was under intense pressure to address the crisis. Coulson had resigned in January but criticism of the Prime Minister's judgement for employing him in the first place did not abate. On 14 July, at the height of the crisis, a public inquiry, headed by Lord Justice Leveson, was announced, to examine the culture, practices and ethics of the media, and the relationship between the press and the public, police and politicians and to make recommendations on the future of press regulation and governance. Public hearings began in November and would continue into 2012, but it was already clear that the relationship between politicians and the media had changed considerably, and that the outcome of the Leveson Inquiry might fundamentally alter the future terms of trade for the press in the UK.

### **Parliament, referendums and elections**

More harmonious relations between the press and politicians were evident, however, in relation to the issue of super-injunctions. Granted by the courts, these injunctions restricted the right of the press to publish allegations about the private lives of a number of prominent celebrities, effectively gagging the mainstream media. Liberal Democrat MP John Hemming used the protection afforded by parliamentary privilege to breach the terms of one injunction during a Commons debate in March and Conservative MP Louise Bagshawe (now Mensch) was subsequently censored for revealing the identity of one of the celebrities during an appearance on a BBC comedy show. But as the names of the celebrities concerned were openly discussed on Twitter and other social media websites, the issue

demonstrated the difficulties caused by the regulatory differences governing the mainstream media on the one hand and social media and the internet on the other.

On the domestic political front the parliamentary expenses scandal continued to rumble on throughout the year. Former Labour MPs Eric Illsley, Jim Devine, Elliot Morley and David Chaytor were all jailed, and on early release were tagged and made subject to home detention curfews. Lords Hanningfield and Taylor, both Conservative peers, were also convicted of falsely claiming expenses and jailed. Former Labour MP Margaret Moran was charged with 21 counts of fraud relating to parliamentary expenses, though her case had not been heard by year's end.

Throughout the year the government struggled with some key aspects of its policy and legislative programme. David Cameron admitted he was not happy with proposals to sell off nearly 650,000 acres of forest and following a large protest, much of it organised online, the policy was overturned. The government also announced a break to 'pause and listen' to public and professional opinion about their proposals to reform the NHS. The British Medical Association had already voted to oppose the reforms and the Liberal Democrats voted at their spring conference to amend the bill. Such was the scale of the final changes to the bill at the end of this consultation process that the committee stage consideration of the legislation had to be repeated amidst much criticism of the leadership and judgement of the Health Secretary. In contrast, there was to be no change of direction or delay to the increase in university tuition fees even though, apparently contrary to the government's expectations, a majority of universities, many of them facing significant budget cuts, simply opted to charge the top rate of £9,000.

Debate about the proposed referendum on the introduction of a new electoral system, the Alternative Vote (AV), dominated the early months of the year. The quality of the 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns were widely criticised however, with both sides condemned for making misleading and exaggerated claims. Unlikely cross-party pairings emerged with politicians such as Ed Miliband and Vince Cable speaking in support of AV while David Cameron and John Reid backed the status quo. But when it came to the vote in May the country overwhelmingly rejected the proposed change with the Yes campaign securing only 32% of the vote in contrast to the No's 68%. At 42%, turnout was higher than expected but for only the second ever UK-wide referendum it was not particularly impressive. For the Liberal Democrats, and especially their leader Nick Clegg, it was a particularly bitter blow after which the party would seek to be more proactive, even aggressive, in articulating clear differences between themselves and their Conservative colleagues in a bid to shore up their declining support. The party's position after the AV result was compounded by the rout they suffered during the local council elections where they lost 748 councillors across the country with Labour making strong gains at their expense in town halls across the north of England. In contrast, their Conservative partners managed to gain 86 extra seats, much against expectations.

In Scotland, however, it was the Scottish National Party (SNP) who emerged victorious with 69 of the 129 seats in the Scottish Parliament, securing the first overall majority for any party in the decade-long history of the institution under a proportional electoral system that was explicitly designed to prevent any one side gaining absolute control. Outside the

Orkneys and Shetlands the Liberal Democrats were wiped out as their supporters switched to the SNP in a clear protest against the coalition government at Westminster. But the SNP also took long-standing Labour seats in many of their traditional city strongholds across the country. Immediately, the SNP leader Alex Salmond claimed the moral authority to hold an independence referendum, sparking a constitutional debate that would run for the rest of the year and beyond. Meanwhile, having only narrowly hung on to his own constituency seat, Labour leader Iain Gray stood down as did fellow Liberal Democrat leader Tavish Scott and Conservative leader Annabel Goldie. The political map of Scotland was redrawn.

At the National Assembly for Wales it was a different story. A referendum was held in March to grant the Assembly more direct legislative powers in policy areas such as health and education. Following a dispute, there was no official 'Yes' and 'No' campaign and turnout was only 35% but those favouring greater devolution of powers secured two-thirds support with only one county, Monmouthshire, rejecting the proposal. But when just a few weeks later Labour won 30 of the 60 seats in the Senedd and opted to govern alone having fallen just one seat short of an outright majority, it was unclear whether, with such a narrow governing base, the Welsh government would be able to take full advantage of the new legislative powers it was to be granted.

Electioneering across the country was temporarily halted in April for the Royal Wedding and the following month the Queen made a successful and historic state visit to Ireland. Further celebrations ensued later in May when US President Barack Obama made a state visit to the UK, during which he gave an address on foreign policy to both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall emphasising the enduring importance and value of the 'Special Relationship' between the two countries.

### **The 'Arab Spring'**

On the international stage revolutions across North Africa and the Middle East toppled long-standing dictators as one nation after another felt the domino effect of the 'Arab Spring'. First Tunisia's President Zine al-Abidine Ben-Ali fled to Saudi Arabia in January, then the following month the 30-year reign of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak was ended when he was forced to resign after a fortnight of protests. Within weeks revolutionary protests had engulfed much of the Arab region and in many instances the protestors faced a brutal crackdown, particularly in Bahrain and Syria.

Meanwhile in Libya, Colonel Gaddafi clung to power despite increasing unrest and a descent into civil war. As government forces reached the rebel-held city of Benghazi, a massacre was threatened, prompting the international community to take action, with France and the UK leading the push for a no-fly zone over the country. A UN Security Council resolution was secured in March permitting the use of force to protect civilians on the ground and air strikes, led by French and UK forces, soon followed. Debate in Parliament centred on the need not to get embroiled in ground operations and questions about whether or not the UN resolution permitted the targeting of Gaddafi directly. Despite an increasingly well organised and resourced rebel assault, the dictator would hang on for nearly six months before rebel advances enabled the National Transitional Council to take control of the country in late August. Having gone into hiding, Gaddafi survived a further two months before he was captured and killed in his hometown of Sirte in October.

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The world's attention temporarily switched to Pakistan in May when US Special Forces located and killed the Al-Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, during a firefight at a property in the city of Abbottabad. But as in previous years, it was events in Iraq and now to a much greater degree in Afghanistan, that shaped the national consciousness on the international front. A further 46 members of the UK armed forces were killed in Afghanistan over the course of the year as pressure grew on the government to agree a plan for withdrawal from a conflict in which UK forces had been fighting for longer than the Second World War.

### Political engagement

2011 was thus one of the most turbulent and momentous years in recent UK history on the political, economic and diplomatic fronts. But what influence, if any, did it have on political engagement? Did the economic crisis and the city riots impact on public levels of interest in politics? Did the sight of parliamentary select committees holding Rupert Murdoch and his newspaper executives to account for the phone hacking crisis improve public perceptions of the role and function of Parliament itself? Are the public more or less satisfied with the system of government or have these events had no discernible impact at all? And are members of the public more or less likely to get involved in politics themselves than in previous years? In short, did the tumultuous events of 2011 have any influence at all on how the public perceive politics and the political process?



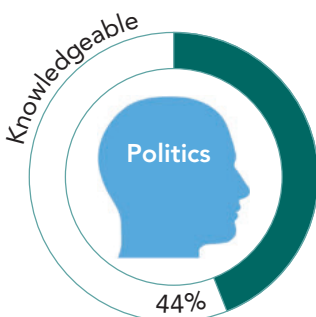
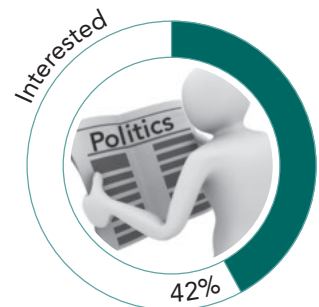
### 3. Disgruntled, disillusioned and disengaged

The last Audit study marked a high watermark in levels of public interest in and knowledge of the political process. The general election and the events surrounding the formation of the coalition government undoubtedly helped to drive that increase. Nonetheless, Audit 8 reflected on a growing sense of indifference to politics, noting that the greater levels of interest and perceived knowledge in an election year were not matched by greater satisfaction with or greater engagement in the political process beyond voting itself.

A year on, this indifference now seems to have hardened into something more serious: the trends in interest and knowledge are downward, dramatically so in some instances, suggesting a public that is turning away from national politics.

#### Turning away from politics?

The proportion of the public that say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics plummeted by 16 percentage points since 2011 and now stands at just 42%; the first time interest levels have dropped below 50% in the entire Audit series. Perceived knowledge of politics has also fallen to 44%, a decline of nine percentage points, and now at a level not seen since Audit 5 in 2008. More people than ever – 15% – claim to know 'nothing at all' about politics, marking a rise of four percentage points in a year.

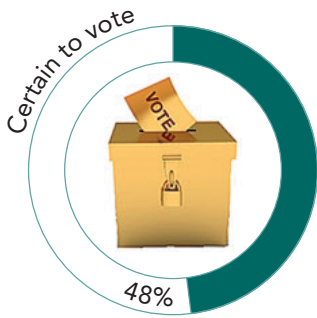


Reflecting this erosion in interest and knowledge, and despite it being a very eventful political year, the number of people who claim that they have 'discussed politics or political news with someone else' has also dropped to its lowest ever level at 35%; three percentage points below the previous low of 38% recorded in Audits 1 and 2, and seven percentage points below that recorded in Audit 8. Disengagement can also be detected in relation to participation. The number of people who report having signed a petition, once the most popular political activity

aside from voting, has declined by nine percentage points to 27%, the lowest level ever recorded in the Audit series.

Alarming, the number of people who, in the event of an immediate general election, say they would be certain to vote, has dropped by 10 percentage points to 48%. This is three percentage points lower than the previously recorded low in certainty to vote as found in



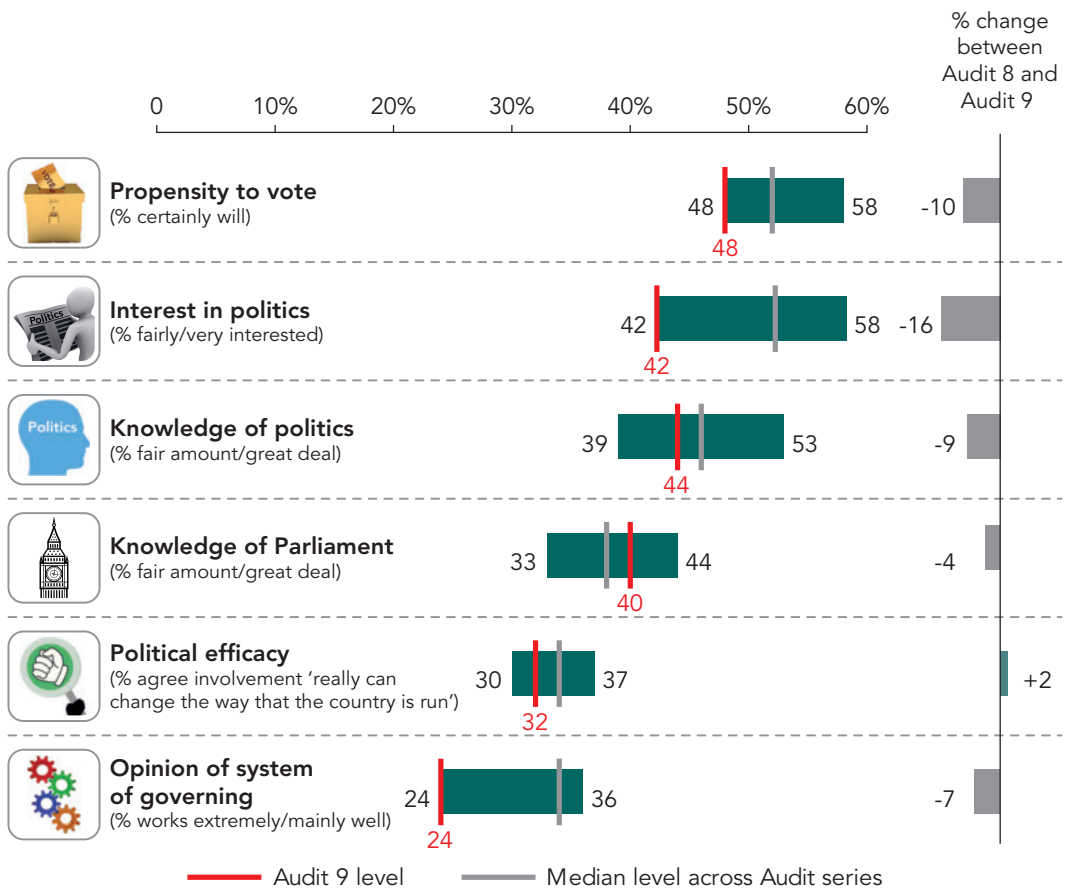


the first Audit. The number of people who say they are 'absolutely certain not to vote' has also increased, by six percentage points to 16%; the highest ever recorded level of intention not to vote, beating the previous high non-voting mark in Audit 7 by four percentage points.

Supporters of the Conservative party remain amongst the most certain to vote (72%) in the event of an immediate general election, but groups which have typically been characterised by lower levels of certainty – namely, C2s and the under-55s – are now even less inclined than previously to declare their intention to vote.

Figure 1, which shows the distribution of values for six indicator questions over the past nine years as well as the relative position of this latest Audit's values, illustrates this downward trend in engagement.

**Figure 1: Engagement levels – Audit comparisons**



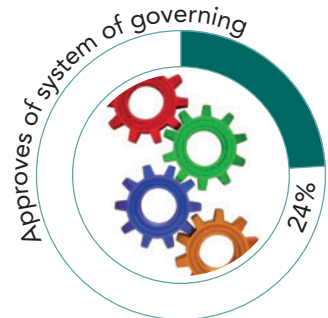
Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

With the exception of 'knowledge of Parliament', engagement levels this year have all fallen below the median for the Audit series, with propensity to vote and interest in politics demonstrating the most dramatic fall. Of these indicators, only political efficacy – the percentage of people believing that if they get involved they really can change the way the country is run – has seen a marginal increase this year (of two percentage points) but even this remains below the median level recorded across the Audit series.

While some degree of decline might be expected following the high levels of activity recorded in Audit 8, the decline in some of these measures is quite stark. This might prove to be a temporary blip but, if not, it could suggest that a more severe form of disengagement than anything previously seen during the Audit lifecycle is now setting in.

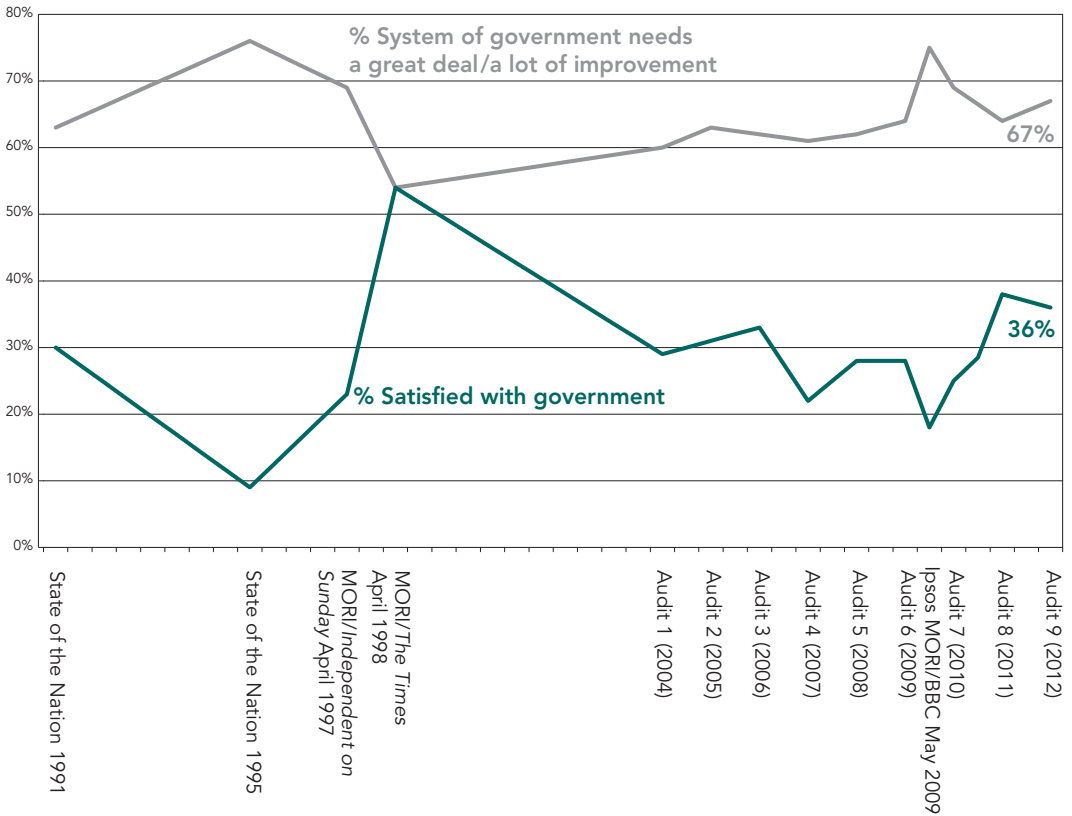
The fact that only 55% of the public claim to have voted at the last general election when of course we know that turnout was 10 percentage points higher at 65% hints, perhaps, at the underlying reasons for the public's political disengagement this year. Interestingly, the same proportion of people claim that they voted in the last local council election (56%) as claim they voted in the general election. Given that turnout in local council elections is generally at least 20% lower than in general elections, this is a particularly surprising finding.

That only 24% believe that the system of governing Britain either 'works extremely well and could not be improved' or 'could be improved in small ways but mainly works well' also suggests an underlying connection between deteriorating attitudes and disillusionment and dissatisfaction with coalition politics. For the first time in the Audit series – emphasising the downward trend in engagement levels – less than a quarter of the public think the system of governing works reasonably well. Indeed, there has been a marked drop of seven percentage points in the number of people who think this way since Audit 8. Consistently across the Audit series two-thirds of the public have said that the system of governing needs 'a great deal' or 'a lot of improvement': but that has now risen to three-quarters of the population.



In Audit 8 we noted that levels of satisfaction with the system of governing almost perfectly reflect levels of satisfaction with the incumbent government and the same remains true in this latest Audit. As Figure 2 shows, the increase this year in the number of people who believe that the system of government needs 'a great deal' or 'a lot of improvement' is mirrored by a decline in satisfaction with the government, albeit the increase in systemic dissatisfaction is a little steeper.

**Figure 2: Present system of governing vs. satisfaction with government**



Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B. The 'satisfied with government' figures are not drawn from the Audit survey. They are taken from MORI/Ipsos MORI polls undertaken in the same months as the Audit survey.

Looking below the headline figures, levels of interest and knowledge vary considerably along party lines, all of which combines to further suggest that the attrition in engagement levels may stem from considerable disillusionment with the outcome of the 2010 general election and the nature and direction of coalition politics that has governed the country in the months since.

Interest in politics among Liberal Democrat supporters has dropped dramatically – by 22 percentage points – in the last year. Those who voted for Labour or the Liberal Democrats in 2010 are now markedly less likely than Conservative voters to profess to be 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics (52% Labour voters, 53% Liberal Democrat voters, and 62% Conservative voters).

At the same time, perceived knowledge about politics amongst people who currently support the Conservative party outstrips knowledge levels amongst supporters of other parties: 61% of Conservative supporters claim to know at least 'a fair amount' (compared to 63% in Audit 8), compared with 45% of Labour supporters (down from 56% in Audit 8) and 46% of Liberal Democrat supporters (down from 61% in Audit 8).

Party allegiance also has a marked impact on the public's views of the current system of governing. The change of government in 2010 was accompanied by a remarkable reversal in approval levels, with Conservative supporters suddenly overtaking Liberal Democrat and Labour supporters in their willingness to describe the system as working 'extremely' or 'mainly' well. This year approval of the system of governing Britain has fallen by seven percentage points to 24% across the population (down from 31% in Audit 8), and the gap in approval rates between the two main parties has widened as increasing numbers of Conservative supporters (57%, up from 46% in Audit 8) have come to view the system favourably. Meanwhile, Labour supporters have become more sceptical, with approval falling from 30% in Audit 8 to just 17% today. People who support the Conservatives are currently more than three times as likely as Labour supporters to describe the system favourably (56% versus 17%). Being on the winning side evidently helps shape public attitudes to politics in the broadest sense if you have a clear political allegiance or preference.

The increased negativity of public attitudes in respect of key aspects of political engagement appears then to be linked, if not conclusively then certainly very strongly, to public attitudes to the current government, be that in relation to the nature of its formation and political shape, or the policies it is pursuing. Public attitudes can of course recover and we may see such a recovery over the course of the next few Audits through to the 2015 general election, particularly if the economic situation improves. Thus far, however, coalition politics does not appear to have been good for political engagement. Furthermore, when only a quarter of the population are satisfied with our system of governing, questions arise about the long-term capacity of that system to command public support and sustain confidence in the future.

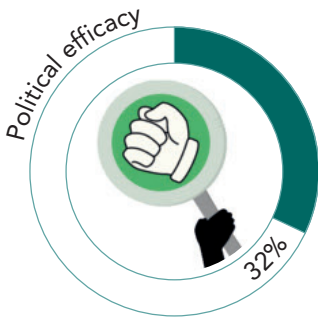
### The efficacy of involvement

One issue unites the public regardless of levels of interest, knowledge, and satisfaction with the system, and of differences in age, gender and social class: the degree to which people feel that getting involved in the political system is effective. In short, most members of the public simply do not think that if they, or people like themselves, were to get involved in politics they could have any impact on the way the country is run.

On this issue there is a clear convergence of attitudes across the population.<sup>2</sup> This sense of impotence in the face of national politics was also universally reflected in the 14 focus groups, involving 153 people, held across the country. Apart from voting almost no participants in the discussions thought that getting involved in politics would make any difference to anything at the national level. Words such as 'pointless' and 'waste of time' were regularly used. And other than voting, the participants felt they had no means to give voice to their views, individually and, more importantly, collectively. Participants conveyed at best only a very limited sense of control over the political elite and other sources of influence (media, big business, the European Union) within the political system and consequently felt that the only way they could make their views known was through the extreme actions of either striking or rioting. Whilst participants accepted that they might

<sup>2</sup> See chapter seven where the graphs depicting the demographic and sub-group differences in relation to 'Feel getting involved is effective' illustrate this convergence in relation to gender, age, and social class.

not necessarily get what they wanted from such action, they concluded that at least the politicians, media and wider public would know what they wanted, and where they stood on the issue. A number of participants, in different groups, were attracted to the notion of being 'more like the French in standing up for our rights' although they were generally dismissive of the likelihood and acceptability of these options in practice.



As in most years in the Audit lifecycle, just under a third (32%) of the public agrees that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run'. This would suggest that the downward trend in the public's sense of political efficacy may have stalled. However, while this remains essentially unchanged since last year's Audit 8 (30%), it is far below the proportion – at 56% – who feel that involvement in their community can bring

about change in their local area. This reinforces the sense that it is at the local rather than the national level that people feel the most potential to make a difference.

Although 56% of the public believe in the efficacy of local activity, however, only two-fifths (38%) say they are willing to actually become involved in local decision-making. Worryingly, particularly for advocates of the government's Big Society agenda, the desire for active involvement in the local community is, at 38%, less common this year than in previous Audits. Indeed, desire for involvement locally has declined by five percentage points in the last year, and by 10 percentage points since Audit 6. This downward trend can be accounted for by a significant shift in attitudes in the last year among C1s (a net fall of 23 percentage points), and those aged 65-74 (a net fall of 20 points). Looking more broadly across the last three years, desire for involvement locally has declined to the greatest degree among ABs (down 35 points net), 55-64 year olds (down 28 points net), 45-64 year olds and C1s (down 26 points net).

In contrast, at the national level, the proportion of people wishing to get involved in decision-making (33%) mirrors the proportion that believe that involvement can bring about change (32%). Even here, however, there has been a downward trend of -30 percentage points in the net figure (the proportion who agree, minus the proportion who disagree) of those who want to be involved in decision-making at the national level compared to Audit 8. Here, the annual decline can be accounted for by the changing perceptions of those aged 65-74 (down 29 points net), and 35-44 (down 28 points net). Across the last three years, however, the greatest change is discerned amongst ABs (down 33 points net) and those aged 45-54 (down 25 points net).

Interestingly, however, although the population as a whole do not seem ready and willing to participate actively in their local community, there are signs that people from BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds are embracing the concept of active local participation. The BME population has a stronger sense of the efficacy of local involvement: 21% 'strongly agree' that they can change their local area compared with 14% of the overall population who say the same. The BME respondents are also more likely than anyone else to feel that they can have influence over decision-making in the country as a whole (22%, compared

with 12% overall) and in their local area (4% feel they have 'a great deal of influence', compared with 2% overall).

### The effects of ageing on political engagement

The Audit has consistently shown that older age groups are more likely to be politically engaged than younger people; they are more interested in politics, feel more knowledgeable about it, are more likely to vote and more satisfied with the system of governing. Does this mean that people get more interested in politics as they get older, or have the lower levels of engagement found in young people in early Audits persisted as they have aged? With nine years between the first Audit and this year's survey, we can begin to examine this question.

It should be noted that this is not a cohort study – the Audit does not survey the same group of people year-on-year – which would provide a more conclusive link between ageing and engagement. However we can draw an indicative picture by:

- (i) comparing the views of those born in 1979-85 when they were surveyed in Audit 1 (as 18-24 year olds) with their views today;
- (ii) comparing the views of those born in 1979-85 now that they have reached the 25-34 age group with the 25-34 year olds from Audit 1;
- (iii) comparing the views of 18-24 year olds today with those of Audit 1.

To increase the sample sizes and thus the reliability of the comparisons, the data for the respective age groups from Audit 1 and Audit 2 has been combined, as has the data from Audit 8 and Audit 9.

#### (i) Children of the '80s: has growing up made them more engaged?

Figure 3 examines the responses of people born in 1979-85 to key engagement questions from Audit 1 and Audit 2 (when they were 18-24 years old and 19-25 years old, respectively) and compares them to the responses from Audit 8 and Audit 9 (when they were 25-31 years old and 26-32 years old respectively).

**Figure 3: Engagement of people born in 1979-85**

	<b>Audit 1 + 2 (2004/05)</b>	<b>Audit 8 + 9 (2011/12)</b>	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Interested in politics</b>	40%	42%	+2
<b>Feel knowledgeable about politics</b>	32%	41%	+9
<b>Certain to vote</b>	28%	42%	+14
<b>Discussed politics</b>	26%	29%	+3
<b>Signed a petition</b>	33%	30%	-3
<b>Agree that getting involved in politics can change things</b>	39%	32%	-7
<b>Satisfied with the system of governing</b>	38%	29%	-9

The clearest change is the increasing certainty to vote, with a greater proportion of those born 1979-85 certain to vote now than in Audits 1 and 2 (up 14 percentage points), and there is also an increase in the proportion who feel knowledgeable about politics (up nine points). However, there is no evidence of improvement in interest in politics or in the other two most common political activities (discussing politics and signing a petition). The one clear decline is the nine point fall in satisfaction with the system of governing – although this should be set in the context of a similar decline in satisfaction across all age groups on this question.

**(ii) '80s child vs. '80s teenager: how do they compare with their older peers?**

Figure 4 compares the responses of those born in 1979-85 with their immediate peer group (those born in 1972-78) at the same stage in life (aged 25-32), to see whether they have followed in the footsteps of their older peers.

**Figure 4: Comparison with older peers**

	Born in 1972-78	Born in 1979-85	
	Audit 1 + 2 (2004/05)	Audit 8 + 9 (2011/12)	Difference
Interested in politics	44%	42%	-2
Feel knowledgeable about politics	36%	41%	+5
Certain to vote	33%	42%	+9
Discussed politics	33%	29%	-4
Signed a petition	35%	30%	-5
Agree that getting involved in politics can change things	34%	32%	-2
Satisfied with the system of governing	34%	29%	-5

This data demonstrates that those born in 1979-85 have caught up to their peer group, in terms of political engagement, over the course of the seven years that separates them. There is no statistically significant difference in the responses to any of the questions, except on the certainty to vote measure, where there is a notably better response (nine points higher).

**(iii) 18-25 year olds: then and now**

Figure 5 compares the responses of 18-24 year olds from Audit 1 and 19-25 year olds from Audit 2, with the 18-24 year olds from Audit 8 and 19-25 year olds from Audit 9. To look at it another way, it is comparing the responses of those people born in 1979-85 with the responses of those born in 1986-92, when both groups were at the same life stage.

Figure 5: 18-25 year olds: then and now

	Born in 1979-85	Born in 1986-92	
	Audit 1 + 2 (2004/05)	Audit 8 + 9 (2011/12)	Difference
Interested in politics	40%	39%	-1
Feel knowledgeable about politics	32%	34%	+2
Certain to vote	28%	27%	-1
Discussed politics	26%	27%	+1
Signed a petition	33%	23%	-10
Agree that getting involved in politics can change things	39%	31%	-8
Satisfied with the system of governing	38%	21%	-17

This shows that on many of the Audit measures there is no discernable difference between the views of young people now compared with young people in 2004/05. However, there has been a noticeable decline in satisfaction with the system of governing (down 17 percentage points) and a smaller drop of eight points in the proportion who agree that getting involved in politics can make a difference, which, as noted above, is common to all age groups. Young people are also now less likely to sign a petition than in the past, again a reflection of a decline in the proportion of people who say they have signed a petition over the course of the Audit series.

These three forms of comparison suggest that as young people (18-24 year olds) age, they do become more politically engaged as measured by the Audit. The 18-24 year olds from Audit 1 are more engaged now than they were previously, and have similar responses to their older peers at the same stage of life. It is also evident that this improvement is not the result of a general, across-the-board improvement in engagement levels, as the engagement profile of 18-24 year olds in Audits 8 and 9 looks similar to those of Audits 1 and 2. The most noticeable areas of improvement are in the proportion of respondents saying that they know either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics and the proportion who say they are certain to vote in the event of an immediate general election.

There are negative trends apparent as well, particularly around an increasing dissatisfaction with the system of governing, but also with the proportion signing a petition or believing that getting involved with politics is effective. These trends, however, are mirrored by a general downward movement across all age groups on these measures, suggesting that they are not attributable to ageing alone.





## 4. The engagement indicators and survey results

This chapter presents the results of the political engagement indicators explored in this year's Audit in relation to knowledge and interest, action and participation, and efficacy and satisfaction. It compares the results with previous years and, where marked or interesting changes have occurred, provides a breakdown of the data in relation to gender, age, social class, ethnicity and party political persuasion.

### A. Knowledge and interest

Audit 8, conducted in the wake of the 2010 general election, saw the public's interest in politics and knowledge of the subject reach their highest levels since the start of the Audit series. A year on, both measures have declined dramatically. The proportion of the public expressing an interest in politics has fallen to the lowest level recorded so far in the Audit series, whilst knowledge of politics has also waned, returning to levels last seen in 2008. Perceived knowledge of Parliament has, in contrast, remained stable.<sup>3</sup>

#### Interest in politics

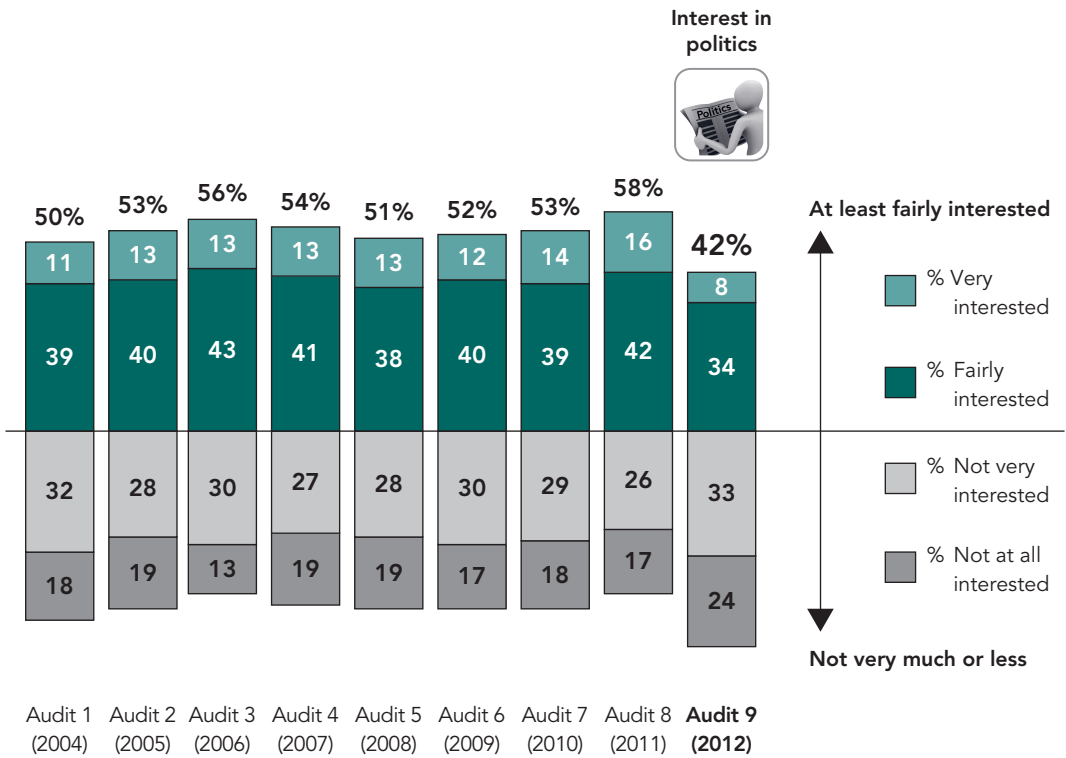
Previous Audit data has shown that interest in politics tends to rise in the immediate aftermath of a general election (see Figure 6). In most years, just over five in 10 people claim to be at least 'fairly interested' in politics. Interest rose to 56% following the 2005 election (Audit 3), returned to the base level in the years that followed, before rising again after the 2010 election to reach its peak at 58% (Audit 8).

This year, however, interest has not simply subsided but fallen to an unprecedented level, with just 42% describing themselves as either 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics. This, alongside the 10 percentage point drop in the proportion who feel 'certain to vote' in an immediate general election, might suggest a strong sense of disillusionment related to the outcome of the last election and the subsequent political developments associated with the coalition government.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to Audit 8, the question regarding knowledge of Parliament referred to 'Westminster Parliament' rather than the 'UK Parliament'. The data from Audit 9 is therefore not strictly comparable to data collected in Audits 1-7, though comparison with previous years can provide a general indication of changes in knowledge levels over time.

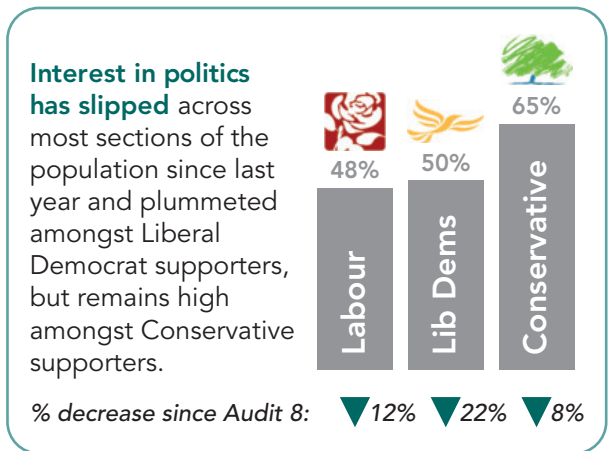
Figure 6: Interest in politics

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?

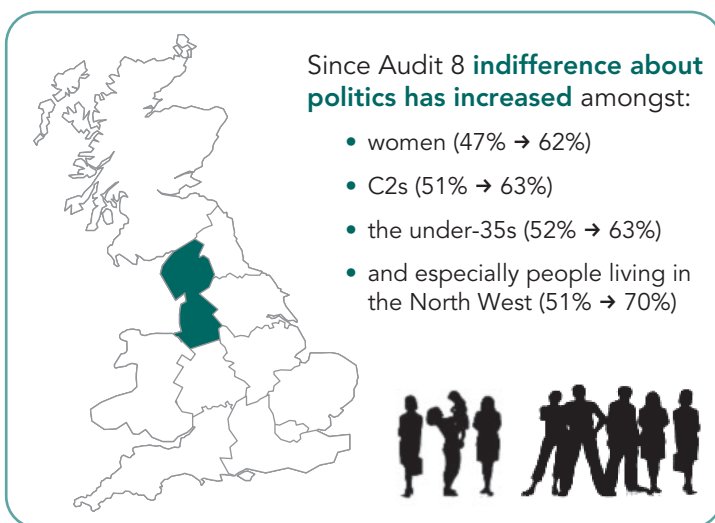


Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

Disengagement seems to be occurring along partisan political lines. While three-fifths (62%) of people who voted for the Conservative party in the 2010 general election profess at least a fair amount of interest in politics, only half of those who reported voting for Labour (52%) or the Liberal Democrats (53%) said the same. Interest levels are substantially higher amongst people who support the Conservative party than amongst Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters; and whereas the proportion of Conservative supporters professing interest in politics remains stable compared to last year, supporters of the Liberal Democrats have experienced a substantial slump in interest (down 22 percentage points).



As in previous Audits, an interest in politics is more commonly reported by people with a degree or higher qualification and those in the AB social grades (68% and 62% respectively, compared with 42% overall). Most demographic sub-groups have experienced a decline in interest since Audit 8. Then, at a time when interest in politics was at its height across the UK, women, people in social grade C2, younger people and those living in the North West were more likely than average to feel indifferent about politics. Interest amongst all these groups has now waned further this year; even higher proportions of these groups now say they are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested in politics.



Interest also fell amongst white respondents (to 42% from 60% in Audit 8). Historically, white respondents have consistently been more likely to express interest in politics than have respondents from BME backgrounds. But a consequence of the falling interest amongst white respondents is the disappearance of any difference in interest levels by ethnicity. Almost equal levels of people from white and BME backgrounds now say they have at least a fair amount of interest in politics (42% and 44%, respectively).

Although interest levels have not increased they have not declined uniformly across all groups. For example, in the last two years, the proportion of 55-64 year olds saying they were at least 'fairly interested' in politics has remained effectively unchanged and above the average. Two groups that have consistently been amongst the least inclined to profess an interest in politics are people in social grades DE and those from BME backgrounds: in both cases, there has been stability since Audit 6 in the proportion professing an interest in politics (36% for those in social grades DE, and ranging between 39% and 44% among people from BME backgrounds). The convergence between white and BME respondents, and between classes may be the start of a long-term trend or a one-off occurrence. If the former, it would suggest that there may be a plateau below which levels of interest are unlikely to fall.

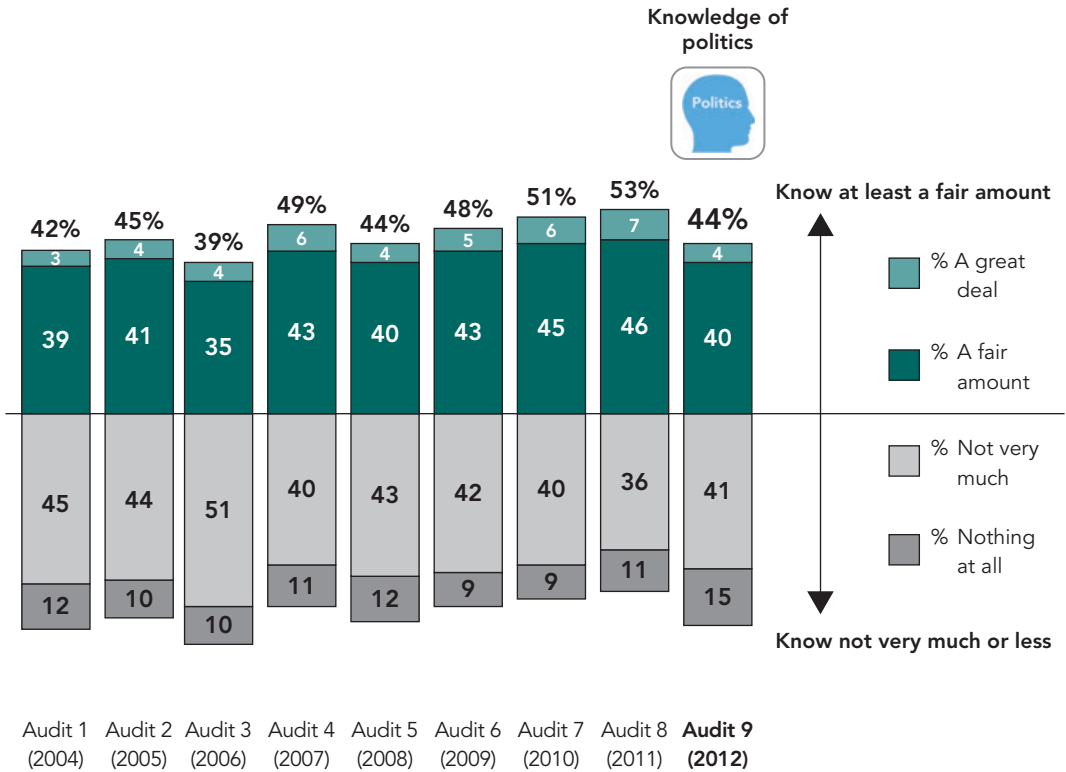
### Perceived knowledge of politics

Over two-fifths of the British public (44%) claim they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics, with 4% describing themselves as knowing 'a great deal' about the subject. While the proportions in both categories have decreased since Audit 8, knowledge levels remain broadly in line with those reported earlier in the Audit series (see Figure 7). The exception to this is the number of people who claim they know 'nothing at all' about politics, with

more people now than ever before claiming to lack any knowledge (15%). Around a quarter of 18-24 year olds (26%), people in social grades DE (22%) and people living in Scotland (22%) make this claim. While similar proportions were recorded last year amongst these groups, Audit 9 sees an increase in the proportions who know ‘nothing at all’ in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside (25% and 21%, respectively, up from 10% and 9% in Audit 8). White respondents are also more likely now than they were in 2010 to claim to have no knowledge about politics (15%, up from 11% in Audit 8).

**Figure 7: Perceived knowledge of politics**

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



Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

As in previous years, claimed knowledge of politics is most widespread amongst men, people aged 55-64, and ABs (52%, 60% and 64%, respectively, compared with an average of 44% saying they know at least ‘a fair amount’ about politics). However, even within two of these groups there has been a decrease in the proportions claiming at least ‘a fair amount’ of knowledge; the proportion of men and ABs making this claim has dropped by 10 and nine percentage points respectively since Audit 8.

The last time the Audit series recorded a fall in knowledge levels was in the year following the 2005 general election (Audit 3). A similar decrease in knowledge levels after the 2010

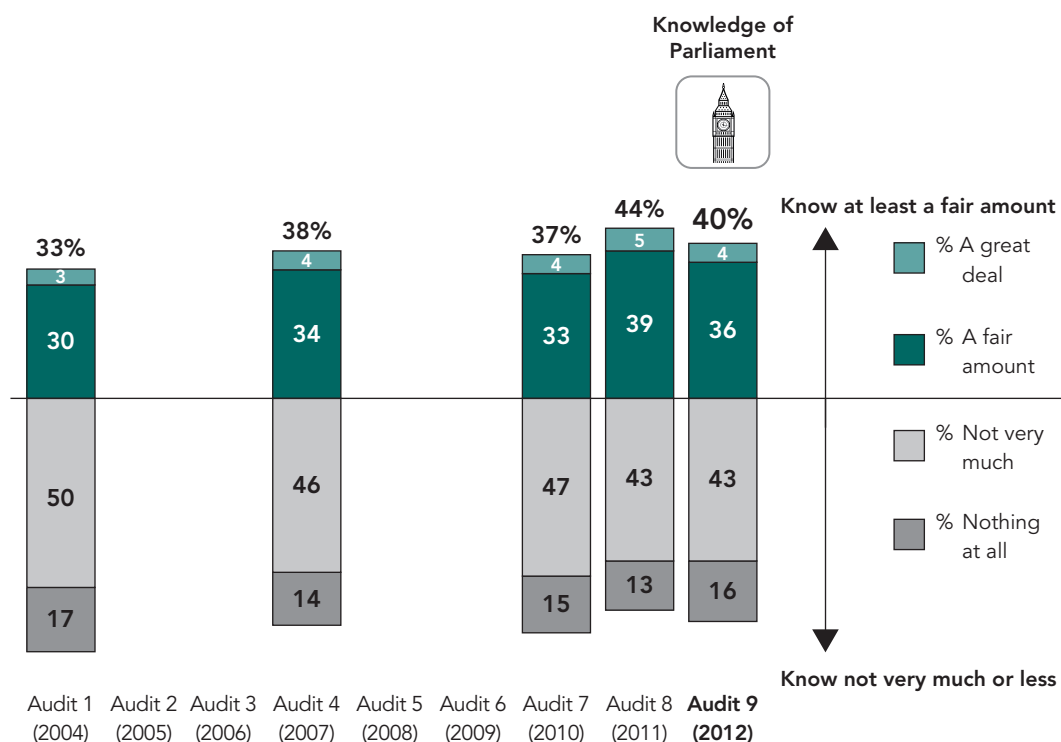
general election did not manifest itself as might have been expected in Audit 8, but seems to be emerging now. The exact cause of this decline cannot be discerned from the data, but may, in part, be linked to the public's waning interest in politics. The two measures are aligned fairly closely: for example, people who have no interest at all in politics are more than three times as likely as the average to claim to know 'nothing at all' about it (55%, compared with 15% overall). Declining levels of knowledge may also be associated with the impact of one's political preference on engagement levels. Hence, while knowledge levels remain high amongst Conservative supporters (61% compared to 63% in Audit 8) they have fallen amongst Labour supporters (from 56% in Audit 8 to 45% in Audit 9) and Liberal Democrat supporters (from 61% in Audit 8 to 46% in Audit 9).

### Perceived knowledge of Parliament

Over a third of the public (36%) claim to know 'a fair amount' about the UK Parliament, and a further 4% feel they know 'a great deal' about it. These proportions reflect the findings in last year's Audit. Indeed, aside from minor fluctuations, the proportion – around four in 10 – claiming to have a sound knowledge of Parliament has remained broadly stable since Audit 4.

**Figure 8: Perceived knowledge of Parliament**

**Q How much, if anything, do you feel you know about the UK Parliament?**

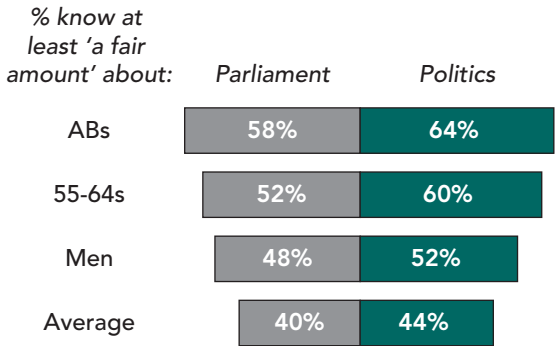


In previous years, the proportion of the public reporting at least ‘a fair amount’ of knowledge about politics has always been higher than the proportion saying the same specifically about Parliament. However, since knowledge about politics has fallen this year, this difference is much less apparent (44% compared with 40%).

Knowledge levels about politics and Parliament do not substantially differ within any individual demographic sub-group either. Level of education clearly has a bearing on knowledge levels, with more than two-thirds of those who hold less than an A-level (or equivalent) qualification feeling they know ‘not very much’ or ‘nothing at all’ about Parliament (68%, compared with 59% overall). Men, 55-64 year olds, and people in social grades A and B are the most likely to say they have, at minimum, ‘a fair amount’ of knowledge. This degree of knowledge is also widespread among people who report having voted in the last election (51%), and is more common among readers of broadsheets (68%) than readers of either mid-market newspapers (51%) or tabloids (31%).

**Knowledge of politics and knowledge of Parliament are fairly closely aligned.**

The same three groups have above average levels of perceived knowledge in both subjects.



**B. Action and participation**

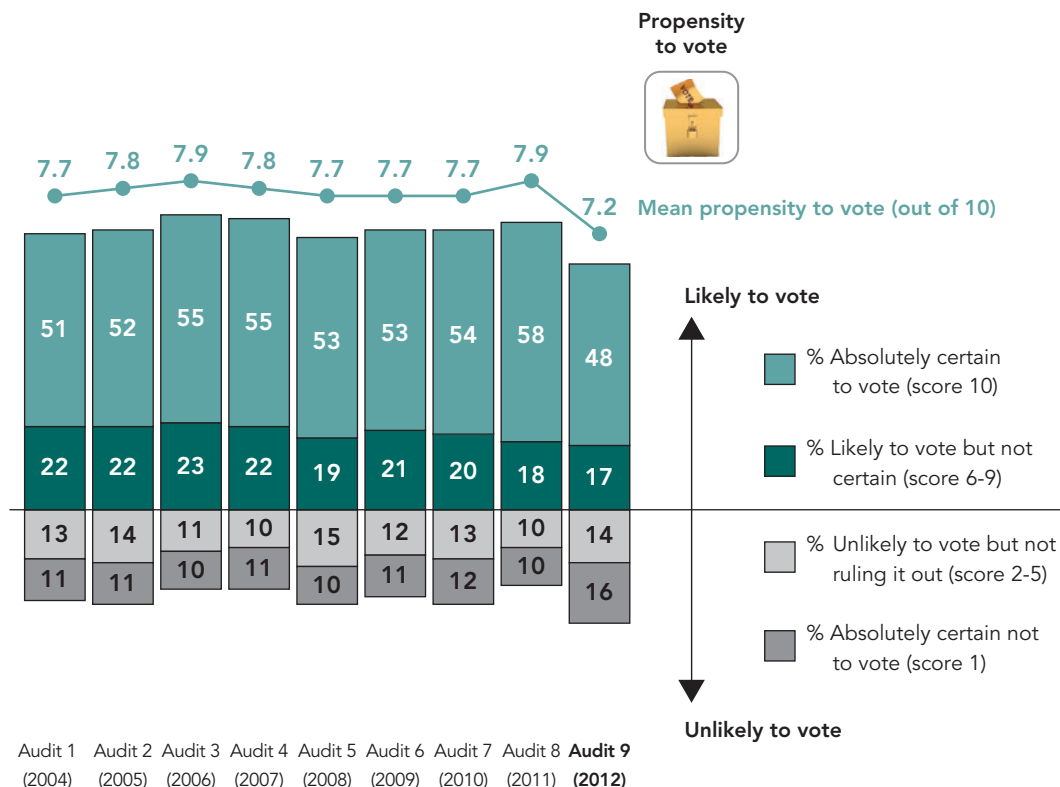
There has been a decline in this Audit in most measures of political and civic activity, including the propensity to vote and reported prevalence of voting.

**Propensity to vote**

Almost half of the public (48%) say they would be certain to vote in an immediate general election. This represents a notable decline from the 58% level recorded in Audit 8 and a return to the lower levels recorded in the early stages of the Audit series (see Figure 9). Despite the similarity to Audits 1 and 2 in the proportion who are certain to vote, the public’s mean propensity to vote is markedly lower this year than it was seven or eight years ago (7.2 out of 10, compared to 7.7-7.9 out of 10 in previous Audits).

Figure 9: Propensity to vote

Q How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election?



Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

Certainty to vote is most commonly expressed by people inclined to support the Conservative party (72%), people in social grades A and B (65%) and those living in Wales (63%). The intention to vote is also prevalent amongst people who voted in 2010 (69%, compared with 10% of non-voters), though not every category of voter is equally likely to feel this way. While 74% of people who voted for the Conservative party intend to vote again, only 59% of Liberal Democrat voters say they will do so – an indication perhaps of the scale of their disillusion with the post-election outcome and the direction of the coalition government.

Certainty to vote increases with age, rising from two in 10 among 18-24 year olds to seven in 10 amongst those aged 75 or above. A broadly similar pattern was apparent last year, but whereas the biggest discrepancy in levels of certainty to vote in Audit 8 lay between people aged 45 or above and younger people, in Audit 9 it lies between the over- and under-55s (70% versus 34%). Historically, younger age groups have been consistently less inclined to say they are certain to vote; in Audit 9 the proportion of younger age groups certain to vote has fallen further, while the proportion of over-55s who are certain to vote has remained stable.



Certainty to vote among female voters has declined considerably from 59% in Audit 8 to just 45% in this latest Audit. It has been asserted that the coalition government's policies are having a disproportionately negative effect on women and that the government consequently has a problem with women voters. A 14 point fall in likely intention to vote would seem to bear this out.

Similarly there has been a decline in certainty to vote among white respondents, down to 49% from the 60% recorded in Audit 8. The gap in certainty to vote between white and BME respondents remains significant however, with only 37% of BME members of the public certain to vote in comparison.

Approximately one in six people (16%) report being absolutely certain *not* to vote in the event of an immediate general election. Unsurprisingly, this claim is more common among people whose responses to the survey indicate their indifference to politics: those who say they are 'not at all' interested in politics (43%), have little in the way of knowledge of it (46%), did not vote in the last election (42%), or did not express an allegiance towards any party (65%). People living in Scotland are also more inclined (21%) not to vote than the average respondent, although this may, of course, be linked to an antagonistic relationship with the Westminster Parliament rather than any particular objection to voting *per se*.

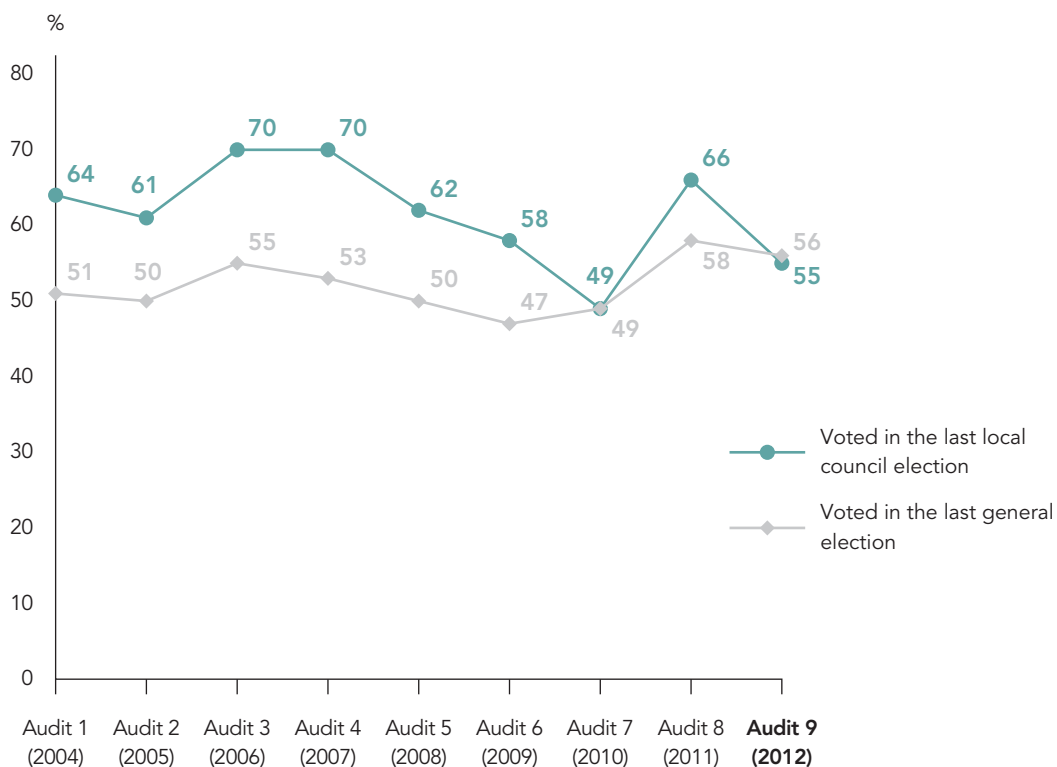
### Political and civic activities<sup>4</sup>

Previous Audits have found that the frequency with which political and civic activities are undertaken is associated, at least in part, with the time and commitment required to carry them out. Once again, this is reflected in the prevalence of the top two activities this year: voting in a council election (56%) or a general election (55%). Episodic forms of activity, requiring a one-off effort every few years, they are therefore relatively easy to undertake and sufficiently memorable for most respondents to recall at the time of the interview; by contrast, fewer people choose to undertake activities which require a more sustained input of effort or time.

Figures 10, 11 and 12 display the proportions of the public who report undertaking 13 of the most common activities during the Audit series. Only activities that have been undertaken by at least one in 10 members of the public in recent years are shown. The charts break these down into three levels of frequency of undertaking, ranging from most frequent (Figure 10) to least frequent (Figure 12).

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<sup>4</sup> The data in this section is based on a survey taken in January 2012 due to difficulties with the method utilised to ask these questions in the original survey in December 2011. See Appendix A for further information.

**Figure 10: Frequency of voting in the last general and local council elections**

Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

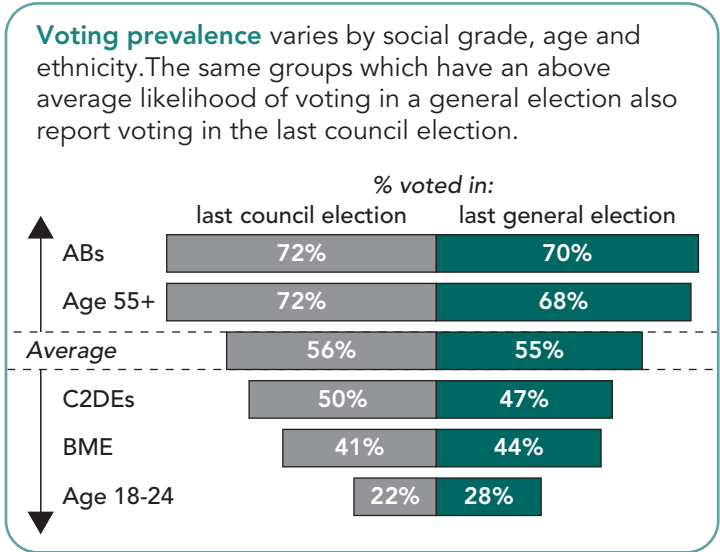
Almost three-fifths of the public (56%) report having voted in the last local council election. This proportion is effectively unchanged since Audit 8 (58%). However, fewer people this year report having voted in the last general election than had been the case last year. This is despite the fact that respondents are urged to look back over ‘the last two to three years’ – a period covering the 2010 general election, when turnout was 65% – and suggests that a considerable proportion of voters are either unconsciously forgetting or actively deciding not to report that they voted in May 2010.<sup>5</sup>

It is also worth noting the similarity between the proportions that report voting in a general and local election. Such a convergence last occurred in Audit 7, after a sharp fall in the number of people saying they had voted in a general election (from 58% in Audit 6 to 49% in Audit 7). Since Audit 7 was conducted four and a half years after the 2005 general election, voters may justifiably have failed to recall casting a ballot – and the question itself only asks for activities undertaken in the last ‘two or three years’, and some will have recognised that election as being outside that timescale. However, the decline in this year’s numbers cannot be so easily explained.

<sup>5</sup> In a separate question towards the end of the Poll (see Appendix B), respondents were asked which party they had voted for in the 2010 general election. The responses for this question did not match up precisely with those given earlier in the survey: 36% of those who did not report voting in a general election over the past two to three years later admitted having voted in 2010.

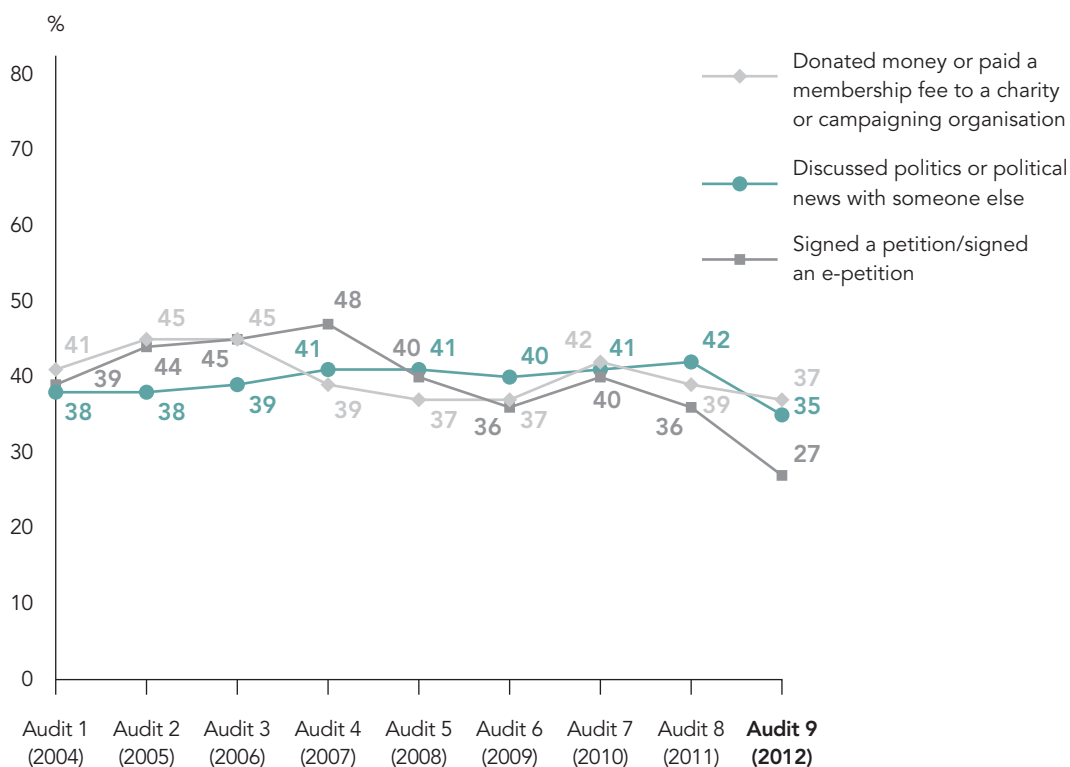
The tendency to vote in local or general elections varies by demographic characteristics, with ABC1s and older groups more likely to vote in both types of election, and people from BME backgrounds less likely to vote in either. Notably, social grade and ethnicity are key differentiators in the prevalence of most of the other activities respondents were asked about. Prevalence also varies across regions, with Londoners consistently less likely than the average to engage in several of the more popular activities.

Figure 11 shows the frequency of three more activities, which typically are carried out by two-fifths or more of the public. The most widespread activity of the three is donating or paying a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation (37%). The prevalence of this activity has fluctuated mildly over the past nine years, peaking just before election years (Audit 2 and Audit 7) and waning thereafter. No change has



taken place this year, compared with Audit 8. In contrast, the proportion of respondents who say they have discussed politics or political news with someone they know has fallen from a previously stable level of around four in 10 to just 35% in Audit 9. This is somewhat surprising given the events that have marked the year, but is possibly linked to the declining interest that the public now feels in politics.

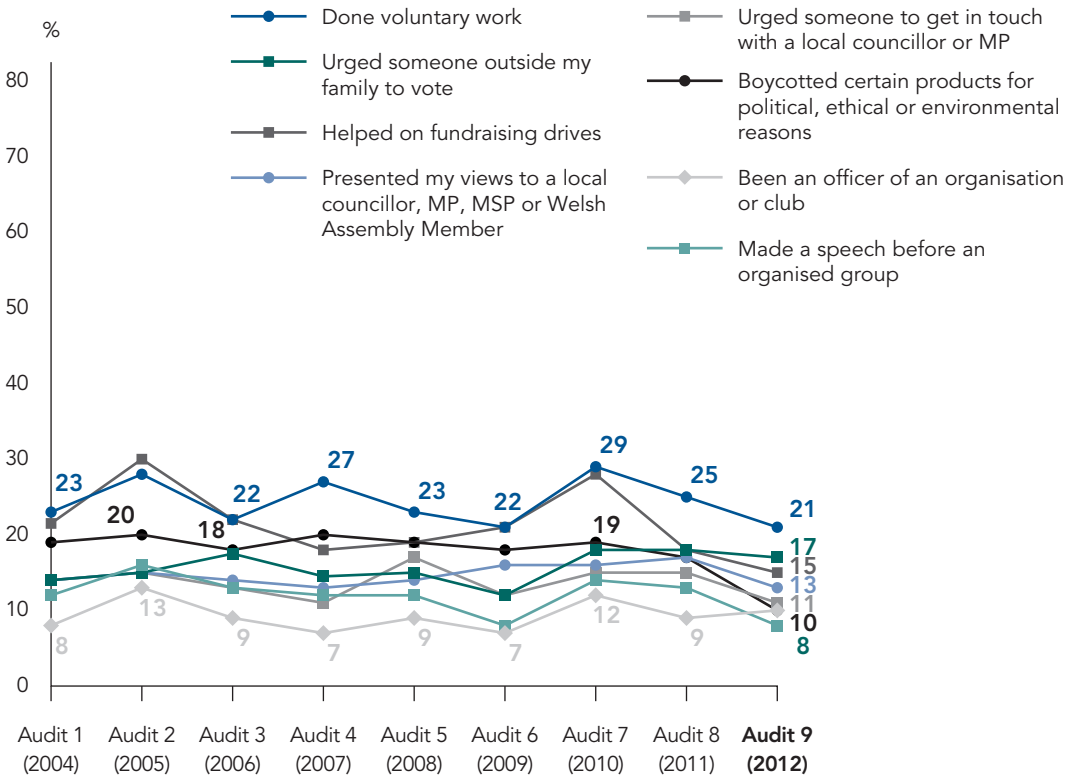
The proportion of the public that say they have signed a petition is also lower now than ever before, despite the addition of 'e-petitions' to the question to remind respondents that government can now be petitioned online through the <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/> website. This fall to 27% is part of a longer-term decline that began in Audit 5. People aged 65-74 and people in London are amongst the least likely to say they supported a petition (20% and 12%, respectively).

**Figure 11: Frequency of donating money, discussing politics and signing a petition**

Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

The frequency of a range of other activities, which are typically undertaken by between one in 10 and three in 10 people, is shown in Figure 12. For example, the number who claim to have boycotted products for political, ethical or environmental reasons has dropped to the lowest ever level at 10%, six percentage points lower than in Audit 8 and nine percentage points lower than was recorded in the first Audit. Since many of these activities tend to require greater commitment they are undertaken by fewer people; hence they appear less volatile than the activities discussed above. Nevertheless, there are prominent peaks in the proportions undertaking fundraising, which appear to be associated with election periods (reaching 30% prior to the 2005 election, and 27% before the 2010 election). There has also been a striking decline over the past two years in the proportion of the public undertaking voluntary work: this has dropped by eight percentage points to 21% from 29% in Audit 7. This direction of change bodes ill for the success of the government's Big Society agenda, which is highly dependent on a renaissance in voluntary activity.

**Figure 12: Frequency of undertaking a range of other civic activities**



Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

There are variations in the prevalence of voluntary work by region and according to respondents' demographic characteristics. The likelihood of participating in fundraising activities, on the other hand, barely varies at all across demographic sub-groups, though it is noticeably less common amongst those aged 75 or above (9% compared with 15% overall).

Aside from the activities mentioned above, a number of other options offered to respondents tend to be performed only by around

**Higher levels of volunteering** are reported in Scotland (28%) and in Yorkshire and Humberside (29%), and **lower levels** in London (11%), the South East (17%) and Wales (14%).

Volunteering is more common amongst 18-24 year olds (30%) and people with a degree or higher qualification (33%).

■ Above average
 ■ Below average

one in 20 (or fewer) members of the public each year. These include expressing a political opinion online (6%), attending political meetings (4%), or demonstrations, pickets or marches (4%), writing a letter to an editor (3%) or taking an active part in a political campaign (2%).

### C. Efficacy and satisfaction

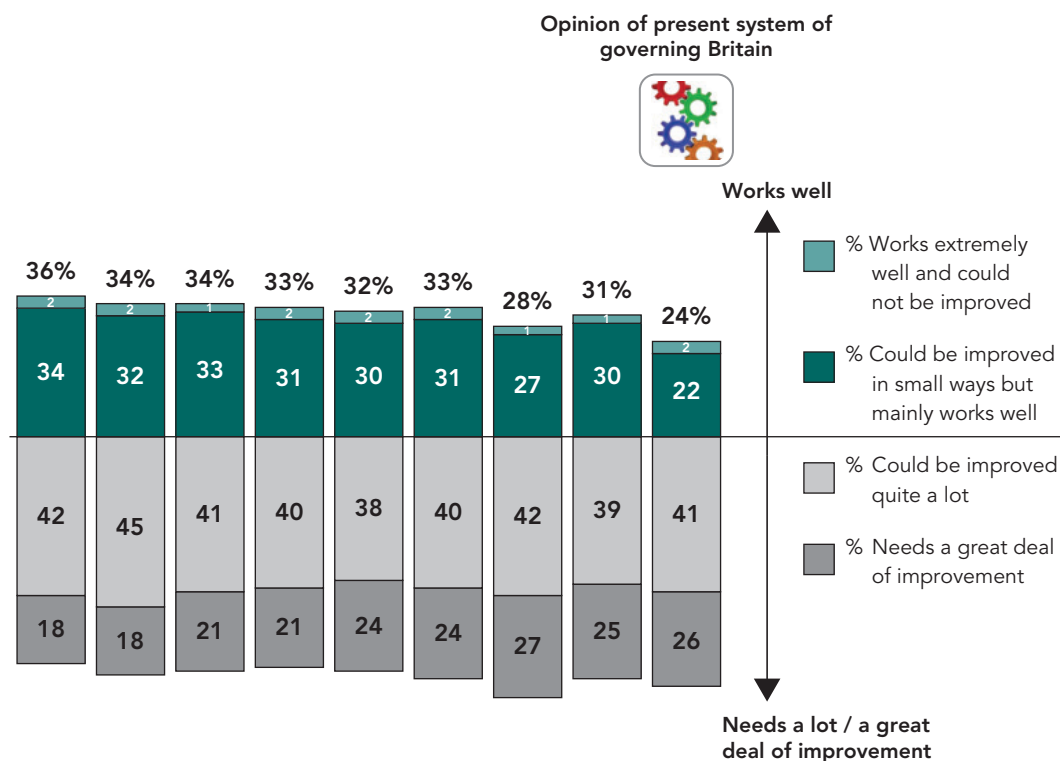
The proportion of the public who feel favourable towards the current system of governing Britain has fallen noticeably this year, leaving a two-third majority with the sense that the system is in need of 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of improvement.

#### Present system of governing

A quarter of the public (24%) feel that the present system of governing Britain works 'extremely' or 'mainly' well, continuing the downward trend in contentment that has been apparent since the start of the Audit series (see Figure 13). Overall satisfaction with the system of government now stands 12 points lower than it did in the first Audit.

Figure 13: Present system of governing

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



Audit 1 (2004) Audit 2 (2005) Audit 3 (2006) Audit 4 (2007) Audit 5 (2008) Audit 6 (2009) Audit 7 (2010) Audit 8 (2011) **Audit 9 (2012)**

Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

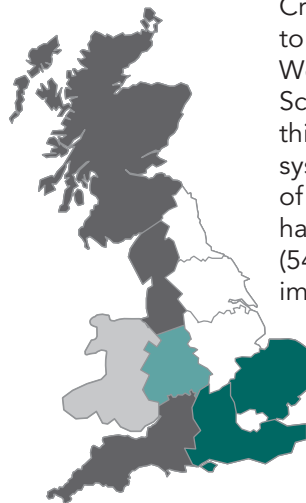
In the last Audit, the change of government following the May 2010 general election was accompanied by a dramatic change in levels of approval by supporters of different political parties. Almost half of those who expressed support for the Conservative party (46%) described the system of governing Britain as working 'extremely' or 'mainly' well, overtaking approval rates by Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters (30% and 33%, respectively). This year the gap in satisfaction with the system of governing between supporters of the two main parties has widened to 39 percentage points (56% approval among Conservative supporters, and 17% among Labour supporters). This disparity is also reflected in those who report having actually voted for the Conservative and Labour parties at the 2010 general election (50% and 16%, respectively), though the difference is slightly less pronounced, reflecting the fact that voters are more inclined than the population as a whole to look upon the system favourably (30%, compared with 24% overall). Intriguingly, however, given the changes in their attitudes detected elsewhere, satisfaction with the system of government among Liberal Democrat supporters has remained relatively stable at 29% (compared to 33% in Audit 8).

Views on the current system have shifted among several demographic sub-groups. Over the course of the last year, the perceptions of BME respondents and those aged 35-64 years old have become less favourable. Fewer BMEs are now prepared to describe the system as performing 'extremely' or 'mainly' well (at 21%, down from 37% in Audit 8), and the proportion of people in the 35 to 64 year old age bracket who say the current system is in need of 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of improvement has risen by 10 percentage points to 73% compared to 63% in Audit 8. In contrast, 18-24 year olds have become less critical of the system. The views of this age group are now in step with those of the overall population, while people aged 65 and over – who previously viewed the system no differently to the rest of the population – have now become the group most likely to describe the system as working 'extremely' well (4% compared with 2% overall).

**Approval of the system of governing Britain**

varies from region to region. Around a third of people living in the South East (31%) and East of England (31%) look upon the system favourably. Thirty-six per cent of those living in the West Midlands – an area with a disproportionately large number of Conservative supporters – say the system works at least 'mainly' well.

Critics are more likely to be found in the South West, North West and Scotland, where over a third (34%) believe the system needs a great deal of improvement. Over half of those in Wales (54%) say it could be improved 'quite a lot'.



The dissatisfaction evidenced last year in Yorkshire and Humberside and the North East has dissipated.

- Works 'extremely' well above average
- Works 'mainly' well above average
- 'Could be improved quite a lot' above average
- 'Needs a great deal of improvement' above average

Approval rates vary by social grade, with two-fifths of people in social grades AB (40%) feeling that the current system of governing Britain works well (compared to 28% of C1s and 18% of C2DEs). Rates also vary by gender (27% of men approve, compared with 21% of women) and by geographical region.

Two-fifths of people who lack any interest in politics (41%) express dissatisfaction with the current system. Since lack of interest is partly linked to social disadvantage, it is not surprising to find extreme disapproval of the system expressed by a substantial proportion of people in social grades DE (33%) and people who lack internet access (35%). Nevertheless, it would be wrong to attribute criticism of the system solely to an indifference towards politics. Extreme discontent is equally high amongst people with 'a great deal' of knowledge of politics as those with no knowledge at all (39% each), suggesting that in some cases it is people who understand the system who would most like to see it change.

### Perceived political efficacy

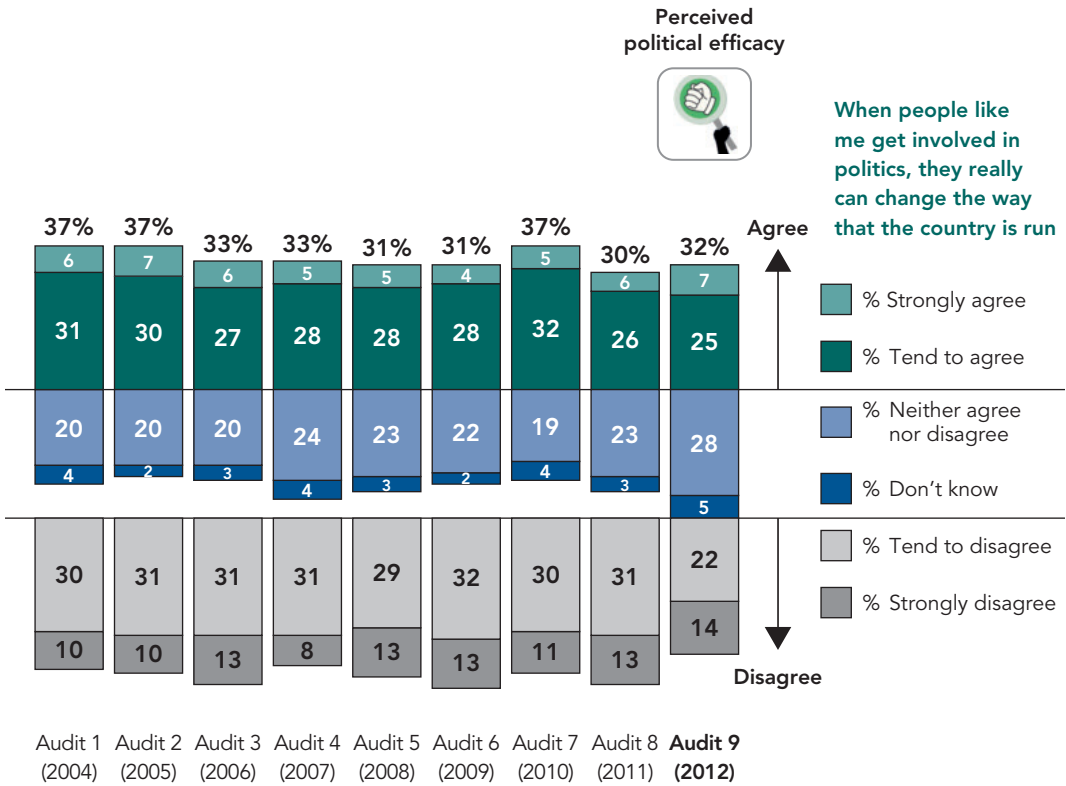
Throughout most of the Audit series, just under a third of the public has agreed with the view that participation in the political arena by themselves or people like them can have a discernible effect on how the country is run (see Figure 14). This trend continues in this latest Audit with 32% agreeing that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run'.

Historically, the trend has been interrupted only three times, in Audits 1, 2 and 7, when perceived efficacy rose to 36% or 37%. Since two of these Audits were carried out immediately prior to election years, it is possible that the peaks owed partly to a heightened sense of empowerment associated with the potential to wield the vote in the general election. This suggestion finds some support in the relatively high levels of agreement this year amongst respondents who claimed to be voters: 37% of those who voted in the last election agreed that their involvement could change the country (compared with 24% of non-voters) and 38% of people who say they are likely to vote said the same (compared with 20% of those who declared themselves unlikely to vote).



Figure 14: Perceived national political efficacy

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?



Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

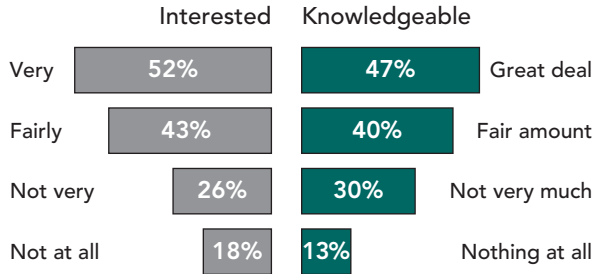
There is wide recognition amongst supporters of the Liberal Democrat party that they have the potential to influence the government and shape the course of events. Almost half of those respondents who claim to be Liberal Democrat supporters (49%) believe that their involvement can help change the way the country is run, compared with 32% of the entire population who claim the same. Nonetheless, they do not seem to feel that this potential is currently being realised as they are no more likely than the rest of the population to say they have ‘some’ or ‘a great deal’ of influence over decision-making in the country (13%).

As in previous Audits, BME respondents (43%) are significantly more likely than white respondents (31%) to believe their involvement can make a difference in the way the country is run. Where people live also makes a difference to attitudes in relation to efficacy: there are above average levels of perceived efficacy in the West Midlands (39%) and the devolved nations (45% in Wales and 38% in Scotland) but no longer in London and the North East where it was particularly strong in the last Audit. In contrast, people in the South West (25%), and, to a lesser extent, C2DEs (16%) strongly disagree with the notion that getting involved can make a difference compared to the overall level of the population – 14% – that say the same.

Compared to the general public, people who believe that the current system of governing Britain needs 'a great deal of improvement' are more likely to have an extreme view of political efficacy, with twice as many as the average strongly agreeing that involvement can bring about change (13%, compared to 7% overall), and even more feeling that the opposite is true (24% strong disagreement, compared with 14% overall). Moreover, perceived political efficacy increases alongside political interest and knowledge.

**Perceived political efficacy** was highest amongst people who were most interested or knowledgeable about politics, and fell as interest or knowledge declined.

*% agree involvement can bring change to the way the country is run:*





## 5. Perceptions of Parliament

After an eventful period of parliamentary activity since the general election, to what extent, if any, is the downward trend in national engagement reflected in attitudes to and perceptions of Parliament? To what extent do the public feel knowledgeable about Parliament, understand and prioritise its functions, and consider it relevant to their daily lives?

In focus groups held across the country participants regularly reflected on Parliament as a 'school playground' or 'nursery' and MPs as 'childish' in their behaviour. When asked why they had described Parliament as a 'classroom' one participant reflected that it was because 'of the way they behave a lot of the time, you know, shouting out. Much of it seems quite immature.' Others considered Parliament in the context of entertainment: the 'yah-boo' nature of politics in the Chamber was seen as a form of theatre or comedy show.

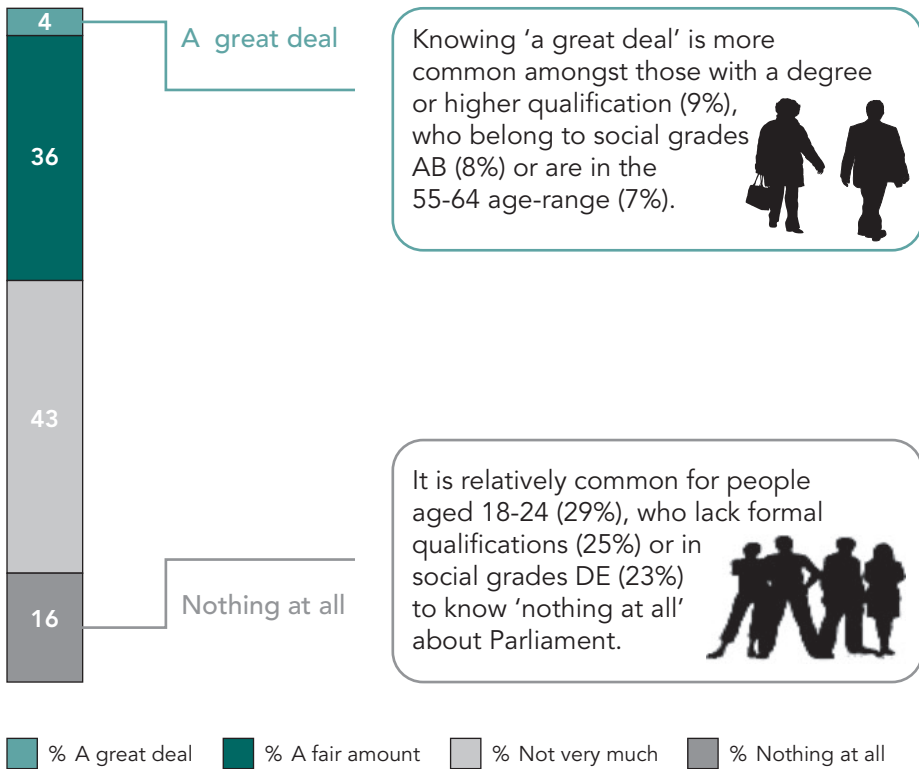
Beyond the verbal pugilism of Prime Minister's Question Time, a number of parliamentary related activities did appear, however, to have registered on the radar of the participants, notably of course the select committee-led phone hacking inquiry and debates on topical issues such as the Hillsborough tragedy arising from the new e-petitions system. In the words of one participant, the 'Murdoch trial' was interesting because 'Parliament was holding someone to account and it wasn't just about Number 10, it wasn't just about policy from the Prime Minister, it was Parliament being brought back to the people'. But what impact, if any, has all of this had on public attitudes?

### Knowledge of Parliament

Over the course of the Audit series the trend in perceived knowledge of the UK Parliament has been one of gradual improvement, although this year there has been a decline of four percentage points in those who claim to have either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of knowledge. However, although fewer than one in 20 adults (4%) feel they have 'a great deal' of knowledge about Parliament, 10 times as many (40%) claim to have at least a 'fair amount' of knowledge. Men and 55-64 year olds lead the way in this respect (48% and 52%, respectively), while 2010 voters are more likely to feel knowledgeable than non-voters (51% versus 21%).

Figure 15: Perceived knowledge of Parliament

Q How much, if anything, do you feel you know about the UK Parliament?



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

With two-fifths of the public claiming at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge, this remains seven percentage points above those who claimed the same in the first Audit study and with the exception of Audit 8, this level of knowledge is otherwise the best score recorded to date. It is also only four percentage points less than the 44% of respondents who claim to know at least a fair amount about politics.

Knowledge levels have remained stable over time amongst most groups, but have particularly grown amongst 18-24 year olds, with those claiming at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge rising gradually to 31% from 17% in Audit 1. This might suggest that a combination of Parliament's own, highly-regarded, education programmes and the provision of citizenship education programmes in schools through the national curriculum over the last decade have had at least some impact on knowledge levels among the younger members of the voting age public.

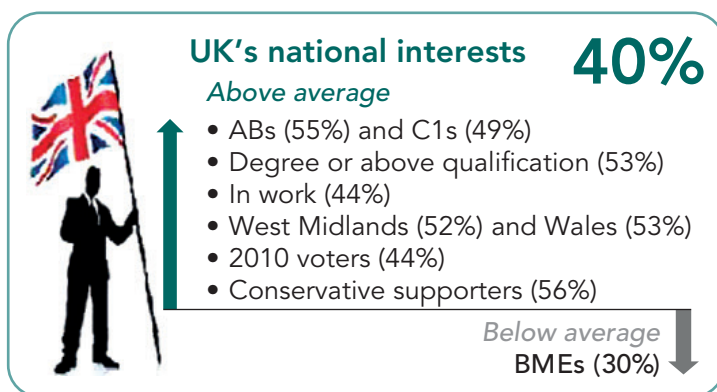
Knowledge of Parliament rises with higher educational attainment, extending to 61% of those who hold a degree or higher qualification, and also varies by social grade, propensity to vote and interest in politics.

As in previous years, three-fifths of the public (59%) feel they know little, if anything, about the UK Parliament, with a sizeable minority (16%) claiming to know 'nothing at all' on the subject. This claim is particularly common amongst 18-24 year olds (29%) and people who live in Scotland (21%).

### The role and functions of Parliament

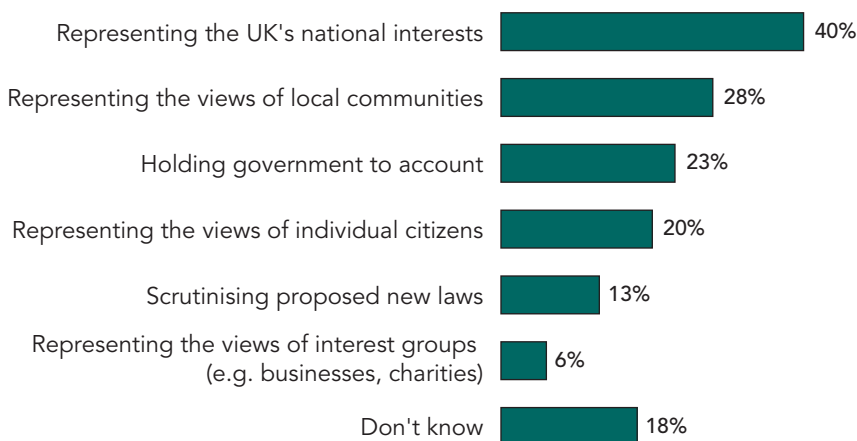
Respondents were invited to select which one or two functions from a range of six options they considered most important to them in terms of the role and work of Parliament.

Topping the list of priorities by a significant margin, the parliamentary function that carries most weight in the public mind is representation of 'the UK's national interests' as reported by two-fifths of the public (40%) (see Figure 16). Mention of the UK's national interest is common amongst the working adult population, people who hold a degree and Conservative supporters. In contrast, people from BME backgrounds are the least inclined to cite the UK's national interest as one of their priorities.



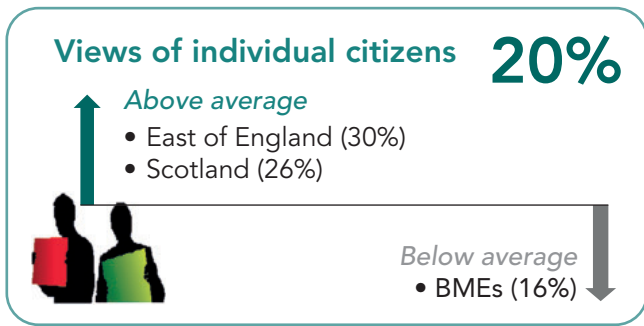
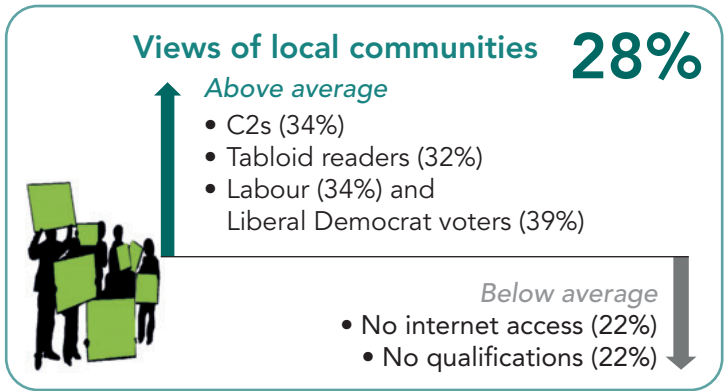
**Figure 16: Priorities for Parliament**

**Q This is a list of some of the functions of the UK Parliament. Which would you say is the most important to you? You can choose either one or two.**



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

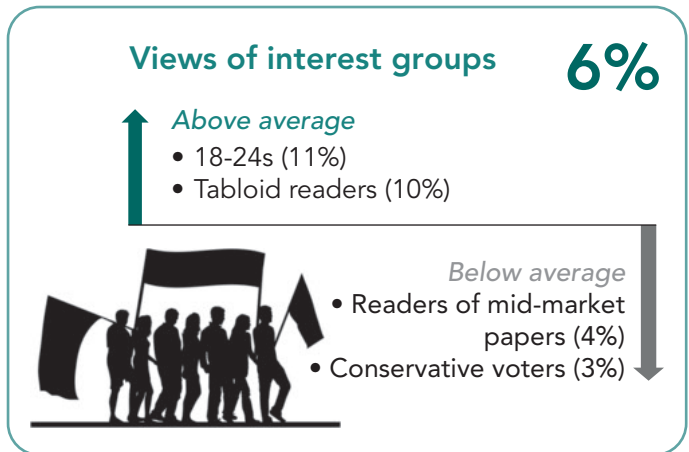
The importance of Parliament's role in representing the views of 'local communities' and 'individual citizens' is chosen by over a quarter (28%) and a fifth of the public (20%), respectively. Disproportionately large numbers of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters say they value Parliament's role in representing the views of local communities and this priority is voiced more frequently by readers of tabloid newspapers and people in the C2 social grade than the population as a whole.



The importance of Parliament's role in representing the views of individual citizens is more common amongst people living in the East of England and Scotland. Otherwise, there is very little demographic variation in the proportions of the public who mention this type of representation.

Representing the views of interest groups is considered to be the least important of Parliament's functions. Tabloid newspaper readers and 18-24 year olds appear to be more concerned about this function than the overall population, whereas readers of mid-market newspapers and Conservative voters are even less inclined than the average to choose this as one of their priorities.

Respondents were directed to think of functions that were important to *them*, rather than functions that were important more generally, to gauge Parliament's relevance in their lives. Consequently, this personalisation may explain why relatively small numbers chose those functions that are perhaps hard to relate to personally, such as 'scrutinising proposed new laws' (13%). This option



was mentioned more by those in the highest social classes and those with higher educational attainment levels (16% of ABC1s and 21% of people who hold a degree or higher qualification) but was mentioned least by 18-24 year olds (6%) and people without qualifications (8%).

Only 23% of the public prioritise 'holding the government to account', even though examining and challenging the work of government constitutes one of the primary responsibilities of Parliament. Relatively few under-35s (12%) choose this accountability function, and the same is true of people who never read newspapers (17%). On the other hand, people in social grade AB and those who support the Conservative party have a higher than average likelihood of believing this to be an important function of Parliament (32% and 34%, respectively, compared with 23% overall).

A person's degree of interest in politics, and the extent to which they feel they know about Parliament or politics in general, all have a bearing on the responses here. Non-representational functions, such as holding government to account or scrutinising proposed new laws, are more widely appreciated amongst respondents with higher levels of education and those who reported being 'very interested' in politics. People who are 'very' interested in politics stand out from the rest of the population for placing importance on looking after national interests (60%, compared with 40% overall), holding government to account for its actions and decisions (38%, compared with 23% overall), and scrutinising new laws (27%, compared with 13% overall). These are also the groups most likely to value Parliament in the abstract, agreeing that it is 'essential to our democracy'.

In contrast, people who admit to knowing 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about Parliament or politics struggle to pinpoint its contribution to the public or the wider democratic system; they are less likely than the rest of the population to mention five of the six functions. The exception is 'representing the views of individual citizens', suggesting that even people who are unaware of the full range of responsibilities covered by the UK Parliament recognise and value its role in dealing with the requests and grievances of individual constituents.

People who are married, with children, white, with a degree are all more likely to prioritise the importance of Parliament representing the UK's national interests. Gender doesn't significantly affect respondents' views of Parliament, although men are more likely to prioritise the importance of scrutinising new laws than are women (15% compared to 10%). The older the respondent, the more likely they are to prioritise the importance of Parliament 'holding the government to account', although this in part may reflect the fact that a significant number of 18-34 year olds say they 'don't know' in response to this question. ABs and C1s are more likely to prioritise 'representing the UK's national interests' than are C2DEs, and ABs are also more likely to prioritise 'holding the government to account' than are the other social classes. In contrast, C2 respondents are more likely to prioritise 'representing views of local communities' than are the other social classes. The proportion of the public who have no view on this issue increases as you go down the social scale, peaking at a 26% of DEs claiming that they 'don't know'.

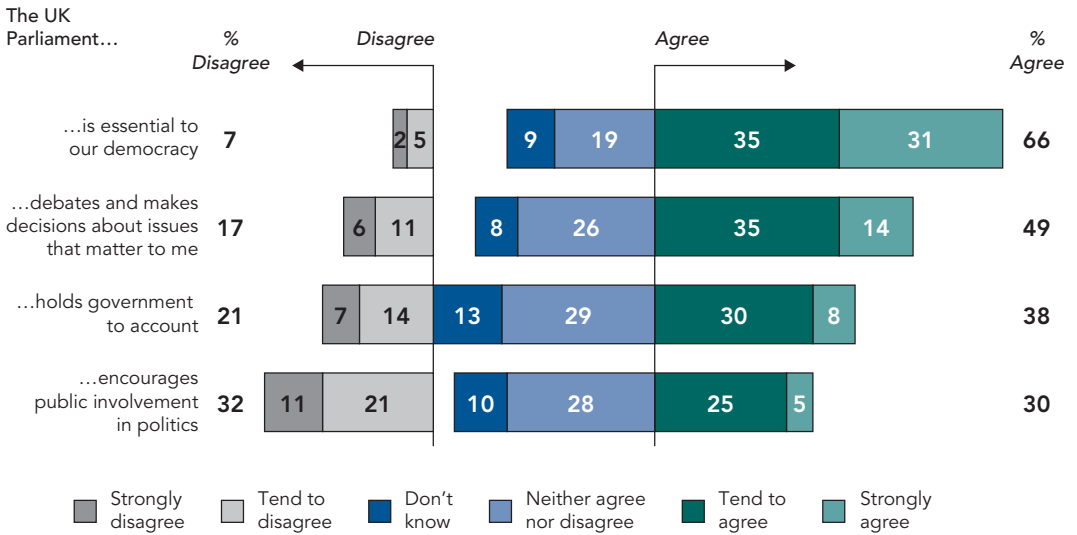


### The importance and relevance of Parliament

While two-thirds of the public (66%) acknowledge the crucial part that Parliament plays in our democratic system, they are less positive about its relevance, its ability to motivate people to participate in politics, and the efficacy of its efforts in carrying out one of its most crucial constitutional functions (see Figure 17). Moreover, few think of Parliament as a source of assistance or a starting point for improving services in their community.

**Figure 17: Perceptions of Parliament**

**Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the UK Parliament?**



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

Perceptions of Parliament are aligned with approval of the current system of governing Britain, and arguably contribute to people’s impressions of how much improvement the system needs. People who describe the system as working ‘extremely’ or ‘mainly’ well are more likely (88%) than the overall population (66%) to consider Parliament essential to democracy, to recognise the relevance of the topics it debates and decides on (69% compared with 49% overall), to acknowledge its attempts to hold government to account (59% compared with 38% overall) and attract the involvement of the public (50% compared with 30% overall).

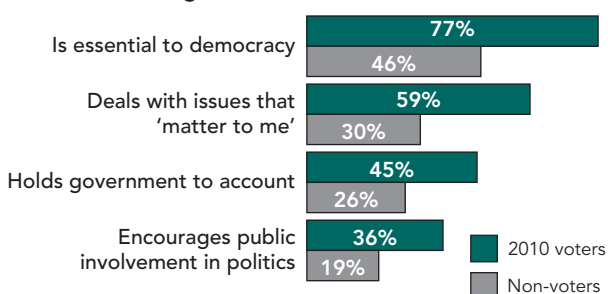
Positive perceptions of Parliament – represented by agreement with each of the four statements – is relatively widespread within the higher social grades and amongst people with the most interest in politics. Perceptions also vary by knowledge of politics and Parliament, with higher agreement levels amongst people who rate their knowledge highly. These groups are the most likely to have voted in the 2010 general election; consequently, the perceptions of voters tend to be more positive than those of non-voters.

### (i) The UK Parliament 'is essential to our democracy'

Parliament is clearly seen by most people (66%) as a necessary part of the democratic process, with only 7% at odds with the suggestion that it 'is essential to our democracy'. A mere 2% disagree strongly with this statement, but the proportion of the public who feel this way is highest in the North East (7%) and South West (5%) of the country, perhaps reflecting in part their distance from Westminster. Women (61%), people from BME backgrounds (59%) and 18-24 year olds (54%) are somewhat less inclined than the rest of the population to acknowledge the importance of Parliament compared with the population overall (66%). Conversely, people who hold a degree or higher qualification (44%) and 55-74 year olds (also 44%) are disproportionately inclined to be strongly supportive of the view that Parliament plays an essential role in the UK's democracy compared with the 31% of the population overall that shares this view.

**Positive views about Parliament** are more common among people who are interested in and knowledgeable about politics and Parliament. They, in turn, are more likely to be voters.

% agree that UK Parliament...



### (ii) The UK Parliament 'debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to me'

Only half the public (49%) agree that the issues debated and decided in Parliament have relevance to their own lives. However, recognition of their relevance is lower among 18-24 year olds (only 37% agree), and people from BME backgrounds (only 8% strongly agree compared with 14% of the entire population who say the same).

A relatively high proportion of those in the 55-64 year old age bracket (20%) and, perhaps surprisingly, residents of Wales (21%), recognise the relevance of the issues dealt with by Parliament and agree strongly that its debates and decisions matter to them (compared with 14% of the population overall who say the same). Compared to the population as a whole, relevance is more commonly recognised by readers of broadsheet newspapers (68% agreement) and mid-market newspapers (65%), as well as people who have gained a degree (62%). Again, educational attainment and social class impact strongly on how Parliament is perceived in this respect.

### (iii) The UK Parliament 'holds government to account'

Two-fifths of the public (38%) agree that the government is being held to account by Parliament. This proportion has not changed in the last two years, though slightly more people 'strongly agree' with this statement (8%) than had been the case previously (only 4% said the same in Audit 7 and 5% in Audit 8). This upward strengthening in perception is partly driven by an increase in the proportion of the public who lack formal qualifications or come from BME backgrounds who now 'strongly agree' that government is being held to account (12% for each group).

Overall, on this measure, Parliament now has a net approval rating of 17% (38% agree that it holds government to account, 21% disagree), an increase of five percentage points compared to Audit 8 (12%) and four percentage points higher than Audit 7 (13%).

An increase in the proportion of the public inclined to hold a positive view of Parliament on this measure can also be discerned in an improvement in the views of men, young people (18-24 year olds) and the older section of the population (those aged 65+). Interestingly, the views of under-25s on this question are no longer different from those of the rest of the population; however, 25-34 year olds are less likely than the public in general to believe that Parliament is succeeding in examining and challenging the work of government (28% agreement, compared with 38% overall). It is also worth noting that there has been a shift in perceptions amongst people aged 75 or above, who have gone from having one of the lowest levels of agreement with this statement in Audit 8 (34%) to one of the highest levels of agreement in Audit 9 (58%). This year more people also have a neutral view on this question: those responding 'neither agree nor disagree' has risen from 20% in Audit 7 to 27% in Audit 8 and again to 29% in this latest poll. Importantly, however, this increase is largely accounted for by fewer people being inclined to disagree that Parliament holds the government to account rather than public views shifting from a positive perspective to one of indifference.

#### **(iv) The UK Parliament 'encourages public involvement in politics'**

The public is evenly split on Parliament's success as a medium for public involvement in the political process, with 30% agreeing and 32% disagreeing that it encourages the public to get involved. Well over a third of people (38%) feel unable to comment, suggesting that this is not a role that many associate with Parliament.

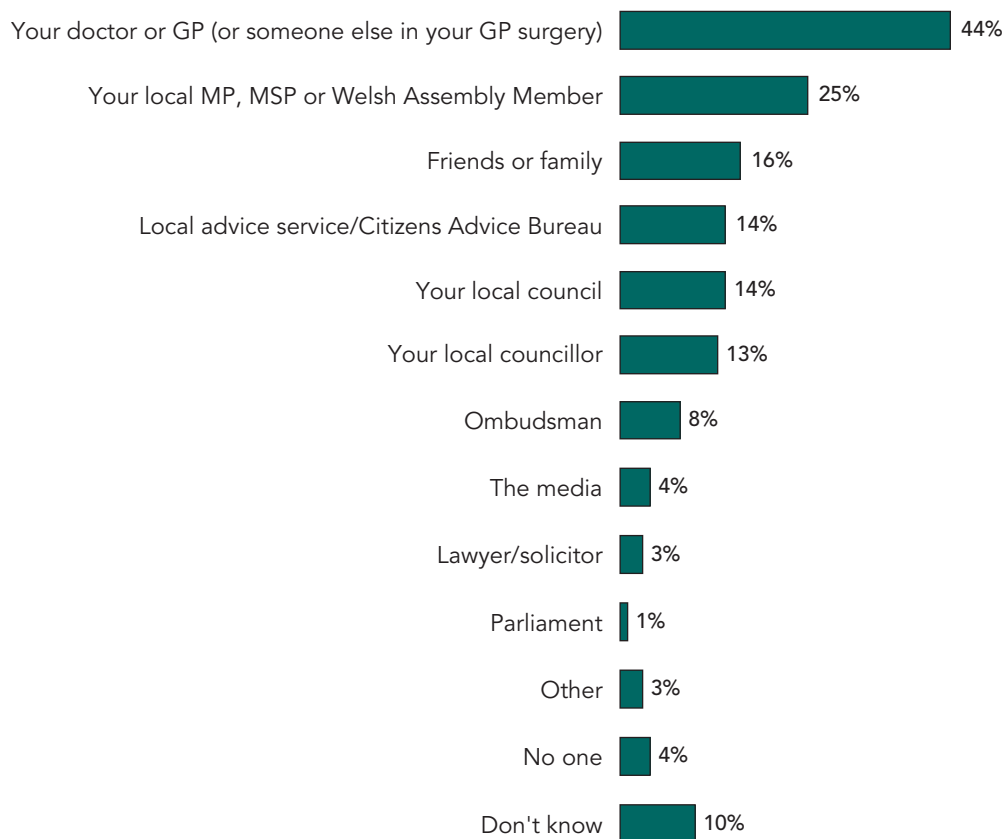
There are very few demographic differences in the public's response to this question. People aged 45-54 or based in Yorkshire and Humberside are more likely than others to strongly object to the statement (16% and 20%, respectively). Meanwhile, agreement is higher than average amongst people aged 75 or above (41%), London residents (39%), and the BME population (39%).

#### **Seeking help from MPs and Parliament**

There has long been concern that MPs are increasingly taking on a 'social worker' role at the constituency level, prioritising local concerns that could and perhaps should be dealt with by locally elected representatives, rather than focusing on their national responsibilities. When faced with a hypothetical scenario of dissatisfaction with local health services, unsurprisingly most people (44%) would likely turn to their GP or someone in their GP surgery for help (see Figure 18). However, a quarter of the public (25%) say they would contact their MP for assistance with their problem, placing them significantly higher in the hierarchy of support than friends or family, local advice services or Citizens Advice Bureau, or their local council. Only 1% would seek assistance from Parliament directly, confirming that MPs individually rather than the institution of Parliament itself is seen as the conduit for grievances. These results, particularly in the context of a growth in localism, offer scant comfort to those who would like to see a realigning of the responsibilities of elected representatives to better reflect the multi-layered nature of governance across the country.

**Figure 18: Seeking help from MPs and Parliament**

**Q If you were not happy with your local health services, who would you be most likely to contact to seek help?**

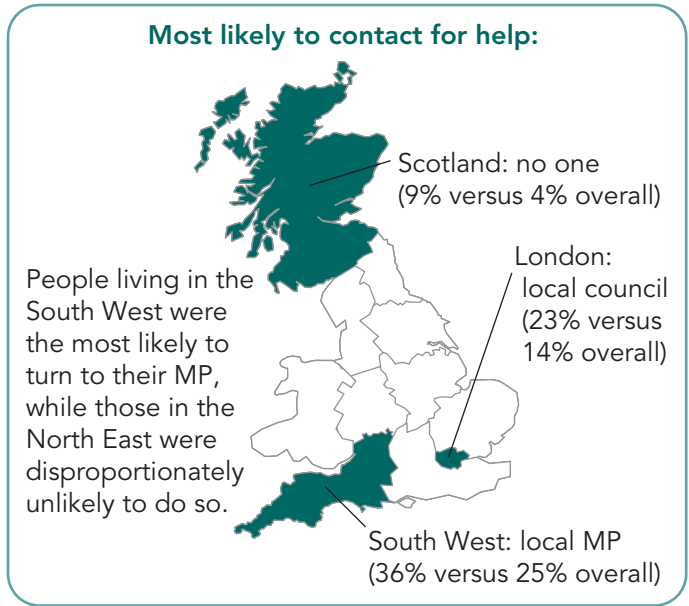


Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

During a time of austerity when socio-economic related personal grievances are likely to increase, and when local advice and Citizens Advice Bureau services have been reduced, one might infer from these results that the constituency caseload of MPs may continue to increase in the future, placing further pressure on their own resources to deal with this workload.

Responses do not vary significantly by demographics, although people are more likely to explicitly mention Parliament as a source of advice or support if they are highly educated (2% of those with a degree-level qualification) or readers of broadsheet newspapers (2%). These two groups also have a higher tendency than the general population to say they would refer their concern to their local MP (34% and 35%, respectively), as are people in social grades AB (34%) and those who feel they have a sound knowledge of Parliament (55%).

Interestingly, there are some minor regional variations, notably the prominence of local government as a source of assistance for Londoners. The public in the capital are almost as likely to consider the local council as a resource on which to call for help with their local services (23%) as they are to approach their local MP (27%). In contrast, in the population at large, only 14% are likely to turn to their local council for help. It is not clear whether this reflects particular satisfaction with local government in London generally, or perhaps more likely a greater sense of awareness not of individual local councils but of the role of the Greater London Authority and the Mayor of London.



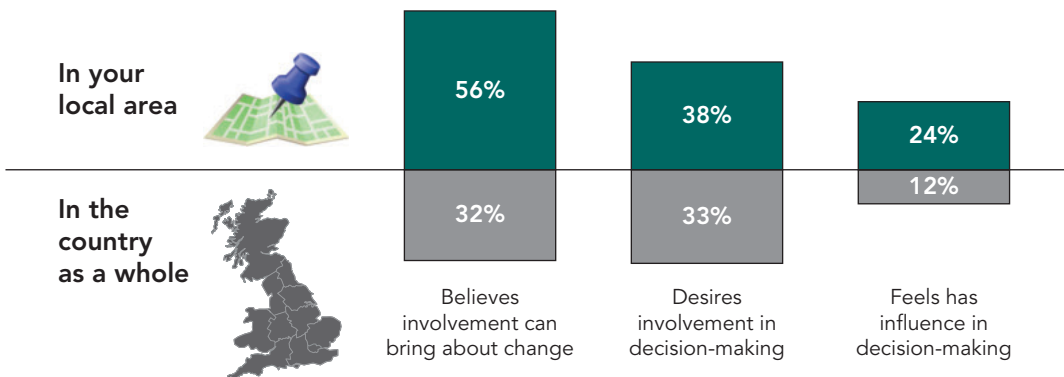
## 6. Civic and political involvement

This study presents the first opportunity in the Audit series to track the public's sense of the efficacy of their involvement locally and nationally as initially measured in Audit 8, and the degree to which they believe that involvement can bring about change as previously measured in Audit 6. Alongside this, the Audit continues to track the public's appetite for involvement in actual decision-making both locally and nationally.

### Perceived efficacy of local involvement

Once again there is a disparity between perceived efficacy and influence at the local and national levels (see Figure 19). Almost three-fifths of the public (56%) agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run'. This claim is more widespread than the belief that the involvement of 'people like me' in a wider political arena with the potential to influence the country as a whole can bring about change (32%), suggesting that it is at the local rather than national scale that people feel the most potential to make a difference.

**Figure 19: Efficacy, desire for involvement, and perceived influence over decision-making locally and nationally**

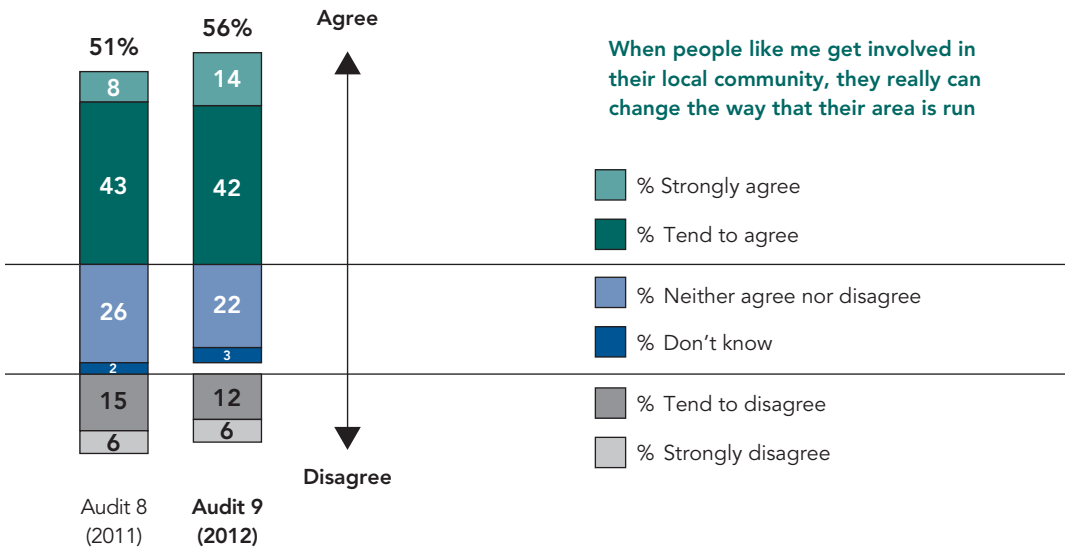


Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

A sense of local efficacy is greater than in Audit 8, when only half of the population (51%) felt their involvement could bring about change in their local community (see Figure 20). There has been an increase in the number of people who 'strongly agree' with this proposition: 14% compared to 8% who said the same in Audit 8. Driving this shift is an increase in the perceived efficacy of people from BME backgrounds: while strong agreement was above average for this group last year (13% compared with 8% overall), it has increased further this year and now extends to 21% of the BME population.

**Figure 20: Perceived local political efficacy**

**Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?**



Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

Four-fifths (81%) of people who believe that their involvement in politics can influence the way the country is run also believe that participation in the local community can bring about local change. Perceived local efficacy is high amongst people inclined to support the Conservative party (68%), readers of broadsheet newspapers (71%), people in social grade AB (67%) and those living in the West Midlands (68%).

People living in rural areas have a greater tendency than the rest of the population to disagree strongly with the notion of local efficacy (8%, compared with 6% nationally). Perceived efficacy is also low in the South East (43%) and amongst people aged 75 or above (45%), and falls below the average mark among the most socially disadvantaged groups, namely people in social grades DE (51%), and those who lack an internet connection (48%) or formal qualifications (45%). Similarly, people who have no interest in politics (38%) or feel they know 'nothing at all' about it (33%), are less likely than the overall population to agree that their involvement can bring about change.

**Desire for involvement in local and national decision-making**

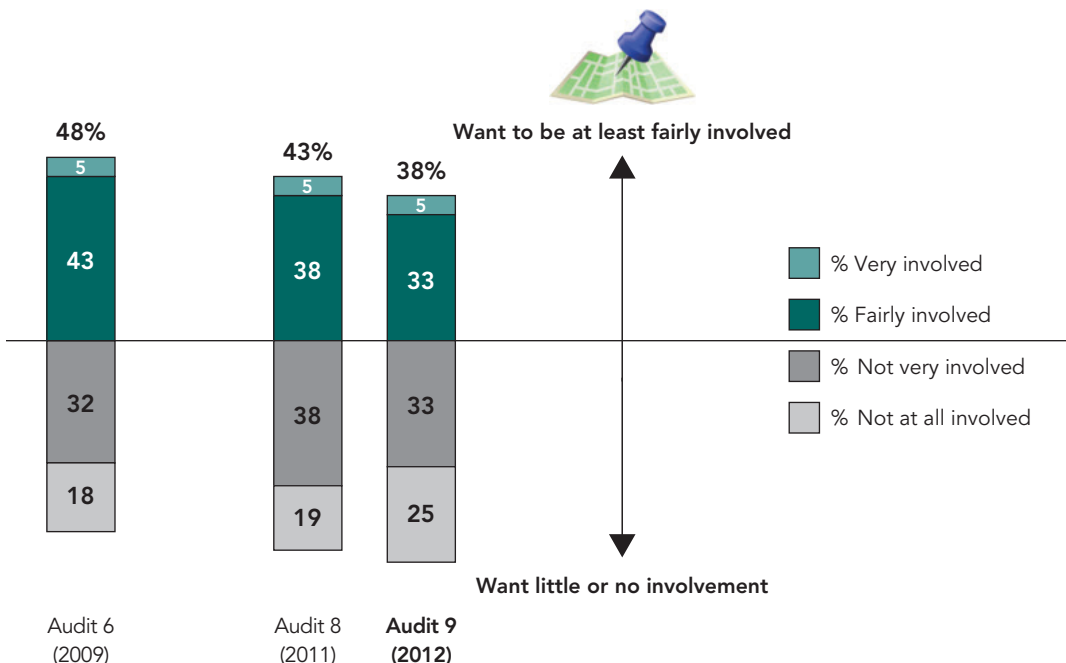
For the first time a sizeable difference has emerged between the proportions of the public who say they want to be involved in decision-making locally (38%) and nationally (33%). Statistically, men are no more likely to want to be involved in one type of decision-making than the other; the same is true of women, BMEs, and people in each of the age and social grade categories. However, there are two groups which clearly prefer the thought of local involvement over national involvement: people in social grade C2 (41% local versus 32% national) and those who are supporters of the Labour party (43% local versus 35% national).

This distinction in attitudes towards local and national involvement was not apparent within these two groups in Audit 8. In the case of C2s, the nine percentage point gap in willingness to participate in local and national decision-making arose through a small (statistically insignificant) increase over the past year in the proportion wishing to become involved in local affairs (from 37% in Audit 8 to 41% in Audit 9). For Labour supporters, on the other hand, the desire for local involvement has not grown (43% in both Audit 8 and Audit 9) and is in fact somewhat lower than for supporters of the two other main political parties (48% amongst Conservative and 47% amongst Liberal Democrat supporters). Instead, the divergence owes to their reduced willingness to engage with the national political arena: the proportion of Labour supporters who want to become involved in decision-making which affects the country as a whole has dropped to 35% from the 43% who said the same in Audit 8. This suggests a strong, perhaps understandable, desire to disassociate themselves from the current government and an acceptance that in the context of coalition politics they can currently exercise little influence at the national level.

An increasing proportion of the population now believe that their participation can make a difference to the way their area is run. However, as yet, there has been no apparent growth in the public's appetite for greater involvement in decision-making at the local level (see Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Desire for involvement locally**

**Q To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in your local area?**



Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.



There has been a slight decline in the proportion of the public wishing to have at least some involvement in how their local area is run (at 38% down from 43% as recorded in Audit 8). This continues an apparent downward trend, which has seen the proportion of the public wanting to have a say in local decision-making fall by 10 percentage points since Audit 6.

The biggest change from previous years is the uplift in the proportion of the public saying they do not wish to be involved 'at all' which has risen to 25% from below a fifth, as recorded in Audits 6 and 8. There has been a particular increase here amongst people aged 75 or above (41%, up from 26% in Audit 8), people who lack qualifications (44% compared to 25% in Audit 8), and people in Yorkshire and Humberside (39%, up from 23%) or the North West (37%, up from 12%).

As in previous Audits, it is common for people in work and those with children in their household to wish to be involved in local decision-making: 46% say they want to be at least 'fairly involved', compared with just 38% across the population as a whole who are of similar view. The same is true of people living in the North East, 13% of whom want to be 'very involved' compared with 5% across the population as a whole. People who feel able to bring about change through involvement in

their local community or through politics are also more likely to want to do so than the rest of the population: this is the case for 48% of those who agree they can make a difference locally, and 51% of those who agree they can make a difference nationally.

This year has not only seen a decline in the proportions who wish to become involved in local decision-making, but a decline also in the proportions willing to contribute to decision-making at a national level. The proportion of people who wish to be 'very' or 'fairly' involved in national decision-making is, at 33%, an all time low (see Figure 22).

**People with children in their household** are more likely to say they want to contribute to decision-making affecting their local community (46%) or country (39%).

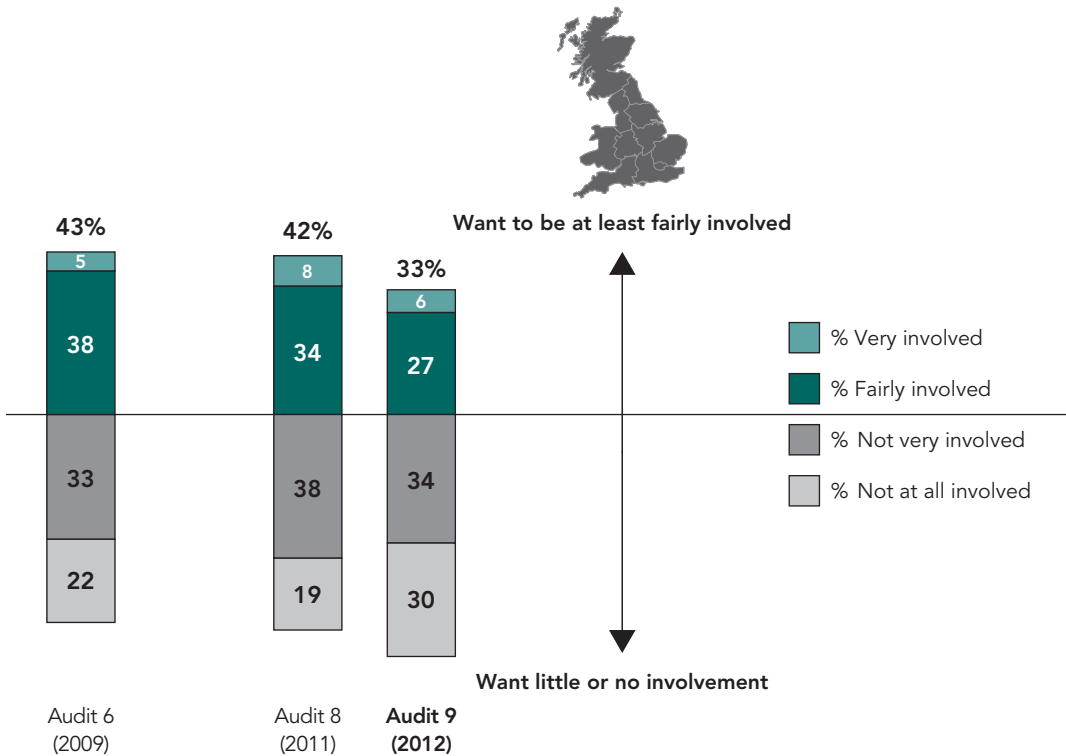
In reality, disproportionately few of them voted in the last local or general election (50% and 49%, respectively).



This is relatively typical for their age. A third of this group are 25-34 year olds, an age-group with low levels of interest and knowledge about politics and low participation in political and civic activity.

Figure 22: Desire for involvement nationally

Q To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in the country as a whole?



Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

The people most likely to want to be involved in national decision-making are those who claim to be very interested in politics (69%), to be at least fairly knowledgeable on the subject (46%), and who believe their involvement in politics could change the way the UK is run (46%). In demographic terms, the desire for involvement is high amongst those educated to A level standard or above (44%), between 25-34 years old (41%), and those with children in their household (39%).

Thirty per cent of the general population say they want no involvement 'at all' in national decision-making. This dislike of involvement rises to 34% among people living in rural areas, 35% in Scotland, 40% in Yorkshire and Humberside and 36% among people not in work. Similarly when it comes to local decision-making, 25% of the general population want no involvement at all, rising to 41% of people aged 75 or over and 44% of people without qualifications. These are also groups disproportionately uninterested in national decision-making (43% and 51%, respectively, compared with 30% overall).

Two more groups that are negatively disposed towards involvement at a national level are those living in the North West and those in social grades DE. In both cases, the number that

claim to want no involvement in national decision-making is far greater than in Audit 8. In the North West, the number who claim to want no such involvement has risen in a year from 12% to 41%, and among DEs has risen from 25% to 34%. The increased inclination of these two groups to distance themselves from the decisions that affect the country has contributed to the inflation of the 'not at all' category, and is one of the main drivers of the decline in the population's desire for involvement in national decision-making.

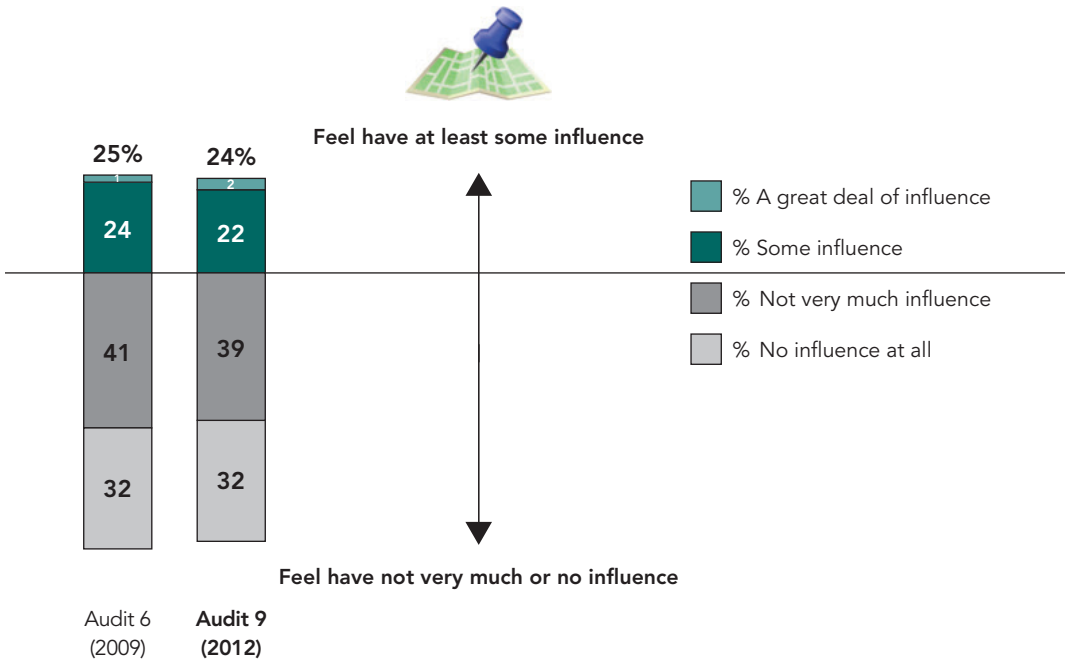
**Influence over local and national decision-making**

The public is twice as likely to feel that they have a perceptible impact in decision-making at the local level than at the national level. While 24% feel they have some influence in the decisions taken in their local area, only 12% feel the same about decisions concerning the country as a whole.

The proportion of the public that feel that they have some sway over decisions made in their local area has remained stable since 2009, at around one in four (see Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Influence over local decision-making**

**Q How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in your local area?**



Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

People from BME backgrounds are the only demographic sub-group with an above average likelihood of believing they have 'a great deal of influence' over local decision-making (4%, compared with 2% overall). This finding should be viewed alongside the rise that has taken place this year in the perceived local efficacy among this group.

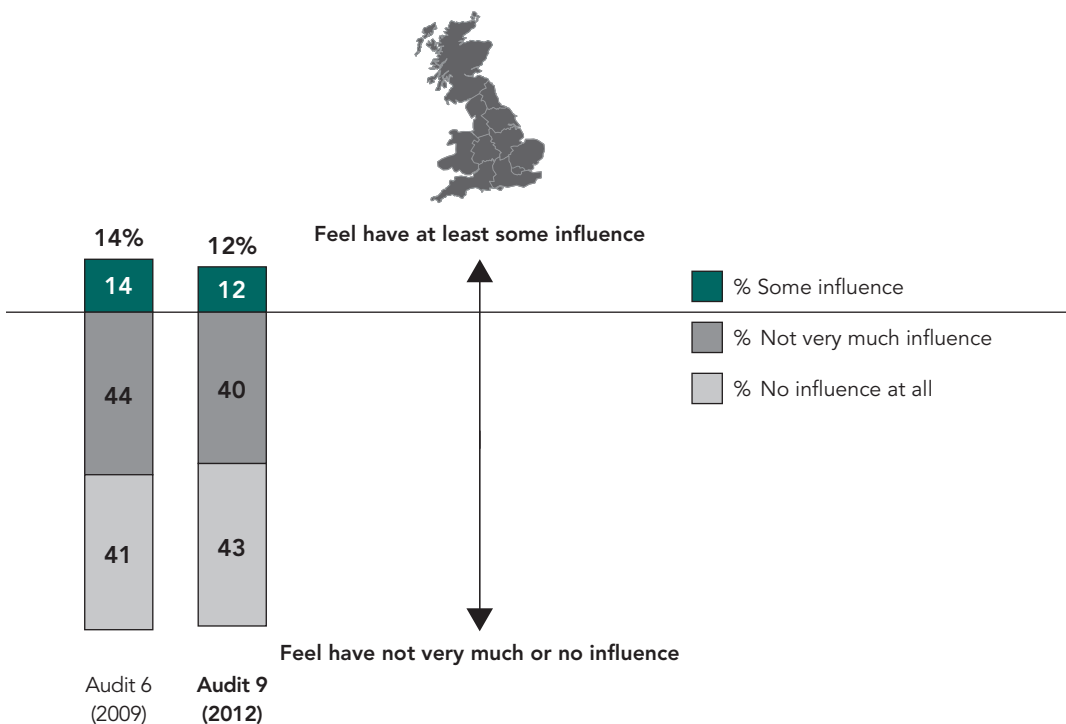
The perception of local influence does not vary by age or region, but is more commonly asserted by socially and politically dominant sub-groups. Hence, relatively high proportions of people in social grades AB (34%) or people who are in work (27%) feel they have at least 'some' influence in their local area (compared with 24% across the entire population). Conversely, people without formal qualifications (38%), who are not in work (35%), or who do not have access to the internet (40%) are more likely than the population as a whole (32%) to feel that they lack any influence 'at all' in their area. This belief is also widely held (38%) by people who live in rural locations.

Feeling influential is more common amongst people who currently support the Conservatives (32%) or Liberal Democrats (35%) than those who support Labour (25%), and this belief is also more prevalent among people who say they voted in the 2010 general election (27%) than among non-voters (16%).

One in eight people (12%) perceive themselves to have at least 'some' influence over the decisions made nationally, although the numbers who feel they can describe themselves as having 'a great deal of influence' are negligible. Attitudes are unchanged from those recorded in Audit 6 (see Figure 24).

**Figure 24: Influence over national decision-making**

**Q How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in the country as a whole?**



Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

There are barely any discernible demographic differences when it comes to perceived influence over national decision-making. Men and women, people in different age groups and social grades, and supporters of the major parties are all equally likely to feel influential. Once again, however, the views of BME respondents stand out: they are more likely than other people to generally feel influential (22%, compared with 12% overall), and are also more likely to say they have ‘a great deal of influence’ over national decision-making (3%) than the wider population where the percentage is negligible. Almost a fifth of London residents (19%) also feel influential, although this in all likelihood stems at least in part from the high proportion of BMEs who live in London.

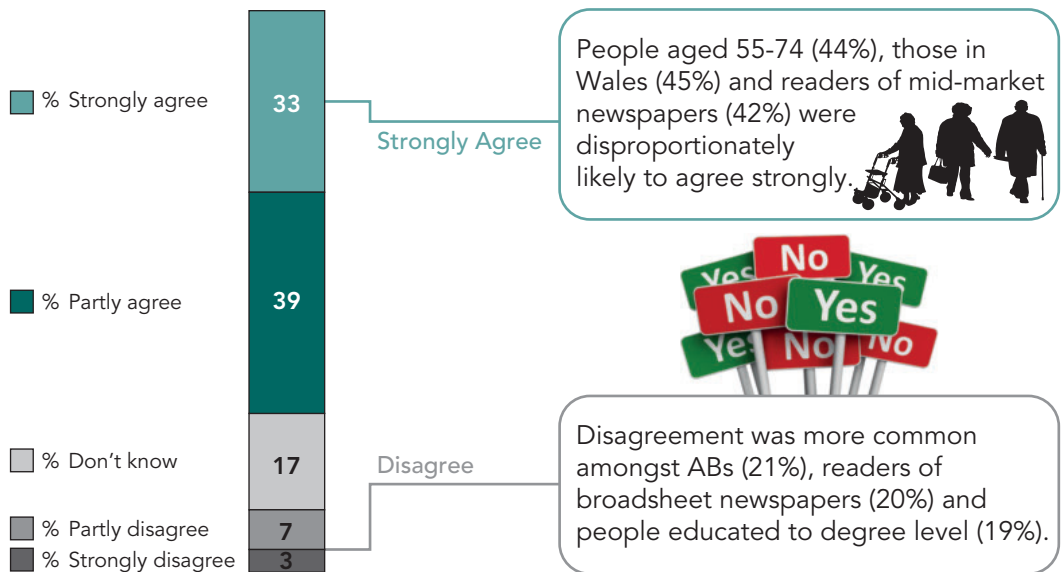
People who believe that their involvement in politics can change the way the UK is run are more likely than the rest of the population to say they have at least ‘some’ influence over national decision-making (22%). In contrast, people who did not vote in the 2010 general election (7%), along with people who lack qualifications (7%) or internet access (9%), are slightly less likely to say they have at least ‘some’ influence.

### Referendum politics

One means by which the public might exercise more influence over policy but which requires only modest levels of sustained engagement is through increased use of referendums. Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) agreed that referendums should be used more often to determine important questions.

**Figure 25: Desire for referendums**

**Q To what extent do you agree or disagree: Important questions should be determined by referendums more often than today**



Base: 1,163 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7-13 December 2011.

The survey did not set out specific scenarios as to what 'important questions' any referendums might determine, and of course providing such specificity (for example, Scottish independence, membership of the EU) could result in very different scores.

Certain groups did have a higher proportion of respondents who disagreed with an increased use of referendums (respondents in the higher social grades, those with a higher knowledge of/interest in politics), but this was a function of these groups having a lower proportion giving 'don't know' responses. Excluding respondents who gave these answers removes the differences between sub-groups across the sample as a whole.

The referendum concept also had considerable appeal to many of our focus group participants although most had to be reminded that a national referendum had recently been held, and generally only when prompted did they recall that its subject was electoral reform. Almost universally, those who then recalled the referendum admitted that they had struggled to understand it and some could not remember whether they had actually voted in it or not. More broadly, participants were very cognisant of the need to strike the right balance between more referendums on important national issues that would give voice to the opinions of the ordinary, working person on the street (people like themselves), with the desire not to end up voting on all manner of issues large and small. Across many of the groups there was a real interest in more public involvement in the political process through referendums offset by a desire to ensure that MPs nonetheless retained their decision-making capacity.

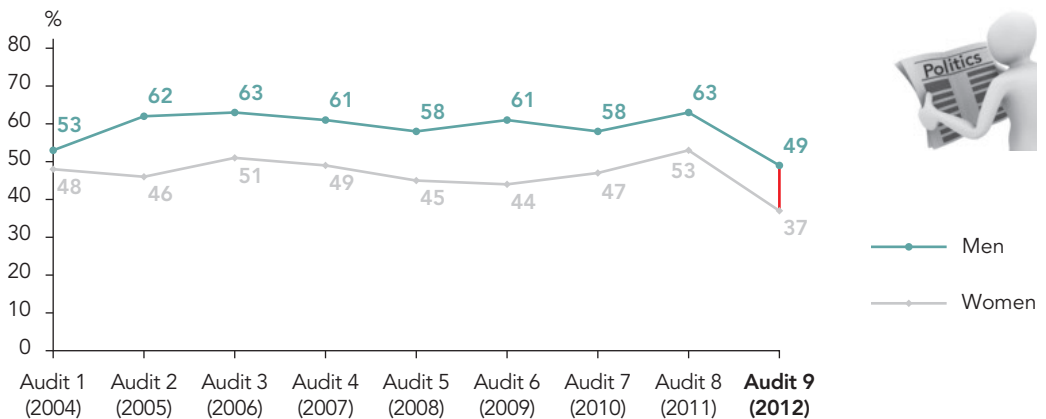


## 7. Demographic and sub-group differences

### A. Gender

#### Interested in politics

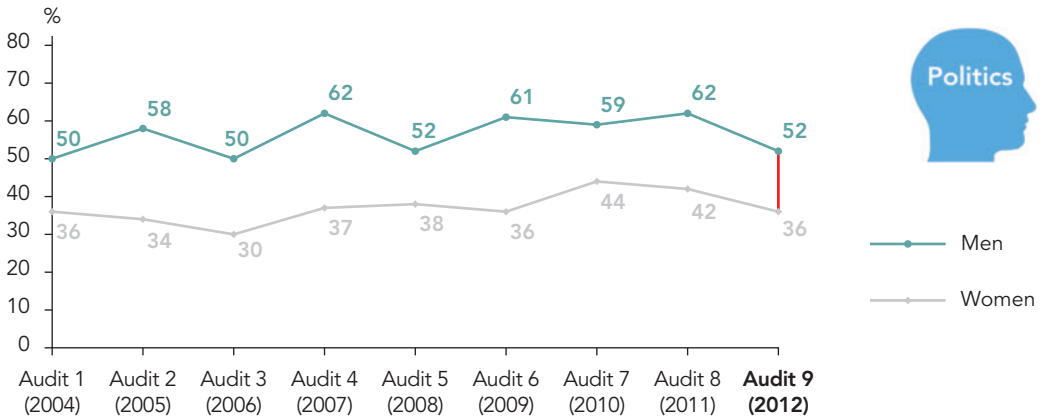
Men have consistently expressed interest in politics in greater numbers than women. This year there is a 12 percentage point difference in levels of interest between the genders but, as the graph below shows, this is by no means the greatest difference during the Audit series. Since Audit 8, the proportions saying they are at least 'fairly' interested have fallen significantly amongst men (from 63% to 49%) as well as women (from 53% to 37%).





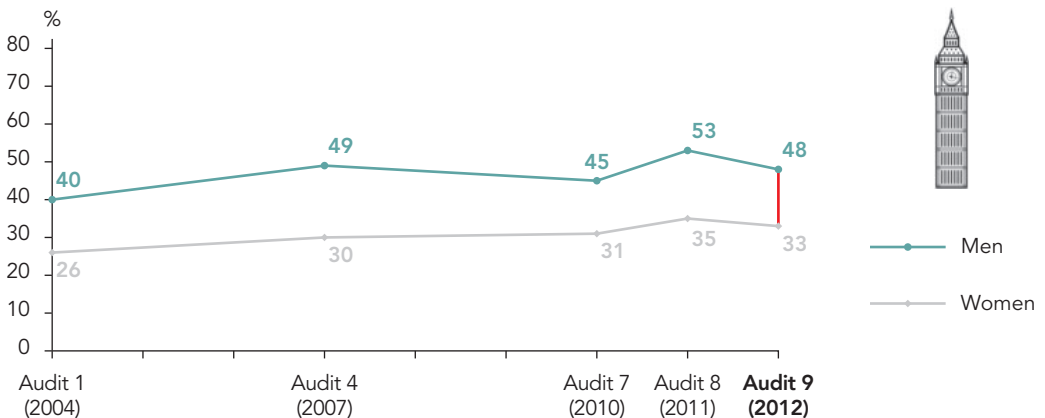
### Knowledgeable about politics

Throughout the Audit series, fewer women than men have claimed to know at least ‘a fair amount’ about politics. This remains the case this year: 36% of women feel they possess this level of knowledge, compared with 52% of men. Both men and women’s knowledge levels have declined since last year, but remain within the typical range for each gender. However, as identified in Audit 7, when claimed knowledge is compared to actual knowledge, as measured in a set of true/false political quiz questions, then the gender gap is significantly smaller.



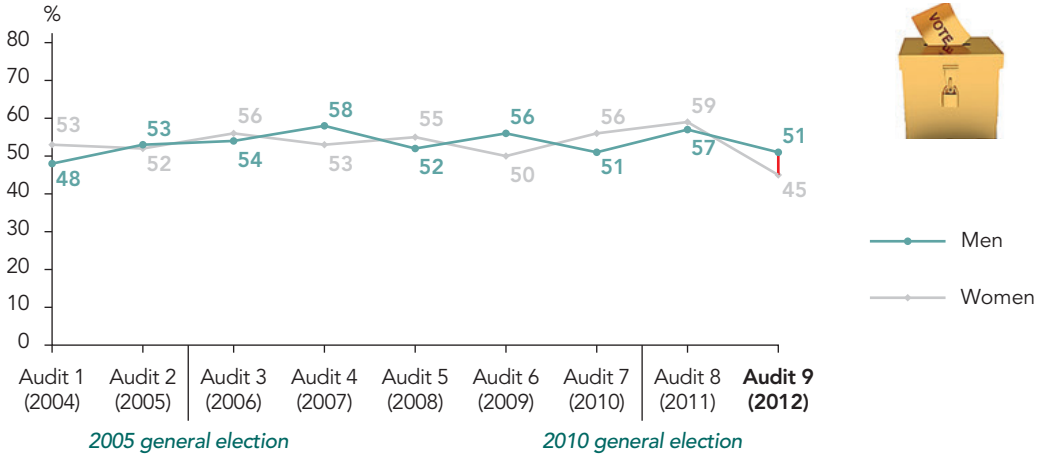
### Knowledgeable about Parliament

As with knowledge of politics, knowledge of Parliament is more widespread amongst men (48%) than women (33%), with no significant change in knowledge levels apparent over the past year. The disparity in knowledge levels between the two genders is reflected to some degree in men and women’s differing views about Parliament: women are less likely than men to believe that Parliament holds government to account (31% versus 45%), or to value its role in scrutinising new laws (10% versus 15%). Fewer women than men consider the issues debated by Parliament to be relevant to them (46% versus 52%) or deem Parliament essential to democracy (61% versus 72%).



### Certain to vote

Throughout the Audit series, similar proportions of men and women have said that they would definitely vote in an immediate general election (within five percentage points of each other). Despite a decline in women’s propensity to vote (down from 59% in Audit 8 to 45% this year), Audit 9 repeats this pattern, with 51% of men and 45% of women saying they are certain to vote.

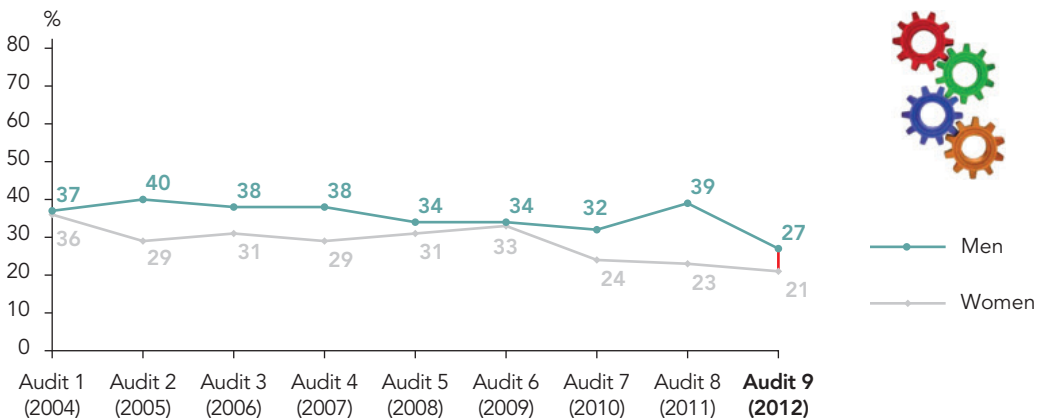


### Action and participation

Fewer women than men report having voted in a general election (58% versus 52%) or a local election (59% versus 53%). Women are also less likely to report participation in a range of political activities, such as making a speech (6% versus 10%), expressing their political opinions online (3% versus 9%) or attending a political meeting (2% versus 6%).

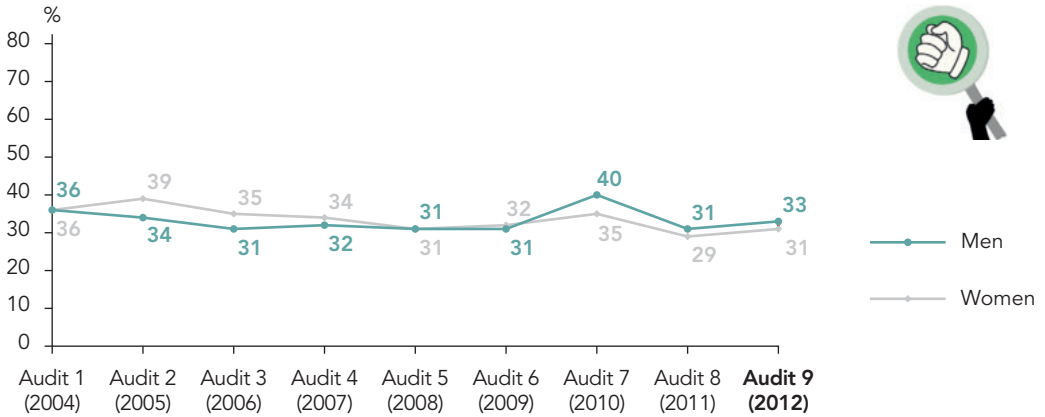
### Approves of system of governing

Although the opinions of both genders regarding the current system of governing Britain were almost indistinguishable during Audits 5 and 6, for the rest of the Audit series men have typically been more likely than women to describe the system as working ‘extremely’ or ‘mainly’ well. Audit 8 saw the largest divergence of views so far (39% of men approved, compared with 23% of women), but the gap has subsequently diminished. While fewer men now view the system favourably compared with last year (27% compared with 39%), the men who hold this view still outnumber women (21%).



### Feel getting involved in politics is effective

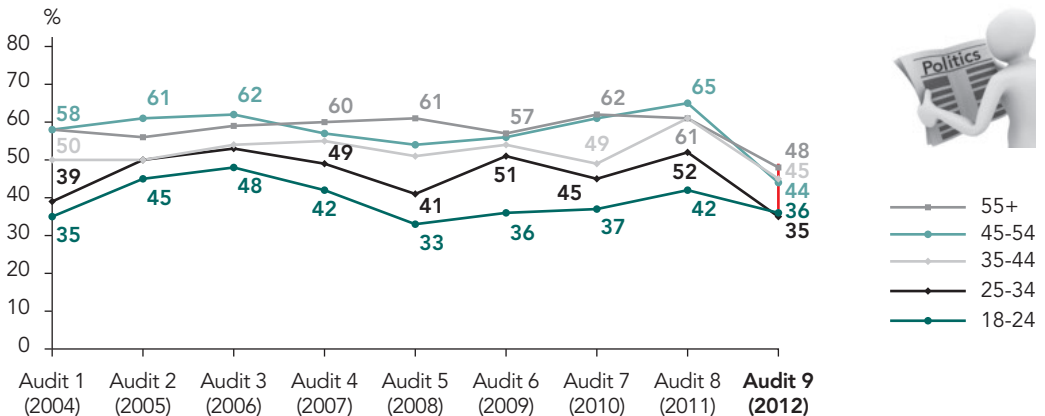
As in previous years, similar proportions of men and women believe that the involvement of people 'like me' in politics can bring change to the country (33% and 31%, respectively). This is also true at the local level, with men as likely as women to believe that involvement in their local community can contribute to change in their area (57% versus 55%). However, a higher proportion of men express the desire to be involved in national decision-making (37%, compared with 30% of women).



## B. Age

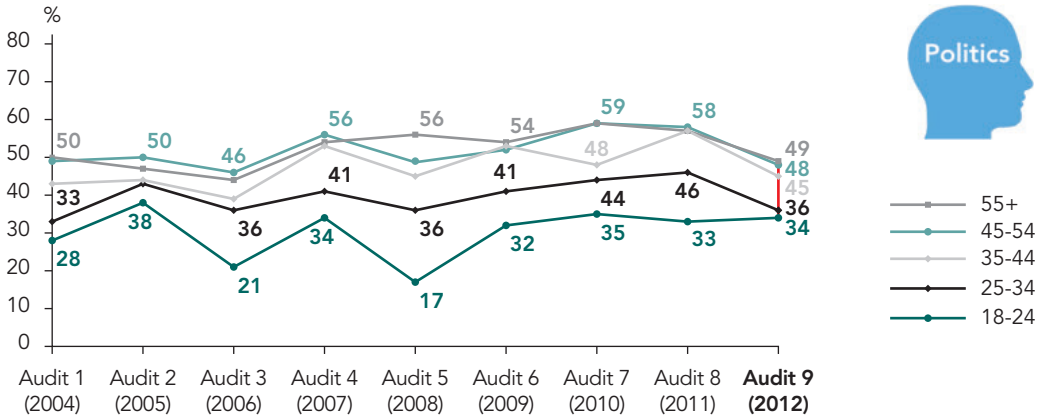
### Interested in politics

Generally speaking, the older people are, the more likely they are to express an interest in politics. The level of interest of each age group has fluctuated over the years, but since the last Audit has fallen sharply amongst all groups with the exception of 18-24 year olds. Even the latter, however, are less likely now than in the period following the 2005 general election to say they are at least 'fairly' interested in politics (36%, compared with 48% in Audit 3).



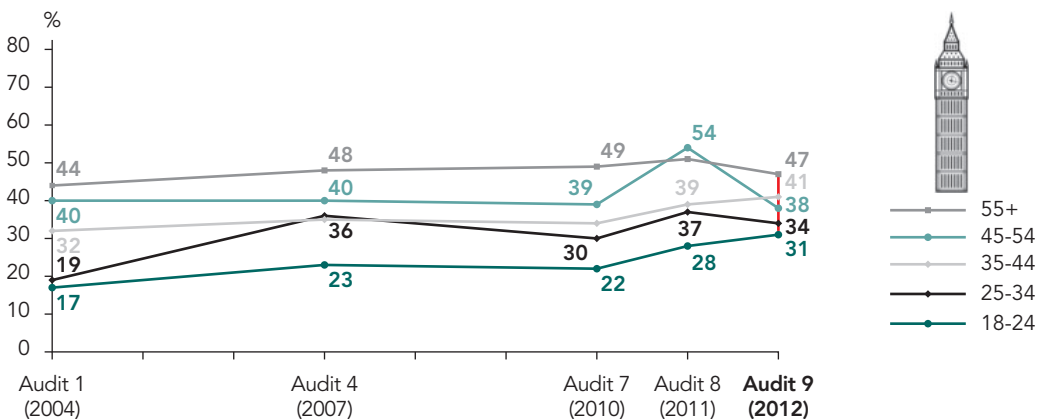
### Knowledgeable about politics

The proportions claiming to have a sound knowledge of politics have typically been highest amongst people aged 35 or above; somewhat lower amongst 25-34 year-olds; and lower still amongst the under-25s, whose knowledge levels have fluctuated over the past nine years. This year, there is a 15 percentage point gap between the knowledge levels of people in the 55 or above age bracket (49%) and the 18-24 age bracket (34%).



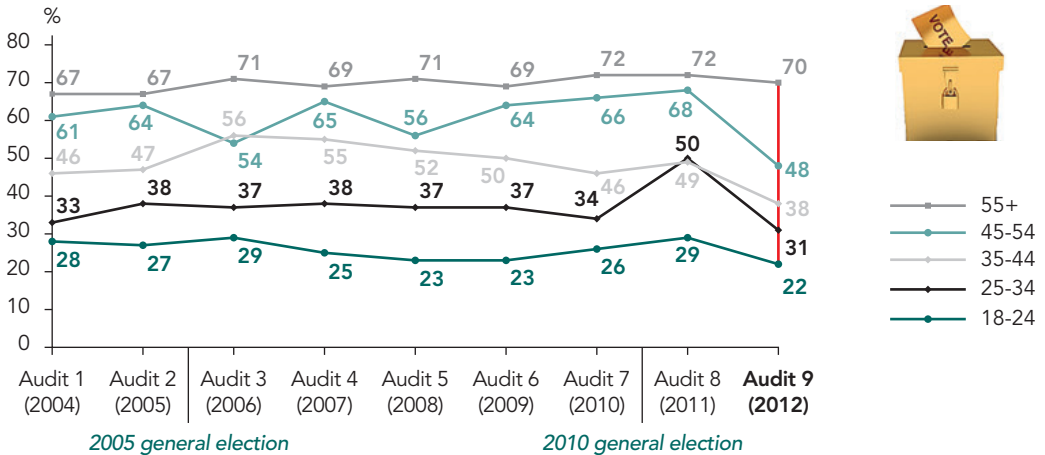
### Knowledgeable about Parliament

Knowledge of Parliament increases with age, with clear distinctions evident between the oldest and youngest groups. While knowledge levels amongst people aged 55 or above have barely changed over time, those of other groups have been more varied, with a gradual rise in knowledge evident amongst 18-24 year olds (from 17% in Audit 1 to 31% in Audit 9). This group is more likely than the rest of the population to value Parliament's role in representing the views of interest groups (11%, compared with 6% overall), but less likely to perceive the issues debated by Parliament as relevant to them (38% agree they 'matter to me', compared with 49% overall). Under-35s are less inclined than the average to agree that Parliament is essential to democracy (55%, compared with 66% overall), or consider it important that it holds government to account (12%, compared with 23% overall).



### Certain to vote

The proportions who feel certain to vote in an immediate general election have always been high amongst older members of the public, and lower amongst successively younger age bands. This remains true in Audit 9; more than three times as many people aged 55 or above (70%) as people aged 18-24 (22%) make this claim. The propensity to vote has remained stable for most age groups, though certainty seems to be gradually waning amongst 35-44 year olds and is now at its lowest point in the Audit series (38%).

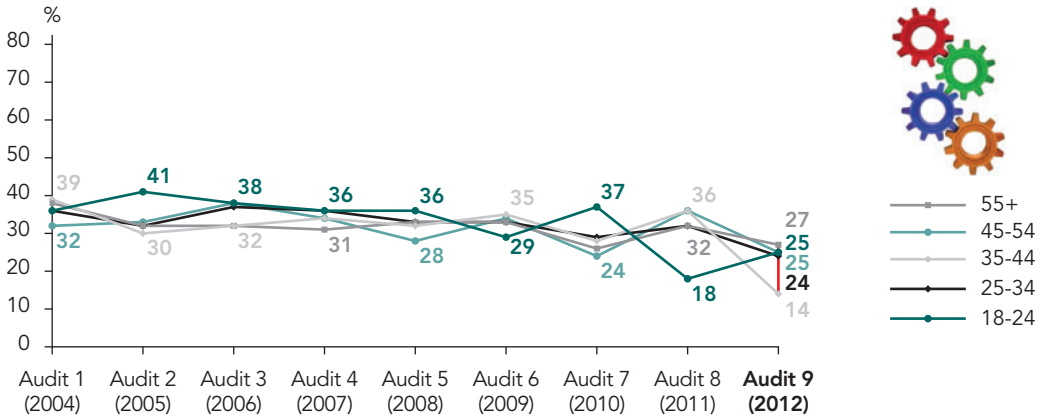


### Action and participation

Older groups have a greater than average likelihood of discussing politics (43% amongst 45-74 year olds, compared with 35% overall) or presenting their views to their MP or local councillor (21% of 55-74 year olds, compared with 13% overall). In general, political activity is less frequent amongst younger groups. For example, only 40% of under-45s report voting in a national or local election, compared with the average across Britain of 55% and 56%, respectively. Political activity is particularly rare among people aged 25-34: the proportions who presented their views to an MP (6%), boycotted products (6%), went to political meetings (1%), or took part in a demonstration (1%) were lower than amongst the rest of the population (13%, 10%, 4% and 4%, respectively). On the other hand, it was the youngest group which was most inclined to volunteer (30% of under-25s, compared with 21% overall) or express their political opinions online (10%, compared with 6% overall).

### Approves of system of governing

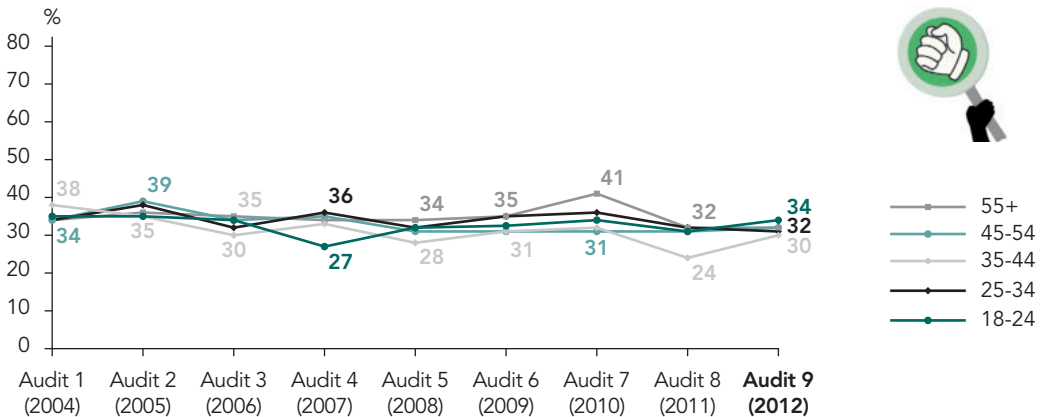
There is no clear pattern of variation between age and approval of the current system of governing Britain. Last year there was an 18 percentage point gap between the highest and lowest approval rates (36% approval amongst 35-44 year olds, and 18% amongst 18-24 year olds), but this year the views of most age groups are alike, with around one in four from each group describing the system as working 'extremely' or 'mainly' well. Approval has fallen starkly amongst 45-54 year olds (from 36% in Audit 8 to 25%), and even more so amongst 35-44 year olds (from 36% in Audit 8 to just 14%); the proportion in the latter group who view the system favourably is lower now than at any time in the Audit lifecycle.



### Feel getting involved is effective

Similar proportions in each age band believe that involvement in politics can help change the way the country is run. Levels of political efficacy declined slightly in every age group following the 2010 general election, but have since remained stable.

At the local level, people aged 75 or above stand out from the rest of the population for being less inclined to believe that involvement in their community can bring about change in their area (45%, compared with 56% overall). Meanwhile, people aged 65 or above are less likely than average to want to become involved in decision-making which can affect their local area (22%, compared with 38% overall) or which can affect the country as a whole (18%, compared with 33% overall).

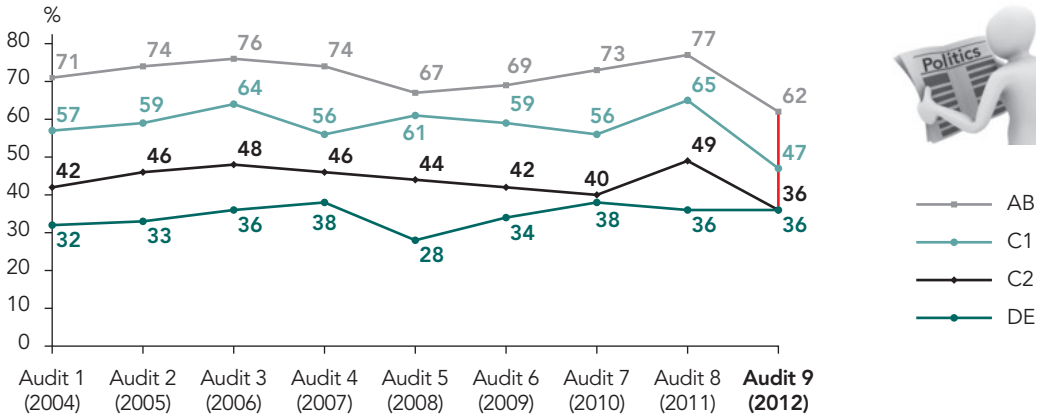


## C. Social Class

### Interested in politics

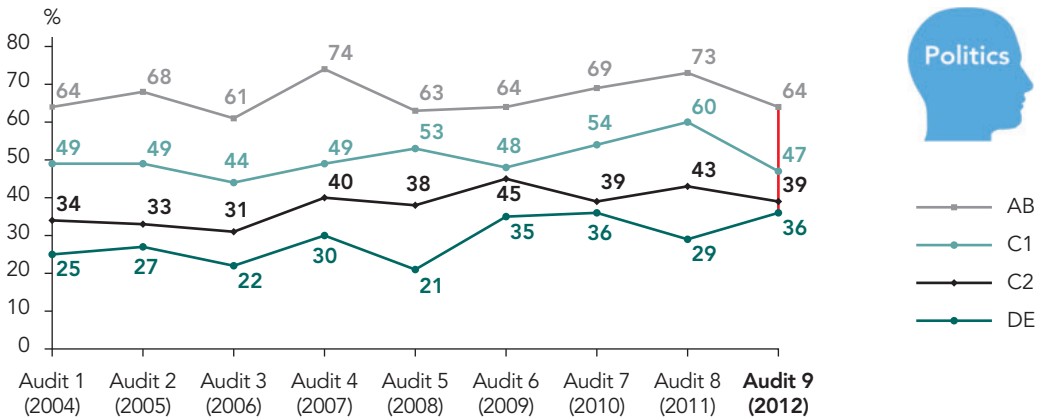
Social grade is a key differentiator for interest in politics, with ABs the most likely throughout the Audit series to express an interest in the subject (62% in Audit 9). This year, levels of interest have declined across all groups except DEs. It is also worth noting that apart from one spike in interest manifested in Audit 8, interest levels amongst C2s have been diminishing at

a steady pace since Audit 3 and that the proportion of C2s who now say they are at least 'fairly' interested in politics is no higher than the proportion of DEs who say the same (36%).



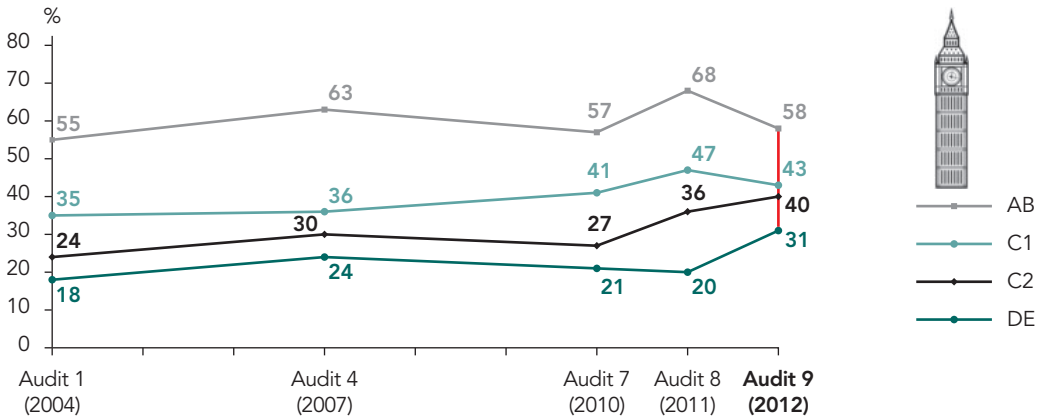
### Knowledgeable about politics

As with interest, knowledge of politics varies by social grade. ABs have consistently been the most knowledgeable group, but after two years of rising knowledge levels amongst this group and C1s, the proportions in these groups who feel they know 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' on the subject have suddenly declined this year (falling from 73% to 64% amongst ABs, and from 60% to 47% amongst C1s). The knowledge levels of C2s and DEs are now similar: 39% of C2s and 36% of DEs claim to know at least 'a fair amount'. Although low compared to the other groups, these proportions are higher than in the early years of the Audit.



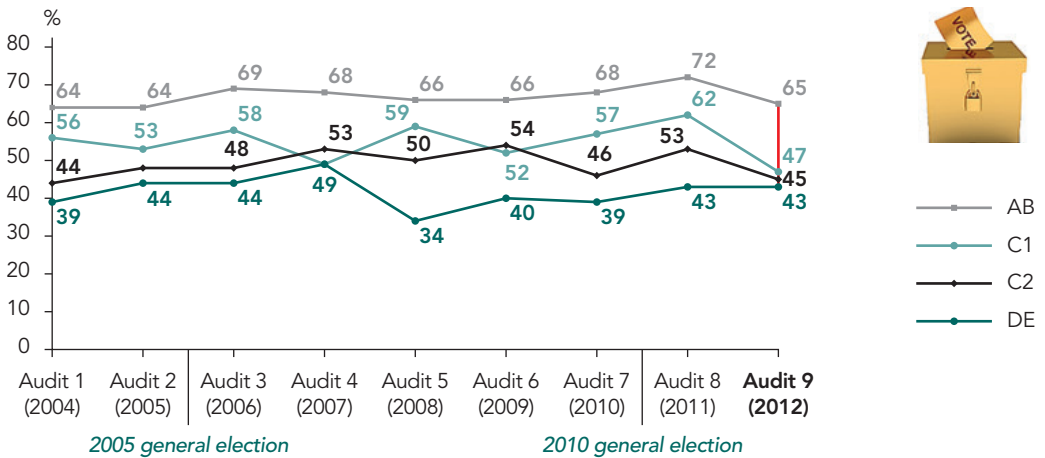
### Knowledgeable about Parliament

The proportion of ABs who feel knowledgeable about Parliament differs substantially to the proportion of DEs who feel the same (58% and 31%, respectively, in Audit 9). Nevertheless, the gap this year (27 percentage points) is smaller than ever before, owing to a rise in professed knowledge amongst the lower social grades. Compared to the population as whole, DEs are less inclined to feel that Parliament deals with issues that are relevant to them (39% agreement, compared with 49% overall) or that it encourages the participation of the public (25% agreement, compared with 30% overall).



### Certain to vote

The people most likely to report that they are certain to vote are those belonging to social grades A and B (65%, compared with 48% overall in Audit 9). This group's propensity to vote has remained broadly stable over time, whilst that of other social grades has always been lower and relatively volatile. The difference in certainty between ABs and all other groups is pronounced this year, as it was in Audit 4 (which was also conducted 18 months after a general election), suggesting that ABs are more inclined than other groups to sustain their interest in voting between elections.



### Action and participation

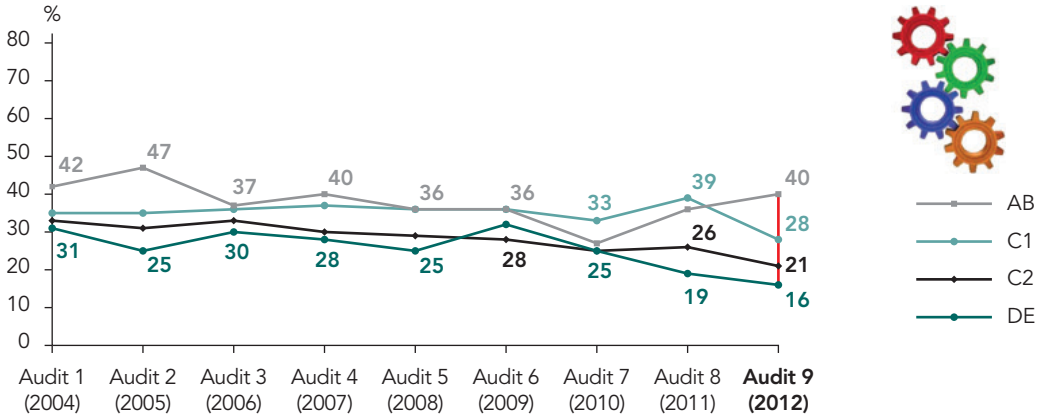
The majority of political activities are most commonly undertaken by ABs followed by C1s, and are considerably less common amongst C2s and DEs. This applies, for example, to voting in the last general election (70% ABs, 59% C1s, and 47% C2DEs) and discussing politics (55% ABs, 43% C1s, and 24% C2DEs).

### Approves of system of governing

Levels of approval of the present system of governing Britain also vary by social grade. The disparity between the views of different social groups has become more pronounced

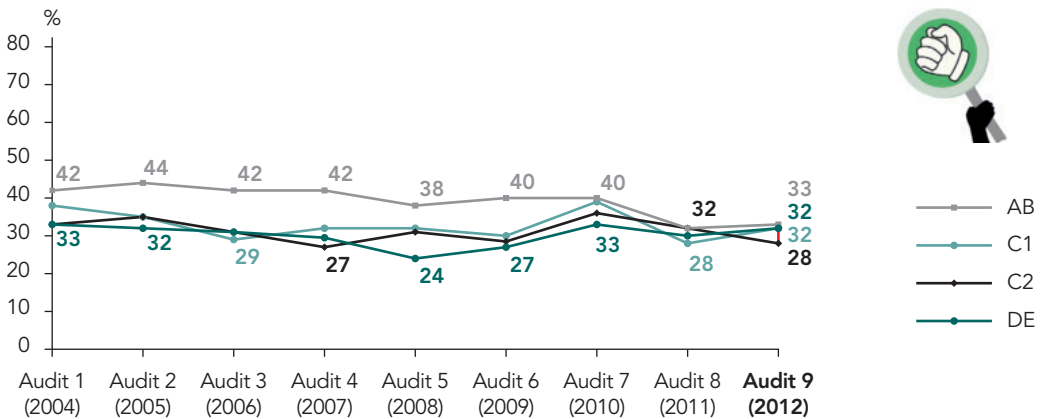


recently, as the proportion of DEs who feel the system is working ‘extremely’ or ‘mainly’ well has fallen – halving between Audit 6 (33%) and Audit 9 (16%) – and the proportion of ABs who feel the same has increased marginally (from 36% in Audit 6 to 40% in Audit 9). The only significant change since last year is that fewer people in social grade C1 are now inclined to view the system favourably (28%, compared with 39% in Audit 8).



### Feel getting involved is effective

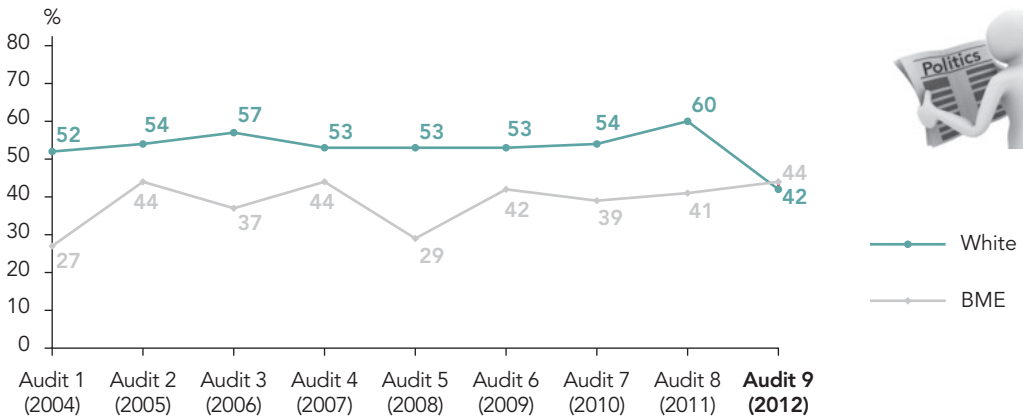
Differences in perceived efficacy between the social groupings were apparent in earlier years of the Audit series but have gradually diminished, as efficacy has grown amongst DEs in recent years and fallen amongst ABs. Since Audit 8, any differences have disappeared altogether. In Audit 9 there is no discernible difference in the proportions of ABs (33%), C1s (32%), C2s (28%) and DEs (32%) who agree that involvement in politics can change the way the country is run. At a local level, however, people in social grades AB are more likely than the rest of the population to feel they can bring about change in their local area by participating in their community (67%, compared with 56% overall), are more likely to feel influential in local decision-making (34%, compared with 24% overall), and more likely to want to be involved in national decision-making (39%, compared with 33% overall).



## D. Ethnicity

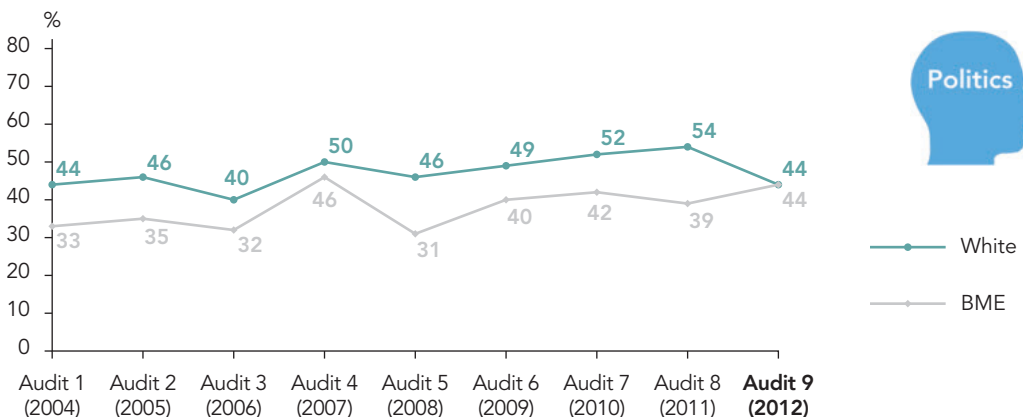
### Interested in politics

Whereas half or more of the white population each year express an interest in politics, people from BME backgrounds have typically been less inclined to say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in the subject. This year, interest amongst the white population has dramatically declined (from 60% in Audit 8 to 44%) while that amongst BMEs has remained stable, and as a consequence the gap in interest levels has closed (42% for the white population and 44% for the BME population).



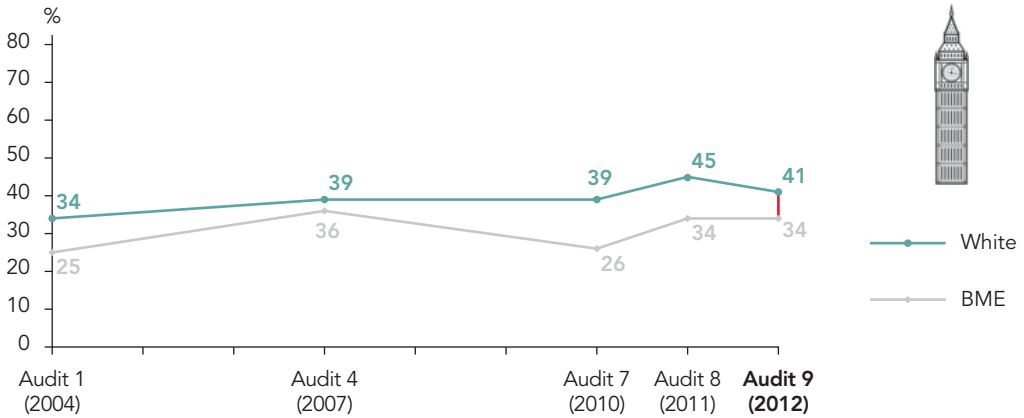
### Knowledgeable about politics

Since the start of the Audit series, the proportion of BMEs who have declared themselves to be knowledgeable about politics has been lower than the proportion of white people who say the same. Knowledge levels almost converged in Audit 4, when the perceived knowledge of people from BME backgrounds spiked, reaching 46% before subsiding to its previous level. This year sees a second convergence in knowledge levels (44% for both groups), this time resulting from a sharp decline in the number of white respondents who claim to be at least 'fairly' knowledgeable about politics (from 54% in Audit 8 to 44% in Audit 9).



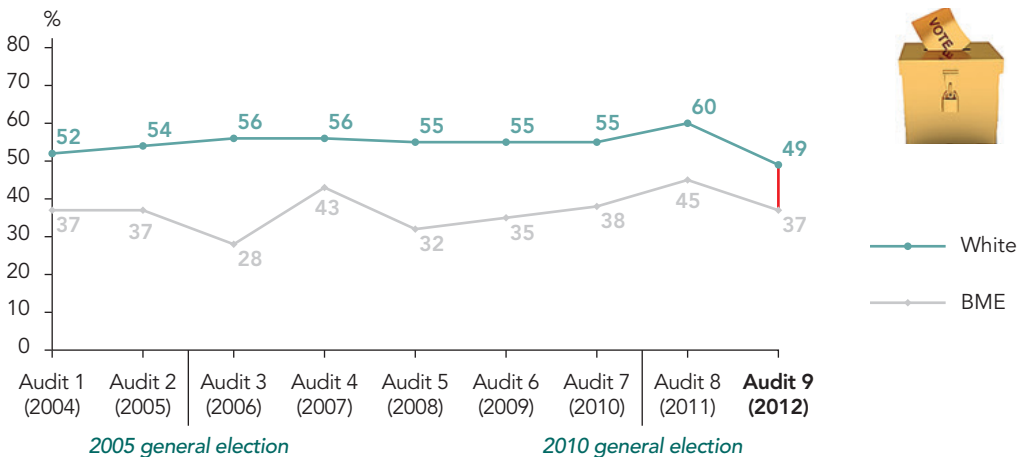
### Knowledgeable about Parliament

As with knowledge of politics, knowledge of Parliament tends to be claimed by more white people than BMEs. However, since Audit 8 knowledge of Parliament has slipped amongst the white population (dropping from 45% to 41%), eliminating the previous differences between the two groups. Despite this, people from BME backgrounds tend to hold slightly different views of Parliament from white people: they are less likely to deem Parliament’s role in representing the UK’s national interests as important to them (30% versus 41%), and fewer agree that Parliament is essential to democracy (59% versus 67%) or strongly agree that the issues it debates and decides on ‘matter to me’ (8% versus 14%). At the same time, BMEs are more likely to say that Parliament encourages the public’s involvement (39%, compared with 29% of white respondents).



### Certain to vote

Since the first Audit, the white population has always been more likely than the BME population to say they are certain to vote in an immediate general election. While this remains true, this year sees a sharp decline in the proportion of white people making this claim (from 60% in Audit 8 to 49% in Audit 9), and a concomitant narrowing of the gap between the two ethnic groups to just 12 percentage points.

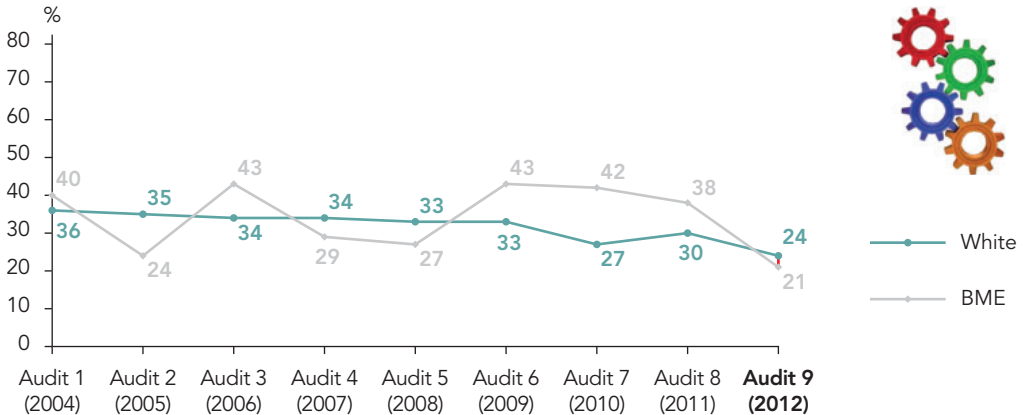


## Action and participation

People from BME backgrounds are less likely than white people to report undertaking a range of political and civic activities, including voting in the last general election (44% versus 56%) or last local election (41% versus 58%). In addition, fewer have discussed politics in the last two to three years (20%, compared with 37% of white people), donated money or a fee to a charity or campaign (21% versus 39%), contributed to fundraising (10% versus 15%), presented their own views to an MP or councillor (7% versus 13%) or urged someone else to do so (6% versus 11%).

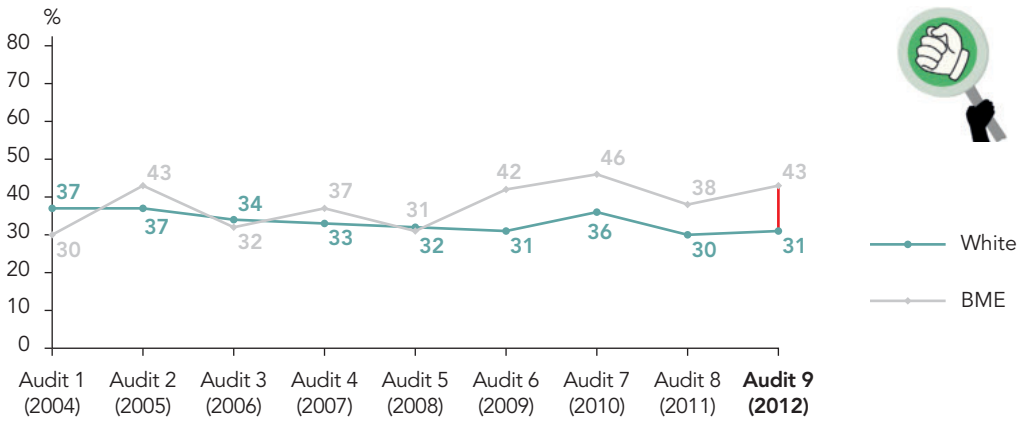
## Approves of system of governing

Approval rates amongst BMEs have fluctuated over time, and have more recently overtaken approval by the white population whose views on the British system of governing started to deteriorate in Audit 7. The belief that the system works 'extremely' or 'mainly' well has gradually become less widespread amongst white people (dropping from 36% in Audit 1 to 24% in Audit 9), and has slumped suddenly amongst BMEs over the past year (dropping from 38% in Audit 8 to 21% in Audit 9).



### Feel getting involved is effective

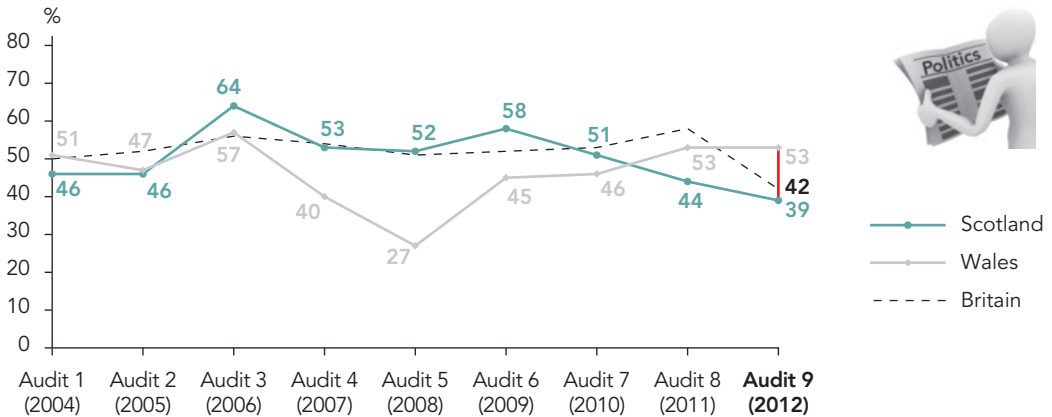
During the first five years of the Audit series, the perceived efficacy of involvement of people from BME backgrounds varied substantially from year to year. Since then, the belief that the country could change through the political participation of ‘people like me’ has become more widespread amongst BMEs, extending to 46% of the population in Audit 7. BMEs are more likely to hold this belief than white people: since Audit 6 the difference in efficacy between the two broad ethnic groupings has been around 10 percentage points, and this difference is sustained in Audit 9. BMEs are also more likely to feel that they are influential in decisions made regarding the country as a whole (3% strong agreement, compared with less than 1% amongst white people). In addition, people from BME backgrounds are more likely to feel that involvement in their community can bring about change in their local area (21% strong agreement, compared with 14% amongst white people), and to believe they currently have influence in local decision-making (4% strong agreement, compared with 1% amongst white people).



## E. Scotland and Wales

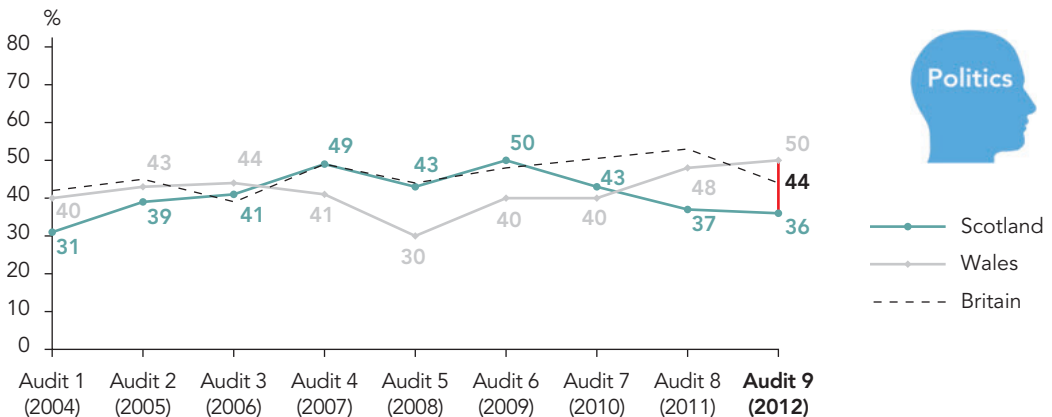
### Interested in politics

Interest in politics has typically been more widespread amongst the Scottish population than the Welsh population, though this pattern was reversed in Audit 8, prior to the 2011 Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament elections. This year, more people in Wales (53%) than in Scotland (39%) claim to be at least 'fairly' interested in politics, and interest levels in Wales lie above the average for Britain as a whole (42%).



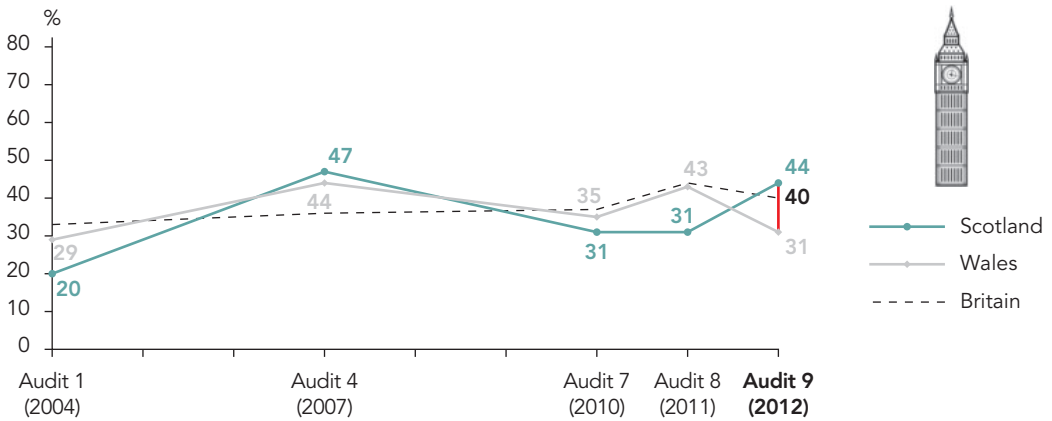
### Knowledgeable about politics

Until recently, levels of knowledge in Scotland have been broadly in line with those in the rest of Britain; this changed in Audit 7, when the proportion of people in Scotland claiming to be knowledgeable about politics dropped from 50% to 43% and then dropped again in Audit 8 to 37%. Knowledge levels in Wales, meanwhile, have typically been lower than average but began rising in Audit 6. In Audit 9, more people in Wales than ever before say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics (50%). In neither location, however, is the proportion claiming to know at least 'a fair amount' about politics significantly different this year from the rest of Britain (44%).



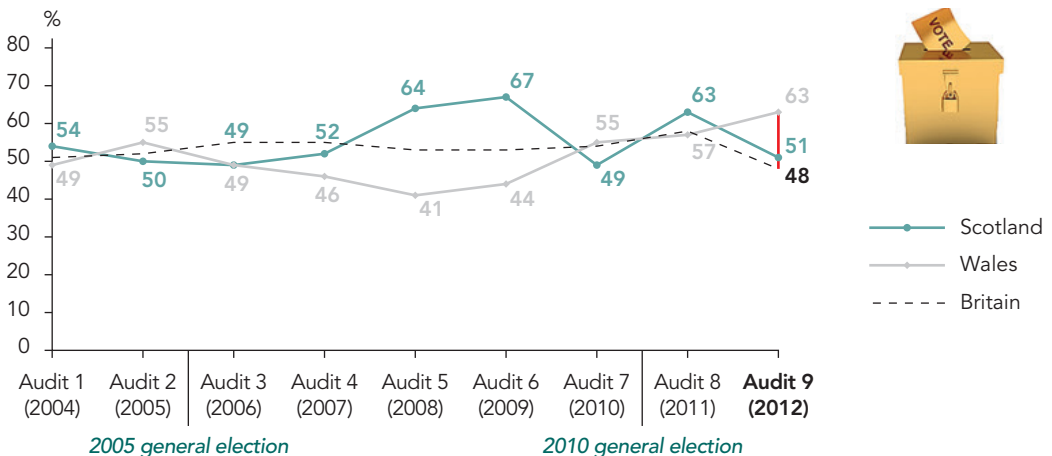
### Knowledgeable about Parliament

The Scottish population's knowledge of the UK Parliament began to decline after Audit 4, and is currently below that of the rest of the British population (31%, compared with 40% overall). People in Scotland are less likely to feel that the UK Parliament is essential to democracy (53%, compared with 66% overall), that the issues it deals with are relevant to them (40%, compared with 49% overall), or that it holds the government to account (27%, compared with 38% overall). In Wales, knowledge levels have kept pace with those in the remainder of Britain. Notably, over three-fifths say that the issues that the UK Parliament debates and discusses are relevant to them (62%, compared with 49% overall). Moreover, people in Wales have an above-average tendency to agree strongly with the notion that the UK Parliament is essential to democracy (44%, compared with 31% overall).



### Certain to vote

People living in Scotland and Wales have typically had a similar propensity to vote in a general election as the rest of the British population. The exception to this was in Audits 5 and 6, when people in Scotland were more inclined than average to say they were certain to vote, while people in Wales were less inclined than average to say the same. Certainty amongst people in Wales has increased since then, reaching an all-time high in Audit 9 (63%, compared with 48% across all of Britain).

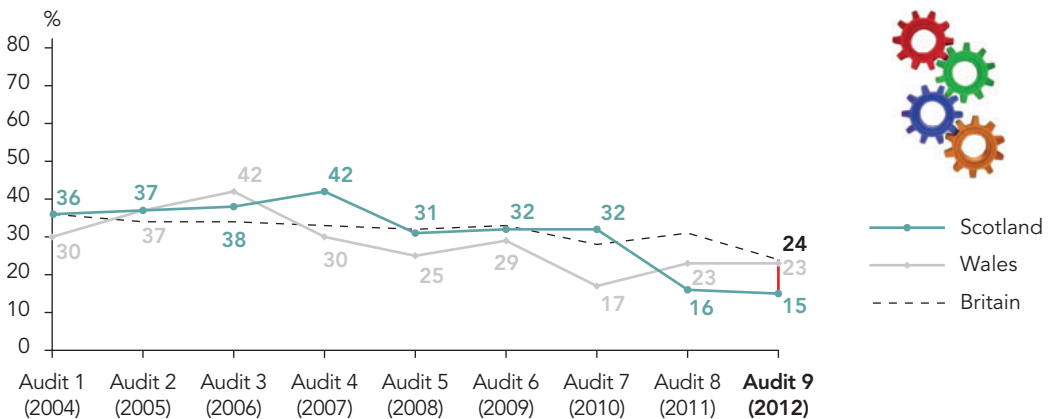


## Action and participation

The proportions of people in Scotland and Wales who report voting in the last Welsh Assembly or Scottish Parliament elections are 41% and 34%, respectively. Neither the Welsh population nor the Scottish population stand out from the rest of Britain with regards to voting or other aspects of political or civic participation, with the exception of volunteering: people in Scotland are more likely and people in Wales less likely than average to say they undertook voluntary work (28% and 14%, respectively, compared with 21% overall).

## Approves of system of governing

The proportions who view the system of governing Britain favourably have gradually fallen amongst both the Scottish and Welsh population. In Scotland, the sharpest decline took place after the 2010 general election, when the proportion saying that it works 'extremely' or 'mainly' well more than halved (from 32% in Audit 6 to 16% in Audit 8). Approval currently stands well below the average for Britain (24%). In Wales, the decline in approval rates which has been evident since Audit 3 has now been arrested and partly reversed, so that the proportion who currently look favourably on the system (23%) is no longer markedly below the average for Britain as whole (24%).

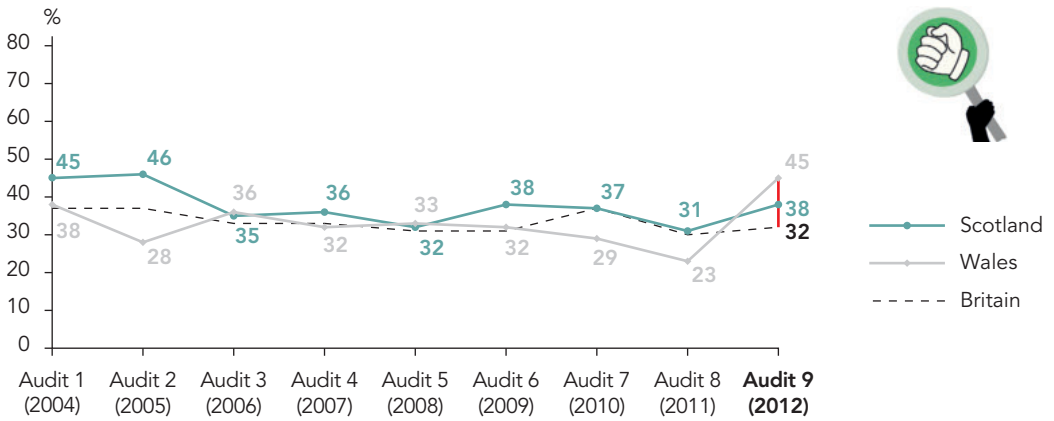


—●— Scotland  
—●— Wales  
- - - Britain



### Feel getting involved is effective

Historically, perceived political efficacy in both Scotland and Wales has been aligned to perceived political efficacy in the rest of Britain. However a striking rise has occurred this year in the proportions who believe that involvement in politics by ‘people like me’ can change the way the country is run. In Scotland, the proportion rose from 31% in Audit 8 to 38% in Audit 9, whilst the same period saw efficacy rise sharply in Wales (from 23% to 45%) and reach a level above the average for Britain (32%). People in Wales are also disproportionately more inclined than the rest of the population to want to be involved in local decision-making (49%, compared with 38% overall). By contrast, the proportions in Scotland who want to be involved in local or national decision-making, or who believe themselves to be influential in local or national decision-making, are the same as those for the rest of Britain.



## Appendix A: Quantitative survey methodology

TNS-BMRB conducted face-to-face interviews with a representative quota sample of 1,163 adults aged 18 or above living in Great Britain. The interviews took place between 7 and 13 December 2011 and were carried out in respondents' homes. The interview total includes 239 booster interviews, which were undertaken in order to make comparisons between different regions and between the white and BME populations more statistically reliable. 95 booster interviews were conducted with respondents living in Scotland, 53 living in Wales, and 91 with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) respondents. This gives a total of 181 interviews in Scotland, 98 in Wales, and 195 with people from BME backgrounds.

Most findings in this report are based on the total of 1,163 interviews conducted between 7 and 13 December 2011. However, the data concerning the activities respondents have undertaken in the last two to three years were considered unreliable owing to a difference in the way these particular questions (Q2.a, Q2.b and Q3. as listed in Appendix B) were administered in 2011 compared to previous years. To counter this, the survey was run again with a new sample of respondents in January 2012, outside the normal Audit reporting timescale of November/December. Findings in this report relating to these three questions only are therefore based on these additional 1,235 face-to-face interviews, which were carried out between 11 and 15 January 2012 and include 169 respondents in Scotland, 105 in Wales, and 213 from BME backgrounds.

Both sets of data have been weighted to the national population profile of Great Britain.

### Statistical reliability

The respondents selected to take part in the survey constitute a sample of the total adult population of Great Britain. Quotas were used to ensure that the number of men and women interviewed, and the number of respondents who worked full-time, part-time or not at all, were representative of the overall population. Nevertheless, as it stands the sample does not reflect an accurate picture of the demographic profile of Great Britain. This is partly because some categories of respondents – such as young people and full-time workers – are less likely to be at home when interviewers knock on their door or are more reluctant to take part in surveys. Extra interviews were required amongst people living in Wales and Scotland, and amongst people from BME backgrounds, to ensure that the number of respondents in each of these groups was sufficient to perform robust analysis. As a result, the proportion of people belonging to these groups is greater in the sample than in the population.

In order to compensate for these biases, the proportion of respondents in each gender, age band and working status was compared to the true proportions in the population. Any differences were corrected by assigning less weight to the responses given by people who

were over-represented in the sample. Hence, the additional interviews conducted in Wales, Scotland and with BMEs were 'down-weighted' to match the distribution of these groups in Great Britain. One consequence of this corrective procedure is that it reduces the size of the sample on which the results are based (the so-called 'effective sample size'). Thus, even though 1,163 adults were interviewed in December 2011, the effective size of the sample is 1,043.<sup>6</sup>

Despite these corrective measures, we cannot be certain whether the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody in Great Britain had been interviewed. Conventionally, survey findings are considered reliable if we are confident that repeating the survey on multiple occasions would lead to similar results 95% of the time.<sup>7</sup> Effective sample sizes are key to determining whether any differences we obtain by running the survey on multiple occasions, or differences in the findings for different groups of respondents, are due to chance alone or whether one set of results genuinely deviates from another set of results. To determine whether a difference constitutes a 'true' deviation, and to feel 95% confident that the interpretation of 'true difference' is valid, the difference must exceed a certain threshold, as shown below:

		Approximately what proportion gave a specific response?				
What is the effective size of the samples being compared?		If 10% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 30% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 50% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 70% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 90% of respondents gave a specific response...
SAMPLE A	SAMPLE B	<b>the difference in the two samples must be around<sup>†</sup>:</b>				
100	100 or more	10%	14%	14%	14%	10%
200	200 or more	7%	10%	10%	10%	7%
300	300 or more	6%	8%	8%	8%	6%
400	400 or more	5%	7%	7%	7%	5%
500	500 or more	5%	6%	7%	6%	5%
600	600 or more	4%	6%	6%	6%	4%
700	700 or more	4%	5%	6%	5%	4%
800	800 or more	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%
1,000	1,000 or more	3%	5%	5%	5%	3%
1,200	1,200 or more	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
1,500	1,500 or more	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%
		<b>...before it can be considered 'statistically significant'</b>				

<sup>†</sup> These figures are conservative and therefore indicative only. Sometimes a smaller difference may be statistically significant, especially if SAMPLE B is much larger than SAMPLE A.

<sup>6</sup> The effective size of the January 2012 sample is 1,122 (unweighted sample size is 1,235).

<sup>7</sup> The 95% confidence level indicates that, if the survey were repeated 20 times, results would be similar on 19 occasions. Any minor variations between the results on those 19 occasions can be attributed to chance, and are not considered to be statistically significant.

The table above is useful when comparing findings between, for example, Audit 9 (effective size 1,043) and Audit 8 (effective size 788). If approximately 50% of respondents in Audit 8 gave a specific response, a difference of around five percentage points (or more) in Audit 9 would indicate a true change had occurred between surveys; a smaller difference would not be considered 'statistically significant' and would conventionally be put down to chance. Similarly, effective sample sizes are important for determining whether differences between the responses given by various sub-groups within the Audit 9 sample are statistically reliable.

		If 10% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 30% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 50% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 70% of respondents gave a specific response...	If 90% of respondents gave a specific response...
SAMPLE A	SAMPLE B	<b>the difference in the two samples must be around:</b>				
Audit 8 (788)	Audit 9 (1,043)	3%	5%	5%	5%	3%
Men (499)	Women (544)	5%	6%	7%	6%	5%
BME (190)	White (892)	5%	8%	8%	8%	5%
		<b>...before it can be considered 'statistically significant'</b>				

### Guide to social grade definitions

The social grade definitions used by the TNS Omnibus are those introduced by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research.<sup>8</sup> For practical purposes, the classification divides individuals into four categories:

Social grade	Label		Definition
AB	Managers and professionals	A	Well-educated top to middle level managers with responsibility for extensive personnel; well-educated independent or self-employed professional people
		B	Well-educated smaller middle-level managers or slightly less well-educated top managers with fewer personnel responsibilities
C1	Well-educated non-manual and skilled workers	C1	Clerical employees (junior managerial, junior administrative, junior professional), supervisors and small business owners
C2	Skilled workers and non-manual employees	C2	Supervisors or skilled manual workers, generally having served an apprenticeship; moderately well-educated non-manual employees
DE	Unskilled manual workers and other less well-educated workers or employees	D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers; poorly-educated managers or small business owners
		E	Poorly-educated manual workers, unskilled workers, and employees working in other non-clerical settings; all others subsisting with minimum levels of income

<sup>8</sup> European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (1997), 'A System of International Socio-economic Classification of Respondents to Survey Research' (Amsterdam: ESOMAR).



## Appendix B: Audit of Political Engagement (APE) Poll topline findings

### Figures used in the report

The Audit 9 figures used in this report are primarily derived from a face-to-face survey conducted in respondents' homes between 7 and 13 December 2011. The results relating to questions Q2.a, Q2.b and Q3. have been derived from repeating the survey with a new sample of respondents between 11 and 15 January 2012 (as explained in Appendix A). There is a note in the tables, text and charts to indicate where this is the case.

Where applicable, trend data from previous Audits of Political Engagement are shown in the topline figures. Information about this data is summarised in the table below.

Audit of Political Engagement (APE)	Sample size	Sample definition	Fieldwork dates	Notes
APE9	1,163	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	7–13 December 2011	Reported data for Q2.a, Q2.b and Q3. in APE9 is derived from fieldwork with 1,235 adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain, conducted 11–15 January 2012.
APE8	1,197	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	3–9 December 2010	Reported data for Scotland includes an additional 98 interviews conducted 7–13 January 2011, providing a total of 197 adults in Scotland.
APE7	1,156	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	13–19 November 2009	
APE6	1,051	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	11–17 December 2008	
APE5	1,073	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	29 November–7 December 2007	
APE4	1,282	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	23–28 November 2006	Respondents in Northern Ireland who were interviewed in APE1-4 are not included in the reported data

Audit of Political Engagement (APE)	Sample size	Sample definition	Fieldwork dates	Notes
APE3	1,142	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	1–5 December 2005	
APE2	2,003	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	2–6 December 2004	
APE1	1,913	Adults aged 18 or above in Great Britain	11–17 December 2003	

Notes on tables:

- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- An asterisk (\*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- A dash (-) indicates that no respondents chose a response.
- Greyed-out columns indicate that a question was not asked in that year’s Audit.
- n/a indicates that the question was asked but the particular response option was not included that year.
- Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to computer rounding, or because multiple answers were permitted for a question.
- Data in this report has been analysed to one decimal place and rounded accordingly. As a result there may be a 1% difference between data reported here and that in previous Audits.

Q1.	How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?									
	APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %	
10 (Absolutely certain to vote)	51	52	55	55	53	53	54	58	<b>48</b>	
9	6	6	7	6	4	5	6	4	<b>4</b>	
8	8	8	7	8	7	8	7	7	<b>5</b>	
7	5	5	7	5	5	6	4	4	<b>4</b>	
6	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	<b>3</b>	
5	7	7	6	5	8	7	7	6	<b>8</b>	
4	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	<b>2</b>	
3	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	<b>2</b>	
2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	<b>3</b>	
1 (Absolutely certain not to vote)	11	11	10	11	10	11	12	10	<b>16</b>	
Refused	-	-	-	1	*	*	*	*	<b>2</b>	
Don’t know	2	1	1	-	4	2	2	2	<b>3</b>	

Q2.a	Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	Voted in the last general election	65	61	70	70	62	58	49	66	<b>55</b>
	Urged someone outside my family to vote	14	17	17	13	15	12	17	18	<b>17</b>
	Helped on fundraising drives	21	30	22	18	19	20	27	18	<b>15</b>
	Presented my views to a local councillor, MP, MSP or Welsh Assembly Member	14	17	15	14	15	17	17 <sup>†</sup>	18	<b>13</b>
	Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	14	16	14	10	16	12	15	15	<b>11</b>
	Made a speech before an organised group	11	17	13	11	12	8	14	13	<b>8</b>
	Been an officer of an organisation or club	8	13	9	7	9	7	12 <sup>‡</sup>	9	<b>8</b>
	Written a letter to an editor	6	7	8	6	7	6	6	7	<b>3</b>
	Taken an active part in a political campaign	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	4	<b>2</b>
	Created a new e-petition on <a href="http://epetitions.gov.uk">http://epetitions.gov.uk</a>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	<b>2</b>
	Stood for public office	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	<b>1</b>
	None of these	25	23	21	23	25	32	30	23	<b>32</b>
	Don't know	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	*	1	<b>1</b>

<sup>†</sup> APE7 wording for half the sample 'Contacted a...'

<sup>‡</sup> APE7 wording for half the sample '...office holder...'

Q2.b	You said that you have presented your views to a local councillor or MP (or MSP/Welsh Assembly Member) (SCOTLAND AND WALES ONLY).									
	ENGLAND: Was this to a local councillor, an MP or both? SCOTLAND/WALES: Was this to a local councillor, an MP or MSP/Welsh Assembly Member? <sup>†</sup>									
	APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9** %	
MP/MSP/Welsh Assembly Member	27			29	29	28	43	37	<b>31</b>	
Local councillor	48			41	48	44	40	43	<b>51</b>	
Both MP/MSP/ Welsh Assembly Member and local councillor	24			29	22	26	19	21	<b>22</b>	
Don't know	2			1	1	2	2	2	-	

\*\* APE9 data from January 2012 survey

<sup>†</sup> Note MSP/Welsh Assembly Member only explicitly mentioned in Scotland/Wales question wording from APE 7 onwards.



Q3.	And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5+ %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	Voted in the last local council election	51	50	55	53	50	47	49	58	<b>56</b>
	Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	41	45	45	39	37	37	42	39	<b>37</b>
	Discussed politics or political news with someone else	38	38	39	41	41	40	41	42	<b>35</b>
	Signed a petition/signed an e-petition	39	44	45	48	40	36	40	36	<b>27</b>
	Done voluntary work	23	28	22	27	23	22	29	25	<b>21</b>
	Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	19	21	18	21	19	18	19	16	<b>10</b>
	Expressed my political opinions online	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	8	9	8	<b>6</b>
	Been to any political meeting	5	6	6	9	6	4	8	6	<b>4</b>
	Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	5	6	6	5	4	3	5	3	<b>3</b>
	Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	5	6	5	5	4	3	4 <sup>†</sup>	4	<b>4</b>
	Voted in the last Welsh/London Assembly/Scottish Parliament election	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	n/a	n/a	<b>7</b>
	None of these	17	16	17	19	20	20	23	19	<b>22</b>
	Don't know	-	*	*	1	2	1	*	1	<b>1</b>

<sup>†</sup> Note that the list of activities is different in Audits 1-4, comparisons with Audits 5-8 should therefore be seen as indicative only.

<sup>‡</sup> APE7 wording for half the sample '...march or strike'.

Q4.	How interested would you say you are in politics?									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	Very interested	11	13	13	13	13	12	14	16	<b>8</b>
	Fairly interested	39	40	43	41	38	40	39	42	<b>34</b>
	Not very interested	32	28	30	27	28	31	29	26	<b>33</b>
	Not at all interested	18	19	14	19	19	17	18	17	<b>24</b>
	Don't know	*	*	*	*	1	*	1	*	<b>1</b>
	<i>Very/fairly interested</i>	50	53	56	54	51	52	53	58	<b>42</b>

Q5.a	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...politics?									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	A great deal	3	4	4	6	4	5	6	7	<b>4</b>
	A fair amount	39	41	35	43	40	43	45	46	<b>40</b>
	Not very much	45	44	51	40	43	42	40	36	<b>41</b>
	Nothing at all	12	10	9	11	12	9	9	11	<b>15</b>
	Don't know	1	*	*	*	*	1	*	*	<b>1</b>
	<i>Great deal/fair amount</i>	42	45	39	49	44	48	51	53	<b>44</b>

Q5.b	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...the UK Parliament?†									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	A great deal	3			4			4	5	<b>4</b>
	A fair amount	30			34			33	39	<b>36</b>
	Not very much	50			46			47	43	<b>43</b>
	Nothing at all	17			14			15	13	<b>16</b>
	Don't know	1			1			1	*	<b>1</b>
	<i>Great deal/fair amount</i>	33			38			37	44	<b>40</b>

† Prior to APE8, asked as 'The Westminster Parliament'. Comparisons with APE8 and APE9 should therefore be seen as indicative.

Q6.	Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	Works extremely well and could not be improved	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	<b>2</b>
	Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	34	32	33	31	30	31	27	30	<b>22</b>
	Could be improved quite a lot	42	45	41	40	38	40	42	39	<b>41</b>
	Needs a great deal of improvement	18	18	21	21	24	24	27	25	<b>26</b>
	Don't know	4	3	4	6	6	3	4	5	<b>10</b>
	<i>Works well</i>	36	34	34	33	32	33	28	31	<b>24</b>

Q7.	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.								
	APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
Strongly agree	6	7	6	5	4	3	5	4	7
Tend to agree	31	30	27	28	27	28	32	26	25
Neither agree nor disagree	20	20	20	24	23	22	19	23	28
Tend to disagree	30	31	31	32	29	32	30	31	22
Strongly disagree	10	10	13	8	13	13	11	13	14
Don't know	4	2	3	4	3	2	4	3	5
<i>Strongly/tend to agree</i>	37	37	33	33	31	31	37	30	32

Q8.	If you were not happy with your local health services, who would you be most likely to contact to seek help? You can select up to three.	
		APE9 %
	Your doctor or GP, or someone else in your GP surgery	44
	Local MP/MSP/WAM	25
	Friends/family	16
	Local advice service/Citizens Advice Bureau	14
	Local council	14
	Local councillor	13
	Ombudsman	8
	Media	4
	Lawyer/solicitor	3
	Parliament	1
	Other	3
	No one	4

Q9.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The UK Parliament holds government to account									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 <sup>†</sup> %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	Strongly agree							4	5	<b>8</b>
	Tend to agree							36	33	<b>30</b>
	Neither agree nor disagree							20	27	<b>29</b>
	Tend to disagree							22	18	<b>14</b>
	Strongly disagree							5	8	<b>7</b>
	Don't know							14	10	<b>13</b>
	<i>Strongly/tend to agree</i>							40	38	<b>38</b>

† APE7 wording: 'The Westminster Parliament'

Q10.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The UK Parliament ...				
		Holds government to account	Encourages public involvement in politics	Is essential to our democracy	Debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to me
		%	%	%	%
	Strongly agree	8	5	31	14
	Tend to agree	30	25	35	35
	Neither agree nor disagree	29	28	19	26
	Tend to disagree	14	21	5	11
	Strongly disagree	7	11	2	6
	Don't know	13	10	9	8
	<i>Strongly/tend to agree</i>	38	30	66	49

Q11.	This is a list of some of the functions of the UK Parliament. Which would you say is the most important to you? You can choose either one or two.	
		APE9 %
	Representing the UK's national interests	40
	Representing the views of local communities	28
	Holding government to account	23
	Representing the views of individual citizens	20
	Scrutinising proposed new laws	13
	Representing the views of interest groups (e.g. businesses, charities)	6
	Don't know	18

Q12.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run.									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	Strongly agree								8	14
	Tend to agree								43	42
	Neither agree nor disagree								26	22
	Tend to disagree								15	12
	Strongly disagree								6	6
	Don't know								2	3
	<i>Strongly/tend to agree</i>								51	56

Q13.a	How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in...your local area?									
		APE1 %	APE2 %	APE3 %	APE4 %	APE5 %	APE6 %	APE7 %	APE8 %	APE9 %
	A great deal of influence						1			2
	Some influence						24			22
	Not very much influence						41			39
	No influence at all						32			32
	Don't know						2			5
	<i>A great deal/some influence</i>						25			24

Q13.b	How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in...the country as a whole?	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	APE7	APE8	APE9
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	A great deal of influence						*			*
	Some influence						14			12
	Not very much influence						44			40
	No influence at all						41			43
	Don't know						1			5
	<i>A great deal/some influence</i>						14			12

Q14.a	To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in...your local area?	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	APE7	APE8	APE9
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	Very involved						5		5	5
	Fairly involved						43		38	33
	Not very involved						32		38	33
	Not at all involved						18		17	25
	Don't know						2		2	4
	<i>Very/fairly involved</i>						48		43	38

Q14.b	To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in...the country as a whole?	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	APE7	APE8	APE9
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	Very involved						5		8	6
	Fairly involved						38		34	27
	Not very involved						33		38	34
	Not at all involved						22		19	30
	Don't know						2		2	3
	<i>Very/fairly involved</i>						43		42	33

Q15.	To what extent to you agree or disagree that: Important questions should be determined by referendums more often than today	
		APE9 %
	Strongly agree	33
	Partly agree	39
	Partly disagree	7
	Strongly disagree	3
	Not sure what a referendum is (spontaneous response)	7
	Don't know	10
	<i>Strongly/partly agree</i>	72

## Appendix C: Qualitative focus groups

Location and Date	Recruitment	Number of Participants
London 16 November 2011	Gender mix 18-35 years old AB social grades Live in urban London (zones 1-6)	12
London 16 November 2011	Gender mix 36-70 years old DE social grades Live in urban London (zones 1-6)	9
Southampton 17 November 2011	Gender mix 18-35 years old AB social grades Live in urban Southampton	12
Southampton 17 November 2011	Gender mix 36-70 years old DE social grades Live in urban Southampton	12
Gildersome, Leeds 16 February 2012	Male Half 18-35 years old / Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in rural area near Leeds	10
Gildersome, Leeds 16 February 2012	Female 18-35 years old DE social grades Live in rural area near Leeds	10
Newbury 20 February 2012	Gender mix 36-70 years old AB social grades Live in rural area near Newbury	11
Cardiff 27 February 2012	Female Half 18-35 years old / Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in urban Cardiff	11



Location and Date	Recruitment	Number of Participants
Cardiff 27 February 2012	Gender mix Half 18-35 years old / Half 36-70 years old Half AB social grades / Half DE social grades Live in urban Cardiff	12
Dundee 1 March 2012	Gender mix 36-70 years old AB social grades Live in rural area on outskirts of Dundee	11
Edinburgh 5 March 2012	Gender mix 18-35 years old DE social grades Live in urban Edinburgh	10
Edinburgh 5 March 2012	Gender mix Half 18-35 years old / Half 36-70 years old Half AB social grades / Half DE social grades Live in urban Edinburgh	11
Newcastle 12 March 2012	Female Half 18-35 years old / Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in rural area near Newcastle	11
Newcastle 12 March 2012	Male Half 18-35 years old / Half 36-70 years old Social grade mix Live in rural area near Newcastle	11
		TOTAL 153

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