Audit of Political Engagement 6

The 2009 Report

with a focus on political participation and citizenship

Since it was first published in 2004 the annual Audit of Political Engagement has made a significant contribution to the debate about the public's view of the political process. Each year it measures the pulse of the nation on politics and the political system providing an annual benchmark against which it is possible to chart areas of continuity and change.

Audit 6 includes a special focus on the public's views on political participation and citizenship, exploring how they perceive their influence over local and national decision-making, the extent to which they would actually like to be involved in politics and the political process, and the barriers to citizen involvement that they believe exist.

The report is an essential source of information for all those with an interest in 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

Ministry of JUSTICE

HOUSE OF COMMONS

AUDIT OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT 6

THE 2009 REPORT

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Preface

The annual Audit of Political Engagement has become, since its launch in 2004, one of the most important – and widely quoted – reports produced by the Hansard Society. It provides an indispensable factual background to debates about the public's knowledge about politics, its degree of interest and willingness to participate directly. The findings often appear in speeches by politicians as well as studies by academics, puncturing many commonly held myths.

This year's Audit, the sixth in the series, is the second produced solely by the Hansard Society, with funding from the House of Commons and the Ministry of Justice. As before, the Audit is based on a face-to-face survey carried out by Ipsos MORI.

The Audit combines regular questions which measure underlying trends on public engagement from year to year, as well as special sections focusing on particular issues or sections of the population. This year, the report looks at the views of black and ethnic minority people (BME), with extra interviews among this group in order to provide a sufficient sample to make comparisons with the rest of the population more reliable.

Contrary to prior assumptions, and with inevitable caveats about the small numbers involved, the report shows that BME respondents are remarkably positive about the political process. They are more likely than other respondents to express a belief in the efficacy of the system and to feel they have influence over decision-making in both their local area and in national politics. Could there be an Obama factor at play? The survey was undertaken in mid-December during his honeymoon/transition. By contrast, BME people are less engaged than the rest of the public on other measures such as interest/knowledge and action/participation. These findings underline the challenge facing the main parties to involve BME people in mainstream politics.

As someone who regularly deals with polling data, I find some of the most interesting results are those which show little change from previous years. These can be of as much significance as the big shifts, which may be explained by short-term events at the time of the survey. For instance, there is a consistent level of interest in politics, at just over half those questioned, with around 40% saying that they have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years.

The Audit shows that, despite a relatively high level of interest in politics, few people express a wish to participate directly. Half the public does not want to be involved in decision-making in their local area - and it is just slightly higher over decision-making in the country as a whole. This is despite Government experiments with citizens' juries and

other forms of popular engagement, and intensive efforts to increase public engagement at a local level.

The Audit should cause all of us involved in discussing democratic renewal and representation to pause and reflect more on what people really believe and feel about the political system – and how much there is still to do to increase public knowledge and satisfaction with how we are governed.

Peter Riddell
Chair
Hansard Society

Executive summary

This is the sixth annual Audit of Political Engagement (APE). It sets out the findings from public opinion polling on a range of political engagement indicators, updating trends from Audits published each year since 2004. This year's report also takes an in-depth look at the relationship between public attitudes to political participation and citizenship. What follows is a summary of the Audit's key findings.

1. Core political engagement indicators

A. Knowledge and interest

- **Interest in politics**
  Just over half the public (52%) say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics, and just under half (47%) say they are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested, which is roughly unchanged since last year. Slightly more people continue to be 'interested' in politics than are 'not interested'.

- **Perceived knowledge of politics**
  More than half the public claim to know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics (51%), down from 55% last year. Correspondingly, 48% claim to know either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics.

B. Action and participation

- **Propensity to vote**
  Just over half (53%) of the public say they would be 'absolutely certain to vote' in the event of an immediate general election. This is unchanged since last year and similar to the results of previous Audits, none of which have strayed beyond the bounds of statistical significance.

- **Discussing politics**
  Two in five people (40%) say they have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years, a figure that is consistent with previous Audits.

- **Contacting elected representatives**
  Seventeen per cent of the public have presented their views to a local elected representative in the last two or three years, 2% more than last year. Of these, 44%

contacted a local councillor, 28% contacted an MP and 26% contacted both. Overall, 9% of the public have contacted an MP and 12% have contacted a councillor.

- **Political membership and giving**
  Only 3% of the population report having donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party in the last two or three years, continuing a downward trend. Donation to a charity or campaigning organisation remains stable at 37%.

- **Political activism**
  Eleven per cent of adults can be classified as 'political activists', according to the Audit definition, i.e. in the last two or three years they have done at least three political activities from a list of eight. Over half the public (51%) report not having done any of these activities, an increase of three points since last year.

C. Efficacy and satisfaction

- **Perceived political efficacy**
  A third of the public believe that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run' (31%) – unchanged from last year – while 45% disagree; an increase of 3% from last year.

- **Present system of governing**
  A third of people (33%) think the present system of governing Britain works 'mainly' or 'extremely' well, an increase of 1% on last year's Audit, but the number saying that the system could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' has increased by two percentage points to 64%. There has been a gradual decline in satisfaction with the present system across the Audits, and the number of respondents who believe the current system works well has decreased by three percentage points since the question was asked in the first Audit.

2. Political participation and citizenship

A. Influence and involvement

- **Perceived influence over decision-making at the local and national levels**
  An overwhelming majority of the public feel they have 'not very much influence' or 'no influence at all' over decision-making in both their local area (73%) and the country as a whole (85%). However, more people feel they have an influence in their local area than in the country as a whole (25% versus 14%).

- **Reasons for not feeling influential in decision-making**
  The most commonly cited reasons for not feeling influential in decision-making point to a belief that politicians and the political system overlook the public's views. The top two answers, 'nobody listens to what I have to say' (29%) and 'decisions are made without talking to the people' (20%) convey a strong feeling among the public that

they are ignored by decision-makers. Other popularly cited reasons include 'the system doesn't allow for me to have an influence' (19%) and 'politicians are just out for themselves' (17%).

- **Desire to be involved in decision-making**
  Half the public do not actually want to be involved in decision-making in their local area. Even more – 55% – do not wish to be involved in decision-making in the country as a whole.

- **Barriers to participation among potential participants**
  People who do not currently feel that they have an influence in decision-making – but who say they would like to be involved – were asked what factors, if any, prevent them from doing so. Nearly half (40%) cite lack of time as the main reason. None of the other reasons cited receive a mention from more than 12% of respondents.

B. Effectiveness and importance

- **Effectiveness of means of participating**
  An overwhelming majority of people (72%) think that voting in an election is 'very' or 'fairly' effective in having an impact on how the country is run. In addition, contacting a political representative is viewed as effective by 53%, and taking an active part in a campaign and signing a petition are both viewed as effective by 47% of the public.

- **Participation and good citizenship**
  Eighty-seven per cent of people think it is 'essential' or 'important' to vote in an election in order to be a good citizen – considerably more than the number who say they are certain to vote in the next election (53%). Keeping informed about current events and affairs is viewed as a corollary to good citizenship by 88% of the population. Contacting a politician or official about an issue of concern and giving money to a charity or campaigning organisation are viewed as important by three quarters of the population, though again, far fewer have actually done so. Taking part in government consultations and expressing one's opinion publicly are seen as important by 62% and 63% respectively. Joining a political party, on the other hand, is only considered an important component of good citizenship by a third of the population (34%).

C. Visiting Parliament

- Three out of 10 members of the public (31%) report that they have visited the Houses of Parliament. Twelve per cent visited over 20 years ago, and 20% visited Parliament in the last 20 years. Sixty-eight per cent of people say they have never visited Parliament.

3. Analysis

- None of the key Audit indicators show any statistically significant movement. All but two indicators are within a single percentage point of their 2007 levels. Only perceived knowledge of politics – which is four points higher – shows any change over the last year and this is not a sufficiently large rise to be statistically significant.

- Over the six Audits, it is possible to detect some emerging patterns:

  - the knowledge indicator has fluctuated the most over the past five years;
  - there are two natural pairs of measures that tend to produce consistently similar findings: there is real congruence between propensity to vote and interest in politics; and there is a considerable degree of correspondence between satisfaction with the system of government and a belief in the efficacy of political action;
  - there is a sharp divergence between interest in politics and reported knowledge of politics after the 2005 general election which is not mirrored at any other point over the Audit cycle thus far.

- While the public has a clear view about the theory of being a good citizen – for example, voting and making charitable donations – they do not actually make the leap from good intention to positive action.

- A substantial number of people, a quarter or more of the public, seem to make a distinction between 'having a say' and 'being involved' in decision-making. They want influence over outcomes but not involvement in the process.

- Voting is seen as being for everyone but getting involved in 'politics' or 'decision-making' is not for 'people like me'. For many people disengagement from politics extends to disengagement from involvement in the decision-making process, even if it is not described as 'political'.

- Social class has more of an impact on political engagement levels than any other factor. On every single measure in this year's Audit, people classified as social grades AB are more politically engaged than DEs, frequently by a margin of around 15 to 20 percentage points. Correspondingly, university graduates are significantly more engaged than those with fewer or no qualifications, and readers of quality newspapers more so than readers of the popular press. All three factors are strongly inter-correlated.

- There may be an Obama factor at play in this year's Audit. If so, it would suggest that representative visibility matters. For the first time in six surveys BME respondents are significantly more likely to express a belief in the efficacy of the political system than are white respondents. BME respondents are more likely to feel they have influence over decision-making in both their local area and in national politics, they are more likely than average to think that voting is an effective means by which to have an impact and they are more likely to think it is important to express their opinion publicly.

1. About this report

This is the sixth annual Audit of Political Engagement. It presents the findings from public opinion polling on a range of political engagement indicators, updating trends from Audits published on an annual basis since 2004.[1] Additionally, this report takes a closer look at public opinion on the relationship between ***political participation and citizenship.***

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

The core indicators

Each annual Audit of Political Engagement provides detailed commentary on six core indicators which have been chosen as key measures of political engagement. These six core indicators enable us to track responses year on year and note the direction and magnitude of change. The six core indicators in each report fall under three themes, namely:

- **Knowledge and interest**:
  (1) the percentage of people who feel that they know about politics.
  (2) the percentage who report an interest in politics.

- **Action and participation**:
  (3) the percentage of people who report they are absolutely certain to vote at an immediate general election.
  (4) the percentage who are classified as 'political activists'.

- **Efficacy and satisfaction**:
  (5) the percentage of people who believe that getting involved works.
  (6) the percentage who think that the present system of governing works well.

These six core indicators are supplemented every three years by a further set of 10 indicators of political engagement (see Appendix A for the full list) creating a full set of 16 indicators that are examined on a triennial basis.[2]

[1] This is the second Audit to be published solely by the Hansard Society; Audits 1-4 were published jointly by the Hansard Society and the Electoral Commission. Polling for the Audits is conducted each year 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) and November-December 2007 (Audit 5). All dates in this report refer to the year in which the Audit report was published, not the year in which the polling was undertaken.

[2] Full Audits were published in 2004 (Audit 1) and 2007 (Audit 4). The next full Audit will be Audit 7 in 2010.

In last year's Audit, and again in this year's report, we have chosen to look in detail at three of these additional 10 indicators outside the usual triennial study pattern. Such is the concern about the degree to which the public are active participants in the political process that we have opted to focus more regularly on three of the additional indicators that fall under the theme of Action and Participation, namely exploring the percentage of people who:

(7) discuss politics.
(8) contact their elected representatives.
(9) are members of or donate to a political party.

Political participation and citizenship

In addition to covering the core indicators each Audit focuses on a special theme, looking in greater depth at a particular area of political engagement or at a specific issue of political interest.

This Audit study takes a more in-depth look at the relationship between public attitudes to political participation and citizenship, as viewed through the nexus of their perceptions of influence over local and national decision-making; the extent to which they would actually like to be involved in decision-making; and barriers to citizen involvement.

Finally, we take a brief look at the public's acquaintance with the Palace of Westminster, the mother of Parliaments and institutional apex of our democratic system, exploring the relationship between political engagement and those drawn to actually visit Westminster.

Research methodology

The information in this Audit derives from the latest Political Engagement Poll undertaken by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Hansard Society.

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 983 adults in Great Britain aged 18+, face-to-face in respondents' homes, between 11 - 17 December 2008.

In order to make comparisons between the white and BME populations statistically reliable, an additional 68 interviews were conducted with BME adults using the same methodology, giving a total of 130 BME respondents in the sample.

The findings in this report are based on the combined total of 1,051 interviews, which have been weighted to the national population profile. See Appendix B for more information.

All survey findings, and comparisons of findings between this and previous Audits, are subject to sampling tolerances depending, in part, on sample sizes. Where percentages do not add up to 100, this is due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers. Throughout this report, an asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half a percent but greater than zero.

Where regions of Great Britain have been identified in this report, they refer to the areas defined by the Government Office Regions. Further information regarding sample

tolerances, interpretation of the data, statistical reliability, and social grade definitions is provided in Appendix B and the full topline survey results can be found in Appendix C.

Please note that all reported results in Audits 1-4 were based on data covering all four nations of the United Kingdom. The figures from this Audit and last year's Audit 5 however, are based only on Great Britain data and do not include Northern Ireland. The figures from previous Audits quoted in this report have therefore been recalculated to cover Great Britain only in order to provide an accurate comparison.

Next steps and future Audits

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 (UKDA) 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.

The 2010 Audit is the next in our triennial studies and as such will explore all 16 political engagement indicators (see Appendix A). Given the rapid changes that are taking place in the nature of political engagement – particularly aided by technological developments – we plan to review and update these indicators in time for next year's Audit. The core indicators must remain the same in order to maintain the coherence and credibility of the Audit as a longitudinal study but we intend to explore how these core indicators can be augmented in the future to better reflect the changing nature of engagement.

2. The political context

The opinions and behaviours measured in the Audit surveys should always be viewed in light of their political context.

Britain in 2008, like the rest of the world, was hit by an economic hurricane as the full impact of the credit crunch and global downturn was felt. The first six months of the year saw debate dominated by growing concerns about the spiralling cost of food, oil and utility bills all of which fuelled a 16-year high in the cost of living. By the end of the year however, concern about inflation had subsided and the media increasingly articulated new concerns about the possibility of deflation as the economic situation worsened, commodity prices declined on the back of a sharp drop in the cost of crude oil, and a 2.5% cut in VAT reduced price increases.

Having been forced to nationalise Northern Rock at the start of the year after it failed to find a suitable private sector suitor for the troubled bank, the Government was forced to step in once again to shore up the banking sector from almost total collapse just nine months later. The month of October would see some of the most extraordinary events in British financial history. On 6 October alone, $90 billion was wiped off the value of British companies in the worst day of trading on the London Stock Exchange since Black Monday in 1987. Local government was briefly at the centre of the storm when it became clear that some councils had invested in high-interest accounts with Icelandic banks that had now collapsed, prompting the British Government to freeze the UK-based assets of those banks, controversially using anti-terrorist legislation. Amid fears about the possible collapse of one or more of the major British banks, and the likely domino effect this would have nationally and internationally, the Government intervened, providing £50 billion of public money to recapitalise the banks, nationalising Bradford and Bingley and setting aside competition rules to sanction the merger of Lloyds and HBOS.

The opinion poll ratings of both the Government and the prime minister briefly recovered as Gordon Brown sought to take the lead in responding to the scale of the crisis internationally, promoting the bank recapitalisation plan as a model for other nations and pushing for an unprecedented co-ordination of interest rate cuts by central banks across the world.

But by the end of the year as consumer confidence and house prices continued to fall, the Government's popularity again began to recede. The international bailout failed to loosen the flow of credit and as a consequence major high street retail names – most notably Woolworths – went into administration and other sectors of the economy, particularly the car industry, were forced to appeal for Government support. November saw the biggest

monthly increase in unemployment benefit claimants – 75,700 people – since the last major recession in the early 1990s. Reduced lending capacity also resulted in a major scaling back of mortgage facilities, cancelling out the Government's efforts to kick start the housing market, particularly for first-time buyers, through a one-year stamp duty exemption. By the end of the year many parts of the country had witnessed a drop of up to 15% in house prices. The year's financial turmoil ended with a 23% drop in the value of sterling to a record low against the euro leading to concerns about a possible currency crisis if parity with the single currency was reached.

The year's economic rollercoaster was mirrored at the political level. Throughout much of the summer, Westminster was beset by talk of a possible cabinet rebellion against Gordon Brown and in the month prior to the Labour Party conference two junior ministers and two Government envoys resigned having openly suggested the need for a leadership contest. But as the financial storm loomed ever larger, the Labour Party rallied behind its leader and enjoyed an unexpected and relatively united conference, overshadowed only at the end by the announcement of the decision by the transport secretary Ruth Kelly to resign from the Government for personal reasons.

In the resulting ministerial reshuffle later in the year the prime minister invited Peter Mandelson to return to cabinet as secretary of state for business enterprise and regulatory reform. With a leading role in tackling the financial crisis, Mandelson's return was seen as a significant concession to one of the major figures of the Blairite era and an attempt to head off an increasingly fractious divide within the Labour Party.

The Conservative Party conference at the start of October was equally dominated by the growing financial storm with David Cameron declaring his willingness to put aside party differences and work with the Government on a short-term basis in the national interest. However, once debate moved on from the immediate requirements of the bank bailout to the wider question of whether a major Keynesian-style stimulus package was needed to stave off the prospect of the recession turning into a depression, the bi-partisan spirit of all parties quickly gave way once again to traditional Westminster-style adversarialism. As 2008 came to an end, political debate had begun to generate a renewed sense of ideological difference – or 'clear blue water' – between the parties, particularly centred around the issue of future public debt and taxation levels.

Beyond the financial crisis the other major theme of the political year was to be found in the growing debate about civil liberties and the appropriate boundaries of state intrusion into people's lives. Two events in particular highlighted this.

First, following the Commons vote in June on the Government's proposals to extend the detention period for terrorism suspects to 42 days, the shadow home secretary, David Davis MP, unexpectedly resigned from Parliament in order to trigger a by-election in his constituency, and thereby force a national debate about what he perceived to be the Government's erosion of civil liberties. The Liberal Democrats offered tacit support by declining to nominate a candidate of their own for the by-election but the thrust of Davis' campaign was muted when Labour also declined to participate.

The second event came at the end of November when, less than a fortnight before fieldwork for this Audit survey began, the shadow immigration minister, Damian Green MP, was sensationally arrested in connection with a series of leaks from the home office. His home and constituency offices were searched as was his House of Commons office. When it emerged however, that the Metropolitan Police had not secured a warrant before entering Parliament a public row erupted with the actions of the Speaker of the House of Commons, the home secretary and the mayor of London all subjected to considerable scrutiny and question about their role and conduct in the affair. For many MPs the decision to allow police officers into the Palace of Westminster to search a member's office, including accessing his computer and email account, without a warrant, was an assault on the privileges of MPs, a threat to the bond of trust and privacy between members and their constituents, and an affront to the very essence of parliamentary democracy itself.

Outside the Westminster village other political developments had an impact on and shaped the fluctuating political fortunes of the main parties across the year.

In London the Conservative candidate Boris Johnson ended Ken Livingstone's eight-year reign as mayor on a record turnout of 45% for the City Hall election. Winning 1,168,738 votes, Boris Johnson secured the largest personal mandate of any politician in the country. Labour's loss of City Hall was mirrored that same day in its worst-ever local council results in four decades. By-elections also afforded it little respite. In addition to the by-election caused by David Davis' resignation, the Conservatives held Boris Johnson's old seat in Henley and won a significant victory in Crewe and Nantwich on a high turnout of 57.7%.

Two other by-elections were held, both of them in Scotland. Following the resignation of Wendy Alexander as leader of the Scottish Labour Party in June after having been found guilty of breaking the rules governing the declaration of donations to her leadership campaign, the party was forced to elect its fifth leader, Iain Gray, since devolution. The following month, the Scottish National Party, riding high in the polls, won Glasgow East from Labour on a 42.2% turnout. The Government's October actions on the financial crisis however, proved enough to enable it to hang on to its seat in Glenrothes in November, on a turnout of 52.3%.

By-election turnouts were relatively high throughout the year reflecting perhaps an increased interest in politics and/or a sense among the public that amid the historic swirl of events, and with a general election getting ever nearer, participation in the electoral process might make a difference. Similarly, when a referendum was held in Greater Manchester about whether to introduce a congestion charge, 53.2% of the electorate turned out to register their objections, defeating the proposal by a margin of almost four to one.

But apart from the financial crisis, by far the biggest political story of the year was to be found beyond British shores in the US presidential election campaign. This was not the first US presidential election to take place since the Audit surveys began, but the 2008 race for the White House generated an unprecedentedly high level of interest among the British public and media.

Just a month before the Audit survey work was undertaken, the candidate whom Britons overwhelmingly preferred[3] – Barack Obama – was elected president. The unlikelihood of Obama's victory – in view of his race and as a relative newcomer to national politics – underlined the power of elections to bring about dramatic and unexpected change. The manner, and in particular the organisation, of his election also generated renewed debate in Britain about how best to engage the public in the political process and reinvigorate our democratic system.

2008 was then a year pitted by events of enormous political and financial significance. But what, if anything, did they mean for political engagement?

Did the scale of the issues facing the country and their impact on people's everyday lives generate an increased knowledge of and interest in politics itself? Did the level of taxpayer funds being pumped into the economy and the debate between the parties about how best to respond to the crisis and utilise that money lead to any changes in the propensity of people to actually participate in the political process through voting or party activism? Did the year's events in any way change how the public views politics and our system of governance generally?

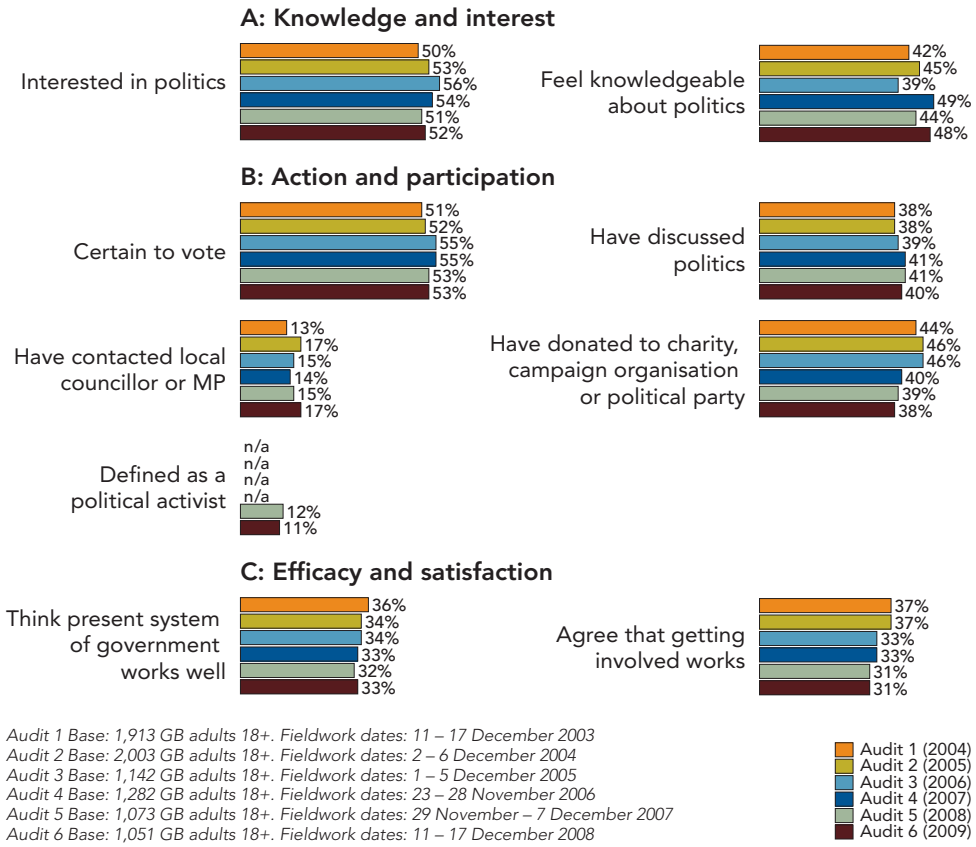
[3] Ipsos MORI, 'Barack Obama and Joe Biden have it in the bag. Oh? Not necessarily!', 17 October 2008, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/content/barack-obama-and-joe-biden-have-it-in-the-bag-oh-n.ashx.

3. Core indicators

The core indicators measure political engagement in terms of three key themes: knowledge and interest; action and participation; and efficacy and satisfaction. This section examines each theme in turn, considering trends over time (Figure 1) and notable contrasts between different population demographics.

The table below shows the level of response to each indicator in each Audit, set out year by year for comparison. The graph demonstrates the essential underlying stability of the indicators with the most marked changes occurring in the Knowledge indicator.

Figure 1: The core indicators[4]



Audit 1 Base: 1,913 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2003
Audit 2 Base: 2,003 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 2 – 6 December 2004
Audit 3 Base: 1,142 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 1 – 5 December 2005
Audit 4 Base: 1,282 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23 – 28 November 2006
Audit 5 Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007
Audit 6 Base: 1,051 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

[4] The Audit definition of a political activist was updated for Audit 5 in 2008 and therefore findings for this indicator cannot be directly compared to previous results.

A. Knowledge and interest

The Audit's measure of knowledge and interest is based on two questions, one examining people's level of interest in politics and the other their perceived knowledge of politics. While interest levels are largely unchanged since last year, there has been an increase in the number of people who say they feel knowledgeable about politics.

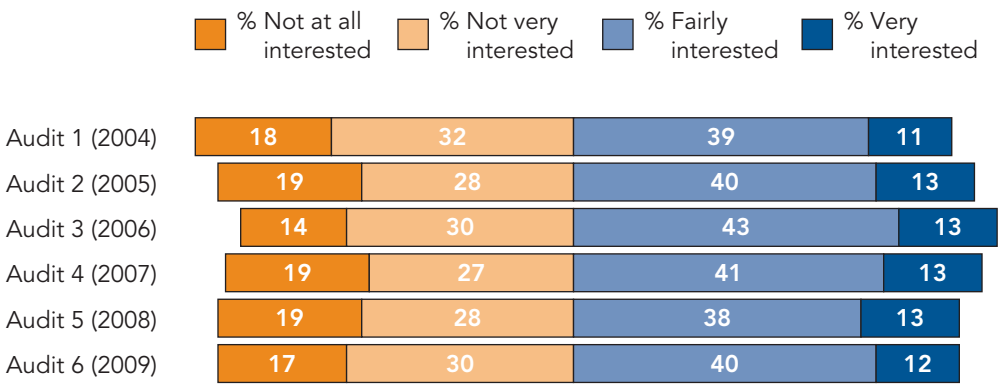
Interest in politics

Just over half of the public (52%) say they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics, and just under half (47%) say they are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested, which is roughly unchanged since last year (Figure 2). Slightly more people continue to be 'interested' in politics than are 'not interested'.

As might be expected, interest in politics appears to follow the electoral cycle, peaking in the Audit following the 2005 general election, but remaining broadly constant in other years.

Figure 2: Interest in politics

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?



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

As in past Audits, men are more likely to say they are interested in politics than women (61% versus 44%).[5] Another continuing trend is significantly greater interest among the more affluent social classes, with two thirds of ABs (68%) saying they are interested in politics compared to only one third of DEs (34%).[6] A similar gap emerges between readers of quality and popular newspapers (82% versus 49%) and university graduates compared to those with no qualifications (77% versus 36%).

[5] While the topline findings are available in Appendix C of this report, a more detailed demographic breakdown of the figures is available on the Hansard Society website and from the UK Data Archive (UKDA) at the University of Essex.

[6] See Appendix B for a guide to social grade definitions.

The biggest differences in age are between the under and over 25s. One third (35%) of those aged 18-24 say they are interested, compared to over half of people for all age groups above the age of 25.

White respondents are more likely to say they are interested in politics than black and ethnic minority respondents (BMEs) – 53% versus 42% respectively. However the figure for BMEs has increased significantly from 27% in the last Audit.[7]

There are some notable regional disparities in reported interest in politics, with only 38% of respondents in the Yorkshire and Humberside region saying they are interested, compared to a national average of 52%. The highest level of interest is in the South East, where 63% of respondents say they are interested in politics. There are, of course, regional differences in social class, education levels, age profiles and numbers of respondents from ethnic minorities, but these explain only a small part of the differences detected in interest in politics.

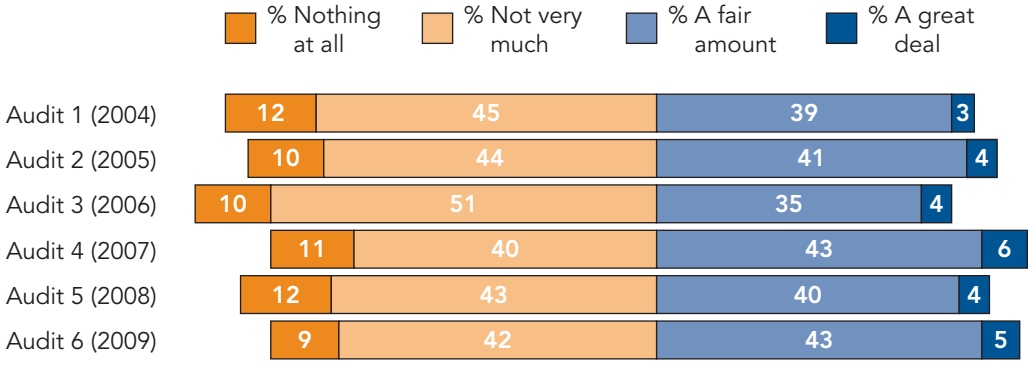
Perceived knowledge of politics

More than half the public claim to know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics (51%), down from 55% last year. Correspondingly, 48% claim to know either 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics.

Perceived levels of knowledge have increased over time, and there is now a more even split between the knowledgeable and the unknowledgeable than in all but one of the previous Audits.

Figure 3: 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 C.

[7] The polling conducted by Ipsos MORI for this report included additional interviews with black and minority ethnic (BME) adults to improve the statistical reliability of comparisons between white and BME respondents. As such, the change from last year may in part be due to improved accuracy.

People who say they are interested in politics also tend to claim greater knowledge: three quarters (75%) of those who are 'very' or 'fairly' interested claim to know at least 'a fair amount' about politics. Among those who say they are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested, only one fifth (20%) claim to know at least 'a fair amount'. The proportions of people who are interested in and know at least 'a fair amount' about politics are very similar (52% and 48% respectively).

Given this and the gender differences in interest mentioned earlier, we might expect men to consider themselves more knowledgeable than women. This is indeed the case: 61% of men say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' compared to only 36% of women.[8]

The difference between ethnic groups is less significant: 49% of respondents of white ethnic origin claim to know about politics compared to 41% of BMEs.

As with interest, levels of claimed knowledge vary dramatically with social class: almost two thirds (64%) of ABs say they know at least 'a fair amount', compared to 48% of C1s, 45% of C2s and only 35% of DEs. There is also a correlation between knowledge and interest regionally, as Yorkshire and Humberside respondents report the lowest political knowledge (just 35% say they know at least 'a fair amount') and the South East the highest (61%), compared to the national average of 48%.

Perceived knowledge appears to correlate with age, with 32% of 18-24 year olds saying they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics increasing steadily to 60% of 65-74 year olds, though only 49% of the 75+ age group say the same.

B. Action and participation

Another key area of the Audit monitors the level of public participation in political activities based on respondents reporting their own behaviour. The core indicators ask people how likely they would be to vote in an immediate general election and monitor the proportion of respondents who can be considered 'political activists'. The Audit also tracks whether, in the last two or three years, they have discussed politics, contacted an elected representative or donated money to a charity or campaigning organisation or a political party. This year's results show very little change in political participation levels since the previous Audit.

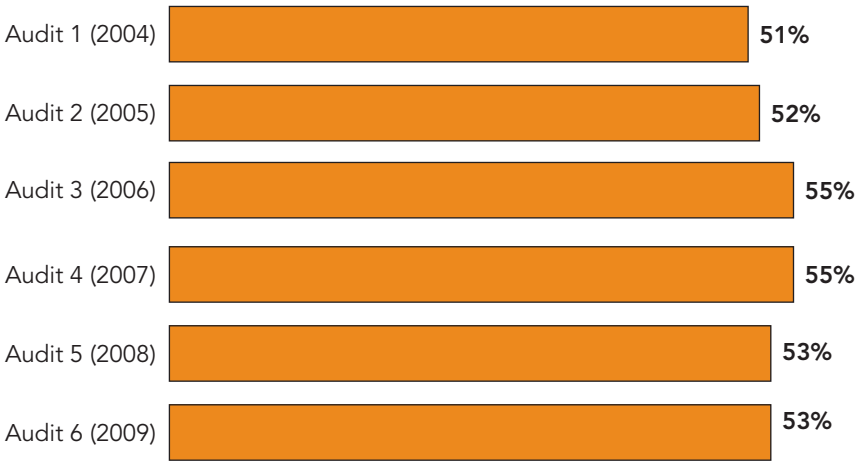
[8] Past Audits suggest that feeling knowledgeable about politics does not always equate with holding actual political knowledge. We found that men tend to overestimate their actual political knowledge, while women are more inclined to underestimate their knowledge. For example, in Audit 4, as in this Audit, the percentage of men reporting 'a great deal 'or 'a fair amount' of knowledge about politics was around 20 points higher than that of women; however, the proportion that could name their MP in Audit 4 was only 6 points higher (47% versus 41%). There may also be a difference between what men and women classify as 'a fair amount' of knowledge.

Propensity to vote

Just over half (53%) of the public say they would be 'absolutely certain to vote' in the event of an immediate general election (Figure 4). This is unchanged since last year and similar to the results of previous Audits, none of which have strayed beyond the bounds of statistical significance.

Figure 4: Propensity to vote – trends

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 you would be absolutely certain not to vote?



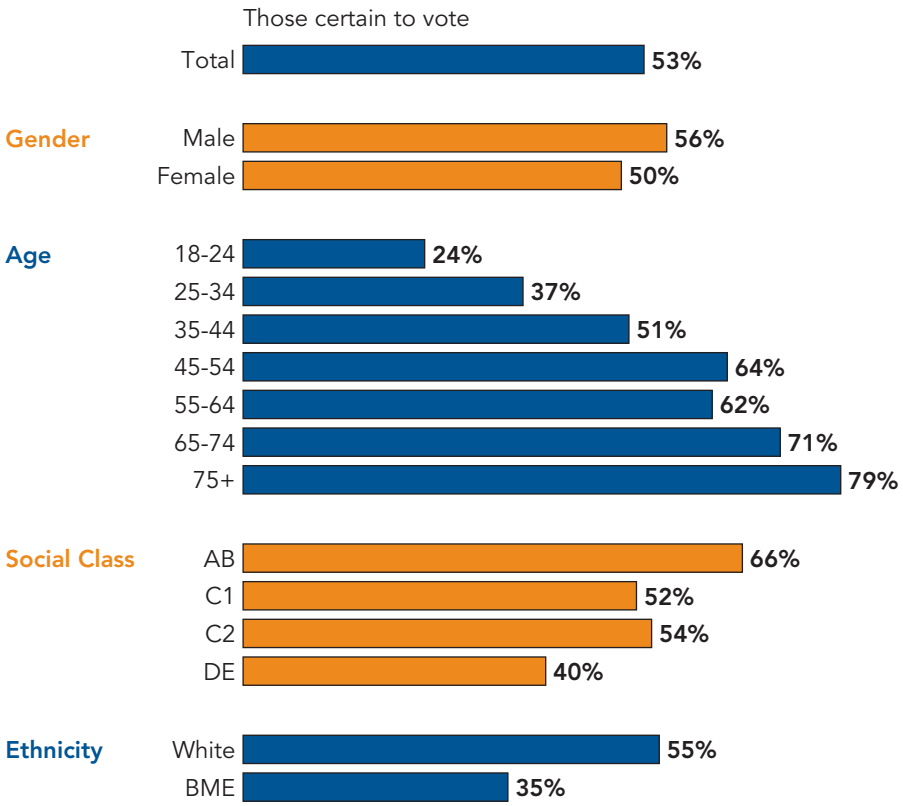
Base: c. 1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix C.

There is only a small difference between men and women in terms of their likelihood to vote; however, as noted in previous Audits, there are large differences between the different age groups. Only a quarter (24%) of 18-24 year olds are 'certain to vote', rising to four fifths (79%) of people aged over 75. Eighteen to 34 year olds are less likely than average to say they are 'certain to vote' and people aged 45 and over are more likely than average to say the same.

Previously we noted greater political interest and knowledge among more affluent social classes. A similar pattern emerges for behavioural measures such as propensity to vote, with two thirds of ABs (66%) saying they are 'certain to vote' compared to 40% of DEs. Likewise 70% of people who read quality newspapers say they are 'certain to vote', compared to just 53% of popular newspaper readers.

Figure 5: 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?



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Respondents in Scotland were the most likely to say they are 'certain to vote' (67%), while only 30% in the North East region say the same. There is also a pronounced difference between ethnic groups: while 55% of white respondents are 'certain to vote', only 35% of BMEs are certain to do so.

There is a strong correlation between interest in politics and propensity to vote. Of those who say they are 'interested' in politics, over two thirds (69%) are 'certain to vote'. By contrast, only just over one third (36%) of those who are 'not interested' say they are 'certain to vote'.

Nonetheless, propensity to vote cannot be explained just in terms of interest in politics. Comparing men and women's contrasting interest and behaviour highlights the fact that this

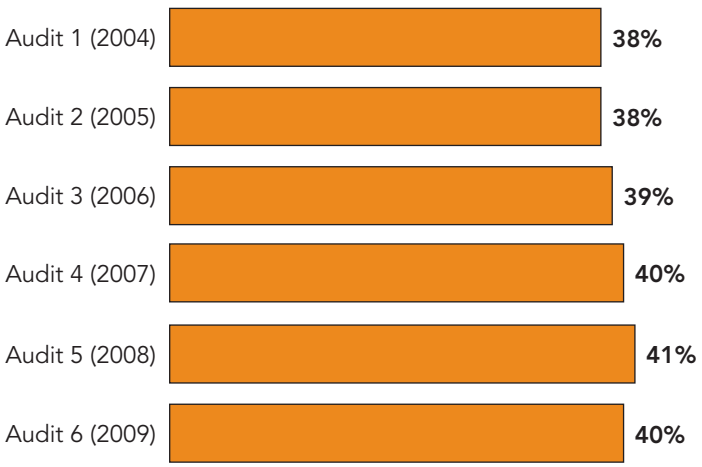
relationship is not always a direct one. A larger proportion of men say they are 'interested' in politics (61%) than think they are 'certain to vote' (56%). For women, the reverse applies: 50% are certain to vote, yet only 44% say they are interested in politics. Perhaps this suggests that for men interest exceeds action, while for women action exceeds interest. This cannot be explained by women feeling a greater obligation to vote whether or not they are interested: men are just as likely as women to say that voting in elections is 'essential' or 'important' to being a good citizen (see Section 4). It seems that motivations for voting may differ between men and women; if this is indeed the case, attempts to increase turnout will need to take account of this difference.

Discussing politics

Two in five people (40%) say they have discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two or three years, a figure that is consistent with previous Audits (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Discussing politics – trends

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

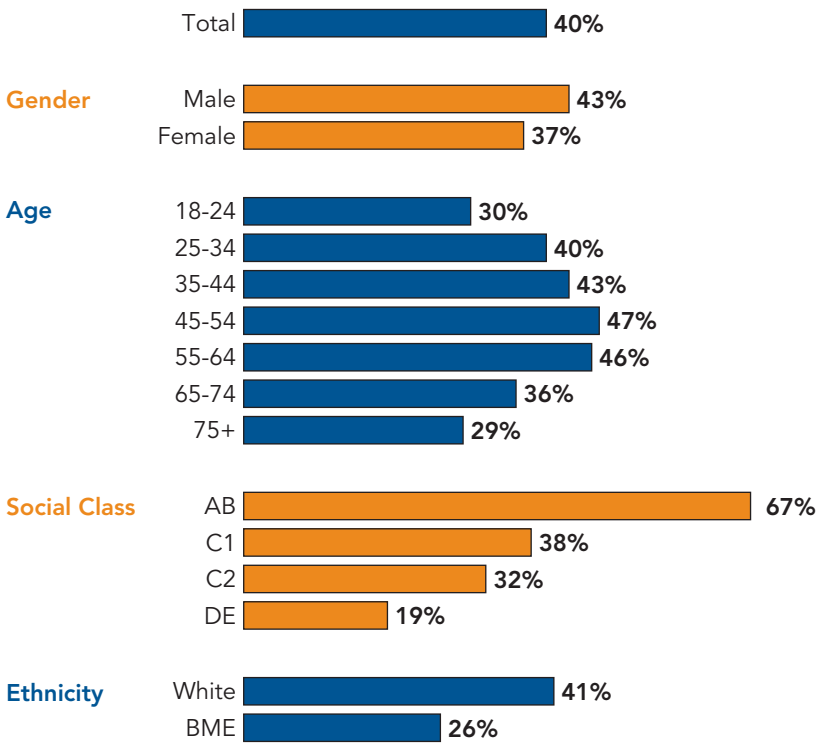


Base: c. 1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix C.

Slightly more men say they have discussed politics in the past few years than women (43% versus 37%), but there are much greater differences between the age groups. Discussion of politics peaks among 45-54 and 55-64 year olds (47% and 46% respectively) and is lower among people aged 18-24 and 75+ (30% and 29%).

Figure 7: Discussing politics – demographic differences

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: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

However, while the likelihood of discussing politics appears to decline beyond the 55-64 age range, the certainty to vote increases (see Figure 5). The contrast is at its most marked among people aged 75+, of whom 79% are 'certain to vote' but only 29% claim to have discussed politics in the last few years. The reverse is true with younger people: while 30% of 18-24 year olds claim they have discussed politics in the last few years, only 24% say they are 'certain to vote'.

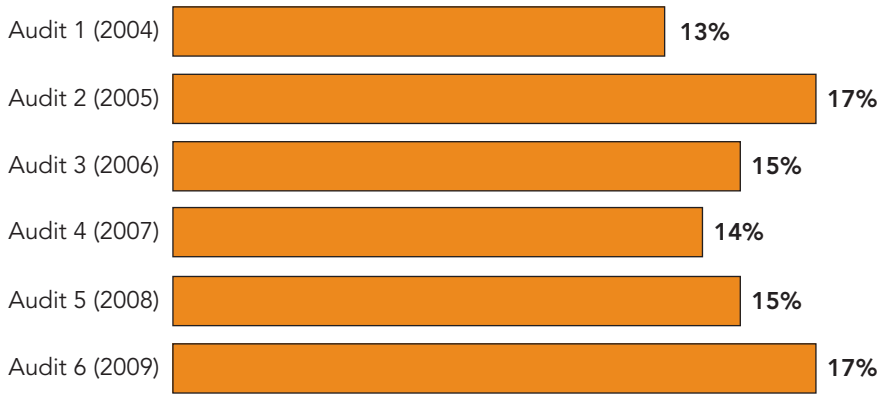
It seems then, that older people regard voting as a civic duty and are more likely to vote whatever the circumstances. In contrast, the reverse is true of young people. They do not regard voting as a civic duty to the same degree that older people do: they are more likely to talk about politics but still do not plan to vote (see Section 4). If this is the case, then again, attempts by political parties to increase electoral turnout need to take account of this significant difference: young people need to be given greater motivation than hitherto if they are to be persuaded to go out and actually vote, and to turn broad interest into active participation.

Contacting elected representatives

Seventeen per cent of the public have presented their views to a local elected representative in the last two or three years, 2% more than last year. Of these, 44% contacted a local councillor, 28% contacted an MP and 26% contacted both. Overall, 9% of the public have contacted an MP and 12% have contacted a councillor.

Figure 8: Contacting elected representatives – trends

Q Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years? 'Presented my views to a local councillor or MP'



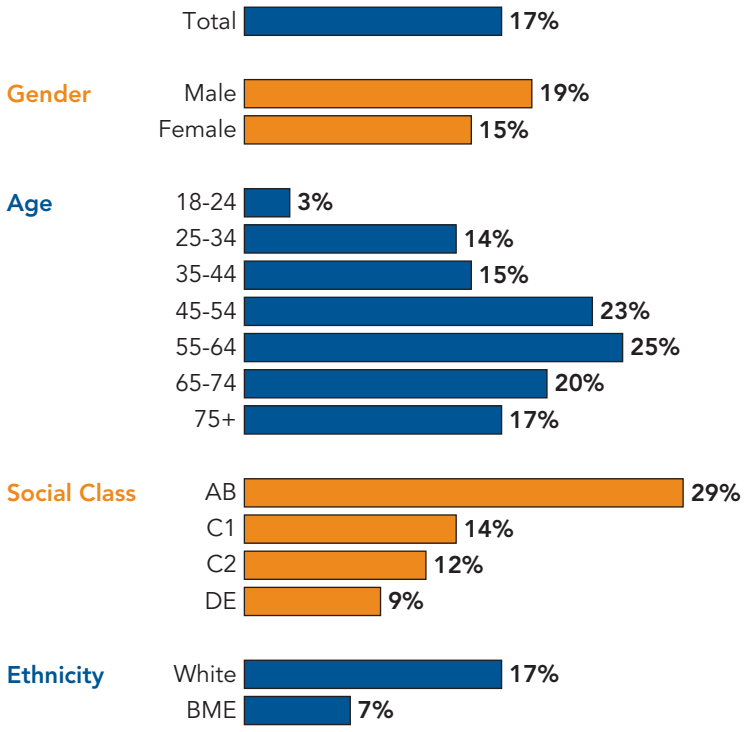
Base: c. 1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix C.

Men are more likely than women to have contacted an elected representative, though only by four percentage points (Figure 9). Different ages and social classes show greater variation, with 18-24 year olds and DEs significantly less likely to have contacted an elected representative than older people or ABs. Once again, engagement in forms other than voting appears to decline after retirement age.

People who read quality newspapers are much more likely to have contacted an elected representative than those who read popular newspapers (30% versus 13%), as are those with degree-level qualifications compared to people with no formal qualifications (29% versus 10%). White respondents are also notably more likely to have made contact than BMEs (17% versus 7%).

Figure 9: Contacting elected representatives – demographic differences

Q Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years? 'Presented my views to a local councillor or MP'



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Political membership and giving

Only 3% of the population report having donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party in the last two or three years, continuing a downward trend (Figure 10). Donation to a charity or campaigning organisation remains stable at 37%.

The continued fall in reported giving to political parties highlights the well known decline in membership and the funding difficulties faced by all the parties.[9] While the proportion of the public giving to charity is unchanged this year, it will be interesting to see whether it changes in the coming years in response to increasingly difficult economic circumstances.

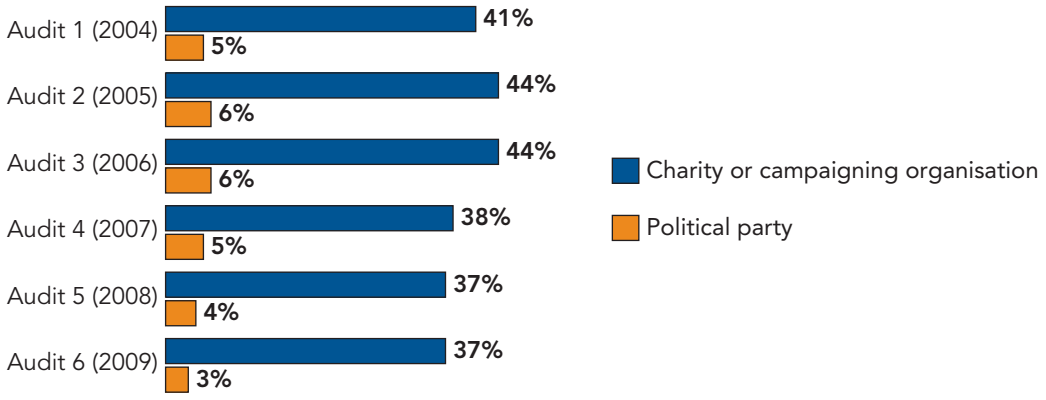
[9] P. Mair & I. van Biezen (2001), 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000', *Party Politics*, Vol. 7, pp. 5-22; P. Webb, D. M. Farrell & I. Holliday (eds.) (2002), *Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.24.

Figure 10: Political membership and giving – trends

Q Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years? 'Donated money or paid a membership fee to…

… a charity or campaigning organisation'?

… a political party'?



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

The most striking demographic disparity occurs when examining the breakdown of the results by social class. ABs are significantly more likely to donate money to a charity or campaigning organisation (56%) or a political party (6%) than DEs (22% and 1% respectively).

Another significant gap exists between the proportion of white respondents who say they have donated to a charity or campaigning organisation (39%) compared to BMEs (17%). A similar though smaller disparity was identified in recent cabinet office research into charitable giving.[10]

The disparity may perhaps be explained in the findings of research conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Charity Commission in 2008. They found that people of black or minority ethnic background are less likely to think that charities are trustworthy (66%, compared to 75% of people of white background), and more likely to feel they are unprofessional (17%, compared to 10% of people of white background). This is despite BME respondents being more likely than whites to think that charities are effective at bringing about social change (80% versus 71%).[11] The cabinet office research may also provide a further clue to the disparity. It found that there were notable differences in the methods of charitable giving, with BMEs more likely than whites to donate via places of worship and to people begging on the street, so there could be other definitional factors behind this disparity.[12]

[10] Cabinet Office (2007), *Helping Out: A National Survey of Formal Volunteering and Charitable Giving* (London: Cabinet Office), p.85.

[11] Ipsos MORI (May 2008), *2008 Charity Commission Study into Public Trust and Confidence in Charities* (London: Charity Commission), p.15.

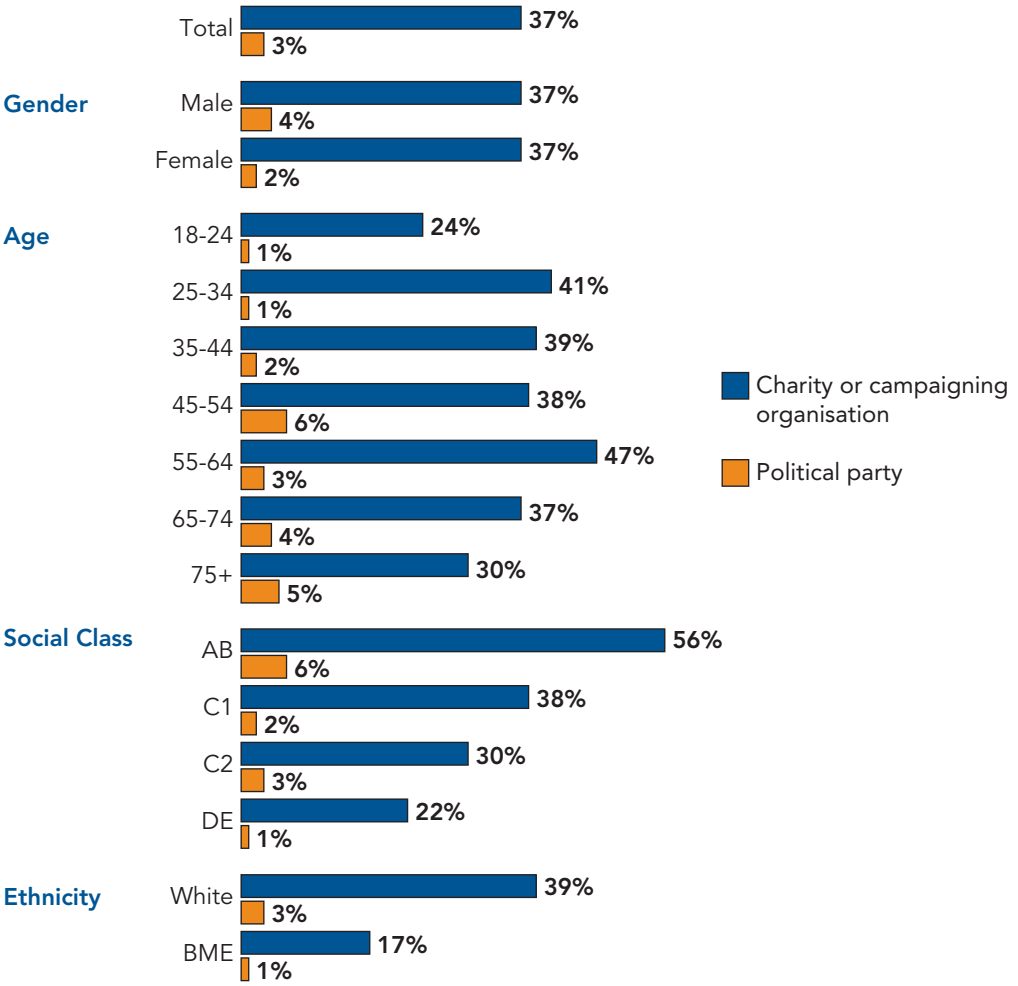
[12] Cabinet Office (2007), *Helping Out: A National Survey of Formal Volunteering and Charitable Giving* (London: Cabinet Office), p.86.

Figure 11: Political membership and giving – demographic differences

Q Which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years? 'Donated money or paid a membership fee to…

… a charity or campaigning organisation'?

… a political party'?



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

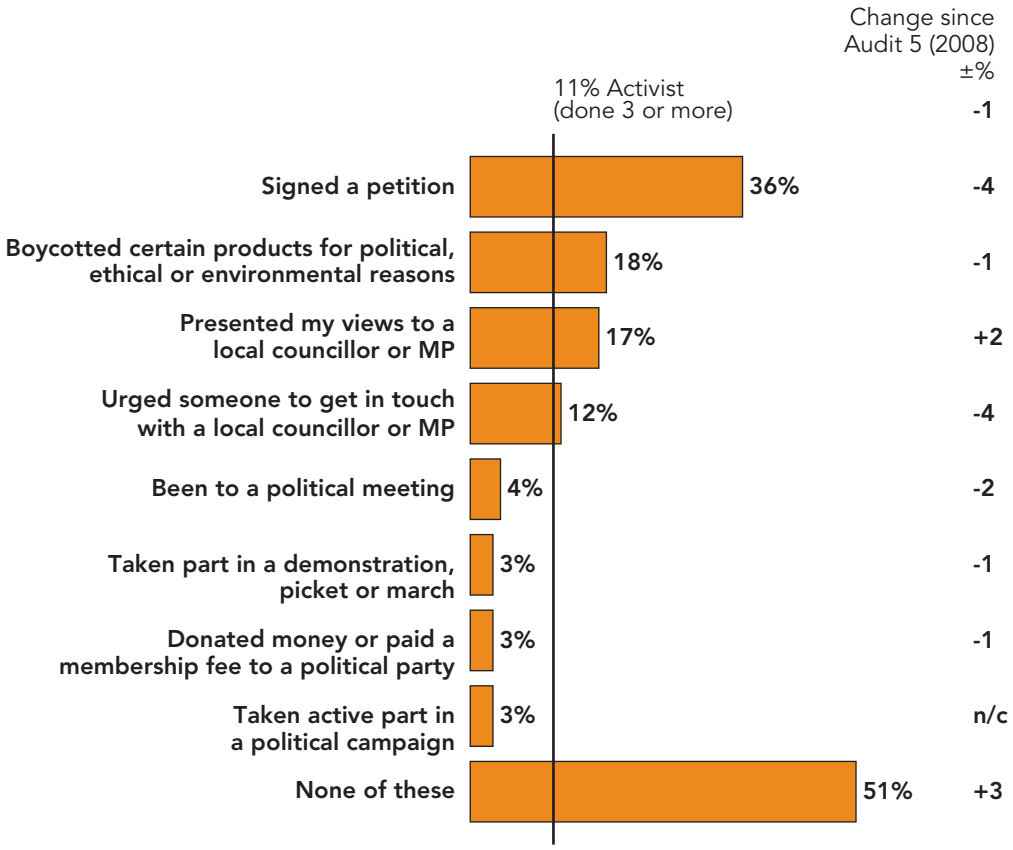
Political activism

Eleven per cent of adults can be classified as 'political activists', according to the Audit definition, i.e. in the last two or three years they have done at least three political activities from a list of eight (Figure 12). Over half the public (51%) report not having done any of these activities, an increase of three points since last year.

Social classes and ethnic groups display the most notable variations in activism. One in five (22%) ABs meet the Audit's definition of 'political activist', compared to only 9% of C1s, 7% of C2s and 4% of DEs. One in 10 (11%) of people of white ethnic origin are activists, compared to only 4% of BMEs.

Figure 12: Political activism

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



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Among the different age groups, people aged 18-24 are the least likely to be activists (4%) and people aged 45-54 are the most likely (18%).

Readers of quality newspapers are significantly more likely to be activists than consumers of popular newspapers (27% versus 6%) and a similar pattern emerges with education levels: university graduates are more likely to be activists than those with no qualifications (23% versus 3%).

C. Efficacy and satisfaction

This third theme examines perceived political efficacy and satisfaction with the present system of governing. This year's results do not differ much from those in the last Audit, but they do confirm a downward trend since the first Audit in 2004.

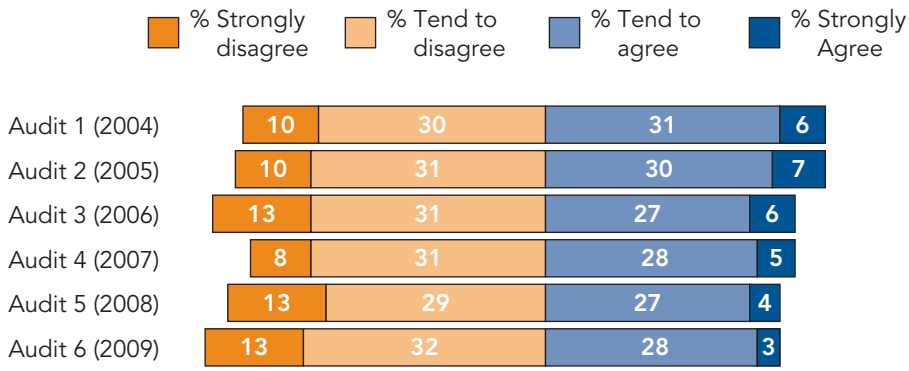
Perceived political efficacy

A third of the public believe that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run' (31%) – unchanged from last year – while 45% disagree; an increase of 3% from last year (Figure 13).

The proportion of the public that agrees that when people like them get involved in politics they can make a difference has been steadily declining since 2003. However, only small proportions of the population feel strongly one way or another; three fifths of people (60%) only 'tend' to agree or disagree. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that 13% of people 'strongly disagree' that they can change the way the country is run.

Figure 13: Perceived political efficacy

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following… 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 C.

Perceptions of political efficacy are similar for men and women and for people of different ages. However, the preceding indicators demonstrated that people from social grades AB are more likely to be engaged than those from lower social grades and this trend continues for efficacy: ABs are more likely to agree they can change things (40%) than C1s (30%), C2s (29%) or DEs (27%).

In general, people who are interested in politics – and more active in it – are more likely to agree that they can change the way the country is run: 42% of people interested in politics

and 51% of political activists agree compared to 20% of uninterested people and 29% of non-activists.

Earlier we noted that people of white ethnic origin are more likely to say they are interested in and knowledgeable about politics than BMEs, and more likely to be politically active. However, BMEs take a more positive view of political efficacy than people of white ethnic origin: 41% agree that they can change things compared to 31% of white respondents, a 10% increase since 2007. Interviewing for the Audit took place just a month after the election of the first African-American president in the United States, and it is possible that this had an impact on BME respondents' perceptions of political efficacy.

Given this increase, however, it is curious that BMEs continue to be disproportionately less likely to participate in politics. This disconnect between views on efficacy and willingness to take action is similar to that identified earlier in relation to charitable giving, though it is not possible to assess whether the reasons are similar. There may be a time-lag between the increase in knowledge and interest and a corresponding increase in participation, and future Audits will examine whether this proves to be the case. Section 4 of this report examines in more detail the reasons for non-participation and finds that they vary by ethnic group.

Present system of governing

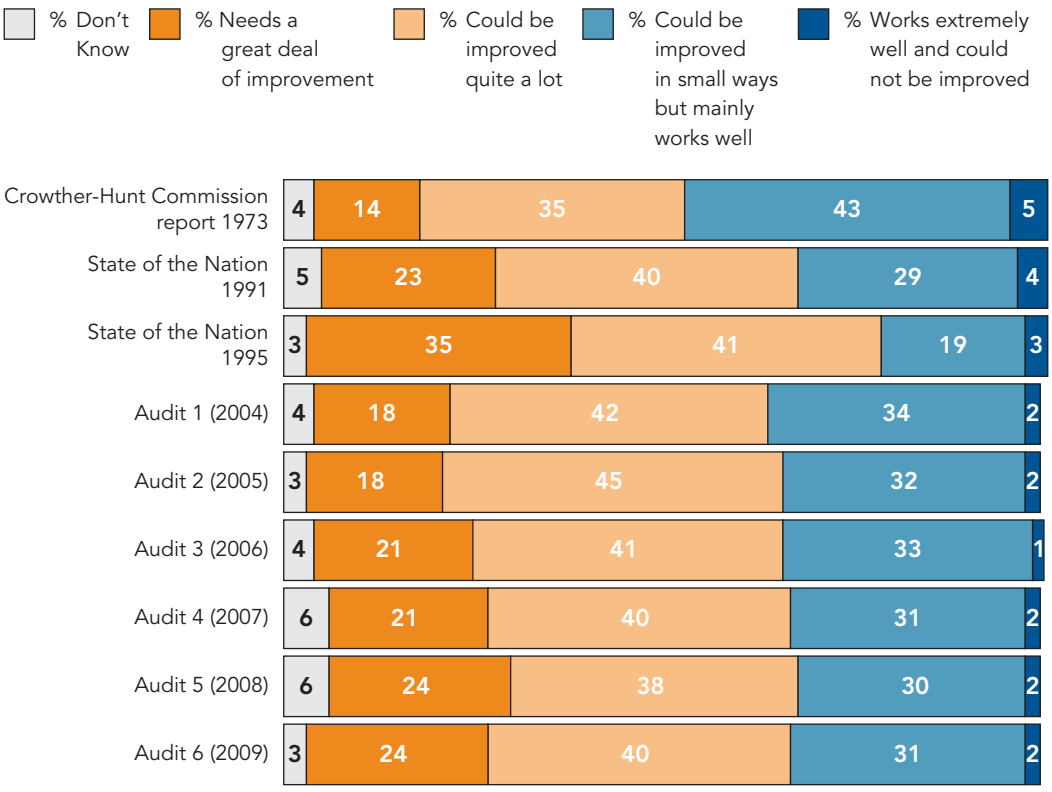
A third of people (33%) think the present system of governing Britain works 'mainly' or 'extremely' well, an increase of 1% on last year's Audit, but the number saying that the system could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' has increased by two percentage points to 64% (Figure 14). There has been a gradual decline in satisfaction with the present system across the Audits, and the number of respondents who believe the current system works well has decreased by three percentage points since it was asked in the first Audit.

Among different demographic groups, one of the most striking disparities is between the white and BME populations. Once again, BMEs are markedly more optimistic than white respondents: 50% think the system of governing Britain needs 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of improvement compared to two thirds of people from white backgrounds (65%).

Other groups which are more likely to think the system needs improvement include readers of popular newspapers (71%, versus 57% of quality newspaper readers) and people who plan to vote Conservative (70%, versus 55% of Labour supporters). Respondents in the West Midlands reported the greatest dissatisfaction with the present system of governing, with 76% saying it needs 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of improvement, compared to the national average of 64%.

Figure 14: Present system of governing

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



See Royal Commission on the Constitution 1969 - 1973, Volume I, Report (Cm 5460)
MORI State of the Nation Poll, 1991 Base: 1,547 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 7 March 1991 - 25 March 1991
MORI State of the Nation Poll, 1995 Base: 1,758 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 21 April – 8 May 1995
Audit 1 Base: 1,913 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2003
Audit 2 Base: 2,003 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 2 – 6 December 2004
Audit 3 Base: 1,142 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 1 – 5 December 2005
Audit 4 Base: 1,282 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 23 – 28 November 2006
Audit 5 Base: 1,073 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007
Audit 6 Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

In terms of electoral cycles and historical parallels, it is possible to draw some comparisons between 1991, 1995 and 2008. On all three occasions, a government which had been in power for a long time faced a challenging political landscape and an election was only a year or two away. The data for this question shows people took a more negative view of the efficacy of the system in 1995 than they do now or than they did in 1991. In 1995, three quarters (76%) thought it needed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of improvement, compared to 64% now and 63% in 1991.[13]

[13] Ipsos MORI, Political Monitor: Satisfaction Ratings, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/content/political-monitor-satisfaction-ratings.ashx

Satisfaction with the performance of government suggests a closer parallel between 1991 and 2008 than between 1995 and 2008. In March 1991, 30% of the public were satisfied with the government and 62% dissatisfied. The picture in December 2008 was very similar: 28% were satisfied and 64% dissatisfied. By contrast, in April/May 1995, only 9% were satisfied and 83% were dissatisfied.[14]

[14] Ibid.

4. Political participation and citizenship

This special section takes an in-depth look at the relationship between public attitudes to political participation and citizenship. It explores respondents' views in relation to influence over, and involvement in, decision-making at the local and national levels, the effectiveness of various political activities and how people view these in the context of good citizenship. It also examines the number of people who have visited the Westminster Parliament.

A. Influence and involvement

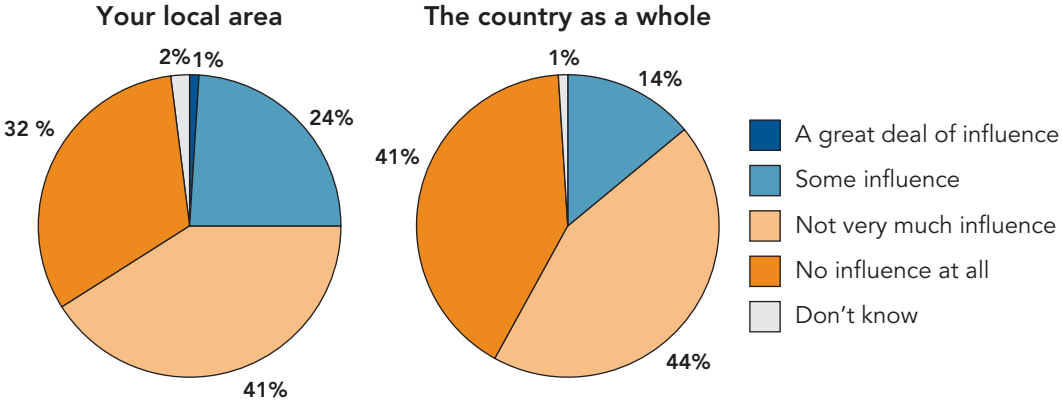
We asked people how much influence they feel they have over decision-making in both their local area and in the country as a whole. Those who said they do not feel influential were asked to identify the reasons for their lack of influence. We then asked people to what extent they would actually like to be involved in decision-making. Finally, we asked those who said they do want to have a say in decision-making – and currently feel they are not involved – what factors prevent them from participating.

Perceived influence over decision-making at the local and national levels

An overwhelming majority of the public feel they have 'not very much influence' or 'no influence at all' over decision-making in both their local area (73%) and the country as a whole (85%) (Figure 15). However, more people feel they have an influence in their local area than in the country as a whole (25% versus 14%).

Figure 15: Perceived influence over decision-making at the local and national levels

Q How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in…?



Base: 1,051 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Interestingly, women are slightly more likely than men to feel they have an influence over decision-making at both the local (27% versus 23%) and national levels (16% versus 12%). Less surprisingly, young people (aged 18-24) are the least likely of all the age groups to feel they have an influence over decision-making: 17% say they have influence at the local level and 9% say the same about the country as a whole.

People from more affluent social classes are also more likely to feel they have an influence: 36% of ABs feel they have an influence over their local area and 21% feel they have an influence over Britain as a whole compared to far fewer numbers of DEs (19% and 10% respectively). Similarly, feelings of influence over decision-making vary with education level, with 36% of university graduates feeling they have some influence over decision-making locally, compared to 18% of those with no formal qualifications.

Just 13% of respondents in the North East region, 16% in the North West and 16% in Scotland say they feel they have at least 'some influence' over decision-making in their local area, compared to the national average of 25%.

Earlier we noted that members of the BME population are less likely than white respondents to be interested in, profess knowledge of or participate in politics, but more likely to take a positive view of the system of governing. BMEs are also more likely to feel they have influence over local decision-making: 28% feel they have influence, compared to 25% of the white population. The contrast between the proportions who do not feel influential is larger: two thirds (66%) of the BME population feel they have little or no influence over local decision-making compared to three quarters (74%) of the white population. At the national level, BMEs are also more likely to feel they have an influence than whites, though the difference is less pronounced (18% versus 14%). More whites feel they do not have an influence at the national level than BMEs (85% versus 78%).

These findings are reflected in the most recent Citizenship Survey conducted by Ipsos MORI for the department for communities and local government, which found that 38% of people feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area, and 20% feel able to influence decisions affecting Great Britain. It also found that ethnic minority groups are more likely to feel they have an influence – 48% saying that they have an influence on their local area, compared to 37% of white respondents, and 34% saying they feel able to influence decisions affecting Britain, compared to 19% of whites.[15]

People classified as political activists are the most likely of all to feel they have an influence over decision-making though, as for BMEs, the difference is much more significant at the local level (where there is a 20% gap between the perceived influence of activists and non-activists) than the national level (where the gap is just three percentage points).

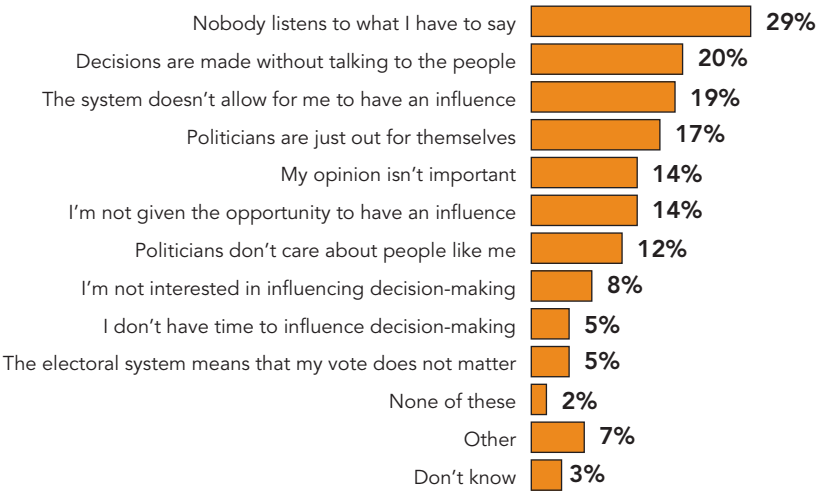
[15] Communities and Local Government/Ipsos MORI (2008), *Citizenship Survey: 2007-2008* (April 2007-March 2008), England and Wales, http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/citizenshipsurveyaprmar08, p.5-6.

Reasons for not feeling influential in decision-making

The most commonly cited reasons for not feeling influential in decision-making point to a belief that politicians and the political system overlook the public's views (Figure 16). The top two answers, 'nobody listens to what I have to say' (29%) and 'decisions are made without talking to the people' (20%) convey a strong feeling among the public that they are ignored by decision-makers. Other popularly cited reasons include 'the system doesn't allow for me to have an influence' (19%) and 'politicians are just out for themselves' (17%).

Figure 16: Reasons for not feeling influential in decision-making

Q You said that you feel you have not very much/no influence over decision-making. Why do you feel this? (multiple responses permitted)



Base: All who feel they do not have influence in their local area or the country as a whole (939).
Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

People who do not feel they have much influence over decision-making are the most likely to say that nobody listens to them. For example, 79% of the 65-74 age group feel they have no influence at a local level and 37% say nobody listens to them compared to a national average of 29%. Those with no formal qualifications fall in the same pattern, with 36% saying nobody listens to their opinions. Lower social grades are also much more likely to give this answer as a reason for not feeling influential (35% of DEs say that nobody listens to them compared to 18% of ABs).

Members of the BME population who do not feel they have influence are less likely than whites to attribute this to feeling that they are being ignored: 22% say nobody listens to them (compared to 29% of white respondents) and only 8% say decisions are made without talking to people like them (compared to 21% of whites). BMEs who feel they lack influence are more likely than the same section of the white population to attribute this to lack of time (9% compared to 5%) or their own lack of interest (15% compared to 8%).

One in five (19%) of those who feel they do not have influence blame 'the system' for not allowing them to have influence. The proportion blaming 'the system' varies for different social classes: it is mentioned by one in five (21%) of ABs and 13% of DEs. Perhaps this can to some extent be explained by the differing levels of interest in politics discussed earlier. Indeed, a quarter (24%) of those who are interested in politics feel the system does not allow them to have influence, compared to only 14% of those who are not interested in politics.

There is a similar divide between ABs and DEs with regard to feeling that 'decisions are made without talking to the people'. One in four (23%) of ABs give this as a reason for not feeling they have influence over decision-making compared to only 14% of DEs.

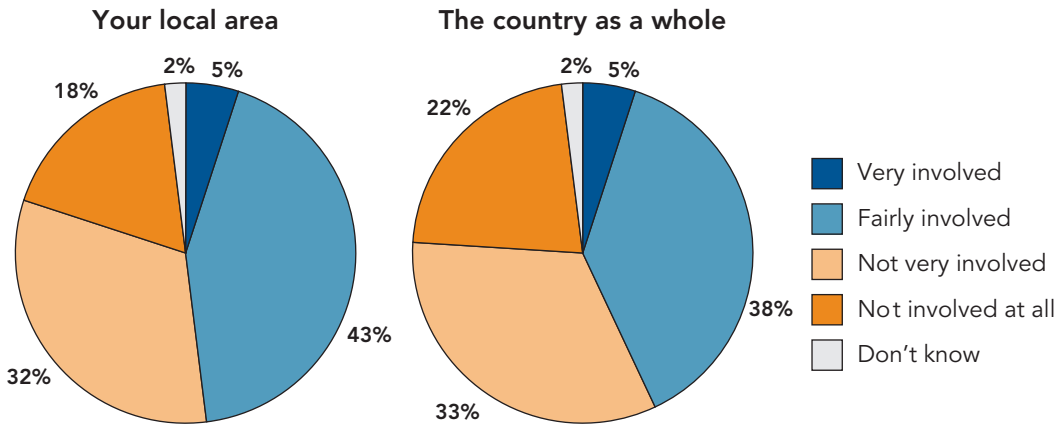
Desire to be involved in decision-making

Half the public do not actually want to be involved in decision-making in their local area. Even more – 55% – do not wish to be involved in decision-making in the country as a whole (Figure 17).

The finding that half of the population do not wish to get involved in decision-making either in their local area or nationally raises a number of important questions about engaging with the public. Does lack of interest arise because tangible forms of engagement appear inordinately time consuming for participation in politics to be possible for most people, or are they simply content to let their elected representatives make decisions on their behalf? If only half the population want to be involved in decision-making, how should this change the approach of government and other organisations in terms of the people they seek to engage with and the forms of engagement undertaken? These issues are considered further in the Analysis section at the end of this report.

Figure 17: Desire to be involved in decision-making

Q To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in…?



Base: 1,051 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

There is very little difference in the responses of men and women or different ethnic groups. The demographic group that is least likely to want to be involved in decision making is older people. Three fifths (61%) of 65-74 year olds and 69% of the over 75s are not interested in being involved in local decision-making. There is even less appetite for involvement in national decision-making among the oldest segments of the population: two thirds (67%) of 65-74 year olds and three quarters of over 75s say they do not want to get involved.

It should come as no surprise that those people defined earlier as 'political activists' and those that are interested in politics are the most likely to want to get involved in decision-making. Four in five (80%) activists want to get involved in local decision-making and 71% say the same about national decision-making. Among those interested in politics, 63% would like to be involved in decision-making at a local level, and 58% at a national level.

There is also a very noticeable difference between members of different social classes. ABs (59%) and C1s (53%) are far more likely to want to get involved in decision-making in their local area compared to 39% of C2s and 38% of DEs that say the same. The picture is similar for decision-making at the national level, although C2s are less likely to want a say than DEs (32% compared to 37%).

Once again, those with at least a university degree are particularly likely to want to get involved in decision-making at the local level (63%) and nationally (61%).

Respondents in the North East region reported the greatest desire for involvement in local decision-making (60%), despite lower than average reported levels of interest in politics and likelihood of voting. Over half of Londoners (51%) would like to be at least 'fairly involved' in decision-making in Britain as a whole, compared to just 26% of respondents in Wales.

Two fifths (43%) of respondents feel that they do not have any influence over decision-making but say they would like to get involved. Understanding why this is the case is an important question for government and organisations carrying out public engagement work, and is considered further in the Analysis section at the end of this report.

Barriers to participation among potential participants

People who do not currently feel that they have an influence in decision-making – but who say they would like to be involved – were asked what factors, if any, prevent them from doing so. Nearly half of respondents (40%) cite lack of time as the main reason. None of the other reasons cited receive a mention from more than 12% of respondents.

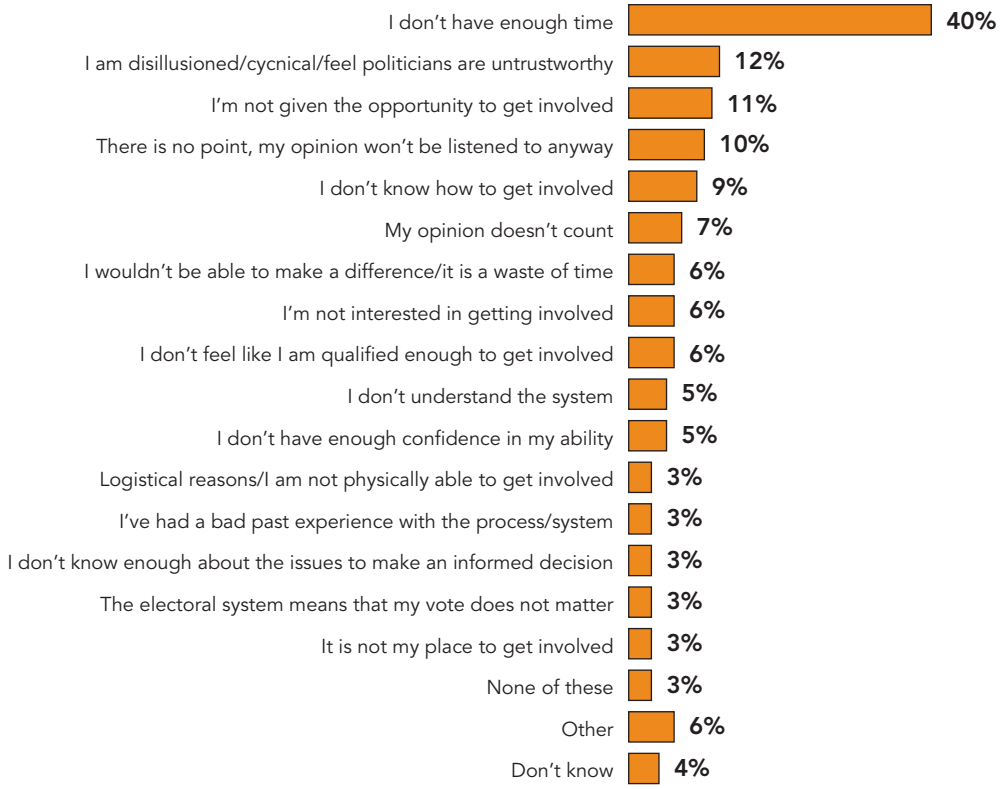
This echoes findings from the recent MORI survey which found that 57% of respondents felt that 'there just aren't enough hours in the day to do all that I want to do'.[16] It may be that

[16] Ipsos MORI Real Trends survey. 2,019 British adults 15+, 9 May-5 June 2008, self-completion and online.

people prioritise other activities over participation in local or national decision-making. In this sense, there is a case for thinking that people who say that there is not enough time to do something are making a judgement that it is relatively unimportant compared to the other things that they manage to find time to do. Overcoming this barrier is not only a matter of making engagement more accessible to people with limited time but also of making engagement itself attractive, thus increasing people's motivation to engage.[17]

Figure 18: Barriers to participation among potential participants

Q What factors, if any, prevent you from getting more involved in the decision-making process? (multiple responses permitted)



Base: All who feel they do not have influence and would like to be involved in decision-making (459). Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Half (50%) of those in full-time work cite a lack of time as a barrier to further involvement compared to 30% of those not working. Respondents aged 35-44 years old are particularly likely to say they do not have enough time: just over half (51%) give this as a reason for not being involved in the decision-making process. There is also an interesting

[17] A. Williamson (2007), *A model for emergent citizen-focused local eDemocracy*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Monash University, Australia, p.354-355.

gender divide: where 44% of women say they do not have enough time, 37% of men give this as a reason.

Some of the other common reasons given are related to cynicism towards politicians and a sense of being ignored by them: 12% say they are 'disillusioned', 'cynical' or 'feel politicians are untrustworthy', 10% say 'my opinion won't be listened to' and 7% say 'my opinion doesn't count'. Here emerges a recurring theme: people do not perceive any reason for making an effort (when their time is already tight) to get involved in politics or decision-making if they feel their opinion will just be overlooked.

On the whole the BME population is not as negative about the political system as people from a white ethnic background: just 6% say their opinion not being listened to is a barrier to getting involved. Not being listened to seems to be much more of a factor for those with no formal qualifications (mentioned by 15%). Negative views of politicians are more of a factor for the white population than BMEs: 12% attribute their lack of involvement to disillusionment or cynicism about politicians while the same is true of just 3% of BMEs who do not feel involved but would like to be.

Another commonly perceived barrier to involvement is a lack of knowledge about how best to get involved. Whereas the BME population is less likely to be cynical about the system they are also less likely to consider themselves knowledgeable: 14% of those who would like to be involved but are not say they do not know how to get involved (compared with 8% of the same section of the white population). Slightly fewer say they do not understand the system (8% compared to 4% of the same section of the white population).

B. Effectiveness and importance

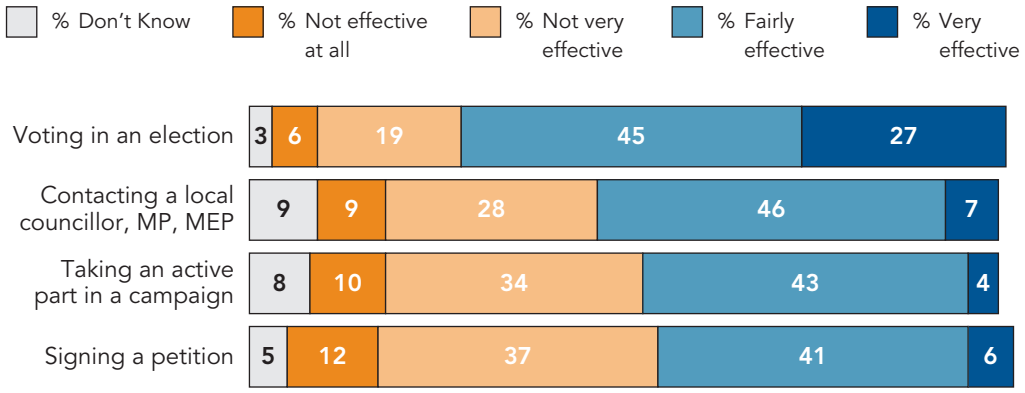
Having established that most people do not feel they have any influence over decision-making – and only half are interested in getting involved – we set out to find which political activities they think are most effective in having an impact on how Britain is run. We also asked how important various politics-related activities were to being a good citizen.

Effectiveness of means of participating

An overwhelming majority of people (72%) think that voting in an election is 'very' or 'fairly' effective in having an impact on how the country is run. In addition, contacting a political representative is viewed as effective by 53%, and taking an active part in a campaign and signing a petition are both viewed as effective by 47% of the public.

Figure 19: Effectiveness of means of participating

Q How effective, if at all, do you think each of the following is?



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Voting in an election is seen as the most effective way of having an impact on how the country is run; indeed a quarter (27%) of those asked believe it is a 'very effective' way of having an impact and almost 45% feel it is 'fairly effective'. BME respondents are particularly likely to say that voting is an effective way of having an impact on how Britain is run: 82% say this is the case (of which 31% think it is 'very effective') compared to 71% of white respondents. This is similar to the number of ABs who think voting is effective (81% compared to only 64% of DEs).

Respondents in the East Midlands and North East regions are the least likely to think that voting is effective (59% and 61% respectively) compared to 80% in the South East and 79% in the South West. These answers are not necessarily directly born out of personal experience. Tellingly, there is no significant difference in perceptions of the effectiveness of voting between those living in 'safe' and 'marginal' parliamentary constituencies: 71% of those from constituencies where the margin of victory at the 2005 general election was less than 10% think that voting is effective, compared to 73% of those in safer seats.

Contacting an elected representative is also seen by many as an effective means of having an impact on how Britain is run. Despite the widespread sense of cynicism towards politicians that is generally deemed to exist, over half (53%) of the public believe that contacting them is an effective means of participation. This may reflect the disparity consistently identified in research by the Committee on Standards in Public Life between the public's trust in their local MP compared to MPs in general,[18] and in earlier Audit surveys

[18] Committee on Standards in Public Life (2008), *Survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life 2008 (London: Committee on Standards in Public Life)*, p.22.

between satisfaction with the way their own MP is doing his or her job and with the performance of MPs in general.[19] It is likely that if the public find communicating with their local MP is effective then they will form a more positive view of them as individuals than they do of MPs collectively when so much of their impression of the latter is gained largely through the prism of the media. The Audit surveys have found that those who have contacted their MP have a higher level of satisfaction with their performance than those who have not.

As noted earlier, a smaller proportion of people have contacted an elected representative in the last few years, fewer than one in five (17%). Compared to other social classes, ABs are most likely to have contacted a politician in the last two or three years, and they are also the most likely to say it is an effective means of participation (64% compared to 45% of DEs).

The public are divided as to whether or not taking an active part in a campaign is an effective means of participation: 47% say it is effective while 45% say it is not. Younger respondents are more enthusiastic about the effectiveness of campaigning than other people: 57% of 18-24 year olds believe it to be an effective measure compared to the overall average of 47%. Of the social classes, C2s and DEs are less likely to feel that campaigning is effective: just 38% of C2s and 36% of DEs believe this is the case compared to 59% of ABs. Again respondents in the South East (57%) and the South West (56%) are the most likely to consider campaigning as effective. Naturally, the majority of political activists (69%) view campaigning as effective.

Although there is a split on the effectiveness of signing a petition, slightly more people feel it is not very, or not at all, effective than feel it is effective (49% compared to 47%). Perhaps unexpectedly, there is little difference in the responses of political activists and non-activists (48% versus 47%). Interestingly of the social classes C2s are the group most likely to consider petitions effective (52%), compared to 45% of ABs and DEs and 46% of C1s. There is also a difference between the readers of popular newspapers, 51% of whom see petitions as effective, and quality newspapers (43%).

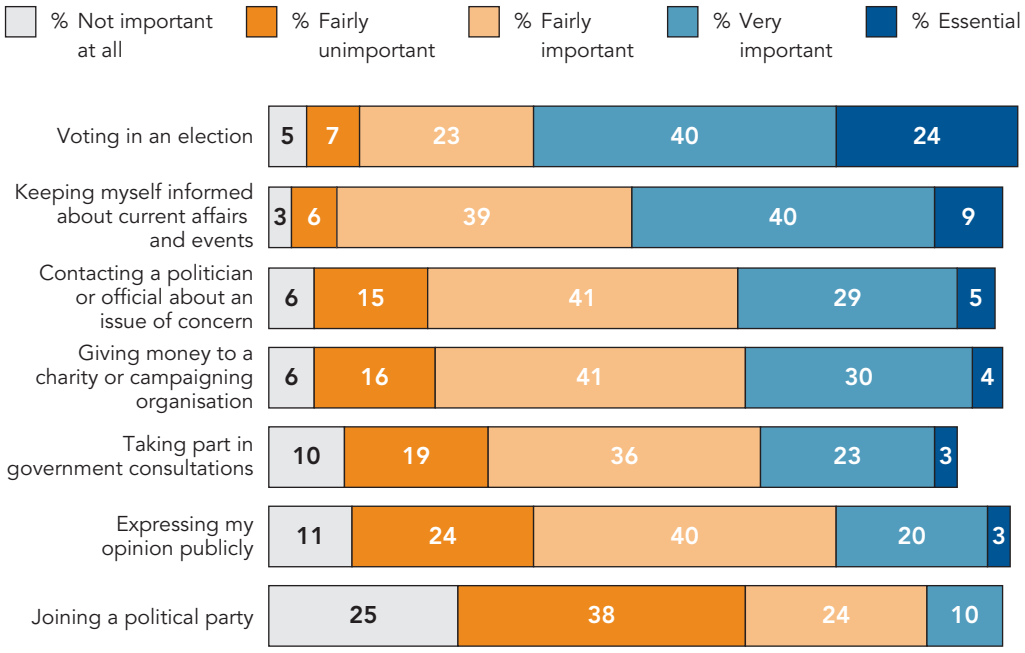
Participation and good citizenship

Eighty-seven per cent of people think it is 'essential' or 'important' to vote in an election in order to be a good citizen – considerably more than the number who say they are certain to vote in the next election (53%). Keeping informed about current events and affairs is viewed as a corollary to good citizenship by 88% of the population. Contacting a politician or official about an issue of concern and giving money to a charity or campaigning organisation are viewed as important by three quarters of the population, though again, far fewer have actually done so. Taking part in government consultations and expressing one's opinion publicly are seen as important by 62% and 63% respectively. Joining a political party, on the other hand, is only considered an important component of good citizenship by a third of the population (34%).

[19] In Audit 4 (2007) 41% of respondents were satisfied with their own MP's performance, but only 30% with the performance of MPs in general.

Figure 20: Participation and good citizenship

Q How important, if at all, do you think each of the following are in order to be a good citizen?



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

As well as being most widely seen as effective, voting in elections is also considered important for being a good citizen. A quarter (24%) think it is 'essential' to vote in elections in order to be a good citizen, while 87% think it is at least 'fairly important'. However, as we noted earlier only just over half (53%) say they are certain to vote at the next general election. Of those who consider voting 'essential', the vast majority (83%) say they are 'certain' to vote in an immediate general election. Of those who consider voting 'very' or 'fairly' important, less than half (47%) say they are 'certain' to vote.

Unsurprisingly, the 75+ age group identified earlier as the most likely to be certain to vote at the next election are the most likely to consider voting at least a 'fairly important' part of being a good citizen (96%), while only 83% of 18-24 year olds and 82% of 25-34 year olds say the same. A similar pattern emerges for social class, with 91% of ABs saying that voting is at least 'fairly important' compared to 83% of DEs. Again the age analysis here reinforces the findings of the Action and Participation indicators, where the data related to respondents' likelihood of discussing politics demonstrates that older people perhaps see voting as a civic obligation in a way that young people do not, regardless of political circumstance. These findings replicate the same analysis: young people need to be given greater motivation to actually vote.

People in the North East and Wales (77% and 78% respectively) are least likely to say that voting is at least 'fairly important', compared to 96% of Londoners and 92% of respondents in the South West.

While BME respondents are less likely to be certain to vote at the next election than white respondents, more BMEs (92%) think that voting is at least a 'fairly important' part of being a good citizen than whites (86%).

It is interesting to compare these findings with a question included in two of the earlier Audit surveys, which asked whether people agree that 'It is my duty to vote'. In Audit 1, 74% of the public agreed with this proposition, and in Audit 4, 77% did so. This is higher than the 64% of the public who think that voting is 'essential' or 'very important' to be a good citizen, and suggests perhaps that a section of the public see voting as more of a personal duty than an important part of citizenship.

Keeping oneself informed about current affairs is seen as an equally important component of good citizenship: 88% believe it is essential or important. Men are more likely to think it is important than women (92% versus 84%) as are more affluent social classes (94% of ABs think it is important compared to 82% of DEs). Ninety-six per cent of people who profess to be interested in politics think it is important.

Three quarters (75%) of people think that it is at least 'fairly important' to contact a politician or official about an issue of concern in order to be a good citizen. There are very few differences in the responses of different demographic groups.

Giving money to a charity is deemed to be an important characteristic of a good citizen by 75% of people. However, this strongly correlates to social grade. The more affluent social classes, who can perhaps better afford to give money to charities, are more likely to feel this is important than the less affluent social classes; 81% of ABs believe this to be the behaviour of a good citizen while just 66% of DEs place importance on giving money to charity.

Yet despite the strong consensus that giving money to a charity or campaigning organisation is important in order to be a good citizen, just 37% of respondents actually reported having done so in the last two or three years. As with voting at elections, it seems the public may think that they should be doing something in theory but in practice they are less likely to carry out their good intentions.

Almost two thirds (62%) of the public feel that taking part in government consultations is linked to being a good citizen. This feeling is especially prevalent among ABs (74% compared to 61% of C1s and DEs and just 54% of C2s), readers of quality newspapers (74% compared to 63% of popular newspaper readers) and university graduates (76% compared to 58% of those with no qualifications). Men are more likely than women to think it is important (66% versus 60%) and BMEs are also more likely than white respondents to do so (69% versus 62%).

Around the same number of people (63%) think it is important to express one's opinion publicly (for example via a radio phone-in, letter to the editor, online forum or public

meetings and events) in order to be a good citizen. People from a BME background are substantially more likely to think it is important than whites (75% versus 61%); men are slightly more likely to think it is important than women (65% versus 60%); and DEs are more likely to think it is important than all of the higher social grades (65% versus 61%).

Joining a political party is seen by the smallest proportion of the public as an important behaviour of a good citizen: nearly two thirds (63%) say it is 'fairly unimportant' or 'not important at all'. Like campaigning, joining a political party is more likely to be seen as important by the younger population. Two fifths (42%) of 18-24 year olds believe joining a political party is essential or important in order to be a good citizen, compared to 34% of the public as a whole. However, yet again there is a sharp contrast between the large number of people who think something is important and their willingness to actually do it: just 1% of 18-24 year olds have paid a membership fee or made a donation to a political party in the last two or three years. BMEs are also more likely than white respondents to think joining a political party is important (46% versus 33%), but again, only 1% have reported doing so in the last few years compared to the overall average of 3%.

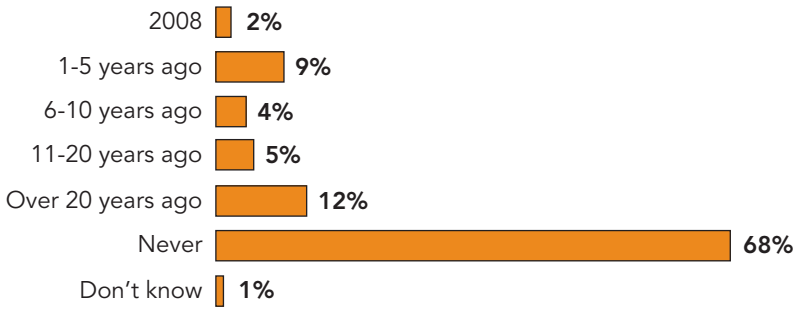
C. Visiting Parliament

Three out of 10 members of the public (31%) report that they have visited the Houses of Parliament. Twelve per cent visited over 20 years ago, and 20% visited Parliament in the last 20 years. Sixty-eight per cent of people say they have never visited Parliament.

The Palace of Westminster is widely viewed as the mother of Parliaments and the institutional apex of our democratic system. This question explores the relationship between political engagement and those actually drawn to visit Parliament. The findings should, however, be treated with a degree of caution, as the question did not specify exactly what was meant by a visit to Parliament and thus respondents were able to interpret its meaning for themselves.

Figure 21: Visiting Parliament

Q When, if at all, have you ever visited the Houses of Parliament?



Base: 1,051 British adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 11 – 17 December 2008

Men are more likely to have visited Parliament than women (35% versus 28%).

Visiting Parliament is strikingly correlated with social class. While 45% of ABs report having visited, only 28% of C2s and 15% of DEs have done so. Similarly, the well-educated are among the most likely to have visited Parliament, for example, 46% of those with a university degree have visited Parliament and 15% have done so within the last five years. Even more strikingly, a clear majority (57%) of readers of quality newspapers report having visited compared with only a quarter of readers of popular newspapers.

People who are interested in politics are also more likely to have visited (39%), as are political activists (45%). Predictably, people who live in London and the South East are the most likely to have visited in the last five years (25%). People further away from Parliament – particularly in the East Midlands and the North East – are significantly less likely to say they have ever visited the institution.

People from the BME population are less likely than the population as a whole to have visited Westminster, with a quarter (24%) reporting having done so compared to 32% of white respondents.

Unsurprisingly older people (45+) are more likely than younger people (under 45) to have visited Parliament at some point in their lives. However, the 18-24 age group are the most likely to have visited within the last 10 years (26%), compared to 18% of 45-54 year olds (the next highest age group). It is likely that many of those in the 18-24 age group may have visited as part of a school group tour of Westminster as part of the citizenship curriculum. The Houses of Parliament are dedicating ever more resources to supporting school visits to Westminster, including a recent pilot programme to cover the transport costs of school groups from across the country. The pilot sold out within hours such was the level of demand. It is likely then that more and more young people will visit Westminster. It will be interesting to see whether this has any impact on young people's sense of citizenship and the links they draw between interest in politics and voting in the future.

5. Analysis

In our analysis of last year's Audit, we suggested that perhaps the most surprising finding was how little attitudes seemed to have moved despite the fact that 2007 was a very eventful year in British politics.

This lack of movement raises questions about the relationship between people's perceptions of, and reaction to, political events and the impact this has on their attitudes to wider political engagement. For example, if people concluded from the year's events that national governments are impotent in the face of global economic forces, then domestic political activity might seem less important and relevant to them. On the other hand, if leading members of the Government are seen to have played a significant role in effectively responding to the economic crisis nationally and internationally, or conversely are perceived as having failed to take the opportunities for leadership that availed themselves, then the importance of the next general election and political activity generally might be magnified in the context of a desire for change. If one of the reasons for comparatively low electoral turnouts in Britain is broad satisfaction with the political system and a lack of urgency for drastic change, then we might expect events which increase the collective feeling of insecurity to encourage people to become more politically interested and active.

However, once again, and despite the scale of events that engulfed the country in 2008, there is little evidence that the public's attitude to engagement changed much at all. Indeed, in light of the dramatic nature of 2008, one of the most striking themes to emerge from the survey is how little the findings have changed.

None of the nine key Audit indicators looked at show any statistically significant movement. In fact all but two are within a single percentage point of their levels in Audit 5. Only in the case of perceived knowledge of politics – which is four points higher than last year – has there been any change over the last year and this is not a sufficiently large rise to be statistically significant.[20]

A. Core indicators: some emerging patterns

After six Audits it is now possible to look at the indicators side by side and begin to detect some emerging patterns.

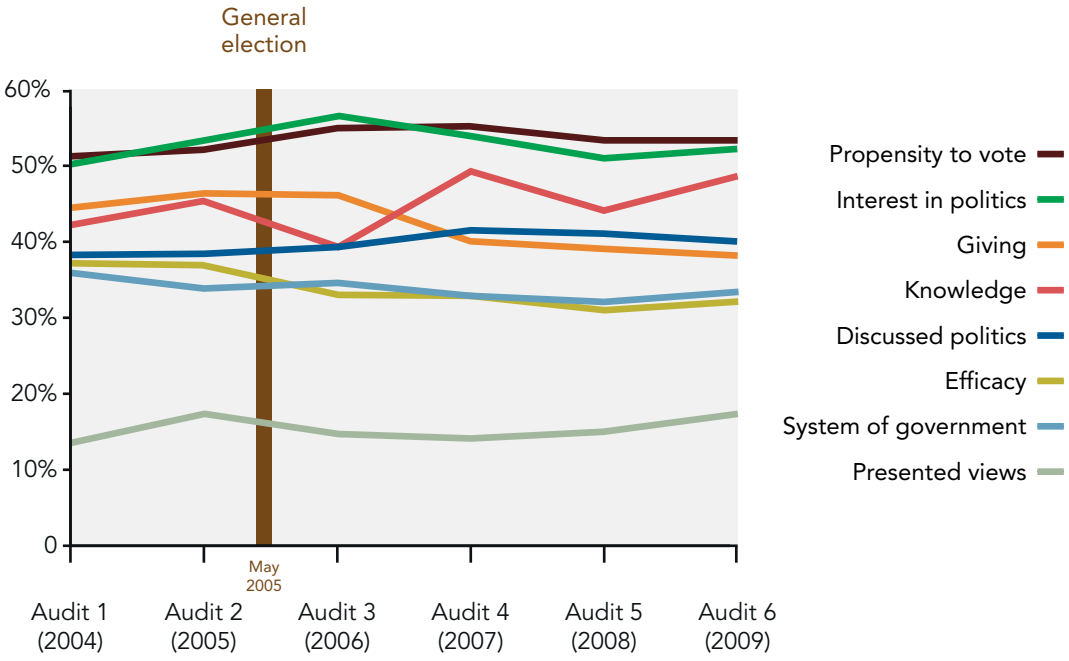
[20] A 4% change lies within the margin of error for this Audit sample and therefore may not be statistically significant. See Appendix B for further information on the statistical significance levels required for the Audit sample.

Figure 22 presents the results of eight of the core indicators that have been looked at in each survey since the Audit series began.

As the graph demonstrates:

- the knowledge indicator has fluctuated the most over the past five years.
- there are two natural pairs of measures that tend to produce consistently similar findings: there is real congruence between propensity to vote and interest in politics; and there is a considerable degree of correspondence between satisfaction with the system of government and a belief in the efficacy of political action.
- there is a sharp divergence between interest in politics and knowledge of politics after the 2005 general election which is not mirrored at any other point over the Audit cycle thus far.

Figure 22: The core indicators in historical perspective



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

Natural pairs?

Among the indicators there are clearly two pairs of measures that tend to produce consistently similar findings, moving broadly in step over the course of the six surveys.

One of the pairs lies within the same core indicator theme: efficacy and satisfaction. There is congruence between satisfaction with the political system and a belief in the efficacy of political action.

The second pair however, cuts across the boundary between the attitudinal (interest) and behavioural (propensity to vote) core indicator themes: there is clearly a similarity between propensity to vote and interest in politics, suggesting that perhaps in respondents' minds the distinction is not necessarily a clear cut one.

These pairings make an interesting contrast for they include measures that to some extent represent polar opposites on the scale of forms of active engagement that the Audit investigates. One of the pairs includes a measurement of the likelihood of voting which can be seen as the least demanding of activities, involving at the lowest level no more than pencilling a cross on a ballot paper every few years. The other pair includes the efficacy measure, exploring whether the public agree that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they can really change the way that the country is run'. Getting involved in politics is a relatively vague term but implies a substantial level of commitment if it is to be worthwhile.

These two pairs therefore represent opposite ends of the commitment scale. The differences in their trends may tell us something about how commitment is viewed and how that changes in future years.

Propensity to vote and interest in politics

The movement in propensity to vote and interest in politics has been modest, but follows a clear pattern: rising towards the 2005 election, peaking in the survey at the end of that year, then slowly falling away again. This is a natural and expected pattern tied to the parliamentary cycle, the imminence of the next general election and the greater degree of media coverage of politics that naturally accompanies an election. The extent to which both these indicators can vary is partly masked because the graph includes only the annual figures taken at the end of each year, and therefore does not reflect the short-lived spike of interest at the time of the general election, when MORI found that 61% were interested in politics.[21] But, more importantly, both these indicators are at a slightly higher level now than in 2003: an upward trend seems to have superimposed itself on the cyclical pattern.[22]

Satisfaction with the system of government and a belief in the efficacy of political action

In contrast, the efficacy and satisfaction indicators show no cyclical pattern. Indeed, as was noted in last year's Audit, they appear to be in slow but steady decline. The movement in these indicators has been small and may (given the possibility of sampling error) be illusory, but if real it is worrying. This apparent fall comes over a period of time when the government has made considerable efforts to increase public involvement in decision-making and to instil the belief that consultation is important and the public's views will be taken into account.[23]

[21] MORI poll for the *Financial Times*, 7-11 April 2005. For further details see http://www.ipsos-mori.com/content/financial-times-election-research-poll-2.ashx

[22] In the case of propensity to vote, we are able to draw slightly more robust conclusions on long-term trends than for most of the other indicators, since we are not entirely dependent on the results of a single survey – this is a measure that Ipsos MORI tracks monthly, so it is possible by aggregating the results of several surveys to be sure that we are not being misled by any sampling error in the Audit survey.

[23] The Government published two consultation documents on the subject in the summer of 2008. See Communities and Local Government (2008), *Communities in control: real people, real power*, Cm 7427; Ministry of Justice (2008), *A national framework for greater citizen engagement*.

That said, the findings of the Audit need to be considered in historical context. There is a danger, when thinking about satisfaction with the system of government, of slipping into a 'golden age' analysis in which that which went before is always deemed to have been better than that which exists today. In fact, as Figure 14 shows[24], the proportion of respondents who think that the British system of governance could be 'improved quite a lot' is at the same 40% level as was found in the 1991 and 1995 State of the Nation reports. In 1995 more people felt the system of governing needed a great deal of improvement than do so today. Given the scale of events this year, which may take time to be felt in full, and the greater proximity of the general election, it will be interesting to see whether there are any changes in these indicators in next year's Audit.

Interest in politics and knowledge of politics

After the 2005 general election the Audit results demonstrated a sharp divergence between respondents' interest in politics and knowledge of politics. After the election, interest in politics reached its highest point in any Audit so far with 56% reporting that they were 'very' or 'fairly interested' in politics. In contrast, at the same time after the election, perceived knowledge of politics reached a nadir with only 39% of respondents saying that they knew 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics.

Could it be that taking an interest in an important political event such as a general election leads many members of the public to conclude that they know less about politics than they previously thought they did? Does the nature of an election campaign, with the concentration of campaigning, strategic communications and debate on a gamut of policy issues, help generate interest but at the same time undermine the confidence that people have in their own knowledge of those political and policy issues? Does the nature of the debate that underpins a general election campaign, coupled with the degree to which people are more attuned to listen to it than might be the case at other times in the political cycle, have an impact on perceptions of knowledge about politics? After only one general election it is not possible to determine a trend. However, it is certainly something to be looked at in the long-term to see if the divergence repeats itself after future general elections.

B. Participation and citizenship

The primacy of voting

Much has been written in recent years about the decline of traditional representative politics.[25] Britain now has one of the lowest political party membership rates in Europe, and the results of this year's Audit do nothing to dispel the notion that the public is deeply disenchanted with political parties.

The precipitous decline in voter turnout at the 2001 general election inspired the creation of the Audit series. However, the new questions in this Audit, focusing on participation and

[24] See page 30.

[25] See, for example, C. Pattie, P. Seyd & P. Whiteley (2004), *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation. and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); G. Stoker (2006), *Why Politics Matters: Making Democracy Work* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); The Power Inquiry (2006), *Power to the People* (London: The Power Inquiry).

citizenship, reveal that voting in elections is viewed by a majority of people as the most important and most effective form of political activity.

Of the seven activities tested, voting was by a long way the form of activity most frequently named as an important part of good citizenship. Sixty-four per cent of respondents thought it was an 'essential' or 'very important' behaviour in being a good citizen. Voting was the only activity that was considered by a clear majority of respondents to be at least 'very important'. There is also widespread agreement that voting is effective, far more so than contacting an elected politician, taking an active part in a campaign or signing a petition. Over two thirds of the public think that voting is at least 'fairly effective' in having an impact on how the country is run.

The findings of this year's survey suggest that a belief in the efficacy of a form of action is one of the strongest drivers of political engagement. The higher the perceived efficacy of a form of action, the more likely it is to be perceived as an important component of good citizenship.

Interestingly voters in 'safe' and 'marginal' parliamentary constituencies display no significant difference in their perception of the effectiveness of voting. One might expect those respondents in marginal constituencies, where the parties are more likely to compete vigorously for their vote, to consider voting to be effective. In fact, respondents in safe seats are more likely to think that voting is effective, albeit only by two percentage points. This might suggest that respondents' perceptions of the efficacy of voting are directly linked to the likelihood of their preferred candidate actually winning.

Citizenship: good intentions v positive action

Voting is seen as at least 'fairly important' by 87% of respondents in the context of being a good citizen and is regarded as the most effective means of participation. Yet only 53% of respondents say they are certain to vote in the event of an immediate general election and at the last general election turnout was just 61% (while turnouts in the most recent devolved, local and European elections were lower still).

Similarly, giving to charity is seen by 75% of all respondents as an important factor in being a good citizen but only 37% of respondents say they have actually donated to a charity at some point in the last two to three years.

Joining a political party is seen as an important behaviour for a good citizen by the smallest proportion of respondents. Two thirds say it is 'fairly unimportant' or 'not important at all'. However, perhaps surprisingly, joining a political party, like campaigning, is more likely to be seen as important by the younger population. Two fifths (45%) of 18-24 year olds believe joining a political party is 'important' in order to be a good citizen compared to 34% of the public as a whole. However, just 1% of 18-24 year olds have actually paid a fee or made a donation to a political party at some point in the last three years.

A pattern in relation to citizenship emerges: while the public has a clear view about the theory of being a good citizen they do not make the leap from good intention to positive action.

Involvement in politics

One of the most stark – and worrying - findings in this year's Audit is that 50% of the public report that they do not want to be involved in local decision-making and 55% do not want to be involved in national decision-making. Reinforcing the concern, there is little difference to be found between the genders and ethnic groups on this issue. Demographically there is some difference in that older people are less interested in being involved than younger people: 23% of 65-74 year olds and three quarters of over 75s do not want to be involved. Given the ageing profile of party memberships and the fact that older people are more likely to participate in a general election and parties therefore spend considerable resources chasing the 'grey' vote, these latter findings may be particular food for thought.

That half of the population do not want to be involved in decision-making (not politics, but decision-making as defined in the broadest sense) is worrying coming as it does after a period of time in which the Government has made ever greater efforts to consult the public and when forms of direct democracy – for example, citizens' juries and referendums – are widely touted as offering solutions to the decline in political engagement and participation. It is not at all clear that these approaches will work any better in the long-term in ameliorating the decline in engagement and participation than will the current system with all its flaws if 50% of the public genuinely do not want to be involved. The Greater Manchester congestion charge referendum for example, generated only a 53.2% turnout, which is not far out of line with the Audit finding that 50% of the public do not want to be involved in local decision-making. Whereas representative parliamentary democracy is able to mediate between and balance competing interests within a 50/50 model of public engagement/non-engagement, it is possible that forms of direct democracy, rather than increasing involvement, engagement and participation, may in fact merely entrench the views and attitudes of that 50% of the public that want to be involved to the detriment of the other half of the population who do not want to be involved.

Perhaps a more effective way of improving involvement levels may be through addressing the stance of that 43% of respondents who feel they do not have any influence over decision-making but would like to get involved. They are less than two thirds of the 69% who agreed that they 'want to have a say in how the country is run' when that question was asked in the Audit survey in 2006. The steadiness of the various indicators of engagement suggests that this discrepancy is not the result of some startling change in opinions over the two-year period. A substantial number of people, a quarter or more of the public, seem to make a distinction between 'having a say' and 'being involved' in decision-making. They want influence over outcomes but not involvement in the process.

For these people, a lack of time is cited as the greatest barrier to involvement. This would suggest that either they have a particular view of how much time involvement in politics takes up and prefer not to give that kind of commitment or that political involvement is in reality a low priority and they prefer to spend their time doing other things that they consider more important. Voting is seen as being for everyone but getting involved in 'politics' or 'decision-making' is not for 'people like me'.

As previous Audits have noted, many people take a very narrow view of what politics is, and may not always make the connection between their most pressing interests and the

seemingly remote or esoteric world of Westminster or town hall politics. The Audit findings this year suggest that many extend that disengagement from 'politics' to disengagement from involvement in the decision-making process even if it is not described as 'political'. Given that levels of belief in political efficacy and in overall satisfaction with the working of the political system seem to move in step, this is a potentially worrying trend.

C. Demographic disparities

Public knowledge, interest and involvement in politics have historically been skewed in terms of gender, age, class and ethnicity, and the Audit has consistently found that this continues to be the case in contemporary Britain. Men, older people, more affluent social classes and people from white ethnic backgrounds tend to be disproportionately politically engaged.

Social class has more of an impact on political engagement levels than any other factor. On every single measure in this year's Audit, people classified as social grades AB are more politically engaged than DEs, frequently by a margin of around 15 to 20 percentage points. Correspondingly, university graduates are significantly more engaged that those with fewer or no qualifications, and readers of quality newspapers more so than readers of the popular press. Of course, these three factors are all strongly inter-correlated.

An Obama effect?
This year's Audit contained some particularly interesting findings vis-à-vis ethnicity. On some measures – interest and knowledge and action and participation – the white population is more engaged than the BME population. However, when it comes to efficacy and satisfaction, BMEs are more engaged.

Since 2007 the proportion of BME respondents expressing an interest in politics has risen by 15% and the number who believe 'when people like me get involved in politics, they can really change the way the country is run' has risen from 31% to 41%. For the first time in six surveys BME respondents are significantly more likely to express a belief in the efficacy of the system than are white respondents.

In addition, BME respondents are more likely to feel they have influence over decision-making in both their local area and in national politics, they are more likely than average to think that voting is an effective means by which to have an impact and they are more likely to think it is important to express their opinion publicly.

For the purposes of this survey a booster group of BME citizens was surveyed enhancing the accuracy of the sample. Even allowing for statistical margins of error however, it cannot be complete coincidence that in this of all year's BME respondents are significantly more likely than white respondents to believe that if people like themselves get involved in politics they can change things.

It is far too soon to discern absolutely whether there is any relationship between these positive BME attitudes and the election of the first ever African-American president in the United States after a prolonged and much watched election campaign dominated by the

mantra of change and the banner messages of 'yes, we can' and 'change you can believe in'. However, given the coverage that the Obama campaign secured in the UK it is not unreasonable to believe that ethnic minorities in Britain might be buoyed by this development and feel less excluded from influence than they had hitherto assumed. If there is an Obama factor at play it would also suggest that representative visibility matters a very great deal.

D. Conclusion

What does it mean that the indicators of political engagement show little reaction to the events of 2008? The indicators are of course only aggregate measures so theoretically it is possible that a good proportion of the public may have changed their views or behaviour but that the changes have cancelled each other out thus resulting in no net effect. However, given the overall stability of the indicators across all other previous Audit surveys, it is more likely that the indicators do reflect a lack of real change. This could suggest that an essential stability underlies the British public's fundamental belief about how our system of government works and the nature of our role in it as citizens. Alternatively, it is possible that events, particularly those which, like the financial crisis, are subject to rapid change and development and emerged in full in the latter half of the year, take time to fully impact upon and affect the public's attitudes, values and behaviour. Regardless of events, attitudinal change may be gradual rather than immediate, but if so this would only confirm the essential stability of the underlying attitudes. As such, the results of the next Audit to be published in spring 2010, reflecting on the public's attitudes in 2009, may provide a clearer indication of the public's response to the events of 2008.

Stability has been a key feature of British politics for centuries. Some academics have noted that despite the dramatic change in democratic politics since 1832, the proportion of citizens who actively take part in politics beyond voting has consistently remained at around 10%.[26] The Audit has found that around this same proportion of the population can be classified as political activists; this year the figure stands at 11%. Compared to other Western democracies Britain tends to score badly in relation to popular participation in politics. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2008 ranked the United Kingdom in 21st place, a relatively low position due almost entirely to its political participation score, which is the lowest of all 30 countries categorised as 'full democracies'.[27]

But does it really matter that political participation rates remain low?

Our parliamentary democracy can continue to function with low levels of participation, but, as Paul Whiteley has demonstrated, there is a link between governmental effectiveness and high levels of political participation.[28] Governance tends to be most effective in

[26] See K. Jefferys (2008), 'Two Cheers for Democracy: involvement and interest in British politics since 1918,' History and Policy paper, www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-82.html.

[27] The index assigns countries a ranking based on their performance in five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. For more information, see www.eiu.com. The other categories are 'flawed democracies', 'hybrid regimes' and 'authoritarian regimes'.

[28] See P. Whiteley (2007), 'What Makes a Good Citizen? Norms, Participation and Citizenship across the Democratic World', in A. Park, J. Curtice, K. Thomson et al. (eds.), *British Social Attitudes*, 24th Report (London: Sage), pp. 173-197 and P. Whiteley, 'Government Effectiveness and Political Participation in Britain', unpublished paper to the Revitalising Politics conference, 5-6 November 2008, London.

countries with high levels of partisanship and turnout, two areas that have dropped significantly in Britain in recent years.

This year's Audit confirms that support for political parties remains low and that at least half of the population have no desire to get involved in decision-making. Moreover, many of those who do wish to get involved say they do not have enough time to do so. These issues need to be addressed not just for reasons of improved political participation but also because they are an essential ingredient in ensuring that Britain is governed better in the future.

Appendix A: Full list of indicators

Below is the full list of the original 16 indicators of political engagement that are included every three years. The next Audit with all 16 indicators will be published in 2010.

Knowledge and interest
Percentage of people who:
- feel they know about politics*
- are interested in politics*
- know their MP's name
- 'passed' a political knowledge quiz
- feel they know about the role of MPs

Action and participation
Percentage of people who:
- are absolutely certain to vote at an immediate general election*
- have discussed politics
- have contacted their MP or councillor
- are classified as political activists*
- are classified as non-political activists
- paid money to or joined a political party

Efficacy and satisfaction
Percentage of people who:
- believe that getting involved works*
- think that the present system of governing works well*
- trust politicians generally
- are satisfied with Parliament
- are satisfied with their own MP

*= core indicator that is asked in every annual Audit.

Appendix B: Survey details

Survey methodology

The information in this Audit derives from the latest Political Engagement Poll undertaken by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Hansard Society. Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 983 adults in Great Britain aged 18+, face-to-face, in respondents' homes, between 11-17 December 2008. An additional 68 interviews were conducted with BME adults using the same methodology. In total, 1,051 interviews were conducted and the data weighted to the national population profile.

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 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 we have weighted our data to be representative of the profile of Great Britain[29], this reduces the 'effective base size' from 1,051 to 824.[30] All statistical reliability has been calculated using this effective base size.

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

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

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

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
824 interviews	**2**	**3**	**3**
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 824 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 percentage points from the sample result (i.e. between 47% and 53%).

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 common subgroup differences referred to through 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
824 (APE6) and 792 (APE5)	**3**	**5**	**5**
130 (BMEs) and 721 (Whites)	**6**	**9**	**9**
102 (18-24s) and 54 (75+s)	**10**	**15**	**17**
396 (men) and 429 (women)	**4**	**6**	**7**
437 ('Interested' in politics) and 386 ('Not interested' in politics)	**4**	**6**	**7**
189 (ABs) and 244 (DEs)	**6**	**9**	**10**

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 C: Political Engagement Poll topline findings

- 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
- Where applicable, trend data from the Audit of Political Engagement 1, 2, 3 and 4 are included, as well as from Ipsos MORI's State of the Nation research for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust
- 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 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
- For State of the Nation 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
- 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

Q1.	How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?					
	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	**APE6**
	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
10 (Absolutely certain to vote)	51	52	55	55	53	**53**
9	6	6	7	6	4	**5**
8	8	8	7	7	7	**8**
7	5	5	7	6	5	**6**
6	3	3	2	3	3	**2**
5	7	7	6	5	8	**7**
4	2	2	1	1	1	**2**
3	2	3	2	2	2	**2**
2	2	2	1	2	2	**1**
1 (Absolutely certain not to vote)	11	11	10	11	10	**11**
Refused	0	0	0	1	*	*****
Don't know	2	1	1	0	3	**2**

Q2.	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**
	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Voted in the last general election	64	61	70	70	62	**58**
Helped on fund raising drives	21	30	22	18	19	**20**
Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	14	17	15	14	15	**17**
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	14	16	14	10	16	**12**
Urged someone outside my family to vote	14	17	17	13	15	**12**
Made a speech before an organised group	11	17	13	11	12	**8**
Been an officer of an organisation or club	8	13	9	7	9	**7**
Written a letter to an editor	6	7	8	6	7	**6**
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3	3	3	3	3	**3**
Stood for public office	1	1	1	1	1	**1**
None of these	25	23	21	23	26	**32**

Q3.	**You said that you have presented your views to a local councillor or MP. Was this to a local councillor, an MP or both?** *Base: All who have presented views to councillor or MP*			
	APE1	APE4	APE5	**APE6**
	(258)	*(180)*	*(171)*	***(165)***
	%	%	%	**%**
Local councillor	48	41	48	**44**
MP	27	29	29	**28**
Both	24	29	22	**26**
Don't know	2	1	1	**2**

Q4.	**And which of these, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?**					
	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	**APE6**
	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Voted in the last local council election	51	50	55	53	50	**47**
Discussed politics or political news with someone else	38	38	39	41	41	**40**
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	41	45	45	39	37	**37**
Signed a petition	39	44	45	47	40	**36**
Done voluntary work	23	28	22	27	23	**22**
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	19	21	18	21	19	**18**
Expressed my political opinions online	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	**8**
Been to any political meeting	5	6	6	9	6	**4**
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	5	6	6	5	4	**3**
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	5	6	5	5	4	**3**
None	17	16	17	19	20	**20**
Don't know	0	*	*	1	2	**1**

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

Q6.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?					
		A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Nothing at all	Don't know
APE1	%	3	39	45	12	1
APE2	%	4	41	44	10	*
APE3	%	4	35	51	9	*
APE4	%	6	43	40	11	*
APE5	%	4	40	43	12	*
APE6	**%**	**5**	**43**	**42**	**9**	**1**

Q7.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run?								
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither/ nor	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Agree	Disagree
APE1	%	6	31	20	30	10	4	37	40
APE2	%	7	30	20	31	10	2	37	41
APE3	%	6	27	20	31	13	3	33	44
APE4	%	5	28	24	31	8	4	33	39
APE5	%	4	27	23	29	13	3	31	42
APE6	**%**	**3**	**28**	**22**	**32**	**13**	**2**	**31**	**45**

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**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Works extremely well and could not be improved	5	4	3	2	2	1	2	2	**2**
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	43	29	19	34	32	33	31	30	**31**
Could be improved quite a lot	35	40	41	42	45	41	40	38	**40**
Needs a great deal of improvement	14	23	35	18	18	21	21	24	**24**
Don't know	4	5	3	4	3	4	6	6	**3**

Q9.-10.	How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in your local area/the country as a whole?				
	A great deal of influence	Some influence	Not very much influence	No influence at all	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
Local area	1	24	41	32	2
Country as a whole	*	14	44	41	1

Q11.	**You said that you feel you have not very much/no (as appropriate) influence over decision-making. Why do you feel that you do not have very much/ have no (as appropriate) influence over decision-making?** *Base: All who say they do not have very much influence (938)*
	%
Nobody listens to what I have to say	29
Decisions are made without talking to the people	20
The system doesn't allow for me to have an influence	19
Politicians are just out for themselves	17
My opinion isn't important	14
I'm not given the opportunity to have an influence	14
Politicians don't care about people like me	12
I'm not interested in influencing decision-making	8
I don't have the time to influence decision-making	5
The electoral system means that my vote does not matter	5
None of these	2
Other	7
Don't know	3

Q12.-13.	**To what extent, if at all, would you <u>like</u> to be involved in decision-making in your local area/the country as a whole?**				
	Very involved	Fairly involved	Not very involved	Not at all involved	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
Local area	5	43	32	18	2
Country as a whole	5	38	33	22	2

Q14.	**What factors, if any, prevent you from getting more involved in the decision-making process?** *Base: All who say they don't have influence and would like to be involved in decision-making (459)*
	%
I don't have enough time	40
I am disillusioned / cynical / feel politicians are untrustworthy	12
I'm not given the opportunity to get involved	11
There is no point, my opinion won't be listened to anyway	10
I don't know how to get involved	9
My opinion doesn't count	7
I wouldn't be able to make a difference / it is a waste of time	6
I'm not interested in getting involved	6
I don't feel like I am qualified enough to get involved	6
I don't understand the system	5
I don't have enough confidence in my ability	5
Logistical reasons/I am not physically able to get involved	3
I've had a bad past experience with the process/system	3
I don't know enough about the issues to make an informed decision	3
It is not my place to get involved	3
The electoral system means that my vote does not matter	3
Other	6
None of these	3
Don't know	4

Q15.-18.	**How effective, if at all, do you think each of the following activities is in having an impact on how the country is run?**				
	Very effective	Fairly effective	Not very effective	Not effective at all	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
Voting in an election	27	45	19	6	3
Contacting a local councillor, MP, MEP (if applicable AM, MSP)	7	46	28	9	9
Taking an active part in a campaign	4	43	34	10	8
Signing a petition	6	41	37	12	5

Q19.-25.	How important, if at all, do you think each of the following are in order to be a good citizen?					
	Essential	Very important	Fairly important	Fairly unimportant	Not important at all	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Voting in an election	24	40	23	7	5	1
Taking part in government consultations	3	23	36	19	10	8
Expressing my opinion publicly e.g. radio phone-in, letter to the editor, online forums, public meetings/events	3	20	40	24	11	3
Keeping myself informed about current affairs and events	9	40	39	6	3	3
Contacting a politician or official about an issue of concern e.g. by visit, letter, telephone, petition	5	29	41	15	6	4
Giving money to a charity or campaigning organisation	4	30	41	16	6	2
Joining a political party	*	10	24	38	25	3

Q26.	When, if at all, have you ever visited the Houses of Parliament?
	%
2008	2
1-5 years ago	9
6-10 years ago	4
11-20 years ago	5
Over 20 years ago	12
Never	68
Don't know	1

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