

Audit of Political Engagement 5

The 2008 Report

with a special focus on the Constitution

The annual Audit of Political Engagement has become an important contribution to the debate about the public's view of the political process since it was first published in 2004. Each Audit measures the nature and extent of political engagement and reveals where views have changed – and where they remain constant. It offers a yearly snapshot of political knowledge and engagement in Britain.

Audit 5 includes a special section on constitutional issues to discover how much the public know about how our constitutional arrangements operate, which areas they are satisfied with and which they think are ripe for reform. This report is a valuable source of information and debate for all those who are concerned with the health of our democratic system.

The Hansard Society is an independent, non-partisan educational charity, which exists to promote effective parliamentary democracy.

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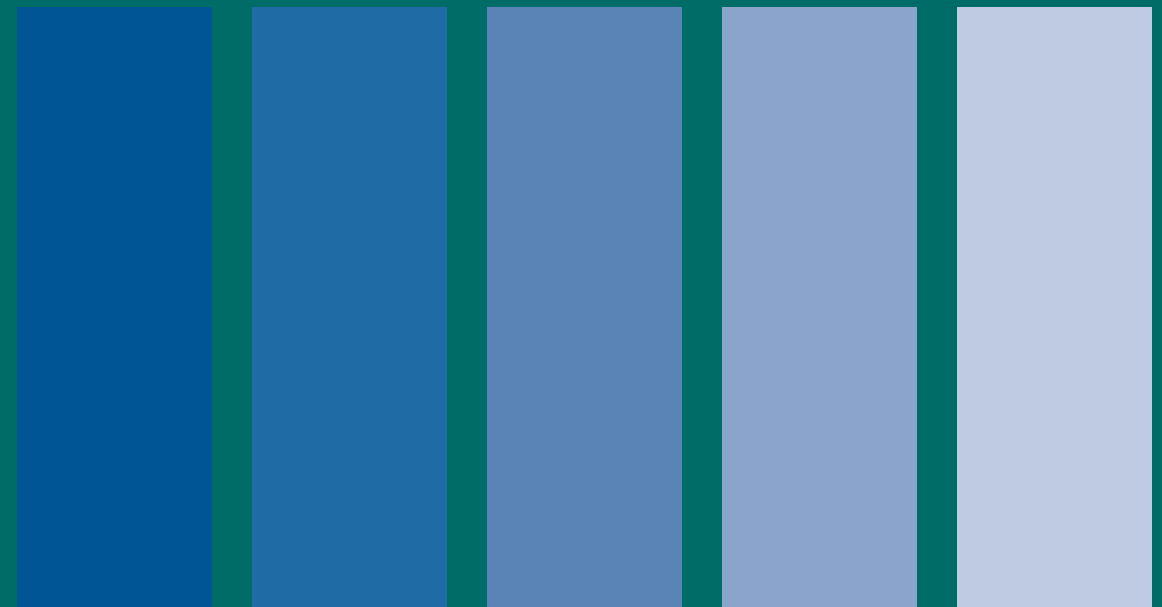


Ministry of
JUSTICE

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Hansard Society

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Acknowledgements

The Hansard Society is very grateful to the House of Commons and the Ministry of Justice for supporting this project. We would also like to thank Ipsos MORI for their invaluable assistance with this report.

Preface

Since its launch in 2004, the annual Audit of Political Engagement has become an important – and widely quoted – contribution to the debate about the public's view of the political process. This is the first of the five Audits 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 survey carried out by Ipsos MORI.

The advantage of an annual survey of this kind is that not only does it provide an independent analysis of public attitudes on key questions of public engagement, but also, by asking the same core questions each year, it shows where views have changed, or, as revealing, remained broadly the same.

A sobering, and consistent, finding from these annual Audits is how few people are politically active – only around one in eight – and how high a proportion of their activities are either one-off, like signing a petition, or do not require much time or effort. Only a tiny handful takes part in political campaigns, or donates money or pays fees to a political party.

These findings are particularly pertinent at a time when the government is bringing forward a programme of parliamentary and constitutional renewal to revive public involvement in the democratic process. That is why this year's Audit includes a special section on constitutional issues to find out more about the public's knowledge, satisfaction with what happens now, and priorities for change. Having a settled view is crucial if reforms are to be successful and lasting.

The Audit reveals a high level of political ignorance about the constitutional arrangements in Britain. Only a quarter, or fewer, of the public say they understand many of the central features of the reform programme such as executive or prerogative powers exercised without Parliament's approval, changes in the composition of the House of Lords, and whether Britain needs a Bill of Rights. The survey suggests there is little public pressure behind votes at 16, electoral reform or fixed-term parliaments.

What the Audit demonstrates above all is how far all of us engaged in discussing democratic renewal – whether elected politicians, the media, or research and educational groups like the Hansard Society – still have to go to increase public understanding of such fundamental features of how we are governed.

Peter Riddell
Chair
Hansard Society

Executive summary

This is the fifth annual Audit of Political Engagement, and the first produced solely by the Hansard Society. It presents the findings from public opinion polling on a range of political engagement indicators, updating trends from Audits published jointly by the Hansard Society and Electoral Commission on a yearly basis since 2004. Additionally, a special theme of this report is the public's knowledge of, and views on, a range of key constitutional issues. What follows is a summary of the Audit's key findings.

1. Core political engagement indicators

A. Knowledge and interest

- **Interest in politics**

Interest in politics has fallen by 3% over the past year, down to 51%. However, the proportion of the public saying that they are very interested in politics has remained stable at 13%. This is lower than the number who report being not at all interested (19%).

- **Perceived knowledge of politics**

More than half of the public claim to know not very much or nothing at all about politics (55%), an increase of 4% since last year. Correspondingly, 44% claim to know either a great deal or a fair amount about politics, down from 49% last year.

B. Action and participation

- **Propensity to vote**

Just over half of the public (53%) claim they would be absolutely certain to vote at an immediate general election. In contrast, 10% are absolutely certain that they would not vote. Seventy-two per cent of people place themselves in the top half of the voting scale (6-10 on the 10 point scale), while almost a quarter of the population (23%) place themselves on the bottom half of the scale (1-5). These figures have not changed substantially since last year's Audit.

- **Discussing politics**

Around two in five members of the public (41%) say that they have discussed politics or political news with friends or family in the last two or three years. This is unchanged since last year, despite the fact that 2007 was relatively eventful in political terms.

- **Contacting local representatives**

Fifteen per cent of the public have presented their views to a local elected representative in the last two or three years, roughly in line with findings from previous Audits. Of these, almost half (48%) have contacted a councillor, three in 10 their MP (29%) and just over one in five (22%) have contacted both.

- **Political membership and donations**

The proportion of people who have donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party in the past two or three years stands at 4%. In contrast, 37% of people have donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation. Only 2% of people have donated to a political party and not to a charity.

- **Political activism**

Around 12% of people are politically active, according to our definition (ie in the last two or three years they have done at least three political activities from a list of eight). Almost half of the public (48%) report not having done any of these activities.

C. Efficacy and satisfaction

- **Efficacy of participation**

Less than 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%), while 42% disagree with this statement. The proportion of people strongly disagreeing with this statement had dropped by 5% in last year's Audit. In 2008, however, the figure has returned to its 2006 level (13%).

- **The present system of governance**

Around a third of the public think that the present system of governing Britain works at least mainly well – 32% say that it either could not be improved or only in small ways. There has been a gradual decline in satisfaction levels across the Audits, and the number of people who believe the current system works well has decreased by 4% since the first Audit. The number saying that the system could be improved either quite a lot or a great deal is roughly the same as 2007, at around three in five (62%).

2. Constitutional issues

A. Knowledge and understanding

- Around half of the public have never heard of or know hardly anything at all about the constitutional arrangements governing Britain. In fact, more people claim to know about the European Union than the constitutional arrangements in Britain.
- Out of 11 key constitutional issues facing the country, there are none which more than half of the public feel they understand.

- The issues which are least understood by the public are: the powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval (only 22% understand this either fairly or very well); proposed reforms of the membership of the House of Lords (26%); and whether Britain needs a new Bill of Rights (28%).
- In contrast, the issues which the public feel they understand best are: whether only English MPs should vote on English issues in the Commons (48%); lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote in a general election from 18 to 16 (48%); and how political parties are funded (39%).

B. Satisfaction

- A clear majority of the public declare themselves satisfied with having a minimum voting age of 18 for a general election (67%).
- For a further two constitutional issues, more of the public are satisfied than dissatisfied: letting the government decide the date for a general election (39% versus 23%) and how votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons (35% versus 21%).
- The constitutional issue that the greatest number of people are dissatisfied with by far is Scottish MPs being able to vote on English issues in the House of Commons (46%).
- More people are satisfied with the unwritten Constitution (19%) than the lack of a Bill of Rights (12%); however, in both cases, over 60% of people are effectively neutral.

C. Priorities for change

- There is no clear public consensus regarding which constitutional issues are most urgently in need of change.
- The most popular priority for constitutional change is how the Human Rights Act works in practice (26%); closely followed by how political parties are funded (24%); Britain's involvement in the European Union (23%); the powers the government can exercise without the approval of Parliament (23%); and Scottish MPs being allowed to vote on English issues in the House of Commons (22%).
- In contrast, only 9% identify Britain's unwritten Constitution and the voting age as the most important priorities for change.

D. Views on Parliament, government and MPs

- An overwhelming majority of people agree that a strong Parliament is good for democracy (75%); that MPs spend too much money on expenses (74%); and that government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individual members of the public (74%).
- However, large numbers also agree that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents (72%) and need sufficient resources to properly represent and inform their constituents (66%); and that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it (60%).
- Taken together, these statements underline some of the key tensions involved in securing public satisfaction with constitutional and political reform.

3. Analysis

- The behavioural measures which record reported levels of participation have, with one exception, remained steady. However, the attitudinal measures – both of the perceived efficacy of political action and of satisfaction with the way that the political system works – show a small deterioration. Taking all the figures into account, this year's are the most negative to date, although the decline has come from a relatively low base of satisfaction.
- In addition, this year's Audit found evidence of a noticeable regional disparity: people in Wales are less likely to be engaged in the political and electoral process on most measures. In contrast, behaviour, knowledge and attitudes among people in Scotland are generally very similar to that exhibited across Britain as a whole.
- It is hard to see any public momentum behind calls for lowering the voting age to 16, electoral reform or fixed-term parliaments. These are not the issues that are worrying even those who feel the system is unsatisfactory, and there is little or no correlation between attitudes to these issues and disconnection or non-participation.
- The public's views of Britain's constitutional arrangements are always likely to be affected by their views of the performance of the government of the day, and these views in turn are likely to depend partly on party political considerations. It is therefore unsurprising that it is Conservatives and Liberal Democrats who tend to express greater dissatisfaction with the way that things operate in Britain at the moment.
- While behavioural factors and measures of interest or knowledge are relatively stable, the efficacy and satisfaction measures may be more liable to fluctuate in line with the public's views of the government in power.

1. About this report

This is the fifth annual Audit of Political Engagement, and the first produced solely by the Hansard Society. It presents the findings from public opinion polling on a range of political engagement indicators, updating trends from Audits published jointly by the Hansard Society and Electoral Commission on a yearly basis since 2004.¹ Additionally, a special theme of this report is the public's knowledge of, and views on, a range of key constitutional issues.

The core indicators

This report provides detailed commentary on six core indicators, which have been chosen as the key measures of political engagement. These indicators are at the heart of the Audit of Political Engagement surveys, enabling us to track responses year on year and note the direction and magnitude of change. The core indicators are considered on an annual basis and are supplemented every three years by a further 10 indicators of political engagement (see Appendix A for the full list).² The six indicators used in this report are:

- **Knowledge and interest:** (1) the percentage of people who feel that they know about politics; and (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; and (4) the percentage who are politically active.
- **Efficacy and satisfaction:** (5) the percentage of people who believe that getting involved works; and (6) the percentage who think that the present system of governing works well.

Constitutional issues

A special theme of this Audit is the public's view of the constitutional arrangements in place for governing Britain. It examines public knowledge, satisfaction and prioritisation on each of the following areas:

- Britain's unwritten Constitution
- The electoral system

¹ Polling is conducted each year in November/December and the report is published the following March. For previous Audits, polling was conducted in December 2003 (Audit 1), December 2004 (Audit 2), December 2005 (Audit 3) and November 2006 (Audit 4). All dates in this report refer to the year in which the Audit report was published, not the year in which polling was undertaken.

² A major Audit was published in 2004 (Audit 1) and 2007 (Audit 4). The next major Audit will be Audit 7 in 2010.

- A Bill of Rights
- Membership of the House of Lords
- Scottish MPs voting on English issues in the House of Commons
- The Human Rights Act
- The powers that government can exercise without Parliament's approval
- The voting age
- Britain's membership of the European Union
- The funding of political parties
- Fixed-term elections

This section also examines the public's opinion on a series of statements relating to Parliament, government and MPs.

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 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewing took place face-to-face, in respondents' homes, between 29 November and 7 December 2007. The data have been weighted to the national population profile.

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

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 sum 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 per cent but greater than zero.

All reported results in previous Audits were based on UK data, whereas figures from this Audit are based on Great Britain data and do not include Northern Ireland. We have amended the figures from previous Audits in this report to be based on Great Britain only. This Audit includes a more detailed breakdown for the older age groups. Whereas previous Audits only included a 55+ category, this report uses the following age groups: 55-64; 65-74; and 75+.

In addition, Scotland and Wales were over-represented in this sample to allow for more robust analysis of the nations, and additional interviews were conducted in these two areas. In the results set out in this report, these groups were 'down-weighted' to their representative level in Great Britain.

Next steps and future Audits

Following the publication of this report, the full survey dataset will be available on the Hansard Society website, where all previous Audits can also be found, as well as on Ipsos MORI's website. It will also be logged at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) archive at the University of Essex, making it available for others to use. As part of our research programme, the Hansard Society may undertake further projects on political engagement and constitutional issues, which will be published on our website.

Forthcoming annual Audits will each focus on a special theme chosen for detailed questioning and analysis and will continue to be complemented by the core political engagement indicators. The next major Audit will be published in 2010 with all 16 political engagement indicators (see Appendix A).

2. The political context

The opinions and behaviour measured in the Audit of Political Engagement surveys must be viewed in the light of their political context. The second half of 2007 was fairly eventful in political terms. A new prime minister entered No 10 Downing Street for the first time in over a decade; the possibility of a snap general election in the autumn gathered considerable media coverage; and the leader of the Liberal Democrats resigned, with campaigning to become his successor taking place at the same time as fieldwork for the Audit survey.

Following elections in the devolved administrations, Scotland and Northern Ireland acquired new First Ministers and a coalition replaced a minority administration in the Welsh Assembly. The election of a Scottish Nationalist minority administration encouraged a renewed debate on constitutional arrangements put in place post-devolution, notably the so-called 'West Lothian Question' (Scottish MPs voting on English issues).

This debate on the arrangements for governing Britain soon widened, as Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that reform of constitutional arrangements would be one of the priorities for his new government. Subsequently, the Ministry of Justice published a green paper on constitutional reform which set out a wide range of options, a number of which are raised in Chapter 4 of this report on public attitudes to constitutional issues.³

A few weeks before fieldwork was undertaken for this Audit, the news agenda was dominated by a series of events in which the competence of the government was questioned by the opposition – including the government's underwriting of the Northern Rock Bank and the loss by a government department of data containing private details of almost half of the UK population.

At the start of the very week in which fieldwork began, the Labour Party's general secretary resigned after admitting an arrangement by which a major donor to the party had concealed his identity. This led to daily headlines on party funding, followed by a police investigation.

Taken together, these developments might be expected, at the very least, to prompt increased public attention towards politics and the workings of the political system.

³ See *The Governance of Britain* (July 2007), Cm 7170.

3. Core indicators

The Audit's six core indicators are divided into three key themes relating to political engagement: knowledge and interest; action and participation; and efficacy and satisfaction.

It is possible to analyse the relationship between these measures, in particular the way in which knowledge, attitudes and behaviour interact with each other, as well as the evident links between levels of engagement and the demographic characteristics of the public.

A. Knowledge and interest

The first of the three themes is the general public's knowledge of, and interest in, politics, which is measured by two key questions – the number saying they are interested in politics and the number saying they know at least a fair amount about it. Both of these measures have fallen slightly on the 2007 Audit, and are now more in line with the findings of the first Audit in 2004.

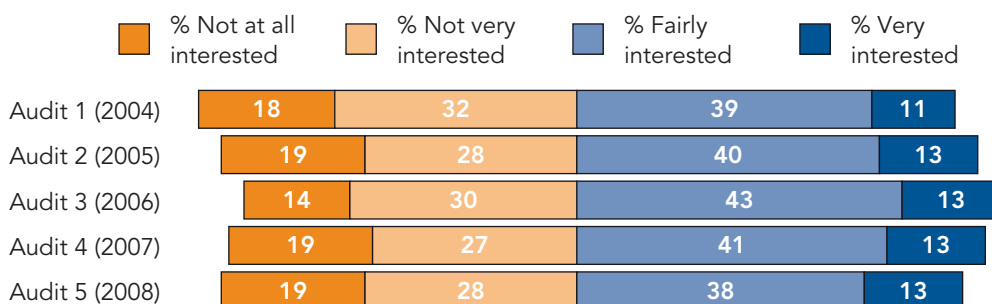
Interest in politics

Interest in politics has fallen by 3% over the past year, down to 51% (Figure 1). However, the proportion of the public saying that they are very interested in politics has remained stable at 13%. This is lower than the number who report being not at all interested (19%).

Interest in politics remains broadly consistent with that recorded by past Audits. The 3% fall brings this year's indicator in line with the findings of the first Audit, and the proportion saying that they are very interested has remained stable for the last four Audits.

Figure 1: Interest in politics

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

In line with previous Audits, men are significantly more likely than women to say they are very or fairly interested in politics (58% against 45%).⁴ The highest level of recorded interest is among the 65-74 age group (69%). Interest in politics increases steadily among the age categories, but then dips within the 75+ age group. A drop in interest among younger people over the last year has been partially hidden by a rise in interest among the older age categories. Only a third of people aged 18-24 (33%) say they are interested in politics, a sharp decline from 41% last year. However, 63% of people aged 55+ say they have an interest in politics, up from 59%.

Groups that are disproportionately less interested in politics are those from lower social grades⁵ (28% of DEs compared with 68% of ABs); black and minority ethnic respondents (BMEs – 27% of this group say that they are interested versus 53% of white respondents); and people in Wales (27% compared to 51% in Great Britain as a whole).

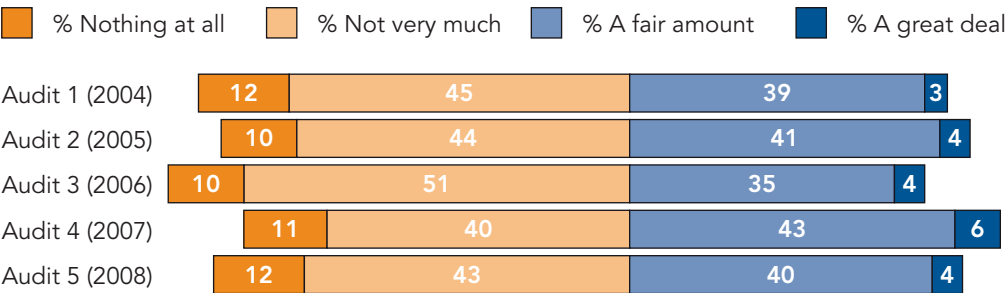
Readers of quality newspapers are overwhelmingly more interested in politics than others, with 79% saying they are interested compared to 50% of readers of tabloid newspapers. Among those who feel they are knowledgeable about the constitutional arrangements governing Britain, almost four in five also say they are interested in politics (79%), compared with 32% of those who feel uninformed about constitutional arrangements.

Perceived knowledge of politics

More than half of the public claim to know not very much or nothing at all about politics (55%), an increase of 4% since 2007 (Figure 2). Correspondingly, 44% claim to know either a great deal or a fair amount about politics, down from 49% last year.

Figure 2: Perceived knowledge of politics

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



Base:1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

⁴ While the topline findings are available in Appendix C of this report, a detailed demographic breakdown of all of the figures is available from the Hansard Society website (www.hansardsociety.org.uk) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) archive at the University of Essex.

⁵ See Appendix B for a guide to social grades.

Reported knowledge of politics has also fallen in this year's Audit, with 44% of the public saying that they know either a fair amount or a great deal about politics, down from 49% in 2007. However, this year's findings are more in line with Audits published in 2004 and 2005 when 42% and 45% respectively, claimed to know at least a fair amount about politics.

Higher proportions of men than women claim to know about politics (52% versus 37% of women), which is in line with previous Audits. Only one in 50 women (2%) report that they know a great deal about politics compared to 6% of men, while almost one in five women say they know nothing at all about politics (18% compared to 7% of men). However, whereas the proportion of women who claim to know either a great deal or a fair amount about politics has remained steady over the past year (up 1%), there has been a significant drop in reported knowledge among men (down 10%). The gap between the sexes has narrowed by 11% over the last 12 months and, consequently, a dip of 5% in overall reported knowledge is masking a more significant drop among men.

Those from higher social grades report considerably more knowledge than lower social grades (63% of ABs know a great deal or fair amount compared with 20% of DEs). Older age groups also claim to be more informed, with over half of the 55+ age group saying that they know about politics, including 62% of those aged 65-74. This compares with just 16% of the 18-24 age group, of which 29% claim to know nothing at all about politics. In addition, only 29% of people in Wales say they know at least a fair amount about politics compared to the average of 44% across Great Britain.

There is a strong correlation between interest and knowledge. Only 13% of people who are not interested in politics say they know a lot about the subject. Readers of quality newspapers are also more likely to report higher levels of knowledge than readers of tabloid newspapers (78% versus 44%). People who claim to know a lot about politics are slightly more likely to be satisfied with current constitutional arrangements, and to believe that the present system of governing works well, than people who do not know much about politics.

B. Action and participation

The Audit tracks five measures of political action and participation, based on respondents' reporting of their own political behaviour. These include propensity to vote, discussing politics, contacting elected representatives, political membership and donations and political activism.

Propensity to vote

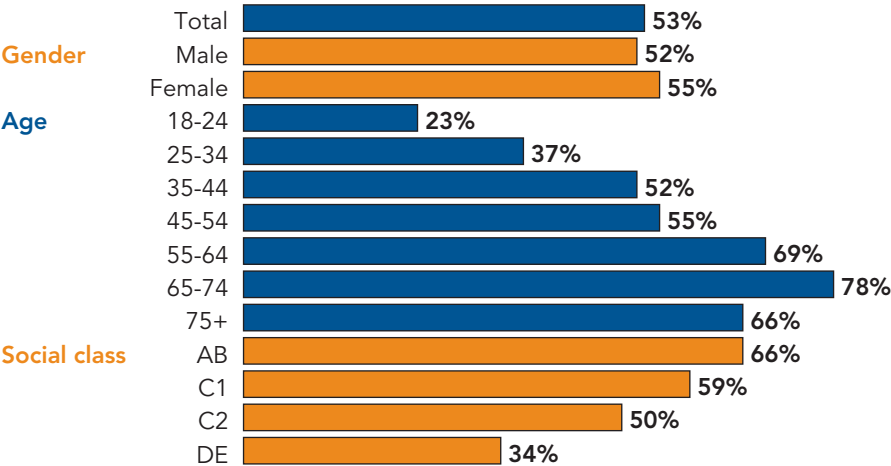
Just over half of the public (53%) claim they would be absolutely certain to vote at an immediate general election (Figure 3). In contrast, 10% are absolutely certain that they would not vote. Seventy-two per cent of people place themselves in the top half of the voting scale (6-10 on the 10 point scale), while almost a quarter of the population (23%) place themselves on the bottom half of the scale (1-5). These figures have not changed substantially since last year's Audit.

As in previous Audits, the propensity to vote increases sharply with age, although it begins to decrease again with those aged 75+. Less than a quarter of 18-24 year olds (23%) are absolutely certain to vote, compared with almost eight in 10 of the 65-74 age group (78%). Among the social grades, two in three ABs (66%) say they are certain to vote, compared with only one in three DEs (34%). Married or cohabiting couples are also more likely to be certain to vote than single people (58% versus 34%).

There are also some noticeable regional disparities. While people in Scotland are more likely to claim they will be certain to vote at the next general election (65% in Scotland compared to 53% overall), the reverse is true for Wales. Only 41% of people in Wales say they will be certain to vote.

Figure 3: Propensity to vote

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



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

Discussing politics

Around two in five members of the public (41%) say that they have discussed politics or political news with friends or family in the last two or three years. This is unchanged since last year's Audit, despite the fact that 2007 was relatively eventful in political terms.

The findings of last year's Audit suggested that politics suffers from a definitional problem in this regard, as only 6% of the British population had in fact not discussed any of the 17 political issues with which they were prompted. The results of this question reflect a similar demographic pattern to the other measures of political engagement – greater engagement with politics among older people (though again dropping off among those aged 75+, to a level similar to that of the youngest adults), with fewer members of lower social grades participating. In addition, 66% of graduates but only 21% of those with no qualifications say they have discussed politics with someone else.

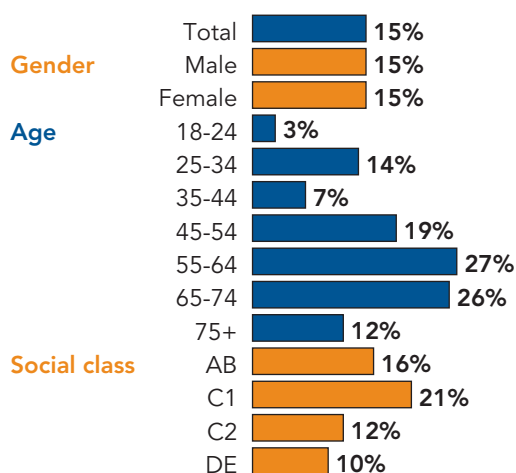
Contacting local representatives

Fifteen per cent of the public have presented their views to a local elected representative in the last two or three years, roughly in line with findings from previous Audits (Figure 4). Of these, almost half (48%) have contacted a councillor, three in 10 their MP (29%) and just over one in five (22%) have contacted both.

As with other measures of engagement, those from higher social grades, with better educational qualifications, who read a quality rather than a tabloid newspaper, and those from white rather than ethnic minority groups, are disproportionately likely to have presented their views to a local councillor or MP. This indicates that the feedback that politicians receive from their constituents does not come from a fully representative section of the population.

Figure 4: Contacting elected representatives

Q Have you presented your views to a local councillor or MP in the last two or three years?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

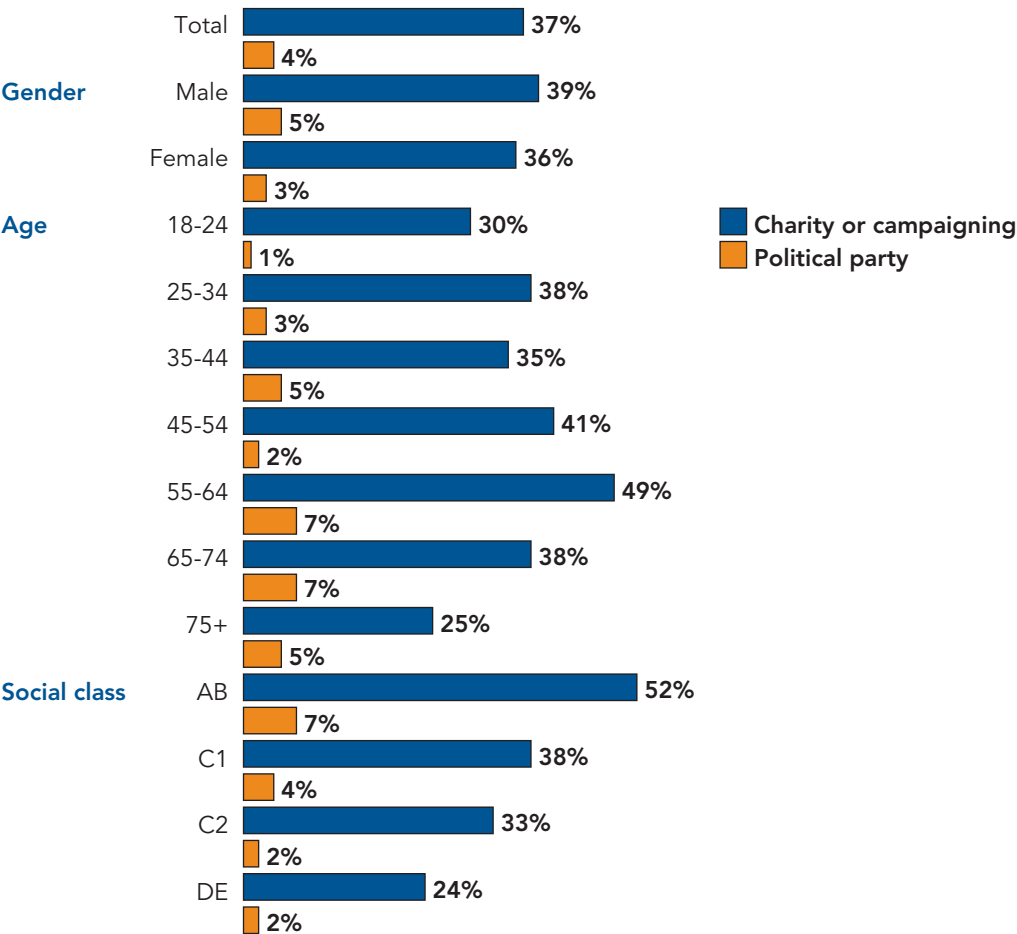
Political membership and donations

The proportion of people who have donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party in the past two or three years stands at 4% (Figure 5). In contrast, 37% of people have donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation, down 8% since 2006. Only 2% of people have donated to a political party and not to a charity.

Figure 5: Political membership and donations

Q In the last two or three years, have you donated money or paid a membership fee to:

- a charity or campaigning organisation?
- a political party?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

The demographic pattern for this measure conforms to the observed pattern for political engagement – those who are older (though under 75) and from higher social grades are more likely to donate to any kind of organisation.

Political activism

Around 12% of people are politically active, according to our definition (ie in the last two or three years they have done at least three political activities from a list of eight – Figure 6). Almost half of the public (48%) report not having done any of these activities.

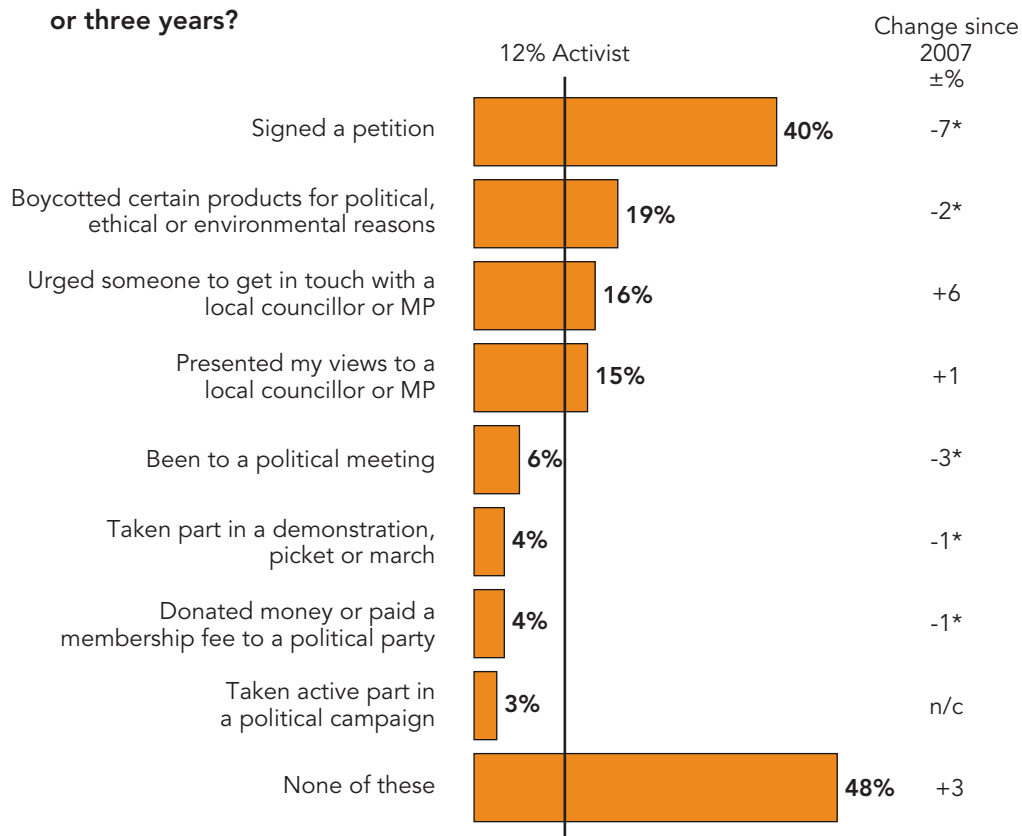
Political activists are defined as those who have done three or more actions from a list of eight political activities (Figure 6). This year, the activity 'donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party' was substituted for 'taken part in a strike'. As such, comparisons with levels of political activism in previous Audits should be seen as indicative only.

Overall, the proportion of the British public defined as political activists is 12%, although there has been some shift in the individual measures. The most significant differences relate to the numbers who have urged someone else to get in touch with a local councillor or MP (up 6%) and those who have signed a petition (down 7%).

The drop in the latter brings it in line with the first Audit. This may reflect the inclusion of an explicit online activity measure in this year's Audit. A proportion of people may not have included signing an online petition in the 'signed a petition' category, and instead included it in 'expressed my political opinions online'. Ten per cent of the public say they expressed their political opinions online in the last few years (see Appendix C, Q4).

Figure 6: Political activism

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



* The list of activities has changed since 2007 so therefore comparisons for these should be seen as indicative only

Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

As Figure 6 reveals, the three most widespread activities are those which ostensibly require the least amount of effort: signing a petition (40%), boycotting certain products (19%) and urging someone to get in touch with an elected representative (16%). Far fewer people participate in more time-consuming political activities such as attending a meeting or demonstration (6% and 4% respectively) or taking an active part in a campaign (3%).

Men and women are roughly equally likely to be activists (11% and 13%, respectively). As with other measures, the likelihood of being a political activist tends to increase with age, with one in 20 18-24 year olds (4%) defined as activists, compared to 17% of 45-54 year olds and an average of 13% among people aged 55+ (though the figure falls to just 3% when looking specifically at the 75+ age group). People in higher social grades are more likely to be political activists, with 21% of ABs taking part in three or more political activities, compared with 5% of DEs.

Other groups far less likely to be political activists are BMEs (only 1% of BMEs are classified as political activists compared to 13% of white respondents); people without formal qualifications (3% compared to 26% of those with postgraduate degrees); single people (6% versus 15% of married/cohabiting people and 17% of divorced/separated people); and readers of tabloid newspapers (8% compared to 28% of quality newspaper readers).

Surprisingly, relatively few of the people classified in our survey as political activists report knowing a great deal about politics – only one in 10. Almost a third of the activists say they know not very much about politics (29%) or nothing at all (2%).

C. Efficacy and satisfaction

The final group of engagement indicators look at the perceived effectiveness of the political system and public satisfaction with how the system works. Neither indicator has moved to a statistically significant degree since 2007, but this year's survey confirms a downward trend that was already present, revealing some deterioration in engagement since 2004.

Efficacy of participation

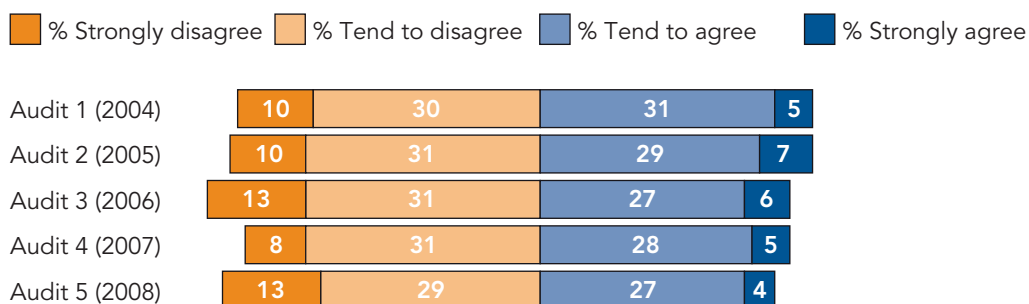
Less than a third of the public believe that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run' (31%), while 42% disagree with this statement (Figure 7). The proportion of people strongly disagreeing with this statement had dropped by 5% in last year's Audit. This year, however, the figure has returned to its 2006 level (13%).

There has been a gradual downward trend in the proportion of the public who believe that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run' since the Audit series began (from 36% to 31%). Moreover, only 4% of the public strongly agree with this statement. However, while the public is less confident of the efficacy of political involvement than four years ago, there has not been a correspondingly large increase in the proportion professing a feeling of powerlessness.

Figure 7: Perceived political efficacy

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

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



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

Looking at results by gender and age, it is interesting to note that perceptions are largely similar. For example, around three in 10 of all age bands up to the age of 65 agree that they can make a difference, including 31% of those aged 18-24, a group who by most other measures are the most disengaged from politics.

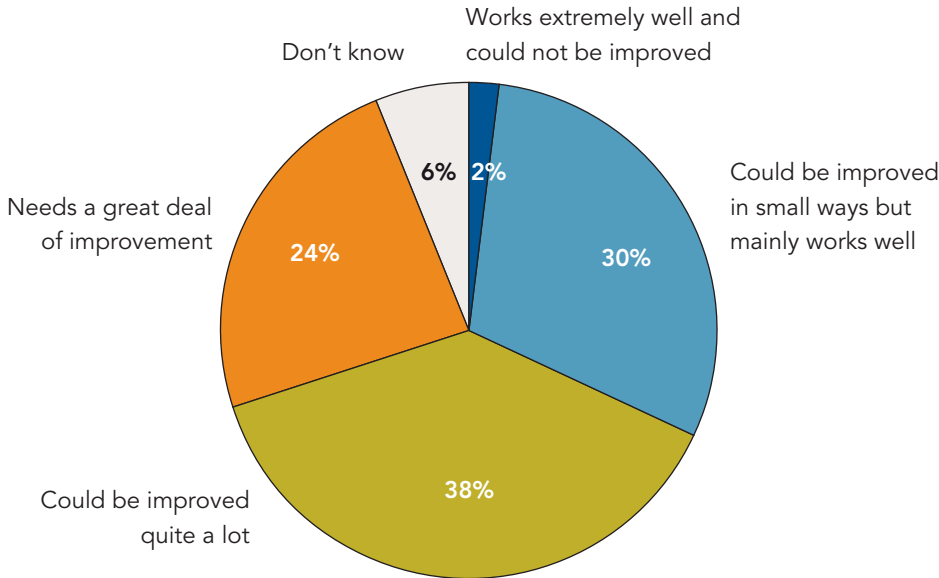
People who are more likely to feel they can make a difference include those who claim to understand the country's constitutional arrangements (48%), readers of quality newspapers (46%), political activists (44%) and Labour supporters (39%). Equal numbers of those supporting opposition parties (45%) disagree that they can really change the way the country is run, while only 32% of Labour supporters do not believe that they can make a difference. Interestingly, even fewer BMEs (28%) believe that they cannot change the way the UK is run, although the number believing they can change things matches the national average (31%).

The present system of governance

Around a third of the public think that the present system of governing Britain works at least mainly well – 32% say that it either could not be improved or only in small ways (Figure 8). There has been a gradual decline in satisfaction across the Audits, and the number of people who believe the current system works well has decreased by 4% since 2004. The number saying that the system could be improved either quite a lot or a great deal is roughly the same as 2007, at around three in five (62%).

Figure 8: Present system of governing

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



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

Those from higher social grades are significantly more likely to think the current system of governance works well – 36% of ABs compared to 25% of DEs – with another noticeable margin between those reading quality and tabloid newspapers (42% versus 26%) and political activists (42% compared to 31% of non-activists) and those who are satisfied with current constitutional arrangements (46% compared to 20% of those who are dissatisfied). As with efficacy, there is also a divide between Conservative and Labour supporters: a third of Conservative voters (33%) think the present system of governing Britain works well compared with over two in five Labour voters (43%).

The number choosing the two more positive of the four possible responses (32%) has dropped 4% since 2004, but the movement has been a gradual one, with no single year-on-year change being statistically significant. A more negative sign, however, is the increase in the number saying that the system needs a great deal of improvement – from 18% in 2004 and 2005 to 24% in 2008.

4. Constitutional issues

From this year onwards, each Audit will focus on an additional politics-related theme over and above the core political engagement indicators. In this report, public attitudes to key constitutional issues are analysed. We have measured knowledge and understanding, satisfaction and priorities for change *vis-à-vis* 11 current issues related to the Constitution:

- Britain's unwritten Constitution
- How votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons
- Whether Britain needs a new Bill of Rights
- Proposed reforms of the membership of the House of Lords
- Scottish MPs voting on English issues in the House of Commons
- How the Human Rights Act works in practice
- The powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval
- Lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote in a UK general election from 18 to 16
- The effect of Britain's membership of the European Union
- How political parties are funded
- How the date of a general election is chosen

A. Knowledge and understanding

Around half of the public have never heard of, or know hardly anything at all about, the constitutional arrangements governing Britain. In fact, more people claim to know about the European Union than the British Constitution (Figure 9). Out of 11 key constitutional issues facing the country, there are none which more than half of the public understands well. As Figure 10 illustrates, the issues which are least understood by the public are: the powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval (22% understand this either fairly or very well); proposed reforms of the membership of the House of Lords (26%); and whether Britain needs a new Bill of Rights (28%). In contrast, the issues which the public feel they understand best are: whether only English MPs should vote on English issues in the Commons (48%); lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote in a general election from 18 to 16 (48%); and how political parties are funded (39%).

The constitutional arrangements governing Britain

One in five people (20%) feel they know a fair amount or more about the constitutional arrangements governing Britain – a figure that has remained fairly stable since the question was asked in 1995 (21%) and 1991 (24%) in the State of the Nation surveys.⁶

As with reported knowledge of politics, men are more likely to say they know at least a fair amount about British constitutional arrangements (24% compared to 16% of women), along with older people and those from higher social grades. For example, only 7% of those aged 18-24 and those in social grades DE know a great deal or a fair amount about Britain’s constitutional arrangements. This compares with 28% of those aged 45-54 and 35% of ABs.

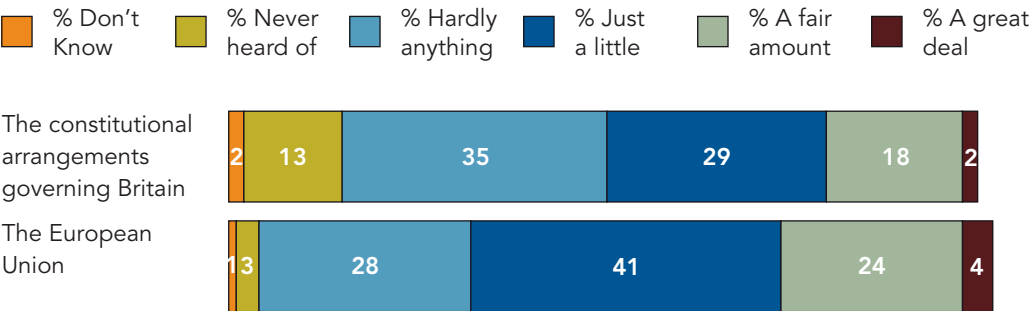
The European Union

In contrast to the British Constitution, a higher number of people report knowing a great deal or a fair amount about the European Union (28%) and perceived knowledge of the EU has actually risen 9% since 1995.

Knowledge of the EU has a wider gender margin. Thirty-five per cent of men report knowing a great deal or a fair amount about the EU, compared with 20% of women. There are also significant social grade divides, with only 13% of grades DE reporting that they know a great deal or a fair amount about the EU, compared with 45% of social grades AB.

Figure 9: Knowledge of British Constitution and the EU

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



Base:1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

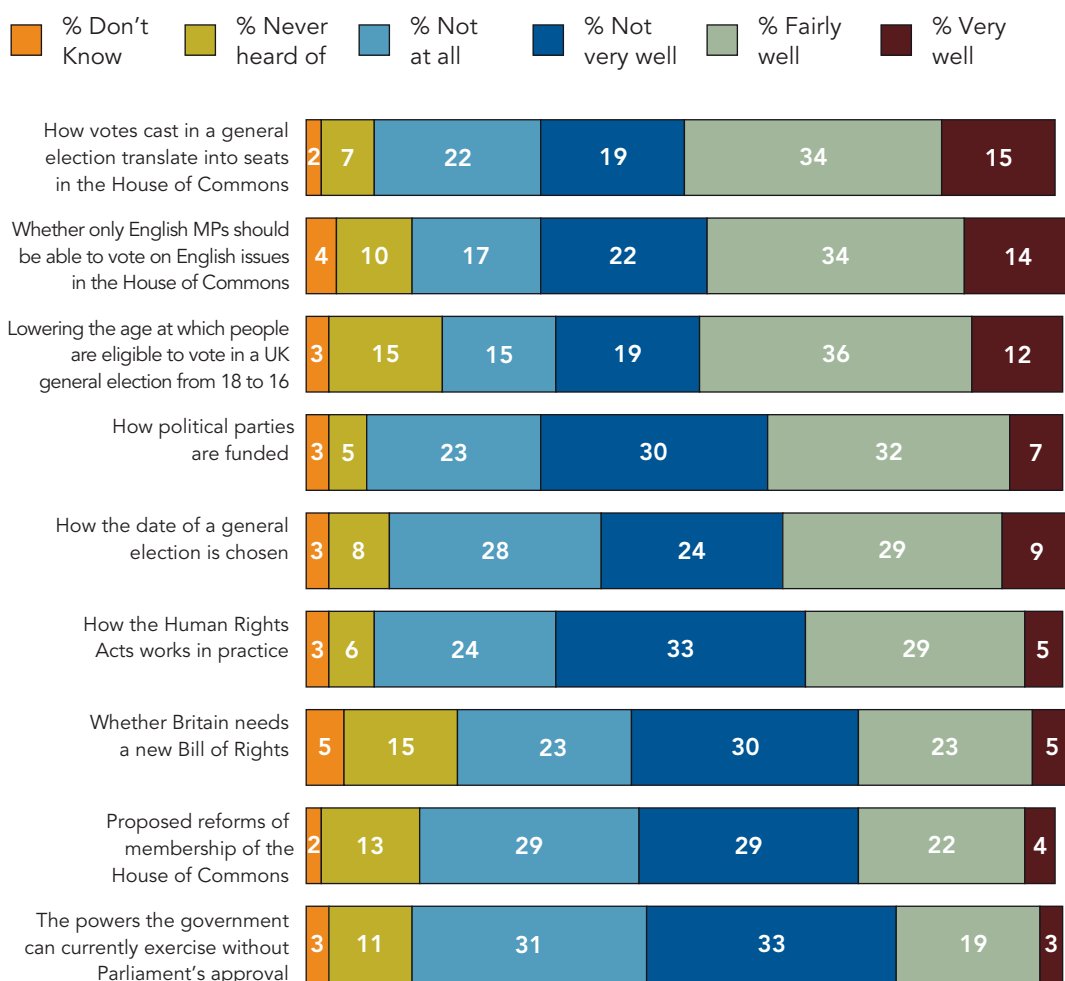
⁶ The State of the Nation series of opinion polls measure public attitudes to democracy and rights in Britain and have been published since 1991 by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd. In the State of the Nation polls, respondents were asked if they knew about ‘the British Constitution’ rather than ‘the constitutional arrangements governing Britain’.

Key constitutional issues

Understanding of each of the 11 constitutional issues – and the strength of that understanding – varies significantly (Figure 10). Three areas stand out as being better understood than the others: how votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons (49% of people say they understand this issue at least fairly well); whether only English MPs should vote on English issues in the House of Commons (48%); and lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote in a UK general election from 18 to 16 (48%). In fact, the proportion of people who claim to understand these three issues is greater than those who say they feel knowledgeable about politics.

Figure 10: Understanding key constitutional issues

Q How well, if at all, do you feel you understand each of the following issues?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

As would be expected, there is a substantial correlation between understanding of these constitutional issues and other measures of political engagement. Those who feel they understand the issues are more likely to feel knowledgeable about politics, more likely to be interested in politics and more likely to be certain to vote. Nevertheless, interest in the various issues is widely spread: only one in five (22%) feel they do not understand any of the issues well and another 12% understood only one.

Clear gender differences are apparent for each of the constitutional issues, with men consistently reporting greater levels of knowledge than women. The most significant margins emerge in relation to how the date of a general election is chosen (only 29% of women understand this issue compared to 47% of men); knowledge of the subject of only English MPs voting on English issues (40% versus 55%); and knowledge of the European Union (20% of women compared to 35% of men). In contrast, the gender margins narrow for issues such as how the Human Rights Act works in practice and the powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval.

Social grade margins are much wider than gender margins. Knowledge of the voting system for general elections sees the biggest gulf between social grades AB and DE: while 71% of ABs say they understand how votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the Commons: only 28% of DEs feel the same. Other significant social grade differences are apparent in relation to how the date of a general election is chosen (58% compared to 19%) and whether only English MPs should vote on English issues in the House of Commons (67% compared to 30%). The broadest differences mirror the issues that are best understood by the public. It appears, therefore, that increased knowledge among the higher social grades has given a boost to overall understanding. Yet these three issues are also the ones in which DEs report their highest levels of knowledge.

Age margins are also apparent. For almost every issue, including lowering the voting age, the age group who feel least informed is the 18-24 group. In contrast, the age group who feel most knowledgeable about an issue is more prone to fluctuation. People aged 45-54 and 65-74 are the most knowledgeable, topping the net rating for five issues each. The 75+ age group claims to be the most knowledgeable about the powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval.

There are also national differences: people in Wales are less likely to feel they understand most of the constitutional debates (Figure 11). On the other hand, understanding of constitutional issues is slightly higher in Scotland than in the rest of Great Britain on all but two of the 11 issues (concerning the electoral system in the Commons and the European Union). In contrast, people in England are slightly more likely to say they understand the Commons electoral system than people in Scotland and Wales.

Figure 11: Knowledge/understanding of constitutional issues

	Great Britain Know very/ fairly well* %	England Know very/ fairly well* %	Scotland Know very/ fairly well* %	Wales Know very/ fairly well* %
How votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons	49	51	47	43
Whether only English MPs should vote on English issues in the House of Commons	48	50	55	24
Lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote in a UK general election from 18 to 16	48	50	50	33
How political parties are funded	39	39	43	39
How the date of a general election is chosen	38	37	43	31
How the Human Rights Act works in practice	34	35	37	17
The European Union	28	28	26	17
Whether Britain needs a new Bill of Rights	28	29	31	12
Proposed reforms of the membership of the House of Lords	26	27	29	17
The powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval	22	24	27	10
The constitutional arrangements governing Britain	20	19	22	16

* Know a great deal/a fair amount about 'the constitutional arrangements governing Britain' and 'the European Union'

Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November - 7 December 2007. Source: Ipsos MORI

B. Satisfaction

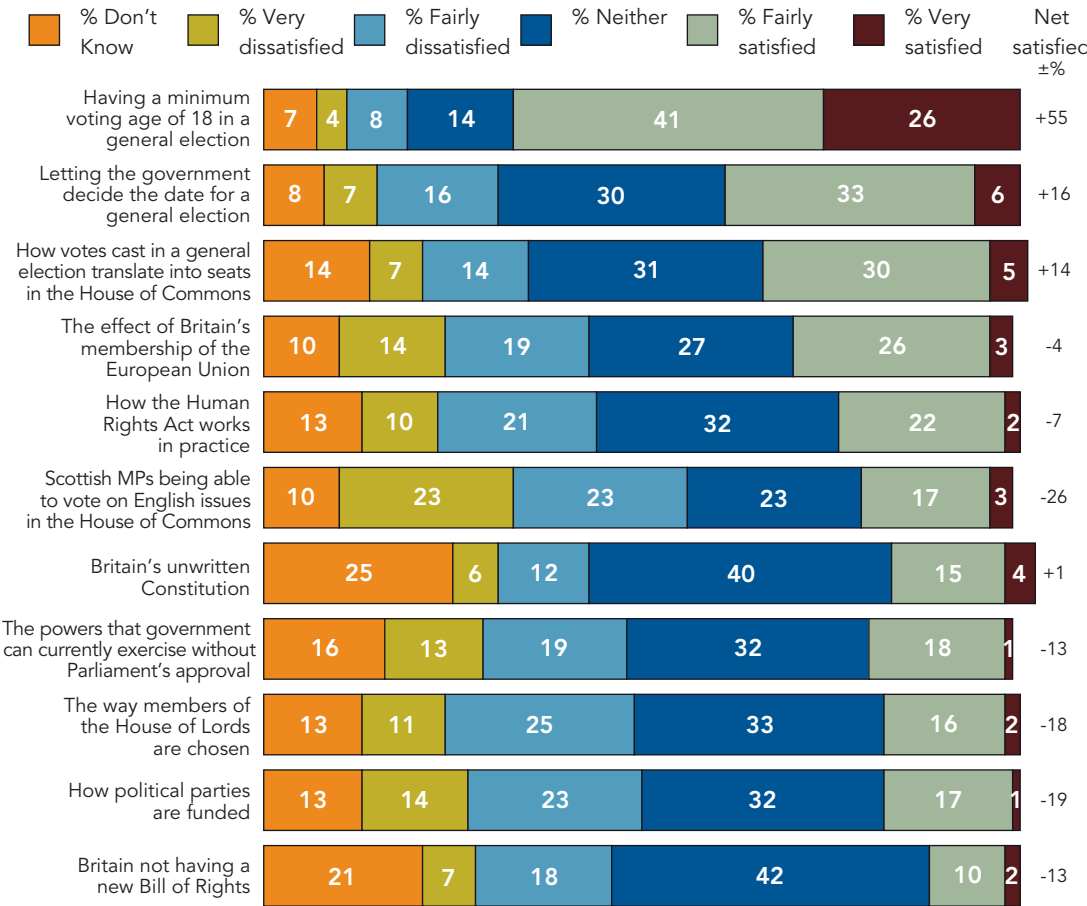
As Figure 12 reveals, a clear majority of the public declare themselves satisfied with having a minimum voting age of 18 for a general election (67%). For a further two constitutional issues, more of the public are satisfied than dissatisfied: letting the government decide the date for a general election (39% versus 23%) and how votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons (35% versus 21%). The constitutional issue that the greatest number of people are dissatisfied with by far is Scottish MPs being able to vote on English issues in the Commons (46%). More people are satisfied with the unwritten Constitution (19%) than the lack of Bill of Rights (12%), however, in both cases over 60% of people are effectively neutral.

Across the constitutional issues, satisfaction is fairly muted. On seven of the 11 issues covered, the proportion of satisfied members of the public is less than a quarter. For nine of the issues, only 5% or less are very satisfied. However, two-thirds of the public are satisfied to retain the voting age at 18, with only one in eight taking the contrary view; and on the other two election-related items (the translation of votes into seats and the government’s power to decide the general election date), the contented group also outnumber the discontented.

Even those who feel the political system as a whole needs improvement (see Figure 8) are not particularly exercised by these issues. Those who say the present system needs improvement are more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied with how votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the Commons (33% compared to 22%), the minimum voting age (65% to 13%) and letting the government decide the date of a general election (34% to 13%).

Figure 12: Satisfaction with constitutional issues

Q Thinking generally, to what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following in Britain at the moment?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

On all but two of the issues, a majority of the public takes sufficient interest to declare themselves either satisfied or dissatisfied with the status quo. The two exceptions concern the unwritten Constitution and a new Bill of Rights, where 65% and 63% respectively of people are effectively neutral.

The clearest margin of dissatisfaction is on the Scottish votes issue (46% dissatisfied, 20% satisfied), and this is the only one on which the majority of those who feel a general need for reform express dissatisfaction (51%, with only 17% satisfied). Dissatisfaction is also apparent, although not as pronounced, in relation to the current systems of party funding (37%); how members of the House of Lords are chosen (36%); the effect of Britain's membership of the EU (33%); the government's powers to act without Parliament's approval (32%); and how the Human Rights Act works in practice (31%).

Britain's membership of the EU and the Human Rights Act are both issues that have particularly exercised parts of the press, and in both cases the balance of opinion is slightly more towards satisfied among quality newspaper readers, and slightly more towards dissatisfied among readers of tabloid newspapers. Both these issues also score highly on the measure of two or three most urgent issues for reform, although in this case as much among quality newspaper as tabloid readers.

Men are marginally more likely to express an opinion either way; consequently, they tend to be both more satisfied and more dissatisfied. Perhaps as a consequence of this, the net difference between men and women's overall satisfaction is narrower than the variances apparent for levels of knowledge. Indeed, for many of the issues, net satisfaction is either the same across the sexes or there is only a negligible difference.

Unlike knowledge levels, a consistent response pattern based on age or social grade is less apparent. Like men, social grades AB are more likely to express both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In relation to age, net satisfaction differs from issue to issue. For example, older age groups (65-74) are the least satisfied on some issues (Britain's unwritten Constitution, Scottish MPs being able to vote on English issues in the Commons, how the Human Rights Act works in practice and the effect of Britain's membership of the EU) and the most satisfied on others (minimum voting age of 18, letting government decide the date for a general election). Over four-fifths of 65-74 year olds are satisfied with a minimum voting age of 18 (81%), compared to 54% of 18-24 year olds. However, a mere 12% of 18-24 year olds expressed dissatisfaction with the minimum voting age.

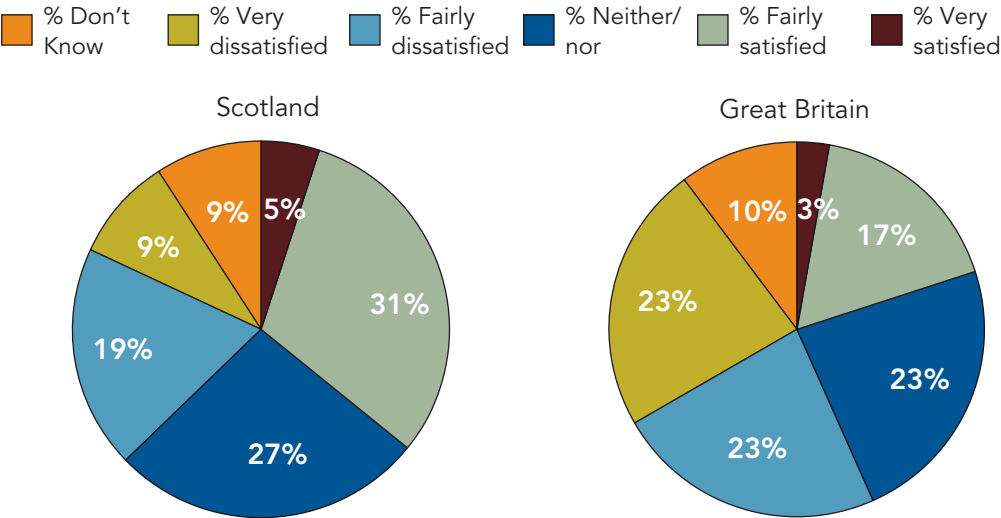
Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are more likely to express dissatisfaction than Labour supporters across the board. In particular, there is a very substantial difference in satisfaction levels *vis-à-vis* the subject of Scottish MPs voting on English issues in the Commons: 61% of Conservatives declare themselves dissatisfied, compared to 38% of Labour voters and 44% of supporters of other parties. When it comes to the public's view of the powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval, Conservatives are dissatisfied with these powers by a ratio of two-to-one (41% to 19%) and Liberal Democrats by a slightly wider margin (46% to 18%), while Labour supporters split evenly (25% satisfied, 23% dissatisfied).

Satisfaction and knowledge

There is a clear link between satisfaction and knowledge; the more people understand a particular issue, the more satisfied they are likely to be. The exception to this rule, however, is the issue of Scottish MPs voting on English issues; although comparatively well understood by the public, dissatisfaction is also relatively high. People in Scotland are more likely to understand this issue (55% compared to 48% across Britain) and be satisfied with the status quo (36% compared to 20%). A November 2007 YouGov survey⁷ found that a majority of Scots (65%) said that it is ‘generally unfair’ that Scottish MPs can vote on English issues; however our survey found that only 28% of Scots are fairly or very dissatisfied with the current arrangements, compared to 46% across Great Britain as a whole (Figure 13). Perceived fairness, then, does not seem to be closely correlated with satisfaction.

Figure 13: Scottish MPs voting on English issues

Q To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with Scottish MPs being able to vote on English issues in the House of Commons?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. 182 Scottish adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

In general, however, knowledge and attitudes among people in Scotland is very similar to that exhibited across Great Britain as a whole. While differences between Wales and the rest of Great Britain are also fairly modest, some variations are apparent.

While the Welsh are no more dissatisfied over most constitutional issues than the rest of the country, they tend to be less satisfied or to have no opinion on constitutional issues. They are particularly less likely to be satisfied with the European Union (16% of those in Wales are satisfied compared to 29% overall) and the workings of the Human Rights Act (15% versus 24%). Fewer people in Wales are dissatisfied with Britain not having a new Bill of Rights (16% compared to 25% across Britain). However, this correlates with lower reporting of awareness of this issue in Wales.

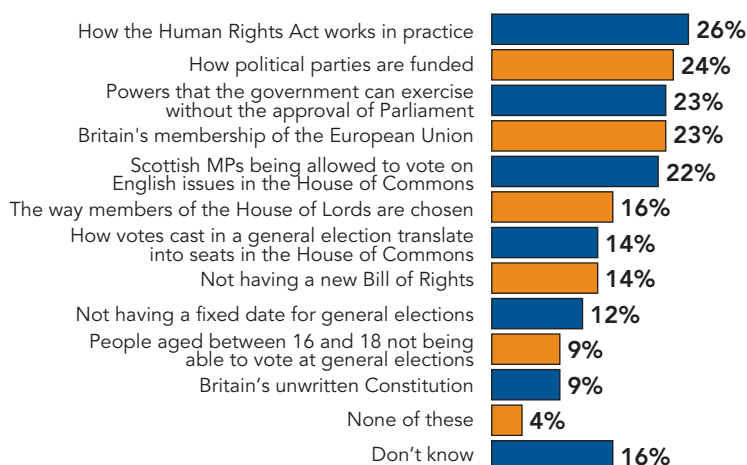
⁷ For all YouGov surveys, see www.yougov.com/extranets/yougarchives/content/archivesPolitical.asp?rID=2.

C. Priorities for change

There is no clear public consensus regarding which constitutional issues are most urgently in need of change. However, as Figure 14 shows, the most popular priority for constitutional change is how the Human Rights Act works in practice (26%), closely followed by how political parties are funded (24%), Britain's involvement in the European Union (23%), the powers the government can exercise without the approval of Parliament (23%) and Scottish MPs being allowed to vote on English issues in the House of Commons (22%). In contrast, only 9% identify Britain's unwritten Constitution and changing the voting age as the most important priorities for change.

Figure 14: Priorities for change

Q Which two or three, if any, of these would you say are the most urgently in need of change?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

Only five issues are perceived by more than one in five people as being in need of urgent change. One of these issues – how political parties are funded – was subject to intense media scrutiny for the week leading up the Audit survey. Yet, despite making headline news on a daily basis, only 24% of the public select party funding as a priority for reform; 76% choose not to.

The issues identified by the smallest proportion of the public as being in need of reform are two areas which are currently under government review: the voting age and Britain's unwritten Constitution. A mere 9% believe that these should be high on the list of government priorities.

Significantly, a fifth of the public cannot identify any constitutional issues urgently in need of change. While 4% say none of the issues should be changed, 16% say they do not know what they would change.

Satisfaction and priorities

There is a clear link between satisfaction and priorities for change. Unsurprisingly, people do not tend to prioritise changing those issues with which they are satisfied. Comparing satisfaction levels with priorities, we can see that some of the most popular priorities for change are Scottish MPs voting on English issues, party funding and the European Union. The lowest priorities are changing the voting age and the way in which the date of a general election is chosen.

Not all issues that are viewed with dissatisfaction are prioritised by the public for change. The public tend to be dissatisfied with the membership of the House of Lords, but it is not one of their top priorities. By comparison, the Human Rights Act – with which the public is more satisfied than membership of the House of Lords – is seen to be the most urgent priority for change.

D. Views on Parliament, government and MPs

As Figure 15 shows, an overwhelming majority of people agree that a strong Parliament is good for democracy (75%); that MPs spend too much money on expenses (74%); and that government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individual members of the public (74%). However, large numbers also agree that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents (72%); that MPs need sufficient resources to properly represent and inform their constituents (66%); and that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it (60%). Taken together, these statements underline some of the key tensions involved in securing public satisfaction with constitutional and political reform.

The public were asked about the extent to which they agree with six statements concerning Parliament, government and MPs:

- A strong Parliament is good for democracy
- Governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it
- MPs need sufficient resources to properly represent and inform their constituents
- MPs spend too much money on expenses
- MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents
- Government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individual members of the public

All of these statements are supported by the majority of people, with five of the six gaining agreement from at least two in three. While not necessarily contradictory, these statements illustrate some of the difficulties in reconciling normative assumptions about how the political system should operate.

Parliament versus government

Seventy-five per cent of people agree that a strong Parliament is good for democracy (36% strongly agree and 39% tend to agree), with support particularly strong among people over 55, and those from higher social grades (81% of ABs). At the same time, three out of five people agree that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it (18% strongly agree and 42% tend to agree), with only 7% disagreeing with this statement. While there is not necessarily an inherent contradiction involved in agreeing with both these principles, strong parliaments tend to limit the actions of government. Similarly, ensuring that government has the powers to act on its mandate can mean placing restrictions on the legislature.

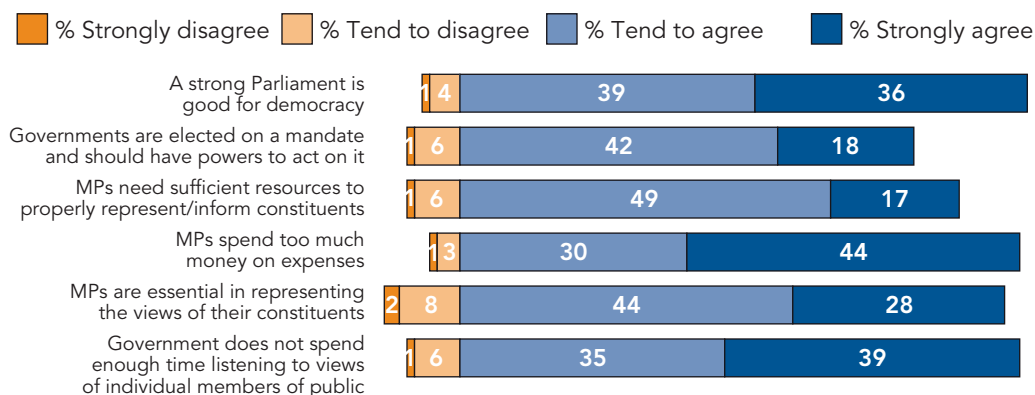
MPs

Since the advent of the publication of MPs' expenses, there has been a great deal of public criticism of the amount they spend. Seventy-four per cent of the public say that MPs spend too much money on expenses, with 44% strongly agreeing with this statement. In their defence, MPs explain that much of this money is used to pay staff and run their offices, as well as communicate with their constituents and manage casework. Perhaps as a result, two-thirds of the public agree that MPs need sufficient resources to properly represent and inform their constituents, with only 7% disagreeing. Polling was carried out before heightened coverage and concerns about MPs' expenses in early 2008.

Representing their constituents has been identified by many MPs as the most important part of their role⁸ – and 72% of the public agree that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents. Only one in 10 people do not agree that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents.

Figure 15: Views on Parliament, government and MPs

Q Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: 1,073 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 29 November – 7 December 2007 Source: Ipsos MORI

⁸ G. Rosenblatt (2006), *A Year in the Life: From member of public to Member of Parliament* (London: Hansard Society), p. 31.

Almost two in five people strongly agree with the statement that government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individual members of the public (39%). In total, 74% of the public believe this to be the case, with only 7% disagreeing.

In contrast to the political engagement indicators, gender differences are not as apparent in relation to these opinion questions. Men are slightly more likely to assert that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it (63% versus 57%). More women agree that MPs spend too much money on expenses (77% compared to 71%), but they are also more likely to believe that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents (75% as against 69%). Their views on the remaining statements are almost identical.

There are some variations relating to age. The three oldest age groups are the most likely to agree that a strong Parliament is good for democracy. Indeed, 51% of the 65-74 age group strongly agree with this statement, compared to only 21% of the 18-24 category. Only 44% of those in the latter group agree that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it, compared to 76% of the 65-74 age group. Older people are also more likely to agree with the statements that MPs need sufficient resources to properly represent and inform constituents and that MPs spend too much money on expenses. Only 58% of the 18-24 age group agree that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents, compared to 72% overall.

Like age, social grade variations are also apparent. The biggest divide relates to MPs needing sufficient resources to properly represent and inform their constituents. Almost four in five people from social grades AB agree with this statement (79%), compared with 53% of DEs. In contrast, an almost equal proportion of people from AB and DE social grades agree that MPs spend too much money on expenses. However, the latter grades are the least likely to agree with the statement that MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents (63% as against 78% for social grades AB). Similarly, they are slightly more likely to agree that government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individuals (72% against 69%), although C2s are the most likely to agree with this statement (80%).

In relation to voting intention, Conservatives are the most likely to believe that a strong Parliament is good for democracy (85% compared to 78% of Labour supporters). They are the most likely to agree that MPs need sufficient resources to properly represent and inform their constituents (73%), but also that MPs spend too much money on expenses (84% compared to 67% of Labour voters). Indeed, only 2% of those intending to vote Conservative disagree that MPs spend too much money on expenses.

Supporters of smaller parties are less likely than the two major parties to agree that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it (57% agree, compared to 69% of Labour supporters and 68% of Conservatives).

Voters of all parties place similar importance on the role of MPs in representing their constituents, while Labour supporters are much less likely than those of other parties to believe that government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individual members of the public (60% compared to 83% of Conservatives and 80% of supporters of other parties).

5. Analysis

Core indicators

The six core engagement indicators evaluate knowledge and interest, behaviour and attitudinal measures. These categories coincide with a fairly clear distinction in the year-on-year pattern: the behavioural measures, which record reported levels of participation, have with one exception remained steady. Knowledge and interest have fallen since the 2007 Audit, but nevertheless suggest no downward trend since the first Audit was published in 2004. However, the attitudinal measures – both the perceived efficacy of political action and satisfaction with the way that the political system works – reveal a small but significant deterioration. Taking all the figures into account, this year's are the most negative to date. However, the decline is fairly small, as it has come from a relatively low base of satisfaction.

To the interested observer of politics, 2007 has been somewhat of a vintage year. It could be argued that the conditions during the year provide a better test of the underlying health of political engagement in Britain than opinions at a more relaxed period in the political cycle. It is noteworthy that with so much high-profile political activity dominating the news – even in the tabloid press – in the weeks before this survey, most of the indicators have not changed much since last year. It is not even possible to suggest that the impact has been averted because the public has a narrow view of what is meant by 'politics' – a change of prime minister, the manoeuvrings around the possibility of an early general election and the Liberal Democrat leadership contest are precisely the sort of events that even those taking the narrowest view recognise as political.

Knowledge and interest

Interest in politics has remained broadly consistent since the first Audit, with only small fluctuations on an annual basis. The consistency of the numbers who say they are very interested in politics has remained remarkably stable since the 1970s. There is evidently a core section of the public who are avid followers of politics, irrespective of changes in the political climate. Fluctuations in interest are among the fairly interested, not the very interested.

These fluctuations may reflect the electoral cycle; interest in politics appears to dip marginally during the mid-term of a Parliament, as occurred in the first Audit. Indeed, it is possible to suppose that there might be a regular cycle of interest within each Parliament, peaking at election times with an increase beforehand, as the proximity of a contest makes the relevance of the subject more obvious. This interest may then fall away again once the deed is done. This argument is given some force by the numbers in each survey who say they are not at all interested in politics. Although it was 19% this year and around this figure

in three of the four previous surveys, it fell to 13% in the 2006 Audit, when polling was undertaken at the end of the 2005 general election year.

The fall over the last 12 months in those who feel knowledgeable about politics has been sharper than the fall in those who report an interest in politics. The proportion of the public who are very interested in politics is now more than three times greater than those who report knowing a great deal about politics. Like interest, the lowest level of perceived knowledge since the start of the Audit was in the 2006 report when three in five people said they knew not very much or nothing at all about politics.

Participation

Three of the four indicators of participation – propensity to vote, having discussed politics and having contacted an elected representative – are effectively unmoved since last year's Audit, and all have remained steady over the five Audit surveys. Certainty of voting in an immediate general election has remained steady from month to month throughout 2007 at around 53%.⁹ The 10% who are absolutely certain they will not vote is also unchanged from previous years, and at least provides an assurance that there is no continuing decline.

Given the number of recent political events, it is unexpected to discover that the proportion of the public who say they have discussed politics or political news with someone else is also unchanged at 41%. It remains distinctly lower than the number saying they are interested in the subject; less than two-thirds of those who are interested in politics have discussed it with anybody else. It is possible that this is an instance of a 'spiral of silence' effect: if those who are interested in politics feel inhibited from raising it as a topic of conversation because they think it will bore or annoy those with whom they are talking, the effect could be to reduce the number of conversations about politics below its natural level, which in turn creates a vicious circle.

Attitudes

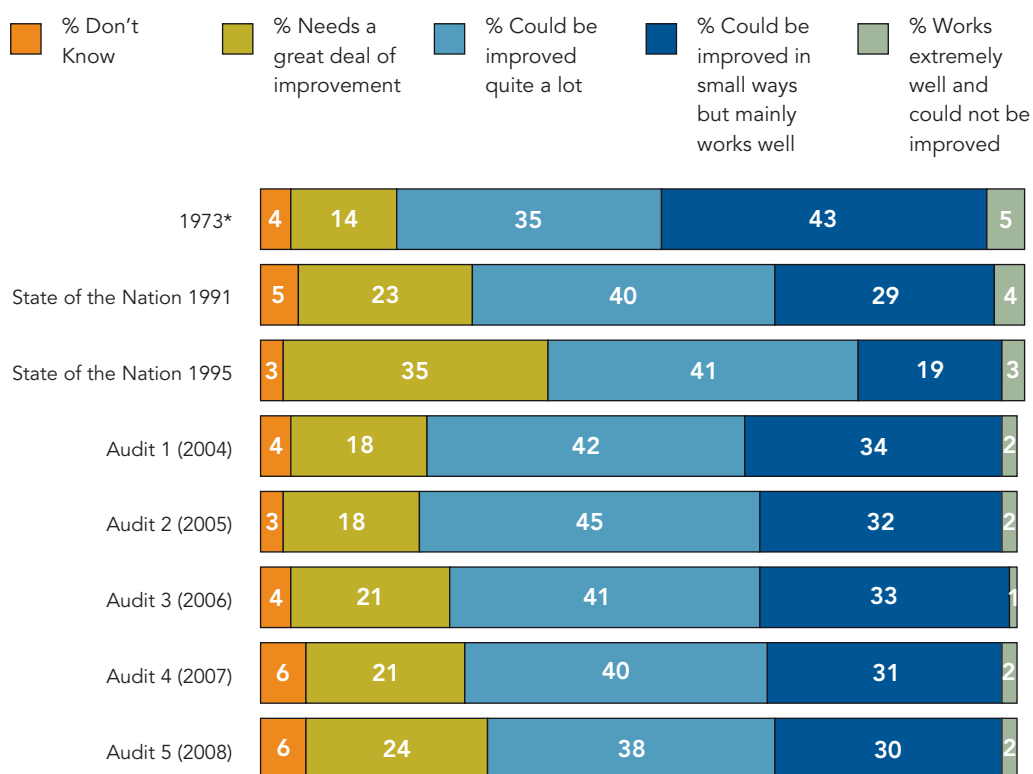
Perhaps the most worrying developments in the Audit indicators appear in those measuring attitudes. While neither has moved to a statistically significant degree since last year, the 2008 survey confirms a downward trend, revealing a real deterioration in political engagement over the past five years. However, other research suggests this decline is not confined just to politics: an April 2007 YouGov poll found that public trust in nearly all public figures – including doctors, teachers and journalists – has fallen significantly since 2004.

⁹ Unlike other questions in the Audit, this is a measure included in all of Ipsos MORI's political surveys.

In the first Audit, 36% of the British public agreed that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run'; the figure is now 31%. The Department for Communities and Local Government's Citizenship Survey has found evidence of a similar decline.¹⁰ While 25% of people felt they were able to influence decisions affecting Great Britain in 2001, only 20% feel they have influence now. The Citizenship Survey has also found that people are much more likely to feel they can influence decisions affecting their local area than in Great Britain as a whole; currently 38% feel they have influence in their local area, although this has also declined 6% since 2001. Those who deny the efficacy of the system are much more likely to be supporters of the opposition parties than of the government – 45% of Conservatives and those supporting other opposition parties disagree that they can really change the way the country is run, compared to 32% of Labour supporters.

Figure 16: Present system of governing in historical perspective

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



* From Crowther-Hunt Commission's report Source: Ipsos MORI

¹⁰ The Citizenship Survey (formerly the Home Office Citizenship Survey) has been commissioned every two years since 2001 and is currently published by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The most recent Citizenship Survey, which covers the period April-September 2007, was published on 17 January 2008: www.communities.gov.uk/archived/general-content/communities/citizenshipsurvey.

However, another negative sign is the increase in the number of people saying that the system needs a great deal of improvement, from 18% in the first two Audits to 24% in this Audit. However, in contrast to many of the indicators, comparative data from the 1970s and 1990s enables a longer perspective to be taken on views of how Britain is governed (Figure 16). This data shows that current opinion is almost identical to responses in 1991 to the State of the Nation survey, a year in which the political circumstances were similar to those in the past year: John Major had taken over from a long-serving prime minister of his own party as Gordon Brown has just done. Given the widespread societal changes that have occurred since 1973, it is striking that the figures have remained relatively stable over the past four decades.

Demographic disparities

Previous Audits have established that levels of political engagement can vary dramatically across genders, age groups, social grades and ethnicity. For example, women, young people, people from lower social grades and BMEs are disproportionately less likely to say they are both interested and knowledgeable about politics. There is also a strong correlation between newspaper readership and interest, with 79% of quality newspaper readers reporting they are very or fairly interested in politics. In light of this fact, it is worrying that the latest British Social Attitudes survey (BSA) found that newspaper readership has fallen dramatically over the past two decades; only 20% of graduates read a quality paper, compared with 50% in 1986. Moreover, the BSA found that among people with no interest in politics, the proportion who regularly read a newspaper has dropped from 69% in 1986 to 40% today.¹¹

Demographic disparities are much less pronounced across the attitudinal measures, although they are still apparent, particularly with regard to social grade and political party affiliation. However, this is not the case with ethnicity. The number of BMEs who believe they can make a difference matches the Audit's overall average (31%) and far fewer are likely to say they cannot change things (28%, compared to 42% overall). The Citizenship Survey has similarly found that BMEs are more likely than white people to feel they can influence decisions at both the national and local levels: while only 19% of white people feel that can influence decisions affecting Great Britain, for BMEs the figure is 33% (for local level decisions, the figures are 37% and 47% respectively).¹²

In addition, this year's Audit found evidence of a noticeable regional disparity: people in Wales are less likely to be engaged in the political process on most measures. Fewer people in Wales are certain to vote in the next general election (41% compared to 53% in Britain as a whole); fewer are interested in politics (27% versus 51%); and fewer are at least fairly knowledgeable about politics (29% compared to 44% overall). They are less likely to have participated in most of the activities in this survey, including voting (44% say they voted in the last general election compared to 62% of all British adults); presenting their views to an elected representative (5% compared to 15%) and discussing politics with someone else (25% versus 41%).

¹¹ British Social Attitudes Survey: www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/pages/or_socialattitudes.htm.

¹² Department of Communities and Local Government Citizenship Survey.

These differences in levels of activity and understanding can in part be explained by the differing demographic profile in Wales, where there are fewer of the AB social grades and more DEs, as well as fewer people with formal educational qualifications. As we have discussed, these factors are closely correlated with most forms of political engagement. It may also be that the existence of devolved government in Wales has diverted the public's attention from issues mainly concerned with Westminster, which arguably have less impact on people in Wales than on those in England – although this does not appear to have happened in Scotland.

Behaviour, knowledge and attitudes among people in Scotland are generally very similar to those exhibited across Great Britain as a whole. In fact, across the board, understanding of constitutional issues is slightly higher in Scotland. One significant difference is that more in Scotland claim to be certain to vote at the next general election (65% versus 53%).

Views on key constitutional issues

Perhaps understandably, the public tend to be more concerned with outcome rather than with process, and generally do not follow the more technical or esoteric debates on constitutional issues. Since 1997, MORI has found that no more than 2% of the British public have identified constitutional reform as one of the most important issues facing the country. It is therefore not surprising that of the 11 constitutional issues that they were asked to consider, there are none which more than half of the public feel they understand very, or even fairly, well.

Knowledge

Although overall knowledge of constitutional issues is low, three are better understood than others. Two concern voting at general elections, a part of the system with which the public have direct contact. The third, the question of whether only English MPs should be allowed to vote on English issues in the Commons, has received a fair amount of publicity.

With the exception of these three issues, significantly more of the public say that they do not understand the issues than say that they do. However, considerably more have an opinion on whether or not they are satisfied with the status quo in each case than feel they understand the issues. It is probable that many of these opinions are instinctive rather than particularly well-considered. As would be expected, there is a substantial correlation between understanding of these constitutional issues and other measures of political engagement: those who feel they understand the issues are more likely to feel knowledgeable about politics, more likely to be interested in politics and more likely to be certain to vote.

Satisfaction

On all but two of the issues, a majority of the public at least takes sufficient interest to declare themselves satisfied or dissatisfied with the current arrangements. The two exceptions, which concern the unwritten Constitution and a Bill of Rights, are among the most technical and the vaguest, and it can reasonably be concluded that neither issue has any real resonance, at least when stated in these terms.

Two-thirds of the public are satisfied to retain the voting age at 18 with only one in eight taking the contrary view; and on the other two election-related items (the translation of votes into seats and the government's power to decide the general election date) the contented group also outnumber the discontented. It is hard to see any public momentum behind calls for votes at 16, electoral reform or fixed-term parliaments. These are not the issues that are worrying even those who feel the system is unsatisfactory, and there is little or no correlation between attitudes to these issues and disconnection or non-participation.

There are four issues where the Audit identifies a reasonably substantial vein of disquiet. All four relate directly to issues and controversies facing the current government: Scottish MPs being able to vote on English issues (46% are dissatisfied), the funding of political parties (37%), the composition of the House of Lords (36%) and the powers that the government can exercise without referring to Parliament (32%).

Priorities for change

The desire for change is spread thinly across a range of constitutional matters. A government seeking to reform our current constitutional arrangements will struggle to satisfy public opinion; there are no easy boxes to tick. Indeed, changes in one area of our constitutional arrangements often bring their own dilemmas.

A clear example of this is Scottish devolution and the subsequent call to resolve the so-called West Lothian or English Question. Twenty-two per cent of the public now believe that urgent change is needed in relation to Scottish MPs being allowed to vote on English issues in the House of Commons, with 46% dissatisfied with the status quo. However, a government seeking to address this demand would have to consider the alternatives carefully, as some sections of the public will be opposed to an independent Scotland, and alternative constitutional arrangements for voting in the Commons will have knock-on effects on our parliamentary structure. Recent surveys have revealed there is little public appetite for the creation of an English Parliament: the latest British Social Attitudes survey found that only 22% of people born and living in England think that it would be the best way to govern England.

Conclusion: attitudes and partisanship

It is important to bear in mind that the public's views on Britain's constitutional arrangements are always likely to be affected by their views on the performance of the government of the day, and these views in turn are likely to depend partly on party political considerations. This may mean that many British adults, rather than holding stable views on the principles of the Constitution that stem directly from their own convictions, may instead express quite different views depending on whether there is a Conservative or Labour government.

The partisan element is clearly visible in the attitudinal indicators, as 65% of Conservatives but only 51% of Labour supporters say the system of governing needs at least quite a lot of improvement. In the 1991 State of the Nation survey, under a Conservative government when overall levels of discontent were similar, 54% of Conservatives and 83% of Labour supporters argued a need for reform.

Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are more likely to express dissatisfaction with the way that things operate in Britain at the moment. Perhaps the clearest case of attitudes to the questions being driven by partisan attitudes is apparent by looking at the public's view of the government's prerogative powers. The maintenance of these long-established powers might be expected to be a touchstone issue between constitutional conservatives and reformers. Furthermore, the present government has made clear that it intends to consider reducing their scope. Yet Conservatives say they are dissatisfied with these powers by two-to-one (41% to 19%) and Liberal Democrats by a slightly wider margin (46% to 18%), while Labour supporters split almost evenly (25% satisfied, 23% dissatisfied).

The public may well not rationalise their attitudes in consciously partisan terms. Nevertheless, it is clear that one cannot divorce the long-term case for constitutional change from shorter-term factors in which political considerations come to the fore. For this reason, it would be unwise to suppose that public opinion on constitutional issues can be used to build a blueprint for reform, or even that it is likely to be consistent. If the Conservatives were to win the next election it is possible that within a short period the public's priorities might be entirely transformed.

These conclusions have a wider message for the interpretation of the Audit of Political Engagement. While behavioural factors and measures of interest or knowledge are relatively stable, the efficacy and satisfaction measures may be more liable to fluctuate with views about the government. However, this is not to imply that the sense of disconnection and disengagement that they measure is unreal or not a cause for concern. Any decline, however small and even from a low base, should be taken very seriously.

Appendix A: Full list of indicators

Each Audit looks at six core indicators, which have been chosen as the key measures of political engagement. These indicators are at the heart of the Audit of Political Engagement surveys, enabling us to track responses year on year and note the direction and magnitude of change. These core indicators are supplemented every three years by a further 10 indicators of political engagement; the next Audit with all 16 indicators will be published in 2010.

Below is the full list of all 16 indicators of political engagement. The six core indicators appear in italics.

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

Appendix B: Technical details

Survey methodology

The survey that makes up this report forms the latest Political Engagement Poll and was undertaken by the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of the Hansard Society. Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewing took place face-to-face, in respondents' homes, between 29 November and 7 December 2007. The data have been 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.

Because we have weighted our data to be representative of the profile of Great Britain,¹³ the 'effective base size' has been reduced from 1,073 to 792.¹⁴ All statistical reliability has been calculated using this effective base size.

For example, with an effective base size of 792 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 +4 percentage points from the sample result (i.e. between 46% and 54%).

¹³ This includes 'down-weighting' interviews in Scotland and Wales to their representative level in Great Britain as these groups were over-represented in our sample to allow more robust analysis.

¹⁴ 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
792 interviews	2	3	4
800 interviews	2	3	4
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

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 – ie 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 overleaf. 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
792 (APE5) and 1,282 (APE4)*	3	4	4
71 (BMEs) and 721 (whites)	7	11	12
91 (18-24s) vs 318 (55+s)	7	11	12
378 (men) and 415 (women)	4	6	7
395 (ABC1s) and 409 (C2DEs)	4	6	7
792 (APE5) and 120 (Scotland)	6	9	10
792 (APE5) and 62 (Wales)	8	12	13

** Please note that this is the total base size rather than the effective base size*

Guide to social grade definitions

The table below contains a brief list of social grade definitions as used by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. These groups are standard on all surveys carried out by Ipsos MORI.

- A** Professionals such as doctors, surgeons, solicitors or dentists; chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior editors, senior civil servants, town clerks, senior business executives and managers, and high ranking grades of the Services.
- B** People with very responsible jobs such as university lecturers, hospital matrons, heads of local government departments, middle management in business, qualified scientists, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades of the Services.
- C1** All others doing non-manual jobs; nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, people in clerical positions, police sergeants/constables, and middle ranks of the Services.
- C2** Skilled manual workers/craftsmen who have served apprenticeships; foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as long distance lorry drivers, security officers, and lower grades of 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

- The Audit of Political Engagement 5 topline findings come from the Political Engagement Poll which had a base of 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face, at home, between 29 November and 7 December 2007.
- This is a quota survey.
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.
- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- An asterisk (*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't knows' or to multiple answers.
- The source for all these results is Ipsos MORI.

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

Q2.	Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?	
		%
	Voted in the last general election	62
	Helped on fund raising drives	19
	Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	16
	Presented my views to a local councillor or MP	15
	Urged someone outside my family to vote	15
	Made a speech before an organised group	12
	Been an officer of an organisation or club	9
	Written a letter to an editor	7
	Taken an active part in a political campaign	3
	Stood for public office	1
	None of these	26

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?	
		%
	Local councillor	48
	MP	29
	Both	22
	Don't know	1
<i>Base: All who have presented views to councillor or MP</i>		

Q4.	Which of these activities, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?	
		%
	Voted in the last local council election	50
	Discussed politics or political news with someone else	41
	Signed a petition	40
	Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	37
	Done voluntary work	23
	Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	19
	Expressed my political opinions online	10
	Been to any political meeting	6
	Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	4
	Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	4
	None	20
	Don't know	2

Q5.	How interested would you say you are in politics?	
		%
	Very interested	13
	Fairly interested	38
	Not very interested	28
	Not at all interested	19
	Don't know	1

Q6.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?	
		%
	A great deal	4
	A fair amount	40
	Not very much	43
	Nothing at all	12
	Don't know	*

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	4
	Tend to agree	27
	Neither/nor	23
	Tend to disagree	29
	Strongly disagree	13
	Don't know	3
	Agree	31
	Disagree	42

Q8.	Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?	
		%
	Works extremely well and could not be improved	2
	Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	30
	Could be improved quite a lot	38
	Needs a great deal of improvement	24
	Don't know	6

Q9.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about the constitutional arrangements governing Britain?	
		%
	A great deal	2
	A fair amount	18
	Just a little	29
	Hardly anything at all	35
	Never heard of	13
	Don't know	2

Q10.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about the European Union?	
		%
	A great deal	4
	A fair amount	24
	Just a little	41
	Hardly anything at all	28
	Never heard of	3
	Don't know	1

Q11.- Q19.	How well, if at all, do you feel you understand each of the following issues?							
	Very well	Fairly well	Not Very well	Not at all	Never heard of	Don't know	Very/ fairly well	Not very well/ at all/ never heard of
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
How votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons	15	34	19	22	7	2	49	48
Whether Britain needs a new Bill of Rights	5	23	30	23	15	5	28	68
Proposed reforms of the membership of the House of Lords	4	22	29	29	13	2	26	71
Whether only English MPs should vote on English issues in the House of Commons	14	34	22	17	10	4	48	49
How the Human Rights Act works in practice	5	29	33	24	6	3	34	63
The powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval	3	19	33	31	11	3	22	75
Lowering the age at which people are eligible to vote in a UK general election from 18 to 16	12	36	19	15	15	3	48	49
How political parties are funded	7	32	30	23	5	3	39	58
How the date of a general election is chosen	9	29	24	28	8	3	38	60

Q20.- Q30.	Thinking generally, to what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following in Britain at the moment?							
	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/ nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Britain's unwritten Constitution	4	15	40	12	6	25	19	18
How votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons	5	30	31	14	7	14	35	21
Britain not having a new Bill of Rights	2	10	42	18	7	21	12	25
The way members of the House of Lords are chosen	2	16	33	25	11	13	18	36
Scottish MPs being able to vote on English issues in the House of Commons	3	17	23	23	23	10	20	46
How the Human Rights Act works in practice	2	22	32	21	10	13	24	31
The powers that government can currently exercise without Parliament's approval	1	18	32	19	13	16	19	32
Having a minimum voting age of 18 in a general election	26	41	14	8	4	7	67	12
The effect of Britain's membership of the European Union	3	26	27	19	14	10	29	33
How political parties are funded	1	17	32	23	14	13	18	37
Letting the government decide the date for a general election	6	33	30	16	7	8	39	23

Q31.	Looking through this list of constitutional issues which two or three, if any, of these would you say are the most urgently in need of change?
	%
How the Human Rights Act works in practice	26
How political parties are funded	24
The powers that the government can exercise without the approval of Parliament	23
Britain's membership of the European Union	23
Scottish MPs being allowed to vote on English issues in the House of Commons	22
The way members of the House of Lords are chosen	16
How votes cast in a general election translate into seats in the House of Commons	14
Not having a new Bill of Rights	14
Not having a fixed date for general elections	12
People aged between 16 and 18 not being able to vote at general elections	9
Britain's unwritten Constitution	9
None of these	4
Don't know	16

Q32.- Q37.	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:							
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither /nor	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion	Agree	Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A strong Parliament is good for democracy	36	39	14	4	1	5	75	5
Governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it	18	42	23	6	1	9	60	7
MPs need sufficient resource to properly represent and inform their constituents	17	49	20	6	1	7	66	7
MPs spend too much money on expenses	44	30	14	3	1	7	74	4
MPs are essential in representing the views of their constituents	28	44	14	8	2	5	72	10
Government does not spend enough time listening to the views of individual members of the public	39	35	14	6	1	5	74	7