Audit of Political Engagement 7

The 2010 Report

with a focus on MPs and Parliament

The annual Audit of Political Engagement has made an invaluable contribution to the debate about the public's view of the political process since it was first published in 2004. Against a backdrop of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the worst economic crisis since the second world war and the MPs' expenses scandal, each yearly Audit has measured the pulse of the nation on politics and the political system providing a benchmark against which it is possible to chart areas of continuity and change.

Audit 7 includes a special focus on MPs and Parliament, exploring how the expenses scandal affected public perceptions of the political system, Parliament and MPs themselves.

This report is a valuable 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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Hansard Society

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Preface

This, the seventh annual Audit of Political Engagement, is the most important since the series was launched in 2004. It is published after a horrendous year for Parliament and just ahead of a general election. Consequently, the format of the Audit has been changed to provide extended analyses and commentaries on the two central questions of how the expenses and related scandals have affected attitudes to MPs and Parliament; and of how public involvement and, in particular, electoral turnout might be raised. As before, the Audit also continues to provide the usual extensive information about the public's patchy knowledge of politics, its varying degree of interest in it, and attitudes to engagement and participation in the political process, based on questions asked each year in order to measure underlying trends.

This is the third Audit produced solely by the Hansard Society, with funding from the House of Commons and the Ministry of Justice, for whose support we are very grateful.

The first question I asked when reading the Audit was what impact would the expenses row have. The answer is surprisingly little. There has been an immediate hit with an eight point rise over the past year to 44% in the number dissatisfied with how MPs in general are doing their job. But, as reported in the introduction to chapter three, 'there is a fundamental stability that underpins the public's view of politics and the political process regardless of the political ebb and flow around them'. But that is only partially reassuring since levels of public trust and confidence were already low. For instance, while the number trusting politicians either a great deal or a fair amount has declined by just one point since the first Audit survey, that is to only 26%. There has been a sharper rise in the number saying they have no trust in politicians.

The main impact of the expenses scandal has been in confirming and hardening the public's long-established scepticism about politicians rather than changing their views. But one worrying outcome for MPs is a significant decline in the impact of Parliament on people's lives, exactly matched by a rise in the perceived influence of the media. So the main challenge for Parliament may be to show its relevance. There is little public interest, however, in the various political reform proposals that have been debated by MPs, think tanks and the media.

This year's Audit raises fascinating questions about public involvement in politics. As before, few people wish to participate directly. For the first time, the report breaks the public down into eight distinct groups based on what we know of their political knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and level and nature of engagement. It then seeks to identify where electoral turnout might be boosted based on the gap between the number of people who say they

have a duty to vote and those who say they are certain to vote in each of these eight groups. The vote gap is highest among those groups defined as 'politically contented', the 'bored/apathetic' and the 'disengaged/mistrustful' and the report concludes that the main focus of those individuals and organisations committed to increasing electoral turnout should therefore be on the first and the third of these groups since the bored/apathetic will be hard to motivate.

The Audit punctures some widely held myths about Parliament and politics, but raises awkward questions about how to achieve democratic renewal and how to restore confidence in representative democracy.

Peter Riddell
Chair
Hansard Society

Executive summary

1. The MPs' expenses scandal

- There has not been a fundamental realignment of views about MPs and the political process as a result of the expenses scandal. For the most part, it has merely confirmed and hardened the public's widely held scepticism about politicians rather than changed their views.

- While seven in 10 people say they have discussed MPs' expenses with their family and friends, three in 10 people do not see this as discussing politics or political news. It is as if, for many people, the MPs' expenses scandal is somehow entirely separate from 'politics'.

- Proposals for constitutional, political, and parliamentary reform in light of the MPs' expenses scandal have yet to resonate with the wider public. Only one in five (19%) have discussed 'the electoral system', and only one in nine (11%) have discussed 'reform of the House of Commons'. Discussion of issues around the selection and recall of MPs is also a minority preoccupation, with just one in 25 people (4%) claiming to have discussed 'open primary selections' and one in 20 (5%) the 'recall of MPs via a petition of their constituents'.

2. Trust

- Trust in politicians generally has not deteriorated much over the course of this Parliament. Nor has there been a 'collapse of trust' in politicians or politics as a result of the expenses scandal, in large part because levels of confidence or trust were already low.

- One quarter of the public (26%) say they trust politicians either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount', down just 1% on the number who did so in the first Audit report.

- However, there has been a hardening of attitudes among those inclined to distrust politicians: 6% more people say they don't trust politicians at all today than did so in the first Audit study.

3. Voting

- Just over half of the public (54%) say they are 'absolutely certain' they will vote in an immediate general election.

- Three out of four members of the public (76%) believe it is their 'duty' to vote. Over the course of the seven-year Audit lifecycle there has been a distinct hardening of attitudes, with a significant rise in the proportion of the public who 'strongly agree' as opposed to those who 'tend to agree' that it is their duty to vote from 37% in the first Audit to 46% in this year's survey.

- 59% of the public agree that 'voting in a general election gives me a say in how the country is run'. People living in marginal constituencies are more likely than those in safe seats to agree that their vote gives them a say. Just under two thirds (64%) of those in all marginal seats agree with the statement, compared with 55% of those in safe seats.

- Two thirds (66%) of the public reject the notion that 'politics is a waste of time', though one in five (21%) agree that it is. Even among those who are least interested in politics or least likely to vote, fewer than two in five believe that 'politics is a waste of time'. Among those certain not to vote, the figure only rises to 38% who believe that 'politics is a waste of time'.

- Utilising their individual characteristics, and reflecting their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, and the level and nature of their engagement with the political process, it is possible to divide the public into eight distinct groups: the 'politically committed'; 'active campaigners'; 'interested bystanders'; 'detached cynics'; 'politically contented'; 'bored/apathetic'; 'disengaged/mistrustful'; and 'alienated/hostile'. By analysing the voting 'gap' for each group it is estimated that electoral turnout might increase by approximately 6% overall if political parties, candidates, Parliament and the media focused on turning those members of the 'politically contented' and the 'disengaged/mistrustful' groups who believe it is their duty to vote into actual voters.

4. MPs

- There is a huge gulf between the public's perception of what they think MPs should be doing and what MPs actually do: most think MPs should represent the views of local people in Parliament, but very few think they do; hardly anyone wants MPs to spend most of their time furthering their own interests; but the public perceive this to be what MPs actually spend most of their time focused on.

- 31% of the public perceive 'for personal gain' to be a major motivating factor for people to become MPs, though an equal number of people believe that most people try to become MPs in order 'to help people in their local area'.

- 50% of the public report believing that MPs spend their time 'furthering personal and career interests' yet just 3% believe that MPs should spend most of their time doing this.

- 61% of the public in super-marginal seats (those with a majority of less than 5%) report that MPs spend their time furthering their 'personal interests' compared to just 49% of the public who say the same in safe parliamentary seats.

- 37% of the public assume MPs focus on representing the views of their political party and 32% say they focus on presenting their views through the media. But these are low priorities for the public with around just one in 10 people considering these to be important activities for MPs.

- Just under half of the public (46%) believe MPs should 'represent the views of local people in the House of Commons', but only one in 10 people (10%) believe most MPs do this. Similarly, two in five people (41%) say MPs should be spending their time 'representing the UK's national interests' but only one in 11 (9%) believe MPs do this.

- Around one in five say they would be proud if a child or relative was either a local politician (21%) or national politician (22%). This ranks politicians 10th/11th out of the 14 professions covered in this survey: putting them in line with a council manager (21%) and ahead of an estate agent (16%) and tabloid journalist (13%). The highest rated professions are family doctor (75%) and school head teacher (64%).

5. Parliament

- There has been a significant decline in the perceived impact of Parliament on people's lives. Only 19% of the public say it is one of the top three institutions that have the most impact on their lives, marking a significant decline from the 30% who said the same in the first Audit.

- The majority of the public (62%) admit that they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about the Westminster Parliament. However, 60% of the public nonetheless believe that the Westminster Parliament 'is worthwhile'.

- If more members of the public knew about Parliament then the institution might be better regarded: 24% of those scoring 7-9 correct answers on the political knowledge quiz in this year's Audit named the Westminster Parliament as influential in people's everyday lives, compared to just 17% of those scoring just 4-6 correct quiz answers and 9% of those scoring 0-3 correct answers.

- Only 27% agree that Parliament 'is welcoming to the public'.

- 40% of the public agree that Parliament 'holds the government to account'.

6. The media and other sources of influence

- The 11% decline in Parliament's perceived influence over the course of the Audit lifecycle is matched by a 9% rise in influence for the media. In each Audit the public have always ranked the media as the most important institution in terms of perceived impact, but the gap between it and the second placed institution (local councils) has grown from five points three years ago to 13 points in this study.

- There has been a marked fall in the perceived impact of the Prime Minister on people's everyday lives, down from 25% in the first Audit to just 17% in this Audit.

In contrast there has been a 7% rise in the perceived impact of business on people's lives in just the last three years.

- The public is evenly split on the way the media reports politics: as many people are satisfied (38%) as dissatisfied (38%); although three times as many are *very* dissatisfied (14%) than are *very* satisfied (4%).

7. Knowledge and interest

- Just over half (51%) of the public claim to know 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' about politics. This is a 3% rise on the result in last year's Audit and marks the highest level of reported knowledge recorded in the Audit series to date.

- 60% of people in marginal constituencies say they know 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' about politics, whereas only 45% of those in safe seats claim this.

- Exactly half of the public (50%) claim to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about the role of MPs.

- Only 44% of the public are able to accurately name their own constituency MP.

- Only 40% of the public claim 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of knowledge about their local council. Just 36% of the public knew that the statement that 'most of the money that local councils spend is raised locally, through council tax' is in fact false.

- Just over half of the British public (53%) say they are either 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics. Three quarters of the public (75%) claim to be interested in national issues but of these only 22% report to be 'very interested'. Similarly, almost four in five people (78%) say they are interested in local issues but of these only 19% claim to be 'very interested', marking a 13% drop over the seven-year Audit lifecycle (and a 9% drop over the last three years alone).

8. Action and participation

- Two in five people (41%) have 'discussed politics or political news with someone else' in the last two or three years.

- Reflecting the high profile expenses scandal in 2009, by far the most discussed political issue was 'MPs' expenses' with seven in 10 people (71%) saying they have discussed this with family and friends.

- There has been a 4% increase this year in the proportion of the public who report having 'signed a petition' (40%) and having 'attended a political meeting' (8%).

- One in 11 people (9%) have 'expressed their political opinions online'. Only a small number of people use either Facebook (4%) or Twitter (2%) to follow a political group or politician.

- Public participation in fundraising and voluntary work is on the rise. Twenty-seven per cent of the public report helping with a fundraising drive, an increase of 7% since last year's Audit. Similarly, the number of those reporting that they have done voluntary work in the last two or three years has risen to 29% – the highest level ever recorded in the Audit.

9. Efficacy and satisfaction

- Almost seven in 10 people (69%) believe the system of governing Great Britain could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' – a rise of 5% on last year's result and 9% higher than the figure recorded in the first Audit study.

- In the first Audit, 36% of the public thought that the system 'works well' but in this year's Audit only 28% do so.

- 37% of the public agree that 'when people like me get involved in politics they really can change the way the country is run' – a 6% increase since last year's Audit.

- Levels of dissatisfaction with Parliament have risen by 5% to a 38% dissatisfaction rate this year. Public dissatisfaction with how MPs do their jobs has risen at an even steeper rate – by 8% to 44%. Despite the expenses problem, and the focus on individually named MPs, only 16% of the public are dissatisfied with how their own MP is doing his/her job compared to 13% who said the same in the first Audit report. And 38% of the public remain satisfied with how their own MP is doing his/her job, just 3% lower than the 41% who reported the same in the first Audit report.

1. About this report

The Audit of Political Engagement series is intended to be a longitudinal study, providing an annual benchmark to measure political engagement in Great Britain, gauging public opinion *vis-à-vis* politics and the political system and more broadly the general health of our democracy.

Each Audit report presents the findings from a public opinion poll survey, providing detailed commentary on a range of indicators that have been chosen as key measures of political engagement. These indicators enable us to track responses year on year and note the direction and magnitude of change since the Audit was first published in 2004. The indicators examined over the course of the Audit lifecycle – some each year, some less frequently – fall under three thematic headings and track the percentage of people who:

Knowledge and interest

- Feel they know about politics;
- Are interested in politics;
- Know their MP's name;
- 'Passed' a political knowledge quiz;
- Feel they know about the role of MPs;

Action and participation

- Are absolutely certain to vote at an immediate general election;
- Have discussed politics;
- Have contacted their MP or councillor;
- Are classified as politically active;[1]
- Are classified as non-politically active;
- Paid money to or joined a political party;

Efficacy and satisfaction

- Believe that getting involved works;
- Think that the present system of governing works well;
- Trust politicians generally;
- Are satisfied with Parliament;
- Are satisfied with their own MP.

In addition to exploring the indicators of political engagement, recent Audit reports have also focused on a special theme of topical interest: Audit 5 focused on the constitution

[1] The definition 'politically active' is new in this Audit – the indicator previously referred to 'political activist' but following a review we have determined that the latter term may misrepresent the focus of the indicator question for it is possible to be politically active without being an activist as traditionally understood in the context of party politics.

and Audit 6 on political participation and citizenship. This year, with the expenses scandal and the anticipated general election in mind, the focus of the report falls on MPs and Parliament.

Regular readers of the Audit report will notice some new developments in this year's study. For the first time we have supplemented the quantitative opinion poll survey with information derived from four qualitative discussion groups held in London and the East Midlands in November 2009. These have enabled us to explore some of the key issues – such as, for example, what the public understands by the term 'politics' – more comprehensively than would otherwise be possible through quantitative research alone.

Findings from these qualitative discussion groups have been clearly highlighted in the report by the use of (fe)male silhouettes alongside direct quotations from participants to illustrate some of the key points or themes that emerged during the group discussions.

Attached to each quotation from a discussion group participant, information is provided in brackets indicating which discussion group location – ie. London or the East Midlands – and which social class – ABC1 or C2DE – the individual came from. More detailed information about the make-up of the discussion groups can be found in Appendix D.

The structure of this year's Audit report also marks a departure from past practice. As this seventh report is the last Audit study before a general election it is possible to chart political engagement trends over the course of a Parliament for the first time. After setting out the annual political context of 2009 in chapter two, the first layer of analysis in this report focuses in chapter three on trends in political engagement during the Audit lifecycle, charting developments over the course of an entire Parliament and much of the last decade.

Such was the enormity of the MPs' expenses scandal in 2009 that analysis of the public's reaction to the scandal forms an entire chapter in itself in chapter four of the report, leading onto a broader commentary and analysis about public perception of MPs, Parliament and the media generally in chapter five.

The Audit has always looked at political engagement in the round: certainty to vote is an indicator of engagement but it has always been recognised that this is but one form of engagement and other, less common forms – such as discussing politics, joining a political party, or seeking to influence the political process through signing a petition – are equally important in their own right. In this year's Audit report however, there is a greater focus than usual on voting as a key form of political engagement in light of the impending general election, the questions that arise about whether public reaction to the MPs' expenses scandal will encourage or deter turnout, and the real possibility that the outcome of the

general election may be indecisive resulting in a hung Parliament. Chapter six specifically explores these themes: it looks at the range of different political engagement trajectories displayed by the public, explores profiles of political engagement and, for the first time, analyses how what we know about political engagement might be utilised to encourage voter turnout in future.

The report then focuses on the engagement indicators and 2009 survey results, presenting in chapter seven the responses to the quantitative survey questions under the three key themes of 'knowledge and interest', 'action and participation', and 'efficacy and satisfaction', augmented by this year's special focus on 'MPs and Parliament'. This analysis is further developed in chapter eight through detailed examination of the demographic and sub-group differences, focusing on gender, age, social class, ethnicity, Scotland and Wales, and, with the general election in mind, marginal seat status.[2] This chapter helps reveal the complex and often contradictory nature of public attitudes to politics and the political process.

Given the changed structure and the extended commentary and analysis in this year's Audit, in order to help readers track which sections of the report relate to the specific indicators of political engagement that have been explored in previous Audits, the relevant sections of chapter seven are flagged up with the following indicator symbol: 

We hope this will enable readers to more readily locate and compare the indicator data. We have also provided the key indicator results for all seven Audits in readily accessible graphical form in chapter nine, again to facilitate ready comparisons across the Audit lifecycle.

The information in the Audit series is derived from an annual Political Engagement Poll undertaken by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Hansard Society supplemented this year by the discussion group findings. Detailed information about the methodology for both the quantitative and qualitative research is set out in the Appendices. Following publication of this report the full survey dataset will be made available on the Hansard Society website (www.hansardsociety.org.uk) in order that others may use it for research purposes. It will also be lodged at the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex.

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] For the purposes of comparison 'super-marginal' seats are defined as those where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of less than 5%, 'marginal' seats are where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of less than 10%, 'semi-marginal' seats are where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of between 10% and 20%, and 'safe' seats are those where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of over 20% or more. Boundaries are based on those in existence at the time of the 2005 general election.

2. The political context

Events shape opinions and behaviours and as such the views of the public, as measured in the Audit surveys, should always be viewed in light of their political context.

Britain in 2009 will be remembered above all for the parliamentary expenses scandal and the political maelstrom that followed, the state of the economy, rising military casualties in Afghanistan, and the internal divisions within Gordon Brown's government in the run-up to the much anticipated 2010 general election.

Parliamentary expenses

There had been concerns about the system of MPs' expenses and allowances for some time thanks to the dogged efforts of freedom of information campaigners. But events came to a head in April 2009 when the *Daily Telegraph* bought a data disc containing the claims and associated receipts of all MPs from a mole with access to the files of the House of Commons Fees Office. What followed for an entire month was a daily front-page drip feed of evocative stories detailing MPs' requests for plush and exotic furnishings, food, duck houses, the cleaning of moats and phantom mortgages, all of which shocked and appalled the public in equal measure. So egregious were many of the claims that the story made global headlines and a new term, 'flipping' – an MP's practice of changing their second home designation in order to maximise the profit accrued from allowances and mortgage payments – entered the lexicon.

With over a third of all members of the House condemned in the court of public opinion, and with members from all parties at fault, the resulting conflagration engulfed the entire political class. The first to pay the price was the Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin. Having confessed to the nation that 'we have let you down very badly indeed', he was forced out of office as it rapidly became clear that he had lost the confidence of MPs and become a lightning rod for public criticism. Several frontbench resignations followed in subsequent months and an unprecedented number of MPs announced their intention to retire at the next general election. But most seriously of all, by year's end the police had referred several cases to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Two separate inquiries were established to investigate different aspects of the debacle. One headed by Sir Thomas Legg audited each Member's claims over the previous five years to determine what should be repaid to the public purse. The other by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), chaired by Sir Christopher Kelly, sought to determine what a new system of MPs' expenses and allowances should look like in the future. The Legg Inquiry quickly found itself mired in controversy when a number of MPs objected to

his decision to impose retrospective caps on their gardening and cleaning expense claims whilst not tackling the vexed question of mortgage interest payments and capital gains. In contrast, the Kelly report was widely welcomed but its implementation was complicated by the government's decision to establish a new Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) in the summer.

Public disgust with parliamentarians was exacerbated by the emergence of similar problems in the House of Lords. In January the *Sunday Times* published allegations suggesting that four peers had indicated a willingness to accept financial inducements – from an undercover reporter posing as a lobbyist – in order to influence legislation due to be scrutinised in the Upper House. A full investigation was undertaken by the House of Lords Committee for Privileges as a result of which two of the peers, having been found in breach of the House Code of Conduct, were suspended until the end of the parliamentary session. In subsequent months the *Sunday Times* revealed evidence against a number of other peers who were alleged to have abused their allowance arrangements, and again the results of police inquiries were referred to the Crown Prosecution Service. Meanwhile, the Upper House undertook a review of its Code of Conduct, the Senior Salaries Review Body proposed significant reform of the expense and allowance system, and the government brought forward proposals to enable peers to be expelled permanently from the House of Lords in the future.

Political crises

That Prime Minister Gordon Brown survived in post to the end of the year was in many ways an achievement in itself, bedevilled as he was by constant speculation about his leadership of the Labour Party.

In some instances the problems he and the government faced were self-inflicted as, for example, when they failed to quickly and effectively resolve the policy decision about the right of Gurkhas to settle in Britain, instead allowing a campaign supporting the Gurkhas, led by actress Joanna Lumley, to dominate the airwaves and the policy debate. Ministers gave the appearance of being buffeted by a tide of events dictated by the media and a celebrity campaigner. The involvement of the Prime Minister's media adviser, Damian McBride, in a proposed campaign to smear political opponents was also a significant springtime distraction that sullied the government's reputation and culminated in the adviser's resignation.

When Labour's Norwich North MP, Ian Gibson, was informed by party officials that he would not be permitted to stand at the next general election after an internal party inquiry into his expense claims, he denounced what he described as the party's kangaroo court tactics and chose to leave Parliament immediately. The by-election was subsequently won by the Conservatives on a 16% swing by their 27-year-old candidate, Chloe Smith. In the only other by-election of the year, also prompted by the expenses scandal, Labour managed to hold on, winning Speaker Martin's Glasgow North East seat with 59% of the vote. However, the 33% turnout was the lowest ever recorded in a Scottish by-election for the Westminster Parliament.

But it was the local and European elections in June which proved to be the most damaging minefield for Brown. At the local level Labour was wiped out, emerging without control of a single county council across the country. The European elections similarly offered no comfort: securing just under 16% of the vote the Labour Party trailed in third behind the UK Independence Party and, worryingly for all the mainstream parties, the British National Party won two seats. The resulting furore later in the year about the appearance of their party leader Nick Griffin on BBC's *Question Time* illustrated the difficulties that mainstream politicians would experience in the future when determining how best to deal with a far-right challenge now given the imprimatur of the ballot box.

Labour's poor showing at the local and European elections was reinforced by senior cabinet resignations that conveyed the impression of a government in real crisis. The day before the local elections the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears resigned, following her colleague, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith who had resigned earlier in the week, out of the government. In all likelihood both would have been sacked after the elections because of problems with their expense claims and as such these resignations could have been passed off as embarrassing. But when the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions James Purnell resigned shortly after the polls closed, calling on Gordon Brown to stand aside in order to give Labour a fighting chance of winning the next election, the government appeared to be in meltdown. Rumours circulated over the course of the next 24 hours of other cabinet resignations and both Alan Johnson and David Miliband were forced to quell speculation that they were planning to mount leadership challenges. In the government reshuffle that followed 11 senior ranking ministers left the government with the Europe Minister, Caroline Flint, leaving office decrying the Prime Minister's treatment of female ministers as 'window dressing'.

The proximity of the general election sharpened the partisan tone on almost every issue with Gordon Brown really enjoying only one moment of respite throughout the year. Having announced a switch in their allegiance to the Conservative Party during party conference season, the *Sun* newspaper added insult to injury when it subsequently ran a story lambasting the Prime Minister for having sent handwritten personal notes of condolence containing errors to bereaved relatives of soldiers killed in Afghanistan. But the story backfired badly on the *Sun* when it rapidly became clear that the public sympathised with a Prime Minister whose bad handwriting was caused by serious problems with his eyesight. Few believed the *Sun's* portrayal of a Prime Minister actively going out of his way to insult grieving relatives. Similarly, it was personal rather than political challenges which achieved rare unity across the party divide when the tragically early death of David Cameron's young disabled son Ivan was announced in February, prompting the Speaker to adjourn the House of Commons and cancel Prime Minister's question time as a mark of respect. But these moments were few and far between amidst the increasingly heated political debate both between and within the parties.

State of the economy

But whatever the travails of both government and Parliament, for the public it was uncertainty about the state of the economy that was of most concern in 2009. The economy shrank at the fastest rate since the second world war, with public borrowing on course to

hit an annual high of £178 billion. In November alone, public sector borrowing hit a record monthly high of £20.3 billion and the Office of National Statistics estimated that public sector net debt now stood at £844.5 billion or 60% of overall UK economic output. It had been anticipated that the economy would return to growth in the third quarter of the year but instead it shrank by 0.3%, leaving the UK as one of the few remaining western industrial democracies still in recession as it entered the last quarter of the year.

Nonetheless, there were small signs of progress: in the last quarter of the year just under 2.5 million people were unemployed but the scale of the quarterly rise had begun to decline; the stock market recovered lost ground; house prices improved with Nationwide concluding that they had bottomed out at little more than 10% below their 2007/08 high; and the national household savings ratio – the percentage of disposable income being saved – also began to rise. However, there was increasing concern by the end of the year that these very signs of progress might actually be a precursor to a second decline and a potential 'double-dip' recession, rather than the 'greenshoots of recovery' that many hoped for. Rising share prices at home and abroad prompted fears that once again the stock market might overheat; and although the economy would be brought back into better balance if household debt declined, there were concerns that the economy could readily contract still further if consumers cut back spending too sharply.

At the G20 conference in London in September, chaired by Gordon Brown, the governments collectively agreed to what was described as an unprecedented fiscal expansion, signing up to a $1.1 trillion package of measures intended to restore growth and jobs and rebuild confidence and trust in the financial system. But little headway was made in securing an agreement to reform the international financial regulatory system and the debate that raged between, on the one hand, the UK and US who both favoured a substantial and ongoing fiscal stimulus, and France and Germany on the other hand who wanted to rein in spending, mirrored the ongoing nature of the debate between left and right here at home.

The Conservatives believed the government was borrowing recklessly; Labour believed that Conservative policies, focused on cutting spending immediately, would risk choking off the nascent recovery if implemented. It was increasingly clear, however, that the country faced a long period of austerity regardless of which party was in government. In his speech to the Conservative's final party conference before the general election, Shadow Chancellor George Osborne laid out a package of measures designed to reinforce his party's credibility as the party of fiscal responsibility: a pay freeze for public sector workers; bringing forward a planned rise in the state pension age; cutting tax credits for the middle classes; and enforcing a public sector salary cap equivalent to the earnings of the Prime Minister.

In the November pre-budget report the Chancellor, Alastair Darling, capped public sector pay rises at 1% for the next two financial years, introduced a 50% tax rate for incomes over £150,000 per annum and imposed an extra 0.5% National Insurance levy on all incomes over £20,000 per year. However, on the spending front, a further £40 billion was committed to shoring up the banking system, with the government's stake in Royal Bank of Scotland increasing from 70% to 84% as a consequence. This latest bailout of the banks was particularly difficult for the public to swallow, coming as it did at the same time as

speculation increased about the likely scale of bankers' bonuses for the year. Leading bank chairmen and chief executives delivered a collective *mea culpa* before the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee in the spring but by year's end, with estimates suggesting that £7.6 billion had been set aside by the banks for bonus payments, to many members of the public the banking culture did not appear to have changed. Amidst increasing public anger, the Chancellor laid out proposals for a 50% windfall tax on bank bonus plans but there was widespread concern that loopholes would be found to avoid payment.

International challenges

2009 was the deadliest year for British troops since the 1982 Falklands War with more than 100 troops killed in Afghanistan. The sight of members of the public lining the streets of the small town of Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire to pay tribute to those who had made the ultimate sacrifice as their military coffins were escorted from RAF Lyneham became an almost weekly occurrence on the evening news. The scale of losses was such that it prompted a broader debate about the government's strategy in Afghanistan and the resourcing of the troops stationed there, with debate particularly centred on whether the military had the equipment, especially the helicopters, needed to fight the Taliban effectively. With British forces having left Iraq, the focus was now entirely on the Afghan theatre, and with an extra 500 troops committed at the end of the year there was increasing concern that, with the war now in its eighth year, there was no strategic plan to define and secure victory and then bring the troops home.

Iraq did return to the headlines towards the end of the year when the promised Iraq War Inquiry began following the final withdrawal of British troops from the country. When former Prime Minister Tony Blair confirmed in a television interview in December that he would have still gone to war in Iraq even if he had known there were no weapons of mass destruction, and that the marshalling of evidence and arguments for military action would consequently have been done differently, this, coupled with the early high profile Inquiry evidence sessions, served to remind everyone of the corrosive impact that the Iraq War had had on British politics since 2003.

Tony Blair also featured highly in the ongoing debate about the future of Europe in the latter half of the year. The Lisbon Treaty was finally ratified requiring, as a consequence, the EU member states to elect a President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs. It was no secret that Blair was interested in the presidency and his case was fought by Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the EU Summit in Brussels. But there was little support for him among the other major European leaders and the job went instead to the Belgian Prime Minister with Britain securing the High Representative role for its surprise candidate, Baroness Cathy Ashton.

Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty also posed significant political challenges for the official opposition. Once the Treaty was ratified by all the member states it rapidly became clear that the Conservative's European policy – predicated on a commitment to a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty – was unsustainable and a new policy had to be announced. The party promised a new 'referendum lock' in the future as well as a new UK Sovereignty Bill, but

whilst more politically realistic, the u-turn was unpopular with party members and the public and led to a temporary dip in the party's opinion poll fortunes.

Beyond Westminster

Navigating the hazardous waters of international relations also proved a challenge for the Scottish Executive. In one of the most significant decisions taken by a Scottish minister in the decade since devolution, the Justice Secretary, Kenny MacAskill, released the Libyan prisoner, Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi to a welter of national and international condemnation. Convicted in 1991 on 270 counts of murder for the UK's worst ever terrorist attack – the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988 – al-Megrahi was appealing against a 27-year prison sentence. But, having been diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer, and with his doctors recommending that he had only months to live, the Scottish minister decided in August to release him on compassionate grounds.

What followed proved to be a huge international embarrassment for the Scottish government and sparked a major diplomatic row with the United States. Despite assurances to the Scottish government that his return would be handled sensitively, al-Megrahi flew home aboard Colonel Gadaffi's private jet to a hero's welcome. Amidst allegations that he had come under pressure to release al-Megrahi to facilitate the UK's continuing economic and diplomatic rapprochement with Libya, not least around oil deals, MacAskill continued to maintain that the decision was his and his alone and was rooted in the ideals of Scottish law. Nonetheless, such was the outrage at the decision, both at home and abroad, that the Scottish Parliament was recalled for only the third time in its history (the other recalls having been to mark the deaths of First Minister Donald Dewar and the Queen Mother). For many, the sight of the Saltire held aloft by the cheering crowds that greeted al-Megrahi at Tripoli Airport was one of the lowest points in post-devolution Scotland, with many left questioning the naivety of Scottish ministers in the face of international realpolitik, and counting the possible future cost to Scotland's international reputation and particularly its business links with the United States.

The al-Megrahi controversy highlighted the difficult tensions that existed at the heart of the devolved constitutional settlement – for both Scotland and Wales – and it was a debate that continued apace throughout the year as the relationship between the devolved legislatures and Westminster and Whitehall was subjected to new pressures and questions.

In Scotland the SNP administration continued to navigate the difficult terrain of minority government while continuing to make the case for independence, a political balancing act made all the more difficult by the economic recession as a number of manifesto commitments had to be diluted or abandoned altogether. When the SNP's £33 billion budget was initially rejected by the Parliament on the casting vote of the Presiding Officer the prospect of ongoing political instability was only resolved when the budget was resubmitted, with minimal changes, following days of political horse-trading. The long-awaited final report of the Calman Commission on the Scottish constitutional settlement was published in the summer, and though it did not fundamentally challenge the constitutional arrangements, it did signal that the time had come for a more ambitious transfer of responsibilities to Edinburgh, recommending a series of revisions to the 1998

Scotland Act to enshrine greater financial autonomy for Scotland through tax-raising powers and the devolving of a range of other reserved powers to the Parliament. Against this backdrop, the SNP continued to push the independence agenda and in November 2009 it published the *Your Scotland, Your Voice. A National Conversation* White Paper which set out a range of constitutional options up to and including the independence option, thereby paving the way for a much promised independence referendum. But with the collapse of the Scottish banking system the year before, enthusiasm for independence appeared to be on the wane as the public questioned whether an independent Scotland could have bailed out its own banking system and kept the economy from slipping into an economic disaster of Icelandic proportions.

In Wales, initiatives by the Labour-Plaid coalition government similarly reinvigorated the constitutional debate. The Independent Commission on Funding and Finance for Wales, set up in 2008 by the Welsh Assembly government as part of the coalition agreement, produced its first report, concluding that need rather than population size should be at the heart of the devolved financial settlement in the future. The All Wales Convention, an independent body set up by the Welsh Assembly government in 2007 to raise awareness about devolution arrangements and determine whether the time had come to move to the next step in the devolution process, also reported. After two years of extensive consultations with the Welsh public, it concluded that there should now be a move to a referendum on primary legislative powers, whilst warning that any successful 'Yes' campaign would require strong, robust leadership. But that decision would be taken by new leaders at the helm of the Welsh Assembly government when, after nearly 10 years in office, Rhodri Morgan retired as leader of the Welsh Labour Party and First Minister and was replaced by Carwyn Jones.

Political reform and the road to the general election

The net result of the political instability of 2009 was that it raised difficult and far-reaching questions not just about the ethics of our parliamentary representatives, but also about the institutional design, structure and functions of representative democracy itself. But what emerged in practice was only an incremental reform agenda. Early changes were witnessed in Parliament under the auspices of the new Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow MP. Having campaigned for the position as a reformer – including at the first-ever public hustings for the election of the Speaker organised by the Hansard Society – he used his mandate to drive through early changes, delivering on his promise to be a more active Speaker acting as an ambassador for the House of Commons in the public domain, particularly with the media and schools. Some of these outreach efforts were modelled on initiatives already being undertaken by the Lord Speaker who in turn took on an even more proactive role in response to the problems of the Upper House.

In terms of parliamentary process and procedure, the new Select Committee on House of Commons Reform chaired by Tony Wright MP set out a road-map to reform and enhance the role of backbenchers in the future. Its most far-reaching recommendations were designed to rebalance the relationship between the executive and Parliament by introducing a business committee in the House of Commons to manage the parliamentary agenda and to elect Select Committee chairs free from the interference of party whips. It

also proposed measures to improve public participation in the legislative process. But as the year ended, the government's response to the recommendations was still awaited, and the window of opportunity for implementation before the end of the parliamentary session grew ever tighter.

At the constituency level, a number of MPs whose expense claims were among the most egregious found local people organising petitions demanding their resignation, indicative of the degree of frustration that some members of the public felt on realising that MPs could not be forced from office until the general election. So when television personality, Esther Rantzen, declared that she would stand as an independent candidate in Luton South in protest at the expense claims made by one of the town's local MPs, Margaret Moran, it prompted renewed interest in the concept of independent MPs as a means to clean up Parliament.

The political parties also used the expenses controversy as an opportunity to initiate reforms particularly around candidate selection, influenced in part by a desire to emulate and import some of the methods that had made the US presidential election of 2008 so interesting as well as to broaden the backgrounds from which the next generation of MPs would come. Sarah Wollaston, a local GP, was selected by the public in Totnes to be their Conservative candidate following the first-ever open primary election conducted by a British political party through a postal ballot of all voters. But at an estimated cost of £40,000 and yielding a participation rate of around 25%, it was an expensive solution that few constituency parties could match. Instead, the parties generally had to rely on the open public meeting rather than the more limited 'selectorate' of party members, a participation model that really resembled a US political caucus meeting more than a primary vote. But whatever the model, the number of MPs standing down at the next general election means that selection decisions made by all the political parties will have significant implications for the future of politics and representative democracy in the years ahead.

As the year ended the prospect of a hung Parliament after the next general election remained a reality. The Conservative Party maintained polling leads of up to 10 points over Labour but it was not enough to suggest that they would enjoy a landslide victory at the next general election when most estimates suggest that around an 8% national swing would be required to deliver them a majority of just one seat. In light of speculation about a close race, focus inevitably began to turn to likely electoral turnout and whether or not the expenses scandal and other political problems of 2009 would drive it up or down.

Political engagement

2009 was then a momentous political year and certainly one of the worst in post-war memory for the reputation of MPs individually and Parliament collectively. But what, if anything, did it mean for political engagement?

Did the expenses controversy prompt people to be more interested in politics and the political process? Did the volume of coverage about MPs and Parliament impact on the public's level of knowledge about them? Was the level of public trust in politicians and the political system really affected as dramatically as the scale of events might suggest it would

be? Do the public still have faith in politics and politicians or are they simply sick of them? Have people been motivated to get involved in the political process themselves instead of leaving it to their elected representatives or has it simply turned them off from any form of engagement in the future? And has the gravity of the economic and international situation had any impact on their propensity to participate at any level?

In short, did the year's events in any way change how the public view politics and political engagement?

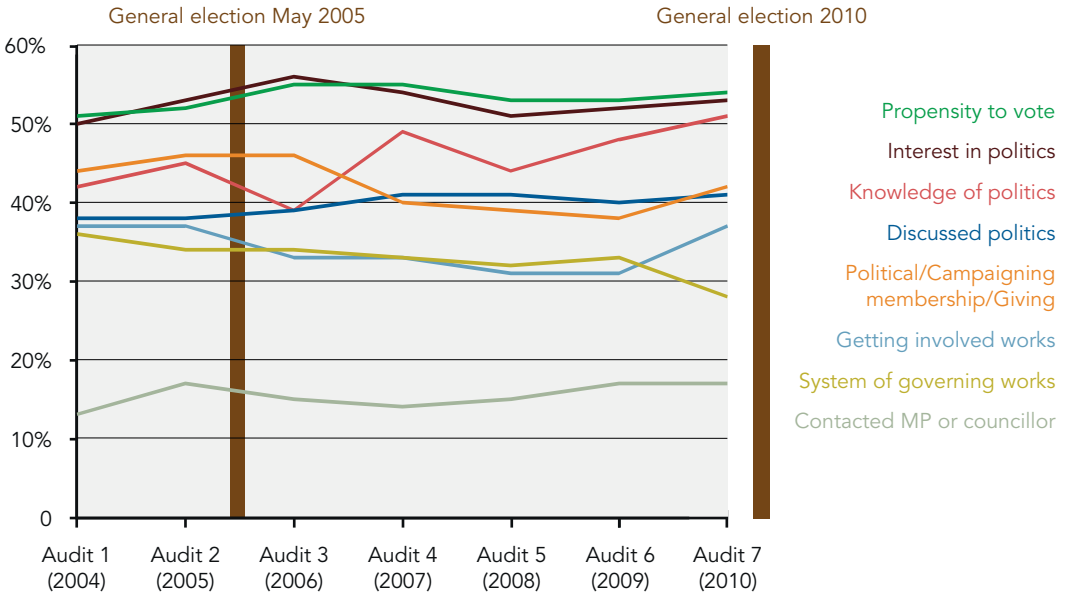
3. End of a Parliament, end of a decade: the Audit lifecycle

The seven-year Audit lifecycle has encompassed a general election, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the MPs' expenses debacle and the worst economic crisis to hit the country since the end of World War Two. We have had two Labour Prime Ministers, and the two main opposition parties have each had three leaders in this period. As we approach the end of the current Parliament and the decade, it is therefore a good time to reflect on what impact these events have had on public attitudes to politics and what changes can be discerned over the years.

An orthodox expectation of such dramatic events would be that public attitudes to politics would be significantly influenced by them. But what is perhaps most remarkable about the Audit data over the last seven years is how little attitudes seem to have changed: there is a fundamental stability that underpins the public's view of politics and the political process regardless of the political ebb and flow around them. The relative stability of the core indicators of political engagement is thus the key feature of the Audit series so far. People tend to have a fairly settled view of the political process – it is their views of individual politicians, specific issues and events that tend to fluctuate.

Figure 1 shows the core indicators included in every Audit thus far. It illustrates that even in the run-up to and the aftermath of the 2005 general election public attitudes to the political process remained fairly constant. There are just two notable exceptions: people's perceptions of their own knowledge about politics, which have varied over the course of the electoral cycle; and the proportion who think the current system of government works well, which is slowly but consistently declining without any apparent connection to the electoral cycle.

Figure 1: The core indicators



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

A. Knowledge

In this year's Audit, 51% of the public claimed to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics, the highest level of perceived knowledge recorded in the data series. Across the Audit range, the knowledge indicator has fluctuated considerably but with no particular cause for the volatility that can readily be discerned.

Interestingly, perceived knowledge about the role of MPs has steadily risen across the Audit lifecycle, from 45% of the public claiming to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' in Audit 1, to 47% in Audit 4, to 50% claiming the same in this year's study. And yet, that perceived increase in knowledge has not been matched by an increased ability on the part of the public to accurately name their own constituency MP, even in this year's Audit when it might have been expected that the public's knowledge of their own MP might have been higher as a result of the local and national media coverage of their expenses. In fact, the knowledge gap has remained consistent across the Audit lifecycle with less than half the public (44%) correctly naming their constituency representative in Audits 3, 4 and 7, and marginally fewer (42%) doing so in the first Audit.

In contrast, there appears to have been a significant change in the public's knowledge of local government over the last seven years. In the first Audit study, 38% of the public claimed to have 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of knowledge about their local council. This figure had climbed to 47% in the fourth Audit report. But this year that figure has dropped back to just 40% claiming the same. The political quiz used in the Audit to test actual as opposed to perceived knowledge also bears out the lack of knowledge among the public about local government, for only 36% knew that the statement that 'most of the money that local councils spend is raised locally, through council tax' is in fact false.

B. Interest

The Audit reports have consistently found a direct link between levels of political engagement on the one hand and levels of knowledge and interest on the other. So it is perhaps not surprising that declining levels of perceived knowledge about local government are matched by equally declining levels of interest in local issues in recent years. Whereas those reporting to be 'very interested' in national issues has declined moderately from 25% in the first Audit to 22% this year, in comparison 32% of the public claimed to be 'very interested' in local issues in Audit 1 but only 19% claim the same in this year's report. There has thus been a significant drop of 13% across the seven-year Audit period and 9% of that decline among those most interested in local politics has occurred in the last three years of the Audit cycle alone.[3]

It is surely not unrelated that the period of decline in knowledge and interest in local issues coincides with the demise of many local newspapers and the decline of regional TV reporting. In 2005 the Hansard Society's Puttnam Commission commented on the importance of regional reporting which informs communities by providing a local viewpoint on national issues.[4] There were strong indications that local newspapers were under pressure from free newspapers aimed at the all-important 18-34 demographic who had the least interest in politics. Five years on, the picture looks considerably worse – in its recent inquiry into The Future for Local and Regional Media, the Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, took evidence from Michael Grade, Executive Chairman of ITV which pointed to a bleak future for regional TV news.[5] Written evidence to the same committee predicted that local and regional newspaper advertising will decline by £1.4 billion over the next five years. The Audit of Political Engagement may well therefore chart a further decline in knowledge and interest in local issues in the future.

Interest in local issues was explored during this year's Audit discussion groups in London and the East Midlands. There was a sharp divide in the responses of the two groups. Those in London were much more likely to think about local political issues – perhaps influenced by more vibrant, less remote local politics with the existence of the London Mayor and Greater London Assembly – whereas the consensus in the East Midlands was that local politics is of little relevance, is dull and lacks power.

'You don't hear much about local politics. It's nothing exciting. You're not going to protest for a new bus stop! It's mundane stuff.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

[3] An apparent fall in perceived knowledge about local matters is not confined to the Audit. Although not directly comparable methodologically, between the last BVPI survey in 2006 which asked about a resident's local council, and the first Place Survey in 2008 which replaced the BVPI survey and asked about local public services, residents' perceptions of their knowledge fell by 7%. All councils in England had to carry out the Place Survey in 2008/09. It replaced the triennial BVPI residents' survey and collects 18 of the citizens' perspective indicators which form the new National Indicator set used by government to assess the performance of local areas through the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

[4] Hansard Society (2005), *Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye* (London: Hansard Society), p.74.

[5] House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee (2009-10), The Future of Local and Regional Media, Uncorrected evidence from Michael Grade, 8 December 2009, HC 43-iii, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcumeds/uc43-iii/uc4301.htm

'At a local level it's about local issues. At national level it's about power and money.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

For politicians and policy-makers this decline in knowledge and interest in local matters should be worrying for there has long been a marked difference between public perceptions, confidence and trust in local politicians and local services compared to those at the national level. Research has consistently demonstrated that public perception of, and confidence in, local services – for example, the local hospital or GP, school or college – is higher than the perception of, and confidence in, the NHS or the national education system. Similarly, the Committee on Standards in Public Life has consistently found that the public tend to trust their local MP more than they trust MPs in general.[6] Familiarity has a strong influence on favourability. If familiarity with local matters – achieved in part through knowledge and interest – continues to decline, then it is possible that the trust and confidence that the public posit in local services and elected representatives may also decline regardless of how efficacious they might actually be. If so, this may further corrode the political system.

C. Present system of governance

The proportion of the public who think our current system of government works well has slowly but consistently declined over the course of the Audit lifespan. Sixty-nine per cent of the public in this year's Audit believe that the system could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' – a rise of 5% on last year's result and 9% higher than the figure recorded in the first Audit study. Overall, the number of people reporting that the system of governing Britain needs improving now stands at the highest level recorded in any of the seven Audits. As one would expect, the number who believe the system 'works extremely well and could not be improved' or 'could be improved in small ways but mainly works well' has declined at a comparable level. In the first Audit 36% of the public thought that the system 'works well' but in this year's Audit only 28% do so.

What is particularly interesting about this indicator of engagement is that its slow but steady decline has occurred with no apparent connection to the electoral cycle. As Figure 2 demonstrates, in previous MORI studies conducted in 1995 and just before the 1997 general election, 76% and 69% of the public respectively said that the country's system of governing needed improving compared to the 69% in this year's Audit saying the same. As difficult as the political and economic challenges of the last few years have been, public perceptions of the system of governing the country are no worse than they were a decade ago and indeed are a little better than they were at the mid-point of the Conservative government of John Major.

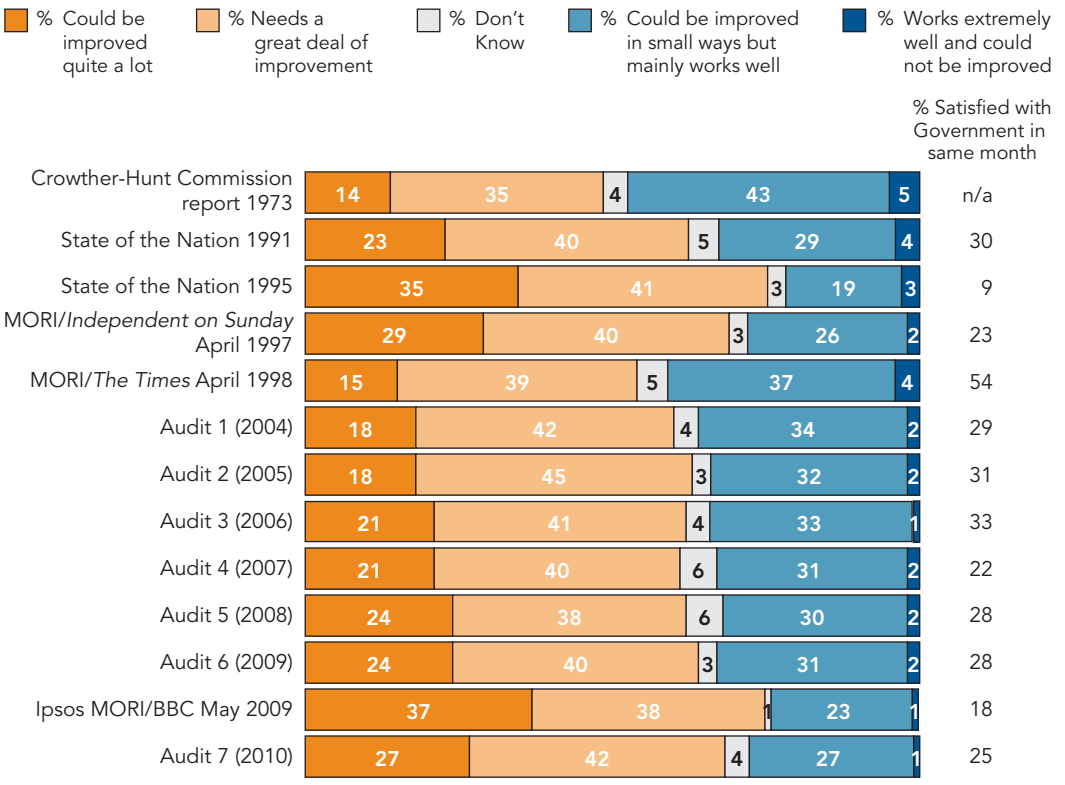
The specific impact of the MPs' expenses controversy on public perceptions of the system of governing is explored elsewhere in this report, but overall it appears to have had little impact on the discernible trend. However, there does appear to be a link between an increase in the perception that the system needs improving and declining levels of overall satisfaction with an incumbent government. In May 2009, when satisfaction with the current Labour

[6] See for example, Committee on Standards in Public Life (2008), *Survey of Attitudes Towards Conduct in Public Life 2008*.

government was just 18%, perceptions that the system was in need of reform were at levels similar to those recorded in April 1995 when just 9% of the public were satisfied with John Major's government.[7] Yet, six months later at the end of 2009, those perceiving the need for reform had declined by 5% and the closer historical comparison appears to be April 1997 when satisfaction with John Major's government had risen to 23%[8] – a level comparable to the 25% satisfaction rate for Gordon Brown's government recorded around the time the Audit survey research was conducted.[9] That said, a perception that reform is needed can persist even when a government is popular: in April 1998, 54% of the public were satisfied with Tony Blair's government, but as Figure 2 demonstrates, although the perception that the system of governing needed improving is lower than in recent years, it is not dramatically lower.[10]

Figure 2: Present system of governing – historical

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



Base: c. 1,000-2,000 GB Adults 18+. See Appendix B.
'Satisfaction with Government' taken from MORI/Ipsos MORI data with fieldwork in the same months.

[7] Ipsos MORI, *Political Monitor – Satisfaction Ratings 1988 - 1997*, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2438&view=wide#1995

[8] Ipsos MORI, *Political Monitor – Satisfaction Ratings 1988 - 1997*, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2438&view=wide#1997

[9] Ipsos MORI, *Political Monitor – Satisfaction Ratings 1997 - Present*, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemID=88&view=wide#2009

[10] Ipsos MORI, *Political Monitor – Satisfaction Ratings 1997 - Present*, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemID=88&view=wide#1998

D. Duty to vote

A constant factor across the Audit data series has been the public's view that they have a duty to vote. Three out of four members of the public have confirmed that they believe it is their 'duty' to vote when asked this question in the first (74%), fourth (78%) and now the seventh (76%) Audit. But over the course of the seven-year period there has been a distinct hardening of attitudes on the matter, with a significant rise in the proportion of the public who 'strongly agree' as opposed to those who 'tend to agree' that it is their duty to vote. In the first Audit only 37% strongly agreed, this climbed to 42% in the fourth Audit, and it has risen still further over the course of the last three years with 46% in this year's survey strongly agreeing that it is their duty to vote. However, given that barely more than half of the public (ranging between 51% in the first Audit, 55% in the third and fourth Audits and 54% in this year's Audit) say they are 'absolutely certain' to vote there is clearly a disconnect between the public's perception of the value and importance of voting and their willingness to actually do so on the day.

'If you don't vote you can't complain. Winning the vote was hard for women. We owe it to them to vote.' (London, ABC1)

'We have a right to vote and we should use it – it's what democracy is.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

'I think we have civic duties and voting is one of them. You can't live in a society without contributing.' (London, ABC1)

E. Involvement

The Audit has also examined political engagement in terms of involvement in the political process, specifically measuring the proportion of people who agree that 'when people like me get involved in politics they really can change the way the country is run'. In the first Audit 37% agreed with this statement and in the years since the results have seen a slow but steady decline to 31% in the sixth Audit. However, this year's Audit has seen an annual six point increase in those agreeing that if people like themselves get involved in politics then they really can change the way the country is run, significantly reversing the decline in the public's response to this question in recent years and restoring it to the levels seen in the first two Audits. It is unclear what specifically may have caused this turn-around but it may possibly be linked to the imminence of a general election which, unlike that in 2005, may bring about a change in government. If getting involved in politics is perceived through the lens of voting and its efficacy then participation in the forthcoming general election may be a driver in improving response rates to this engagement indicator.

F. Political and civic participation

Beyond voting, the public's propensity to participate in a range of political and civic activities has also been measured across the Audit series. There are no significant continuous upward or downward trends across the seven-year cycle, indeed what is remarkable about the activism indicator is the degree to which there are annual swings in response rates to individual activities. However, in a time of economic recession and high unemployment, it is worth noting that public participation in fundraising and voluntary work are on the rise. For example, 21% of the public in the first Audit study reported that they had helped on a fundraising drive in the last two or three years. Within a year this had climbed by 9% to 30% of the public and dropped back again by 8% the following year. Since then, for the last three Audits, the response rate has hovered between 18% and 20% but in this latest report it has climbed significantly again by 7% in one year to 27%. Similarly, the number of those reporting that they have done voluntary work in the last two or three years has also fluctuated considerably from year to year, although to a lesser degree than those involved in fundraising. In the first Audit, 23% of the public reported undertaking some voluntary work, which rose to 28% in the second Audit, dropped back the following year to 22% before rising in the fourth Audit back to 27%. In the last two Audit studies voluntary participation has hovered at 22%–23% but this year has risen again to its highest ever recorded level of 29%.

G. Satisfaction with Parliament and MPs

Public satisfaction with how Parliament works and how MPs generally do their job has been stable across the Audit lifecycle until this year. In the first Audit and again in the fourth Audit, a third of the public reported being dissatisfied with how Parliament works. But this year, levels of dissatisfaction have unsurprisingly risen by 5% to a 38% dissatisfaction rate. Public dissatisfaction with how MPs do their jobs has risen at an even steeper rate – by 8% – from the 36% recorded in both Audit 1 and Audit 4 to the 44% recorded in this latest Audit. Yet, although public dissatisfaction with their own local constituency MP has also risen, it has done so at a lesser rate – just 4% since the first Audit. Despite the expenses problem, and the focus on individually named MPs, only 16% of the public are dissatisfied with how their MP is doing his/her job compared to 13% who said the same in the first Audit report. And 38% of the public remain satisfied with how their own MP is doing his/her job, just 3% lower than the 41% who reported the same in the first Audit report.

H. Trust in politicians

Surprisingly perhaps, trust in politicians generally has not deteriorated much over the course of this Parliament and certainly not as much as one might expect it to have done this year in light of the expenses controversy. Twenty-six per cent of the public trust politicians either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' in this latest Audit, down just 1% on the number who did so in the first Audit report. Although 51% of the public reported 'not very much' trust in politicians in Audit 1, that figure has declined to 48% today. Where there has been a discernible shift over the course of the Audit lifecycle is with those members of the public who, when asked about their trust in politicians, respond by saying 'not at all': 6% more people say they don't trust politicians at all today than did so in the first Audit. There appears then to have been a hardening of attitudes among those inclined to distrust politicians generally: more people today are likely to say they have no trust in politicians than was the case seven years ago.

I. The impact of Parliament

As we approach the end of the current Parliament, one of the more worrying trends for parliamentarians must be the finding in this year's Audit that there has been a significant decline in the perceived impact of Parliament on people's lives. Of eight institutions – the media, local councils, business, the civil service, the European Union, the Westminster Parliament, the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet – Parliament ranks sixth in terms of having the greatest impact. Only 19% say it is one of the top three institutions that have the most impact on their lives, marking a significant decline from the 30% who said the same in Audit 1. These results suggest that while the MPs' expenses scandal has had a modest impact on the proportion of the public dissatisfied with Parliament as an institution, there may have been a bigger change in the relevance Parliament is seen to have on other people's lives (at least in relation to other institutions).

J. The impact of other institutions

The 11% decline in Parliament's perceived influence over the course of the Audit lifecycle is matched by an 11% rise in influence for the media. In each of the three Audit surveys where this question has been asked, the media have always been ranked as the most important in terms of perceived impact, but the gap between it and the second placed institution (local councils) is now much bigger. In Audit 4 the gap was five points (54% and 49% respectively) but that has now grown to 13 points (63% and 50% respectively).

There has also been a marked fall in the perceived impact of the Prime Minister on people's everyday lives, down from 25% in the first Audit to 24% when last measured in Audit 4, to just 17% in this latest Audit. In contrast there has been a marked rise in the perceived impact of business on people's lives – up from 37% to 44% since Audit 4 – perhaps reflecting the effects of the financial crisis and recession.

4. MPs' expenses: the public reaction

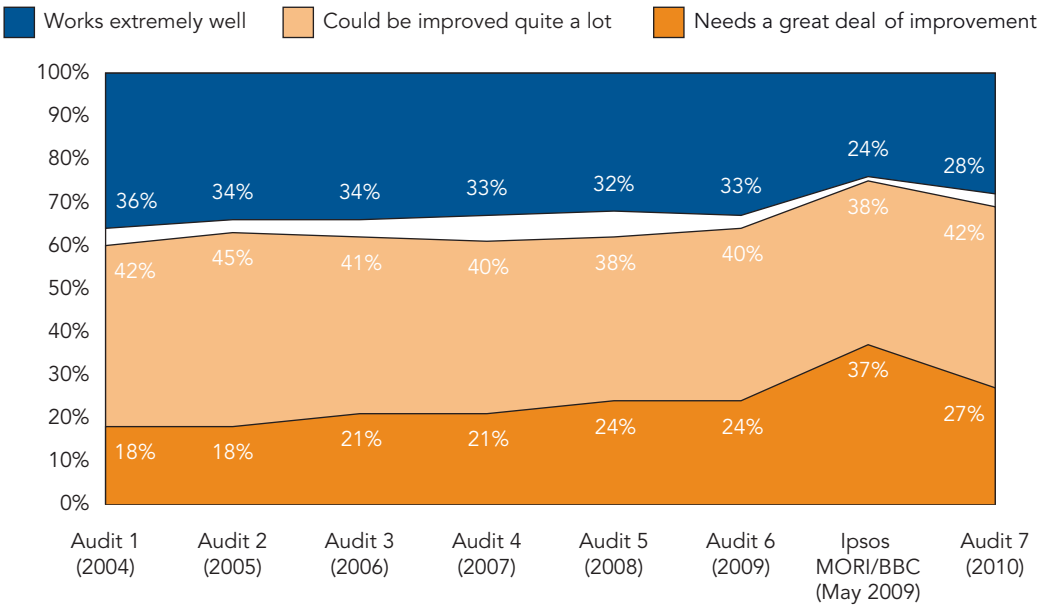
Seven out of 10 people in Britain say they have discussed MPs' expenses with friends or family. (For a detailed data breakdown see chapter seven.) But the scandal does not seem to have increased people's interest in or understanding of politics. People are, for example, no more likely to be able to name their own MP correctly this year than they have been in previous years, despite the press coverage devoted to individual MP's expense cases in both the national and local media. Interestingly, there is a gap of 30% between the proportion who say they have discussed the expenses scandal and those who say they have discussed 'politics or political news'. It is as if, for many people, the MPs' expenses scandal is somehow entirely separate from 'politics'. (See chapter six for a more detailed examination of what the public understand by politics.)

The impact of the expenses controversy on satisfaction with and trust in MPs and Parliament has already been detailed. Beyond this, if the events of 2009 were to impact on any of the other indicators of political engagement then one might expect public perceptions of the system of governance to be affected. And the Audit results this year suggest that has indeed been the case – with a 5% annual increase in those believing the system needs to be improved.

But a survey by Ipsos MORI for the BBC in May 2009 at the height of the MPs' expenses scandal showed that 37% of the public believed the system of governing needed improving a great deal, considerably higher than the 27% who said the same in November 2009 when the research for this latest Audit was carried out. Figure 3 highlights the responses regarding the system of governing across the Audit lifecycle but with the additional incorporation of results from the May 2009 survey.

Figure 3: Present system of governing – impact of the MPs' expenses controversy

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



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

If the May data were omitted from the chart, it would be easy to conclude that nothing exceptional had happened during 2009 and that there had merely been a continuation of the slow increase in dissatisfaction with the system of governance as observed since the first Audit. This suggests that the public response to the emergence of the expenses scandal did, as one would expect, have a significant impact on public attitudes in the immediate period when it dominated media headlines but that this proved to be a temporary one with public attitudes rapidly settling back to more normal levels as the issue ebbed from the media spotlight in the months that followed. A 5% increase in the number of people believing that the system of governing needs improvement is statistically significant but not perhaps as dramatic an increase as many might have expected given the enormity of the expenses scandal.

Overall there has not been a fundamental realignment of views about MPs and the political process as a result of the expenses scandal and, as we have seen, there has certainly not been a 'collapse of trust' in politicians or politics, in large part because levels of confidence or trust were already low. For the most part, it seems the MPs' expenses scandal has confirmed and hardened the public's widely held scepticism about politicians rather than changed their views.

The Audit survey research was conducted in November 2009, when the heat of the expenses scandal had to some extent passed. It may be that the measures announced already by the main parties had provided some reassurance to the public; or that, having made their dissatisfaction clear, they were giving the political class time to put their house in order; or

simply that the public had to some extent lost interest in the issue. We will need to wait until Audit 8 in order to assess whether the expenses scandal has caused only a modest long-term decline in confidence or trust, or whether concern or anger will re-emerge and even solidify if expectations of reform are not met at the next general election or thereafter.

In the four discussion groups conducted in London and the East Midlands the MPs' expenses scandal was often raised spontaneously by participants but it did not dominate the discussions and those attending were not particularly hostile to MPs. There was no agreement among the participants about the extent of the abuse of expenses: some felt all or nearly all MPs were involved, while others considered that it was not fair to blame MPs as a whole for the errant behaviour of a few. There was also some disagreement about whether the system for paying expenses was to blame, though most felt that even if the system did allow for abuse, MPs should not have taken advantage of it. Again, there was a desire that MPs hold themselves to a higher standard in the public interest.

Importantly, although participants were angry about and critical of MPs' behaviour, very few believed the expenses scandal had fundamentally altered their opinion of MPs. It had merely proven what they already suspected about MPs, they said, rather than transformed their understanding.

'I am not surprised by what has happened, but I was surprised by the amount of people involved and the amount of money was shocking.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

'I was shocked. We working class people couldn't get away with it. We'd be in court or something like that.' (London, C2DE)

'I was disgusted by these people.'
(East Midlands, C2DE)

The quantitative survey results also suggest that the scandal's greatest impact may have been in hardening already prevailing negative attitudes of dissatisfaction with MPs and Parliament. The Ipsos MORI/BBC poll in May 2009 further demonstrates this point.[11] Almost seven in 10 people (68%) at that time agreed that 'most MPs make a lot of money by using public office improperly', yet this is only marginally higher than the proportion of the public who agreed with the statement when asked in 1994 (64%). Longer-term trends, however, show a much more significant shift, as under half the public (46%) agreed with the statement in 1984. This is important because a hardening of a long-term trend will be very difficult to turn around in the short to medium term.

[11] Ipsos MORI (2009), *Expenses Poll for the BBC*,
http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2349

The outcome of the discussion groups also suggests that a further effect of the scandal has been to reinforce the impression that politicians are different from ordinary people. The attendees perceived that the politicians had acted above their peers and had been able to act 'above the law'. While most felt that MPs should not be able to do things that 'ordinary people' could not do, some went further and argued that in fact MPs should aspire to and be judged against a higher set of standards than ordinary people given the exalted role they seek as representatives and legislators acting on behalf of the wider public. The fact that the MPs' expenses scandal has revealed that many MPs do not behave in this way may have further entrenched the 'us and them' view held by many members of the public. This will be very difficult for parliamentarians to challenge given the real and anecdotal evidence that people have now amassed to support this view.

'When some MPs tried to wriggle out of it, you just wanted to slap them.' (London, C2DE)

'What hacked me off was the general lack of contrition... they blamed the system!' (East Midlands, C2DE)

'When they put in the claims who passed them? They're to blame. People are human, if you put in claims you can't blame them for taking it.' (London, ABC1)

'If a person is morally upstanding they should be able to understand the difference between right and wrong.' (London, ABC1)

Perhaps reflecting the gulf between the public and MPs, the response of those at Westminster to the expenses crisis has been to focus on a broad parliamentary and political reform agenda. But it is not one that appears to have engaged the public. In the quantitative survey results few people report actually having discussed political process or reform related issues in the last year. Only one in five (19%) have discussed 'the electoral system', and only one in nine (11%) have discussed 'reform of the House of Commons'. Discussion of issues around the selection and recall of MPs is also a minority preoccupation, with just one in 25 people (4%) claiming to have discussed 'open primary selections' and one in 20 (5%) the 'recall of MPs via a petition of their constituents'. These reform ideas would appear to be preoccupations of the Westminster village that have yet to resonate with the wider public.

5. Public perception of MPs, Parliament and the media

Public perceptions of MPs

Previous research has shown that the public are sceptical about politicians' motives. For example, the Ipsos MORI / BBC poll in May last year showed that 62% of the public believe that MPs put 'their own interests' first, ahead of 'their party's' (21%), 'their constituents' (7%) or 'the country's' (5%).[12] Although this belief in MPs' self-interest was undoubtedly encouraged by the expenses scandal, the public has in fact long held this view of politicians. In 1994 for example, more than half the public (52%) believed MPs put 'their own interests' first and only a quarter (25%) that they prioritised 'their party's interests'.[13]

However, public opinion is actually more complex in this area than the above analysis would suggest. This year's Audit shows that although 'for personal gain' is perceived by the public as a major motivating factor for people to become MPs (31%), an equal number of people believe that most people try to become MPs in order 'to help people in their local area'. Although approximately a third of people consider personal gain as a primary motivator for any involvement in politics, many more believe that it is far from the driving factor.

Nonetheless, in the run-up to the 2010 general election, the results do reveal a worrying trend for incumbent MPs in 'super-marginal' seats (those with a majority of less than 5%). In these seats, 61% of the public report that MPs spend their time furthering their 'personal interests' compared to just 49% of the public who say the same in 'safe' parliamentary seats (those with a majority of 20% or more).[14]

The overall quantitative survey findings are consistent with the views of participants in the discussion groups. While many were critical of MPs generally, most participants believed that a lot of people who try to become Members of Parliament do so for selfless reasons but that even those who enter Parliament with the right intentions usually get taken over by 'the system'.

'You do have some genuine people [in Parliament] with principles, but when they get in there they have to go with the system and get into the rat race.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

[12] Ipsos MORI (2009), *Expenses Poll for the BBC*, Computer Tables (Q7), http://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Polls/poll_expenses_poll_for_bbc_tables.pdf

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] For an explanation of marginal status see footnote 2.

'I don't think they understand the common people.' (London, C2DE)

'They are so detached from the ordinary man in the street. Most have never had to work for a living.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

'Some of them have never done any job. What's their expertise?' (London, C2DE)

Using the discussion groups to explore further how the public perceive MPs, the participants were invited to name an animal whose attributes they thought best typified those of MPs generally. A number of examples given by the participants are set out below. For the most part, the images conjured up by the participants reinforce the view that above all else they perceive MPs to be remote and out of touch with ordinary people or, at worst, very self-interested. However, there were a few instances where participants pointed out the good work that their local MP, or another MP of which they were aware, had done. They were able to clearly distinguish between the actions of a good local MP and those of MPs in general. In these instances, the 'good' local MP seemed to be viewed by the participants as somehow separate to and different from the other MPs in the House of Commons – the exception rather than the rule.

Animal	Explanation
	Horse: 'They work tirelessly for you'
	Bear: 'They argue and moan'
	Giraffe: 'Taller than anyone else; can pick off the best fruit before anyone else'
	Sloth: 'Old fellows, lying back having a snooze'
	Pig: 'Greedy'
	Weasel: 'General liars'

But these responses are not significantly different to those the Hansard Society found in 2005 when it commissioned qualitative focus group research (albeit using different methodology to those commissioned for the Audit) into the public view of politics. Then the participants viewed politics as 'the pursuit of an exclusive and disreputable elite of "hypocrites and liars"'.[15] Parliament was deemed to embody the traits of sly, greedy and deceitful creatures such as rats, weasels, snakes, foxes and vultures.[16] Again, this would suggest that the expenses controversy has reinforced and hardened existing attitudes rather than fundamentally changed public perceptions of MPs.

Some of those in the discussion groups who were most cynical about MPs did not know whether MPs would help people at a local level. Most assumed that they would not be interested in local problems or were surprised that they could easily get in contact with their local MP themselves.

*'If I had a dispute with my next door neighbour, I am not going to go to my MP. If I did she would tell me to "f*** off".'* (East Midlands, ABC1)

'I was in hospital with some 90 year old ladies. [The local MP] had visited them at home when they'd asked a question, and then he came back to see how they were getting on.' (London, C2DE)

'I never knew I could telephone my local MP. I am surprised an MP would do this.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

'I have written to [my local MP]. I was surprised how effective it was.' (London, C2DE)

'Helping individuals is a media gimmick … MPs would only help if there was a PR benefit.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

Throughout the discussion groups, the relaying by participants of positive stories about MPs' actions to help constituents were a key point at which other participants were prepared to re-evaluate their perception of MPs. When it was put to them that MPs spend a lot of time in their constituencies helping their constituents, a typical response from the more cynical participants was 'are they [MPs] really listening because they are interested or just to tell us what they think?'. However, when other participants gave concrete examples of how they or

[15] See V. Ram, 'Public attitudes to Politics, Politicians and Parliament', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59 (1), January 2006, p.190.

[16] V. Ram (2005), *Enhancing Engagement: What People Think, Know and Expect of Parliament* (London: Hansard Society), p.11.

their friends or family members had received help from an MP, then even the most cynical seemed prepared to think again about how they evaluated these politicians.

Conversely, whilst the participants were receptive to hearing positive anecdotes about helpful MPs, they were also very ready to take on board negative messages about MPs even when these were not rooted in any first-hand experience.

'My local MP … someone wrote to her saying their street was being used as a rat run all through the night. She wrote back saying "get some earplugs".' (London, C2DE)

'Word has it people have gone to [local MP] with problems about housing and she says "you're lucky you've got a house".' (London, C2DE)

For the public, the first impression made by an MP counts enormously – not just to the person on the receiving end of the encounter with the MP but also to the wider community. A member of the public having a good encounter with an MP cannot alone make that MP's reputation, but a bad encounter with a member of the public might certainly break it.

To a degree not seen for many years, the expenses controversy has opened up a dialogue about the nature of the role and function of MPs: how do they spend their time; how *should* they spend their time; what do the public want them to prioritise? This year's Audit survey consequently set out to explore some of these issues in more detail. Specifically, two separate questions were asked, enquiring about what activities the public think MPs spend their time doing; and then what they think are the most important activities that MPs *should* spend their time on. As a result, a 'perceptions gap' can be measured of the difference between what the public wants MPs to do compared to what they think they actually do. The results demonstrate that the public perception of how MPs spend most of their time is almost a mirror image of what people think MPs should actually do. (For a full data breakdown see chapter seven.)

The most commonly held belief (of 50% of the public) is that MPs spend their time 'furthering personal and career interests' yet just a tiny proportion – 3% – believe that MPs should spend most of their time doing this. The perceptions gap here is 47 points – considerably greater than is found in relation to any of the other behaviours.

The next most common activities that people assume MPs do is 'represent the views of their political party' (37%) and 'present their views through the media' (32%). Again, both of these are low priorities in terms of what the public would like MPs to spend their time on, with around one in 10 people considering these to be important activities for MPs.

Few people also believe that MPs get involved in the types of activities the public considers most important for MPs to do. Just under half of the public (46%) believe most MPs should

'represent the views of local people in the House of Commons', but only one in 10 people (10%) believe most MPs do this. This gives a perceptions gap of 36 points. Similarly, two in five people (41%) say MPs should be spending their time 'representing the UK's national interests' but only one in 11 (9%) believe MPs do this – giving a perceptions gap of 32 points (see Figure 31).

In the discussion groups, most participants acknowledged that they had little understanding of what MPs typically spend most of their time doing. Even where they were critical of parliamentarians, most believed they would spend some of their time in the constituency. Nevertheless, there was a strong desire for MPs to do more to make themselves more visible in their communities, including utilising local advertising opportunities and an accessible constituency surgery schedule.

'An MP living in the local area is important. The ones you don't hear about are probably the best ones – the ones on TV are not working on local issues.' (London, C2DE)

'The MP should promote [the local area]; her name should be linked [with the local area] all the time.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

Irrespective of how much participants felt they understood the working lives of their MP, there was almost universal agreement among them that MPs should spend more time in their constituency than in Parliament. They wanted their MP to focus on listening to and helping local people, to be a community 'champion' for the local area.

The question about what MPs should spend their time on was also asked in Audit 4 although some of the answer codes have been modified so it is not strictly possible to trend results. Nevertheless, the findings are similar. What the public would like MPs to concentrate on doing has remained fairly constant since Audit 4. The main change has been a 10% increase in the proportion of the public who feel that 'representing the UK's national interest' is one of the most important ways MPs should spend their time. This might be due to the technical changes in the questionnaire or perhaps it could reflect the key international events of the past year, in particular the international financial crisis, and the impact this might have had on the public's perception of what an MP's priorities ought to be, or perhaps even a hardening of anti-European attitudes following ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

Linked to the prioritisation of work activities by an MP is the issue of resources. Here, the public may have a significant and important knowledge gap. The issue was not covered in the quantitative survey but emerged during the four discussion groups. The participants were asked what they thought the impact would be if an MP became a government minister. Views on this were split. Some participants believed that it would not be beneficial for local constituents as the MP would be less available; others felt that it would be beneficial as the MP would be in a position to do more for their local area. Interestingly however, during the course of the discussion most assumed that MPs generally would have

a fairly large staff to help them with their jobs which would be augmented if they became a minister as additional staff in their department would then be available to do constituency related work. Given that most MPs generally have at best three full-time staff working either in Parliament or in the constituency, and that departmental civil servants are expressly forbidden from undertaking any political or constituency related work for their minister, it is clear that public perception of the resources available to MPs is out of kilter with reality. As such there may be an important disconnect – caused primarily by the knowledge gap – between the expansive role that the public wants MPs to perform in the local community and the resources that are available to enable them to do so.

Public perceptions of Parliament

When asked about their knowledge of 'politics', their 'local council', 'the Westminster Parliament' and 'the role of MPs', the public know least about Parliament with just 37% reporting that they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about it, compared to 51% reporting that level of knowledge about politics, 40% about their local council and 50% about the role of MPs. The majority of the public – 62% – admit that they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about the Westminster Parliament.

The discussion groups also laid bare this lack of knowledge. It was clear that many of the participants did not understand how Parliament fits into the system of governance in this country and many used the terms 'Parliament' and 'government' interchangeably. While many participants admitted they did not know enough about how Parliament works, even those few who felt more confident that they know about Parliament were often factually wrong in the assertions they made about it during the course of the discussions. Interestingly, many asserted that they felt they ought to know more about Parliament and tended to blame the education system for not teaching people adequately about politics or citizenship.

The Audit results this year suggest that the impact of the expenses scandal on Parliament has been limited. There has been only a 5% increase in the proportion of the public dissatisfied with Parliament since the question was last asked in Audit 4 (from 33% to 38%) although the 11% decline in the perceived influence of Parliament on people's lives in recent years may reflect the impact of the controversy.

However, other research suggests that the reputation of the Westminster Parliament has been more severely hit than the Audit indicates. The Ipsos MORI / BBC survey in May 2009 showed that at the height of the expenses scandal just one in five people (20%) were satisfied with 'the way the Westminster Parliament is doing its job these days'.[17] This was less than half the proportion of the public that expressed satisfaction (45%) when asked exactly the same question in 2001.

The Eurobarometer 71 survey of citizens in all 27 EU nations conducted in June–July 2009 also indicated low levels of trust in Parliament. Just 17% of the British public said they trusted their national Parliament, a decline of 13% compared to the results in 2008, and 15%

[17] Ipsos MORI (2009), *Expenses Poll for the BBC*, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2349

lower than the average level of trust in national parliaments across the EU. However, although Britain was only 2% less trustful of its Parliament than the EU average in 2008, the Eurobarometer research surveys consistently find that the British are less trustful of a range of institutions – government, Parliament, political parties, the EU and the European Commission – than their European counterparts. The only exception to this in 2009 is the judicial and legal system in which more than half (53%) the British public express trust, 5% higher than the EU average.[18]

Despite low levels of knowledge and trust however, the Audit survey finds that the majority of the public – 60% – believe that the Westminster Parliament 'is worthwhile'. Most of the participants in the discussion groups shared this analysis as well: even where they were critical of the behaviour of MPs, most believed Parliament is essential and that there is no alternative way of governing society.

The link between familiarity (knowledge) and favourability is particularly evident in relation to Parliament as Figure 4 demonstrates. For all four positive statements about Parliament, people who say they know at least 'a fair amount' are significantly more likely to agree with the positive statement than those who say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all'. The contrast is particularly pronounced on the question of whether Parliament is worthwhile: a view taken by four fifths (83%) of those who know at least 'a fair amount' about Parliament, but only half (48%) of those who know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all'.

Figure 4: Views and knowledge of Parliament

		Knowledge of Parliament	
	Total	Great deal/ fair amount	Not very much/nothing at all
The Westminster Parliament …	%	%	%
… is worthwhile			
Agree	60	83	48
Disagree	14	6	18
… holds government to account			
Agree	40	51	32
Disagree	27	33	24
… is working for you and me			
Agree	38	49	32
Disagree	34	33	36
… is welcoming to the public			
Agree	27	35	22
Disagree	30	32	30

[18] European Commission (2009), *Eurobarometer 71 – Spring 2009*, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71_en.htm

This correlation between knowledge and favourability is not necessarily causal, but it does suggest that if more members of the public knew more about Parliament then the institution might be better regarded. Twenty-four per cent of those scoring 7-9 correct answers on the political knowledge quiz in this year's Audit named the Westminster Parliament as influential in people's everyday lives, compared to just 17% of those scoring 4-6 correct quiz answers and 9% of those scoring 0-3 correct answers.

Perceptions of the Westminster Parliament were explored in some detail during each of the four discussion groups. It became clear that many of the participants first thought about Parliament in terms of what politicians are there to do – for example, to debate and vote on issues. It was also clear that their perceptions are shaped by their response to the behaviour of MPs and that for many the 'yah-boo' culture of partisan debate and the unrepresentative nature of the House of Commons is deeply unappealing.

'They don't seem that grown up, seeing as they are supposed to be running the country.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

'…don't like parties trying to make the other party look stupid.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

'It looks like it is full of people who have moved from one old boys' club to another.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

When asked whether Parliament 'is welcoming to the public', most felt that it was not or that it could be made a lot more welcoming, reflecting the quantitative results where only 27% 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree' that Parliament is welcoming. The response of many of the participants in the discussion groups was directly related to their views about how politicians fail to listen to the public. But for others, it reflected their belief that the building itself is too closed off from ordinary people, although for a few it was welcoming in the wider democratic sense because it is possible to peacefully demonstrate outside the building. Few participants were aware of the existing range of opportunities to visit Parliament and several did not know that it is possible to visit Parliament without an invitation (e.g. from one's MP). Consequently, when they were told that they could tour the building they were impressed that this was possible.

'You can't walk in [to Parliament] you need an appointment. If you're lucky enough to get one … you can't even sit down on their benches you know … they think they're better than we are.' (London, C2DE)

'It's meant to be our Parliament. It belongs to us. We should be able to go. Show us what's behind the scenes.' (London, C2DE)

Participants were attracted to the idea of open days where people could take guided tours of the building, however, most were keen that these should not just take place during recess but should provide access to the 'working' parts of the building. Participants wanted a proper behind-the-scenes look at their Parliament in action.

In line with the quantitative survey findings, the consensus of the discussion group participants was that Parliament is not 'working for you and me'. For many, this was because they could not see the impact of what was happening in Parliament or because politicians do not listen to ordinary people. The belief, demonstrated by the expenses scandal, that MPs have put their own interests first also influenced perceptions on this point.

In the quantitative survey 40% of the public reported that they either 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree' that 'Parliament holds the government to account'. This issue proved to be the one that many members of the discussion groups found most difficult to answer. Some felt it did because there is a 'shadow government' within Parliament in the form of the opposition, while others believed that Parliament was unable to do so because of the government's majority in the House of Commons. More generally, the participants' expressed lack of detailed knowledge about how Parliament and government works meant many were simply unsure about how to answer the question.

Public perceptions of the media

Consistently ranking throughout the Audit series as the institution that has the most impact on people's lives, the role of the media has a critical role to play in political engagement. The quantitative survey demonstrates that the public is evenly split on the way the media reports politics: as many people are satisfied (38%) as dissatisfied (38%); although three times as many are very dissatisfied (14%) than are very satisfied (4%). Almost half (47%) of readers of tabloid papers are satisfied with media reporting of politics, compared to only 29% of readers of broadsheets and 35% of those who do not read a newspaper regularly. (For a more detailed data breakdown see chapter seven.)

In the discussion groups, participants' first reaction to the media was often that it cannot be trusted as it is not unbiased, although it was generally acknowledged that most people would not necessarily know whether a particular newspaper or other media outlet has a particular bias. But the participants' criticism of the media was not just because of any perceived political bias, but also because they believe that one newspaper or broadcaster will only ever be able to give one perspective on a story.

As a consequence several participants reported that they liked to read a variety of newspapers (particularly on the internet as it is faster and cheaper) and also to read other people's comments about articles. Similarly, several participants also favoured radio phone-

in shows because they allowed both for ordinary people to have their say and also for a wide variety of views to be expressed on any particular issue or topic.

'I think phone-ins are good because it is a real person, not an MP, not someone wearing a badge; it's the common man, it's easier to connect.' (London, C2DE)

6. Improving political engagement

As we approach the next general election there is increasing interest in the likely level of voter turnout – for voting is the most common form of political engagement. Indeed, one of the reasons the Audit study was established in 2003 was to explore the issues around public engagement in the political process precisely because of concerns about declining levels of voter turnout at successive general and local elections.

But there are other, less common forms of political engagement, that have also been explored over the course of the seven Audit reports thus far. Voting is, after all, a form of engagement that requires only occasional participation. The Audit has therefore looked at engagement in the political process more broadly to include activities such as: discussing politics with friends, family or colleagues; political activism through membership of or support for a political party; seeking to influence the political process directly by signing a petition or writing to an elected representative; or influencing political outcomes indirectly through support for a campaigning group or boycotting products.

But to understand how and why people do or do not participate in the political process, and what might help foster greater engagement in the future, it is important first to develop some understanding of how members of the public themselves perceive politics.

What is politics?

In this year's Audit survey each participant was asked, unprompted, 'what do you understand by politics?' The most popular responses given were:

- 26%: the way the country is governed/running the country/what the government does;
- 18%: Parliament;
- 14%: elections/voting.

The term 'politics' and the associations that people make with it were also discussed during the four discussion groups. Some participants responded with specific issues or associations with governance, for example, Parliament. But by far the most common associations with politics were general and negative in nature and for the most part related to their perception of how politicians behave.

'Politics is always associated in a negative light. I don't know people who are engaged.' (London, ABC1)

'When I hear "politics" I know there will be a problem somewhere.' (London, ABC1)

'I just think it is another word for lying. It's a cloak they wrap around themselves.' (London, C2DE)

The way in which politics and government in this country is conducted – and the negative perceptions that the public have of it as a result – is an important and emergent theme in this Audit. However, whatever the faults of the system, most people retain an underlying belief in the importance of politics.

A clear majority of the British public value politics. In the quantitative survey for this year's Audit, two thirds (66%) reject the notion that 'politics is a waste of time', though one in five (21%) agree that it is. Yet even among those who are least interested in politics or least likely to vote, fewer than two in five believe that 'politics is a waste of time'. Among 18-24 year olds only a third (34%) agree with the statement, and the level is similar for black and ethnic minority (BME) respondents (29%), and those in social classes DE (33%). Among those certain not to vote, the figure only rises to 38% who believe that 'politics is a waste of time'.

But this belief in the underlying value of politics does not translate into broad approval of how politics is conducted, with more people dissatisfied than satisfied with how Parliament works and how MPs in general are doing their job. Similarly, in the discussion groups, participants were critical of the current state of governance and how politics is conducted but only a small minority dismissed politics as being irrelevant or a waste of time.

'You can't not have politics. It's just how politicians behave.' (London, C2DE)

'Most people talk about their views, but don't do anything about it.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

Instead, participants felt politics was important generally, even if it was not important to them as an individual. They saw politics as essential to the proper functioning of society but did not necessarily believe that every individual has to be politically active in order for society to work; they recognised that people can contribute to society in other ways than through the political sphere. Most of the participants felt that politics was something that happened 'around them' but not necessarily 'to them'; what they considered politics to be was not something that necessarily impinged on their daily life.

'Without politics there'd be no law and we'd descend into anarchy.' (London, ABC1)

'Politics doesn't affect your day-to-day life … people are not starving. Your life is not in danger.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

Several discussion group participants who said they were not involved in politics or not interested in being involved explained that this was in part because they believed nothing would change or they would not be listened to. For some a lack of time was an issue, and the generally negative impression of politics was off-putting to others.

'If most of your life is taken up making a living, the last thing you want to do is read about politics.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

However, it was also apparent that many of the participants just did not feel the need to get involved – they were content to be disengaged and betrayed no great desire to participate or have some role in the decision-making process. The problem was not that they were trying and failing to knock down a locked door to democracy but rather that they did not feel it important for them to open the door in the first place.

For those who were active in politics or interested in being so, one of the clear motivators for getting involved was to make a difference. But their level of commitment was not predicated on their activism actually resulting in some form of change either locally or nationally; indeed, a number of them naturally assumed that they were unlikely to be able to effect change due to the 'system', or because they were not sufficiently prominent or important enough to be listened to.

'Politics enables us to get things done, but bureaucracy stands in the way of people making a difference.' (London, ABC1)

'If you have a celebrity fronting up an issue it's more likely to happen than if it's just one of us, like Joanna Lumley on her campaign. Fat chance for the rest of us. The rest of us can't get things sorted.' (London, C2DE)

Yet, even where participants accepted that their involvement would not change a decision about how the country was run, they were clear that this would not necessarily stop them from being active.

Interestingly, these themes which emerged at the discussion groups about the motivating factors determining participation in politics quite closely mirror the findings in the quantitative survey conducted last year for Audit 6. That research found that: around half the population simply do not want to get involved in decision-making at either the national or local level[19]; a lack of time is the greatest barrier to participation[20]; a clear distinction is drawn between 'having a say' and being involved in decision-making, and influence is favoured but not involvement[21]; people feel they lack influence in decision-making above all because 'nobody listens to what I have to say'[22]; the more efficacious any form of political action is perceived to be, the more highly it is valued[23]; and although the public recognise what it takes to be a good citizen, they largely fail to convert good intentions into positive action.[24]

Interest in politics

A key and early gateway to political engagement is interest in politics. Just over half the public say they are interested in politics with 14% saying they are 'very interested'. The Audit survey data and qualitative research points to the existence of three broad but distinct groups in relation to interest:

- those with a strong and continual interest;
- those without the slightest interest;
- and those in between, encompassing between half and three quarters of the population, who are:
    - less interested (for whom politics is certainly not the main interest of their life or main activity outside work or their family);
    - who become interested from time to time;
    - or who have the potential to become interested – perhaps because of an issue that affects them or because of the involvement of a political personality with whom they associate.

The basis for an individual's interest in politics may be broad and multi-faceted, and motivations for political engagement beyond just voting may include a combination of one or more of the following factors:

A personal sense of duty
People who feel that they have a responsibility (or even a right) to involve themselves in politics as an extension of the civic duty to vote, perhaps because of their education, or status in society, or a family tradition of political activism.

[19] Hansard Society (2009), *Audit of Political Engagement 6* (London: Hansard Society), pp.36-37.
[20] *Ibid.*, p.37.
[21] *Ibid.*, p.52.
[22] *Ibid.*, p.35.
[23] *Ibid.*, p.51.
[24] *Ibid.*

Intrinsic or external interest
People who find politics and the political process interesting beyond any specific outcomes or personal benefits: in other words, those who follow politics as others might follow football or a soap opera.

Reactive personal interest
People who see their own lives and interests, or those of people close to them (friends, family or community), being affected by the political process and wish to influence the outcome as a result (for example, a planning application that affects their neighbourhood, or proposed legislation that might affect a hobby or interest such as fishing).

Civic involvement
People whose involvement in their local community or other interests (for example, faith groups, charities or campaigning groups) makes them interested in political outcomes and may lead them to pursue those interests through the political process (a proactive form of personal interest).

These motives for engagement need not be exclusive; there may also be some element of 'journey' from one to another. But the key insight is that people's interest in politics is not fixed; many more people may have a latent interest than those who are politically active at any one time. This potential to be engaged may help explain some of the conflicting attitudes revealed in the Audit data. For example, some of the people least engaged in politics are most likely to name their own MP correctly: these may be people who do not currently 'need' politics but want to know how to make use of the political process if the need arises (and so want to know their MP as they would want to know their doctor or dentist).

But interest in the political process on its own is often not sufficient to foster political engagement, for the Audit data suggests that there are a number of potential barriers or hurdles to engagement that may still need to be overcome. Broadly speaking these barriers can be broken down into the following categories:

Lack of knowledge
People who might want to be involved in politics but do not know how to start or what to do; or who are not aware of the potential of politics (either as a whole or at a particular level, such as local government) to make a difference; and (extrapolating the relationship between familiarity and favourability), who are dubious about the political process because they do not understand it.

Will not make a difference
People who feel that, individually or collectively, they cannot influence political outcomes; who might, for example, see the political system as favouring others (as with some of the 62% who believe that MPs put their own interests ahead of those they are supposed to represent).

Disconnected
People who cannot find a way to connect with politics in the first place or who find it hard to remain engaged.

Distaste
People whose perceptions of the political system are so negative that they are discouraged from being involved with it.

Remote or alien
People for whom the political system, and politicians, seem so distant or different from them, they cannot see themselves as being able to participate.

The journey to political engagement

One way to consider such barriers and the way they might be lowered or overcome is to see the process of engagement as a form of journey starting with awareness, then interest, through trial and acceptance to repeated use, then loyalty and finally advocacy or recommendation to others. Although this over-simplifies what is often a much more iterative or instant process, it does capture the sense of a developing relationship in which a barrier at one stage of engagement may prevent someone progressing to the next.

Using a combination of the survey data and the qualitative research it is possible to give 'high', 'medium' and 'low' rankings to the different stages of this political engagement journey. And doing so immediately highlights the distinction between an individual's journey towards voting and the different trajectory of their journey towards any other form of political engagement.

Figure 5: The political engagement journey

Stage of the Journey	Voting	Other Forms of Political Engagement
Awareness	High	Medium
Interest	High	Medium
Trial	High	Low
Acceptance	High	Low
Repeat	High/medium	Low
Loyalty	Medium/low	Low
Advocacy	Low	Low

On the journey to voting, the number of people who complete the stages from awareness to acceptance (in other words, seeing it as their duty to vote) is high, but begins to fall off to a medium level of 'loyalty' to voting (as with the 59% turnout in 2001) and a low level of advocacy (that is, those who seek to persuade others to vote).

In contrast, the journey to other forms of political engagement begins with a lower level of awareness as to what those forms of political engagement are or why they might be of

interest; the numbers involved in trials of other forms of political engagement are fairly low, while ongoing or repeat engagement, let alone loyalty or advocacy, are lower still.

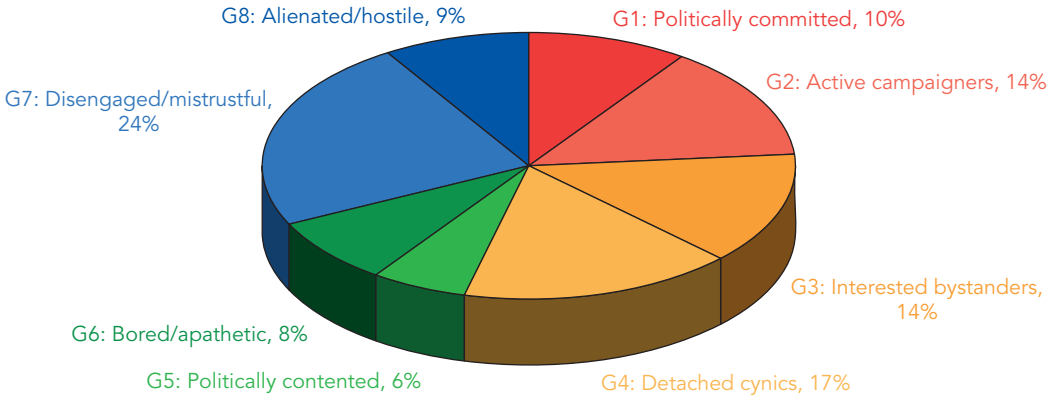
The quantitative research over the Audit lifecycle suggests that the barriers to voting may be quite different to the barriers to other forms of political engagement. Though the broad mix of variables involved may be similar – a lack of knowledge, interest, satisfaction and time, or a sense of remoteness, alienation, or distaste – each variable may be weighted differently thereby creating a range of different barriers to engagement.

Clusters and profiles of engagement

A further way to shed light on these issues it to use statistical techniques to divide up the public into clusters. This analysis can then be overlain with evidence from the qualitative research and other polling research to create different profiles or segments of political engagement that combine an analysis of behaviour with underlying motivations for political engagement. From our analysis we have identified eight distinct groups, each with their own characteristics, reflecting their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, and the level and nature of their engagement with the political process.[25]

Group 1: **Politically committed (10% of British adults)**
Group 2: **Active campaigners (14% of British adults)**
Group 3: **Interested bystanders (14% of British adults)**
Group 4: **Detached cynics (17% of British adults)**
Group 5: **Politically contented (6% of British adults)**
Group 6: **Bored/apathetic (8% of British adults)**
Group 7: **Disengaged/mistrustful (24% of British adults)**
Group 8: **Alienated/hostile (9% of British adults)**

Figure 6: Political engagement profiles



[25] Note that due to statistical rounding of the individual group percentages, the total for all the groups adds up to more than 100%. See Appendix C for the data breakdown of the eight groups.

Looking at the profile of each group in turn reveals a number of interesting characteristics. In advance of the next general election and concerns about turnout it is particularly useful to focus on their attitudes to voting and what these might reveal.

Group 1: Politically committed (10% of British adults)
76% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 93% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 91% say they voted at the last council elections.

A group of hardcore activists, those members of the public falling within this category have a strong commitment towards voting and political involvement, are both interested in and knowledgeable about politics and are predisposed to work with or through politicians and political parties.

The politically committed display a high level of activism, both political and civic. Two-thirds – 67% – say they have made a speech before an organised group in the last two or three years, 69% have presented their views to an elected representative and 67% have urged somebody else to do so; a quarter have played an active part in a political campaign (compared to 5% nationally), and 7% have stood for public office.

They strongly disagree that 'politics is a waste of time' (87% disagree), and are mostly dissatisfied with the media's reporting of politics; they are more likely than average to see 'holding government to account' as an important function of MPs, and when asked to describe what 'politics' means to them are more likely than other groups to come up with characterisations involving discussing issues, reaching agreement, and making decisions about how the country should be run. They are more trusting of politicians than average, and more likely to be satisfied with how MPs are doing their job (45%). As 52% of them are satisfied with the job their local MP is doing, this also means they make less distinction between the performance of their own MP and that of MPs in general than average. Half of them would be proud if their child were to become an MP.

They are overwhelmingly middle class (84% ABC1, and virtually none are social housing tenants) are almost exclusively white, and well over half are graduates. They tend to be readers of the quality rather than the popular press (they have much higher than average readership of all five of the national broadsheet or recently-broadsheet titles), and few read the tabloids regularly.

Group 2: Active campaigners (14% of British adults)
82% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 93% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 90% say they voted at the last council elections.

Regular voters, this segment of the public is interested in and knowledgeable about politics, but they are less passionate about and less involved in party politics than the politically committed; they may be reliable supporters of political causes but not active members.

Almost all say they are interested in local and national issues, and six in seven are interested in politics, but their interest tends to be less intense than that of the politically committed – in each case, considerably fewer say they are 'very interested'. Three in five have urged

somebody outside their family to vote (higher even than for the politically committed) but only one in three have contacted an MP, councillor or other elected representative to express their views (less than half the figure for the politically committed), and only 3% have taken an active part in a political campaign.

They believe in the value of politics: 91% disagree that 'politics is a waste of time', and half believe that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run', while four in five say that 'voting in a general election gives me a say in how the country is run'. They, like the politically committed group, are more likely than other groups to say they see politics as being about choices as to how the country is run, and they are the group most likely to assert the importance of MPs debating issues in the House of Commons.

They are more likely than average to trust politicians, and the majority are dissatisfied with the media's reporting of politics. Half (52%) say they are satisfied with the way their own MP is doing his or her job, but only 34% are satisfied with the performance of MPs in general, a bigger differential in favour of their local MP than for any other group.

This group is mainly middle class (79% ABC1), with higher than average readership of the *Times* and the *Guardian*, and many of the rest reading the *Daily Telegraph* or *Daily Mail*; few of them read the *Sun*, though *Mirror* readership is not significantly below the average for the public as a whole.

Group 3: Interested bystanders (14% of British adults)
77% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 96% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 85% say they voted at the last council elections.

A group with broadly the same levels of interest and commitment as the previous two in terms of discussing politics and voting, this group is, however, less interested in seeking to influence political outcomes directly or in voicing their opinions beyond their immediate family and friends.

Just 6% have contacted an MP or local councillor and 3% have written a letter to an editor in the last few years. On the other hand, four in five (80%) have discussed politics or political news with somebody else.

Since they are much more likely than average to pick the Westminster Parliament as having an impact on people's everyday lives, and two-thirds (68%, around the average for all adults) say that 'voting in a general election gives me a say in how the country is run', a good turnout from this group is not surprising. Nevertheless, they are not trustful of politicians, if less extreme in their distrust than average.

This group is mainly middle class (65% are ABC1s) and contains an atypically large proportion of 45-59 year olds (41% compared to 24% in the population overall). A similar proportion to groups one and two read newspapers, though they are almost evenly balanced between readership of quality newspapers and tabloids.

Group 4: Detached cynics (17% of British adults)
68% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 84% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 56% say they voted at the last council elections.

Most of this group believe in voting and generally do so, and almost half know their local MP's name, although they are not particularly knowledgeable about politics otherwise.

They are not respectful towards politicians and only 11% would be proud if their child was an MP. They also have a low level of civic activism in general: only 6% say they have recently helped on fundraising drives and only 2% report having boycotted products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (compared to 27% and 19% respectively in the general adult population).

This group includes more of the elderly than the other seven groups (more than a third are aged 65+), and are comparatively rare in the youngest age bands. In line with this older age profile, many have no formal educational qualifications (38% compared to 19% of all adults), and only one in 10 are graduates. They are rarely readers of the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Times*, though there is no other title that particularly predominates in their place. In terms of age and social class, this group is broadly similar to the national profile, except that it contains reduced proportions of ABs and people under 25.

Group 5: Politically contented (6% of British adults)
55% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 92% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 42% say they voted at the last council elections.

This group tends quite strongly towards civic activism and expresses satisfaction with the political system, but they are not so likely to translate their belief in a duty to vote into actually turning out on polling day, nor are they much involved in other specifically political forms of activism.

They are especially likely to characterise 'politics' as being about people with power running things and as a way to make decisions, and see representing local views as the most important function of an MP. They are rather more trusting of politicians than average (45% trust politicians at least 'a fair amount', compared to 26% for all British adults), and give high satisfaction scores to the way Parliament works (51% satisfied) and the way MPs are doing their job (42%); the same proportion are satisfied with their own MP's performance (42%), but this includes many more who are very satisfied.

They are also more likely than average to feel that 'voting in a general election gives me a say in how the country is run'; but otherwise, perhaps, they are content to leave the job to the politicians and get on with their own daily lives. There is no sign that they are generally apathetic (more than a third have been an officer or office holder of an organisation or club, for example, compared to only 12% of the public as whole, and they are twice as likely as average to have helped on fundraising drives), but they are much less likely than average to have taken an active part in a political campaign, urged somebody else to vote or contact an elected representative, or to have done so themselves.

This group are mostly middle class (76% are ABC1), and while spread across all age groups they are slightly more prevalent among senior citizens (three in 10 are aged 65 or over).

Group 6: Bored/apathetic (8% of British adults)
35% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 73% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 23% say they voted at the last council elections.

This is a group that mostly believe in voting yet are unlikely to do so in practice. Twice as many admit they consider it their duty to vote as say they are absolutely certain they would vote at an immediate general election. The remainder of this group may do so, or may not: while 35% were absolutely certain they would vote, a further 39% rated their likelihood of doing so at between six out of 10 and nine out of 10.

They have a higher than average belief that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run', but they also have a lower than average personal involvement in most forms of civic or political activism. Only 6%, for example, have helped on fundraising drives.

Their declared interest in politics is only a little below average, and they feel they know as much about it as anybody else, but they rarely discuss it – just 1% say they have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years. In fact they are not particularly knowledgeable: their average quiz score was 4.8 out of 9, more than a point below the national average (only the alienated/hostile group scored worse); yet paradoxically almost all of them know their own MP's name (which less than half the public as a whole do).

They are most likely of all groups to consider politics boring. 'Politics' to them is often seen as meaning Parliament or elections and voting, and to a greater extent than other groups they come up with the epithet 'boring' to describe it. But they express higher than average satisfaction with the performance of Parliament and of MPs in general, and perhaps befitting their armchair status are mostly content with the media's reporting of politics (62% satisfied, compared to 38% across the public as a whole). Does this explain why, of all groups, they are most likely to hold the misconception that local government spending is mainly funded from the council tax (78%)?

This group are mostly working class (just 38% are ABC1s), and are more likely than average to read the *Daily Mail* or *Mirror*, and less likely than average to read the *Daily Telegraph*.

Group 7: Disengaged/mistrustful (24% of British adults)
24% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 60% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 10% say they voted at the last council elections.

This group, the biggest identified in the segmentation and comprising almost a quarter of the public, is characterised by a lukewarm commitment to voting. Almost two in five feel it is their duty to vote yet are not certain they would do so in the event of an immediate general election. This reflects the fact that their commitment to voting as a duty is weaker than that of the groups who are more likely to vote in practice. (Only 22% 'strongly agree'

while 37% 'tend to agree' it is their duty to vote – in the other groups where this is widely accepted, those who strongly agree are at least as numerous as those who only tend to agree.)

They are more distrustful of politicians than average, and slightly less likely than average to pick the EU as one of the institutions with most effect on people's everyday lives. Only 13% can name their own MP, so it is unsurprising that they make almost no distinction between satisfaction with MPs in general (24%) and with their own MP (25%), though not nearly as many are very dissatisfied with their own MP as with MPs in general.

This group is mainly young (more than half are aged under 35), and rather more working class than the adult public as a whole, though 44% are ABC1s. They are rarely readers of the broadsheet press, and more likely than average to read the *Sun*, *Daily Star* or *Metro*.

Group 8: Alienated/hostile (9% of British adults)
16% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' at an immediate general election, 17% agree 'it is my duty to vote', and 1% say they voted at the last council elections.

This group have a very low level of interest in or knowledge about politics, low satisfaction with the system, low belief in its efficacy and almost total distrust of politicians. They are often actively hostile towards the system.

They tend to give a much higher proportion of 'don't know' answers than other groups. Unsurprisingly, few of them believe in voting and few of them do so (in fact, 55% say they are absolutely certain not to vote at an immediate general election). This lack of engagement is not confined to voting or more politically focused forms of engagement because neither are they engaged in other forms of civic activism.

There is no ambiguity about their negative attitudes, however: two-thirds (67%) say they trust politicians 'not at all', only 2% would be proud if their child became an MP and when asked for unprompted descriptions of what they understand by 'politics' they are much more likely than other groups to mention sleaze or corruption. Two-thirds (64%) are dissatisfied with the way Parliament works, and 63% with the way MPs generally do their jobs; they judge their own MPs only a little more charitably, 7% being satisfied with their performance and 31% dissatisfied (25% very dissatisfied, even though only 11% could give their MP's name unprompted).

This is a mainly young group (half are aged under 35), and mainly working class (only 31% are ABC1s): three in five rent their homes, and a third have no car in their household; barely half have a landline telephone. They are more likely than average to be regular readers of the *Sun*, *Daily Star* or of no newspaper at all, and are only rarely readers of broadsheet titles.

Utilising knowledge about engagement to improve electoral turnout

A significant disconnect has been identified across the Audit data series between a person's belief in voting as a civic duty and their certainty to vote at the next general election. Of course, low levels of actual voting despite higher levels of reported certainty to vote do not

necessarily equate with disengagement from the political process. The decision not to vote might in itself be an active decision borne of engagement in the process.

However, knowing what we do about the complexities and contradictions of political engagement from the Audit reports thus far, and given the existence of these eight distinct political engagement groups within the population, it is possible to reflect on whether there is any reason to believe that the electoral turnout rates of one or more of these groups might be enhanced in the future. If political parties, candidates, Parliament or the media wished to try to turn those who think it is their duty to vote into actual voters, upon which groups should they concentrate?

Figure 7 sets out the level of each group's certainty to vote, belief in their duty to vote, and whether or not they voted at the last local elections. It then sets out the voting 'gap' that exists between duty and certainty to vote for each group.

Figure 7: Political engagement profiles – voting patterns

	% of the population	Certain to vote	Duty to vote	Voted at council elections	**Voting 'gap'**
Group 1: Politically committed	10%	76%	93%	91%	**17%**
Group 2: Active campaigners	14%	82%	93%	90%	**11%**
Group 3: Interested bystanders	14%	77%	96%	85%	**19%**
Group 4: Detached cynics	17%	68%	84%	56%	**16%**
Group 5: Politically contented	6%	55%	92%	42%	**37%**
Group 6: Bored/ apathetic	8%	35%	73%	23%	**38%**
Group 7: Disengaged/ mistrustful	24%	24%	60%	10%	**36%**
Group 8: Alienated/ hostile	9%	16%	17%	1%	**1%**

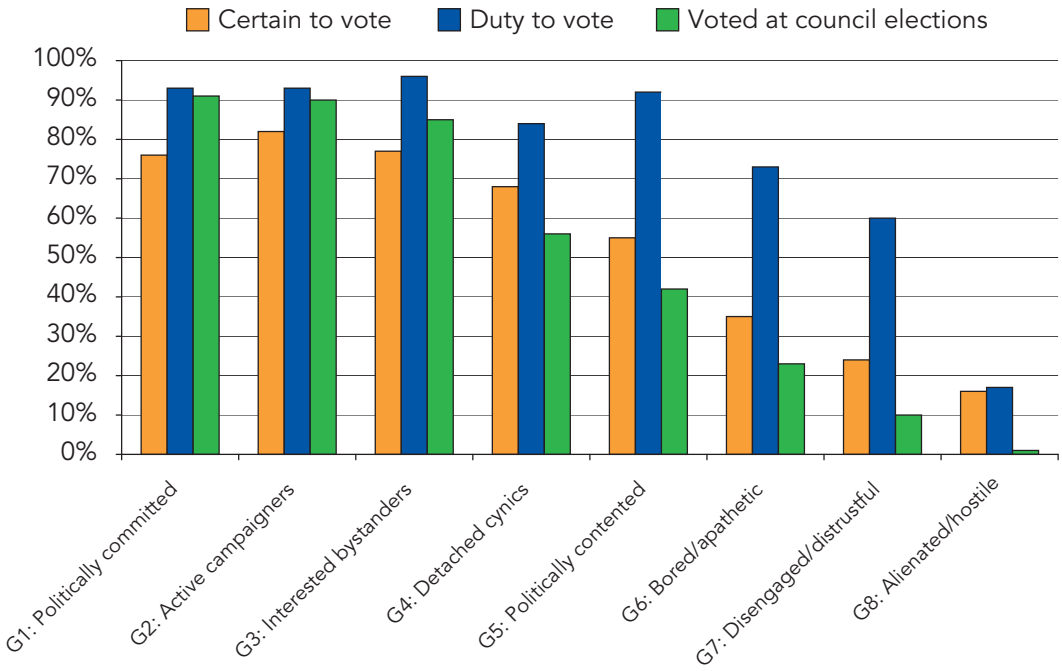
As Figure 7 demonstrates, the voting 'gap' for the first four groups – active campaigners, the politically committed, interested bystanders and detached cynics – is relatively similar in a range of 11-19% giving an average voting gap of 15% ± four percentage points.

Groups five to seven – the politically contented, bored/apathetic, and disengaged/mistrustful – are also similar, encompassing a narrower 36-38% voting gap range.

And finally, group eight stands alone with a voting gap of just one percentage point.

Figure 8 demonstrates the voting gap more vividly.

Figure 8: Political engagement profiles – the voting gap



This voting gap analysis would suggest that those groups where the focus on turnout ought perhaps to be concentrated would be groups five to eight.[26] However, what we know of these groups from the cluster analysis would suggest that the alienated/hostile are likely to be extraordinarily difficult to engage and it would be unrealistic to hope that they can be converted into voters. And although the bored/apathetic group is more politically engaged than those who are alienated or hostile, these too will also be a particularly difficult group to motivate.

However, group five (the politically contented) and group seven (the disengaged/mistrustful) may be within reach of being engaged enough to persuade them to vote in future elections.

[26] Note that previous surveys have shown that 'certainty to vote' tends to under-report actual election turnout. This will potentially make the 'voting gap' difference between groups 1-4 and groups 5-7 even more stark, and so would reinforce the argument for concentrating engagement work on groups 5 and 7.

To a large extent these groups are at different ends of the 'politically engaged' spectrum but both have the same problem in common: a very big gap between duty and certainty of voting.

Members of group five – the politically contented comprising 6% of the population – are generally fairly positive about politics, more trusting of and satisfied with their politicians, have a higher than average level of civic activism, and are spread evenly across the age groups. When politicians and the media speak about disengagement it is usually against a negative contextual canvass of strong disaffection, distrust, hostility and alienation. The Audit data and cluster analysis suggests that in fact there is this small, but nonetheless significant, segment of the population who are not yet engaged but who do not fit this negative stereotype and who may be more open than most to positive efforts to engage with them.

At the other end of the spectrum, group seven – the disengaged/mistrustful – is the largest segment of all. This is a very different segment of the population to that of group five – its members are lukewarm to the concept of a duty to vote and political engagement and are more likely to be distrustful of politicians. However, they are not nearly as opposed to politics as those who are alienated or hostile, and particularly in the post-expenses aftermath and the run-up to a general election, there may be opportunities to engage their interest in the future if the concerns that exist about politics and the political process – not being listened to, the culture of politics and the way the process is conducted – are taken on board and changes are forthcoming. Comprising 24% of the population, the group is in many ways simply too large to ignore and its members are significantly younger and more working class than the average which also presents opportunities for targeted engagement initiatives.

Given these differences in attitudes and behaviour between the two groups, although the engagement problem they share is the same, the engagement solutions will not be. And the rewards may be considerable in terms of voter engagement at future elections. If both of these groups were to vote as much as the 'relative average' of the first four groups in our cluster analysis, (i.e. if the voting gap difference for groups five and seven was around 15-16% instead of around 36%) then we estimate that electoral turnout might increase by approximately 6% overall.

In an age of lower turnout that could make a very big difference indeed and in the context of a possible hung Parliament it could be vital. Of those members of the public comprising group seven, 30% express a voting preference for the Conservative Party and 40% for Labour. If accurate, a 6% increase in turnout would therefore most likely disproportionately favour the Labour Party.

7. The engagement indicators and survey results

This section of the report presents the results of all the questions asked in this year's Audit, compares the results with previous years where marked or interesting changes have occurred and provides a breakdown of the data in the areas of gender, age, social class, ethnicity and other demographics where there are marked differences. Where the data relates to the key indicators of political engagement explored in previous Audits this is flagged in the text for ease of reference.

A. Knowledge and interest

There has been an increase in the proportion of the public who feel informed about politics and about the role of MPs; but there has been no shift in the proportion who feel informed about the Westminster Parliament and there has been a fall in how many people feel informed about their local council.

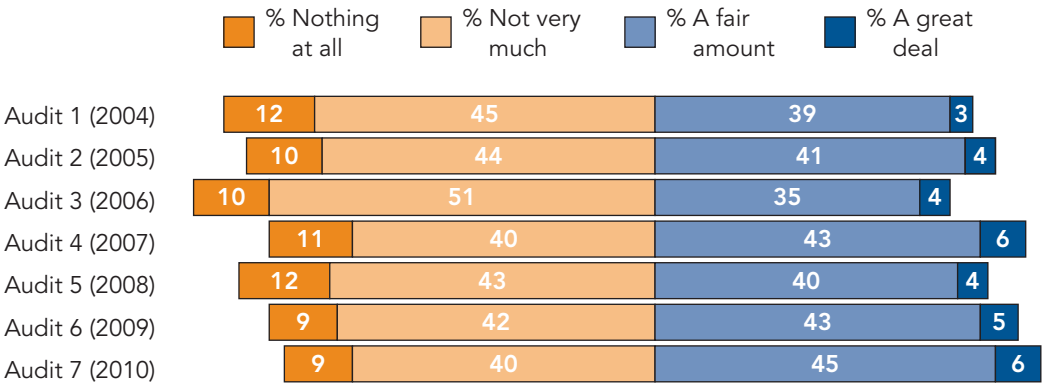
More people say they are interested in 'issues' (either local or national) than in 'politics'. However, there has been a significant drop in the proportion who are 'very interested' in local issues.

Perceived knowledge of politics

Just over half of the British public (51%) claim to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics, which is a 3% increase since the last Audit, conducted in December 2008, and is now the highest level recorded to date in the Audit series. The lowest level was 39% measured in the Audit 3 survey, conducted in December 2005, making this the most volatile of all the core indicators of political engagement.

Figure 9: Perceived knowledge of politics

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

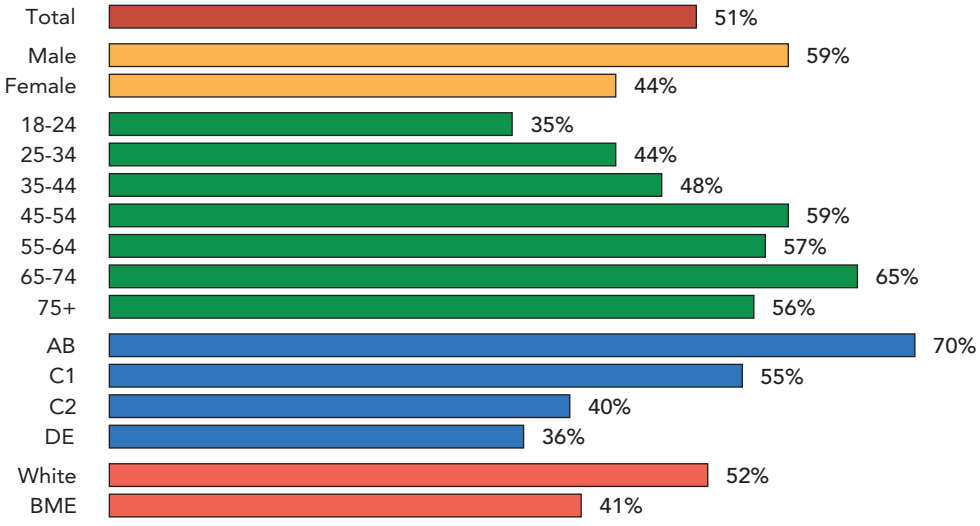


Base: c. 1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

As in previous years, substantially more men feel they are knowledgeable about politics than women: 59% of men say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount', compared with 44% of women. More older people also tend to say they are knowledgeable – for example, almost two-thirds (65%) of 65-74 year olds say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount', whereas amongst 18-24 year olds, the same proportion (65%) say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all'. Twice as many of those in social grades AB (70%) say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics compared with people in social grade DE (36%).

Figure 10: Perceived knowledge of politics – demographic differences

Q How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?
Those who say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Claimed knowledge of politics appears linked to interest in politics: amongst those who are interested in politics, four in five (80%) say they know at least 'a fair amount', which is four times the proportion (19%) of those who are not interested in politics. However, it should be noted that this correlation does not necessarily indicate a causal relationship between the two.

There are distinct regional differences, with 69% of people in the South East saying they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics, compared to 40% in the East Midlands, 41% in Wales and 43% in Scotland.

There is also a difference related to where people live and the level of political activity that may be taking place in their area, for 60% of people in marginal constituencies say they know 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal', whereas only 45% of those in safe seats claim this.[27] This is not surprising given that in marginal constituencies there tends to be a higher level of political activity – leafleting, telephone and doorstep canvassing – and therefore visibility on the part of individual politicians and the political parties as they seek to engage the electorate. It demonstrates however, that grassroots political activism may still have a significant influence on public knowledge about politics. A worrying consequence of declining political party membership, and therefore the capacity for grassroots activism, may therefore be the impact it could have on public knowledge about politics and the political process.

Political knowledge quiz

Respondents' political knowledge was assessed through a political quiz, similar to quizzes asked previously in Audit 1 and Audit 4 though all but two questions were entirely new for this survey. The questions were chosen to cover a wide variety of aspects of the political system at the local, national and European level and updated from those used previously so issues of particular interest for this Audit could be included. Each consisted of a factual statement that respondents were asked to assess as true or false.

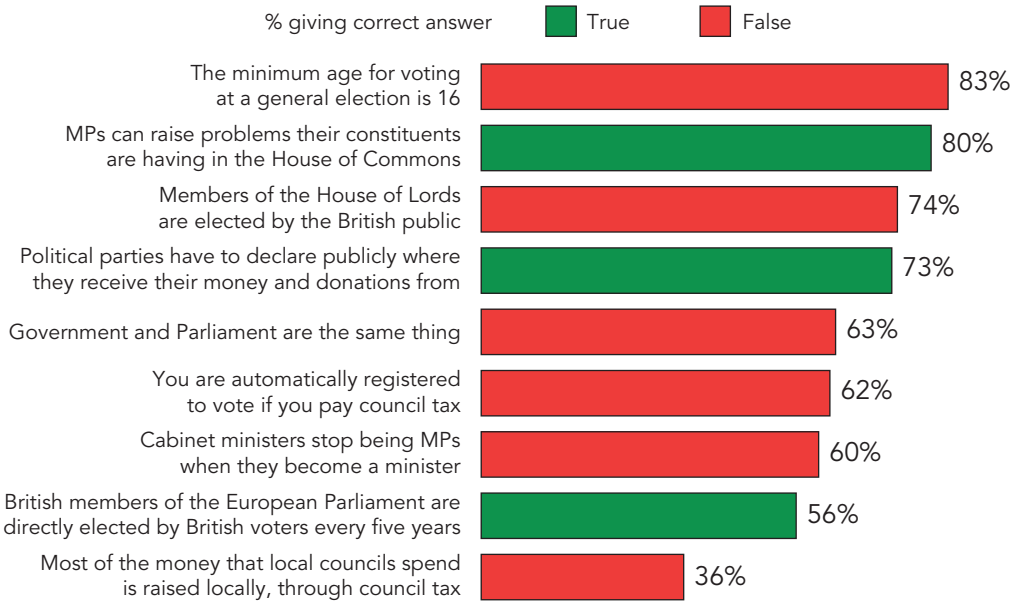
People's assessment of their level of knowledge appears to be fairly accurate, as measured by these political knowledge questions. Amongst those who got seven or more questions out of nine correct on the political knowledge quiz, 72% say they knew 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics. At the other end of the scale, only 21% of those who got three or fewer questions right claim to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'.

As Figure 11 shows, for seven of the nine quiz questions at least three in five people gave the correct answer. One in nine people (11%) were able to answer all nine questions correctly and the average number of correct answers was six (overall 61% of the public are able to achieve this). As the chart shows, for seven of the nine quiz questions at least three in five people gave the correct answer. Four fifths (83%) correctly answered that 'the minimum age of voting at a general election is 16' is false. A similarly high proportion correctly answered that 'an MP can raise problems their constituents are having in the House of Commons' (80%).

[27] For an explanation of marginal status see footnote 2.

Figure 11: Knowledge of politics – political quiz

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



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

However, just 56% correctly say it is true that 'British members of the European Parliament are directly elected by British voters every five years' and almost half the public (48%) think, incorrectly, that 'most of the money local councils spend is raised locally through the council tax'.

Two of the quiz questions were previously asked in Audit 4. There has been a small rise in the proportion correctly stating that 'the minimum age for voting at a general election is 16' is false (from 79% to 83%), but no statistically significant change in the proportion of the public correctly answering 'false' for 'you are automatically registered to vote if you pay council tax' (64% in 2006 and 62% now).

The question 'Parliament and government are the same thing' was also asked in previous Hansard Society research in 2008, and on that occasion only 49% disagreed with the statement.[28] However, the difference in methodology employed for each study means that the findings are not directly comparable.

Using six or more correct answers as a benchmark (overall 61% of the public are able to achieve this) we can examine sub-group differences.

Men score better than women on average: 65% of men got six or more questions right, compared with 57% of women achieving this. This is broadly similar to the differences

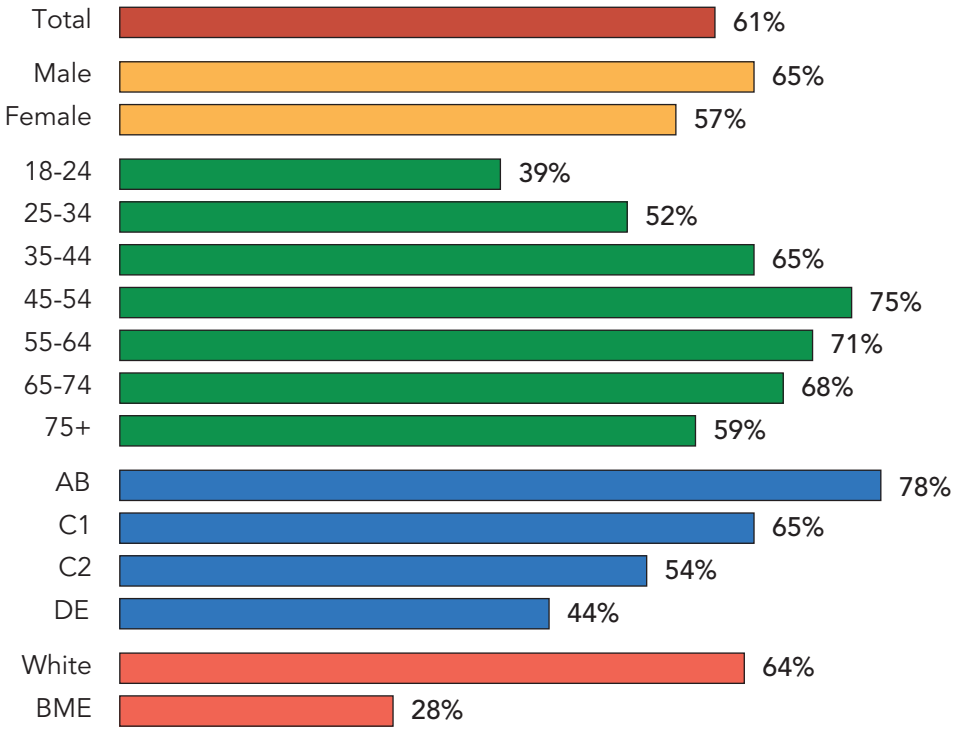
[28] S. Kalitowski (2008), *Parliament and the Public: Knowledge, interest and perceptions* (London: Hansard Society). http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/publications/archive/2008/11/25/parliament-doesn-t-reflect-british-society.aspx

recorded in previous Audits, and other Hansard Society research.[29] This is also in line with differences in reported levels of interest, and claimed knowledge, between men and women. Indeed, there is a fairly strong correlation between interest and knowledge, with 77% of people who say they are interested in politics getting six or more quiz questions correct, compared with 44% of those who say they are not interested. The proportions of men and women giving correct answers are not significantly different for five of the seven questions. Larger proportions of men than women (63% compared to 50%) correctly say that it is true 'British members of the European Parliament are directly elected by British voters every five years'. Similarly, men are slightly more likely to answer correctly that it is true that 'Political parties have to declare publicly where they receive their money and donations from' (by 76% as against 69% of women).

The Liberal Democrats can boast the most knowledgeable supporters – 80% of the party's supporters get six or more answers right, compared with 69% of Conservative supporters and 60% of Labour supporters. Two thirds (68%) of those in marginal seats answer six or more questions correctly, compared with 57% of those in safe seats, below the national average.[30]

Figure 12: Political quiz – demographic differences

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



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] For an explanation of marginal status see footnote 2.

Scores in the political quiz vary across Great Britain. Over two thirds give six or more correct answers in the South East (78%), South West (73%) and Scotland (67%). By contrast, half or less give six or more correct answers in the North West (46%) and the West Midlands (50%).

Knowledge, as measured by the quiz, varies with levels of educational attainment. Just under two fifths (37%) of those with no formal qualifications give six or more correct answers, compared to 55% and 61% of those whose highest qualifications are GCSEs or A-Levels respectively. Four fifths (83%) of those with a degree give six or more correct answers.

On the basis of the quiz, the most knowledgeable groups are middle-aged people (75% of 45-54 year olds were correct on six or more answers) and social grades AB (78% achieved this score).

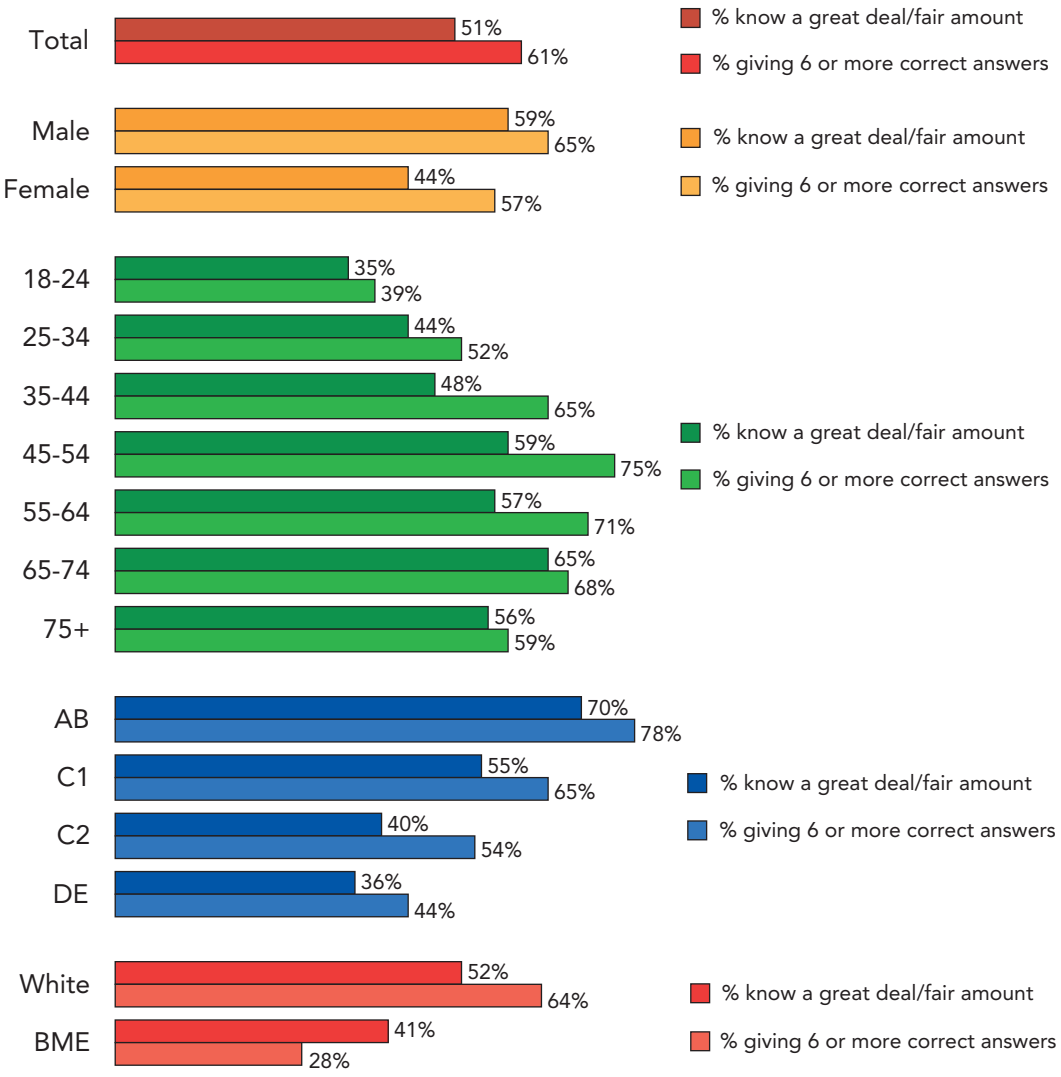
Earlier we noted that men are more likely than women to get six or more correct answers and that they are also more likely to say they know a 'great deal' or 'fair amount' about politics. As Figure 13 shows, for most of the population there is this same broad association between perceived knowledge and actual knowledge as measured by performance in the quiz. The groups who are most likely to say they are knowledgeable are the groups most likely to give six or more correct answers.

However, there are some notable variations in this association between people's perceptions of their own knowledge and their quiz scores. For example, women are less likely than men to give six or more correct answers, but only by an eight point margin (57% compared to 65%). When it comes to perceptions of their own knowledge the gap is wider: there is a 15 point difference between women and men's perceptions of their own knowledge, with 44% and 59% respectively saying they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics.

A similar association between perceived and actual knowledge seems to exist for different ages and social classes, but for different ethnic groups the picture is rather different. Members of the white population are more likely to give six or more correct answers than to say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics. For the BME population the reverse is true: 41% say they know at least 'a fair amount' but only 28% give six or more correct answers.

Figure 13: Knowledge of politics – claimed vs. actual

Q How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?
Q Please tell me if you think that the following statements are true or false



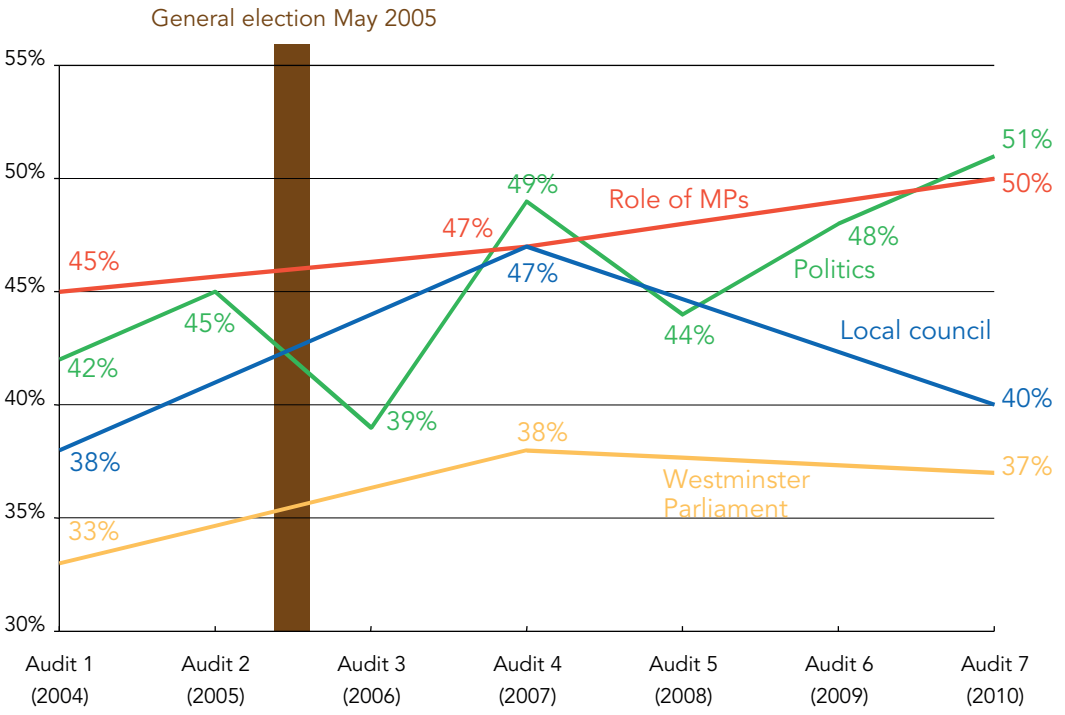
Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009

Knowledge of MPs, the Westminster Parliament and local councils

Reflecting the changes observed in the number of people who feel knowledgeable about politics, there has been a similar small rise in people's perception of how much they feel they know about the role of MPs, rising from 47% claiming to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' when last asked in the survey for Audit 4 (and from 45% in the first Audit survey) to exactly half the public (50%) measured in this latest survey.

Figure 14: Knowledge of politics, council, Parliament and MPs

Q How much, if anything, do you know about…?
Those who say they know a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount'



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

However, this rise in perceived knowledge about the role of MPs has not translated into any more of the public being able to correctly name their own local Member of Parliament: only 44% correctly named their local MP in this year's survey, which is entirely consistent with previous Audits.

Fewer people feel they know about the Westminster Parliament (37% feel knowledgeable) than about the role of MPs (50%); and again this is consistent with findings from previous Audits. As such, the majority of the public (62%) admit they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about the Westminster Parliament.

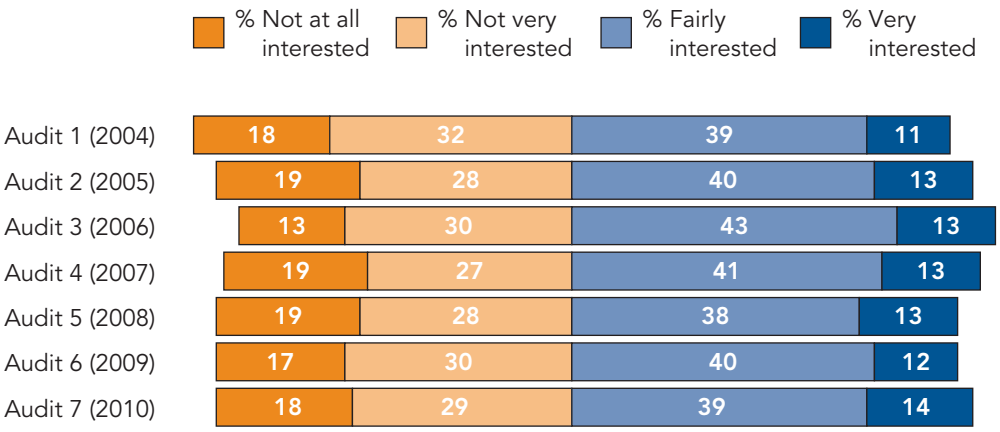
In contrast to slightly rising levels of perceived knowledge of politics and the role of MPs there has been a marked fall in how many people feel knowledgeable about their own local council. When this was last asked in Audit 4 almost half the public (47%) said they knew 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'. In this survey it has fallen back to just two in five people (40%), in line with the findings from the first Audit survey when 38% of the public felt knowledgeable.

Interest in politics

Just over half the British public (53%) say they are either 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics and just under half are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested (47%). These findings are consistent with previous Audits as each of the previous surveys has found that 53% of the public (plus or minus 3 percentage points) are interested in politics.

Figure 15: 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.

In line with previous years, and also with claimed levels of knowledge, more men claim an interest in politics (58%) than women (48%). More affluent social grades also continue to report higher levels of interest, with ABs twice as likely to be interested as DEs (by 73% compared to 38%). Two-thirds (66%) of 55-64 year olds are 'very' or 'fairly' interested, the highest proportion of any age group. Only 38% of 18-24s are 'very' or 'fairly' interested.

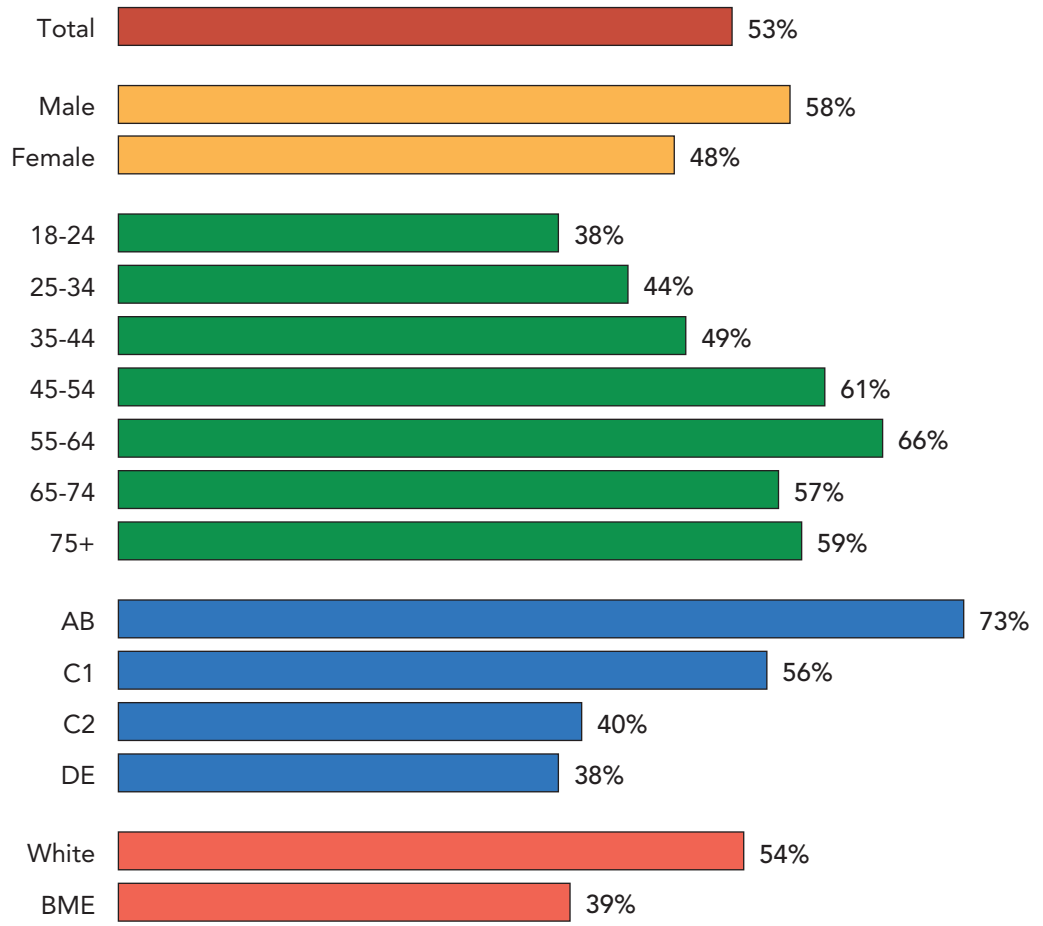
Eighty-five per cent of readers of quality newspapers say they are interested in politics, compared to 46% of tabloid readers and those who do not read newspapers, though this largely reflects the social class differences.

While interest in most regions of Great Britain does not differ markedly from average, 71% of people in the South East say they are interested in politics, compared to just 37% of people in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Figure 16: Interest in politics – demographic differences

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?

Those who say they are 'very interested' or 'fairly interested'



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Interest in issues – local and national

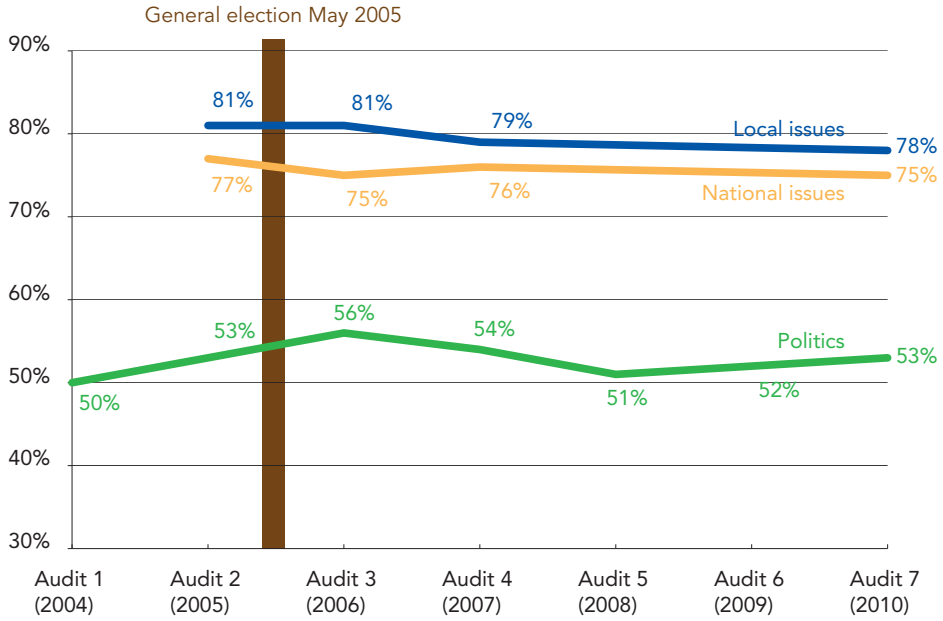
Almost four in five people (78%) say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in local issues and 23% 'not very' or 'not at all' interested.

The results of this latest survey are consistent with levels of expressed interest in local issues when asked in previous Audits (79% in Audit 4 and 81% in both Audits 2 and 3). Little has changed in terms of the proportion who are 'interested', but perhaps more significantly, there has been a very sharp drop in the proportion saying they are 'very interested' in local issues: down from 32% in Audit 2 to 28% in Audit 4 and 19% in this survey.

Figure 17: Interest in politics, local and national issues

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?

Those who say they are 'very interested' or 'fairly interested'



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

The level of public interest in national issues is almost as high as interest in local issues with three quarters of the public (75%) saying they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested and one quarter (24%) 'not very' or 'not at all' interested. These findings are in line with previous Audits and in the case of national issues there has been no change in the proportion of the public saying they are 'very interested'.

There is slightly less disparity between different groups in terms of interest in national issues, compared with interest in politics. There is no statistically significant difference in men's and women's levels of interest in national issues (77% and 74% respectively). Young people are less likely to be interested in national issues than older age groups, but the difference is less marked than with interest in politics: 67% of 18-24 year olds are interested in national issues, compared with 84% of 55-64 year olds.

In contrast with interest in politics and national issues, women are more likely than men to be interested in local issues (80% of women versus 75% of men).

Those in more affluent social grades are more likely to be interested in local and national issues than are those who are less well-off. Eighty-nine per cent of ABs are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in local issues, compared with 67% of DEs. Similarly, 90% of ABs are interested in national issues compared with 61% of DEs.

B. Action and participation

MPs' expenses have been widely discussed by the public; though very few have been engaged in discussions about constitutional and political reform or how MPs are selected or recalled. Despite the MPs' expenses scandal there has been no change in how many people recall 'discussing politics or political news' compared with previous years.

The other action and participation indicators are broadly in line with previous Audits. There has been a small increase in the number of people who say they have given to charities/campaigning organisations.

Slightly more people are defined as 'politically active' this year compared to last, which includes a rise in the proportion who have signed a petition. Expressing political opinions online is about as common as actually going to political meetings (though generally different individuals do these activities); and both these forms of participation are marginally more popular than writing to editors.

Propensity to vote

Just over half of the public (54%) say they are 'absolutely certain' they will vote in an immediate general election. This is in line with the levels of propensity to vote measured in previous Audits, where the results have ranged between 51% and 55% of the public saying they were 'absolutely certain to vote'. The prospect of a general election less than a year away does not, at this stage, seem to have had much impact on how committed people are to voting. Analysis of MORI's tracking of this indicator before the 2005 general election shows that certainty of voting did not pick up until very close to the official election campaign.[31] In a survey conducted in February 2005, prior to the dissolution of Parliament, 53% of the public were 'absolutely certain to vote' rising to 61% in a survey conducted between 7-9 April 2005, just a few days after the dissolution of Parliament.

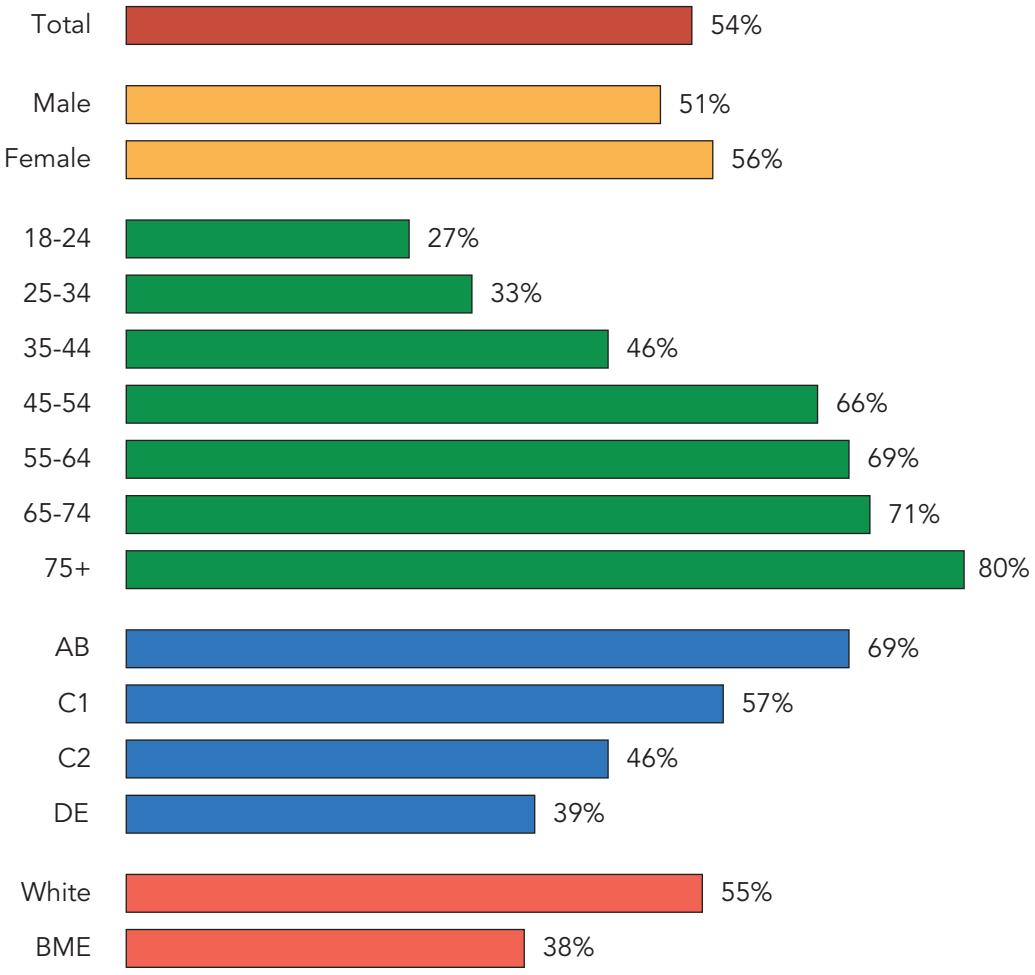
There is only a small difference between men and women with regard to their likelihood to vote. However, consistent with previous Audits and many other studies, different age groups have considerably different voting propensities. Only just over a quarter (27%) of 18-24 year olds say they are certain to vote, rising steadily to 80% of over-75s. Those aged 18-44 are less likely than average to say they are certain vote, while those aged 45 or over are more likely than average to say this.

[31] Ipsos MORI, *Likelihood of Voting*, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=61

Figure 18: Propensity to vote – demographic differences

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

Those certain to vote



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Consistent with differences in knowledge and interest, people in less affluent social grades are less likely to vote: 39% of DEs are certain to vote, compared with 69% of ABs.

Another key demographic difference in propensity to vote is between those from BME groups, of whom 38% are certain to vote, and those from white ethnic groups, of whom 55% are certain to vote. This reflects a similar pattern in comparative levels of interest and knowledge of politics.

Generally, those who are interested in politics are considerably more likely to vote than those who are not interested: almost seven in 10 (69%) of interested people are certain to vote, compared with just over a third (36%) of those who are not interested in politics. However, this relationship between interest and voting is not entirely straightforward: men say they are more interested in politics than women, but are actually slightly less likely to vote; more women say they are certain to vote (56%) than say they are interested in politics (48%).

The relationship between interest in politics and certainty to vote is complemented by one between knowledge and politics (as would be expected, given the relationship between interest in and knowledge of politics). Just 27% of those who scored 0-3 on the knowledge quiz say they are certain to vote, compared to 68% of those scoring 7-9.

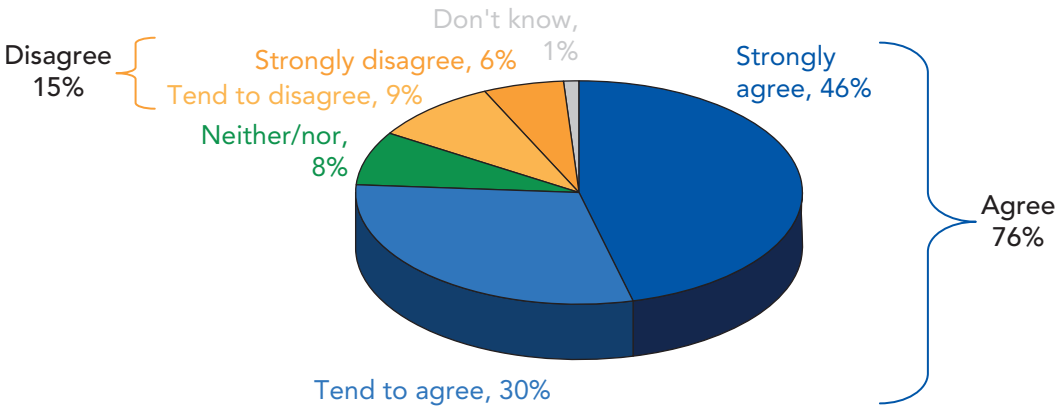
Duty to vote

Three-quarters of the public (76%) agree that 'it is my duty to vote' and only a small proportion (15%) disagree.

Figure 19: Duty to vote

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

'It is my duty to vote'



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

These findings are consistent with the attitudes recorded in Audit 1 (74% agreed) and Audit 3 (78% agreed); although there has been a significant rise in the proportion of the public who strongly agree with the statement over this time period.

Last year's Audit examined the theme of participation and citizenship. It found a disparity between, on the one hand, the amount of political involvement people think that good citizenship requires, and on the other, the extent of their own personal involvement with politics.

Nine in 10 (91%) of those who are certain to vote agree that they have a duty to vote. However, the gap between duty and actual voting is reflected in the fact that a third (33%) of those who are certain not to vote still agree that they have a duty to do so.

Figure 20 highlights that for all age groups, larger proportions of the public agree that it is their duty to vote than say they are absolutely certain to vote.

The gap between feeling a sense of duty and actually acting on it is particularly prominent among younger age groups: there is a disparity of 35 percentage points between the proportion of 18-24 year olds saying it is their duty to vote, and the proportion saying they are certain to do so. This gap suggests that while younger people feel that they ought to vote this is ultimately subsumed by other factors such as, perhaps, a lack of interest in voting, albeit not necessarily a lack of interest in politics *per se*. Duty seems to be less binding for younger people.

As Figure 20 illustrates, younger age groups are also less likely than older age groups to agree that they have a duty to vote. For example, 62% of 18-24 year olds agree, compared with 89% of 55-74 year olds and 85% of those aged 75 and over.

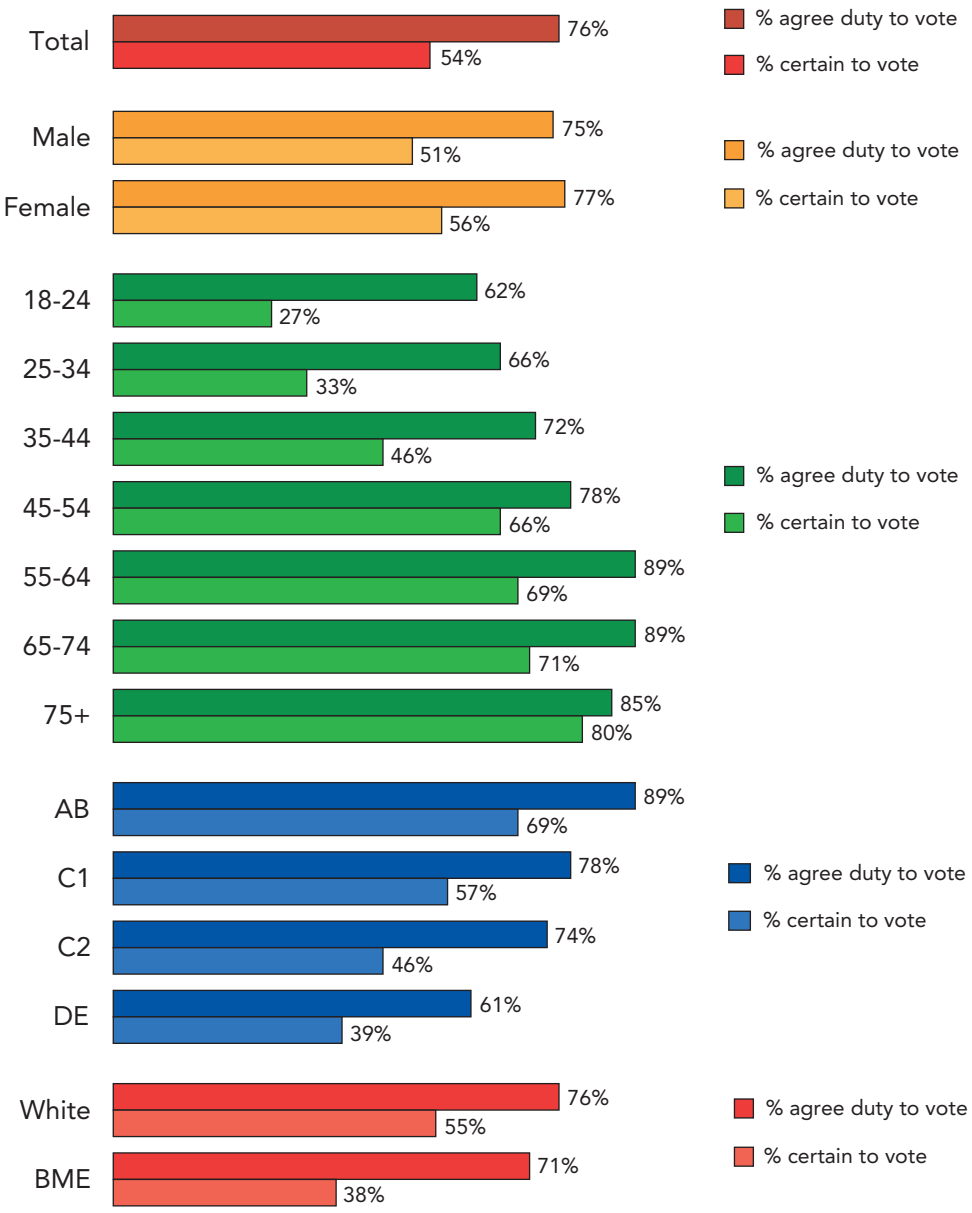
Similarly, among members of the BME population, a sense of duty to vote does not seem to translate into certainty to vote. There is very little difference between BME and white respondents in terms of their agreement that 'it is my duty to vote' (76% of white people and 71% of BME people agree). This does not, however, translate into equal likelihoods to actually vote: 55% of white people say they are absolutely certain to vote, compared to only 38% of people from an ethnic minority.

Figure 20: Duty to vote vs. Certainty to vote

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

'It is my duty to vote'

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



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Discussing politics

Two in five people (41%) have 'discussed politics or political news with someone else' in the last two or three years. This result is no different from that in previous Audits where the response has shown no variation outside the margin of error, ranging from 38%-41%.

Slightly more men than women say they have discussed politics (44% of men and 38% of women). Discussion of politics seems to peak amongst middle-aged people – almost three-fifths (57%) of 45-54 year olds say they have discussed politics in the past two or three years, compared with 28% of 18-24 year olds and 27% of over-75s. This reflects a similar, though slightly less accentuated, trend in both interest and knowledge of politics. However, it contrasts with the trend in certainty to vote, where voting increases with age. Older people are willing to vote regardless of having not discussed politics.

As noted in previous Audits, there are very stark differences between different social groups. Almost two-thirds (65%) of ABs say they have discussed politics in the last two or three years, but this falls to just one-fifth (21%) among DEs. Members of ethnic minorities are particularly unlikely to say they have discussed politics: only 15% of BMEs report having done so in the past two or three years.

This apparent lack of any change in people's propensity to discuss what they see as politics or political news should be seen in the context of this year's major political scandal: MPs' expenses. Respondents were shown a list of 14 local, national and international issues and were asked to identify which, if any, they had discussed in the last year or so. Reflecting the high profile expenses scandal in 2009, by far the most discussed political issue was 'MPs' expenses' with seven in 10 people (71%) saying they have discussed this with family and friends – far higher than general interest in politics and higher than any of the other specific issues on the list.

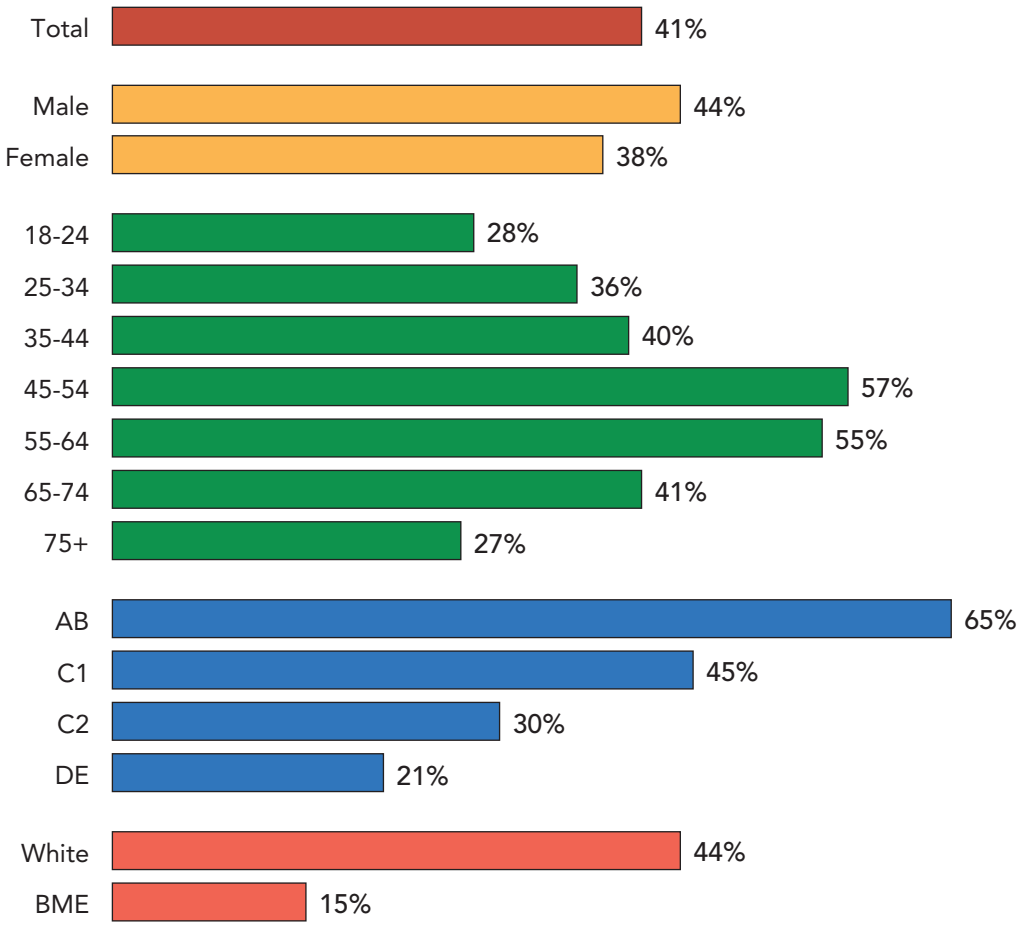
Interestingly this is the only political issue that at least half the public have discussed, which is in line with the earlier core indicator on the proportion of the public who have 'discussed politics or political news' which shows that around two in five people say they have done this. However, the fact that many more people admit to having discussed MPs' expenses also raises the question of why around three in 10 people admit to have discussed 'MPs' expenses' with their family and friends but do not see this as 'discussing politics or political news'.

Analysing discussion of politics with discussion of MPs' expenses by sub-group reveals that the patterns for discussing the two issues are very similar. For example, people in the higher social grades are more likely to have discussed both 'politics and political news' and 'MPs' expenses' than those in lower grades. Only among 45-64 year olds and ABs do we find at least half having discussed 'politics and political news'; yet at least half of each sub-group claim to have discussed 'MPs' expenses' with the one exception of BMEs (38%). We also find that while a larger proportion of men than women have discussed 'politics or political news' (men are six points higher than women), the reverse is true in terms of discussing 'MPs' expenses' (women are four points higher than men).

Figure 21: Discussing politics

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

'Discussed politics or political news with someone else'

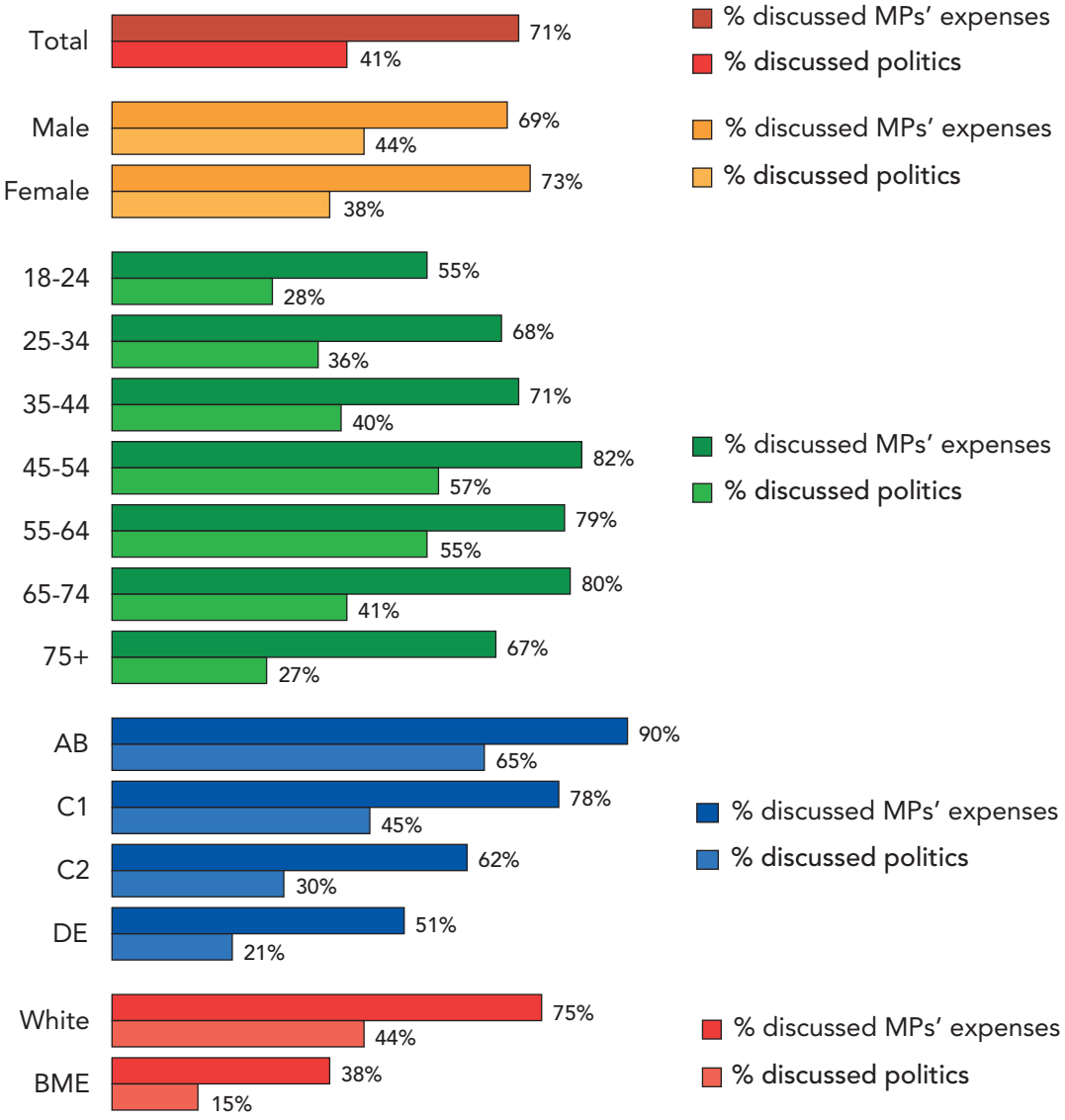


Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Figure 22: Discussing politics vs. MPs' expenses

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

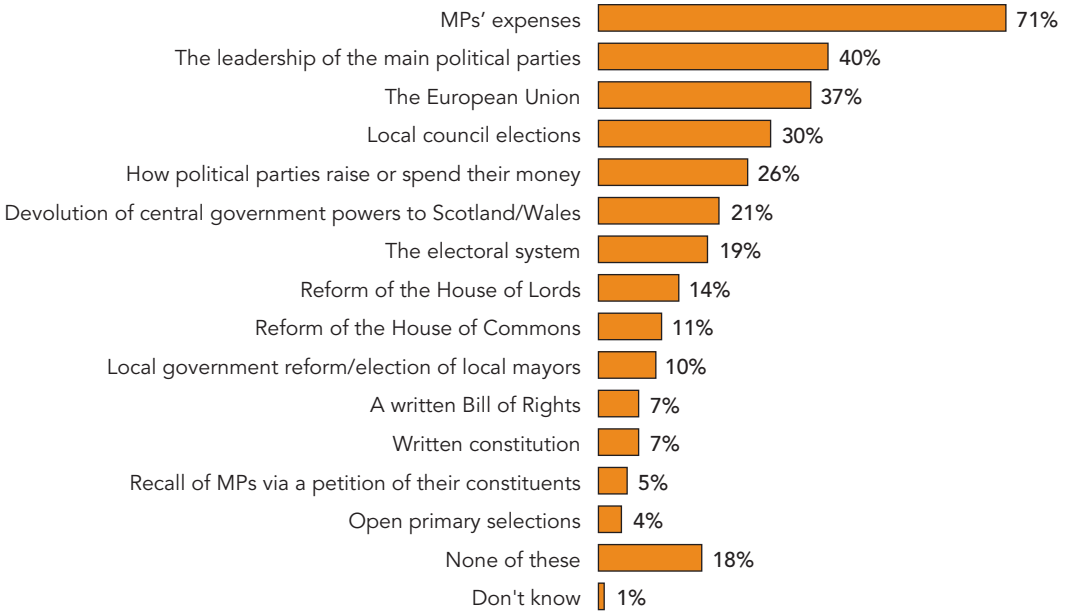
Q Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years? 'Discussed politics or political news with someone else'



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Figure 23: Issues discussed last year

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



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

The next most discussed issues after MPs' expenses are 'the leadership of the main political parties' (40%) and 'the European Union' (37%). Again both of these issues could be expected to have been relatively high given the widespread speculation for much of the year about Gordon Brown's leadership of the Labour Party and the European Parliament elections. The turnout in the European Parliament election at 34.5% is in line with the proportion of the public discussing this as an issue.

Fewer people have discussed political process or reform related issues, including one in five (19%) who have discussed 'the electoral system' or one in nine (11%) 'the reform of the House of Commons'. Discussion of issues around the selection and recall of MPs is also a minority preoccupation, with just one in 25 people (4%) claiming to have discussed 'open primary selections' and one in 20 (5%) the 'recall of MPs via a petition of their constituents'.

Overall, eight in 10 people (81%) have discussed at least one political issue in the past year or so and a little over one in three (35%) have discussed four or more issues. The demographic differences in response to this question are not particularly large, save for those along social class lines: 94% of ABs have discussed at least one of the issues, compared to 86% of C1s, 74% of C2s and just 65% of DEs.

Using the 'four or more issues' as a benchmark indicator to assist in sub-group analysis, we find that men and women are fairly similar (36% and 34% respectively). Middle-aged people

and those in more affluent social grades are more likely to have discussed four or more issues (52% of 55-64 year olds, and 58% of ABs, for example). White respondents are also considerably more likely to have discussed four or more issues than people from BME backgrounds – 38% and 6% respectively.

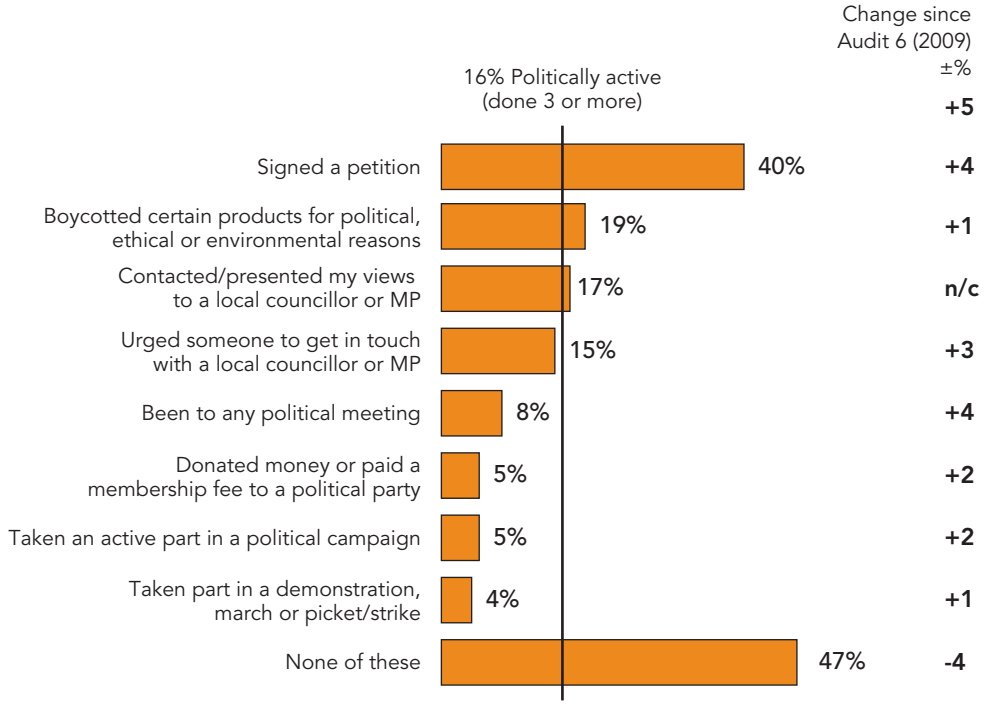
Politically active

The Audit measures participation across a range of eight political activities (other than voting), as shown in Figure 24. People who have taken part in three or more activities are classified as 'active'. This year, 16% of the public classify as politically 'active', which is up from 11% in 2006 and 12% in 2005.[32]

Participation in the individual activities is fairly consistent with findings from last year's Audit. The two key changes are a 4% increase in the proportion of the public who have 'signed a petition' (from 36% to 40%) and who have 'attended a political meeting' (4% to 8%). Both of these changes are statistically significant if not substantial. On none of the activities do we find fewer respondents reporting they have done them in this Audit than in the last one.

Figure 24: Political activities

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



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

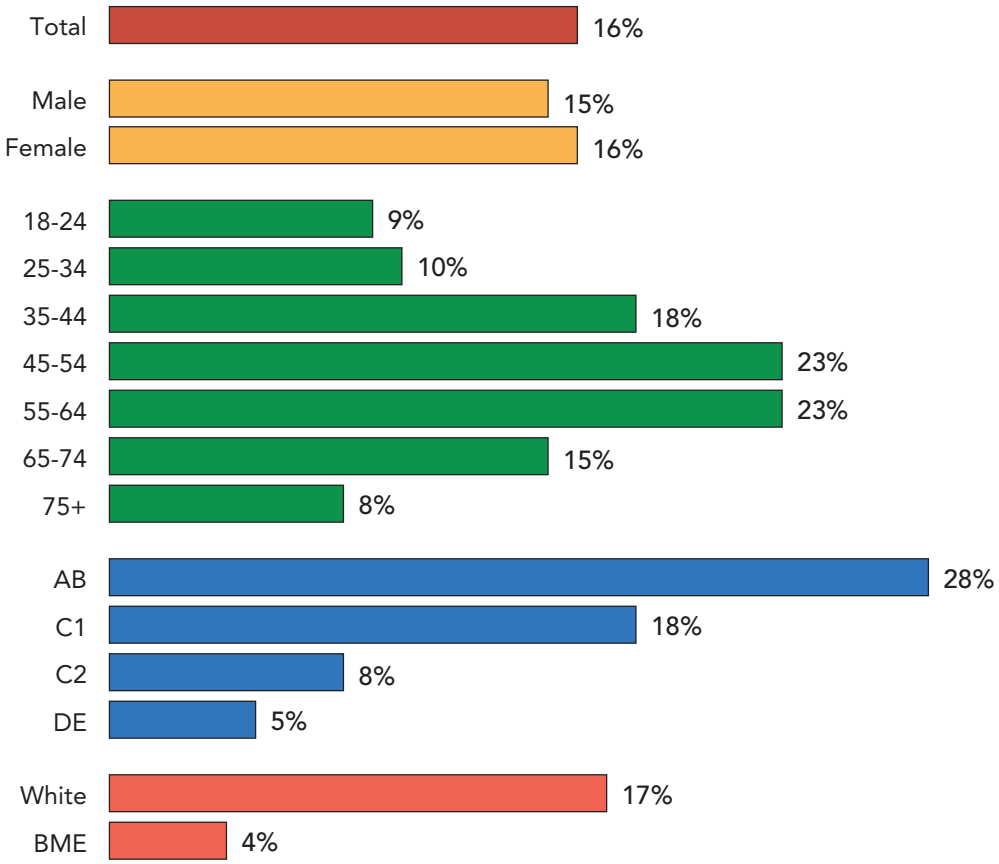
[32] The definition 'politically active' is new in this Audit – the indicator previously referred to 'political activist' but following a review we have determined that the latter term may misrepresent the focus of the indicator question for it is possible to be politically active without being an activist as traditionally understood in the context of party politics. The original basis for determining political activism was also changed after Audit 4 so comparisons are only possible between Audits 5, 6 and 7.

As Figure 25 demonstrates there are considerable differences amongst social grades and ethnic groups in levels of activity. Over a quarter (28%) of ABs are politically active, while only 8% of C2s and 5% of DEs are. Only one in 25 (4%) BMEs are politically active, compared with 17% of those from a white ethnic background.

Figure 25: Politically active – demographic differences

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

Done three or more activities from list



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Seventeen per cent have contacted a local councillor or MP (or MSP/AM) in the last two or three years,[33] the same proportion as in last year's Audit, and over the course of the Audit series this result has been at 16 (± three percentage points).

[33] In this year's Audit, new versions of the question wording for two of the options in this question were included. In order to check that the new wording did not influence responses, half of the sample received the old question wording and half the new question wording. There was no statistically significant difference between responses for the two versions. This year's Audit also specifically referred to MSPs for those respondents resident in Scotland, and Welsh Assembly Members for those respondents resident in Wales.

One in 20 people (5%) have donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party. This compares with 3% in the last Audit (a marginal change) and in line with the average result across all the Audits, which have varied between 3%-6%.

At the same time and despite the economic crisis, there has been an increase in the proportion of the public who have donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation: slightly over two in five people (42%) say they have, which is up from 37% last year and is now the highest level of donation since Audit 3 when 45% of the public said they had done so.

The five point rise in donating/paying a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation is mirrored by an even bigger increase in the number of people who claim to have 'helped on fundraising drives' (27% compared with 20% last year) and 'done voluntary work' (29% compared with 22% last year). Both of these increases reverse downward trends observed in the past couple of years in previous Audits. That donating or fundraising has increased during a recession is perhaps surprising; but the recession, with high levels of unemployment, is surely the explanation for increased levels of voluntary work.

Online activity: Facebook and Twitter

For the past three years the Audit has explored online political activism, which has been further widened this year to look specifically at the use of Facebook and Twitter. This should be seen in the context of overall use of the internet, which seven in 10 people (71%) in the survey report accessing. Younger age groups are most likely to use the internet: 86% of 18-34 year olds and 82% of 35-54 year olds do, compared to 49% of those aged 55 and over.

One in 11 people (9%) have 'expressed their political opinions online', which is the same as said this in the previous two Audits and is about as high as those who have 'been to any political meeting'.

There are no obvious instances where one group attends political meetings more than expresses opinions online, or vice versa – the levels are fairly steady throughout the different demographic groups. However, it seems that there is not a great deal of overlap between those who attend meetings and those who express themselves online. Amongst those who have expressed their opinions online, under a third (32%) have been to a political meeting. Of those who have been to a political meeting, a similar proportion (36%) have expressed their opinions online. There are a significant number of people who do only one of these two activities. This means that 14% of the public have done either or both of them.

This might suggest that the internet does not generally cause someone to be interested in politics and does not in itself increase their motivation to become involved, particularly through traditional means of participation. But what the internet can do – and where its value may lie in the context of political engagement – is in lowering the barriers to participation. Thus someone who is less motivated to get involved can become involved more easily than through traditional means of participation and, allowing for all other variables in the engagement process, may perhaps be more likely to stay involved in the long-term.

The Hansard Society's *Digital Citizens* research shows that 70% of online citizens think that the internet makes it easier for them to get involved in civic and political life and 49% would prefer to do so online if they had a choice. It found that people see the value of the internet in helping them to be better informed and better connected, but they don't necessarily value it as a tool to 'connect' with politicians because they perceive nothing in it for them as citizens. A sample of 'digital leaders' showed that social media is important and highly valued amongst this elite group of political/digital experts, but that social media concepts in a political context have not yet crossed over into the mainstream where they are still seen primarily as useful tools for extending and enhancing existing personal relationships and for following celebrities, rather than engaging in the political process.[34]

These findings are reflected in the Audit survey where, looking at the population as a whole, we find only a small number of people use either Facebook (4%) or Twitter (2%) to follow a political group or politician.

In line with the quantitative findings, the discussion group participants almost universally rejected the idea that they would want to follow a politician on either Facebook or Twitter. The two main reasons given for this view were that they use these social networking sites for other purposes – for example, to keep in touch with friends or to follow a celebrity or comedian – and that if politicians were to use them it would only be for 'cynical reasons to increase their publicity'.

'They would just do it to curry favour. It wouldn't be them. It would be one of their advisers.' (East Midlands, C2DE)

'A politician might be on Facebook to make themselves look cool, but it is probably some adviser that has told them to do it.' (East Midlands, ABC1)

It was generally felt that this medium of communication was not a 'natural' one for politicians and so participants were sceptical about the motives of those politicians who used them.

One participant said that she had used Facebook as a way of keeping updated about political action, for example in providing information about marches and demonstrations, and she felt the internet was an invaluable way to facilitate information sharing and planning. In this case the internet aided someone already engaged in politics rather than as a mechanism that could trigger their initial involvement.

[34] A. Williamson (2010), *Digital Citizens and Democratic Participation* (London: Hansard Society).

C. Efficacy and satisfaction

There is a reasonably strong underlying belief in the efficacy of politics and of voting in a general election, even where there is scepticism and concern about how politics works in practice. On the whole, people reject the notion that politics is 'a waste of time' and believe that voting gives people a say – though they are less convinced that other forms of getting involved, as identified in the survey, make a difference. More people believe the system of governing Britain needs improving than in previous Audits and there has been an increase in dissatisfaction with Parliament, MPs generally and one's own MP.

Perceived political efficacy

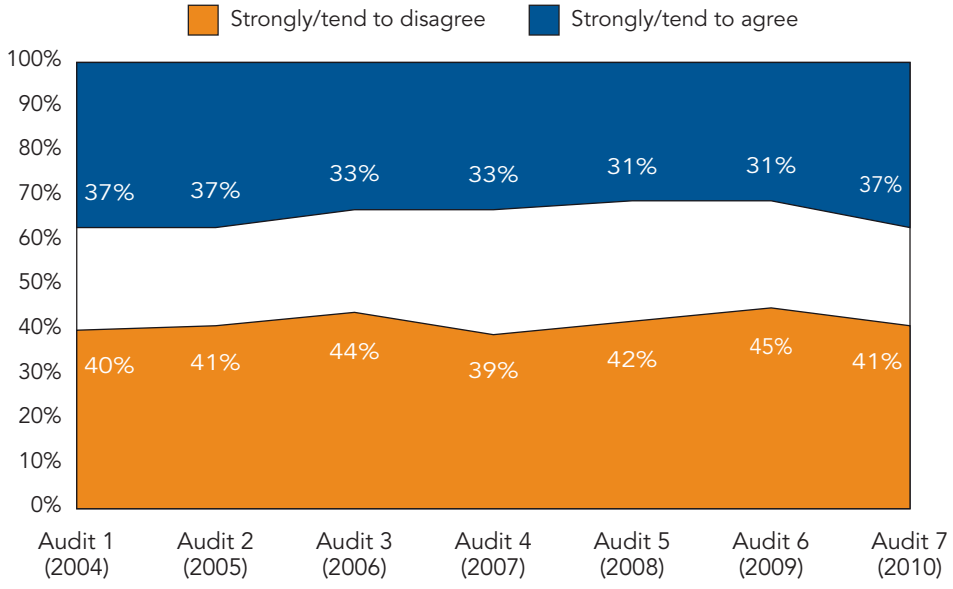
The Audit measures political efficacy in terms of the proportion of people agreeing that 'when people like me get involved in politics they really can change the way that the country is run'.

Just over a third of the public (37%) agree with this statement. As Figure 26 shows, this is a rise of six percentage points from last year (31%) and reverses a downward trend from the past few years. The belief in the efficacy of getting involved is therefore back to the same levels as measured in the first two Audits. Nevertheless, it is still the case that more people disagree (41%) with the statement than agree with it.

Figure 26: Perceived political efficacy

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

'When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run'



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

There is relatively little variation between different groups on this indicator. While last year we found that ABs were slightly, but significantly, more likely to agree than DEs, this year the gap between the social classes is not statistically significant.

Differences in attitudes between age groups are too small for us to be confident they are statistically significant. This contrasts with the variations in attitudes and behaviour between age groups noted elsewhere in this report. In particular, earlier we noted that young people express lower than average levels of interest, knowledge and likelihood of voting. By contrast, young people aged 18-24 are about as likely as average to think that getting involved can be effective – 36% agree. The situation is markedly different for middle-aged people. While they express higher than average levels of interest in and knowledge of politics, middle-aged people are not significantly more confident than average to agree that people like them can make a difference if they get involved (32% of 44-54 year olds agree).

Last year's Audit revealed that a significantly larger proportion of BME respondents than white respondents agreed that people like them can change things if they get involved in politics. This prompted the question of whether an 'Obama effect' was at work in Great Britain. The pattern persists this year: 46% of BMEs agree that people like them can change the way the country is run if they get involved in politics (41% last year), compared with 36% of the white population (31% last year).

The belief in the efficacy of getting involved is particularly high among the politically active, but still less than half (47%) agree that they can change the way the country is run by getting involved. A third of the non-politically active (35%) agree.

Supporters of both Labour and the Liberal Democrats are more likely than average to agree that getting involved is effective (43% and 45% respectively agree). Conservative supporters however are closer to the average, with only 36% agreeing.

Perceived efficacy of voting

An additional statement was included in this Audit to examine more precisely the perceived efficacy of voting. In this question respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree that 'voting in a general election gives me a say in how the country is run'. For this question, considerably more people agree (58%) than agree about general political efficacy, and fewer (28%) disagree.

Older groups and those in more affluent social grades are more likely than average to agree that voting gives them a say in the running of the country (69% of 55-64 year olds, and 69% of ABs, for example). However, there is rather less variance in these levels of agreement than in levels of certainty to vote. Some groups are less likely to think that voting gives them a say, but many more of them agree that voting is effective than say they are certain to vote. In this respect, the perceived efficacy of voting is similar to the sense of duty for voting.

On the other hand, BME respondents are particularly likely to think that voting gives them a say in the running of the country – two thirds (67%) agree with the statement, rather more than average.

There is no difference between supporters of Labour and the Conservatives (66% and 65% respectively agree with the statement), but Liberal Democrat supporters are even more positive – 71% agree with the statement. Given the Liberal Democrats' commitment to electoral reform, their belief that the current voting system is inherently unfair, and that as the third party they are consistently excluded from government, it is perhaps surprising that they believe more strongly than do supporters of the other main parties that voting gives them a say in the way the country is run.

People living in marginal constituencies[35] are more likely than those in safe seats to agree that their vote gives them a say. However, it is perhaps a smaller difference than might be expected. Just under two thirds (64%) of those in all marginal seats, and 67% of those in super-marginal seats with a majority of less than 5%, agree with the statement, compared with 55% of those in safe seats.

Present system of governing

If the MPs' expenses scandal was likely to impact on any of the indicators of political engagement we would expect those indicators measuring how the public rate MPs, Westminster and the 'system of governance' to be one of the most likely candidates. The new survey suggests this has happened, though only to a limited degree (See chapter three, section C for more details.)

Almost seven in 10 people (69%) believe the system of governing Great Britain could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal', which is more than double the proportion of the public (28%) that believes the system 'could not be improved' or 'mainly works well'. Since the last Audit the proportion believing the system needs improving has risen five points (from 64%) and represents the highest level recorded in any of the seven annual Audits to date.

Women are slightly more likely to believe the system is in need of improvement than men (72% to 65%), as are older people (78% of 65-74 year olds, compared to 58% of 18-24 year olds), and white people compared to BMEs (70% to 51%). There is surprisingly little variation between the social classes in response to this question, in contrast to the rest of the Audit data.

Satisfaction with Parliament and MPs

Compared to when last asked in Audit 4, there has been no statistical change in how satisfied people are either with how Parliament works (33% are satisfied) or with how MPs in general are doing their jobs (29%). However, there has been an increase in the proportion of the public who are dissatisfied: a five point increase since Audit 1 from 33% to 38% with how Parliament works; and an eight point increase in dissatisfaction with how MPs in general are doing their jobs (from 36% to 44%).

As well as asking the public to show their approval for 'MPs in general' a further question is asked in the Audit about how satisfied or dissatisfied the public is with how well 'your MP

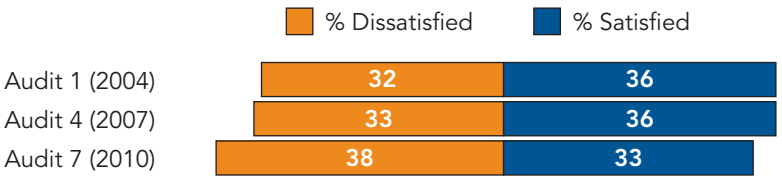
[35] For an explanation of marginal status see footnote 2.

is doing his/her job'. As with the other satisfaction questions, since Audit 4 there has been a statistically significant increase in the proportion of the public dissatisfied with how their own MP is doing his/her job, up from 12% to 16% who are dissatisfied. In addition, there has also been a fall in satisfaction down from 41% satisfied in Audit 4 to 38% in this survey.

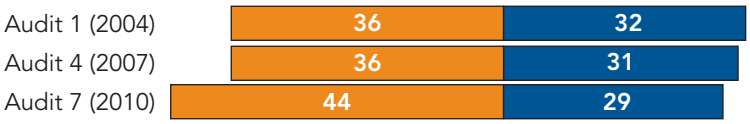
Figure 27: Satisfaction with Parliament and MPs

Q Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that… ?

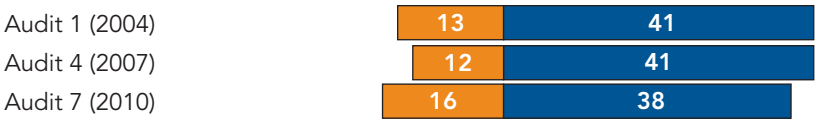
Parliament works



MPs in general are doing their job



Your MP is doing his/her job



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

People from BME backgrounds appear more likely to be satisfied with Parliament and MPs on each of the three questions asked: 53% of BMEs are satisfied with the way Parliament works, compared with 32% of the white population; 45% of BMEs are satisfied with MPs in general, and 46% with their MP in particular, compared with 27% and 38% respectively of people from white ethnic groups.

Focusing on geographical variations, smaller proportions of people in Wales are satisfied than average for each of these measures: for example, just one fifth (21%) of people in Wales are satisfied with the way Parliament works, compared with a third (34%) across Great Britain as a whole.

In terms of social groups, 37% of ABC1s are satisfied with how Parliament works, compared with 30% of C2DEs, and this pattern is repeated in satisfaction with MPs in general (32% and 25% respectively) and local MPs specifically (40% versus 36%).

Amongst different age groups, however, the picture is less clear, and differs across the different measures. Young people are the most likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament

works (41% of 18-24 year olds are satisfied), while those aged 45-54 are least likely to be satisfied (only 27% are). On satisfaction with MPs in general, however, there is little variation between the age groups, although over-75s are slightly more likely to be satisfied (38%, compared with the average of 29%). In terms of satisfaction with their local constituency MP, satisfaction seems to increase more directly with age: 28% of 18-24 year olds are satisfied, compared with 62% of over-75s.

Trust in politicians

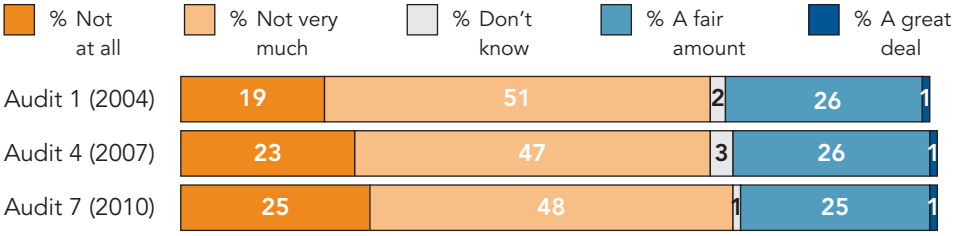
One quarter of the public (26%) say they 'trust politicians generally', though this is made up of just 1% who trust politicians 'a great deal' and 25% who trust them 'a fair amount'. Three quarters of the public trust politicians 'not very much' (48%) or 'not at all' (25%).

As Figure 28 demonstrates, these figures are almost exactly the same as was measured in Audit 1 and Audit 4, though there has been a hardening among those who distrust politicians, with those saying they do not trust politicians at all increasing from 19% in Audit 1 to 25% this year.

There is relatively little variation between different age groups in terms of trust in politicians, but those in social grades AB are rather more likely to trust them than average (33% of ABs trust politicians 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'). Ethnic minority individuals are also a little more likely than average to trust politicians (36% do), while people in Wales are particularly distrustful (only 17% trust politicians 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount').

Figure 28: Trust in politicians

Q How much would you say you trust politicians generally?



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

Even amongst the more politically active, only 38% trust politicians, while 62% trust them 'not very much' or 'not at all'. On the other hand, trust in politicians is considerably higher than average amongst those who are satisfied with MPs in general – 53% of this group trust politicians, compared with just 9% of those who are dissatisfied with MPs.

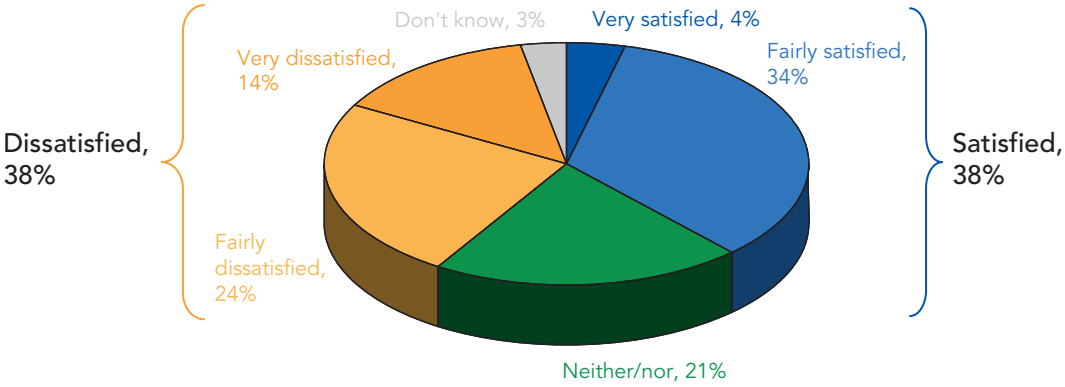
Satisfaction with media coverage of politics

The public is evenly split on the way the media reports politics in the UK: as many people are satisfied (38%) as dissatisfied (38%); although three times as many are *very* dissatisfied (14%) than are *very* satisfied (4%).

Almost half (47%) the readers of tabloid papers are satisfied with media reporting of politics, compared to only 29% of readers of broadsheets and 35% of those who do not read a newspaper regularly.

Figure 29: Media reporting of politics

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the media reports politics in the UK?



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

The connection between social grade and newspaper readership suggests that perceptions should vary by social grade in a similar fashion. This is indeed the case: a smaller proportion of people in the social grades AB are satisfied with the media's reporting of politics than those in other grades: 29% of ABs are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied, compared with 38% on average. On the other hand, members of the ethnic minority population are more likely to be satisfied than average: 55% are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied.

D. MPs and Parliament

People are generally sceptical about the motives of Members of Parliament. The expenses scandal has confirmed their already negative view of most parliamentarians, rather than fundamentally altered it. However, most people think people who try to become MPs or get involved in politics do it for the right reasons.

There is a huge gulf between the public's perception of what they think MPs should be doing and what MPs actually do: most think MPs should represent the views of local people in Parliament, but very few think they do; hardly anyone wants MPs to spend most of their time furthering their own interests; but the public perceive this to be what MPs actually spend most of their time focused on.

Parliament is seen as worthwhile by the majority of the public, but people do not feel very informed about what it does. Just one in five believes the Westminster Parliament is one of the political institutions that has the most impact on people's lives; fewer people today

consider it to be influential than in previous years. The media is seen as having the most impact on people's lives (and more so than in previous Audits) while the Prime Minister is seen as having least impact (and less so than previously).

Politicians' motives

In this year's Audit two questions were asked about the perceived motivations of people who try to become MPs or who get involved in politics generally. Participants were invited to rank a list of motivating factors in order of perceived importance.

Figure 30 shows that people are most likely to see 'to help people in their local area' as the primary motivator for either getting involved in politics (33%) or trying to become an MP (31%), with 'for their own personal gain' seen as the second likeliest (30% for those getting involved in politics, 31% for those seeking to become an MP).

Figure 30: Politicians' motives

In general, what do you think motivates most people who try to become MPs?	First choice	First or second choice	First, second or third choice
To help people in their local area	31%	56%	78%
To help the country as a whole	17%	38%	65%
To help their political party	16%	48%	75%
For their own personal gain	31%	45%	60%
In general, what do you think motivates most people who get involved in politics?	**First choice**	**First or second choice**	**First, second or third choice**
To help people in their local area	33%	61%	76%
To help the country as a whole	16%	35%	58%
To help their political party	15%	46%	71%
For their own personal gain	30%	41%	53%

However, the proportion saying 'personal gain' declines as second and then third preferences from the list are included, such that when all four statements are taken in order it comes last. This would suggest that while around 30% of people consider 'personal gain' as a primary motivator for any involvement in politics, many others believe that it is far from a driving factor.

There are fewer apparent demographic differences in response to this question, though the more affluent social classes are less likely to believe that those who get involved in politics are doing so for 'personal gain'; 18% of ABs say 'for personal gain' as their first response compared to 40% of DEs.

How MPs should and do spend their time

Two questions were also asked in this year's Audit looking at what activities the public think MPs spend most of their time doing and what people think are actually the most important activities that MPs ought to concentrate on.

As Figure 31 shows, the public perception of how MPs spend most of their time is almost the mirror image of what people think MPs should do.

There are few significant differences in opinion between men and women or across the age groups in terms of what MPs should do, although young people are less likely to prioritise 'holding the government to account', with just 15% of 18-24 year olds saying this, compared to 42% of 45-54 year olds and 65-74 year olds.

The demographic differences between the social classes are more significant, and show more affluent groups place greater emphasis on an MP's parliamentary role. Fifty-six per cent of ABs prioritise 'representing the views of local people in the House of Commons' (compared to 28% of DEs), 48% say 'debating important issues in the House of Commons' (25% of C2s, 34% of DEs) and 46% say 'holding the government to account' (25% of C2s, 22% of DEs). In contrast, 21% of ABC1s say MPs should prioritise 'dealing with the problems of individual constituents', compared to 31% of C2DEs.

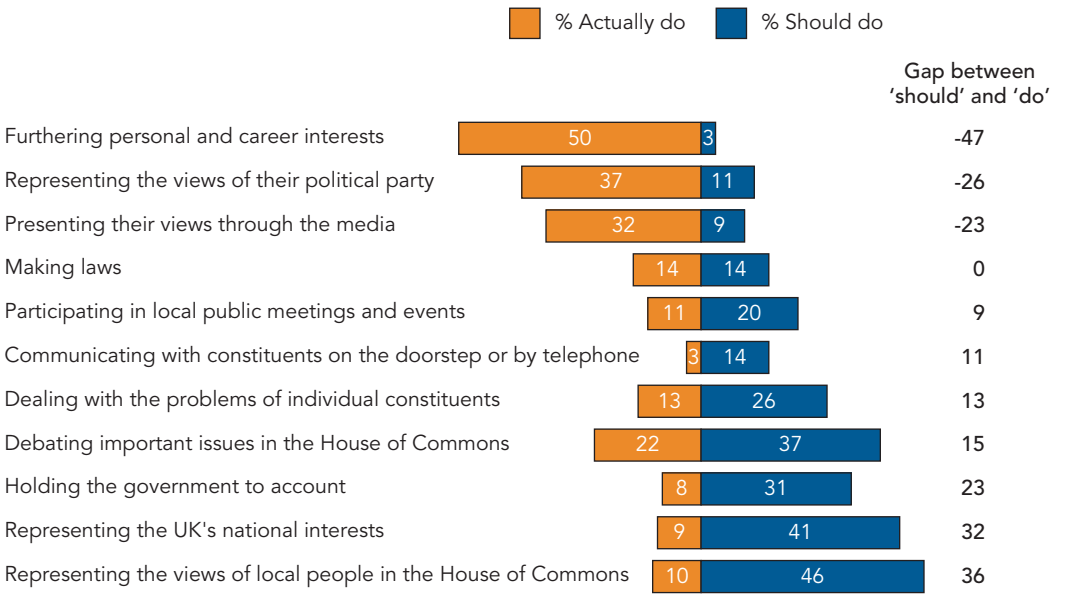
White people are more likely to say 'representing the views of local people in the House of Commons' (48% compared to 26% of BMEs) and 'representing the UK's national interests' (43% compared to 18% of BMEs), though less likely to say 'presenting their views through the media' (8% compared to 17% of BMEs).

Stark contrasts are apparent between those who performed well on the political knowledge quiz and those who did not. Twenty-two per cent of those who scored 0-3 correct answers in the knowledge test say 'representing views of local people in the House of Commons', compared to 40% of those scoring 4-6 and 61% of those scoring 7-9. Seventeen per cent of those who scored 0-3 say 'presenting their views through the media', compared to 11% of those who scored 4-6, and just 3% of those scoring 7-9.

Figure 31: Ways MPs should and do spend time

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

Q Which two or three, if any, do you feel that most MPs spend their time doing?



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

There were fewer demographic differences in terms of what respondents thought MPs actually spend their time doing, though it is noteworthy that 58% of ABs say 'furthering personal interests' (compared to 37% of DEs), despite the fact that ABs report greater levels of trust in politicians than DEs. This is very similar to proportions of those who use the internet who say 'furthering personal interests' (55%) compared to those who do not use the internet (38%). This is likely to reflect the disparity in internet usage (79% of ABC1s use the internet, compared to 62% of C2DEs) rather than evidence of the internet's role in disseminating news of the expenses scandal.

Across the party lines, only 39% of Labour supporters say 'furthering personal interests', compared to 57% of Conservatives and 56% of Liberal Democrats.

Those with more knowledge of politics are more likely to say that MPs spend their time 'furthering personal interests' and 'representing the views of their political party'. Fifty-eight per cent of those who scored 7-9 correct answers on the knowledge test say 'furthering personal interests', compared to 49% of those who scored 4-6 and 29% of those who scored 0-3. Fifty-two per cent of those who scored 7-9 say 'representing the views of their political party', compared to 29% of those who scored 4-6 and 16% of those who scored 0-3. This suggests that the more people know about politics the more it fails to meet their hopes and expectations.

A cautionary result in the approach to the forthcoming general election is that 61% of those in super-marginal seats (those with less than a 5% majority) say that MPs spend their time 'furthering personal interests', compared to 49% of those in safe seats who say the same.

The question about what MPs should spend their time on was also asked in Audit 4, though some of the answer codes were modified so it is not strictly possible to trend results. Nevertheless, the findings are similar and the public's priorities as to what they want MPs to do have remained fairly consistent since Audit 4.

The main change has been a 10 point increase in the proportion selecting 'representing the UK's national interests'. This might be due to the technical changes in the questionnaire or could reflect the key international events of the past year, in particular the international financial crisis.

Two other changes are also noteworthy, illustrating how even slight changes to terminology can make a big difference to public interpretations:

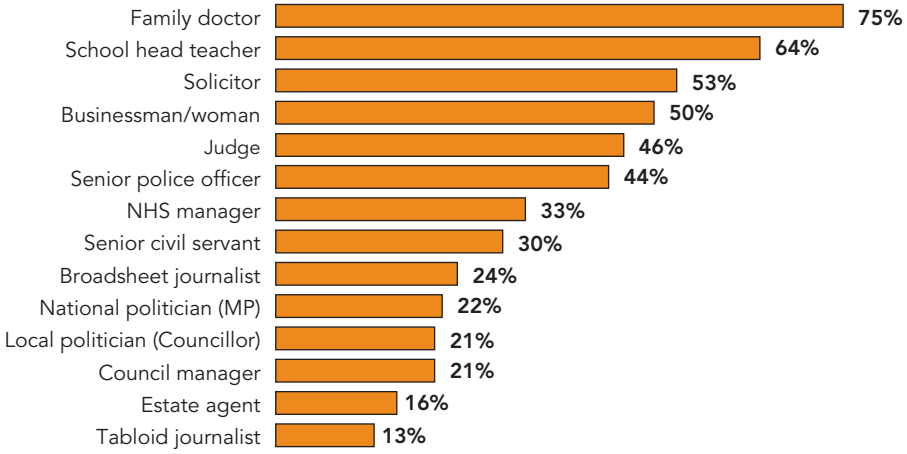
- Changing 'campaigning on constituents' doorsteps' to 'communicating with constituents on the doorstep or by telephone' has increased the response to that question from 5% in Audit 4 to 14% this year; and
- Modifying 'making good laws' to 'making laws' has halved the number of people selecting this (from 30% to 14%).

Pride in politics as a career

Respondents were shown a list of 14 different professions and then asked to indicate which they would be proud for a child or a family member to do.

Figure 32: Professions to be proud of

Q Here is a list of different professions. Please indicate which, if any, you would be proud for a child or family member of yours to do



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Around one in five say they would be proud if a child or relative was either a local politician (21%) or national politician (22%). This ranks politicians 10th/11th out of the 14 professions covered in the survey: putting them in line with a council manager (21%) and ahead of an estate agent (16%) and tabloid journalist (13%). The highest rated are family doctor (75%) and school head teacher (64%).

Those who are satisfied with their local MP were slightly more likely to say they would be proud of a child or relative being a national (27%) or local (25%) politician than those who are dissatisfied with their local MP (18% and 17% respectively). The gap in pride is larger between those who are satisfied or dissatisfied with MPs in general: 33% of satisfied people would be proud of a child or relative being a national politician, but only 16% of the dissatisfied would feel the same.

Men are slightly more likely than average to say they would be proud if a child or relative was a national (27%) or local (24%) politician, as are those in more affluent social grades (35% of ABs, and 11% of DEs, would be proud if a child or relative were a national politician). However, a 20% gap in approval exists for all the jobs listed between ABs and DEs (and similarly between white people and BMEs) suggesting different outlooks towards the nature of the 'professional' jobs presented rather than any particular disapproval towards political posts.

Perceptions of the Westminster Parliament

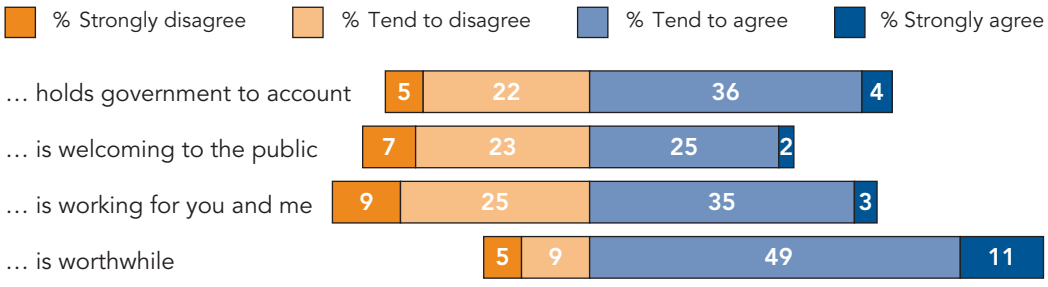
Despite widespread public criticism of Parliament the majority of the public (60%) believe that the Westminster Parliament 'is worthwhile' and only 14% disagree.

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate their views on three other statements about objectives associated with Westminster, namely: whether it 'holds government to account'; 'is welcoming to the public'; and 'is working for you and me'.

As Figure 33 shows there is little consensus about how well it is achieving these.

Figure 33: Views of Parliament

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements… The Westminster Parliament…



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

Two in five respondents (40%) agree that the Westminster Parliament 'holds government to account' but 27% do not agree (the remainder do not express an opinion either way). Similarly, slightly more people agree (38%) than disagree (34%) that Parliament 'is working for you and me' but again a relatively high proportion do not express an opinion either way (28%); and the public is equally split on whether Parliament 'is welcoming to the public': 27% agree and 30% disagree, with 43% not expressing an opinion.

Relationships between these attitudes and age are not straightforward. The oldest tend to take a more positive view than the youngest. For example, amongst over-75s, 45% think Parliament 'holds government to account', 38% that it 'is welcoming to the public', 50% that Parliament 'is working for you and me', and 74% that it 'is worthwhile'. In contrast, young people are more likely to be critical: of 18-24 year olds, only 29% think Parliament 'holds government to account', 24% that it 'is welcoming to the public', 36% that it 'is working for you and me', and 49% that Parliament 'is worthwhile'. Yet, as noted earlier, under-25s are the age group most likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works. In addition, there is no clear pattern of positive attitudes increasing with age.

More affluent social classes are likely to be positive about Parliament. Forty-six per cent of ABs think that it 'holds government to account' (compared to 28% of DEs), 33% think it 'is welcoming to the public' (22% of DEs), 47% that it 'is working for you and me' (27% of DEs) and 75% think it 'is worthwhile' (46% of DEs).

BMEs are more likely to be positive about Parliament than average on all of these measures, except on the measure of whether Parliament 'is worthwhile'. For example, 48% of BMEs agree that Parliament 'holds government to account', compared with the average of 39%, yet 54% agree that Parliament 'is worthwhile', less than the national average of 60% agreeing.

The impact of Parliament and other institutions on people's lives

Out of a list of eight institutions (excluding the devolved bodies), the Westminster Parliament ranks sixth in terms of the impact it is seen to have on people's everyday lives.

One in five people (19%) say it is one of the three institutions having most impact on their lives. This is a significant drop of 8% from the 27% that reported the same in Audit 4 and 11% down on the 30% who similarly agreed in Audit 1 (when it was ranked fourth).

There has been a similar fall in the perceived impact of the Prime Minister on people's everyday lives, which is down from 24% when last measured in Audit 4 to 17% in this survey.

In contrast, there has been a marked rise in the perceived impact of business on people's lives (up from 37% to 44% since Audit 4), perhaps an effect of the global financial crisis.

There has been an even more significant 9% increase in the impact of the media (up from 54% to 63%). In each of the three Audit surveys where this question has been asked the media have always been ranked as the most important in terms of perceived impact, but the gap between it and the second placed institution (local councils) is now much bigger.

In Audit 4 the gap was five points (54% and 49%, respectively) and now it is 13 points (63% and 50%, respectively).

Although the proportions mentioning each institution vary slightly between demographic groups, there is relatively little difference between groups in terms of the ranking of the institutions. Parliament is consistently seen as less influential than other institutions such as the media and business.

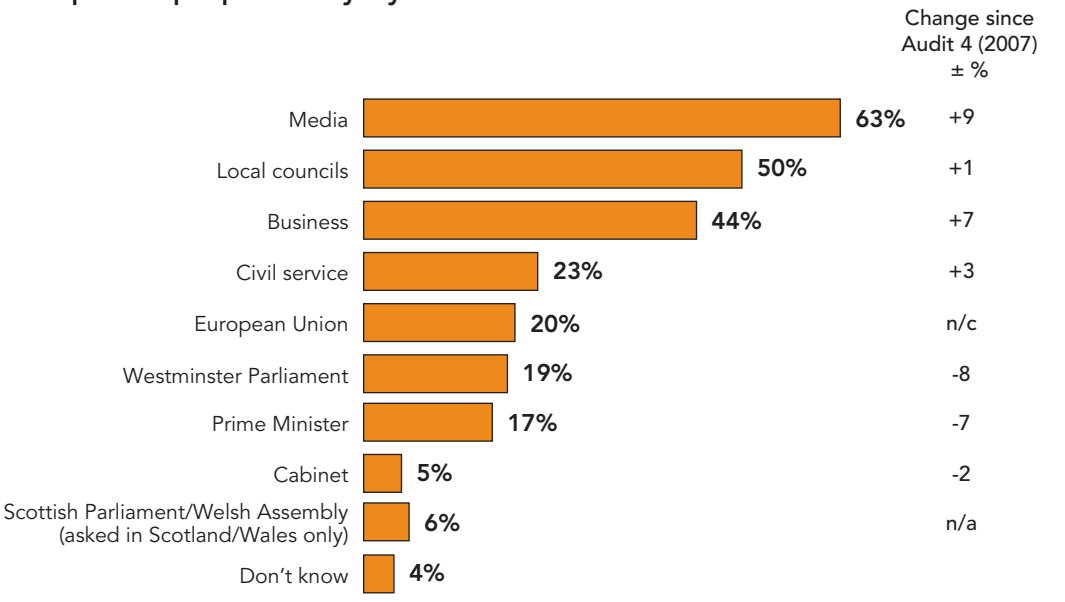
Women are more likely to name local councils as having the most impact on people's lives than men (55% to 45%), while men are more likely to name businesses in response to this question (50% to 37%).

Young people are significantly more likely to name the media as having a large impact on people's lives (72% of 18-24 year olds compared to 50% of those over 75) and the Prime Minister (25% of 18-24 year olds compared to 12% of those over 75). Conversely they are much less likely to name the EU (8% of 18-24 year olds compared to 31% of those over 75) or the Westminster Parliament (12% of 18-24 year olds compared to 27% of those over 75).

ABs are more likely than DEs to say the media (73% to 49%), business (51% to 38%) and Parliament (25% to 14%) have an impact on people's everyday lives and less likely to say the same about the Prime Minister (11% to 22%).

Figure 34: Impact on people's everyday lives

Q From this list, which two or three of the following do you believe have most impact on people's everyday lives?



Base: 1,156 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 13-19 November 2009.

8. Demographic and sub-group differences: the complexity of public attitudes

It is important to note that the public is not a one-dimensional body whose responses to questions are always completely rational and logical. The Audit results this year, as in previous years, reveal the complex nature of public attitudes to politics and political engagement and how, at times, they point in contradictory directions.

A. Gender

Men are more likely to take an interest in politics and therefore probably unsurprisingly demonstrate more knowledge of it. However, this does not translate into any significant difference in overall levels of political activity, nor of satisfaction with the political system.

The pattern of results suggest that women take a more localist view of the world, with more interest in local issues, greater propensity to correctly name their local MP, and a greater perceived influence of local councils. However, they perhaps view politics at a national level with greater suspicion, being less likely to see the system of governing as working well and being less trusting of politicians.

Knowledge and interest
Men are more likely to claim they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics (59% to 44% of women), but although they score higher on the political knowledge quiz than women (65% of men score six or more correct answers; 57% of women) the gap between perceived and actual knowledge is much smaller for women than it is for men.

Men are also less likely to be able to name their MP, with only 41% giving the right answer compared to 47% of women. They are also more likely to say they know about the role of MPs (55% to 45%) and the Westminster Parliament (45% to 31%), though there is no difference in claimed knowledge about local councils. Men are also noticeably more likely to say they are interested in politics (58% to 48% of women), but less likely to say they are interested in local issues (75% to 80%).

Action and participation
More women say they are certain to vote than men (56% to 51%), though there is no meaningful difference in terms of their feeling a duty to vote. However, given that interest and knowledge are linked to participation, it is perhaps surprising that women are more inclined to vote than men by as much as 5% given that men report higher levels of interest in and knowledge of politics.

Men are more likely to say they have discussed politics in the last two or three years (44% to 38%), though marginally more women than men say they discussed the issue of MPs'

expenses (73% to 69%). Significantly more men than women say they have discussed the European Union (42% to 33%). Women are more likely than men to have signed a petition in the last two or three years (43% to 36%) and to have donated to a charity or campaigning organisation (46% to 38%), though there is no difference in the proportions of men and women who are 'politically active'.

Efficacy and satisfaction
Women are less satisfied with the current system of governing (72% say it needs improvement, compared to 65% of men), less likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works (30% to 38%), and also marginally less likely to say they trust politicians (24% do, compared to 28% of men). However, they are more likely to be satisfied with the performance of their own MP (41% to 36% of men).

MPs and Parliament
There are not large differences in the views of men and women about MPs and little difference in the perceived influence of Parliament and the Prime Minister in people's everyday lives. More widely, women are more likely to see the media (66%) and local councils (55%) as being influential than are men (61% and 45%), though the reverse is true of business (37% to 50%).

B. Age

Young people are less knowledgeable and interested in politics, and less politically active than other age groups. They are, however, more satisfied with the way the country is run and how Parliament works, suggesting perhaps they feel less impetus to get actively engaged, but the 18-24 year old group are also disproportionately likely to agree that politics is a waste of time (34%, compared to 21% on average).

Knowledge and interest
Younger people are less likely to be knowledgeable about politics or claim knowledge of it than older people. A steady trend of increasing knowledge exists from 18-24 year olds upwards, dipping slightly at the end with those 75 or above. Similar patterns exist for knowledge of local councils and the Westminster Parliament, the name of their MP, and also with interest in politics, local issues and national issues.

Action and participation
Young people are significantly less likely to be certain to vote than older people. Just 27% of 18-24 year olds are certain to vote (despite 62% agreeing they have a duty to), compared to 80% of those 75 and above (85% of whom feel a duty to vote). There is, however, no difference between 18-24 year olds and those 75 and above when it comes to discussing politics (28% and 27% respectively), compared to 45-54 and 55-64 year olds (57% and 55%). Similar trends are largely evident for all of the political activities measured, with the youngest and oldest significantly less likely to have done them.

Efficacy and satisfaction
Younger people are, however, more positive about the system of government (32% of 18-34 year olds think it mostly works well, compared to 26% of those 35 and above) and more

likely to agree that getting involved can make a difference (38% of 18-34 year olds, compared to 33% of 35-54 year olds). Young people are more likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works (38% of 18-34 year olds, compared to 29% of 35-54 year olds) but less trusting of politicians generally (23% of 18-34 year olds, compared to 28% of those aged 35 and above) and less satisfied with how their MP is performing (28% of 18-34 year olds are satisfied, compared to 50% of those 55 and above).

MPs and Parliament

Views on what MPs should spend their time doing do not differ greatly by age, although young people are less likely to prioritise holding the government to account (just 19% of 18-34 year olds choose this, compared to 37% of those 55 and above), a finding that cannot be explained by a similar disparity in understanding that there is a difference between Parliament and government.

Curiously, even though young people are less likely than other age groups to think that Parliament is 'holding government to account', 'is welcoming', and 'is working for you and me', and only half think that the institution 'is worthwhile', they are nonetheless the age group, as noted above, most likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works.

There are also few differences in views about what MPs actually spend their time doing, although fewer 18-34 year olds say 'furthering personal interests' (41%) than 35-54 year olds (60%). Young people are less likely to consider the Westminster Parliament and the European Union as influential in people's everyday lives (13% and 9% of 18-34 year olds respectively, compared to 25% and 29% of those 55 and above), but more likely to consider the Prime Minister influential (24% of 18-34 year olds, compared to 14% of those 35 and above). This is perhaps explained by the finding that fewer young people (51% of 18-34 year olds) see Parliament as worthwhile, compared to 71% of those aged 55 and above.

C. Social class

The most significant demographic divides across all the Audits have been along class lines. More affluent social classes are consistently more knowledgeable, active and satisfied with politics than those who are less well off, and by considerable margins. While there are large disparities in the views of different age groups, as highlighted above, those gaps may close as the current younger cohorts grow older. There is less reason for optimism in relation to social class, as social mobility is nothing like as inevitable as ageing. Class differences should therefore be a primary area of concern when considering how to improve engagement.

Knowledge and interest

Significant differences exist between claimed and actual knowledge of politics between the social classes. Seventy per cent of ABs say they know about politics and 78% score six or more correct answers in the knowledge quiz, compared to just 36% and 44% respectively of DEs. Similar disparities exist on claimed knowledge of the role of MPs (68% to 34%) and the Westminster Parliament (57% to 20%), though the gap on claimed knowledge of local councils is much smaller (43% to 36%). Fifty-two per cent of ABs can name their MP correctly, compared to 38% of DEs. ABs are much more interested in

politics (73% are, compared to 38% of DEs) and also in local issues (89% to 67%) and national issues (90% to 61%).

Action and participation
The more affluent social classes are more likely to be certain to vote (69% of ABs, 39% of DEs) and to feel a duty to vote (89% to 61%). More ABs than DEs have discussed politics (65% to 21%) and all of the political issues show similar clear trends across the classes. The more affluent the social class, the more likely it is that they will have done every single political activity measured by the Audit.

Efficacy and satisfaction
Across the classes there is little difference in terms of satisfaction with the system of governing (unlike in all the previous Audits), though the more affluent social classes are more satisfied with the work of Parliament, MPs in general and their own MP. ABs are more likely than DEs to say that voting in a general election gives them a say in how the country is run (69% to 49%) and to believe that getting involved in politics can make a difference (39% to 33%). Unsurprisingly then, they are also less likely to say that politics is a waste of time (11% of ABs, compared to 33% of DEs). ABs are more likely to trust politicians than DEs (33% to 24%), though C2s report the lowest level of trust (20%).

MPs and Parliament
ABs are more likely to say that Parliament is influential in people's everyday lives (25%, compared to 14% of DEs) and are more likely to agree with all of the positive statements about Parliament, particularly that it is worthwhile (75% of ABs compared to 46% of DEs). In contrast, DEs are more likely to say that the Prime Minister is influential in people's everyday lives (22% do, compared to 11% of ABs). ABs are more likely to say that MPs should spend their time 'representing views of local people in the House of Commons' (56%, compared to 28% of DEs) and 'holding government to account' (46% to 22%), and less likely to say 'dealing with problems of individual constituents' (21% to 32%). Despite having greater trust in politicians and being less likely to say that people who get involved in politics or stand to be MPs do so for personal gain, markedly more ABs than DEs feel that MPs currently spend their time 'furthering personal and career interests' (58% to 37%). The relationship between knowledge of politics, trust in politicians and perceptions of their motivations are clearly not straightforward.

D. Ethnicity[36]

Last year's Audit found that a significantly larger proportion of the BME population than the white population agreed that people like them can change things if they get involved in politics. This prompted the question of whether an 'Obama effect' was at work in Great Britain. For the time being at least, it appears that changes in action have not followed the change in attitudes. This year's Audit suggests that, despite the fact that BMEs express more positive views about the political system than the white population do, it is still the case that members of the BME population are generally less interested, knowledgeable or politically active. Overall there is little notable change from last year in the attitudes of the BME population.

[36] Note that BMEs are not a homogenous group and therefore care should be taken when drawing conclusions from the data.

Knowledge and interest
Members of the BME population are less likely than the white population to say they are interested in politics (39% compared to 54%); local issues (67% compared to 79%) or national issues (63% as against 77%). Similarly, the BME population are less likely than the white population to say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics (41% compared to 52%) or to give six or more correct quiz answers (28% compared to 64%). On average, BMEs answer 4.4 of the political quiz answers correctly compared to the 6.1 correct answers averaged by the white population.

Action and participation
Levels of action and participation are lower for the BME population than for the white population. In general there is a gap between the proportion of people who agree that it is their duty to vote and the proportion who actually do so. Among members of the BME population this gap is particularly pronounced. There is very little difference between BME and white populations in terms of their perception that 'it is my duty to vote' (71% of BME people and 76% of white people agree). This does not, however, translate into equal likelihoods to actually vote: only 38% of BME people say they are absolutely certain to vote, compared to 55% of people from the white population.

BMEs are less likely to be classed as 'politically active' (as measured by the Audit's definition of having taken part in three or more of a list of activities in the last two or three years) than the white population (4% to 17%). There has been little change in terms of specific activities and BMEs are still less likely to have participated in the last two or three years in a range of activities, including:

- contacting their local MP, councillor, MSP or Welsh Assembly Member (6% compared to 18% of the white population);
- voting in the last council election (25% compared to 51%);
- discussing politics or political news (15% compared to 44%); or
- donating money or paying membership to a charity or campaigning organisation (15% compared to 45%).

Efficacy and satisfaction
For the second Audit running, a larger proportion of BME people than white people agree that people like them can change things if they get involved in politics: 46% of BMEs agree (41% last year), compared with 36% of the white population (31% last year). However, as noted above, actual involvement among the BME population remains lower than among the white population. Similarly, the BME population continue to take a slightly more positive view of the current system of governing Great Britain than do the white population. Two fifths (42%) of BMEs say the current system at least 'mainly works well' compared to only just over a quarter (26%) of the white population.

MPs and Parliament
People from BME backgrounds appear to be more satisfied with Parliament and MPs on each of the three questions asked: 53% of BMEs are satisfied with the way Parliament works,

compared with 32% of white respondents; 45% of BMEs are satisfied with MPs in general, and 46% with their MP in particular, compared with 27% and 38% respectively of people from the white population. BMEs are also a little more likely than average to trust politicians (36% do) compared to 25% of the white population. BMEs are more likely to be positive about some aspects of Parliament: for example, 48% agree that Parliament 'holds government to account', compared with 38% of the white population. However, on the issue of whether Parliament 'is worthwhile', only 54% agree, compared to 61% of the white population.

E. Scotland and Wales

Levels of engagement in Scotland and Wales differ from that observed in Great Britain as a whole, with Wales in particular showing signs of greater disengagement on the measures of satisfaction with the political system.

Knowledge and interest

People in Scotland and Wales are as likely to be interested in politics as are people in Great Britain as a whole. The same applies for interest in both local issues and national issues. Those in Wales and Scotland claim a lower level of knowledge about politics than the average for Great Britain: only 41% in Wales and 48% in Scotland say that they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount', compared to 51% in Great Britain as a whole. People in Wales are as likely as the British average to say they know at least 'a fair amount' about their local council, the role of MPs or the Westminster Parliament. By contrast, people in Scotland are less likely to say they know about their local council (31% say they know at least 'a fair amount', compared to 40% in Great Britain as a whole), or the role of MPs (38% as against 50% in Great Britain as a whole).

Given that people in Scotland are less likely to claim knowledge than those in Wales or Great Britain as a whole, it is perhaps surprising to find they are not less likely to answer six or more questions correctly in the political quiz. There is no statistically significant difference between the proportions who give six or more correct answers to the quiz in Great Britain as a whole (61%), Wales (62%) or Scotland (67%).

Action and participation

Differences in levels of political activity are too small for us to be confident that they are statistically significant. Similarly, there is little difference in the proportions of those who have contacted or presented their views to MPs, local councillors, Welsh Assembly Members (AMs) or Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). Differences in likelihood to vote are also too small for us to be confident that they are statistically significant.

Efficacy and satisfaction

When it comes to assessing how much the current system could be improved, people in Scotland are as likely to express a positive view as the British average. By contrast, people in Wales are less likely to take a positive view. Four fifths (80%) of people in Wales think the system could be improved 'quite a lot' or more, compared to 69% of those in Great Britain as a whole and 64% in Scotland. Less than half (49%) of those in Wales agree that 'voting gives me a say in how the country is run', compared to 68% in Scotland and 59% in Great Britain as a whole.

MPs and Parliament

Smaller proportions of people in Wales than average are satisfied with Parliament and MPs in general: for example, just one fifth (21%) are satisfied with the way Parliament works, compared to one third (34%) in Great Britain as a whole. Similarly, in Wales, satisfaction with MPs in general is only 18%, compared to 29% in the entire country. When it comes to their own local MP, people in Wales are not significantly less likely to be satisfied than are people in the whole of Great Britain.

Perceptions of the institutions that have the most influence vary between Wales, Scotland and Great Britain as a whole. Local councils are more likely to be seen as having an impact on people's everyday lives in Scotland (mentioned by 60%) than in Great Britain (50%). Business is less likely to be seen as having an impact by people in Scotland and Wales (mentioned by 23% and 32% respectively) than in Great Britain as a whole (44%). The Westminster Parliament is more likely to be seen as having an impact by people in Scotland than by people in Great Britain as a whole (by 29% to 19%).

F. Marginal seats[37]

As might be expected, people's level of engagement may at least be partly influenced by whether they live in a marginal constituency (where political parties focus much of their campaigning effort and there is perhaps a greater sense of being able to influence election outcomes) or in a safe seat. Those living in marginal seats tend to be more politically knowledgeable, interested and active, but this does not translate into significant differences in terms of their satisfaction with the political process.

Knowledge and interest

Compared to those living in safe seats, people living in marginal seats express more interest in politics, local issues and national issues. Three fifths (60%) of those in marginals are interested in politics (compared to only 48% in safe seats). Just over four fifths of those who live in marginals are interested in local issues or national issues (both 82%), as against 73% and 72% respectively in safe seats. In marginals, the public claim greater knowledge of politics and score slightly better in the political quiz. Three fifths of people in marginals (60%) say they know at least 'a great deal' about politics: more than the 45% in safe seats who make the same claim. Just over two thirds (68%) in marginals give six or more correct answers in the political quiz, slightly more than the 57% who manage to do so in safe seats. Knowing the name of the local MP is one piece of knowledge that does not vary significantly between those in marginal and safe seats (49% and 46% respectively). Indeed, people are least likely to know the name of their MP in semi-marginals (those with a 10-20% majority for the incumbent), where only 38% do so. This might be the result of their being less exposed to the political campaigning focused on marginal seats and being less likely to have a long-standing incumbent candidate who has had time to build their profile.

[37] For the purposes of comparison 'super-marginal' seats are defined as those where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of less than 5%, 'marginal' seats are where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of less than 10%, 'semi-marginal' seats are where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of between 10% and 20%, and 'safe' seats are those where the winning party in 2005 had a majority of over 20% or more. Boundaries are based on those in existence at the time of the 2005 general election.

Action and participation

People in marginal seats are more likely to participate in the political process than those in safe seats. In marginals, almost a fifth (19%) have undertaken a sufficient number of activities to meet the Audit's definition of 'politically active'; in safe seats this applies to just one in 10 (9%). In marginals, just over three fifths (62%) say they would be 'absolutely certain' to vote in an immediate general election, compared to just under half (47%) in safe seats. In marginal seats, significantly larger proportions have contacted their MP, local councillor or MSP/AM (21% compared to 12% in safe seats) or voted in the last council election (57% as against 42% in safe seats). Similarly, in marginal seats, half have discussed politics or political news (50%) or donated money or paid membership to a charity or campaigning organisation (50%), while in safe seats the same figures are nearer to a third (33% and 31% respectively).

Efficacy and satisfaction

There is no significant difference between safe seats and marginal seats in the proportions who are satisfied with Parliament, MPs in general or their own MP. While people living in marginal constituencies are more likely than those in safe seats to say that their vote gives them a say, it is perhaps a smaller difference than might be expected. Just under two thirds (64%) of those in marginal seats agree with the statement, compared with 55% of those in safe seats. Slightly larger proportions in marginals agree that it is their duty to vote (83% compared to 74% in safe seats).

MPs and Parliament

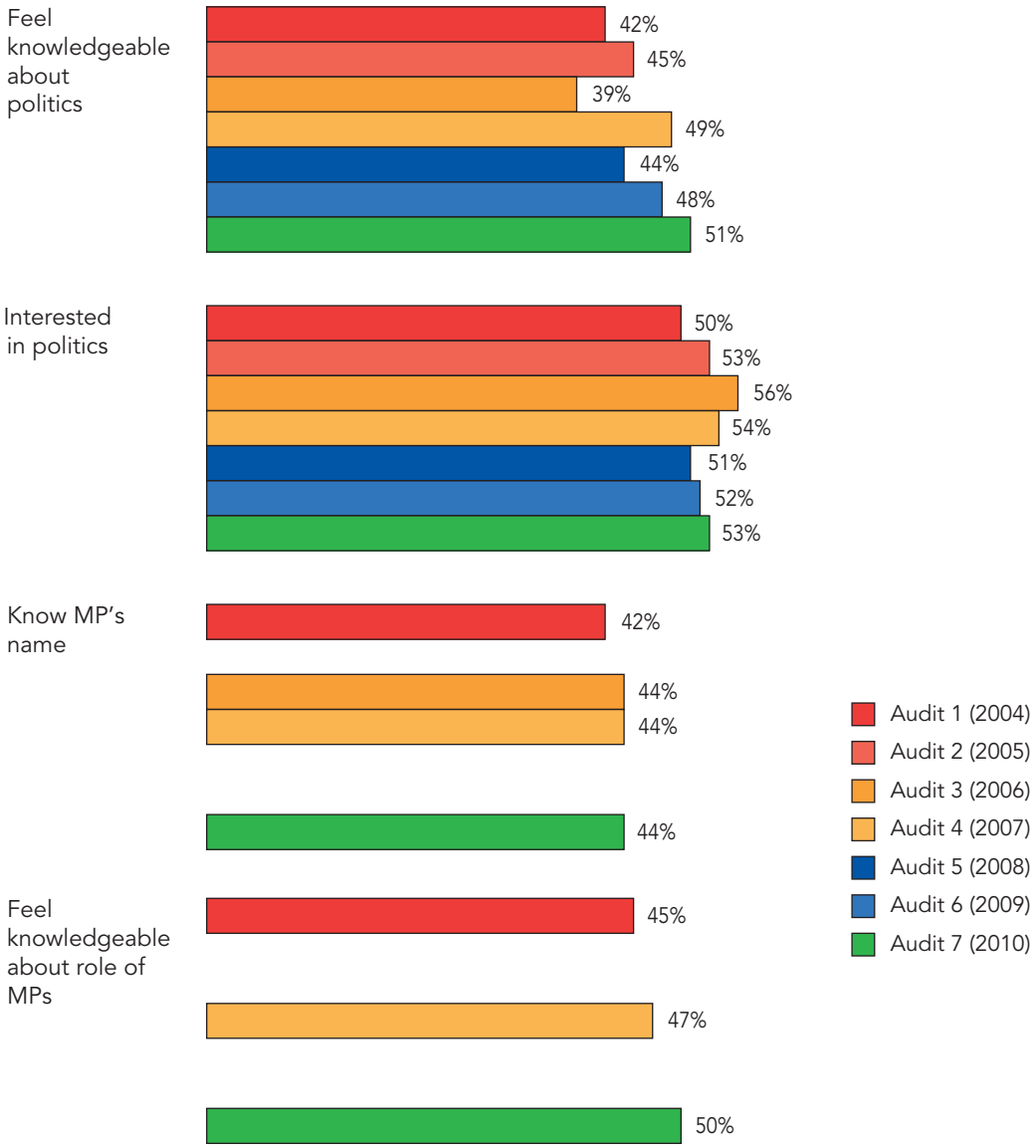
Most perceptions of MPs and their roles differ little between people in marginal and safe seats. However, those in marginal seats are more likely to feel that MPs spend their time representing the views of their political party than those in safe seats (44% to 31%). This is unsurprising given the greater amount of political campaigning they will likely have been exposed to. People in marginal seats are also more likely to agree that Parliament is worthwhile than those in safe seats (67% to 59%), despite the fact that there is no difference in reported satisfaction with how Parliament works. A cautionary note in the run-up to the 2010 general election is that 61% of those in super-marginal seats (those with less than 5% majority) say that MPs spend their time furthering personal interests, compared to 49% of those in safe seats who say the same.

Social class and seat marginality

Earlier we noted that ABC1s are more likely than C2DEs to be politically engaged generally. Given the findings that people in marginal seats are more likely to be politically engaged, it is worth considering the extent to which social class differs between marginal and safe seats. Respondents in marginal seats were more likely to be ABC1s than those in safe seats (by 61% to 51%). However, this difference is smaller than several of the differences in levels of engagement between people in safe and marginal seats, suggesting that the differences recorded are the result of more than just variations in social class.

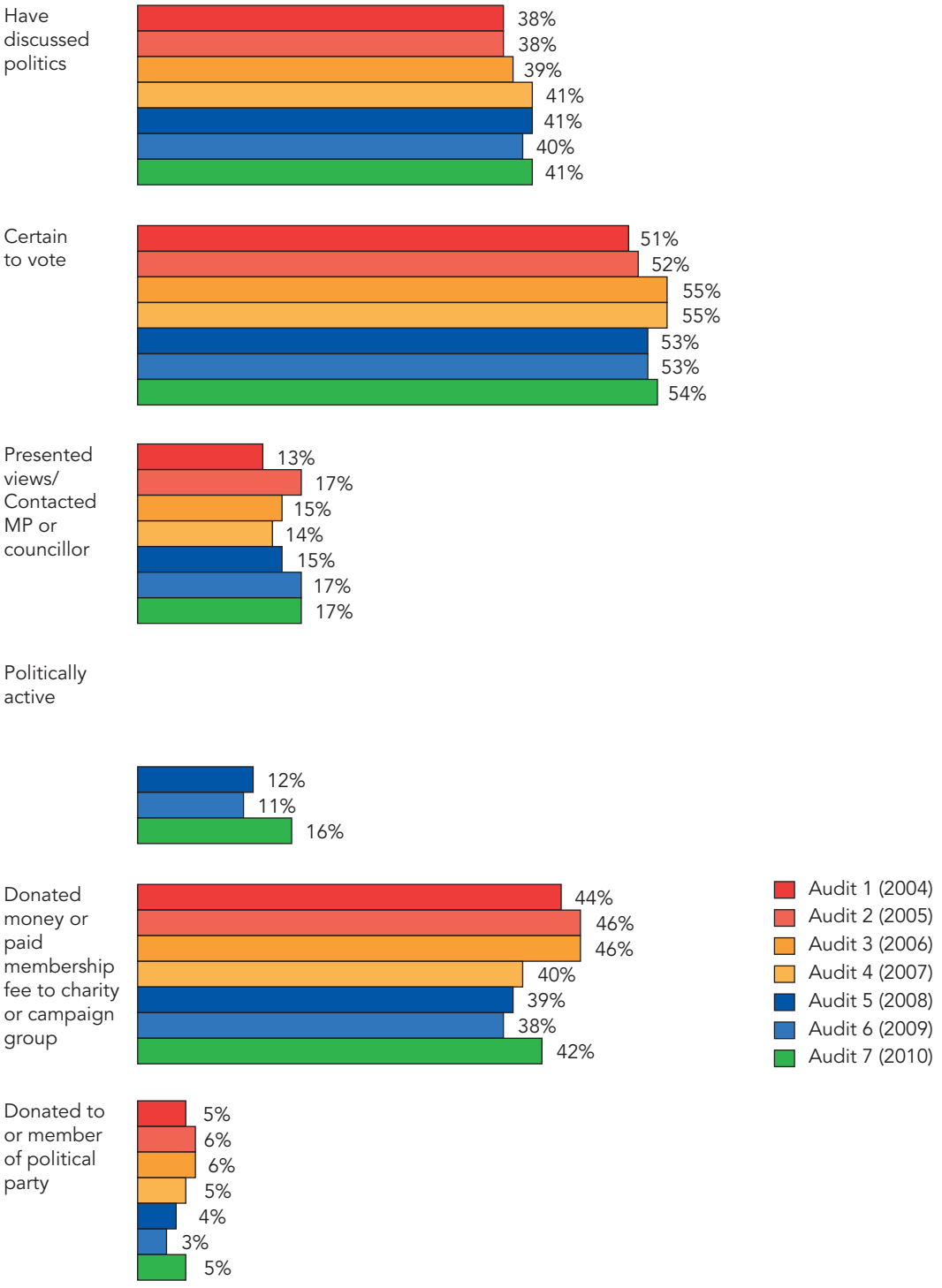
9. Audit series indicator graphs

Knowledge and interest indicators



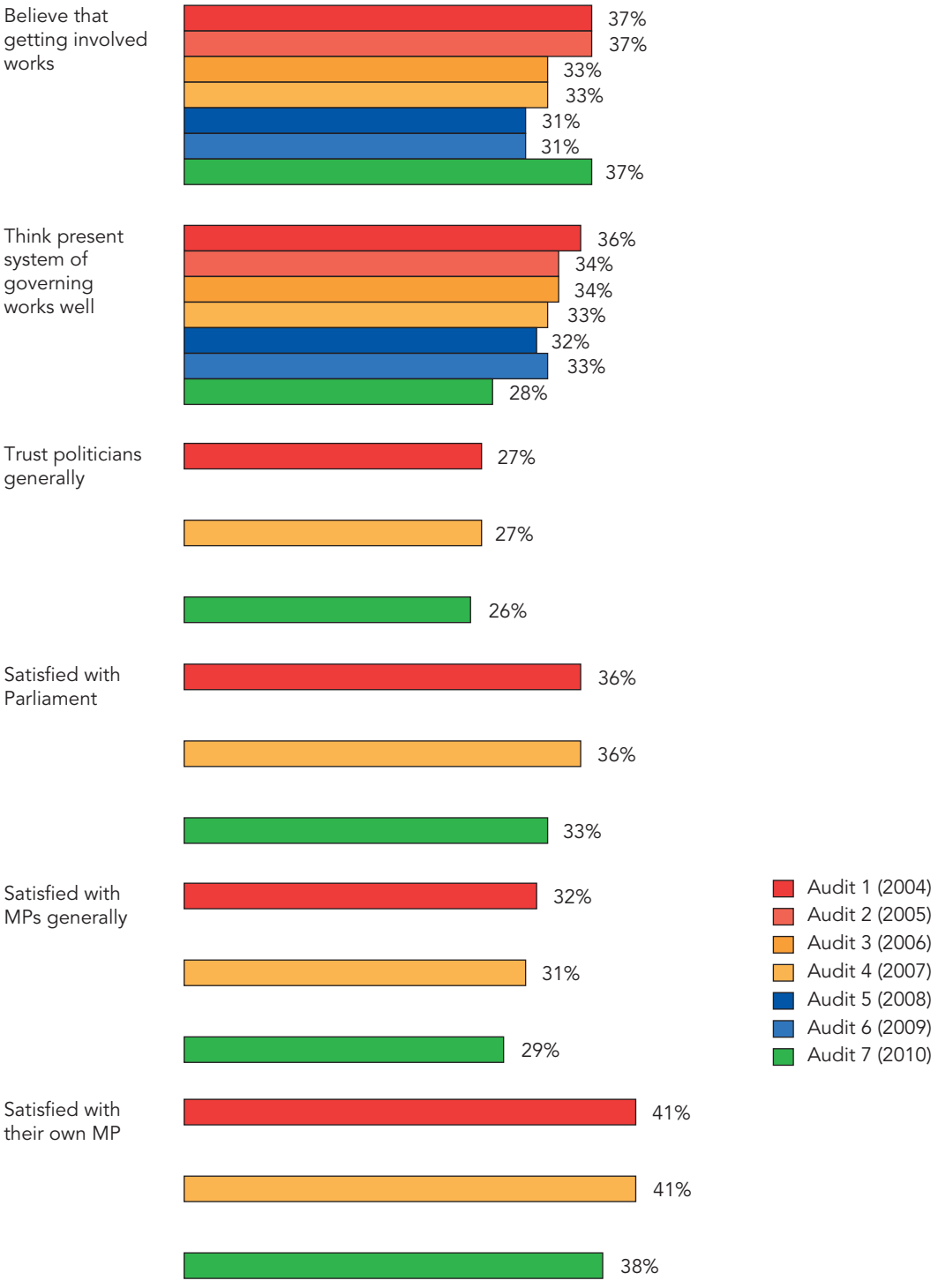
Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

Action and participation indicators



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

Efficacy and satisfaction indicators



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

Appendix A: Quantitative survey methodology

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 944 adults in Great Britain aged 18+, face-to-face, in respondents' homes, between 13 – 19 November 2009.[38] In order to make comparisons between the white and BME populations more statistically reliable, an additional 83 interviews were conducted with BME adults using the same methodology. Additionally, 79 interviews were carried out in Scotland, and 51 in Wales, with the same aim of raising reliability.

Findings in this report are based on the combined total of 1,156 interviews, which have been weighted to the national population profile of Great Britain.[39] Where regions have been identified, they refer to the areas defined by the Government Office Regions.

Statistical reliability

The respondents to the questionnaire are only samples of the total 'population' of Great Britain, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody in Great Britain had been interviewed (the 'true' values). However, the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values can be predicted from the knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which this prediction can be made is usually chosen to be 95% – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range.

Given that the data is weighted to be representative of the profile of Great Britain[40], this reduces the 'effective base size' from 1,156 to 801.[41] In practice this means that the additional interviews conducted in Wales, Scotland and with BMEs have no effect on the statistical reliability of the overall dataset, but they do mean that comparisons with the *overall* data (or other subgroups) which involve Wales, Scotland or BMEs are more statistically reliable. All statistical reliability has been calculated using this effective base size.

[38] Polling for each Audit report thus far has been conducted in November or December and the report is published the following Spring. For previous Audits, polling was conducted in December 2003 (Audit 1), December 2004 (Audit 2), December 2005 (Audit 3), November 2006 (Audit 4), November-December 2007 (Audit 5) and December 2008 (Audit 6).

[39] Note that one of the BME booster sample interviews took place in Scotland and formed part of the Scottish booster sample. This is only counted once in the total number of interviews.

[40] This includes 'down-weighting' the additional BME interviews to their representative level in Great Britain as these groups were over-represented in our sample to allow more robust analysis.

[41] This is also known as the 'design effect', wherein some factors of the research methodology can negatively impact on the reliability of the data.

The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the '95% confidence interval'.

Size of sample on which survey result is based	**Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels**		
	10% or 90%	**30% or 70%**	**50%**
	±	±	±
100 interviews	6	9	10
200 interviews	4	6	7
400 interviews	3	4	5
500 interviews	3	4	4
600 interviews	2	3	4
801 interviews	**2**	**3**	**3.5**
1,000 interviews	2	3	3
1,200 interviews	2	3	3
1,300 interviews	2	3	3
1,400 interviews	2	2	3
1,500 interviews	2	2	3

For example, with an effective base size of 801 where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of ±3.5 percentage points from the sample result (i.e. between 46.5% and 53.5%).

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be 'real', or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is 'statistically significant', we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume '95% confidence interval', the differences between the results of two separate groups must be greater than the values given in the table below. We have listed in bold the common sub-group differences referred to throughout the report.

Size of samples compared	Differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
100 and 400	6	9	10
200 and 400	5	8	9
300 and 500	4	7	7
300 and 700	4	6	7
400 and 400	4	6	7
400 and 700	4	6	6
400 and 1,000	4	5	6
500 and 500	4	6	6
500 and 1,000	3	5	5
700 and 1,000	3	4	5
800 and 1,000	3	4	5
1,000 and 1,500	2	4	4
801 (APE7) and 824 (APE6)	**3**	**5**	**5**
115 (BMEs) and 703 (Whites)	**6**	**9**	**10**
98 (18-24s) and 87 (75+s)	**9**	**13**	**15**
391 (men) and 410 (women)	**4**	**6**	**7**
404 ('interested' in politics) and 394 ('not interested' in politics)	**4**	**6**	**7**
161 (ABs) and 222 (DEs)	**6**	**9**	**10**
101 (active campaigners) and 160 (detached cynics)	**8**	**11**	**13**
72 (politically committed) and 66 (bored/apathetic)	**10**	**15**	**17**

Guide to social grade definitions

Listed below is a summary of the social grade definitions on all surveys carried out by Ipsos MORI. These are based on classifications used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising.

A Professionals such as doctors, surgeons, solicitors or dentists; chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior editors, senior civil servants, town clerks, senior business executives and managers,

and high ranking grades of the Services.

B People with very responsible jobs such as university lecturers, hospital matrons, heads of local government departments, middle management in business, qualified scientists, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades of the Services.

C1 All others doing non-manual jobs; nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, people in clerical positions, police sergeants/constables, and middle ranks of the Services.

C2 Skilled manual workers/craftsmen who have served apprenticeships; foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as long distance lorry drivers, security officers, and lower grades of Services.

D Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, including labourers and mates of occupations in the C2 grade and people serving apprenticeships; machine minders, farm labourers, bus and railway conductors, laboratory assistants, postmen, door-to-door and van salesmen.

E Those on lowest levels of subsistence including pensioners, casual workers, and others with minimum levels of income.

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

Figures used in the report

- APE7 results are based on 1,156 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 13–19 November 2009.
- Where applicable trend data from the Audit of Political Engagement 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are included, as well as from Ipsos MORI's State of the Nation research for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust and Expenses Poll for the BBC.
- APE1 results are based on 1,913 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 11–17 December 2003.
- APE2 results are based on 2,003 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 2–6 December 2004.
- APE3 results are based on 1,142 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 1–5 December 2005.
- APE4 results are based on 1,282 adults aged 18+ in the Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 23–28 November 2006.
- APE5 results are based on 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 29 November–7 December 2007.
- APE6 results are based on 1,051 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 11–17 December 2008.
- For the State of the Nation poll MORI interviewed 1,758 adults across Great Britain face-to-face between 21 April–8 May 1995, and 1,547 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain between 7–25 March 1991.
- For the *Independent on Sunday* poll MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,069 adults aged 18+ at 78 enumeration district sampling points across Great Britain in-home between 2–3 April 1997.
- For the *Times* poll MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 996 adults aged 18+ at 164 sampling points across Great Britain, face-to-face between 24–27 April 1998.
- For the Expenses Poll for the BBC Ipsos MORI interviewed 1,001 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain by telephone between 29 May–31 May 2009.
- Other trend data is included where appropriate.
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.
- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- An asterisk (*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't knows' or to multiple answers.

Please note that reported figures in Audits 1-4 were based on UK data, whereas figures in Audits 5-7 are based on Great Britain data. When referenced in this report for the purposes of comparison, we have therefore amended the figures from Audits 1-4 to be based on Great Britain only (i.e., not including Northern Ireland).

Q1.	**What do you understand by 'politics'?** (answers below 3% not shown)
	%
The way the country is governed/running the country/ what the government does	26
Parliament	18
Elections/voting	14
Local government/ councils	11
People with power/people who run things	10
Arguments between parties/politicians	10
Party system/alignment of groups	10
Sleaze/corruption/they are all crooks	9
Talking/people discussing issues/ reaching agreement	7
Choices for society/how the country should be run	6
Way of making decisions	5
Spin/lies	5
Public link with/control over government/ representation	5
Disagreement/ confrontation/argument	5
Boring	4
Not listening/ignoring public opinion	4
Cronyism/jobs for the boys/nepotism	3
Important issue of the day	3
Irrelevant/doesn't involve me/something for other people	3
Other	1
None of these	2
Don't know	8

Q2.	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**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
10 (Absolutely certain to vote)	51	52	55	55	53	53	**54**
9	6	6	7	6	4	5	**6**
8	8	8	7	7	7	8	**7**
7	5	5	7	6	5	6	**4**
6	3	3	2	3	3	2	**3**
5	7	7	6	5	8	7	**7**
4	2	2	1	1	1	2	**2**
3	2	3	2	2	2	2	**2**
2	2	2	1	2	2	1	**2**
1 (Absolutely certain not to vote)	11	11	10	11	10	11	**12**
Refused	0	0	0	1	*	*	*
Don't know	2	1	1	0	3	2	**2**

Q3.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**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Voted in the last general election	64	61	70	70	62	58	**49**
Voted in the last general election (excluding those aged under 18 in May 2005)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	66	63	**54**
Helped on fund raising drives	21	30	22	18	19	20	**27**
Presented my views to/Contacted a local councillor, MP, MSP or Welsh Assembly Member	14	17	15	14	15	17	**17**
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	14	16	14	10	16	12	**15**
Urged someone outside my family to vote	14	17	17	13	15	12	**17**
Made a speech before an organised group	11	17	13	11	12	8	**14**
Been an officer/office holder of an organisation or club	8	13	9	7	9	7	**12**
Written a letter to an editor	6	7	8	6	7	6	**6**
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3	3	3	3	3	3	**5**
Stood for public office	1	1	1	1	1	1	**1**
None of these	25	23	21	23	26	32	**30**

Q3.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?** *Base: All who have contacted/presented views to councillor, MSP or Welsh Assembly Member*

	APE1	APE4	APE5	APE6	**APE7**
	(258)	(180)	(171)	(165)	**(192)**
	%	%	%	%	**%**
MP	27	29	29	28	**43**
Local councillor	48	41	48	44	**40**
Both MP and Local Councillor	24	29	22	26	**19**
Don't know	2	1	1	2	**2**

Q4.a	**And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?**

	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5†	APE6	**APE7**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Voted in the last local council election	51	50	55	53	50	47	**49**
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	41	45	45	39	37	37	**42**
Discussed politics or political news with someone else	38	38	39	41	41	40	**41**
Signed a petition	39	44	45	47	40	36	**40**
Done voluntary work	23	28	22	27	23	22	**29**
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	19	21	18	21	19	18	**19**
Expressed my political opinions online	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	8	**9**
Been to any political meeting	5	6	6	9	6	4	**8**
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	5	6	6	5	4	3	**5**
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march/ march or strike	5	6	5	5	4	3	**4**
None	17	16	17	19	20	20	**23**
Don't know	-	*	*	1	2	1	*

† Please note that the list of activities is different in Audits 1-4, comparisons with Audits 5, 6 and 7 should therefore be seen as indicative only.

Q4.b	And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?
	%
Joined a political group on Facebook	4
Followed a politician or political group on Twitter	2
Served as a school governor	2
Served as a hospital governor	*
Served as a local magistrate	*
None of these	92

Q5.	How interested would you say you are in politics?						
		Very interested	Fairly interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested	Don't know	Very/fairly interested
MORI 1973	%	14	46	27	13	*	60
State of the Nation 1991	%	13	47	26	13	*	60
State of the Nation 1995	%	13	40	30	17	*	53
APE1	%	11	39	32	18	*	50
APE2	%	13	40	28	19	*	53
APE3	%	13	43	30	13	*	56
APE4	%	13	41	27	19	*	54
APE5	%	13	38	28	19	1	52
APE6	%	12	40	30	17	*	52
APE7	**%**	**14**	**39**	**29**	**18**	**1**	**53**

Q6.	How interested would you say you are in local issues?						
		Very interested	Fairly interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested	Don't know	Very/fairly interested
APE2	%	32	49	14	5	*	81
APE3	%	30	51	13	5	*	81
APE4	%	28	51	13	7	*	79
APE7	**%**	**19**	**59**	**17**	**6**	*****	**78**

Q7.	How interested would you say you are in national issues?						
		Very interested	Fairly interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested	Don't know	Very/fairly interested
APE2	%	25	52	17	6	*	77
APE3	%	23	52	18	7	*	75
APE4	%	24	52	15	9	*	76
APE7	**%**	**22**	**53**	**16**	**8**	*****	**75**

Q8.	Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?									
	Crowther-Hunt Commission report 1973	State of the Nation 1991	State of the Nation 1995	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	**APE7**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Works extremely well and could not be improved	5	4	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	**1**
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	43	29	19	34	32	33	31	30	31	**27**
Could be improved quite a lot	35	40	41	42	45	41	40	38	40	**42**
Needs a great deal of improvement	14	23	35	18	18	21	21	24	24	**27**
Don't know	4	5	3	4	3	4	6	6	3	**4**
Works well	48	33	22	36	34	34	33	32	33	**28**

Q9.-Q12.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about…?						
		A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Nothing at all	Don't know	Great deal/ fair amount
Politics							
APE 1	%	3	39	45	12	1	42
APE 2	%	4	41	44	10	*	45
APE 3	%	4	35	51	9	*	39
APE 4	%	6	43	40	11	*	49
APE 5	%	4	40	43	12	*	44
APE 6	%	5	43	42	9	1	48
APE 7	**%**	**6**	**45**	**40**	**9**	*	**51**
Your local council							
APE 1	%	4	34	49	12	1	38
APE 4	%	5	42	43	9	1	47
APE 7	**%**	**4**	**36**	**50**	**9**	*	**40**
The Westminster Parliament							
APE 1	%	3	30	50	17	1	33
APE 4	%	4	34	46	14	1	38
APE 7	**%**	**4**	**33**	**47**	**15**	**1**	**37**
The role of MPs							
APE 1	%	4	41	42	13	1	45
APE 4	%	5	42	41	11	1	47
APE 7	**%**	**6**	**44**	**40**	**9**	**1**	**50**

Q13.	Which of these local, national and international issues, if any, have you discussed with your family or friends in the last year or so?
	%
MPs' expenses	71
The leadership of the main political parties	40
The European Union	37
Local council elections	30
How political parties raise or spend their money	26
Devolution of central government powers to Scotland/Wales	21
The electoral system	19
Reform of the House of Lords	14
Reform of the House of Commons	11
Local government reform/ election of local mayors	10
A written Bill of Rights	7
Written constitution	7
Recall of MPs via a petition of their constituents	5
Open primary selections	4
None of these	18
Don't know	1

Q14.	What is the name of your local Member of Parliament?			
	APE 1	APE 3	APE 4	**APE 7**
	%	%	%	**%**
Gave correct answer	42	44	44	**44**
Gave wrong answer	10	9	6	**10**
Don't know/no answer	49	46	50	**46**

Q15.	**Please tell me if you think that the following statements are true or false. If you don't know, just say so and we will move on to the next question.**		
	True	False	Don't know
	%	%	%
Cabinet ministers stop being MPs when they become a minister (FALSE)	12	**60**	29
British members of the European Parliament are directly elected by British voters every five years (TRUE)	**56**	19	25
Members of the House of Lords are elected by the British public (FALSE)	12	**74**	14
MPs can raise problems their constituents are having in the House of Commons (TRUE)	**80**	8	11
Most of the money that local councils spend is raised locally, through council tax (FALSE)	48	**36**	16
Government and Parliament are the same thing (FALSE)	28	**63**	9
Political parties have to declare publicly where they receive their money and donations from (TRUE)	**73**	16	12
You are automatically registered to vote if you pay council tax (FALSE)			
APE 4	21	64	15
APE 7	25	**62**	13
The minimum age for voting at a general election is 16 (FALSE)			
APE 4	14	79	8
APE 7	13	**83**	4

Q16.-Q18.	Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way…?							
		Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/ nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know	Very/ fairly satisfied
That Parliament works								
APE 1	%	1	35	27	23	9	5	36
APE 4	%	2	34	24	24	9	7	36
APE 7	**%**	**1**	**32**	**24**	**25**	**13**	**4**	**33**
MPs in general are doing their job								
APE 1	%	1	31	26	26	10	5	32
APE 4	%	2	29	27	26	10	6	31
APE 7	**%**	**1**	**28**	**24**	**30**	**14**	**3**	**29**
Your MP is doing his/her job								
APE 1	%	8	33	26	9	4	21	41
APE 4	%	11	30	30	9	3	17	41
APE 7	**%**	**8**	**30**	**27**	**9**	**7**	**18**	**38**

Q19.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?						
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Strongly/ Tend to agree
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Politics is a waste of time	6	15	12	41	25	1	21
Voting in a General Election gives me a say in how the country is run	15	43	11	20	8	2	58
It is my duty to vote							
APE 1	37	37	10	10	5	1	74
APE 4	42	36	10	7	3	2	78
APE 7	**46**	**30**	**8**	**9**	**6**	**1**	**76**
When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run							
APE 1	6	31	20	30	10	4	37
APE 2	7	30	20	31	10	2	37
APE 3	6	27	20	31	13	3	33
APE 4	5	28	24	31	8	4	33
APE 5	4	27	23	29	13	3	31
APE 6	3	28	22	32	13	2	31
APE 7	**5**	**32**	**19**	**30**	**11**	**4**	**37**

Q20.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?						
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Strongly/ Tend to agree
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The Westminster Parliament…							
…holds government to account	4	36	20	22	5	14	40
…is welcoming to the public	2	25	28	23	7	15	27
…is working for you and me	3	35	22	25	9	5	38
…is worthwhile	11	49	20	9	5	6	60

Q21.	From this list, which two or three of the following do you believe have most impact on people's everyday lives? You can select up to three options.		
	APE 1	APE 4	**APE 7**
	%	%	**%**
Media	52	54	**63**
Local Councils	47	49	**50**
Business	41	37	**44**
Civil Service	22	20	**23**
European Union	17	20	**20**
Westminster Parliament	30	27	**19**
Prime Minister	25	24	**17**
Cabinet	8	7	**5**
Scottish Parliament/Welsh Assembly (asked in Scotland/Wales only)	n/a	n/a	**6**
Don't know	*	-	**4**

Q22.	How much would you say you trust politicians generally?		
	APE 1	APE 4	**APE 7**
	%	%	**%**
A great deal	1	1	**1**
A fair amount	26	26	**25**
Not very much	51	47	**48**
Not at all	19	23	**25**
Don't know	2	3	**1**
Great deal/fair amount	27	27	**26**

Q23.	Which TWO or THREE, if any, do you feel are the most important ways that MPs should spend their time?
	%
Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons	46
Representing the UK's national interests	41
Debating important issues in the House of Commons	37
Holding the government to account	31
Dealing with the problems of individual constituents	26
Participating in local public meetings and events	20
Communicating with constituents on the doorstep or by telephone	14
Making laws	14
Representing the views of their political party	11
Presenting their views through the media	9
Furthering personal and career interests	3
Other	*
None of these	1
Don't know	6

Q24.	Which TWO or THREE, if any, do you feel that MPs spend most of their time doing?
	%
Furthering personal and career interests	50
Representing the views of their political party	37
Presenting their views through the media	32
Debating important issues in the House of Commons	22
Making laws	14
Dealing with the problems of individual constituents	13
Participating in local public meetings and events	11
Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons	10
Representing the UK's national interests	9
Holding the government to account	8
Communicating with constituents on the doorstep or by telephone	3
Other	*
None of these	2
Don't know	9

Q25.	Here is a list of different professions. Please indicate which, if any, you would be proud for a child or family member of yours to do.
	%
Family doctor	75
School head teacher	64
Solicitor	53
Businessman/woman	50
Judge	46
Senior police officer	44
NHS manager	33
Senior civil servant	30
Broadsheet journalist	24
National politician (Member of Parliament)	22
Local politician (Councillor)	21
Council manager	21
Estate agent	16
Tabloid journalist	13
None of these	3

Q26.	In general, what do you think motivates most people who try to become MPs? Which of the following is the…
	%
Most important	
For their own personal gain	31
To help people in their local area	31
To help the country as a whole	17
To help their political party	16
None of these	5
First or second most important	
To help people in their local area	56
To help their political party	48
For their own personal gain	45
To help the country as a whole	38
None of these	5
First, second or third most important	
To help people in their local area	78
To help their political party	75
To help the country as a whole	65
For their own personal gain	60
None of these	5

Q27.	In general, what do you think motivates most people who get involved in politics? Which of the following is the…
	%
Most important	
To help people in their local area	33
For their own personal gain	30
To help the country as a whole	16
To help their political party	15
No answer	7
First or second most important	
To help people in their local area	61
To help their political party	46
For their own personal gain	41
To help the country as a whole	35
No answer	7
First, second or third most important	
To help people in their local area	76
To help their political party	71
To help the country as a whole	58
For their own personal gain	53
No answer	7

Q28.	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the media reports politics in the UK?
	%
Very satisfied	4
Fairly satisfied	34
Neither/nor	21
Fairly dissatisfied	24
Very dissatisfied	14
Don't know	3

Appendix C: Engagement profiles

	Base	Total Sample	Group 1 PolCom	Group 2 ActCamp	Group 3 IntByst	Group 4 Cynics	Group 5 PolCon	Group 6 Bored	Group 7 Mistrust	Group 8 Hostile
Unweighted:	n =	1,156	96	142	146	228	62	93	287	102
Weighted:	n =	1,156	116	157	159	191	66	92	277	99
All (weighted)	1,156	100%	10%	14%	14%	17%	6%	8%	24%	9%
Gender										
Men	561	49%	44%	47%	51%	47%	46%	53%	51%	45%
Women	595	51%	56%	53%	49%	53%	54%	47%	49%	55%
Age										
18-34	356	31%	15%	22%	18%	14%	30%	39%	52%	49%
35-54	402	35%	44%	41%	32%	34%	29%	33%	31%	34%
55+	398	34%	40%	37%	50%	52%	41%	28%	16%	17%
Social Class										
AB	310	27%	59%	45%	35%	13%	42%	15%	14%	11%
C1	333	29%	25%	34%	30%	31%	34%	23%	30%	20%
C2	241	21%	10%	10%	21%	24%	9%	31%	26%	27%
DE	272	24%	6%	11%	14%	32%	15%	31%	30%	42%
Region										
North	387	33%	22%	30%	25%	33%	34%	47%	36%	47%
Midlands	358	31%	28%	27%	36%	32%	31%	21%	34%	31%
South	411	36%	50%	43%	38%	35%	34%	32%	30%	22%
Type										
Urban	784	68%	68%	69%	62%	63%	75%	75%	68%	71%
Rural	136	12%	13%	11%	16%	12%	10%	8%	11%	10%
Mixed	235	20%	19%	20%	21%	25%	15%	16%	21%	19%
Education										
GCSE/ O-level ~	320	28%	10%	15%	25%	30%	19%	38%	36%	41%
A level ~	213	18%	21%	20%	22%	7%	21%	18%	23%	16%
Degree~+	287	25%	56%	47%	25%	11%	38%	11%	15%	8%
None	219	19%	2%	9%	15%	38%	15%	29%	17%	23%
Ethnicity										
White	1,054	91%	99%	97%	96%	88%	99%	83%	86%	89%
BME	100	9%	1%	3%	4%	12%	1%	17%	14%	11%
Newspaper										
Quality	253	22%	51%	45%	29%	13%	28%	9%	9%	2%
Popular	423	37%	18%	23%	40%	42%	32%	55%	41%	38%
None	522	45%	41%	40%	34%	47%	45%	36%	52%	62%

	Base	Total Sample	Group 1 PolCom	Group 2 ActCamp	Group 3 IntByst	Group 4 Cynics	Group 5 PolCon	Group 6 Bored	Group 7 Mistrust	Group 8 Hostile
Politics										
Interested	611	53%	86%	85%	73%	41%	59%	46%	35%	4%
Not Interested	539	47%	14%	15%	27%	59%	40%	54%	64%	92%
Active										
Activist	180	16%	73%	38%	7%	5%	3%	0%	5%	0%
Not Activist	976	84%	27%	62%	93%	95%	97%	100%	95%	100%
Governing										
Works Well	322	28%	19%	34%	21%	27%	46%	38%	30%	15%
Needs Improvement	793	69%	81%	66%	77%	66%	54%	59%	66%	76%
Marginality										
Super	175	15%	21%	25%	15%	13%	14%	9%	15%	5%
Marginal	373	32%	37%	47%	33%	30%	30%	25%	31%	17%
Semi-Marginal	396	34%	38%	37%	30%	34%	28%	35%	33%	39%
Safe	387	33%	25%	16%	37%	36%	42%	40%	36%	45%
Internet										
Use anywhere	826	71%	90%	80%	74%	56%	75%	60%	75%	63%
Don't use	330	29%	10%	20%	26%	44%	25%	40%	25%	37%
Voting										
Certain to Vote (CTV)	619	54%	76%	82%	77%	68%	55%	35%	24%	16%
Certain Not to Vote	140	12%	5%	1%	1%	5%	1%	12%	20%	55%
May/May not Vote (2-9)	397	34%	19%	17%	22%	27%	44%	53%	56%	29%
Duty to Vote										
Agree	878	76%	93%	93%	96%	84%	92%	73%	60%	17%
Disagree	171	15%	3%	2%	3%	5%	4%	17%	27%	57%
Voting Intention (CTV)										
Conservative	228	40%	37%	42%	52%	36%	50%	40%	30%	14%
Labour	175	31%	21%	30%	23%	42%	16%	44%	40%	44%
Liberal Democrat	90	16%	25%	19%	11%	11%	22%	12%	17%	6%
Other	73	13%	17%	9%	14%	11%	12%	4%	13%	36%

Appendix D: Qualitative research methodology

In order to explore the issues in more depth, this year's Audit also included four discussion groups with members of the public. Two groups each were held in London (16–17 November 2009) and the East Midlands (both on 19 November 2009).

Participants were recruited for the groups using the quotas listed below.

Discussion Group Recruitment Quotas				
Location	London	London	East Midlands	East Midlands
Date	16 November 2009	17 November 2009	19 November 2009	19 November 2009
Gender				
Male	5	5	5	5
Female	5	5	5	5
Age				
18-34	3	3	10	2
35-54	4	4	0	4
55+	3	3	0	4
Social grade				
ABC1	10	0	0	10
C2DE	0	10	10	0
Ethnicity	c. 2-3 BME	c. 2-3 BME	c. 2-3 BME	c. 2-3 BME
Interest in Politics				
Very/fairly interested	5	5	5	5
Not very/not at all interested	5	5	5	5
Political Party affiliation	Mix	Mix	Mix	Mix

Appendix E: Discussion group guide

Section	Topics to be covered	Length
INTRO	Introduce self and thank participants for attending Explain purpose of group and confidentiality of all responses Explain reason for tape recorder and presence of clients if necessary. Explain that there are no right or wrong responses and we are interested in everyone's opinion Housekeeping: toilets and fire exits Introductions: Ask each person for their name, how long they have lived in the area and their favourite thing about living in the area	5 minutes
THE 'POLITICS' BRAND	When you hear the word 'politics' what first comes to mind? WRITE ON POST IT NOTES AND THEN ON WHITEBOARD	10 minutes
VOTING AT GENERAL ELECTIONS	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? WRITE ON POST IT NOTES Why/why not? Is voting effective? Why/why not? What does voting achieve?	10 minutes
IMPORTANCE OF POLITICS	Is politics important to you? Is politics important to your friends/family? Why / why not? In what ways? Probe for local vs. national	10 minutes
INFORMATION ABOUT POLITICS	How do you find out about what is happening in politics? How much do you trust these sources? Why/why not? Have you ever looked at political websites? Or discussed politics on the internet? Followed politicians, parties or campaigns on Twitter? Joined political or campaigning groups on Facebook (or other social networking sites) Where would you like to find out about what is happening in politics? PROBE ON TIME OF DAY/LOCATION/HOW FIT IN WITH DAILY LIFE	10 minutes

Section	Topics to be covered	Length
WHY PEOPLE GET INVOLVED IN POLITICS	What type of person do you think gets involved in politics? What do you think motivates them? Do you want to get involved in politics? Why/why not? What stops you? Is that because you want to make something happen or because you want to stop something happening? What role should citizens have in politics? Would you personally be prepared to get involved in politics? PROBE FOR REASONS PROBE FOR LOCAL/NATIONAL THROUGHOUT PROBE FOR DIFFERENCE IN GETTING INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY/SOCIETY VS. GETTING INVOLVED IN POLITICS	15 minutes
UK PARLIAMENT AND GOVT.	When you hear the word 'Parliament' what first comes to mind? WRITE ON POST IT NOTES AND THEN ON WHITEBOARD PROBE: Why do you say that? When you hear the word 'Government' what first comes to mind? WRITE ON POST IT NOTES AND THEN ON WHITEBOARD How is this different from 'Parliament'? GO THROUGH EACH OF THE PARLIAMENT'S AIMS ON FLIPCHART AND ASK What does this mean to you? Is Parliament achieving this? What does it need to do better to achieve this?	20 minutes

Section	Topics to be covered	Length
MPs	When you hear 'MPs' what first comes to mind? WRITE ON POST IT NOTES AND THEN ON WHITEBOARD OR USE PROJECTIVE ANIMAL TECHNIQUES PROBE ON POSITIVE AND NEGATIVES How have your views changed over the last year? Over the last five years? ALLOW TIME TO EXPLORE IMPACT OF EXPENSES, THEN MOVE CONVERSATION ON Leaving aside the issue of MPs' expenses, how have your views changed over the last year? Over the last five years? What do you think your local MP should spend most of their time doing in your local area? What do you think your local MP actually spends most of their time doing in your local area? REPEAT ABOVE, BUT ASK ABOUT MPS' NATIONAL ROLES How satisfied are you with MPs as a whole? How satisfied are you with your local MP? EXPLORE REASONS FOR DIFFERENCES IF ANY. ALSO EXPLORE WHAT MPS NEED TO DO IN ORDER TO INCREASE PUBLIC TRUST How do you find out about what your MP is doing? What methods of communication should MPs use to better keep you informed? What happens when an MP is appointed a minister? EXPLORE PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE AND IMPACT ON HOW WELL A MINISTER CAN SERVE CONSTITUENTS What would you think of your MP becoming a minister?	20 minutes
CLOSE	Any questions? THANK AND CLOSE	5 minutes