Audit of Political Engagement 8

The 2011 Report

with a focus on coalition politics,
civic involvement and the Big Society

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

Following the enormous political changes witnessed in 2010, Audit 8 focuses on two key areas of interest. It explores public attitudes to civic and political engagement and participation in the context of the government's 'Big Society' focus on community volunteering, devolved decision-making and localism. Secondly, it looks at public attitudes to the new political and constitutional landscape that followed the inconclusive general election result and particularly the impact on perceptions of Parliament and attitudes to the voting system in advance of the 2011 referendum.

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

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

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Preface

The annual Audit of Political Engagement has become even more important, and revealing, this year. Britain has seen the creation of its first peacetime coalition for nearly 80 years, which has produced far-reaching proposals to change the relationship between the state and the citizen, as well as over how we vote. So, in addition to the usual questions asked each year, this Audit also looks, in particular, at how likely people are to get involved locally – as part of the Big Society agenda – and at the coming referendum on switching to the Alternative Vote system of elections to the House of Commons.

This Audit, the eighth in the annual series dating back to 2004, is the third published solely by the Hansard Society, with funding from the House of Commons and the Cabinet Office, for which support we are grateful. One of the main reasons the Audit has become so useful, and widely quoted, is that it provides a guide to underlying trends about the public's knowledge of politics, its varying degree of interest in it, level of satisfaction, and attitudes to engagement and participation. The main interviews were undertaken by Ipsos MORI in December with a discussion among a selected group of voters in January.

Whereas the 2010 report was dominated by the impact of the expenses scandal, this one was overshadowed by the May general election and the creation of the coalition. One result is that perceived knowledge of politics and Parliament, and interest in politics, have risen this year, notably among 25-44 year olds. However, this has not been driven by any increase in participation levels since political activity is no higher than in years without an election. People are happy to be spectators rather than players. Moreover, despite the increase in knowledge of Parliament, fewer are satisfied with it, 27%, compared with 33% a year ago. Voters are also sceptical about the impact of their own involvement: only three in 10 agree that if people like themselves get involved, they can change the way the UK is run.

The Audit has some fascinating insights into the coalition government's Big Society programme. People are far more positive about the efficacy of getting involved in their local area than about getting involved in politics. They see politics as something that other people do, something distant from them. But they see local involvement in community terms, where personal involvement can make a difference. However, most people still will not become involved. The Audit identifies around one in seven of the public as possible candidates for the Big Society – those 'Willing Localists' who are not already actively involved but seem willing and likely to become involved in community activities locally.

Voters have contradictory attitudes about coalition politics. Some like the idea of consensus but do not like what compromise means for manifesto promises. The qualitative research suggests that voters know little about the Alternative Vote (AV) referendum and have little

understanding of voting systems. However, even when they are not convinced by the pro-AV arguments, many say they will vote 'yes', if they bother to vote, because it is a change. They do not like the current system – not First Past the Post specifically, but the state of politics generally – so any alternative therefore attracts support.

As before, the Audit underlines the problems for politicians in trying to engage the active involvement of the public – and incidentally shows how the Hansard Society's various programmes to promote understanding of, and participation in, representative politics are needed now more than ever.

Rt Hon Peter Riddell
Chair, Hansard Society

Executive summary

1. Impact of the general election

- Interest in politics rose five points to 58% and now stands at the highest ever level recorded in the Audit lifecycle. The increased level of interest is particularly marked in those in the 25-34 (seven point rise) and 35-44 (12 point rise) age brackets.

- Perceived knowledge of politics also increased, albeit only marginally compared to the level of interest (up just two points at 53%). However, the long-term trend across the Audit lifecycle remains one of steady and sustained improvement, with self-reported levels of knowledge about politics now significantly above the nadir of 39% recorded in Audit 3.

- But people's increased interest in and perceived knowledge of politics in a general election year was not matched by greater understanding or by greater engagement, beyond the 'entry level' action of voting in the election. An election does not seem to act as a spur to encourage wider political or indeed civic activities.

- Fewer people can correctly name their local Member of Parliament than in recent years: only 38% can do so compared to 44% in Audit 7, a situation clearly derived from the historically high turnover of MPs at the general election.

2. Local versus national engagement

- Almost seven in 10 people (69%) claim they are interested in how things work in their local area, a higher level of interest than for politics more generally (58%).

- There is a strong correlation between those who are interested in politics and those who are interested in how things work locally: 86% of those interested in politics are also interested in the workings of their local area. But it is also true that almost half (48%) of those who are not interested in 'politics' are interested in the way things work locally.

- Over half of the public (54%) say they do not know 'very much' or 'anything at all' about how things actually work in their local area while 46% say they know at least 'a fair amount'. This is lower than the 53% that say they are knowledgeable about politics.

- People are far more positive about the efficacy of getting involved in their local community than they are about getting involved in politics. Around half of the public

(51%) agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community they really can change the way their area is run', while one in five people (21%) disagree. This compares favourably to the one in three (30%) who agree that they can change the way the UK is run by getting involved in politics and 44% who disagree.

- Two in five (39%) of those who do not think they can change the way the UK is run by getting involved in politics do think they can change the way their area is run by getting involved in their local community.

- More people are positive about how things work in their local area than in Britain as a whole. Around half the public (49%) believe that how things work in their local area 'could not be improved' or could 'be improved in small ways' (47%), whereas only three in 10 people (31%) say the same about the system of governing Britain.

3. Big Society: getting involved

- The proportion of people who want to get involved in decision-making in their local area has fallen by five points to 43%; in contrast the two in five people (42%) who want to be involved in national decision-making remains stable.

- Only one in 10 people say they will 'definitely' spend some time doing some form of voluntary work at some point in the next couple of years.

- 53% of the public actively say they will 'definitely not' volunteer for a trade union, 48% for a political party and 42% for a church or religious group.

- Those aged under 45 (particularly those in the 25-34 age bracket); those in the highest social grades (ABC1); those with children; and those who tend to vote for the Liberal Democrats are the groups consistently more likely to be willing to spend time doing voluntary work.

- Overwhelmingly, motivation to volunteer and get involved seems to be rooted in a sense of personal self-interest. When asked under what circumstances people would be encouraged to get more involved in their local community the most common responses are: 'if I felt strongly about an issue' (40%); 'if it was relevant to me' (33%); 'if I had more time' (28%); and 'if it affected my street' (25%).

- 'Willing Localists', comprising 14% of the GB adult population, are probably the key target group for the success of the Big Society. They are not actively involved in a wide range of community and socio-political activities but seem the most willing to do so and are those most likely, realistically, to become so in the future.

- Two-thirds of the 'Willing Localists' group are women and they are more likely than other groups to have children in their household (44%). Otherwise they are fairly evenly spread across the adult population with a close to average profile on age, social class and ethnic group.

- To have any chance of being successful the Big Society concept needs to be kept away from contested or political associations. The language also needs to be re-tooled. 'Society' is perceived in broad, nationwide terms and is therefore less likely to generate public interest and engagement; an emphasis on 'local community', reflecting a more personalised focus is needed.

4. Perceptions of Parliament

- Perceived knowledge of Parliament has increased by seven points to 44%, a record level in the Audit series.

- But satisfaction with Parliament has declined by six points to a record low, with just 27% saying they are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the way that Parliament works.

- 45% of those who say they are absolutely certain to vote at the next election feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about Parliament.

- Just one in three people (30%) agree that Parliament is 'working for you and me', a significant decline of eight points in just a year.

5. Party views

- Following the general election, interest in politics among Labour voters stands at just 59% compared to 73% of Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters who say the same.

- Conservative voters are happiest with the current system of government: 53% think it needs quite a lot or a great deal of improvement compared to 66% of Labour and 66% of Liberal Democrat supporters who say the same.

- Supporters of the coalition parties are more likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works than those who support a party outside government: 40% of Conservative supporters are satisfied with the way Parliament works and 34% of Liberal Democrats feel similarly. However, just 25% of Labour voters are satisfied with the way Parliament works.

- Although Liberal Democrat supporters are less satisfied with Parliament overall than the Conservatives, they are more likely than supporters of any of the other parties to believe that it holds the government to account and that it is 'working for you and me'.

- Overall, Liberal Democrat supporters also tend to be the most engaged in politics and are the strongest believers in the efficacy of getting involved locally: 62% feel they can make a difference in their community compared to 54% of Labour supporters and 52% of Conservative voters.

6. Coalition and referendum politics

- In our qualitative research, opinion about coalition government and the politics of compromise was sharply divided: some welcomed consensus politics but others were concerned about the impact on the accountability of government provided by manifesto commitments. Many saw the coalition through the emotive prism of 'betrayal'.

- The public who took part in the qualitative research had confused and often contradictory views about the extent to which MPs can 'represent' the views of their constituents and act as the 'voice of the people'. However, the public largely felt that to represent them effectively two factors in an MP are a priority: they should agree with their policies and they should be 'local', by which they mean have lived in the constituency for a number of years.

- Despite very mixed views about the advantages and disadvantages of the Alternative Vote (AV) system, most who took part in our research discussion groups said that, if they vote, they will likely support a change in the system. This was not because of particular dissatisfaction with First Past the Post. Rather, their dissatisfaction with the current system of politics, with MPs, Parliament and government was such that almost any change was preferable to the *status quo*.

1. About this report

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

Themes and focus

Based on findings from an opinion poll survey, the report explores public attitudes to a range of political engagement indicators that track knowledge of and interest in the political system; the degree of public action and participation in politics; and the public's sense of efficacy and satisfaction with the democratic process.

A core number of engagement indicator questions are asked in each poll, enabling us to track responses year on year and so chart the direction and magnitude of change over the course of the Audit lifecycle. Each year these core questions are supplemented by additional questions derived from a theme(s) of topical interest. Audit 5 focused on the constitution, Audit 6 on political participation and citizenship, and last year's Audit 7 report on MPs and Parliament. Mindful of the enormous changes to the political landscape that we have seen in the last year, we have chosen to focus on two key areas in this study:

I. public attitudes to the new political and constitutional landscape that has emerged as a result of the inconclusive general election result and particularly the impact on perceptions of Parliament and attitudes to the voting system in light of the forthcoming referendum on the Alternative Vote (AV); and

II. public attitudes to civic and political engagement and participation, particularly given the government's focus on community volunteering, localism and devolved decision-making in the context of its 'Big Society' agenda.

In addition to the quantitative opinion poll survey, we have also utilised findings derived from two qualitative omnibus discussion groups and a 'debate and discussion day' for this year's report. Together these have enabled us to explore aspects of our two themes in a more detailed and comprehensive way than would have been possible through quantitative research alone.

Structure

A range of events – political, economic, social and international – all come together to shape and define each year; the chapter that follows therefore provides the essential political context against which the public attitudes in 2010 should be seen.

Chapter three explores a number of the key themes that emerge from this year's data including the rising rate of knowledge and interest about politics and Parliament and the link that can be detected between familiarity and favourability, between the public's knowledge of an aspect of politics and the degree to which this can then have an impact on how they look favourably upon it. It analyses the degree to which a sense of public indifference about political participation, despite rising levels of knowledge and interest, appears to be ever more entrenched and it reflects on the extent to which there is a link between the indicators of engagement and social inequality. Finally, it interrogates the complex and often contradictory nature of public attitudes and the extent to which public satisfaction with politics and the political system is inextricably linked to desired political outcomes.

The emergence of the first coalition government in modern political memory is the focus of chapter four. Public attitudes to the new political and constitutional settlement that has emerged since the general election are exposed, including views on the principle and practice of coalition government and the necessity for compromise, and changing perceptions of manifesto commitments and mandates. The knock-on effects in terms of attitudes towards Parliament and MPs and the nature of representation are also detailed. Finally, attitudes to the voting system and knowledge of the impending referendum on the Alternative Vote are outlined in this chapter, for attitudes to these issues are inextricably linked to current public perceptions of election outcomes and coalition politics.

Chapter five compares and contrasts public attitudes to a range of civic and political engagement indicators, exploring the degree to which the public may or may not be willing to get more involved in community or politically oriented activities, at both local and national level. It outlines the barriers to civic and political involvement and the degree of overlap between them, sets out the degree to which personal self-interest rather than altruism is a key motivator and details how those most willing to get involved are in many cases those who are already active in some way. Using the Audit data and other recent polling over the last year the chapter provides further insight into civic and political involvement by segmenting the public into seven distinct engagement groups: the 'Alienated'; the 'Already Active'; the 'Disengaged and Apathetic'; the 'Exaggerators'; the 'Onlookers'; the 'Satisfied but Unenthusiastic'; and the 'Willing Localists'. The chapter then explores those areas where the potential for civic and political engagement might be augmented in the future.

The remainder of the report focuses on the core engagement indicators. Chapter six presents the data in relation to the quantitative survey questions under the headings of 'knowledge and interest', 'action and participation' and 'efficacy and satisfaction', augmented by the 'civic and political involvement' data derived from the special themes. This analysis is further developed in chapter seven through detailed examination of the demographic and sub-group differences of gender, age, social class, ethnicity, and Scotland and Wales and marginal seat status. Finally, the headline Audit data can be quickly explored in graphical form in chapter eight.

The data for all Audit reports are derived from an annual Political Engagement Poll and qualitative research undertaken by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Hansard Society. The

methodology for both the quantitative and qualitative research is set out in the Appendices. Following publication of each Audit report the full dataset is made available on the Hansard Society website (www.hansardsociety.org.uk) in order that others may use it for research purposes. It is also lodged at the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex for the same purpose.

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

2. The political context

Public attitudes and behaviours are shaped and defined by the political events of the year. Any measurement of public engagement must take account of the political context – the actors and forces at work – that may have impacted on public perceptions.

2010 was a landmark political year that will be remembered above all for a general election that saw the return of a hung Parliament and the consequent emergence of the first coalition government in post-war political history. But the year began as 2009 had ended, with a Labour government beset with internecine warfare and constant speculation about the leadership of the party, on-going questions about the ethical probity of MPs, peers and political parties, and an economy in crisis.

Leadership, expenses and ethics

If Gordon Brown had hoped that rumblings about his leadership would cease with the start of what would be an election year he was quickly disabused of the notion; in the first week back at Westminster following the Christmas recess two former ministers, Patricia Hewitt MP and Geoff Hoon MP, called for a secret ballot to resolve the leadership question. The so-called 'snow plot' rapidly collapsed when it became clear that no senior ministerial figures would rally to the cause. Rather than unseating him the attempted coup had the opposite effect; it confirmed that Brown would indeed lead the party into the election campaign. But though his position was now secure – if only because of the absence of willing alternative candidates – the attacks on his ability and competence continued unabated. Before the month of January was out the former Labour Party General Secretary Peter Watt published a damning insider's account, *Inside Out*, which portrayed Brown in unflattering terms. He was derided for lacking both vision and strategy whilst running a shambolic, dysfunctional operation. Within a month another book, *The End of the Party* by journalist Andrew Rawnsley, alleged that, amidst allegations of bullying in Downing Street, Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell had warned Brown about his conduct towards staff. Although the claims were denied the weekly drip feed of stories focusing on Brown's competence and suitability for the job of Prime Minister was corrosive and the publication of Tony Blair's and Peter Mandelson's memoirs later in the year would serve only to confirm the seriousness of many of those concerns.

Further allegations about impropriety in Parliament also continued to emerge. A BBC investigation alleged in February that 20 MPs from all parties had failed to declare relevant interests when raising issues in the House of Commons. The sense that MPs had lost their ethical moorings was further compounded when three former cabinet ministers – Stephen Byers, Patricia Hewitt and Geoff Hoon – were secretly recorded by Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme in March bragging about what they would charge to use their knowledge and

contacts to influence policy and legislation. They were rapidly ejected from the Parliamentary Labour Party but the damage had been done. Their actions – in Byers' own words he was 'like a sort of cab for hire' – enraged many coming so soon after the expenses scandal and amidst an economic recession.[1]

The final report by Sir Thomas Legg, who had been appointed to review each MP's expenses over the last five years, was also published in early February: 389 MPs were eventually asked to repay a total of £1.12 million to the public purse.[2] Three Labour MPs – David Chaytor, Jim Devine and former minister Elliot Morley – and Conservative peer Lord Hanningfield were also charged in February with false accounting under the Theft Act. Their initial legal defence was predicated on parliamentary privilege but although this argument was dismissed by the Supreme Court it rapidly became clear that the cases would drag on through the election period and beyond. With other cases having been referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, charges against more members were also anticipated. Indeed, just a fortnight after the election the re-elected MP for Barnsley Central, Eric Illsley was charged, as was Conservative peer Lord Taylor of Warwick. By year's end only David Chaytor's fate had been resolved when in December he changed his plea to guilty and so faced a custodial sentence.

Such was public disgust with the conduct of MPs that when, later in the year, members of the new Parliament registered serious complaints about the rigidity and unnecessarily bureaucratic nature of the new expenses regime implemented by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, there was little public and media sympathy for them in light of the conduct of their predecessors. When the MP for East Ham, Stephen Timms, suffered serious injuries after being stabbed in his constituency advice surgery shortly after the election however, it was a timely reminder that being an MP is also an important public service that is not without risk when engaging with the public.

Despite the difficulties facing Brown in the pre-election period the Conservative Party proved unable to carve out a significant and potentially winning lead in the polls between January and March. The party consistently scored below 40%: given that it needed to achieve an historic 6.9% swing, ratings at this level were not good enough to secure victory at the election. The data suggested that whilst the public did not want another Labour government they had not yet found a compelling reason to vote for a Conservative one. There was increasing talk in the media of a hung Parliament.

The Conservative Party was also not immune to the financial and ethical difficulties besetting Labour. Conservative MPs were caught up in the BBC and Channel 4 investigations and in March the party's controversial deputy chairman and donor Lord Ashcroft finally confirmed that he had not been resident in the UK for tax purposes over the last decade, contrary to the assurances he had reputedly given at the time he was appointed to the House of Lords. The case served to reopen the debate about how the political parties were being funded and by whom on the eve of the election.

[1] *Sunday Times*, 'Revealed: Labour's cash for influence scandal', 21 March 2010, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article7068820.ece

[2] House of Commons Members Estimates Committee (2009-10), *Review of Past ACA Payments*, HC 348, Appendix.

The general election

One consequence of the parliamentary expenses scandal and the general demoralisation of the 2005-10 Parliament was that an unusually large number of MPs – 149 (23%) in total[3] – chose to retire at the end of the Parliament, the highest recorded number in post-war history. Of these, 102 were Labour MPs, reflecting the low morale within the party as members anticipated an imminent change in the party's electoral fortunes and a return to opposition.

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MPs retired

For the first time ever the three main party leaders had agreed to hold televised debates and it was these that would largely influence the trajectory of the campaign and the parties' respective strategies in the run-up to polling day. Following lengthy negotiations with the TV companies three debates were held during the campaign: the first with ITV, the second on Sky News, and the final debate on the BBC. Given his difficulty in communicating and connecting with voters, unsurprisingly Gordon Brown was deemed to have lost all three encounters. It was the performance of Nick Clegg in winning the first debate that defined much of what would follow during the campaign. Polling at only 19% before the first debate, Liberal Democrat ratings shot up by 10%. Hitherto relatively unknown to the public, interest in their leader surged afterwards amidst a media driven frenzy of 'Cleggmania': the debate both focused attention on him and his party's policies, but also helpfully positioned him on an equal footing with the other two party leaders. A Populus poll found that on every 'Prime Ministerial characteristic' the public's perception of Clegg was substantially better at the end of the third debate than before the first.[4] The debates thus helped the Liberal Democrat leader far more than they did David Cameron and the Conservative Party.

Aside from the debates, the election campaign proved to be a largely dull affair, enlivened only by the 'bigot-gate' debacle. Following a relatively innocuous encounter with a Labour voter, Mrs Gillian Duffy, in Rochdale about immigration, Gordon Brown got into his car with his radio microphone still attached and was recorded describing her as a 'bigot' whilst in conversation with an aide. The incident and Gordon Brown's pained reaction when hearing his own words replayed in a BBC radio studio later that day proved to be the most momentous event of the campaign, replayed endlessly on radio, TV and the internet. But the event proved to have seemingly little effect on the overall outcome; Labour regained the Rochdale seat at the election.

Government formation

The post-election parliamentary arithmetic was very finely balanced: 65% of the public voted – up just four points on 2005 – and for the first time since 1974 a hung Parliament was the result. The Conservatives won 307 seats (up 97); Labour won 258 seats (a loss of 91) and the Liberal Democrats took 57 seats (down five); a further 28 seats were won by the nationalists and other minor parties including the Green Party whose leader, Caroline Lucas, became the party's first ever MP. In total, 232 new members were elected. But no party

[3] On the day the general election was called there were also three seats vacant in addition to the 149 retirements: David Taylor had recently died but had previously announced his intention to retire; Ashok Kumar had recently died, but had intended to stand again; and Iris Robinson had previously announced she was standing down at the election, but was forced to resign early following a personal and financial scandal.

[4] See D. Kavanagh & P. Cowley (2010), *The British General Election of 2010* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p.250.

232
new MPs elected

could secure an overall majority of 326 seats on their own and only a combination of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats together could command a significant majority of seats in the House of Commons. A progressive 'rainbow alliance' embracing Labour and almost all the non-Conservative members of the House was widely discussed but such an alliance, even if it could be formed, could claim the support of 53% of the electorate but only 328 seats in the House of Commons thus providing only a perilously thin majority. The arithmetic thus pointed in the direction of some form of alliance or arrangement between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. However, conflicts between ideological traditions and instincts, personal relationships and party interests, plunged Westminster politics into uncharted territory in the week following polling day as the potential political outcomes were worked through. Gordon Brown and his ministers remained in office as a caretaker government but much of the focus shifted towards the Conservative and Liberal Democrat negotiating teams. What eventually emerged after five days of inter-party negotiations was an outcome barely mentioned before polling day: a formal Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition. David Cameron took over as Prime Minister with Nick Clegg serving as his Deputy. For the first time in post-war history Liberal MPs occupied ministerial office.

A week later the coalition formally launched its *Programme for Government* setting out in detail, across 31 identified policy areas and over 400 individual commitments, what it planned to do over the course of the following five years.[5] Whilst not papering over the differences, the party leaders were at pains to stress that the document encompassed a strong emphasis both on responsibility and individual liberty, that it was a synthesis of the Conservative Party's 'Big Society' vision and the Liberal Democrats' focus on the citizen.[6] And above all, the leaders stressed that the budget deficit reduction programme would take precedence over all other measures.[7]

Coalition politics and policy

The government unveiled an ambitious legislative programme in the Queen's Speech within weeks of the election including the scrapping of the previous government's plans for a national identity card scheme; provisions to enable more schools to become academies and free schools; giving councils more powers over housing and planning decisions; a review of local government finance; the abolition of a number of quangos; reform of the police service including new directly elected commissioners; and welfare reform to create a single welfare to work programme and make benefit payments more conditional on a willingness to accept work.

An ambitious programme of constitutional and parliamentary reform was also unveiled: the introduction of fixed-term parliaments; a referendum on the Alternative Vote (AV), coupled with a reduction in the number of parliamentary constituencies to 600 (from 650) in time for the next election, accompanied by reform of the boundary review process. In the longer-term the government indicated that it would introduce recall provisions for MPs and focus on the next stage of House of Lords reform.

[5] HM Government (20 May 2010), *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government.*
[6] Ibid, p.8.
[7] Ibid, p.35.

The Queen's Speech also heralded important developments as far as devolution was concerned. In Scotland the review of the devolution settlement led by Sir Kenneth Calman had made a series of far-reaching recommendations to devolve more powers from Westminster to Holyrood, including new income tax-raising powers. The coalition said it would now implement the recommendations. In Wales it also committed to hold a referendum in 2011 on the devolution of further powers that would free the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government from having to seek agreement at Westminster before legislating in some areas of already devolved responsibility.

But the coalition was to have only a short honeymoon. Within weeks the Liberal Democrat Chief Secretary to the Treasury, David Laws MP, resigned from the cabinet after the press revealed that he had been paying rent to his partner for accommodation in London in contravention of the parliamentary expenses rules. In the months that followed, several Liberal Democrat ministers found themselves subject to a level of press scrutiny they had not endured whilst in opposition; the most serious being when the Business Secretary Vince Cable was secretly recorded by undercover *Daily Telegraph* journalists in his constituency advice surgery claiming that he had 'a nuclear option. If they push me too far then I can walk out of the government.'[8] The legislative programme also ran into early difficulties when the Education Minister Michael Gove was condemned for his peremptory handling of changes to the nationwide Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme and on the constitutional front there was widespread criticism of the government's failure to properly consult on its fixed-term parliament proposals and the linking of the AV referendum to the reduction in the size of the House of Commons and the changes to the boundary review process.

Fratricidal drama: the Labour leadership election

The existence of the coalition and the resulting tribal anger that was directed at the Liberal Democrats, coupled with the fact that in May they had secured their best local election results for 14 years, left Labour in a more buoyant mood than many would have expected of a party that had just lost a general election. In the months immediately afterwards Labour largely focused its efforts internally as the party looked for a new leader. Gordon Brown resigned following the election and deputy leader Harriet Harman took over on an interim basis pending the election of the new leader. Five candidates emerged of which four were former cabinet ministers: David Miliband; his brother Ed Miliband; Ed Balls; and Andy Burnham. The only candidate without ministerial experience was Diane Abbott. The leadership process revealed little in terms of new policy developments or significant new thinking for the future; having only just returned to opposition after an exhausting 13 years in office it was too early for that. Instead, much of the media focus centred, soap-opera style, on the Miliband brothers' contest for the crown. After months travelling the country the fratricidal drama reached its denouement in Manchester on the eve of the party's annual conference in October; Ed Miliband had beaten his older and more experienced brother David to the prize in a wafer thin victory.

[8] *The Daily Telegraph*, 'Vince Cable: Transcript of his meeting with reporters', 21 December 2010, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/liberaldemocrats/8215501/Vince-Cable-transcript-of-his-meeting-with-reporters.html.

The economy

At the start of the year the release of the economic figures for the last quarter of 2009 confirmed that the UK had officially come out of recession. Unemployment fell for the first time in 18 months and house prices rose; however, growth of only 0.1% suggested that any recovery was precariously poised. The pre-election March budget was unusually downbeat; there was little money for giveaways to tempt voters and Chancellor Alistair Darling warned that the budget cuts to come would be deeper than those of the Thatcher government in the 1980s. He announced a 1% increase in stamp duty on houses valued at £1 million in order to finance a stamp-duty holiday for first-time buyers on properties worth up to £250,000 and £2.5 million in tax from bank bonuses was directed to support the small business sector through the difficult economic period. But it was the government's refusal to reverse the previously announced 1% increase on staff and employers' National Insurance contributions from April 2011 that prompted most political debate. The opposition derided it as a 'tax on jobs', a call supported by leading businessmen who warned, in a public letter to the press on the eve of the election, that the measure would put the economic recovery at risk.

Soon after the general election the new government announced an immediate £6 billion worth of cuts and in an emergency June budget stated that its approach would be a ratio of 77:23 of spending cuts versus tax rises in order to bring the budget deficit into balance by 2015-16. The budget also confirmed pay freezes for public sector workers and cuts to housing benefit and disability living allowance. In a move that infuriated Liberal Democrat supporters it was also announced that VAT would rise from 17.5% to 20%; the party had warned during the general election campaign that the other parties were planning a secret VAT increase only to find that it was now implementing it in government. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies claimed that the budget would hit the poorest hardest, denting the coalition's claims that it was taking a 'fair' approach to the cuts programme across all sections of society. The comprehensive spending review in October confirmed the scale of the economic misery: most government departments faced a 20% four-year cut in their budget; just under half a million public sector jobs were likely to be lost; and a further reduction of £7 billion was to be made to welfare spending on top of the £11 billion that had previously been announced. Controversially, the government proposed to cut child benefit for families with a higher rate taxpayer from January 2013.

The combined effect of the budget cuts and the public perception of broken promises all proved damaging to Liberal Democrat support throughout the autumn and their poll ratings suffered. The problem manifested itself most prominently in the debate about higher education funding. Contrary to Liberal Democrat policy in the election, the government proposed to allow an increase in university tuition fees up to £9,000. In a wave of unrest students organised university sit-ins and marches, taking to the streets in their thousands in November and December. The government claimed that the plans were fairer and more progressive as repayments would start at a higher income level than under the previous policy and would be better linked to an individual's ability to pay. The Liberal Democrat leader however, had actively campaigned during the election on a 'no increase in tuition fees' platform and every one of his party's MPs had signed up to the pledge. Opposition to the new policy was therefore particularly directed – often in personal and vitriolic terms – towards Nick Clegg. However, the students' cause was damaged when the

demonstrations descended into violence: the building housing the Conservative Party headquarters in Westminster was occupied and badly damaged, Parliament Square was besieged by students and riot police, and the Prince of Wales' car was attacked in central London. Despite the protest the government won the tuition fees vote with a majority of 21 but it split the Liberal Democrats: 21 of their MPs voted against the government, including two former party leaders, Charles Kennedy and Sir Menzies Campbell, eight abstained, and three Parliamentary Private Secretaries – ministerial aides – resigned.

The Liberal Democrats would face their first major electoral test since joining the coalition when a by-election in Oldham and Saddleworth was ordered for January 2011. In December, for the first time in 99 years, a specially convened election court ordered that the constituency election be re-run and the sitting MP, former Labour immigration minister Phil Woolas, was barred from holding public office for three years. The court found that Woolas, who had won the seat at the general election by just 103 votes, was guilty of lying about his Liberal Democrat opponent and had knowingly misled the electorate in breach of the 1983 Representation of the People Act. The case raised serious questions about how politicians might campaign and communicate in the future. Across the political divide there was also real concern about the constitutional implications of two unelected judges overturning the democratic decision of the electorate. But despite protestations on all sides of the House of Commons, the legal judgement remained and Woolas was removed from Parliament.

Beyond Westminster

International events also played their part in shaping the British political scene throughout the year and Iraq and Afghanistan continued to dominate the headlines. One hundred and three British soldiers died in Afghanistan during the year and the end of the conflict remained distant. Concern about the capacity of the armed forces to undertake the military mission in light of serious budget cuts at the Ministry of Defence dominated debate in the latter half of the year. As for Iraq, the Chilcot Inquiry into the lessons to be learnt from the Iraq war continued its work, with a parade of current and former ministers, military officers and civil servants called to give evidence, foremost among them Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The release of hundreds of thousands of files on the Iraq war and other conflicts by the whistleblowing website Wikileaks in the autumn added to concerns about the conduct of ministers, diplomats, civil servants and senior army personnel in the run-up to and during the conflict.

Like many parts of the world the country was also affected by the impact of the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud that brought air travel to a halt for much of April, impacting on the economy and the airline and tourism business in particular. In line with the caretaker rules governing the election period, ministers were careful to consult with their opposition counterparts on the measures taken to address the difficulties. Similarly, the Greek economic crisis provided a difficult financial backdrop to the inter-party negotiations conducted in the five days following the general election. The Greek government had requested an international financial bailout in April and by May its credit rating had been downgraded. National strikes followed on 5 May – the day of the British general election – after the government unveiled a package of severe austerity measures; the protests rapidly turned violent and three people were killed in Athens. The Chancellor, Alistair

Darling, travelled to a meeting of European Finance Ministers the weekend after the election to discuss a proposed 100 billion Euro three-year loan from the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). But in the absence of a clear election result, caretaker government rules again applied and he consulted beforehand with his Conservative and Liberal Democrat counterparts, George Osborne and Vince Cable, on the terms of the financial bailout and the approach to be taken at the meeting by the British government.

As almost all occupational pensions schemes contained BP shares in their portfolio, the fall-out from April's BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was also a major political as well as financial and environmental concern. Estimates suggested that BP shares accounted for one in every six pounds invested in British pensions; when its share price plummeted by over 25% in the month of June alone many public and private sector workers feared the effect on their savings.

Towards the end of the year the collapse of the Irish economy brought the scale of the international financial crisis ever nearer home. The government supported another joint EU-IMF bailout as well as offering to make a direct bilateral loan. In total the British contribution to the loan package was estimated to be in the region of eight billion Euros. The coalition thus found itself in the uncomfortable position of promising potentially billions of pounds in loans to a Eurozone country at a time when it was making significant cuts at home. As a major UK trading partner however, the government deemed it to be in the national interest to support the Irish economy. Trade with Ireland exceeded total UK trade with the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China; if the Irish economy collapsed it would have serious consequences for UK exports.

Political engagement

2010 was thus one of the most momentous years in post-war political history. New territory was charted electorally, constitutionally and economically. But what, if any impact, did this have on political engagement? Was the public more knowledgeable about politics after a hard fought election campaign, party leaders' debates, and the coalition negotiations? Did the dramatic scale of events pique their interest in politics at all? Has the coalition government and the process by which it was formed following an inconclusive election result had any impact on public perceptions of the efficacy of our political system? Are people more or less satisfied with the system of government or has it had no discernible influence at all? And are the public more motivated to get involved in politics or civic and community activities than in years past? In short, did the year's events in any way change how the public view politics and political engagement?

3. The complexity of public attitudes

As in previous years what is perhaps most surprising about the Audit data is the continuing stability in public attitudes. Despite the enormity of the political events of 2010, underlying public perceptions and behaviours remained largely static: the headline engagement indicator results show few significant changes and levels of active engagement and participation remain in the doldrums. However, below the surface of the topline results, and with eight Audit datasets now available, it is possible to add greater depth and nuance to the engagement picture.

A rising rate of knowledge and interest

The events of 2010 had the greatest impact in terms of rising levels of interest in politics and in perceived knowledge of Parliament. People's interest in politics rose five points to 58% since the last Audit and now stands at the highest ever level recorded in the Audit lifecycle. The prospect of a 'change' election and the greater accessibility of politics to a broader swathe of the public, particularly due to higher than usual levels of media coverage, would readily account for this. Although the older generation are generally more likely to be interested in politics – and this still holds true – in this Audit the increased level of interest is particularly marked in those in the 25-34 and 35-44 age brackets. Fifty-one per cent of 25-34 year olds now express an interest in politics, a rise of seven points in a year. The increase among 35-44 year olds is even higher with a 12 point rise in interest since Audit 7 (49% to 61%). This would suggest that events such as the general election, the formation of the coalition and the economic crisis, did in some way capture the attention not of the youngest voters but of those who, in the 25-44 age range, had perhaps the most to gain or lose from the results of the election and issues such as the proposed solutions to the nation's economic problems: those such as first-time buyers, parents of young families, and early and mid-career professionals.

58%
interested in politics – Audit record

Perceived knowledge of politics also increased, albeit only marginally compared to the level of interest (up just two points at 53%). However, the long-term trend across the Audit lifecycle remains one of steady and sustained improvement, with self-reported levels of knowledge about politics now significantly above the nadir of 39% recorded in Audit 3. Perceived knowledge of Parliament has also increased – and at a faster rate than knowledge of politics – with a seven point rise in the proportion of the public claiming to know at least 'a fair amount' about it, bringing it to its highest level ever recorded in the Audit lifecycle.[9] A third more of the population now claim to know at least a 'fair amount' about Parliament

[9] Note, however, that in previous Audit studies the question has been worded as 'Westminster Parliament' as opposed to 'UK Parliament' – the trends are therefore indicative only.

than did so in the first Audit study in 2004. Worryingly, however, 45% of those who say they are absolutely certain to vote at the next election feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about Parliament. And whereas 67% of 18-24 year olds feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics, an even higher proportion – 72% – of the same age group feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about Parliament. Unsurprisingly, fewer people can correctly name their local Member of Parliament than in recent years: only 38% can do so compared to 44% in Audit 7, a situation clearly derived from the historically high turnover of MPs at the general election.

45%
of those certain to vote know little about Parliament

Almost seven in 10 people (69%) claim they are interested in how things work in their local area, a higher level of interest (11 points) than for politics more generally. This reflects similar questions in previous Audit studies where, consistently, around four in five people were very or fairly interested in 'local issues'. However, a majority of the public (54%) report that they do not know much or anything at all about how things actually work in their local area, and levels of knowledge about how things work locally are lower than levels of political knowledge generally (46% know at least a fair amount about how things work in their area, compared to 53% who say the same about politics generally). These issues are explored in more detail in chapter five.

Familiarity and favourability

It has been a staple of the Audit series that levels of knowledge and interest are inextricably linked: the more knowledgeable a person the more likely they are to be very or fairly interested in politics. The same holds true in this study: 78% of those who say they are interested in politics also say they know at least a fair amount about it. However, it has also been a general rule of thumb that familiarity breeds favourability: that when analysing the reputation of political actors and institutions a greater level of knowledge and interest breeds a greater sense of satisfaction with them. But the latest Audit data suggests this picture is more complex with regard to political engagement in Britain today.

Only 27%
are satisfied with Parliament

Despite an increase in perceived knowledge of Parliament, fewer people are now satisfied with it (27%) than at any time in previous Audits (36% were satisfied in Audits 1 and 4; and 33% in Audit 7). The level of 'dissatisfaction' is broadly consistent with previous years. Rather, the change can be discerned in the number of people – a third compared to around a quarter in the last Audit – who say they are 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the working of Parliament. One might characterise their attitude as one of indifference or conclude that they are reserving judgement in light of the unusual nature of this 'hung' Parliament.

In contrast, following the 5% spike last year in the number of people who, in the aftermath of the expenses scandal, felt the system of governing needed improving, the proportion who feel the same today has returned to the levels seen in Audit 6. Whilst views on the workings of Britain's system of government remain negative, twice as many people believe the system of governing 'could be improved quite a lot' or needs 'a great deal of improvement' than consider that the system works 'extremely well' or 'could be improved

in small ways but mainly works well' (64% and 31% respectively). These findings are broadly in line with public attitude measures in each of the past seven years.

This year's decline in satisfaction with Parliament suggests the emergence of a worrying narrative about its role following the traumatic events of the last two years and the aftermath of the expenses scandal. It appears that Parliament specifically, rather than 'the system of governing' generally, has suffered in public perceptions. In part this may be linked to the degree to which perceptions of the efficacy of the system are directly linked to the public's satisfaction with political outcomes and because in the public mind Parliament appears to have no independent institutional identity but is perceived largely through the prism of the work and conduct of MPs. How these attitudes to and perceptions of Parliament are now being shaped, and what impact the events of the last year may thus have had on the public's sense of favourability towards it as an institution is explored in more detail in chapter four.

Those who say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics have better perceptions overall than those who report lower levels of knowledge. However, those at the top of the knowledge spectrum, those who say they know 'a great deal' about politics, have a slightly less favourable view of the system of governing than those who claim to know only 'a fair amount'. Those who say they know 'a great deal' are second only to those who say they know 'nothing at all' in concluding that the system 'needs a great deal of improvement'. This situation was inverted in Audit 6 when those who professed to know a great deal about politics were the group on the knowledge spectrum that was most likely to say that the system of government needed a great deal of improvement. It is unclear exactly why the more knowledgeable members of the public are among those most likely to think that the system needs improving. However, one could infer that perhaps those people with higher levels of knowledge about politics are consequently more aware of the failings of the political system. And those who claim lower levels of knowledge (those who know 'a fair amount' rather than 'a great deal') are perhaps more likely to hedge their bets when considering improving the system precisely because they are aware of their lack of comprehensive knowledge as a base for making an informed view of the system and the case for change.[10]

The perceived efficacy of politics is also at an all-time low in the Audit series. Just three in 10 (30%) now agree with the statement that 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run'. This continues the downward trend since Audit 1 when 37% agreed with the statement and would suggest that last year's finding where there was a 6% increase, putting efficacy levels back to where they were seven years ago, may have been a short-term blip in attitudes. That the public have a declining sense that when they get involved in the political process they can make a real difference may pose significant challenges for those who advocate measures designed to facilitate greater public participation and engagement. However, a much higher proportion of the public – 51% – agree that

Just three in 10

agree that by getting involved they can make a difference

[10] It is also important to bear in mind that the total number of people reporting 'a great deal' of knowledge is lower (n=51-87) so their responses are more likely to fluctuate compared to the responses of those who claim 'a fair amount' of knowledge whose numbers are greater (n=456-547).

'when people like me get involved in their local community they really can change the way their area is run'. The emphasis on involvement in the local community rather than politics leads to a very different perception among the public about the impact they might have if only they engaged in the process. Belief in their capacity to bring about an efficacious outcome locally is clearly held by half the population – and yet, we know that they do not engage and participate actively in this way. These contradictions are explored in greater detail in chapter five.

Broader issues of geography and distance – and a person's sense of place – appear to be an important factor in engagement. For example, the further from London they are, the less interested in and knowledgeable about politics and the Westminster Parliament a person is likely to be compared to the national average. Those in the North West region (49%) and Scotland (44%) profess the lowest levels of interest in politics. This is matched by low levels of reported knowledge: 70% of respondents in Scotland feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about the UK Parliament and 64% say the same about politics. Dissatisfaction levels with Parliament also reflect issues of distance, being particularly high in the North East (49%), the Yorkshire and Humber region (46%) and Scotland (47%). Eighty-one per cent of respondents in the North East feel the system of governing could be improved 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal', the highest proportion of any region in the country. Yet in contrast, the North East is particularly positive about local involvement and how things work locally. Scottish respondents also feel strongly about the workings of the political system with 77% saying it could be improved. In contrast, those living in London are the most content with and positive about the present system of governing; 41% believe the system works either 'extremely well and could not be improved', or 'it could be improved in small ways but mainly works well'. This evidence would seem to underline the ongoing importance of outreach and education programmes to link Parliament and politics to the regions and bridge the problems posed by virtue of geographical distance.

A growing sense of indifference?

The public may have found contemporary politics more interesting than in many years past, and more have demonstrated a willingness to actually vote than in recent general elections, but political activity more generally is not higher around a general election than it is in 'peacetime' years. The greater interest in and perceived knowledge of the political process is not matched by greater understanding or by greater engagement, beyond the 'entry level' action of voting in the election. An election does not seem to act as a spur to encourage wider political or indeed civic activities. Active engagement is flat or slightly down across almost all the engagement indicators.[11] Whatever motivates greater levels of interest, knowledge and election turnout does not translate into other forms of political or civic activism.

In Audit 3, as in this report, the holding of a general election led to no increase in political activity apart from voting. In this year's research 66% claim to have voted in a general election and 58% in a local election – 17% and 9% more, respectively, than said the same

[11] The two key exceptions are: voting in the local and national elections (with the former increase at least in part due to the May 2010 local elections in England being held on the same day as the general election); and helping on fundraising drives, down from 27% to 18% (which is closer to the long-term trend for this question).

in Audit 7. However, giving money to a political party or to a campaigning organisation and signing a petition, are all at record lows in the Audit series. Similarly, there is no significant rise in the number of people discussing politics or political news with others – family or friends – in an election year: as in previous Audits, only two in five people report having done so (42%). And worryingly for those who are looking for an up-lift in civic activism in the context of devolved decision-making and greater community empowerment, only one in 10 people say they are definitely willing to volunteer at some point in the next few years. Given the relatively soft, open-ended nature of this question this might be perceived as a particularly disappointing response, as chapter five explores in more detail.

In so far as there is any evidence of greater public engagement, it is at the level of a spectator rather than a participant. An interest in and knowledge of politics is deemed reasonable and, as Audit 7 demonstrated, voting is widely regarded as a civic duty. However, political activism is quite a different matter altogether. It is a minority interest with only 4% saying they have taken an active part in political campaigns in the last two or three years. It is also one that has strong negative associations, both in terms of the efficacy of political activity and the conduct of politicians themselves. In other areas of life, such as sport, for example, the greater awareness or interest that may flow from a national team's success on the field of play creates inspiration and potential for greater individual involvement through playing or coaching. Turning that potential for engagement in the sport into practical reality then depends on a number of factors, including resources and the capacity and quality of the sport's national and local infrastructure to engage and retain new and existing participants. But the starting point for engagement is generally a positive one. With politics, the opposite is often true. Heightened interest stems often from a series of negative associations: crisis, cuts, conflict and sleaze. The poor standing of politics – and the negative connotations that attach to it – thus deters people from turning latent interest into active engagement and participation.

Social inequality and engagement

There is a clear link between the indicators of engagement and social class. The higher the social class the more likely a person is to express interest in, report knowledge of, and have actively participated in the political process in some way. Social class is a clear driver in the engagement process.

For example, whereas three quarters (77%) of those in social classes AB are interested in politics, only just over a third (36%) of those in social classes DE express the same. Income levels have a noticeable effect on interest: 73% of those earning more than £25,000 per annum are 'very' or 'fairly interested' in politics; but only 44% of those earning £9,499 or less per year feel the same way. Knowledge of politics, like interest, rises with each social grade: only one in three (29%) in social classes DE claim to know at least a 'fair amount' about politics; this rises to 43% of C2s and then to 59% of C1s and finally peaks at 73% of ABs. The higher the social grade the higher the level of interest in and knowledge of Parliament as well as the greater the capacity to correctly name one's MP. Like knowledge and interest, propensity to vote also reflects social class: 72% of ABs state they would be certain to vote at an immediate general election; this falls to 62% of C1s and falls again to 53% of C2s and 43% of DEs.

55%
of ABs but only
33%
of DEs feel knowledgeable about how their local area works

Similar links between engagement and class are also relevant in the context of local as well as national political engagement. Fifty-five per cent of respondents in social classes AB report knowing a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount' about how things work in their local area; but only 33% of DE respondents claim the same. The more affluent social classes are also more likely to believe that if they get involved locally they can bring about changes: 60% of ABs believe this compared to just 45% of DEs. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, those in social classes AB are more likely to volunteer than people in other social grades. The exceptions are C2s who are more likely to volunteer with a church or religious group, and C1s who are more likely to volunteer with groups working with children and young people.

When it comes to the efficacy of the political process, social grade is less of a guide. Around three in 10 of all social grades agree that by getting involved in politics they can change the way the UK is run. However, there are differences in levels of satisfaction. A third (33%) of those in social classes AB are satisfied with the way Parliament works as are around a quarter of C1s and C2s (27% and 25% respectively). But only one in five DE respondents are satisfied. Indeed, higher proportions of those in lower social grades believe the system of government needs improving compared to those in higher social grades (69% to 61% respectively).

Looking at the engagement model in social class terms suggests that the higher up the social classes you go, the more interested and knowledgeable you are likely to be; and the lower down the social grades you are, the less satisfied you are likely to be with the system of government. This suggests an important link between inequalities of political engagement and social mobility, and as such, at least in the short and medium term, the intractability of the political engagement problem.

Satisfaction and voting intentions

The Audit data throws up some interesting links between public attitudes and voting preferences. Following the general election, interest in politics among Labour voters stands at just 59% compared to 73% of Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters who say the same. Beyond interest, the evidence also strongly suggests that the public's attitude towards the governance of Great Britain and perceptions of the effectiveness of Parliament are heavily driven by their sense of satisfaction with political outcomes.

Interested in politics?
59%
of Labour supporters but
73%
of Conservative & Liberal Democrat supporters

As Figure 28 demonstrates (see page 85), perceptions that the system of governing needs improving generally increase as satisfaction with the incumbent government decreases. The increase in overall satisfaction with the government since 2009 may thus explain the marginal decrease in those who believe the system of government needs improvement in this Audit. There has been a five point drop since Audit 7 (from 69% to 64%) in the number of people who say they believe the system of governing Great Britain could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal'.

Think system of government needs improving?

53%

of Conservative supporters but

66%

of Labour & Liberal Democrat supporters

Conservative voters are happiest with the current system of government: 53% think it needs quite a lot or a great deal of improvement compared to 66% of Labour and 66% of Liberal Democrat supporters who say the same. When Labour was in government prior to the general election the reverse was true: then 76% of Conservative supporters felt the system needed improving and slightly fewer Liberal Democrats (63%) said the same. However, more Labour supporters were inclined to satisfaction with the system with 59% reporting that the system needed to be improved.

Supporters of the coalition parties are also more likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works than those who support a party outside government. Forty per cent of Conservative supporters are satisfied with the way the UK Parliament works and 34% of Liberal Democrats feel similarly. However, just 25% of Labour voters are satisfied with the way Parliament works, compared to 43% of them who said the same in 2009 when their party was still in power. Conversely, before the general election brought them into government, 37% of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats were satisfied with how Parliament works. So there has been an increase in satisfaction among supporters of both coalition parties – but that uplift is significantly smaller than the decline in satisfaction among Labour supporters. Clearly, the loss of power has had an impact on perceived satisfaction among Labour voters; but coalition, being less satisfactory than outright victory, has led to a relatively small improvement in satisfaction, particularly among Conservative supporters.

In Audit 7 younger respondents (those aged 18-34) were more satisfied with the system of government than older age groups: 32% of them thought the system worked well compared to just 25% of those aged 35 plus who said the same. In this Audit however, attitudes have reversed: just 26% of the younger cohort say the system works well compared to 36% of those aged 35-54 and 30% of those aged over 55. Given that satisfaction with the current system of government tends to correlate with satisfaction with the government itself, this attitudinal change may reflect the fact that younger age groups are perhaps more negatively disposed towards the coalition government – and particularly the Liberal Democrats' role in it – than older respondents, arising, for example, as a result of policies such as the decision to increase university tuition fees.

Feel they can make a difference in their community?

62%

of Liberal Democrats

54%

of Labour supporters

52%

of Conservatives

Interestingly, although Liberal Democrat supporters are less satisfied with Parliament overall than the Conservatives, they are more likely than supporters of any of the other parties to believe that it holds the government to account and that it is 'working for you and me'. Overall, Liberal Democrat supporters also tend to be the most engaged in politics and are the strongest believers in the efficacy of getting involved locally: 62% feel they can make a difference in their community

compared to 54% of Labour supporters and 52% of Conservative voters. This may, in part, reflect the party's historic reliance on a policy of strategic local growth through a focus on community politics. It may also suggest that the party's supporters are among those most likely to get involved in the community and volunteering activities that are considered component parts of David Cameron's Big Society; and are perhaps more likely to do so than the Prime Minister's own party supporters.

For voters who do not support one of the three main parties, levels of dissatisfaction with the democratic process are unsurprisingly much higher. Eighty-three per cent of respondents who would vote for 'other' parties feel the system of governing could be improved quite a lot or needs a great deal of improvement. Sixty-seven per cent of them are dissatisfied with the way that Parliament works and 48% do not believe Parliament holds the government to account. At the 2010 general election, 11.9% of the public supported 'other' parties (compared, for example, to 5.4% in 1979 and 1.4% in 1950): in an age of ever increasing de-alignment this could indicate a growing problem for the future.

4. Engagement in a new political and constitutional landscape

The formation of the coalition government has fundamentally changed the political landscape. Two parties with very different philosophies and ideologies have formed a government in the national interest. Manifesto pledges have been set aside on both sides in order to agree a common programme for government, and a radical programme of budget austerity and reform of state provision of services is underway. Members in both coalition parties find their loyalty stretched by the nature of the agreement and the policies they are asked to collectively support. The political dynamics within Parliament and beyond have also changed with just one main party of opposition, Labour, but two parties now within government that are the focus of scrutiny.

But what impact has this process had on public attitudes to politics, MPs, and Parliament? Has the search for cross-party consensus, and claims to be acting in the national interest, affected public perceptions of the efficacy of the political system? Are the public understanding or suspicious of parties that shelve policy promises in order to facilitate broader political agreement? Does the process of inter-party negotiation appeal to or appal the public and has it had any effect on their sense of confidence in politicians and the democratic system? And does this herald any wider change in public attitudes towards the political and electoral system?

The logic of 'compromise' versus the emotion of 'betrayal'

Looking at attitudes to coalition governments in general, there is much contradiction in public opinion and views were sharply divided during our qualitative discussion groups held in London. On the one hand compromise is seen, in principle, as a good thing in that it leads to more consensual politics.

'Compromise – I think it's a good thing. You might have a party and like some of what it wants'

'Coalition government, it's a terrible thing. I don't think coalition works. If there's two parties they're after their own agenda and not singing from the same hymn sheet'

Some participants felt it might help to 'defuse extreme situations' of the kind, for example, that the country could face economically. Other participants felt that as the balance of power would always lie with one dominant partner in a coalition then it could use the other party to prop up its more extreme policies. Conversely, some participants perceived that the Liberal Democrats had in all likelihood watered down the Conservative Party policy platform. For some this was a real advantage of coalition government; for others the price of doing so was considered too great.

Some participants worried that coalitions do not deliver strong government: policies are diluted in the search for consensus, but the result is that the government is less able to deliver what people voted for. In short, in seeking to please a broader cross-section of opinion the coalition ends up pleasing no one.

'Trouble is, you're always going to get conflicting points of view, there are two sets of policies'

'At the moment we all have to compromise, so they can just say that now. It's just a cop out. They don't have to follow their own election manifesto anymore, so it's all rubbish'

Some perceived that for the parties this was advantageous as it opened up the policy arena; not being bound by manifesto commitments meant they were effectively free to do just as they wished.

For these participants the tradition of manifesto commitments at least provided some semblance of accountability, even if a majority of them had never actually read the policy documents themselves.

As we found in Audit 5, 60% of the public – three out of every five people – agree that governments are elected on a mandate and should have the powers to act on it, with only 7% disagreeing with the statement.[12] With coalition government, however, the concept of what constitutes a 'mandate' is much more inchoate and it is clear that the public are struggling with the dilemmas it poses.

'I think they should do what they say they're going to do… If they've agreed to do something, that's what we voted them in on, so they should do those things'

Even among participants who were opposed to Conservative policies there was a sense that they would prefer a stronger government model even if it meant the implementation of policies they disliked because it would at least mean that the government was implementing what it had promised.

'I was a lifelong Lib Dem voter and member until the election and the result, I was appalled that the Lib Dems could find consensus with the Conservative government, a government I protested about, I was demoralised, appalled, thought the consensus would go Lib-Lab, totally disillusioned by my party selling out, didn't listen to the membership'

A strong emergent theme during the qualitative research was that voters felt 'betrayed'. In the discussion groups, participants saw the reality of compromise as a significant problem with the current coalition government. They gave voice to this sense of betrayal in conversation with each other, with mainly, but not just, Liberal Democrat supporters exhibiting a degree of hostility to the coalition and the extent to which they perceived it was dancing to the Conservative Party's tune.

[12] Hansard Society (2008), *Audit of Political Engagement 5* (London: Hansard Society), p.33.

The presence of key Liberal Democrat politicians, particularly party leader Nick Clegg, appearing regularly at press conferences to defend the coalition's decisions, seemed to particularly irritate some and was cited as evidence that the coalition had gone 'too far'.

'Why is the Deputy Prime Minister representing the whole coalition party all the time?'

'If I could do my vote again, I'd do it different'

There was a feeling among participants that the coalition is unbalanced and therefore not a genuine partnership and this is partly why it is not working as some had hoped it might.

A key theme of the discussions was concern that the smaller partner in the coalition holds less sway and therefore always has to make compromises.

This should of course be seen in context: the research took place just a few weeks after the decision to increase higher education tuition fees and the backdrop of the student riots in protest. The policy ran counter to Liberal Democrat manifesto pledges and promises made during the election campaign by the party's leader and other MPs. The vote was seen as one where the coalition had required the party to make serious compromises. Since the election the party has lost considerable support – Ipsos MORI's February 2011 Political Monitor showed just 13% of those who were certain to vote intended to support the Liberal Democrats, suggesting more than half of their general election voters have moved away from the party.[13] This may prove to be a temporary problem but the loss of support, even among those who supported the idea of a coalition prior to the election, indicates a serious conflict between the logic of compromise and the emotion of betrayal.

Parliament: 'working for you and me'?

The nature of coalition government is such that Parliament plays a critical role for it is where the dynamics of the inter- and intra-party relationships now play out from vote to vote, issue to issue. But although Westminster may now occupy a more central and prominent role in the political and public mindset than in recent years, explaining perhaps why the public consequently perceive they are more knowledgeable about it, the increased attention has not generated greater levels of satisfaction and confidence in the institution.

Fewer people are now satisfied with Parliament than at any time in the Audit lifecycle. Only 38% of the public believe that the UK Parliament 'holds government to account' – a rate of two in every five people that is consistent with previous Audit findings. And just one in three people (30%) agree that Parliament is 'working for you and me', a significant decline of eight points in just a year.[14] More people now disagree with the statement (39%) than concur with it and, as with other areas of political engagement, social class heavily influences attitudes. As Figure 1 shows, those in social grades DE are much more likely

[13] Ipsos MORI Political Monitor, 25 February 2011 at www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2725/ReutersIpsos-MORI-February-2011-Political-Monitor.aspx

[14] Note, however, that in previous Audit studies the question has been worded as 'Westminster Parliament' as opposed to 'UK Parliament' – the trends are therefore indicative only.

(51%) compared to those in C2 (43%), C1 (33%) and particularly AB groups (32%) to reject the idea that Parliament is working for them.

Figure 1: Parliament: working for you and me

The UK Parliament is working for you and me		
	% agree	% disagree
All	30	39
Gender		
- Male	32	38
- Female	28	39
Age		
- 18-34	29	36
- 35-54	29	39
- 55+	32	41
Social grade		
- AB	41	32
- C1	32	33
- C2	25	43
- DE	22	51
Ethnicity		
- White	29	40
- BME	40	24
Work status		
- Full-time	31	37
- Part-time	37	33
- Not working	27	43

Given that the lower socio-economic groups are likely to be heavily affected by the government's programme of budget cuts, it is unlikely that the perception of Parliament working for these people will change anytime soon. Indeed, this year's data demonstrates that those who are unemployed are least likely to feel that Parliament has an impact on their everyday life, mirroring the view that the institution is not working for people like themselves.

In part, the problem may be that Parliament is the forum in which the decisions that seed the public's sense of betrayal are made and in the context of a coalition government, the public's perception of Parliament's role may be heightened. For example, during our qualitative research Parliament was regularly associated in the minds of the participants with the breaking of manifesto promises such as tuition fees, the approval of public

spending cuts, and the failure to effectively regulate the banks and thereby protect the public from the financial crisis. Its increased prominence, coupled with its association with policy outcomes that are not regarded efficaciously, may thus have a detrimental influence on public attitudes towards it. If so, Parliament's reputation may continue to take a heavy battering in the years ahead by virtue of being prominently and frequently associated with the difficult decisions, particularly in the economic sphere, that will have to be made, many of which will not be popular.

Representativeness: local versus national tensions

The qualitative research also suggests that the unrepresentative nature of Parliament does not help its cause. Participants in the discussion groups were asked to describe what they thought the role of Parliament to be. The graphic below portrays the responses of the participants; the larger the word the more often it was mentioned.

Figure 2: The role of Parliament

Representing citizens' views, improving and making laws and protecting citizens emerged as the prime functions perceived by participants to be Parliament's responsibility. They clearly saw Parliament as a place where 'the voice of the people' is represented. However, for a number of participants Parliament's ability to do this was hampered by the fact that it is not actually representative of the public at large.

'People are not represented across the board. It's dictated to and dominated by public schoolboys and Oxbridge people'

The issue of representation raises two specific and significant issues: the degree to which MPs are expected to 'represent' the views of their constituents and the manner in which

they should do this, and how important the make-up of the membership of Parliament is as a matter of principle and practice in relation to this ability to effectively represent constituents' views.

While participants in the discussion groups were quick to be critical of Parliament, many did acknowledge that MPs are doing the job that the public wants of them and they accepted that not everyone in Parliament should be tarred with the same brush in relation to expenses and other problems. There was widespread acceptance that being an MP is a difficult job and one that many nonetheless do well. But views on whether or not participants felt represented by their MP very much relied on knowledge of who their MP was. Many participants did not know the name of their MP from which they extrapolated that the MP must not be doing a good job of representing them because, if they did not even know who he or she was, how could they be doing so? Those participants who could identify their MP generally felt that they were doing a good job, even if they did not necessarily vote for them, in large part because they felt they were representing their constituents well. Such positivity largely stemmed from the fact that the MP for a lot of the participants was very visible locally, and in a small number of cases from good experiences when the participants had had cause to contact them. In most of these instances what mattered most to the constituent was receiving a response, even if it did not resolve their problem. Simply by responding they felt that the MP had at least taken the time to consider their problem.

'People should vote on issues and the MP should take it forward'

This sense of contact and communication was important to many of the participants: they actively wanted MPs to engage with them. For example, on the whole they wanted MPs to consult regularly with their constituents before making decisions in Parliament. Many felt that as an MP is there to represent the views of their constituents – to be the 'voice of the people' – it was important they find out what the public think about an issue in hand; that unless they consulted with them the MP would be in no position to act on behalf of their constituents.

This of course runs counter to the importance that the public also attaches to a party's mandate to govern which requires a majority of the governing party's MPs to support that mandate throughout the course of a Parliament if it is to be implemented. Participants also struggled to explain how MPs should go about consulting their constituents regularly before reaching a decision on an issue. Some suggested that MPs send out questionnaires, knock on doors, hold local meetings, or offer online voting options on issues. In the participants' minds, the onus was on MPs to make the effort to find out what their constituents thought on any given issue, rather than on constituents to proactively inform them of their views. Many suggested that MPs should be holding regular events that were open to the public to come and speak to them about issues of interest and concern. When it was put to them that most MPs already do this, most of the participants had not heard of advice surgeries, for example, and blamed MPs for not publicising them more. However, as previously, when prompted as to whether they had made attempts themselves to look for such meetings or information about how to contact their MP, few had done so; indeed, they felt they should not have to do so as MPs should make it easier for them.

Other participants pointed to the impracticality and cost of an MP having to consult his or her entire constituency on every significant decision they had to make each year. While for the most part these respondents did feel that some consultation should take place, many of them felt it was the job of an MP to make their own decisions and exercise their own judgement based on what they thought would be best for their area and for the country as a whole.

'They should make their own judgement. You're electing someone based on your perception of them. If they're bowing to the wind they're not really doing their job anymore'

'I think he's got to weigh up the arguments, listen to what they bring to the table and make his own judgement, what he thinks is best'

To do this would involve taking constituents' views into consideration, but it would also mean consulting experts and advisers after which the MP should make the decision based on all the evidence available to them.

A few participants wanted referendums on almost all issues: crime, specifically sentencing and capital punishment; the European Union and the single currency; international treaties; war; welfare; and the NHS were all mentioned as topics where a referendum might be applied. As one participant put it, 'in an ideal world we would vote on anything'. But most participants accepted that such an approach was not practical. There was recognition that a nationwide referendum on issues of 'fundamental' change to our politics and constitution such as the voting system or changing the currency was appropriate and necessary.

Beyond this however, there was less support for the use of referendums more widely. Indeed, concern was expressed about low levels of public interest and knowledge if referendums were held regularly, and the likely cost was deemed problematic as well. And some discussants noted that the reason for having MPs and a government was precisely for them to make decisions on our behalf.

'You should have referendums on things that would change the whole of the UK'

'I think if you elect a government you're hoping that they'll represent your views…there shouldn't be a need for a referendum'

In order to represent them effectively and be 'the voice of the people', discussants prioritised two factors in an MP: that they should agree with their policies and they should be local. Below is a graphic representing what participants felt to be the most important factors; the larger the word the more often it was mentioned by them.

Figure 3: Characteristics of an MP

As the graphic demonstrates, being 'local' was clearly the most important characteristic. When pressed to explain this, for most participants it meant that the MP had lived in the constituency for a number of years.

'They don't have to be born there, but they can't represent the area if they haven't lived there'

Residency in the community was perceived to imply that the MP would know and care about it and its people, that they would understand any issues and problems and know what would be in the best interests of the community.

'I think they need to know the way the people in that area want to live'

Being local was closely connected in the participants' minds with the idea that the MP was good at their job. There was thus a high degree of scepticism at the suggestion that someone from outside could be a good MP, although for some this negative response was also rooted in opposition to the prospect that their representative might be 'parachuted in' by their central party.

A sense of local connection, and shared beliefs and understanding about what their MP stood for was thus critical in people's attitudes towards them. Nearly all of the participants rejected issues of age, gender, ethnicity and social background as being important to them, although some did make comments that implied concern if not criticism about the narrow socio-economic status and background of MPs. But many participants set these demographic characteristics entirely to one side, appearing to signify that they did not even consider them when voting for an MP. The participants were far more interested in what an MP stands for, what they believe in and whether or not they were good at their job rather than who they are in terms of background.

But while no one placed any of these demographic characteristics as one of their top two priority characteristics in an MP (they were always placed at the bottom in varying orders), women tended to prioritise gender at the top of the list of demographics. While they did not feel it was the most important characteristic – and no one said they would vote for someone just because they were a woman – many of the female participants identified a perceived shortage of women in Parliament as a problem that they would like to see addressed.

'I just think it should be a fair distribution. This is not a fair distribution'

From the responses they gave in the pre-discussion questionnaires, it is clear that most of the participants were aware that there are far more men in Parliament than women and more white MPs than non-white MPs. Indeed, when invited to estimate the demographic make-up of Parliament many gave answers that were close to the correct figures, although interestingly, on average, they tended to overestimate the number of non-white MPs. Taking the average of their responses, the participants believed that Parliament was 75% male and 25% female; and 84% white and 16% non-white. In fact, only 22% of the 2010 parliamentary intake are women and only 4% of them are non-white. The higher expectation about the ethnic make-up of Parliament may reflect a London bias in the discussion groups as participants were surprised to hear that across the country around only one in 10 people are non-white, whereas the figure for London is of course significantly higher.

'To me it's irrelevant; so long as they're doing the job they've been elected to do… it's about capability'

But although female and BME participants tended to feel more strongly than other participants that Parliament should generally be more representative of the public, they still felt that in choosing their local MP their gender and ethnicity was not important, and certainly not as important as policy agreement and the need for an MP to be good at their job.

These participants tended not to recognise the contradiction and tension between wanting to see improvements in the total make-up and therefore general representativeness of Parliament and the representativeness they wanted in a local constituency context that was predicated on entirely different factors and characteristics.

'It should be more representative centrally in Parliament but it is less important at a local level'

They drew a clear distinction between the merits of a local MP and the job they do in representing constituents, and the need for more general representation of the public as a whole in Parliament.

When pressed on the general representativeness of Parliament the participants for whom this was a concern nonetheless largely rejected the idea of redressing the problems through any form of positive discrimination. However, there were a few participants willing to countenance measures to encourage non-white MPs. This was rooted in a view that while, for the most part, men could represent women and vice versa, a white MP would likely struggle to understand some aspects and issues of ethnicity and therefore in a constituency

with a predominantly non-white population, the community would be better served by a non-white MP. Again, though, this stance was rooted in understandings and expectations about the 'local' characterisation of the MP rather than any desire to bring about a more generally representative Parliament.

Electing MPs: a case for change?

Given public attitudes to coalition government in principle and in practice, the declining sense of satisfaction with Parliament, and the prioritisation attached to the local characterisation of an MP, does any of this have implications for the electoral system in light of the impending referendum on the Alternative Vote?

Our qualitative research, conducted early in January 2011, found that many participants were not even aware that a referendum on the electoral system was to be held within months. Indeed, some of the younger participants in particular admitted that our discussion was the first time they had heard of it. The electoral system was clearly not something that most of them had ever spent any time considering or talking about and the ideas put in front of them were difficult for many to grasp, often leading to more questions and confusion than concrete answers.

Participants were invited to list a series of concepts about the voting system in order of importance to them:

a) Having one MP representing a clear geographical area;

b) The elected MP winning at least 50% of votes in their constituency;

c) The number of MPs a political party has should be roughly equal to the proportion of votes they get in the general election;

d) A system that is likely to produce one party with a majority in Parliament to govern on its own;

e) A system that is likely to produce an outcome where two or more parties have to form a coalition in order to govern;

f) Being able to vote for more than one candidate by ranking candidates in order of preference;

g) A system that makes it more likely that smaller parties win seats in Parliament.

Most participants generally struggled to understand and prioritise these concepts and none was deemed to be clearly more important than the others. Negative perceptions of the current coalition government – and the dissatisfaction and hostility to it among many of the participants – proved to be more important than any other factor in discussions about the electoral system. The idea that a particular voting system might be likely to produce more coalitions was not a popular one; a system deemed more likely to produce a one party majority in Parliament, allowing it to govern on its own, was far better received.

'Better not to have conflicting ideas about a single area – the area should be represented by one person'

Beyond this, two of the most popular concepts were the idea of having one MP representing a clear geographical area and each MP winning at least 50% of the votes in their constituency. The importance of the clear constituency link is understandable in the context of the public's prioritisation of the 'local' characteristic in their MP. The notion of multi-member constituencies was strongly rejected. They did not see any potential for augmenting and strengthening local links in this way; the possibility of conflict between the members was perceived more strongly, likely resulting in a lack of decision-making by the MPs to the detriment of the constituency.

'Two (MPs) in one area might have different ideas, which would stop decisions being made'

In contrast, having one MP representing a clear geographic area would provide clear accountability and ensure MPs maintained links with their community.

'Decisions Parliament makes should reflect the overall make-up of the country – smaller parties should be listened to as well'

Some participants mentioned proportionality as an important facet of an electoral system, believing that this would better ensure that results were 'fair' and that the votes of those who supported smaller parties would not be wasted.

In the words of one participant, 'it is crazy at the moment the way that parties can get 10, 15% of the votes and not get any seats'.

When challenged about the prospect that a more proportional system might result in representation of extremist parties such as the British National Party in Parliament, most of the participants felt that people should have greater faith in the public not to vote for them, and if they did so then this would be a democratic outcome reflecting the will of the people.

'People might be more inclined to vote for the smaller parties knowing that you're not throwing your vote away… might lead to more pluralism'

'If you've got to get half the votes you'll put more effort in, in order to get 50% of the vote'

The idea that each MP should command at least 50% support in their constituency was a popular one. In the context of articulating the local voice of constituents in Parliament, having at least 50% of the vote was perceived to strengthen their position. However, many participants clearly did not fully understand the concept and how it might be achieved. Some participants believed this was already the case under the existing First Past the Post system, misunderstanding the difference between securing 50% of the vote and winning the 'most' votes. The clear attraction of 50% support to the participants who favoured the

principle was that the MP would have a strong mandate and would probably have to work harder for their local area in order to achieve such support.

But when it was explained to them that most candidates would probably reach 50% only by counting lower preference votes (second and third choices etc.) then participants tended to look far less favourably on the idea.

'I like the ranking system, that way you're going to get a better view of what people want'

There was a mixed response to the concept of voting for more than one candidate. Some participants liked the fact that they would be able to state preferences, as they might like a particular candidate or party but not usually consider voting for them.

A few suggested that it might encourage people to vote for a party they would not otherwise consider because they were thought not to have a chance of winning. However, the dominant feeling in the discussion groups was that having more than one vote was unnecessary.

'I'd rather vote for one because I know who I am going to vote for. I don't need a ranking system'

To some participants the principle of ranking seemed mystifying. As one put it, 'You can't say you want four people to have the same job'. If they knew who they were going to vote for why would they want to vote for someone else?

Indeed, some worried that by stating more than one preference their choices might 'come back to haunt' them as a candidate might get elected who no one really wanted. One participant articulated his concerns in blunt terms: 'I'm worried that a second or third vote comes back to bite you in the arse.'

Participants generally did not feel the need to state a preference unless it was to show they did not want someone to get elected. Again, this stemmed from a misunderstanding of the system: some thought they could prevent a candidate or party from getting elected by giving them their lowest preference although this of course in practice counts as a vote for that candidate or party that can be allocated to them during one of the counting rounds.

'If you have a favourite then why would you need to give a second or a third? Why would you want to give a vote to someone you would disagree with?'

Given that the discussion group took place in London one might have expected greater understanding of the concept given that in the London mayoral elections voters have had the opportunity to rank the candidates. However, when a participant recalled their voting experience in the London mayoral elections it was conveyed in unsatisfactory terms: 'when we voted last time (for the London Mayor), I thought it (the ranking system) was silly. I wanted to vote for one person.'

Despite low levels of awareness about the referendum generally, and clear reservations about some aspects of the AV system, almost all the participants said they would be inclined

to vote to change the system. But that desire for change was not driven by the merits of the AV system or because of dissatisfaction with the current First Past the Post system *per se*. Rather, a combination of dissatisfaction generally with 'the way the system works', with the current coalition government, and with the result and consequent outcome of the 2010 general election are the key drivers of public opinion. There was a clear appetite for 'change' to the political system among participants, even though there was rarely any clarity about exactly what that change should look like. The public's sense of dissatisfaction with politics and the political process has reached the point that they are now willing to try something new as an alternative to the unsatisfactory nature of the *status quo*. As some of the participants put it, 'it's got to be better than the system we have now – it's shown it's not working' and 'I don't like what we've got at present, and if we're going to try something new, I'm willing to try it.'

But despite this appetite for change, many of the participants found the arguments against AV to be convincing. While they may claim to want a change to the system it is not because they see AV as a superior alterative to the current voting system. Some expressed concern about the cost of changing the system. In the current economic climate where there is deep concern about public finances, worries over extra expenditure on something that many people see as a low priority will have some traction with the public. Even though many wanted change, very few saw electoral reform as a priority. As one participant described it, the proposed reform was 'interesting, but not essential'.

For many, the suggestion that AV might make coalitions more likely was a compelling argument against the reform. Any change that facilitated more 'broken promises' and the 'compromising of principles' was deemed unattractive and made the discussant think twice about wanting to change the system. Only a few participants pointed out that the current voting system had delivered a coalition government and therefore a change in the election process would not necessarily make any difference on this score.

'You could end up with someone that nobody really wanted'

Generally participants wanted a voting system that was 'simple' to understand and explain. AV was perceived to be complicated, and many of those present struggled to understand the idea that someone might win a seat despite not having the most first preference votes. It seems to be ingrained in many that 'winning' means getting the most votes outright; doing so by virtue of second or third preference votes is deemed to be a weaker result.

However, whilst the complexity resonated with people, some found the idea that the system should not be adopted because it was complicated to be an insult. But the argument that AV is used widely in other organisations such as unions, charities and other member organisations had little traction; it was largely an irrelevance other than to a small number of participants who welcomed the knowledge that the system had been proven elsewhere.

The most compelling and convincing argument in favour of AV was that it would reduce the number of 'safe' seats in Parliament. Discussants were attracted by the idea that this would mean MPs would have to work harder for their support and that, as one participant described it, it would put the MPs 'on notice'. In similar vein, it was felt by many that

needing to achieve 50% of the vote would make candidates work harder to secure their support and strengthen their mandate in Parliament if they represented the views of at least half of their constituents. For others, a voting system that helped smaller parties and widened people's choice in an election was a real attraction with AV.

Overall, despite very mixed views about the advantages and disadvantages of the AV system, for most participants the mantra of change was of far greater significance in determining their likely stance in the referendum. Although many were convinced by some of the arguments against AV, and did not always fully understand the arguments in favour of it, only a handful of participants actually changed their mind about voting in favour of a new system in the referendum following the discussion. Dissatisfaction with the current system of politics, and with MPs, Parliament and government, is such that change, in almost any guise, is preferable to the *status quo*. In the short-term the referendum may therefore act as a sticking plaster, providing a quick cover to stem the tide of systemic problems besetting our politics. In the medium to long-term however, once the novelty of change has worn off, given that the public are not convinced about the merits of the proposed change, there is a risk that public dissatisfaction and disappointment may simply be entrenched still further.

5. Civic engagement: barriers and opportunities

For the first time this year's Audit looks in detail at civic rather than just political engagement, focusing on the degree to which the public are willing to engage in local rather than national forms of action and participation, and whether this might offer any kind of bridge to greater levels of political engagement in the long-term.

Significantly more people are interested in how things work in their local area compared to how things work in politics generally. The Audit also demonstrates that a majority of the public believe that if people like themselves get involved in their local community they really can change the way their area is run; in contrast, far fewer say the same about the likely efficacy of getting involved in politics generally. However, despite this greater willingness to get involved and a stronger sense that they can make a difference locally, a majority of the public say they actually know little about how things work in their local area and only one in 10 people believe they are certain to volunteer in some form in the next couple of years. The headline data thus conveys a very complex narrative, to which fresh layers of analysis can be added if the responses to a range of civic/local and political/national engagement indicators are compared.

Civic versus political engagement: differentiating the local from the national

Consistently across the Audit lifecycle around four in five people have said they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in local issues. This is reflected this year in the seven in 10 people (69%) who say they are interested in how things work in their local area, a higher level of interest than for politics more generally (58%). There is however, a strong correlation between those who are interested in politics and those who are interested in how things work locally: 86% of those interested in politics are also interested in the workings of their local area. But it is also true that almost half (48%) of those who are not interested in 'politics' are interested in the way things work locally. For many, their response appears to be a reflection of how they understand and think about the term 'politics', seeing it primarily through the prism of national, Westminster-based politics, whilst seeing local issues through a community lens, devoid of any political taint.

48%
of those NOT interested in politics ARE interested in the way their local area works

Over half of the public (54%) say they do not know 'very much' or 'anything at all' about how things actually work in their local area while 46% say they know at least 'a fair amount'. This is lower than the 53% that say they are knowledgeable about politics. The same groups of people are more likely to profess knowledge of how things work locally than they do about politics. Men (50%), those aged 55 and over (52%) and ABs (55%) are all more likely to say they are knowledgeable about how their local area works. However, this local

knowledge appears to differ throughout Great Britain. While those in the East and West Midlands have high levels of self-assessed knowledge (56% and 58% respectively), people in Scotland (61%), the South East (63%) and Wales (63%) are more likely than others to say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all'.

39%
of those who think they CAN'T change the way the UK is run think they CAN change the way their local area is run

People are far more positive about the efficacy of getting involved in their local community than they are about getting involved in politics. Around half of the public (51%) agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community they really can change the way their area is run', while one in five people (21%) disagree. This compares favourably to the one in three (30%) who agree that they can change the way the UK is run by getting involved in politics and 44% who disagree. Pertinently, two in five (39%) of those who do not think they can change the way the UK is run by getting involved in politics do think they can change the way their area is run by getting involved in their local community. It is this optimism and belief in the efficacy of localism that needs to be exploited if civic engagement is to be augmented.

There is very little demographic variation in feelings of efficacy, although 56% of ABC1s (and 60% of ABs) agree that getting involved in the local community can change things. Liberal Democrat supporters are the strongest believers in the efficacy of getting involved locally; 62% feel they can make a difference compared to 52% of Conservatives and 54% of Labour supporters.

The data suggests that the public feel more closely connected to their local area than they do to politics in general. While 'politics' seems to be something that other people do and is distant from them, the local community is somewhere their personal involvement can make a difference.

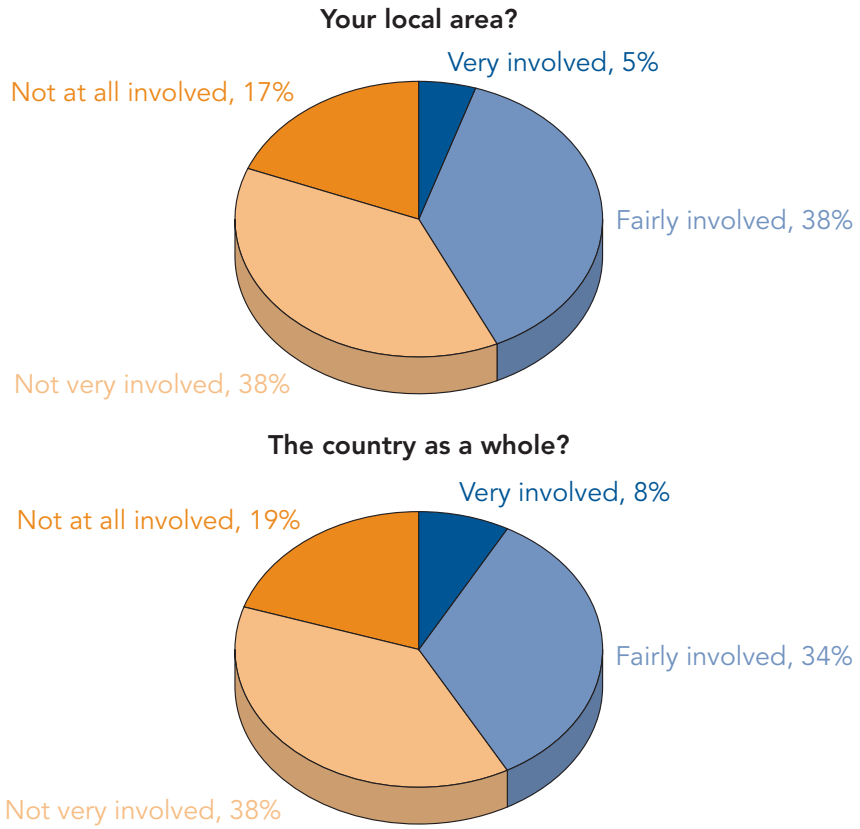
As with efficacy and knowledge, more people are positive about how things work in their local area than in Britain as a whole. Around half the public (49%) believe that how things work in their local area 'could not be improved' or could 'be improved in small ways' (47%), whereas only three in 10 people (31%) say the same about the system of governing Britain. While two thirds (64%) of the public think the system of governing Britain needs 'a lot' or a 'great deal' of improvement, less than half (46%) think the same about how things work locally. Interestingly, there are some quite important geographical differences in people's perceptions of the way their local area is run: in particular, people in Scotland and Wales, where they have devolved governments, are more likely than anywhere else in Great Britain to think that how things work locally needs improvement (61% and 60% respectively). At least in terms of satisfaction with how things are run locally, the additional representation and powers afforded the public through the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales do not seem to be having a positive impact on public attitudes.

In the Audit 6 report we found that more than two in five people (43%) said they wanted to be either very or fairly involved in national decision-making while half (48%) wanted to

be involved in local decision-making, a gap of five percentage points. But the situation has now changed in the intervening two years. The proportion of people who want to get involved in decision-making in their local area has fallen by five points to 43%; in contrast the two in five people (42%) who want to be involved in national decision-making remains stable.

Figure 4: Involvement in decision-making

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

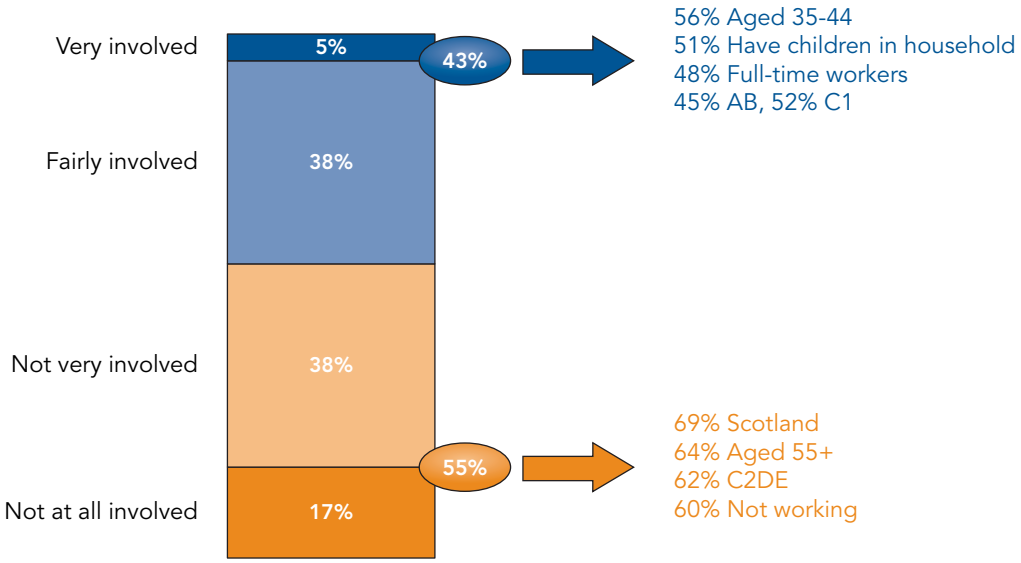
There is now no statistical difference between the proportion of people who want to get involved in decision-making locally and nationally. This is counter to the usual pattern: there is usually a distinct gap between attitudes to local and national involvement, as evidenced in levels of interest and efficacy.

Figure 5 shows some of the demographic differences for those who want to be involved locally and those who do not. Full-time workers (48%) and those with children in their household (51%) are more likely than the average to want to be involved, even though they are the ones that probably have the least amount of time to spare for such involvement. Civic and social ties associated with having school age children often appear to promote

local engagement, and this was borne out in the qualitative research where participants in the discussion groups tended to think that the people most likely to get involved in voluntary work and local community activities would be retired, unemployed, wealthy enough not to have to work, or mothers who would get involved in things that affected their children. Interestingly, young people aged 18-24 are much more likely to want to be involved in decision-making locally than nationally, whilst those in the 45-64 age bracket are marginally more likely to say they want involvement at a national rather than a local level. (See also page 78 for more detail on the demographic breakdowns on this issue.)

Full-time workers and those with children are those most likely to want to get involved

Figure 5: Local involvement



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

But what does all this mean for the Prime Minister's Big Society strategy? What exactly is meant by the Big Society has at times been unclear but it is broadly predicated on the belief that citizens should be empowered to solve problems at the local level in the communities where they live. The govermment's adviser, Lord Nat Wei, has outlined a Big Society 'ecosystem' encompassing three distinct but linked levels of activity. First, citizens as individuals or through neighbourhood groups (including both active campaign groups with a social mission and groups focused on local engagement and participation such as sports or interest groups) should have the opportunity to play a more participatory role in the governance, design and delivery of services in their area. Secondly, social providers in the public and private sector should collaborate to design and deliver services locally, and finally government at local and national level whilst retaining responsibility for providing essential services, should work, with other partners, to design and deliver them in innovative ways.[15]

[15] See Cabinet Office, 'Building the Big Society', Presentation by Lord Nat Wei to the Big Society Public Services Seminar Series, Institute for Government, 6 June 2010.

To build this Big Society ecosystem will require a reconfiguration of the development and delivery of policy in order to ensure that people are more involved in their communities, are able to contribute more effectively through a stronger social sector and are better able to shape government policy and delivery. To achieve this will require, for example, a focus on more group membership, civic action, charitable giving, on capacity building and on improved information provision, resources and community leadership. Already the government points to a number of initiatives to kickstart the development of this ecosystem including promoting mass social action through a 'Big Society Day', greater emphasis on charitable giving and philanthropy, a National Citizen Service scheme for 16 year olds, support for the expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises, and new community powers to enable local people and organisations to run services.

The Prime Minister has acknowledged that building the Big Society will require cultural change on a scale that will take more than a generation to achieve and will demand 'mass engagement: a broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and obligation' including by that significant percentage of the population who have no record of getting involved and have never expressed any desire to do so.[16] But how realistic is this vision given public attitudes to civic and political engagement locally and nationally?

Volunteering: civic versus political

A relatively small proportion of the public say they will 'definitely' spend time doing voluntary work on a range of possible activities at some point in the next couple of years. Only one in 10 people say they will 'definitely' volunteer in a range of ways – a number of voluntary activities were suggested in the Audit based around civic, political and religious groups (see page 79 for the full range of activities discussed) – including helping 'voluntary groups to help sick, elderly or people in need' (10%) or volunteering to support 'sporting, social or recreational groups' (11%). But those people who say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' do one form of activity are also more likely to do others.

Only one in 10
say they will 'definitely' volunteer at some point in the next few years

There is clearly a significant divide in terms of people's willingness to undertake voluntary activities in what might be deemed purely civic or community spheres and those that involve some form of political or religious affiliation. As Figure 24 (see page 79) demonstrates, between two and three people in every 10 will 'probably' or 'definitely' spend time on voluntary activities in the civic/community sphere; the proportion of the public willing to volunteer is therefore boosted (from only one in 10) if political/religious activities are discounted from the range of options. Indeed, 53% of the public actively say they will 'definitely *not*' volunteer for a trade union, 48% for a political party and 42% for a church or religious group.

When looking at which people are more likely to say they will spend time doing voluntary activities a pattern emerges as the same groups are consistently more likely to be willing to spend time doing voluntary work, namely: those aged under 45 (particularly those in

[16] David Cameron, Hugo Young Memorial Lecture, 10 November 2009.

the 25-34 age bracket); those in the highest social grades (ABC1); those with children; and those who tend to vote for the Liberal Democrats. It is noticeable that under-45s are most likely to say they will 'probably' or 'definitely' engage in voluntary activities when in actual fact it is those aged 55 and over that more commonly participate in the activities measured in the Audit. This would suggest that among the younger cohort there is some untapped potential to be exploited in terms of civic engagement.

However, when it comes to the political sphere the vast majority are heavily resistant to the idea of getting involved and political organisations are not seen as a route into or out of local community activities. Participants in our discussion groups did not see any link between local community activities and local political parties. Indeed, at the mention of political parties there was immediately a negative reaction, particularly among those who felt that parties were only ever seen 'when there is an election and they want your vote'. In the words of one participant, 'political parties don't do things for the local interest they just seek re-election'. For many then, parties are seen purely as electoral machines, divorced from any involvement in and commitment to the community interest. Parties are also seen largely through a national political rather than community lens: those people that would want to get involved in political organisations are deemed to be more interested in seeing changes on a national scale rather than in their local area. That said, for most of the participants, if an issue was important to or interested them then they might be supportive regardless of whether the campaign was being run by a political party or a local community organisation. What mattered most to them was the issue, not who was co-ordinating the campaign activity.

Public service involvement: building the Big Society?

In the discussion groups there was a generally positive response to the idea of the government encouraging people to take part in the running of some aspects of our public services. However, many participants were adamant that the voluntary work being encouraged should not be a replacement for current existing roles, but rather seek to augment them: in essence, they did not want people to lose their jobs and be replaced by volunteers. Some participants noted that there might be benefits to greater local volunteer involvement in public services, particularly in terms of budget and therefore tax savings. A number of discussants suggested that one way of attracting people to get involved would be by specifically demonstrating the impact it would have on taxes. For example, 'if you did xx hours of voluntary service you could reduce your council tax by £xx' or 'if 100,000 became volunteers the government could cut national tax by £xx'. Despite this perceived advantage, however, a clear majority of the discussants had real concerns that unqualified people would end up doing jobs that really required specialist expertise. They clearly distinguished between the government encouraging voluntary work in local communities to help people – which they liked – and the government asking members of the public to run services. In light of this, unsurprisingly most who completed the pre-discussion questionnaire agreed with the statement 'the government is responsible for improving public services and local areas, they shouldn't be calling on the public to help'.

Based on comments made by the Prime Minister and other members of the government about how the public might participate in the Big Society, we presented participants with a list of activities for discussion:

- Help run your local library;
- Sit on the front desk at a police station to provide advice to the public;
- Set up or run a local school with a group of other parents; and
- Be part of a group examining how the local council spends its money and making decisions on how some of it is spent.

These activities would all require a considerable degree of commitment in terms of both time and effort and fall at the upper end of the engagement and participation scale. Nonetheless, they fall squarely within the debate about how the public might take up greater responsibility for community and public service provision.

The activity that people most said they would get involved in was helping to run their local library – particularly if it was under threat of closure. In the eyes of participants the library had a strong link to the local community, and they felt that it was 'a good thing to do'.

'You're getting books for free so you should give back by volunteering to help out. You should if you have a conscience'

However, they placed the onus on current library users to become volunteers first. They believed they had the greatest stake in the continuation of the service and therefore would be the group most likely to agree to participate in its running.

Being part of a group to examine how local councils spend their money was considered an interesting idea and one that some participants said they would like to do. But their motivation for doing so appeared to derive from a general mistrust of the political process and politicians, rather than any proactive desire on their own part to make decisions about local public spending priorities.

The setting up and running of a school or helping staff the reception desk at a police station were less popular. These roles were considered to be specialist in nature and therefore not something that 'just anyone' could or should get involved in. A few participants were not clear how running a school would be different from being a parent governor and few felt that 'ordinary people' would have the expertise to manage a school on a day-to-day basis. A significant barrier to helping at a police station was fear of being attacked; while others said they would not want to volunteer 'just to be shouted at all day'.

Overall the participants generally seemed positive about helping out with these local activities. However, those that were most enthusiastic were also the ones who were already engaged in some form of volunteering or local activity. Of those currently not involved in any voluntary or community activities, it tended to be the younger participants who said they were interested in getting involved, motivated by an expectation that this would bolster their credentials for future employment or university. But, as the Audit data and other research has consistently demonstrated, it is the younger age groups that are less likely to act on interest and actually get involved. Enthusiasm does not tend to translate into commitment.

Barriers and incentives to engagement

In the questionnaire that members of the discussion group completed before joining the debate, most people agreed that 'it is my duty to get involved in my local community'. During the course of the discussions however, many felt that a sense of 'duty' was the wrong word; rather, people felt they should get involved in their local community out of a sense of respect for it. However, the quantitative research demonstrates that in reality the public are driven to get involved by what might perhaps be regarded as less honourable motivations.

When asked under what circumstances people would be encouraged to get more involved in their local community the most common responses are: 'if I felt strongly about an issue' (40%); 'if it was relevant to me' (33%); 'if I had more time' (28%); and 'if it affected my street' (25%). (See page 81 for the full break-down of responses to this question.)

Personal self-interest is the biggest motivator to volunteer and get involved:

40%
are more likely to if they feel strongly about an issue

33%
if it is relevant to them

28%
if they have more time and

25%
if it affects their street

Overwhelmingly, motivation to volunteer and get involved seems to be rooted in a sense of personal self-interest. People say they are interested in being more engaged locally but on the whole are not willing to actually commit to activities; the interest is not matched by sufficient intensity of will. The extra motivation required to turn interest into action appears to revolve around whether the issue/activity affects them or their community in a quite personalised way. Again, these quantitative survey findings were reflected in our qualitative discussion group research.

'It has to be getting involved in an area I'm interested in'

A number of the discussants did participate in local community and voluntary activities. For example, one participant helped to fundraise for the renal unit in a local hospital where a family member had been treated; another was a member of a group that had been set up to keep their local community clean because they were 'fed up' with the way their neighbourhood looked. Some younger participants said that had done voluntary work to enhance their CVs both for future job and university and college applications, believing that 'it looks good' and might therefore help to differentiate them from other candidates. A number of participants admitted that they volunteered as 'it gave them something to do'.

'The average person is concerned with number one'

Given that self-interest appears to be one of the most important drivers of greater involvement locally, it is not surprising that many participants suggested that the offering of some sort of 'reward' would be a way of increasing engagement. For example, many of the younger discussants suggested that at the end of a community project, those that volunteered their time could have a party thrown for them, have 'a day out', or be presented with an award, certificate, or tickets to an event. Another suggested incentive, aimed

specifically at younger people, was for companies to 'sponsor' a voluntary work project and, in exchange, volunteers could undertake a work placement or internship with the company concerned. All saw such incentives as important mechanisms to enhance motivation to take part, as they would give the participants something to look forward to – a 'reward' – at the end of the process.

In the Audit 6 report 'not having enough time' was cited by 40% of respondents who wanted a say in local or national decision-making to explain why they were not already involved. But asked of the entire survey sample this year, only one in three (28%) say the same: interest in and relevance of local issues appear to have taken over as the key drivers to getting involved. But those who are most likely to say they would get involved if they had the time are those in social class ABC1 (33%); full-time workers (42%) and those aged 25-34 (37%) and 35-44 (45%). Indeed, for the 35-54 age group having more time is a greater incentive than 'if it was relevant to me' (39% and 35% respectively).

'It's not advertised enough basically'

A further barrier identified by the discussion group participants was a lack of knowledge about how or where to get involved. Not having enough information at their disposal was particularly – but not exclusively – mentioned by younger participants, who felt that they had not seen or heard much about opportunities to get involved.

'Advertise it. I've never see anything about how to do it'

Indeed, some even said that if the opportunities were made more obvious to them they would get involved. However, when pressed about whether or not they had ever proactively looked for anything, all admitted that they had not. Nonetheless, they argued firmly that the onus should be on the groups wanting involvement and volunteers to provide the information, to reach out and find them by placing information in more obvious places, rather than the responsibility being placed on them as individuals to locate the opportunities.

'Let more people know! Billboards, pamphlets, anything'

The 'lack of information' argument is rather 'soft' and could perhaps be seen as an 'easy excuse'; people generally feel culturally attuned to the social desirability of volunteering and involvement and in light of the self-interested nature of participation it is perhaps difficult to admit why one is not doing so. While obviously not true of all those that do not get involved, clearly many people do not do so because they 'can't be bothered' or 'do not feel the need to'.

A number of participants also pointed to a diminishing sense of 'local community' as the reason why there is a lack of involvement and volunteering at the local level.

'It means more to local people who have been in the area for a long time. If you move to an area (London) you don't care about it'

This is perhaps, as one participant mentioned, a problem that is particularly specific to London and other large urban centres where populations tend to

be more transient and connections and community ties are dispersed over a wider geographic area.

'If you are not from a place you have to put more effort into engaging with a community'

It reflects a strong public tendency to think that people would get involved in their area if only they felt closely connected to it and therefore cared about it.

Most of those that completed the pre-discussion questionnaire agreed that 'people pull together in my local area to improve things'.[17] But in reality the data suggests that this is not the case – connection to and caring about an area are not sufficient drivers for engagement unless there is some other factor, usually of a self-interested nature, to enhance the desire to get involved.

'It's all about the wider community, if you're from here or there, it all matters to help each other'

Priorities for Big Society engagement?

The extent to which there is a pool of people, able and willing to become more involved in civic and community activities – the raw material of the Big Society – is uncertain. Clearly civic participation is far more socially acceptable than political involvement. To have any chance of being successful the Big Society concept needs to be kept away from contested or political associations. The language also needs to be re-tooled. 'Society' is perceived in broad, nationwide terms and is therefore less likely to generate public interest and engagement; an emphasis on 'local community', reflecting a more personalised focus is needed.[18]

But the complex, and often contradictory, nature of public attitudes, means it is difficult to see where a new cadre of civic-minded local activists are to be found and engaged. Those who are interested in being more involved generally turn out to be already active and committed in some way: the circle of engagement is thus not readily augmented. Although there is intrinsic interest and belief in the power of the local community, perceptions of efficacy do not, on their own, build involvement. Much will depend on the competing demands placed on people's time and their sense of altruism, both of which may be put under pressure during 'hard times', and on the practical and 'outcome' oriented perception of participation. Though the desire to be involved locally may be widespread, the intensity of that desire is not.

The evidence thus far suggests that civic involvement and participation is unlikely to be a bridge to broader political activism at a later stage. However, through segmentation and cluster analysis, a more enhanced perspective emerges. This suggests that there is some overlap between people's attitudes towards politics and the kind of civic engagement that

[17] This reflects the findings of a national Ipsos MORI poll in September 2010 that found that two thirds (64%) feel people get together locally to improve things, while a quarter (26%) disagreed (1,004 telephone interviews with GB adults aged 18+, 10-12 September 2010).
See http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2675/Majority-of-voters-still-do-not-know-what-the-Big-Society-means.aspx

[18] The need to change the emphasis in language from 'society' to 'community' has also been reflected in other recent research. See, for example, Brand Democracy (2010), *Big Society and Harnessing the Power of the UK. A State of the Nation Survey: Society and attitudes to contributing – the view of the UK workforce and the role business can play* (London).

is said to be at the heart of the Big Society, including some of the barriers to involvement, perceptions that such actions are ineffective, no strong impetus to take part personally, or a sense of disempowerment and alienation.

Exploring the public's attitude towards current and prospective involvement in both the local/civic as well as national/political sphere through factor and cluster statistical analysis provides a more nuanced picture of engagement. Specifically, we explored underlying attitudes in relation to levels of activity and interest in politics; belief in the efficacy of political or community action and interest in being involved in decision-making; interest in local/community issues; satisfaction with the workings of the political machinery; likely future involvement in local community activities; and likely future involvement in political party or trade union activities. Seven distinct groups or segments emerged in which the members of each group were as like each other, and as different from the members of the other groups as possible, in terms of their attitudes.

Group 1: **Onlookers (20%)** – happy with the political system but feel no urge to be involved themselves.

Group 2: **Satisfied but Unenthusiastic (15%)** – are broadly content and not very interested in further involvement.

Group 3: **Already Active (14%)** – strongly engaged and interested in doing more.

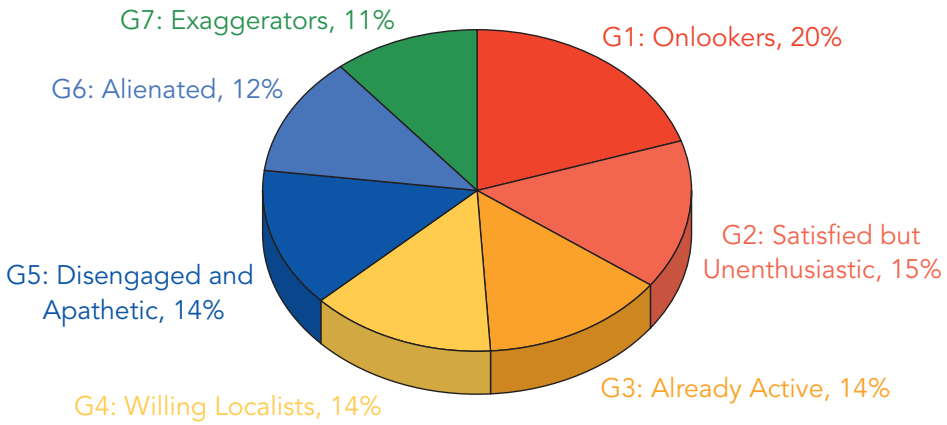
Group 4: **Willing Localists (14%)** – not already actively involved but seem willing and likely to become involved in most community activities, at least locally.

Group 5: **Disengaged and Apathetic (14%)** – disengaged without being negative, and with no interest in being more involved.

Group 6: **Alienated (12%)** – have strongly negative views and little interest in being more involved.

Group 7: **Exaggerators (11%)** – say they want to be more involved but may well be over-claiming.

Figure 6: Profiles of civic and political engagement



Examining each group in turn reveals a number of interesting and relevant characteristics in the context of engaging the public in the Big Society and efforts to broaden the level of civic and political engagement across the country.

Group 1: Onlookers (20% of the GB adult population)

'Onlookers' have low levels of activism (similar to those that are alienated in Group 6) and are unwilling to commit themselves to future involvement. They are broadly satisfied with the current system and have a high belief in the efficacy of involvement at all levels. Almost half feel the system of government mainly works well, and two-thirds that things work well in their local area. They mostly believe that getting involved in politics and getting involved at the local level works, and around half say they are interested in getting involved in local decision-making. However, their actual involvement in activities is low across the board. Only in relation to voting, where they reflect average electoral turnout levels, and talking about politics, where they are as likely as average to have talked about politics with somebody else, are they noticeably active. Only 3% have helped on fundraising drives in the last few years and only 8% have done voluntary work. Reflecting this, they declare a low willingness to get involved in the future: in fact, virtually none of them say they will 'definitely' get involved in any of the eight activities (see page 79 for list).

However, this group are much more likely than average to say that they would be encouraged to get involved if they felt strongly about an issue or if 'things got worse', suggesting that they may be unwilling to take the trouble to get involved at the moment simply because they do not see the need, but might do so if they did.

This group is somewhat more male than female (56% to 44%), but close to average in its age and class profiles, and slightly but not dramatically more white than average (7% BME). They are particularly common in the North East (where they make up 33% of adults) and are more likely than other groups to name 'immigration/race relations' as the most important issue facing the country.

Group 2: Satisfied but Unenthusiastic (15% of the GB adult population)

This group have a higher than average level of current involvement in political activities, but a low willingness to get involved locally in the future (though they are more willing to take part in some types of activities than others). Being at the moment the most active group apart from the 'Already Active', they could turn out potentially to be either the Big Society's biggest obstacle or its greatest missed opportunity.

They are generally satisfied with the way things work at the moment, locally and nationally, and are interested in local community issues. Like the 'Willing Localists', they have more faith in the value of getting involved locally than politically, but they are not very interested in getting involved in local decision-making.

At 80% their self-reported general election turnout is exceeded only by the 'Already Active', and they are twice as likely as British adults as a whole to have been an officer of an organisation or club. Otherwise, they have broadly average levels of political and civic activity (although since the remaining five groups are less active than average this could be a bit misleading). They claim to be fairly knowledgeable about politics though only 48% can name

their MP, which is higher than average but far from outstanding. And more than half feel the system of government mainly works well, and two-thirds that things work well in their local area.

When it comes to willingness to get involved in particular activities they rate significantly higher than average on sporting/recreational and church groups, a little higher than average in relation to young people's activities and community groups, and lower than average on voluntary groups to help the sick/elderly and campaigning organisations. They are very unlikely to spend time on either of the 'political' activities. However, there are signs that they may be more strongly motivated the more localised the issue, as they are particularly likely to say that they would be encouraged to get involved 'if it affects my street' or involves 'important decisions about my area'.

This group is mostly middle class (77% are ABC1), middle-aged or older (just 18% aged 18-34) and particularly common in rural areas (where they make up 24% of the total), and in Southern England outside London. A third (33%) are in the ACORN 'wealthy achievers' classification.[19] They include a disproportionately high number of part-time workers (19%) and are more likely than the average to shop at Waitrose (10%). As this socio-economic profile would suggest, those that vote are also strongly Conservative.

Group 3: Already Active (14% of the GB adult population)

This group are the existing core of socio-political activity in Britain, and are the most active opinion leaders. They are characterised by high levels of activity in almost all areas measured in the Audit survey, and although they have a strong belief in the efficacy of political action, on balance they are dissatisfied with the state of the political and governmental machinery. This group will be important to the success of the Big Society, but only in the sense of it being reliant on them to remain as engaged and as active in the future as they are at present. The signs, however, are good as they express a higher than average expectation that they will get involved (further) in the future.

They score very highly on all our activism measures: all but a handful (89%) say they have donated money or paid a membership fee to a campaigning organisation in the last two or three years; the majority have urged somebody outside their family to vote (64%), have urged somebody to contact an MP or councillor (52%), have presented their own views to an elected representative (55%), and have boycotted products on a matter of principle (54%). Sixty-two per cent have done voluntary work, almost half have helped on fundraising drives and made a speech to an organised group (both 47%), and a quarter have written to an editor (28%) and been to a political meeting (25%).

They display a high level of interest in politics (51% say they are very interested, 94% are very/fairly interested and 94% have discussed politics with somebody else). On balance they say they believe that by getting involved in politics, people like them really can change

[19] ACORN is a geodemographic segmentation of the UK's population which segments small neighbourhoods, postcodes, or consumer households into five categories, 17 groups and 56 types. It is used to understand customers' lifestyle, behaviour and attitudes, or the needs of local neighbourhoods and people's public service needs. The 'wealthy achievers' classification includes three groups: 'wealthy executives', 'affluent greys' and 'flourishing families' encompassing a broad range of largely affluent mature professionals who are property owners. See http://www.caci.co.uk/acorn-classification.aspx for more information.

the way the UK is run, and likewise most believe that they can change the way their area is run by getting involved in their local community. However, most of the group feel the system of government needs improvement, while they are evenly split on the performance of Parliament.

This group are more willing than average to get involved in future community activities, but less so than the 'Exaggerators' in Group 7, perhaps because their answers are more realistic, or perhaps simply because as they are already more heavily involved they have less scope to take on further commitments. They are much more likely than other groups to say that feeling strongly about an issue would encourage them to get involved, probably reflecting the way that their engaged attitudes already drive them towards an active role.

The 'Already Active' are disproportionately drawn from elderly or middle-aged groups rather than the young (just 13% are aged 18-34). They are overwhelmingly middle-class (83% ABC1), are more likely than any other segment to fall into the 'urban prosperity' ACORN classification (23%),[20] and only 4% are from BME groups. Most of them vote (93% say they did so at the general election and 86% are certain they would do so again in an immediate election), with supporters of all the parties well represented. Two in five (38%) read a quality newspaper regularly, and almost all (91%) are internet users.

Group 4: Willing Localists (14% of the GB adult population)

The 'Willing Localists' are probably the key target group for the success of the Big Society. They are not actively involved in a wide range of community and socio-political activities but seem the most willing and realistically likely to become so in the future.

They are characterised by a high degree of willingness to take part in most community activities, and tend not to be interested in politics or be politically active, but are interested in local affairs, and seem to draw a clear distinction between these and national/political activities. They also express a low level of satisfaction with the working of current institutions and are highly dissatisfied with the current system of government (91% say it needs quite a lot or a great deal of improvement).

They tend to favour 'voluntary' or 'community' involvement over more 'political' forms of activity and have a higher than average likelihood of having helped on fundraising drives (25%) and done voluntary work (32%) in the last few years. But they have a much lower than average rate of participation in relation to other activities: most notably, only 1% have written to an editor. However, this fits with their low interest in political matters: 34% are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics, and few feel they know much about it or about Parliament.

Importantly, this group tend to draw an unusually strong distinction between national politics and local affairs. On balance they are sceptical that getting involved in politics can change the way the UK is run, but most agree that getting involved works at the local level, and they are more likely than any other group to believe that 'local people working

[20] The 'urban prosperity' classification includes three groups: 'prosperous professionals', 'educated urbanites', and 'aspiring singles'. See http://www.caci.co.uk/acorn-classification.aspx for more information.

together', 'community organisations' and 'charitable/voluntary organisations' have an impact on people's everyday lives. They express a very high level of interest in how things work in their local area, and the majority feel they work reasonably well. Most say they are interested in getting involved in local decision-making but they are distinctly less interested in getting involved in national decision-making.

This leads naturally to a higher than average willingness to get involved in most of the local activities listed in the Audit survey – though they have no interest in the two 'political' activities (political parties and trade unions) and only an average likelihood of getting involved with church/religious groups. However, in context, they are more likely than other groups to name a shortage of time as an obstacle to their involvement.

Demographically, there is a big gender imbalance: two-thirds of this group are women and they are more likely than other groups to have children in their household (44%). Otherwise they are fairly evenly spread across the adult population with a close to average profile on age, social class and ethnic group. They are particularly prevalent in Wales (where they make up 29% of adults) and the North East (25%). 'Willing Localists' are more likely than any other group to shop at Asda (28%), while a third (32%) also shop at Tesco. Their internet usage is much like that of the general public but over half (54%) watch satellite TV, well above the 40% national average.

Group 5: Disengaged and Apathetic (14% of the GB adult population)

This group are generally characterised by low levels of interest and activity in all the fields covered by the Audit survey, and by a high tendency towards non-committal answers on all questions. They display very low levels of current political or civic activity, a low willingness to get involved locally, and a low level of interest in local affairs and in politics in general. They are less dissatisfied with the current system than some of the other groups, but mainly because they give more neutral answers ('don't know' or 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied') rather than because many of them are satisfied.

Their political engagement is at rock bottom levels. Only 11% have discussed politics with somebody else, and they have virtually no interest in it (just 17% are 'very' or 'fairly' interested, 45% 'not at all', and only 6% feel they know at least 'a fair amount' about it). Similarly, they have very low knowledge of Parliament (94% say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all'), and only 16% can name their MP; their reported general election turnout was just 43%. Few have extreme views, positive or negative, about how well the system of government works, three in five have no clear view either way on their satisfaction with Parliament, and more than half fail either to agree or disagree that 'Parliament is working for you and me'.

Their non-political involvement is hardly higher. A reasonable proportion of the group (18%) say they have done voluntary work in the last two or three years, but otherwise their participation across all forms of activity explored in the Audit is very low. They express very low interest in how things work in their local area, very low knowledge about it, and very low interest in getting involved in local decision-making.

Predictably then, they display little willingness to get involved in local activities in the future, except for church/religious groups, where their willingness is about average. In reality they

may be even less likely to get involved than the summary figures suggest, since their reluctance to commit themselves on any of the survey questions may be reducing the number who say they 'definitely won't' spend time in the future on various activities.

This group includes a high proportion of young people (43% are aged 18-34), and is mostly working class (62% C2DE); they include a higher than average proportion of BME adults (18%), though less so than the 'Exaggerators'. Just 65% are internet users, and only 4% read a quality newspaper. More than a third (35%) are single, so attitudes may to some extent reflect a lack of family/community responsibilities.

Group 6: Alienated (12% of the GB adult population)

The 'Alienated' are characterised by low political or civic activity at the moment, and by being very unwilling to get involved in the future, which follows naturally enough from their being very dissatisfied with the current state of affairs and their low belief in the efficacy of political or community action. They are not simply apathetic: they have strong opinions but these are negative ones.

This group scores low on all the activity measures although 63% say they voted at the general election and 44% say they would be certain to vote in the event of an election now. Only 10% have done voluntary work. They are highly dissatisfied with the current system of government and with how Parliament is doing its job (three-quarters are dissatisfied, and 78% disagree that 'Parliament is working for you and me'). They strongly disagree that getting involved in politics works, and only a handful agree that getting involved at the local level works. They feel they have little knowledge of how things work in their local area, though almost all feel their local area needs improving. However, the majority are not very interested in getting involved in local decision-making, and very few expect to get involved locally, though they are a little less reluctant to participate in sporting/recreational activities than others included in the survey.

This group is mostly working class (only 34% ABC1), are unlikely to read a quality newspaper (4%) and only 67% are internet users. They are more likely than the other segments to fall in the ACORN 'hard pressed' (33%) classification[21] and are more likely than other groups to name unemployment specifically as the single most important issue facing the country rather than the economy in general. Those who vote are mostly Labour supporters.

Group 7: Exaggerators (11% of the GB adult population)

Superficially this group are the most promising for recruitment to the Big Society by virtue of their current low levels of participation but very high willingness to get involved. However, their answers to other survey questions suggest this may be unrealistic. Distinctively, they tend to be positive about the 'political' activities in the list (parties and unions) as well as the non-political ones. While it is possible that they may be simply better disposed to politics than most of the public, nevertheless there is a suspicion that many are simply unwilling to admit they would not get involved. The erratic nature of their responses across

[21] The 'hard pressed' classification includes four groups: 'struggling families', 'burdened singles', 'high rise hardship' and 'inner city adversity'. See http://www.caci.co.uk/acorn-classification.aspx for more information.

the Audit questions suggests that their high expressed willingness to get involved may well exaggerate their real potential.

They are much more likely than average to say they will probably or definitely get involved in all eight community activities listed in the survey, including the two political ones (parties and unions) which most of the other respondents eschewed. They are also stronger on party political than community elements among the activities they say they have already been involved with in the last two or three years (though even in these cases they are much less involved than the 'Already Active', who do not balk at admitting they are unlikely to spend time on activities with parties or unions in the next few years).

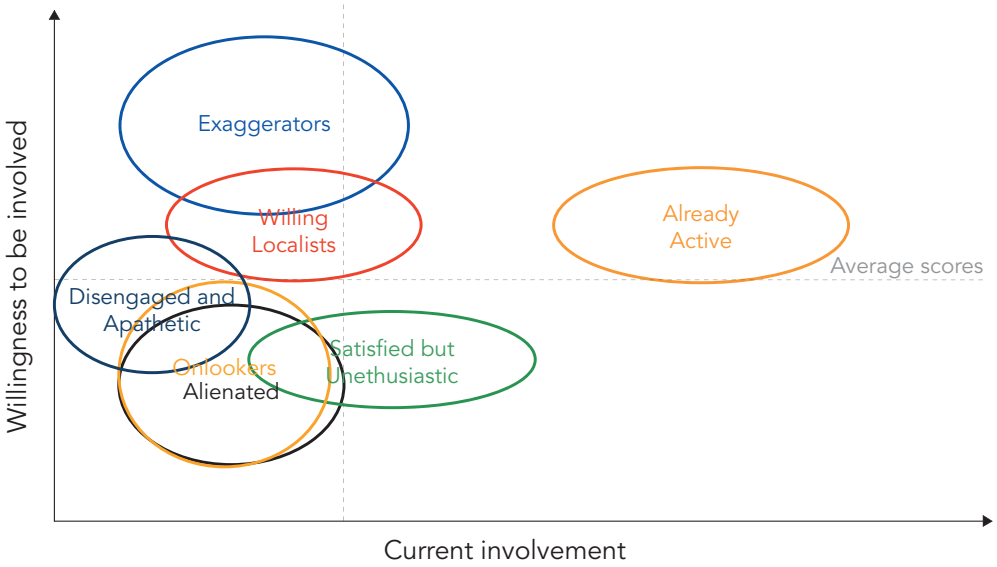
Only half are certain to vote, though 57% say they voted at the general election and 53% in the last council election. On balance they say they believe getting involved in politics works and that getting involved at local level works. Three-quarters (74%) say they would like to be involved in local decision-making. On the other hand, they express only an average level of interest in politics, and just 29% say they have discussed politics with somebody else. And only 27% can name their MP, lower than any other group except the 'Disengaged and Apathetic'.

This group is younger than average (45% are aged 18-34), and more likely to be living in inner-city urban areas and to be from an ethnic minority group (30% are BMEs). Perhaps as a result, members of this group are more likely than other groups to name crime as the most important issue facing the country (though, as for everybody else, they are less worried about this than the economy and unemployment). They are particularly prevalent in London (where they make up 24% of the total), the North West (22%) and the East Midlands (19%).

They are more likely than other groups to say that one of the things that would encourage them to get more involved would be if they knew more people in their local community, so it may be for some that low current participation simply reflects the nature of local urban neighbourhoods where there is less community interaction and fewer obvious opportunities to become involved. This may also explain why such a comparatively low number say they have discussed political issues with anybody else.

Figure 7 shows where each of the seven segments lies, in relation to each other, in terms of current involvement and willingness to be involved in the future.

Figure 7: Current involvement and future willingness



In terms of future civic engagement then, the most important group is likely to be that 14% of the population that make up the 'Willing Localists' category. They are not already actively involved in a wide range of community and socio-political activities but they seem most willing and realistically likely to become so in the future. It is this group that will need to be nurtured if the Big Society is to take root in communities across the country. However, having identified the likely participants no one should underestimate how difficult it will be to turn interest and a sense of willingness into active, and perhaps most challenging of all, sustained participation.

For this group, a lack of time is an important barrier to engagement that must be surmounted. Given that the group is disproportionately female and at 44% are more likely than other groups to have children in their household then issues such as childcare may also be particularly important if the availability of time is to be addressed. If this issue can be dealt with, however, then the very presence of children among their number might provide the additional spur necessary to many in this group to become more active, albeit this may result in engagement focused on largely family-oriented activities.

Given the group's antipathy to political activity and involvement it would seem likely that greater engagement will manifest itself only in the local community sphere; that it is unlikely to extend into the broader context of political engagement. However, if greater civic engagement were to drive up their level of interest in politics, broaden their understanding of what constitutes politics, and thus help enhance their belief in the efficacy of action in the political as opposed to merely local community domain, then it is arguably possible that this may lead to them being more favourably disposed towards involvement in the political sphere generally. If policies and initiatives helped develop 'Willing Localists' such that they developed characteristics closer to those of the 'Already Active' then it may be possible to bridge the gap between local, civic and national, political engagement.

6. The engagement indicators and survey results

This section of the report presents the results of all the questions asked in this year's Audit. It compares the results with previous years and provides a breakdown of the data in the areas of gender, age, social class, ethnicity and other demographics where marked or interesting changes have occurred.

A. Knowledge and interest

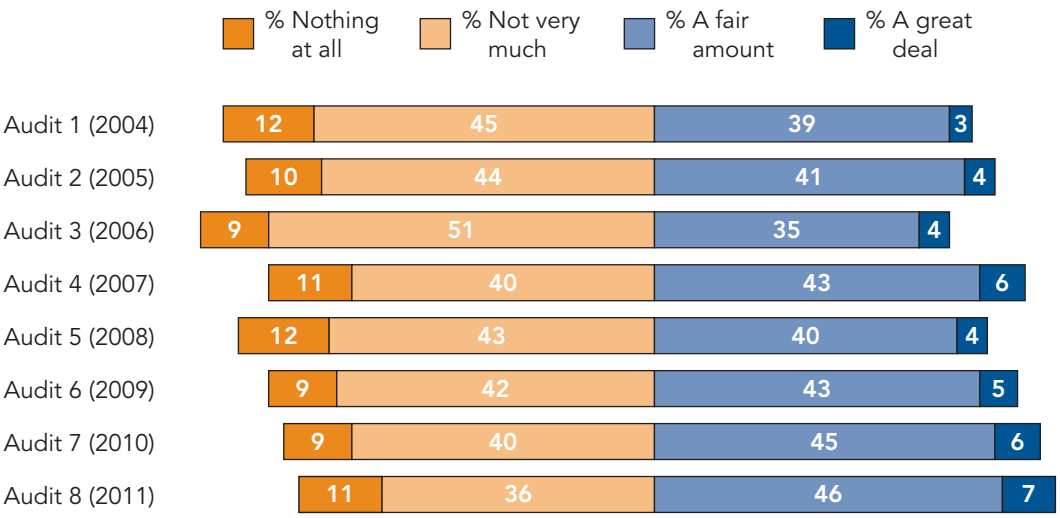
Levels of knowledge and interest in politics have increased this year, with both at their highest recorded levels across the Audit series. Perceived knowledge of Parliament has also increased, though the proportion of the public who can correctly name their MP has fallen.

Perceived knowledge of politics

Just over half of the British public (53%) claim to know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics, the highest level recorded to date in the Audit series, and continuing a steady rise over the past four years. In the last Audit that followed a general election (Audit 3) perceived knowledge of politics noticeably declined, but this has not been repeated this year.

Figure 8: Perceived knowledge of politics

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



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

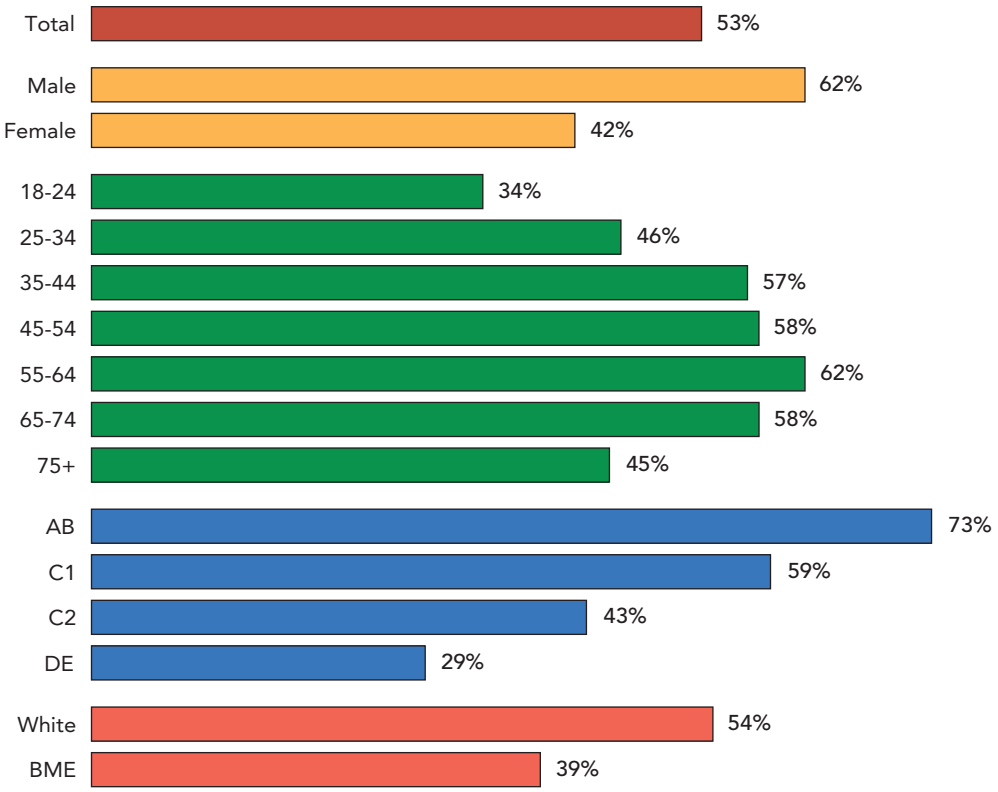
As found in previous Audits, men claim greater knowledge of politics than women: 62% claim at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge compared to just 42% of women who claim the same. This 20 point difference is the average gender gap for perceived knowledge of politics across the Audit series. However, as identified in Audit 7, when claimed knowledge is compared to actual knowledge as measured in a set of true/false political quiz questions, then the gender knowledge gap is significantly smaller.[22]

Older people tend to say they are more knowledgeable about politics – for example, 62% of 55-64 year olds say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount', compared to 34% of 18-24 year olds. More than twice as many of those in social grades AB (73%) say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics compared with people in social grades DE (29%).

People in Scotland are the most likely to say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics (64%).

Figure 9: Perceived knowledge of politics – demographic differences

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

[22] See Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7* (London: Hansard Society), pp.64-66.

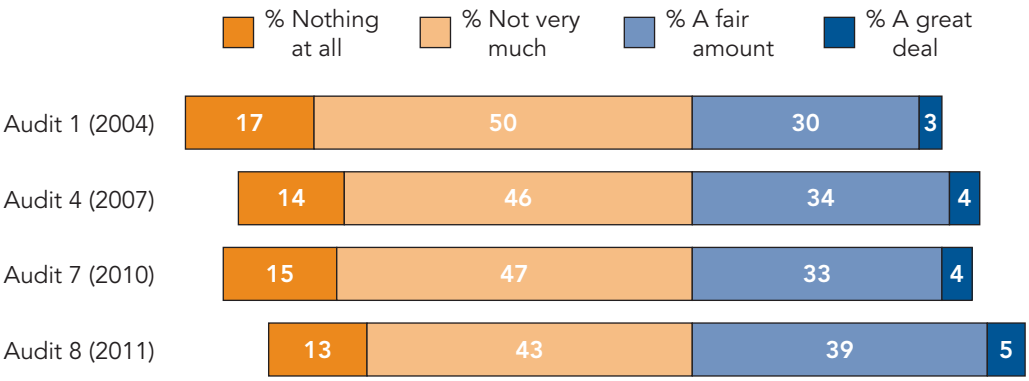
Access to different media has a clear impact on perceived knowledge, with 85% of those who read a quality daily newspaper saying they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about politics. In contrast, 66% of people who do not use the internet feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics.

Perceived knowledge of Parliament

Knowledge of Parliament has increased in the last year, with 44% of the public saying they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about the UK Parliament, compared to 37% who said the same in Audit 7.[23] Similarly to knowledge of politics, knowledge of Parliament is at an all-time high across the Audit series.

Figure 10: Perceived knowledge of Parliament

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



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

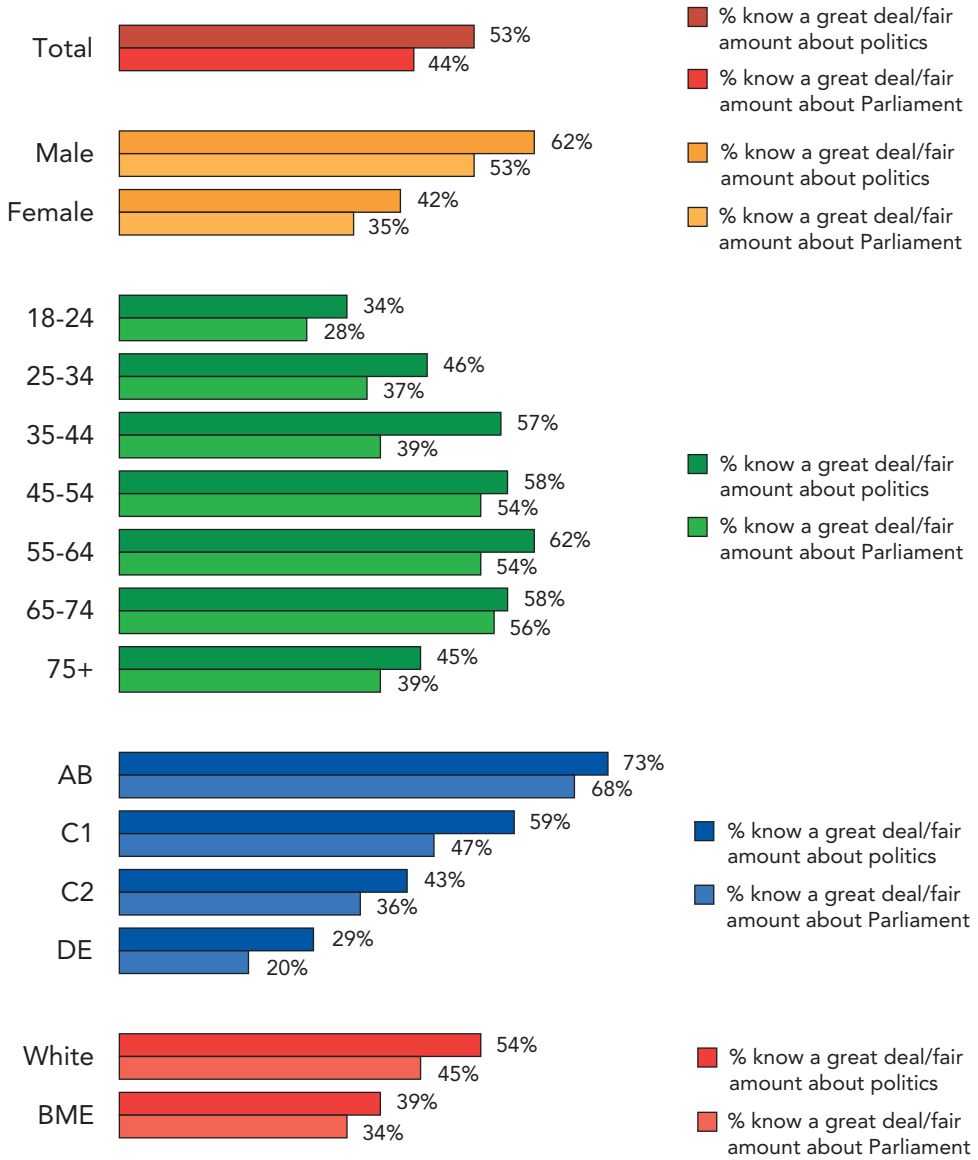
Knowledge of Parliament and knowledge of politics show similar patterns of variation across both genders, each age group and social class. In each case people are slightly less likely to say they know at least 'a fair amount' about the UK Parliament compared to politics in general.

However 35-44 year olds (and to a lesser extent 25-34 year olds) are markedly less likely to feel knowledgeable about Parliament than politics, as are those in the C1 social class. The differences in perceived knowledge, which were common across all the demographic breakdowns in last year's Audit have shrunk significantly, except in these three instances.

[23] Note, however, that in previous Audit studies the question has been worded as 'Westminster Parliament' as opposed to 'UK Parliament' – the trends are therefore indicative only.

Figure 11: Knowledge of politics vs. knowledge of Parliament

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Remarkably almost half (45%) of those who say they are absolutely certain to vote feel they know not very much or nothing at all about the UK Parliament. Despite a commitment to participating in the activity that determines the composition of Parliament, they feel unaware of its consequences.

Other groups who feel they know not very much or nothing at all about the UK Parliament are people in Scotland (70%) and those who do not use the internet (73%).

Name of MP

Fewer than two in five people (38%) can correctly name their local MP. This is down from 44% who could do so in the most recent three Audits when this was tested (Audits 3, 4 and 7). This can be explained by the high turnover of MPs at the general election, when 232 new MPs were elected. It indicates that despite knowledge and interest in politics increasing – probably due to the election and its aftermath – this does not necessarily result in people taking a close interest in the outcome of the general election in their own local area. Or if they do, the name does not 'stick' in the memory, demonstrating the value of incumbency in political campaigns, and the extent to which candidates need to build recognition and profile over time.

Figure 12: Identifying the Member of Parliament

Q What is the name of your local Member of Parliament?

	Audit 1 (2004) %	Audit 3 (2006) %	Audit 4 (2007) %	Audit 7 (2010) %	**Audit 8 (2011) %**
Gave correct answer	42	44	44	44	**38**
Gave wrong answer	10	9	6	10	**7**
Don't know / no answer	49	46	50	46	**55**

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

Those who are interested in politics are more likely to be able to correctly name their MP (49%). Those least likely to give a correct answer are the youngest members of the public; just one in five (19%) of 18-24 year olds and a quarter (25%) of 25-34 year olds can do so. There is a large disparity between white and BME members of the public – 40% of white people correctly named their MP compared to just 19% of BMEs. There is also an interesting regional divide, where those in the North and Scotland are least likely to correctly name their MP: only 23% in the North East, 26% in the North West and 22% in Scotland could do so.

Where the MP is a Liberal Democrat or from one of the smaller parties (i.e. not Conservative or Labour) constituents are more likely to correctly name their MP (56% and 57% respectively). Additionally half (49%) of respondents who would vote Liberal Democrat can correctly name their local MP.

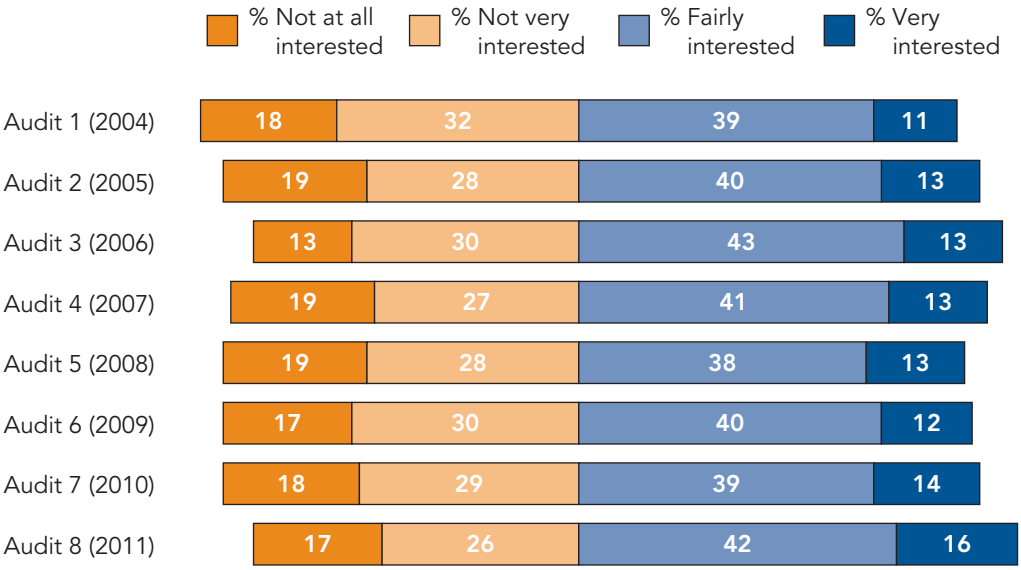
Interest in politics

Following a year which saw a general election, the first hung Parliament after an election since 1974, and five days of inter-party negotiations resulting in a coalition government, interest in politics has hit an all-time high in the Audit series. Fifty-eight per cent of the

population now say they are 'very' or 'fairly interested' in politics. This follows a pattern: interest also rose after the last general election in 2005, albeit not to the same extent as in 2010. And previous surveys by MORI have separately recorded slightly higher levels of interest on two occasions, in 1973 and 1991 (60% on each occasion), both in anticipation of the subsequent general elections in 1974 and 1992.

Figure 13: Interest in politics

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?



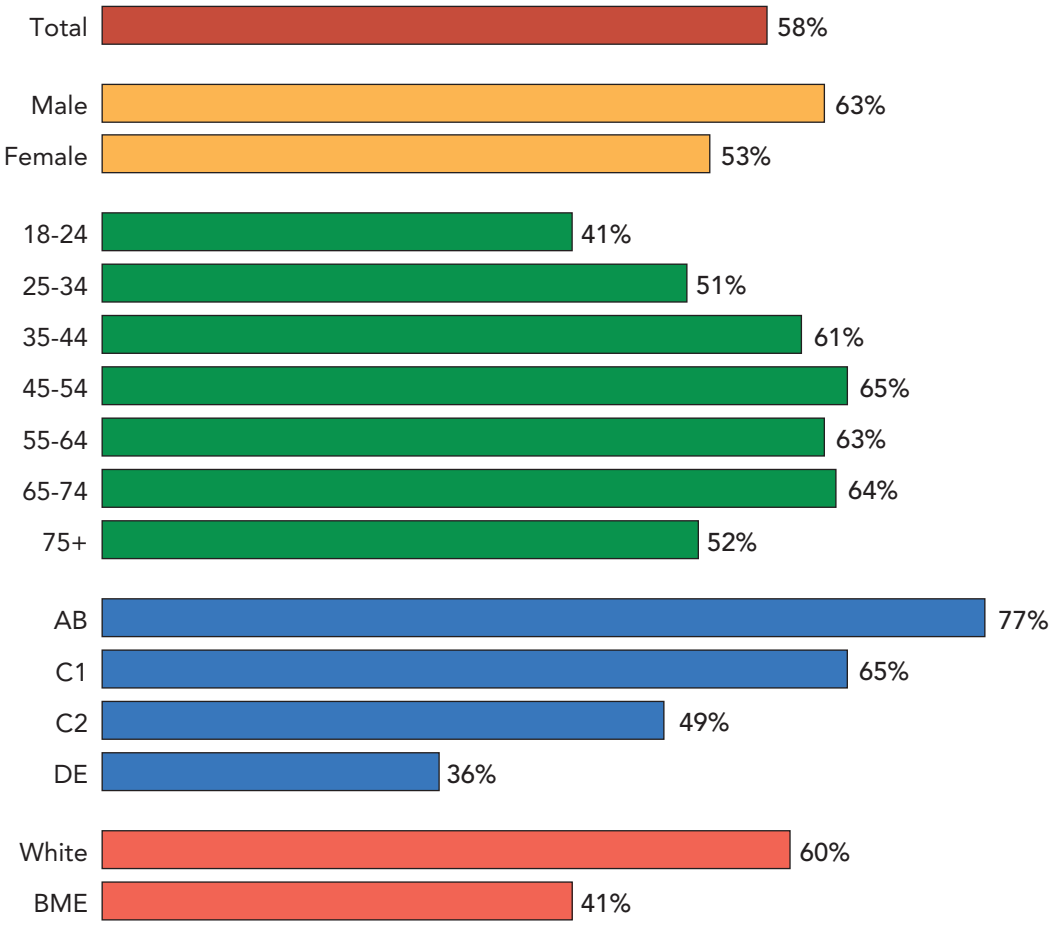
Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

The Audit has consistently found that older people are more likely to be interested in politics than younger people. While this is true in this year's Audit, the increased interest in politics has been driven primarily by those aged 54 and under. Interest levels for 18-24 and 25-34 year olds have increased in the last year from 38% to 41% and 44% to 51% respectively (although neither hit the highs of 48% and 53% recorded after the previous general election in Audit 3). Similarly, interest among those aged 35-44 has also increased to a series high of 61%, up 12 points from last year.

Figure 14: Interest in politics – demographic differences

Q How interested would you say you are in politics?

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Interest is up nine points among C1 and C2 social classes and four points among ABs. However, it appears that the events of the year have not affected interest among DEs, with levels down two points (effectively unchanged from last year). Similarly, interest among BME groups has remained static (up two points) while interest among white people is up six points on last year.

There is a divide between supporters of the main political parties; Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters are more interested in politics this year (73% each) than are Labour voters (60%). There is also some regional difference with those in the North West and Scotland professing the lowest levels of interest (49% and 44% are interested respectively).

B. Action and participation

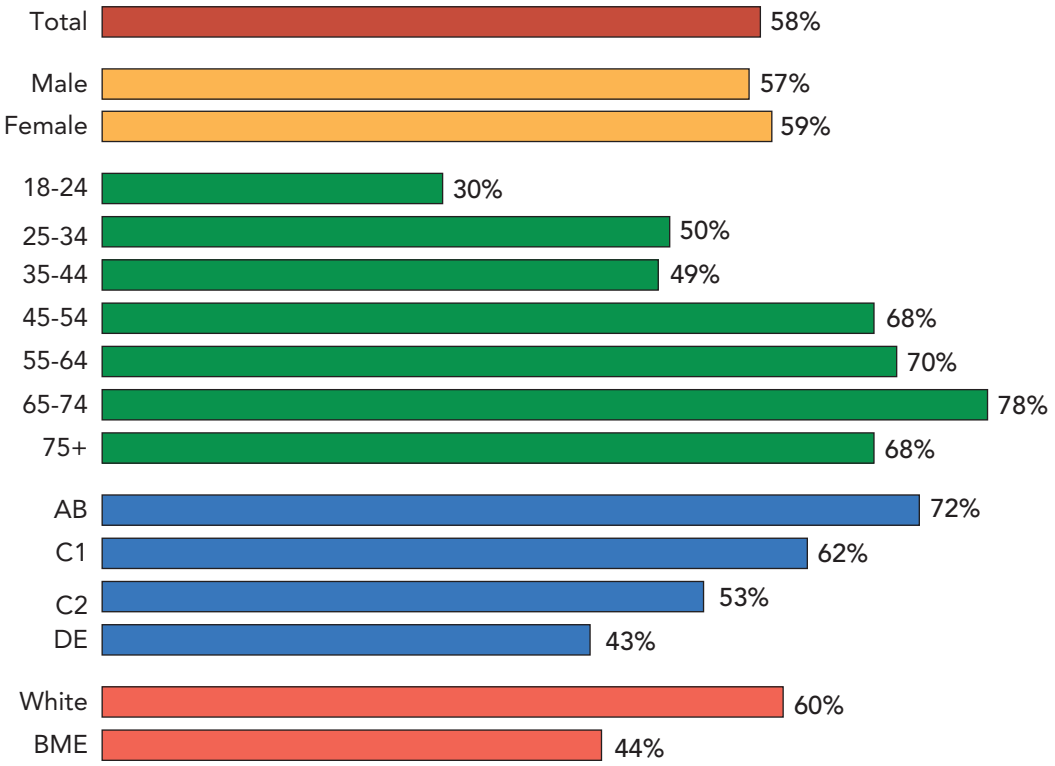
The proportion of the public who say they are certain to vote in an immediate general election is also at an all-time high in the Audit series. However, other measures of political activity and involvement show little or no change. Despite the general election, hung Parliament and coalition, the proportion of the public who say they have discussed politics in the last two or three years shows no meaningful change.

Propensity to vote

The proportion of people saying they are 'certain to vote' at an immediate general election is the highest recorded in the Audit series, with 58% now saying they would do so – a rise of four points on last year. This mirrors the increase in reported interest in politics and reflects the turnout at the general election, which was high by recent standards (65% in 2010, 61% in 2005 and 59% in 2001).

Figure 15: Propensity to vote – demographic differences

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

While men and women are equally likely to turn out at a general election, age, social grade and ethnicity are key differentiators. Those aged 44 or under are noticeably less likely to be certain to vote, as are those in lower social classes. While certainty to vote has increased slightly across all the demographic measures, it has risen significantly for the 25-34 year old age group, up 17 points on last year to 50%. This may reflect a combination of influences: for most of this cohort, the general election was the first 'change' election of their voting lives; in difficult economic times the likely consequences of the election were sharpened and thus perceived more clearly – in terms of employment and living standards – than at previous elections; and the innovation of the televised leaders' debates helped to engage them in the campaign itself.[24]

Ipsos MORI's final estimates of how people actually voted at the general election in May broken down by gender, age, social grade and by housing tenure show a similar pattern.[25]

Generally, those who are interested in politics are considerably more likely to vote than those who are not interested: almost three quarters (74%) of interested people are certain to vote, compared with 37% of those who are not interested in politics. However, this relationship between interest and voting is not entirely straightforward: men say they are more interested in politics than women, but are actually slightly less likely to vote; more women say they are certain to vote (59%) than say they are interested in politics (53%).

People expressing support for any of the political parties are more likely than average to be certain to vote, however there is no discernable difference in the likelihood to vote of people in marginal seats compared to safe seats (either on the basis of seats that were marginal after the 2005 election or the 2010 election).[26]

Discussing politics

Roughly two in five people (42%) have 'discussed politics or political news with someone else' in the last two or three years. Despite the general election, this result is no different from that in previous Audits, which have ranged from 38%-42%.

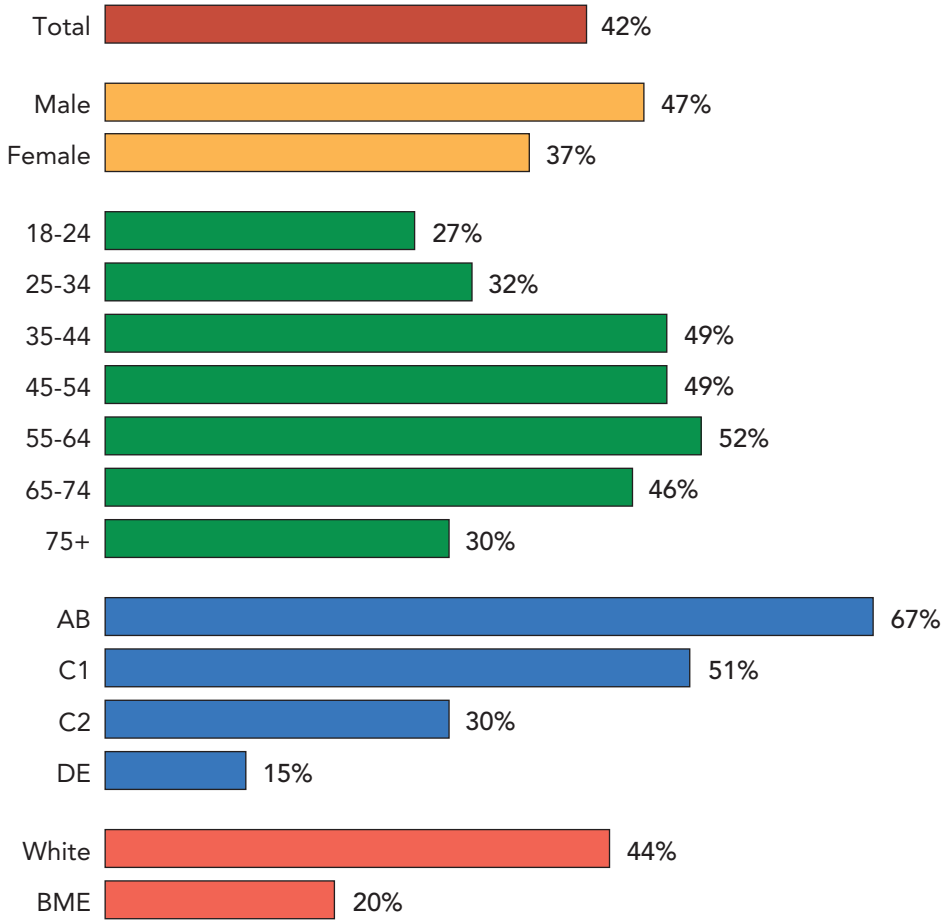
[24] See J.G. Blumler, 'Voters' Responses to the Prime Ministerial Debates: A Rock (of Future?) Ages' in S. Coleman (ed.) (2010), *Leaders in the Living Room. The Prime Ministerial Debates of 2010: Evidence, Evaluation and Some Recommendations* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism), pp.35-54.

[25] http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2613&view=wide

[26] For the purposes of comparison 'marginal' seats are where the winning party had a majority of less than 10% and 'safe' seats are those where the winning party had a majority of over 20% or more. Boundaries are based on those in existence at the time of the relevant general election.

Figure 16: Discussing politics – demographic differences

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Men are more likely than women to say they have discussed politics (47% to 37%). While older people are more likely to have discussed politics than younger people, the difference in this year's Audit is less stark than last year. In Audit 7, 55-64 year olds and 65-74 year olds were more likely than other age groups to have discussed politics, whereas this year there is no discernable difference between those aged 35-74.

As in previous Audits, those in more affluent social classes are more likely to say they have discussed politics. Discussion of politics has increased by six points for the C1 social class this year, but declined six points for DEs. One in five (20%) of BMEs say they have discussed politics – an increase of five points on last year – whereas there has been no change for white people at 44%.

Political and civic activities

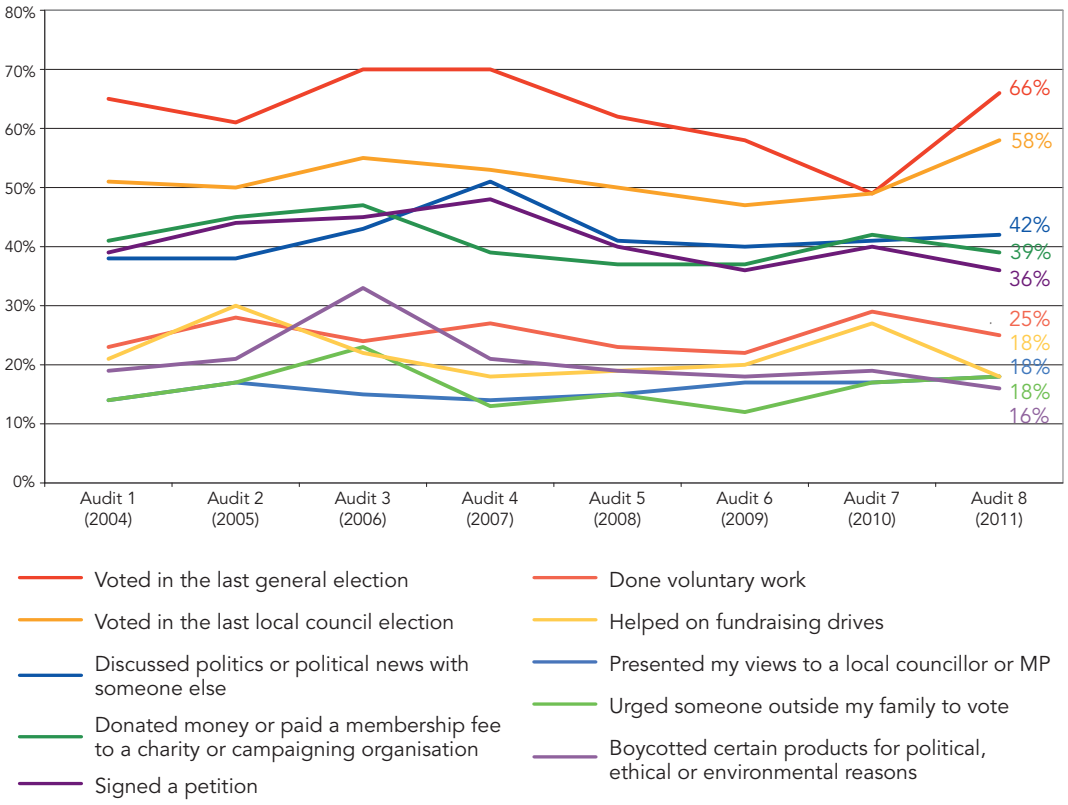
The political and civic activities measured across the Audit series remain largely stable. Figure 17 charts the activities respondents are more likely to say they have engaged in over the last two or three years.

The most volatile activity is 'voted in the last general election', for the straightforward reason that when the question has been asked in the last two Audits (6 and 7) it had been more than three years since the last general election. As would be expected, the figure has increased this year to 66%, in line with the turnout of 65% at the election itself. The figure for 'voted in the last local council election' has also increased this year (up nine points to 58%), which would be expected as there is higher turnout at local elections that take place on the same day as general elections.

It is particularly noticeable that the level of people who say they have discussed politics or political news has shown no significant rise, despite the general election and prevalence of political coverage around the formation of the coalition.

Figure 17: Political and civic activities – Audit series timeline

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



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

The chart conveys the extent to which there is a tripartite division of activity predicated on the degree of sustained commitment and time required to undertake each particular activity.

The more commonly undertaken activities – voting in a general or local election – are those that require only limited time and commitment. Voting is a one-off activity usually taking place only once a year in most cases. The next layer of activities – discussing politics, donating money to a charity or campaigning organisation, and signing a petition – also require only cursory time and attention.

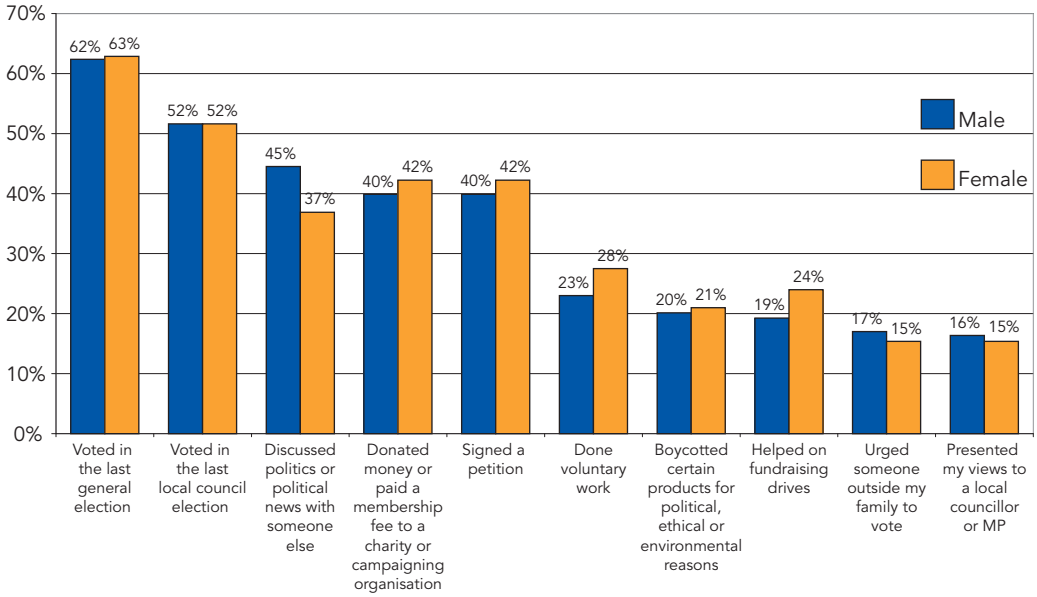
Further down the chart however, the activities begin to become more effortful. Doing voluntary work and helping on fundraising drives, while covering a wide spectrum of possible levels of involvement, require more of a commitment, particularly in terms of time (if not necessarily intellectual engagement) to participate in. At the bottom of the activity chart – contacting a local councillor or MP (or MSP in Scotland/AM in Wales), urging someone to vote or boycotting a product – all require a greater level of intellectual engagement with politics or an issue as well as some commitment of time.

Off the chart entirely are other, even less commonly undertaken activities. Fifteen per cent of people this year say they have urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP, 8% have expressed their political opinions online, 6% have been to any political meeting, 4% have taken part in a political campaign, 4% have taken part in a demonstration, picket or march, and 3% have donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party. Involvement in these activities requires a greater level of commitment than engagement in the more popular forms of activity.

Examining the average scores for the more 'popular' activities over the eight years of the Audit series demonstrates that there is little difference between the genders (Figure 18). On just three activities are differences apparent – women are more likely to say they have helped on fundraising drives and done voluntary work, while men are more like to say they have discussed politics.

Figure 18: Political and civic activities – gender averages across the series

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



Mean average values across all eight Audits. Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

A similar analysis of the activities by age group shows a fairly consistent pattern of increasing participation as age rises (dipping slightly for those 75 and over). However, younger age groups (18-34 year olds) are not significantly less likely to have done voluntary work or helped on fundraising drives. While they may be less engaged with politics on the basis of the other measures in the Audit, they are not disengaged from these civic activities.

Younger age groups are also not significantly less likely to have urged someone outside their family to vote, despite being less certain to vote themselves. It may be that older age groups have an unspoken assumption and expectation about voting – they have a stronger sense of a duty to vote and are more likely to vote than younger age groups – and thus perhaps they do not see the need to urge others to vote.

C. Civic and political involvement

People profess to have less knowledge of how things work in their local area than they do about politics generally. Conversely, however, they are also more interested in their local area than they are in politics.

The public are more positive about the efficacy of involvement locally than nationally, but there is no difference (unlike in Audit 6) between the proportion of people who would like to be involved in local decision-making compared to national decision-making. This may be in part because people express greater satisfaction with how things work locally than they do with the system of governing as a whole.

Only a small proportion of the public, one in 10, will definitely volunteer in the next two or three years and no more than three in 10 will probably volunteer. The factors that might stimulate higher levels of volunteering are relatively self-interested, with personal impact and benefit being the most likely motivators.

Knowledge of how things work locally

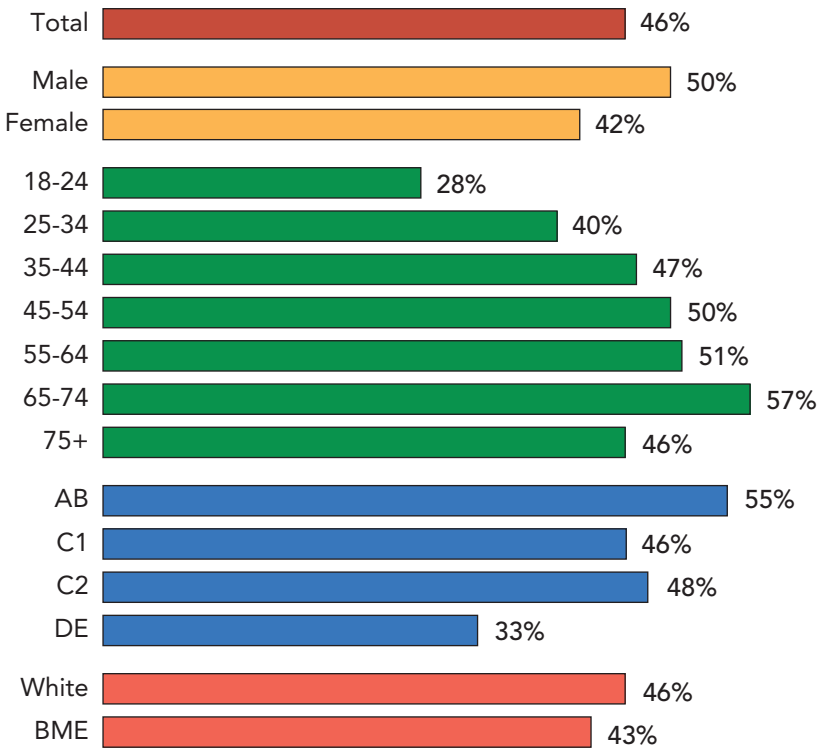
Less than half (46%) of people say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about how things work in their local area. This is less than the 53% who say they know at least 'a fair amount' about politics.

The same groups of people are more likely to profess knowledge of how things work locally as claim knowledge about politics. Half of men (50%) say they know at least 'a fair amount' about how things work locally compared to 42% of women. Young people (18-24 year olds particularly, but also 25-34 year olds) are less likely to feel knowledgeable about how things work locally.

Figure 19: Perceived knowledge of how things work locally – demographic differences

Q How much, if anything, do you feel you know about how things work in your local area?

Those who say they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount'



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Perceived knowledge of how things work locally varies by social class, with 55% of ABs saying they know at least 'a fair amount' compared to 33% of DEs. Unlike many other measures in the Audit, however, there is no difference between the C1 and C2 classes. There is also no divide between white and BME respondents.

But levels of local knowledge appear to differ throughout Great Britain, with those in the East and West Midlands reporting higher levels of self-assessed knowledge (56% and 58% respectively). People in Scotland (61%), the South East (63%) and Wales (63%) are more likely than others to say they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all'.

People who say they are interested in politics are more likely to say they know at least 'a fair amount' about how things work in their local area (58%), as do people who read quality newspapers (61%).

Interest in how things work locally

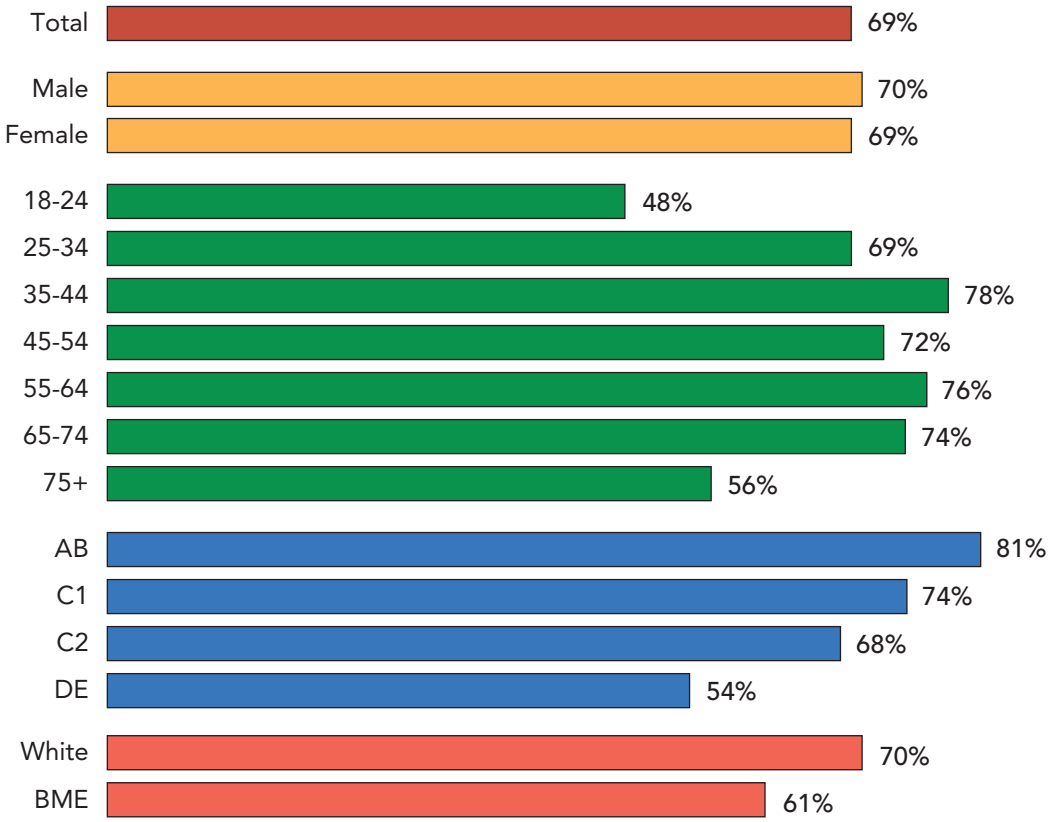
Seven in 10 people (69%) are interested in how things work in their local area, a higher level of interest than for politics more generally (58%). This reflects similar questions in previous Audits, which have consistently found around four in five were 'very' or 'fairly' interested in 'local issues'.

There is however, a strong correlation between those who are interested in politics and those who are interested in how things work in their local area (86% of those interested in politics are also interested in the workings of their local area). But half of those who are not interested in 'politics' are interested in the way things work locally. This perhaps reflects what people understand by the term 'politics', seeing it simply in national terms, rather than encompassing local issues as well.

Figure 20: Interest in how things work locally – demographic differences

Q How interested would you say you are in how things work in your local area?

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

There is no difference in interest in how things work locally between men and women, nor between most of the age groups. 18-24 year olds, however, are significantly less likely to be interested (48%) as are those aged 75 and over (56%). ABs are also more likely to be interested in how things work locally than DEs (81% compared to 54%).

People who can name their MP (84%) and those who are absolutely certain to vote (80%) are more likely to be interested in how things work in their local area, as are Conservative (78%) and Liberal Democrat (79%) supporters.

Eighty-six per cent of those who are interested in politics are also interested in how things work in their local area, compared to half (48%) of those who are not interested in politics.

Thirty-seven per cent of respondents in the North West and 36% of those in Scotland are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested in how things work in their local area.

Perceived efficacy of local involvement

People are far more positive about the efficacy of getting involved in their local community than they are about getting involved in politics. Around half of the public (51%) agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community they really can change the way their area is run', while one in five people (21%) disagree. This compares favourably to the one in three (30%) who agree that they can change the way the UK is run by getting involved in politics and 44% who disagree.

There is no difference between men and women in their responses to this question, nor between white people and BMEs. There is also very little variation between age groups: 55-64 year olds are marginally higher (55% agree) but all the other age groups are within three points of the headline figure. Differences are apparent across the social classes, however, with 60% of ABs agreeing, compared to 47% of C2s and 45% of DEs.

Liberal Democrat supporters are the strongest believers in the efficacy of getting involved locally; 62% feel they can make a difference compared to 52% of Conservatives and 54% of Labour supporters. However, just a third (34%) of those who would not vote agree that by getting involved locally they can make a difference.

Sixty-three per cent of respondents from the North East agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run', compared to just 46% of those in Scotland.

Views on how things work in local area

As with efficacy and knowledge, more people are positive about how things work in their local area than in Britain as a whole. Around half the public (49%) believe that how things work in their local area 'could not be improved' (2%) or could 'be improved in small ways' (47%), whereas only three in 10 people (31%) say the same about the system of governing Britain. While two thirds (64%) of the public think the system of governing Britain needs 'a lot' or a 'great deal' of improvement, less than half (46%) think the same about how things work in their local area.

People in more affluent social classes (ABC1s) are more likely to be satisfied with how things work locally than C2DEs, however more C1s (57%) are satisfied than ABs (52%).

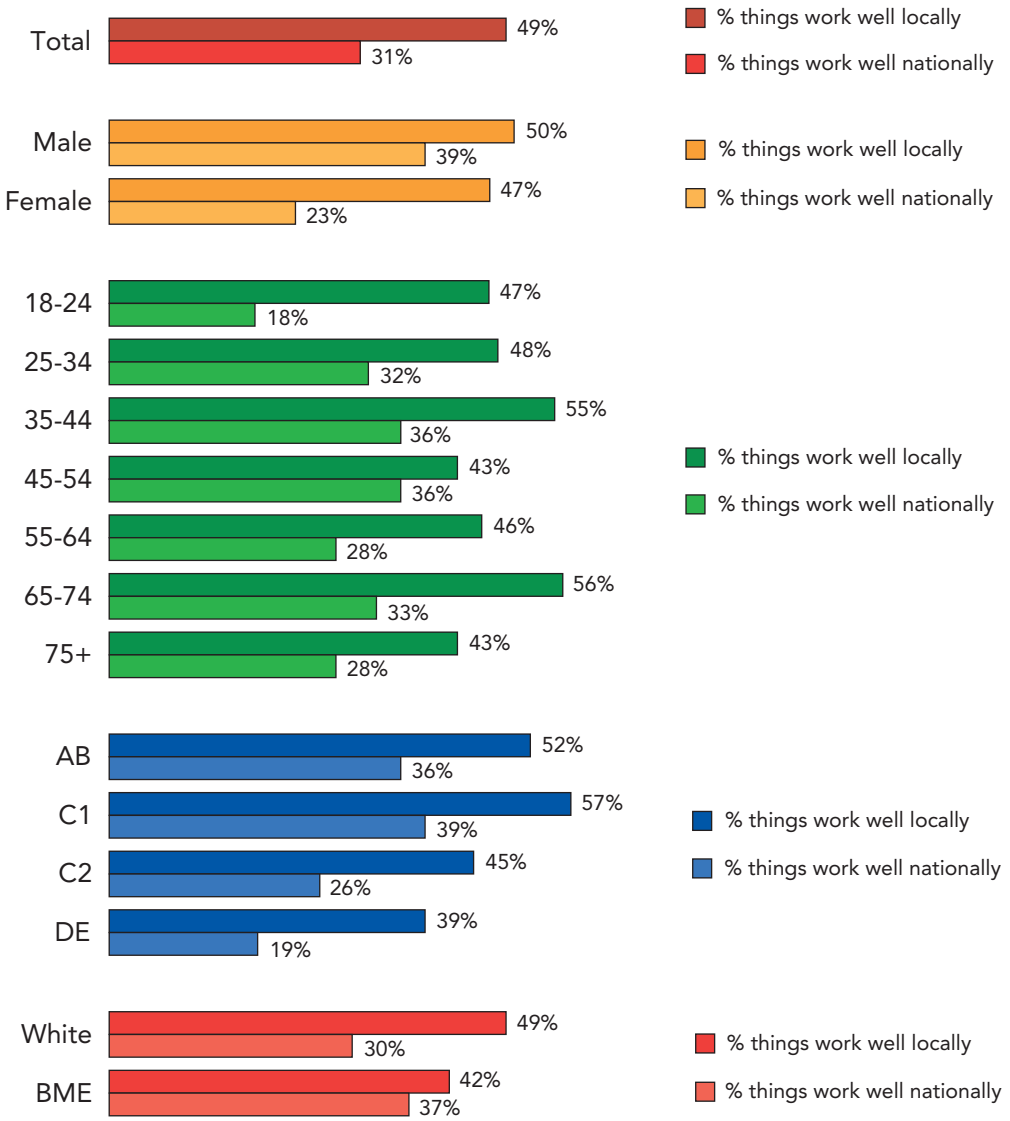
There are geographical differences in how people see the way their local area is run. People in Scotland and Wales – where they have devolved governments – are more likely than anywhere else in Great Britain to think how things work locally needs improvement (61% and 60% respectively).

Figure 21: Satisfaction with how things work locally vs. nationally – demographic differences

Q Which of these statements best describes your opinion on how things work in your local area?

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

Those who say 'work extremely well and could not be improved' or 'could be improved in small ways but mainly work well'



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Satisfaction with how things work locally is greater for all groups than satisfaction with how things work nationally, although the difference is particularly pronounced for women and for young people (18-24 year olds) who are much more favourable about how things work locally than nationally.

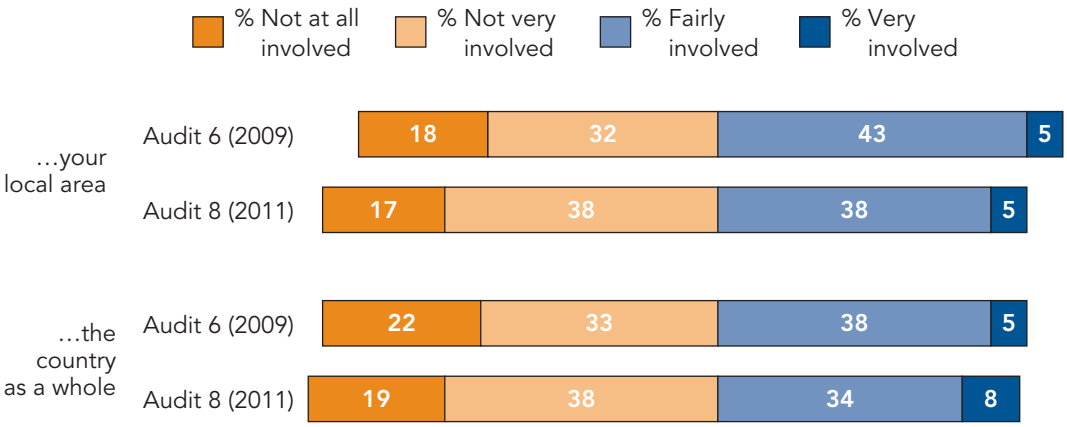
Desire for involvement – locally and nationally

Around two in five (43%) of people say they would like to be either 'very involved' or 'fairly involved' in decision-making in their local area, and a similar number (42%) would like to be involved in decision-making in the country as a whole.

The proportion who would like to be involved locally is down five points from when this question was last asked two years ago in Audit 6, however, desire for involvement in national decision-making is unchanged.

Figure 22: Desire for involvement locally and nationally

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



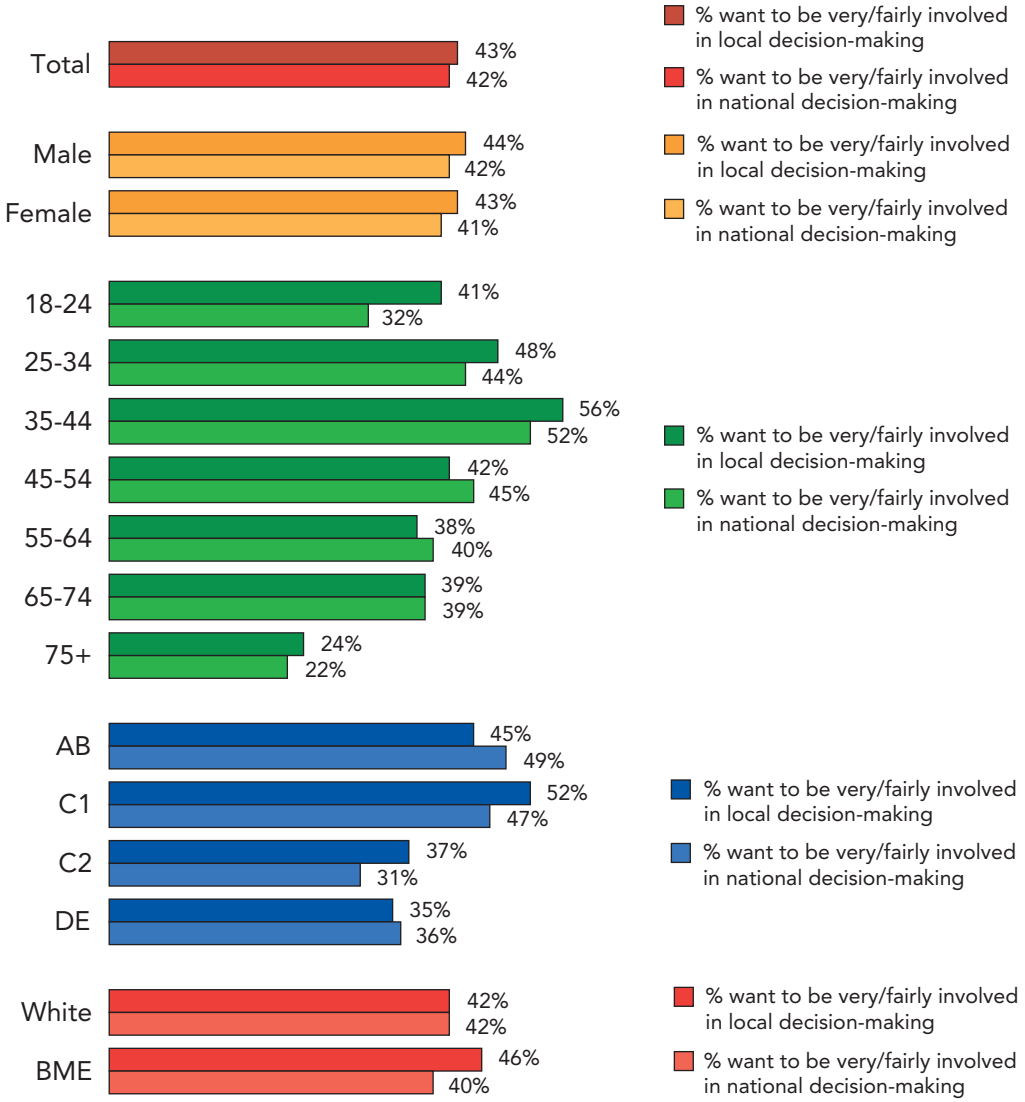
Base: c.1,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

It is interesting that there is now no statistical difference in the proportion of people who want to get involved in decision-making locally and nationally. As explained earlier in this report, there is traditionally a gap between attitudes to local and national involvement as evidenced in levels of interest, efficacy and satisfaction.

Figure 23: Desire for involvement locally and nationally – demographic differences

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

Those who say 'very' or 'fairly' involved



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

The demographic comparisons between these two questions are particularly interesting. Young people (18-24 year olds) are much more likely to want involvement in decision-making locally rather than nationally, as to a lesser extent are those in both the C1 and C2 social classes and BMEs. In contrast, those aged 45-64 and ABs are marginally more likely to say they want involvement at a national level.

Not only are C1s more likely than ABs to be satisfied with how things work locally (see previous section) they are also more likely to want to be involved locally.

Interestingly full-time workers (48%) and those with children in their household (51%) are also more likely than the average to want to be involved locally – even though they are the ones, presumably, with the least amount of time to spare. However, as explained in chapter five, families with children are among those groups most likely to be motivated to become more engaged in civic activities in the future.

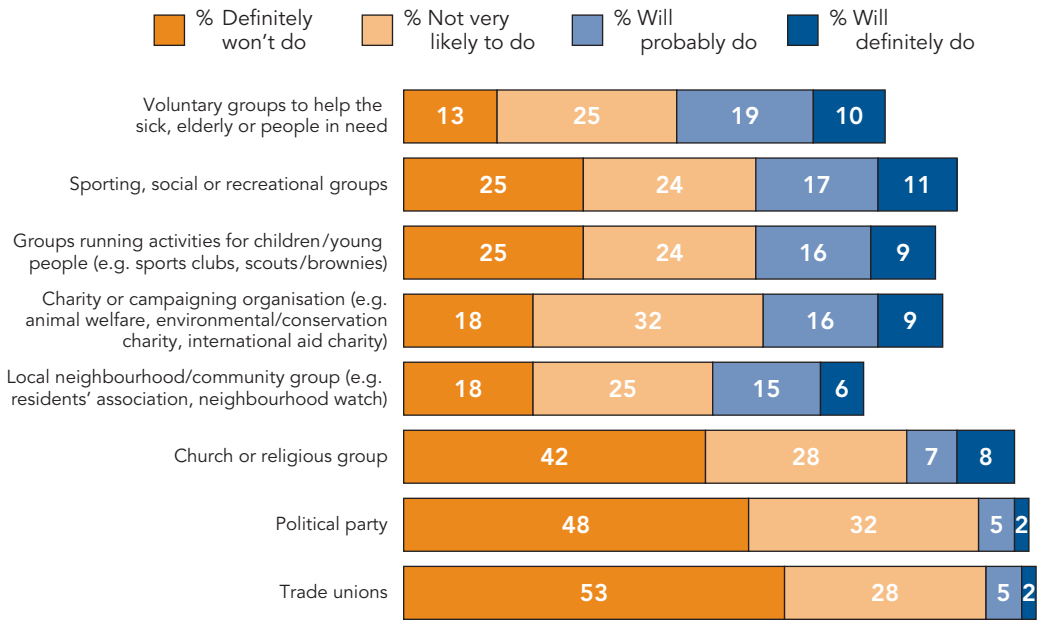
Respondents in Scotland show less desire to be involved in decision-making both locally and nationally, with 69% and 71% respectively saying they want to be 'not very involved' or 'not at all involved'. The most positive region is the North East, where 52% of respondents say they would like to be involved in decision-making in their local area.

Willingness to engage in voluntary activities

A relatively small proportion of the public say they will 'definitely' spend time doing voluntary work on a range of activities. Approximately one in 10 people say they will 'definitely' volunteer in a range of ways, including helping 'voluntary groups to help sick, elderly or people in need' (10%) and volunteering to 'sporting, social or recreational groups' (11%). Those people who say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' do one activity are more likely to do other activities.

Figure 24: Willingness to get involved

Q How likely, if at all, is it that in the next few years you will spend time doing voluntary activities with each of the following groups:



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Between two and three in 10 people say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' do a range of voluntary activities with the exception of those associated with church or religious groups, political parties and trade unions. A high proportion of the public say they will 'definitely' not get involved with the activities of trade unions (53%), a political party (48%) or church or religious group (42%).

Those groups that are most likely to say they are willing to spend time doing some form of voluntary work are those aged under 45 (in particular 25-34 year olds); those in the highest social grades (ABC1); those with children; and Liberal Democrat voters.

BMEs are also more likely to say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' spend time volunteering for all the suggested activities, with the exception of sporting/social groups. Thirty-three per cent of BMEs will 'definitely' or 'probably' spend time volunteering with a charity or campaigning organisation, and 31% with a church or religious group.

It is noticeable that under 45s are most likely to say they will 'probably' or 'definitely' do voluntary activities when in actual fact it is those aged 55 and over who are currently more likely to undertake the civic (including voluntary) and political activities measured in the Audit (see page 94). There is evidently the potential to get a younger cohort more active in volunteering.

Men are more likely than women to volunteer for sporting and social groups (33% to 22%), while women are more likely to get involved with charity or campaigning organisations (29% to 21%).

Younger people (18-34 year olds) are more likely to say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' volunteer with a sporting, social or recreational group (37%) or get involved running activities for children or young people (36%). Unsurprisingly those with children in their household already are also more likely to say they 'definitely' or 'probably' will get involved running activities for children or young people (44%).

Respondents in the South East are the most likely to say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' spend time volunteering with a local neighbourhood or community group in the next few years (28%). However, almost three in five (59%) of those in Scotland say they are 'not very likely' or 'definitely' will not.

Similarly, people in London are the most likely to say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' volunteer with a political party (14%), while those in Scotland are least likely, with 92% saying they are 'not very likely' or 'definitely' will not.

Respondents in London were also the most likely to say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' volunteer with a charity or campaigning organisation (31%) and with a trade union (16%).

Liberal Democrat supporters are more likely to say they will 'definitely' or 'probably' spend time volunteering with a charity or campaigning organisation (38%), with a local neighbourhood group (28%) and with sports or recreational groups (37%). Labour

supporters, unsurprisingly given the institutional and historical links, are more likely to say they will volunteer with a trade union (11%).

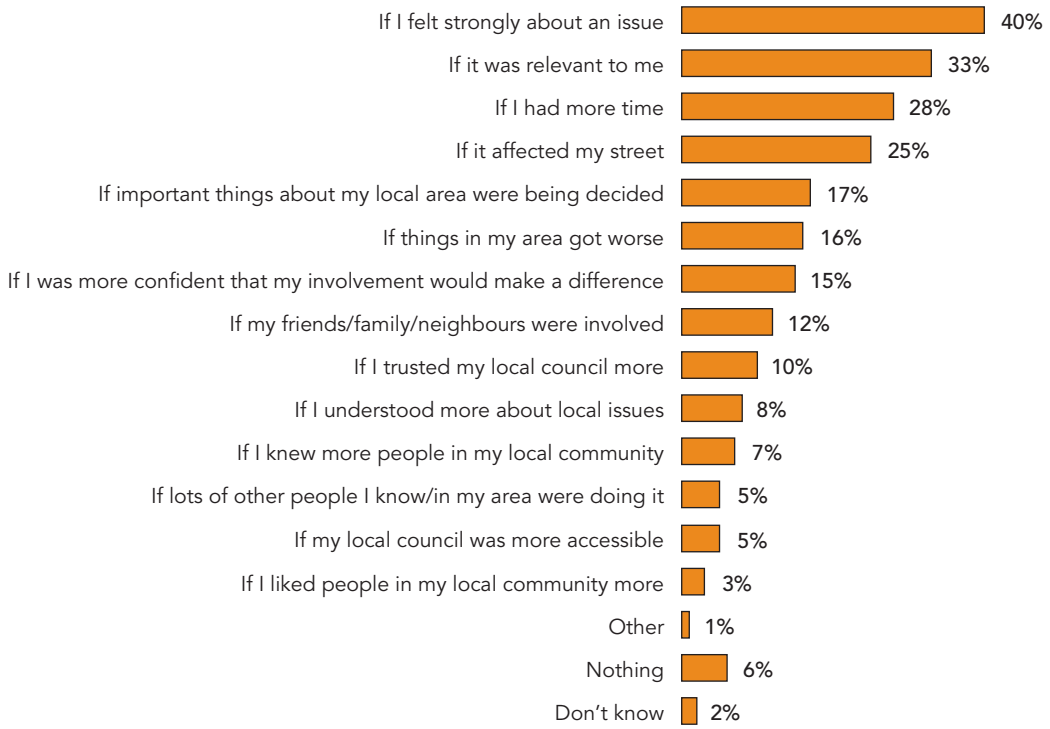
Drivers for community involvement

Respondents were asked what would encourage them to get more involved in their local community. The most common answers mentioned are: 'if I felt strongly about an issue' (40%), 'if it was relevant to me' (33%), 'if I had more time' (28%) and 'if it affected my street' (25%).

It is notable that these answers are all very personal and self-interested. External barriers do not appear to deter engagement – understanding local issues, accessing or trusting the local council do not score highly. To get people more involved, the personal benefits need to be evident.

Figure 25: Motivations for involvement

Q Which two or three, if any, of the following would most encourage you to get more involved with your local community?



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Almost one in three (28%) say they would get involved if they had more time. In Audit 6, those who were not currently involved in decision-making but who wanted to be, cited 'not having enough time' as the prime barrier to doing so. These latest findings suggest that interest in and the relevance of local issues are more important involvement factors.

Those who are most likely to say they would get involved if they had more time are: ABC1s (33%); full-time workers (42%); and those aged 25-34 (37%) and 35-44 (45%). Indeed, for the 35-54 age group having more time is a greater incentive than 'if it was relevant to me' (39% and 35% respectively).

Time is less of an issue for DEs (21%). For them, to a greater degree than other groups, understanding more about local issues would encourage them to get more involved (12%). For more affluent social classes the prime motivating factors are feeling strongly about an issue (46% ABs compared to 29% DEs), if important things about the local area were being decided (29% of ABs compared to 8% of DEs), and if they were confident that their involvement would make a difference (21% of ABs compared to 9% of DEs).

For young people (18-24 year olds) the involvement of friends or family would make a bigger difference than for other groups, with 21% saying this, compared to the average response of 12%.

Continuing the trend of stronger levels of community interest in the North East, 44% of respondents in this region say they would get more involved in their local community if it affected their street.

D. Efficacy and satisfaction

The perceived efficacy of politics is at an all-time low in the Audit series. However, satisfaction with the system of governing has marginally increased, suggesting perhaps that the damaging impact of the MPs' expenses crisis in relation to this indicator has now receded.

Satisfaction with Parliament has decreased somewhat since last year, though this does not manifest itself in an increase in expressed dissatisfaction. There has been no change in the proportion of people agreeing that Parliament 'holds government to account', but there has been a decrease in those agreeing that Parliament 'is working for you and me'. This suggests some – but not a great deal – of negative feeling towards the outcome of the election and a hung Parliament; the public may be reserving judgement.

The media and local councils are still top of an amended list of institutions or groups that have the most impact on people's everyday lives.[27] While not directly comparable to last year, Parliament's importance has gone up, and it now ranks third on the list.

Perceived political efficacy

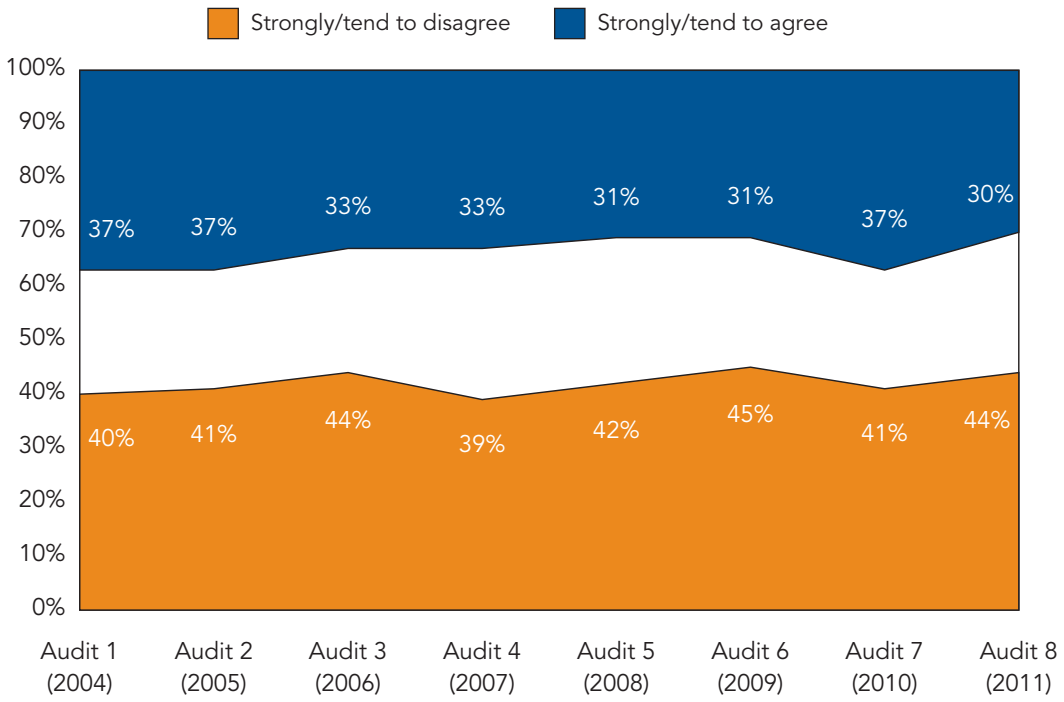
People's views on the efficacy of getting involved in politics has declined since last year, with just three in 10 (30%) agreeing with the statement 'when people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run'.

[27] The list was augmented in this Audit to include a civic/community element. Two new categories were added to the list: 'Local people working together in their community' and 'Community organisations e.g. youth clubs, social clubs'. The term 'Westminster Parliament' used in previous Audits was also amended to 'UK Parliament' in this Audit. Data comparisons between this Audit and previous reports are therefore indicative only.

Figure 26: Perceived political efficacy

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

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



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

There is very little demographic variation in response to this question, with no perceptible difference by gender, age or social class. This year's Audit continues the recent trend from Audit 6 which found that BMEs are more likely than the white population to feel they can make a difference; 38% of BMEs now agree while only 30% of the white population do so. This may account for why BMEs are more likely to say that they will 'definitely' or 'probably' volunteer in the next two or three years; although a lower proportion of BMEs say they actually do get involved in the political and civic activities examined earlier (see page 98).

The feeling that getting involved can make a difference is particularly strong in London (40% agree) and again in the North East (42%).

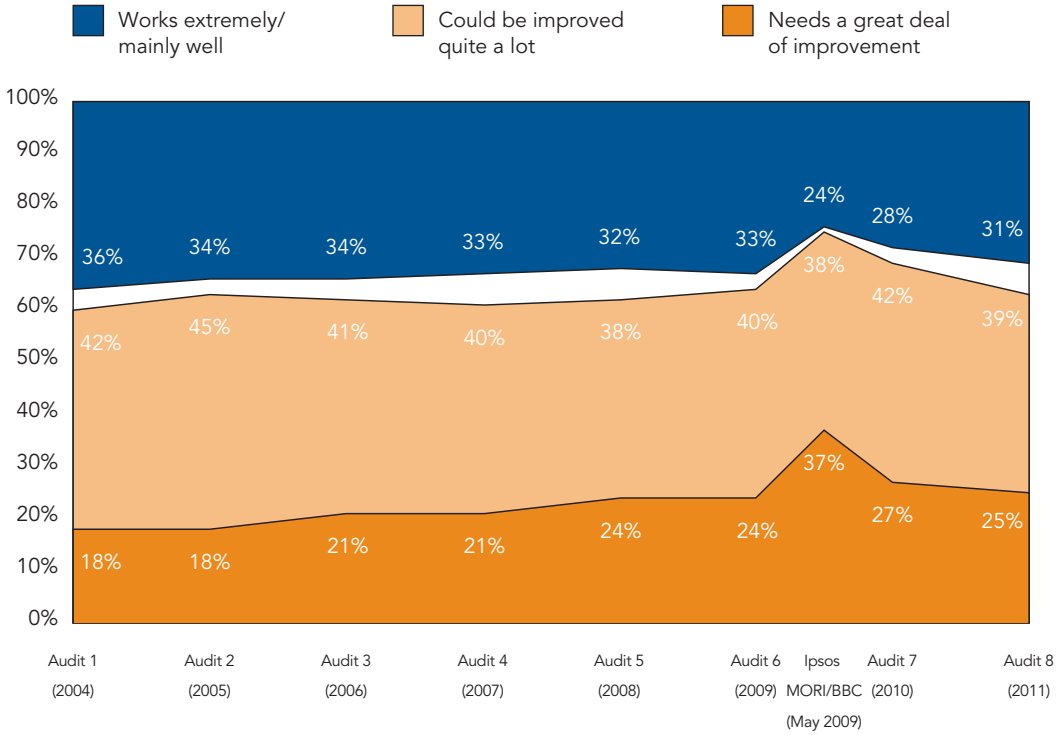
Present system of governing

Almost two thirds of people (64%) believe the system of governing Great Britain could be improved either 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' compared to the 69% who said the same last year in Audit 7. It is clear from Figure 27 that the spike in discontent in May 2009 at the time of the MPs' expenses crisis was temporary, and that satisfaction with the system of governing has settled back to its trend position across the Audit lifecycle.

Despite the fall, however, it is important to note that more than twice as many people still feel the system of government needs improving than think it needs little or no improvement (31%).

Figure 27: Present system of governing

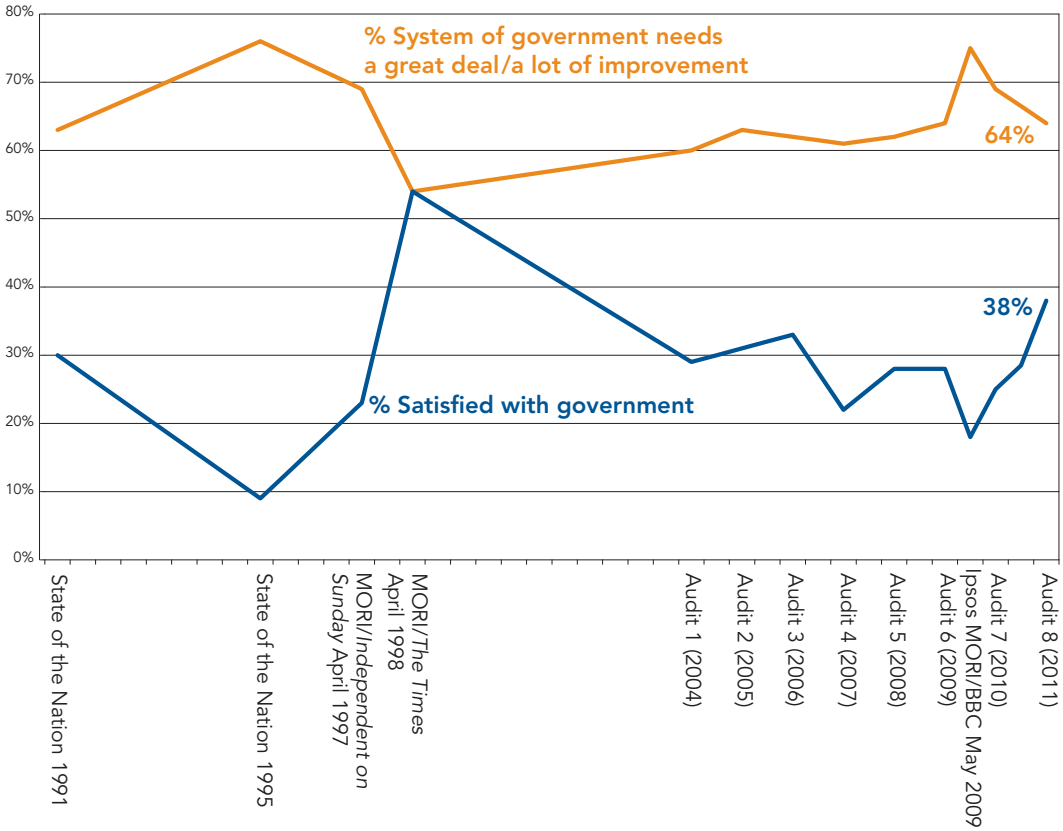
Q Which of these statements best describes your opinion of the present system of governing Britain?



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

Comparing satisfaction with the system of governing with satisfaction with the government shows a fairly consistent pattern over the last 20 years. Dissatisfaction with the system almost perfectly reflects satisfaction with the incumbent government – with the most 'positive' moment for both the system and a government measured in April 1998, when the Labour government led by Tony Blair was still in its infancy and at the height of its popularity.

Figure 28: Present system of governing vs. satisfaction with government



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

Conservative voters are the happiest with the current system of governing (46% think it needs little or no improvement and 52% think it needs quite a lot/a great deal of improvement) while two thirds (66%) of Labour and Liberal Democrat voters think the system needs improvement. This represents a turnaround since last year when Labour was in power and three quarters (76%) of Conservatives felt the system needed improvement compared to 59% of Labour voters and 63% of Liberal Democrats.

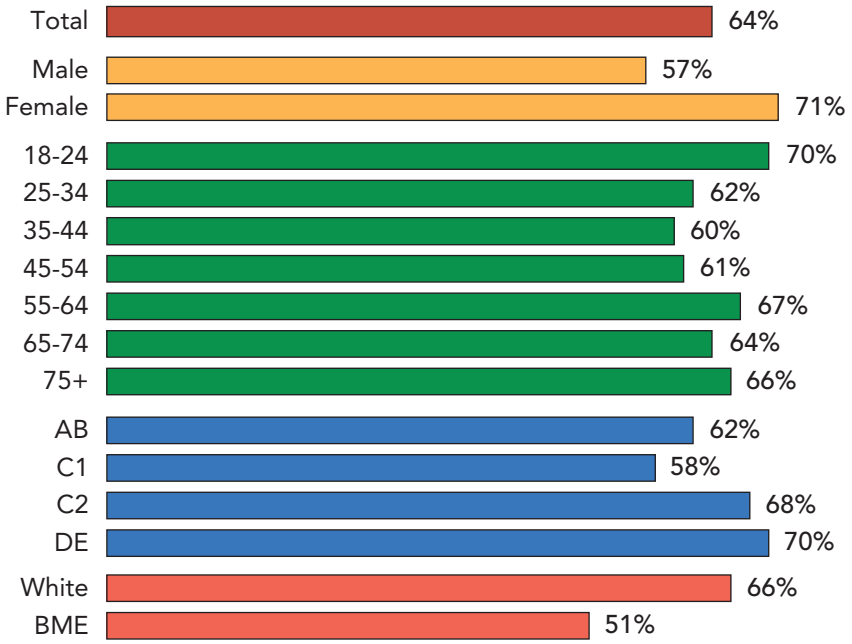
Two thirds (66%) of white people say that the system is in need of 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of improvement, compared to half (51%) of BMEs.

Dissatisfaction with the system of governing is greatest among those in the North East (81% think the system needs 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of improvement), Scotland (77%), Wales (74%) and Yorkshire and Humber (73%). By comparison, only half (53%) of those in London say the same.

Figure 29: Present system of governing – demographic differences

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

Those who say 'could be improved quite a lot' or 'needs a great deal of improvement'



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Women are more likely than men to think that the system of governing needs improvement (71% to 57%), while those in lower social grades (C2DEs) and younger people (18-24 year olds) are also less positive, with 70% of both groups saying the system needs improvement.

Satisfaction with Parliament

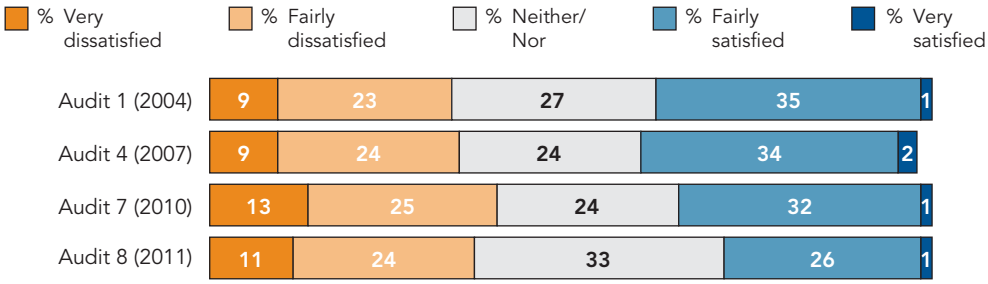
Satisfaction with Parliament has declined to a record low, with just over a quarter (27%) saying they are 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the way that Parliament works, compared to 33% who said the same last year.

However, it is also clear that dissatisfaction with Parliament has not increased in response. Instead, a greater proportion (33%) of people say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied than in previous years (24% in Audits 4 and 7 and 27% in Audit 1).

Dissatisfaction is higher in areas geographically furthest from Westminster, with the North East (49%), Scotland (47%) and Yorkshire and Humber (46%) most likely to be dissatisfied. There is also greater than average dissatisfaction with Parliament among those who feel the system of governing Britain needs improvement (49%) and those who do not feel their involvement can change the way the UK is run (47%).

Figure 30: Satisfaction with Parliament

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that Parliament works?



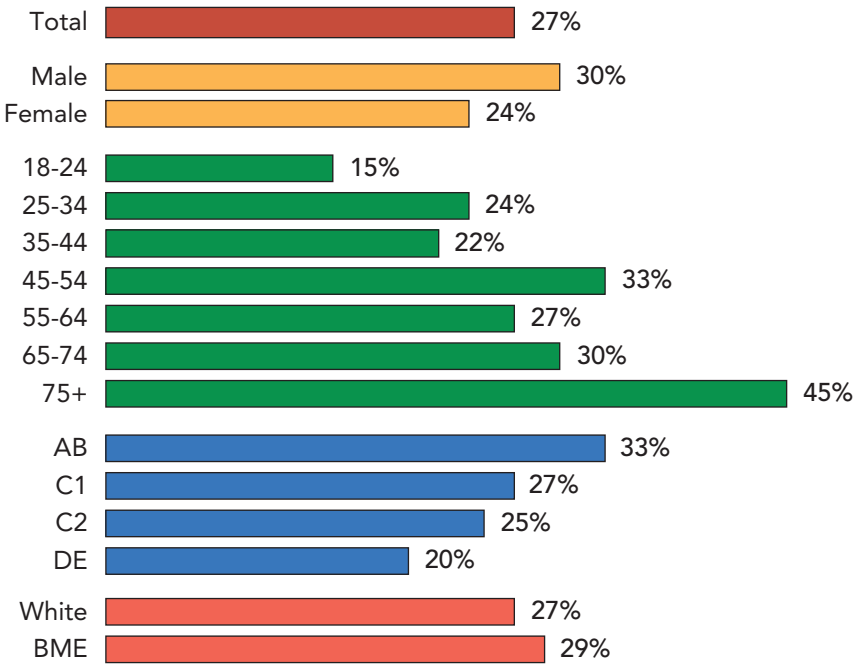
Base: c.1,000-2,000 GB adults 18+. See Appendix B.

Men are more likely than women to say they are satisfied with the way Parliament works (30% compared to 24%). Young people (18-24 year olds) are much less likely to be satisfied with Parliament (15%) compared to those aged 75 and over (45%). Satisfaction with Parliament also varies by social class, with ABs more likely to be satisfied (33%) than DEs (20%).

Figure 31: Satisfaction with Parliament – demographic differences

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that Parliament works?

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

There is also a divide along political lines. Those who would vote for either coalition party are more likely to be satisfied with the way Parliament works than those who would vote for a party not in government. Conservative voters are the most satisfied (40%) while a third (34%) of Liberal Democrats are also satisfied, compared to just a quarter (25%) of Labour voters.

Two in five (39%) of those who feel they know a great deal or a fair amount about the UK Parliament are satisfied with the way that Parliament works, while a quarter (26%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

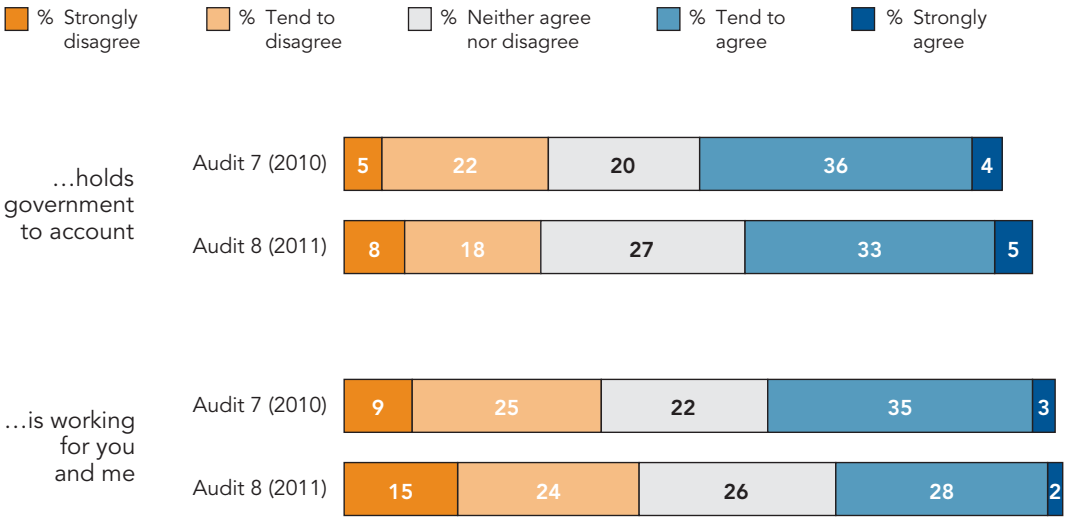
Perceptions of Parliament

Three in 10 people (30%) agree with the statement that Parliament 'is working for you and me', a decline of eight points from last year and in line with the deterioration of satisfaction with Parliament generally.

However, there has been no change in the response to the statement that Parliament 'holds government to account', with roughly two in five (38%) agreeing.

Figure 32: Perceptions of Parliament

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements: Parliament…



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

There is little demographic variation in response to the statement that Parliament 'holds government to account'. The youngest and oldest age groups (18-24 year olds and those aged 75 and over) are less likely to agree (31% and 34% respectively), while those aged 55-64 are most likely to agree (44%). Those in higher social grades are more likely to agree that Parliament 'holds government to account'; 44% of ABs do so compared to 32% of DEs.

The differences are more pronounced in response to the statement Parliament 'is working for you and me'. More men (32%) than women (28%) agree with the statement, as do more BMEs (40%) than white people (29%). There is also a bigger divide between the social classes, with 41% of ABs agreeing, compared to just 22% of DEs.

Only half (51%) of the respondents who agree that Parliament 'is working for you and me' are satisfied with the way that Parliament works. A further third (33%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Liberal Democrat supporters are the most positive about Parliament, with 52% agreeing that it holds government to account, and 44% that it 'is working for you and me'.

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

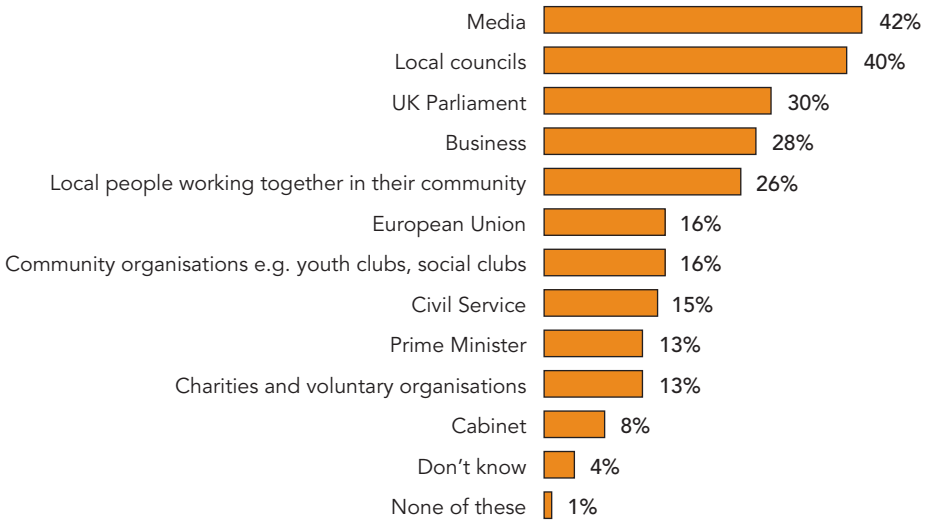
The media (42%) and local councils (40%) are the two institutions perceived to have the most impact on people's everyday lives, while one in three (30%) name the UK Parliament. This follows previous Audits where the media and local councils were also seen to have the biggest impact on people's lives. Business (28%), local people working together in their community (26%), the European Union (16%), community organisations (16%) and the civil service (15%) are all perceived to have more impact on people's everyday lives than the Prime Minister (13%).

The number and type of organisations listed in this question have changed since last year so direct comparisons are only indicative, but it is interesting to note that while 19% of people named the Westminster Parliament last year as one of the two or three that had most impact on people's lives, 30% say the same about the UK Parliament this year. On last year's list Parliament ranked below business, the European Union and the civil service but this year has overtaken all three.

Men (34%) and ABs (40%) are the most likely to say that Parliament impacts on people's everyday lives while those not working (26%) and BMEs (16%) are the least likely to say this.

Figure 33: Impact on people's everyday lives

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



Base: 1,197 GB adults 18+. Fieldwork dates: 3-9 December 2010.

Men are also more likely than women to say that business has an impact (33% compared to 23%), while women are more likely to say local people working together in their community (30% to 22%), community organisations (19% to 12%) and charities (16% to 10%).

Younger people (18-34 year olds) are more likely than those aged 55 and above to say that the media (44% to 35%), business (33% to 21%) and the Prime Minister (17% to 8%) have an impact on people's everyday lives. In contrast, those aged 55 and above are more likely to say local councils (43% to 35%), local people working together (30% to 19%) and the European Union (21% to 14%).

Those in higher social grades (ABC1s) are more likely to say the media (49% to 33% of C2DEs) and business (34% to 20%) have an impact on people's everyday lives, while C2DEs are more likely to say the Prime Minister (18% to 10%).

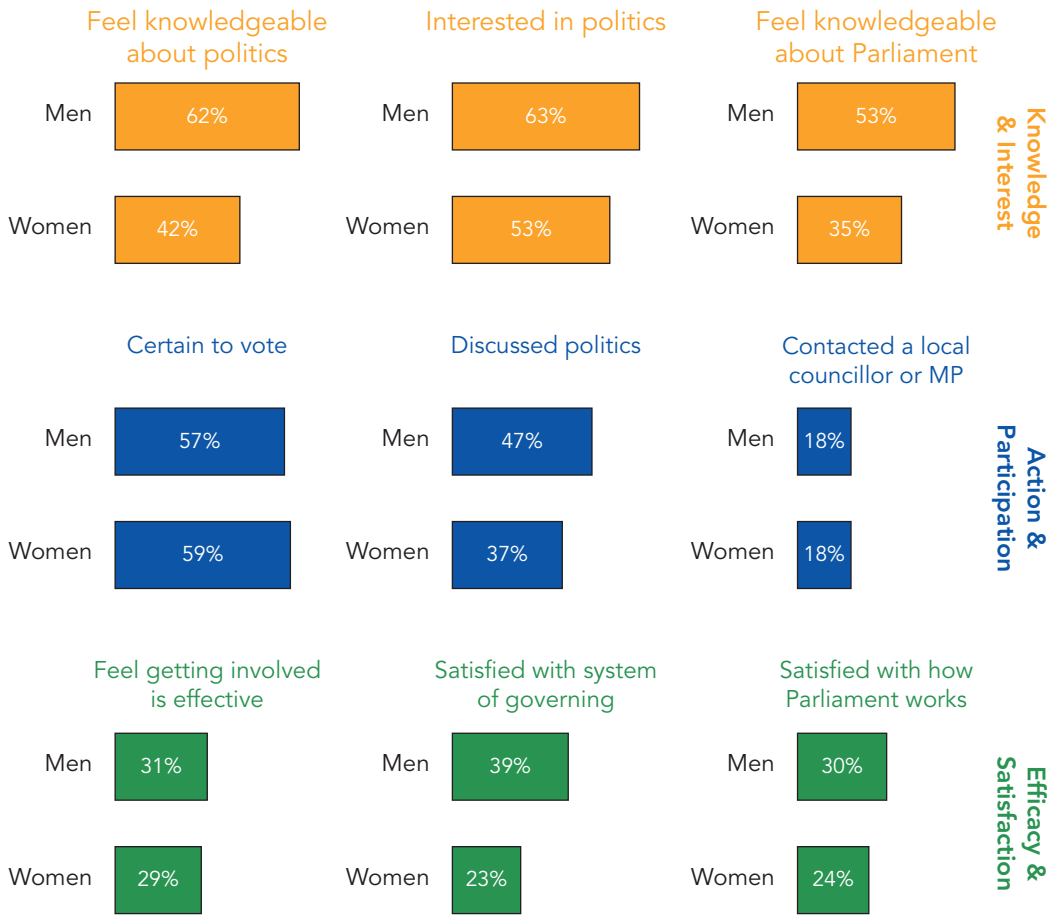
Just 16% of Londoners feel that local people working together impact their lives but the picture in the North is very different. One in four (39%) in the North West, a third in Scotland, Yorkshire and Humber and the North East believe that working together in communities can make a difference (32%, 33% and 33% respectively).

7. Demographic and sub-group differences

A. Gender

Men are more likely to be interested in politics, and claim to know more about politics than women; however this does not translate into significant differences in political participation. As in last year's Audit, women are more critical of the present system and are more likely to take a locally oriented view of the world than men.

Figure 34: Summary of indicator results by gender



Knowledge and interest

Men are more likely to take an interest in politics: almost two thirds (63%) of men compared to half (53%) of women say they are interested in politics. Men also feel they know more about politics than women (62% of men compared to 42% of women), and about the UK Parliament: half of men (53%) in comparison to 35% of women feel they know at least a fair amount. However, more women than men can correctly name their local MP; 40% of women in comparison to 36% of men.

Action and participation

Men and women are almost equally likely to vote, 57% of men and 59% of women are certain to vote. Men are more likely to say they have discussed politics in the last two to three years than women (47% to 37%). Women are more likely than men to help on fundraising drives (20% to 15%) and to urge someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP (17% to 12%), while men are more likely to write a letter to an editor (10% to 5%) and be an officer of an organisation or club (12% to 7%).

Civic and political involvement

Men and women are equally interested in how things work in their local area (70% to 69%), however, men are more likely to claim they know at least a fair amount about how things work in their local area than women (50% to 42%). Men and women have similar opinions on how things work in their local area; 50% of men and 47% of women say they are satisfied with how things work in their local area. An equal number of men (44%) and women (43%) would like to be at least fairly involved in decision-making in their local area. There are few significant differences in participation in the voluntary activities listed in the Audit between men and women, although women are more likely to volunteer with a charity or campaigning organisation than men (29% to 21%).

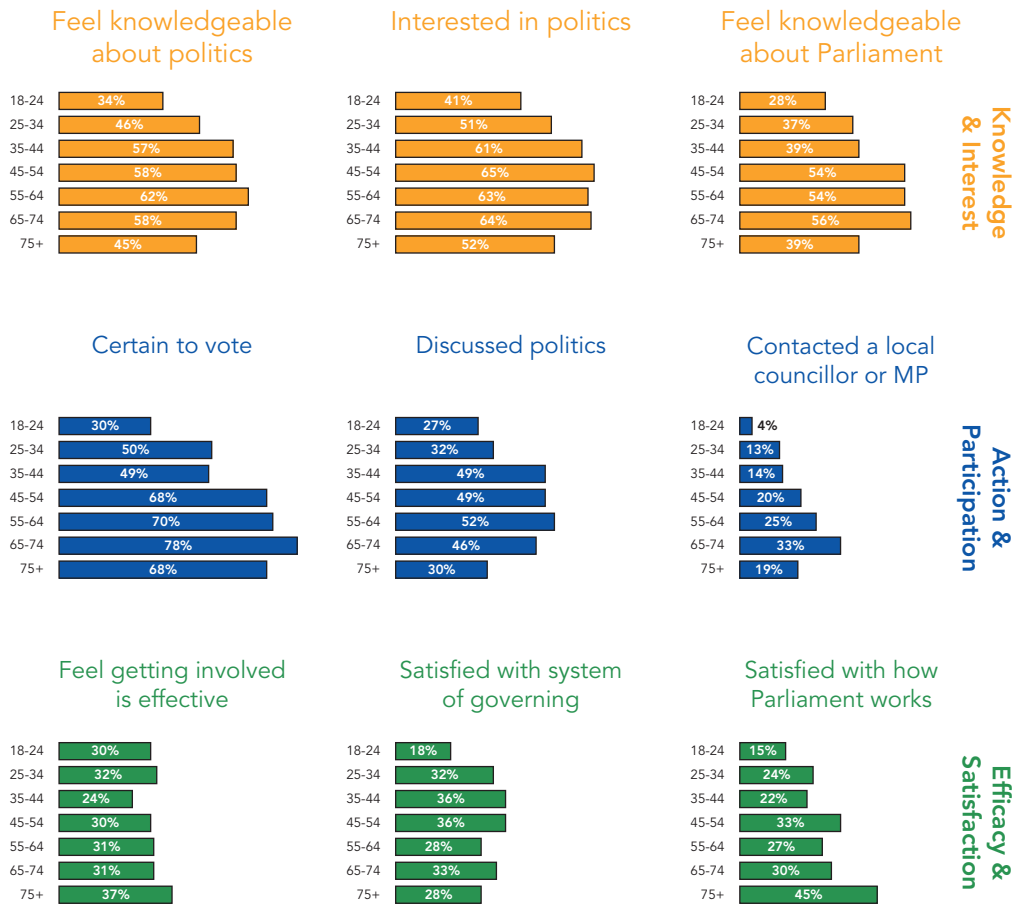
Efficacy and satisfaction

As in the previous year's Audit, women are less satisfied with the present system of governing Britain; 71% feel the system needs improvement, compared to 57% of men, and are less satisfied with the way that Parliament works than men; 30% of men are satisfied while only 24% of women are. Slightly more men than women think that the UK Parliament 'is working for you and me' (32% to 28%) and men are more likely to think that the UK Parliament has an impact on people's everyday lives (34% to 25%). Women are more likely to view local people working together in their community (30% to 22%) as having an impact on people's everyday lives than men.

B. Age

In Audit 7 young people were more satisfied with the system of government, whereas this year they express the least satisfaction with the current system of governing. Young people are less interested and knowledgeable about politics and Parliament than older age groups. There is a similar degree of satisfaction about how things work locally across all age groups, however interest in and knowledge about how things work in the local area peaks at the 35-54 age group and decreases after the age of 75.

Figure 35: Summary of indicator results by age



Knowledge and interest

Younger respondents are less interested in politics, and less knowledgeable about politics and Parliament. Three fifths (57%) of the youngest age bracket (18-24) are 'not very' or 'not at all' interested in politics, and only 8% of this age group state that they are 'very interested'. Sixty per cent of 18-34 year olds feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about politics, and two thirds (66%) of 18-34 year olds feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about Parliament. Interest in and knowledge of politics increases with age, but dips slightly in the over 75 age bracket. Only one fifth (22%) of those aged between 18-34 could correctly name their local MP, in comparison to 50% of those aged over 55 who could correctly name their local MP.

Action and participation

The 18-34 year old age bracket is the least likely to vote; 41% are certain to vote in a general election, while those aged over 55 are the most likely (72%), as well as being the most likely to have voted in the last council election; 70% in comparison to 39% of 18-34 year olds. As with the previous year's Audit, the youngest and oldest age brackets (18-24 year

olds and those over 75) are markedly less likely to have taken part in the political activities asked in the Audit survey.

Civic and political involvement

Younger people are less interested and less knowledgeable about how things work in their local area; 51% of 18-24 year olds are not interested in how things work in their local area, and 70% feel they know 'not very much' or 'nothing at all' about how things work in their local area. Interest in and knowledge about how things work in the local area is high between the ages of 35-74, but decreases after this point; almost three quarters (72%) of 45-54 year olds are interested compared to 56% of those over 75, and over half (57%) of 65-74 year olds know at least a fair amount compared to 46% of respondents over 75. Perceptions across the age groups about how things work in the local area are more or less identical; 48% of 18-34 year olds and 50% of 35-54 year olds and 49% of those over 55 feel things work well.

Over half of the 18-34 and 55 plus groups feel that people getting involved in their local community can change the way that their area is run (52%). The 35-44 age group are the most enthusiastic about getting involved in decision-making in the local area, over half (56%) would like to be involved, and the 75 plus age group is the least enthusiastic, only a quarter (24%) would like to be involved. In terms of the voluntary activities listed in the Audit, the youngest age bracket are the most likely to spend time with groups running activities for children or young people in the next few years – 36% in comparison to just 10% of those aged 55 and above. Similarly 37% of younger people are likely to volunteer with a sporting, social or recreational group compared to 22% of those 55 and over. Propensity to volunteer across the range of activities in the Audit is low in the oldest age bracket (75 plus) except for volunteering with a church or religious group, where a quarter (24%) would volunteer, in comparison to just 9% of 18-24 year olds and 10% of 35-44 year olds.

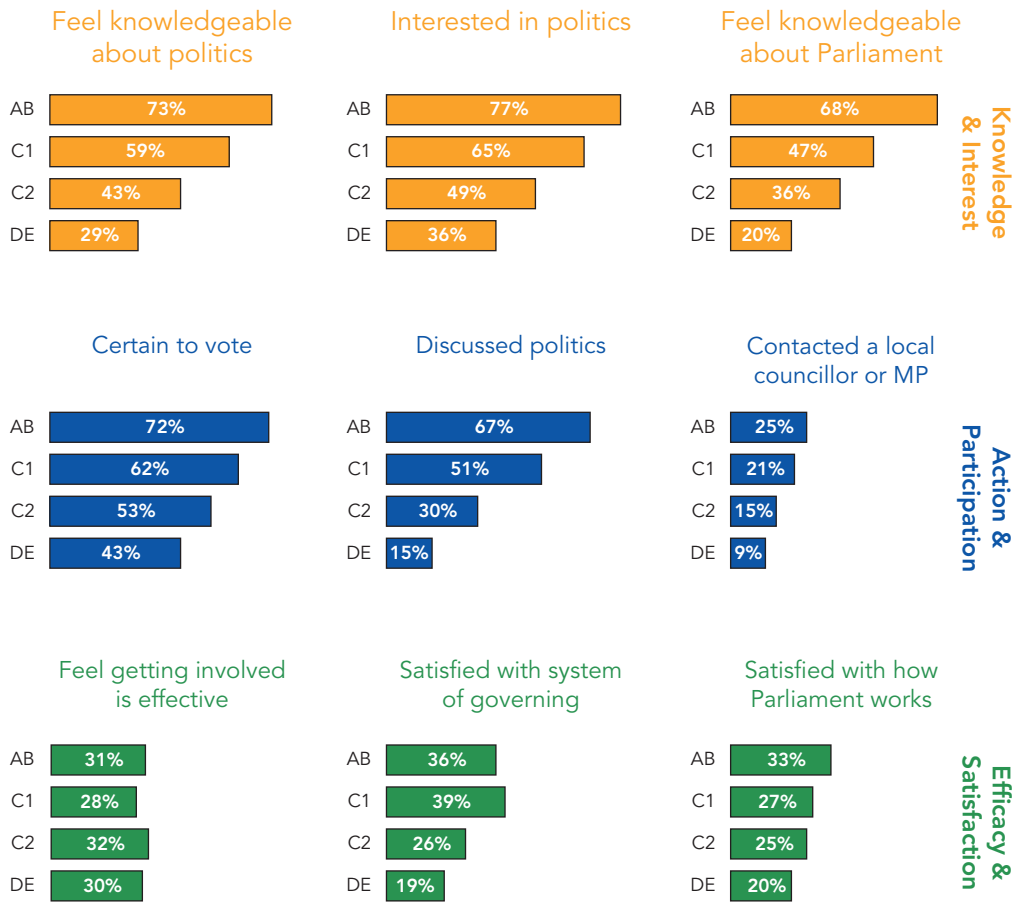
Efficacy and satisfaction

Satisfaction with the way that Parliament works increases with age, just one in five (21%) of 18-34 year olds are satisfied with the way that Parliament works, compared to 28% of 35-54 year olds and 31% of those 55 years and over. However, the oldest and youngest age groups are less positive about the current system of governing Britain; 26% of 18-34 year olds and 29% of those over 55 say it works well in comparison to 36% of the 35-54 age group. Those aged 55 or over are the most likely to agree that the UK Parliament holds the government to account, 41% compared to 35% of 18-34 year olds and 38% of 35-54 year olds. The lower age brackets believe that the media has an impact on people's everyday lives; 44% of 18-34 year olds and 46% of 35-54 year olds say this. But 45% of those in the older age brackets (55 plus) see Parliament as having an impact on people's everyday lives.

C. Social Class

As in previous years, there are clear differences in political engagement between the highest and lowest grades: the more affluent social classes are more knowledgeable about and interested in politics, and more likely to volunteer with almost all of the groups mentioned in the Audit. However, these differences are less pronounced on the efficacy and satisfaction indicators.

Figure 36: Summary of indicator results by social class



Knowledge and interest

ABC1 respondents are more interested and feel more knowledgeable about politics and the UK Parliament than C2DE respondents. More than three quarters (77%) of ABs are interested in politics, which is more than double the figure for DEs (36%). One in three (29%) DEs say they know at least a 'fair amount' about politics while one in five (20%) say they have a similar knowledge of Parliament. This self-assessed knowledge rises with each social grade – 43% of C2s say they are knowledgeable about politics and 59% of C1s say the same. Almost three quarters (73%) of ABs believe themselves to know at least a fair amount about politics. Those in higher social grades are also more likely to correctly name their MP, 47% of ABs and 42% of C1s gave a correct answer compared to 36% of C2s and 25% of DEs.

Action and participation

Those in lower social grades have a lower propensity to vote: 43% of DEs and 53% of C2s are certain to vote at an immediate general election compared to 62% of C1s and 72% of ABs. Indeed, three quarters (76%) of ABC1s say they voted in the last general election while

only 55% of C2DEs say they did. Three fifths (58%) of ABC1s have discussed politics with someone else, compared to one fifth (22%) of C2DEs. In fact, ABC1s are more likely to have done every single one of the political activities measured by the Audit.

Civic and political involvement

Respondents from higher social grades are more knowledgeable and interested in how things work in their local area: 55% of AB respondents feel they know 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' about how things work in their local area, compared to 33% of DE respondents. Four fifths (81%) of AB respondents state they are 'very' or 'fairly' interested in how things work in their local area, compared to just over half (54%) of DE respondents. C1 respondents are slightly more positive about how things work in their local area than ABs (57% to 52%), although both social grades are more positive than C2s and DEs (45% and 39%). C1 respondents also show the most desire to be involved in decision-making in their local area, 52% compared to 45% of ABs, 37% of C2s and 35% of DEs. The more affluent classes are more likely to believe that when people get involved in the local community they can change things; 60% of AB respondents believe this in comparison to 45% of DEs. AB respondents are more likely to volunteer with almost every group mentioned in the Audit report than other social grades, apart from with a church or religious group, where C2s are more likely to volunteer, and groups for children and young people, where C1s are more likely to volunteer.

Efficacy and satisfaction

The differences among social grades are less pronounced on the efficacy and satisfaction indicators. In terms of efficacy, around three in 10 of all social grades agree that by getting involved in politics they can change the way that the UK is run. However, there are differences in levels of satisfaction. A third of ABs (33%) are satisfied with the way Parliament works as are around a quarter of C1s and C2s (27% and 25% respectively), but only one in five DEs are satisfied (20%). Higher proportions of those in less affluent C2DE social grades believe the system of government needs improving (69% compared to 60% of ABC1s). A significantly higher number of AB respondents than other social grades believe the UK Parliament has an impact on people's everyday lives; 40% compared to 29% of C1s, 27% of C2s and 21% of DEs. In contrast, the Prime Minister is seen to have an impact for twice as many DEs as ABs (21% to 10%).

D. Ethnicity

The white population have a greater interest in and self-assessed knowledge of politics and indeed take a greater part in politics than BMEs, but have lower levels of efficacy and are less happy with the current system of government.

Figure 37: Summary of indicator results by ethnicity

Knowledge and interest

Three in five (60%) of the white population are interested in politics and over half (54%) say they know at least 'a fair amount' about it compared to two in five (41%) BMEs who express an interest and a similar number (39%) who say they are knowledgeable. Knowledge of the UK Parliament is also higher amongst the white population, 45% of white respondents feel they know at least a fair amount about the UK Parliament, in comparison to 34% of BME respondents. Double the number of white respondents compared to BME respondents could name their local MP correctly (40% to 19%).

Action and participation

There is a large difference in participation levels, three in five (60%) of the white population are certain to vote, while less than half (44%) of BMEs are certain to vote. More white people (68%) than BMEs (51%) say they voted in the general election, and more than double the number of white respondents compared to BMEs discussed politics in the last two or three years (44% to 20%).

Civic and political involvement

White respondents are more likely than BME respondents to be at least fairly interested in how things work in their local area (70% to 61%); however knowledge of how things work in their local area is relatively similar, 46% of white respondents and 43% of BME respondents feel they know at least 'a fair amount'. Almost identical numbers of both white and BME respondents agree that 'when people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run' (52% to 50%). Desire to be involved in decision-making in the local area is slightly higher amongst BMEs (46% to 42%). BME respondents are more likely to take part in all of the voluntary activities listed in the Audit than white respondents, with the exception of volunteering with sporting, social or recreational groups, where 27% of white respondents would definitely or probably volunteer in comparison with 26% of BME respondents. BME respondents are significantly more likely than white respondents to volunteer to help the sick, elderly or people in need (40% to 27%) and church or religious groups (31% to 14%).

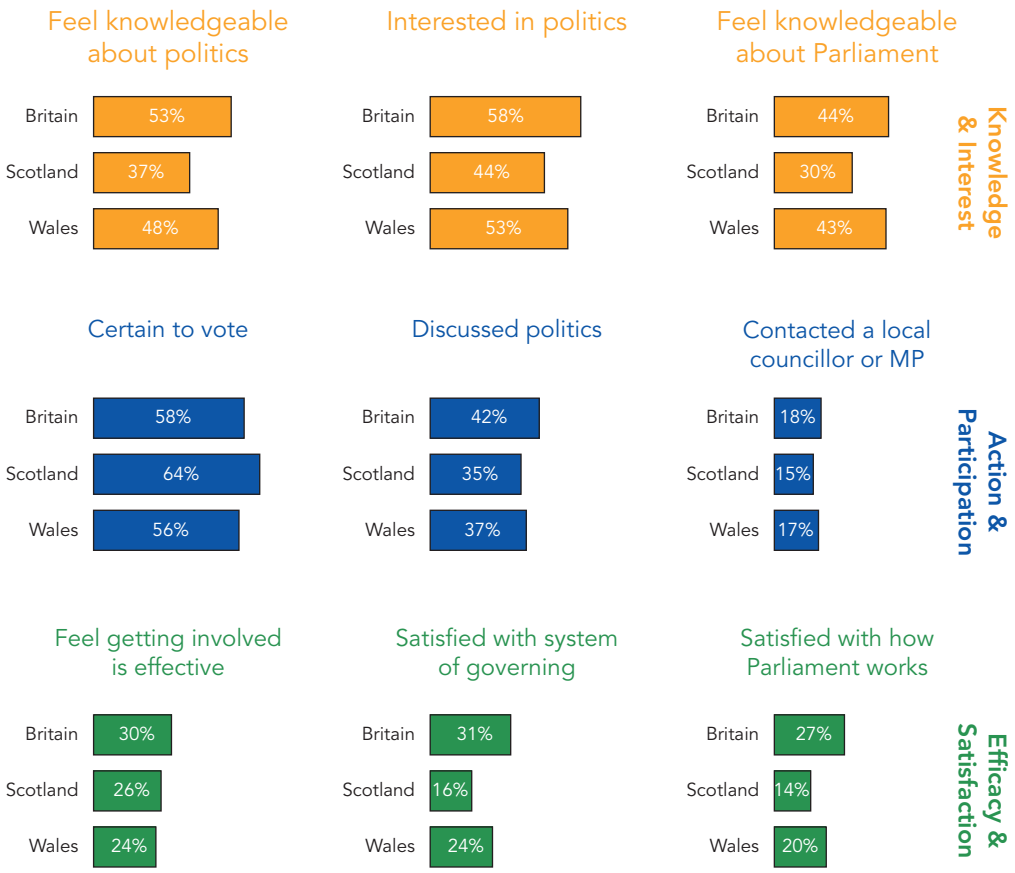
Efficacy and satisfaction

Over two thirds (38%) of BMEs believe that by getting involved in politics they can change the way the UK is run while three in 10 (30%) white people say the same, thus continuing a trend from the previous two years wherein BMEs have a higher belief in the efficacy of getting involved than do the white population. BMEs are also less likely to say the system needs improving: 51% of BMEs think this in comparison with two thirds (66%) of the white population. However, the white population and BMEs are similarly satisfied with the way Parliament works (27% and 29% respectively). Although BMEs are more likely to agree that the UK Parliament is working for you and me, 40% in comparison to 29% of the white population, only 16% of BME respondents feel the UK Parliament has an impact on people's everyday lives, compared to 31% of white respondents.

E. Scotland and Wales

On the whole, people in Scotland are more negative on the engagement indicators than are those across Great Britain as a whole. This is unlike in previous Audits wherein the views and behaviours of those in Scotland tended not to be significantly different from those across Great Britain. Engagement levels are lower in Scotland on almost every measure, particularly on those related to knowledge, interest and satisfaction. There is very little difference between people in Wales and the whole of Great Britain on most engagement indicators.

Figure 38: Summary of indicator results for devolved nations



Knowledge and interest

Those in Scotland report a lower self-assessed level of knowledge of both politics (37%) and Parliament (30%) than the British average (53% and 44% respectively), and those in Wales (48% and 43% respectively). Those in Scotland are also less interested in politics; 56% of respondents are 'not very/not at all' interested in politics, compared to 47% in Wales and 43% in Great Britain as a whole. Just 22% of respondents in Scotland could name their local MP correctly, whereas 38% in Great Britain and 43% in Wales were able to do so.

Action and participation

One significant exception to lower engagement levels in Scotland is certainty to vote in an immediate general election; more people in Scotland are absolutely certain to vote (64%) than in Great Britain as a whole (58%). This is despite the fact that fewer in Scotland report that they voted at the last general election (61% say they did so compared with 66% for Great Britain as a whole). It may be the case that with elections to the Scottish Parliament taking place in May 2011 the prospect of the 'next election' seems less remote in Scotland. This pattern is not repeated in Wales in this Audit; despite the occurrence of Welsh Assembly elections in May 2011 fewer people in Wales say they are certain to vote (56%).

Civic and political involvement

Those in Scotland are less interested and knowledgeable about how things work in their local area; 63% of those in Scotland are interested in comparison to 69% in Great Britain as a whole, and 38% in Scotland feel knowledgeable, compared to 46% in Great Britain as a whole. Those in Wales are slightly more interested in how things work in their local area (75%) but express a lower level of knowledge than those in Great Britain as a whole (37% to 46%). Over three fifths (61%) of respondents in Scotland and three fifths (60%) of those in Wales feel that things in their local area could be improved, compared to 46% in Great Britain as a whole. Those in Scotland were less interested in being involved in decision-making in their local area (30% compared to 42% in Great Britain as a whole), and significantly less interested in involvement in the country as a whole (27% to 41%). Respondents in Scotland are also less likely to feel that getting involved in their local community makes a difference, 46% agree that people like them can change the way their area is run, compared to 51% of those in Great Britain as a whole. The likelihood of volunteering in every activity mentioned in the Audit is consistently lower in Scotland than in Great Britain as a whole, but broadly similar in Wales and Great Britain.

Efficacy and satisfaction

Satisfaction with the way the UK Parliament works is 13 points lower in Scotland than in Great Britain as a whole (14% to 27%). Coupled with a lower level of satisfaction is a feeling – lower than the British average – that the system works well (16% compared to 31%). Those in Wales are also more critical of the current system of governing Britain than the British average; only a quarter (24%) of people in Wales think the present system works well. Respondents in Scotland are less likely to feel that Parliament is 'working for you and me', 20% agree in comparison with 30% in Great Britain as a whole. There are interesting differences in Scotland on perceptions of which things have the most impact on people's everyday lives. They are less likely to cite the media as being influential (33% of those in Scotland say this, compared with 42% across Great Britain), and are more likely to cite local institutions such as councils (at 46%, their most common answer, compared with 40% across Great Britain saying the same) and local people working together (32%, compared with 26% across Britain). People in Wales are also more likely to name local institutions such as councils (44% to 40%) and local people working together in their community (28% to 26%) as having an impact on people's everyday lives.

F. Marginal Seats[28]

The differences between engagement, knowledge and interest in politics in marginal and safe seats have decreased in this year's Audit, which could be due to the passing of a general election and a resulting decrease in political campaigning. Political activity remains higher in marginal seats, but there are relatively few differences in participation in voluntary activities mentioned in the Audit.

[28] For the purposes of comparison 'super-marginal' seats are defined as those where the winning party in 2010 had a majority of less than 5%, 'marginal' seats are where the winning party in 2010 had a majority of less than 10%, 'semi-marginal' seats are where the winning party in 2010 had a majority of between 10% and 20%, and 'safe' seats are those where the winning party in 2010 had a majority of over 20% or more. Boundaries are based on those in existence at the time of the 2010 general election.

Knowledge and interest

Interest in politics is slightly higher in marginal seats than safe seats (59% to 56%) but highest in super-marginal seats (60%). Those in safe seats feel they know more about politics than those in marginal seats (54% to 49%), but there is no difference in reported levels of knowledge about the UK Parliament. As seen in the previous year's Audit, the likelihood of knowing the name of the local MP does not vary significantly between marginal and safe seats, 38% of those in marginal seats are likely to correctly name their local MP compared to 36% of those in safe seats.

Action and participation

There is no difference in the likelihood to vote between those in marginal and safe seats. Those in marginal seats are more likely to take part in the political activities listed in the Audit than those in safe seats, particularly voting in the last local council election (61% to 56%) and signing a petition (41% to 33%).

Civic and political involvement

Those in super-marginal seats are more interested in how things work in their local area (73%) than those in marginal seats (68%) and safe seats (69%), but perceived knowledge of how things work in their local area is identical across all types of seats. People in super-marginal seats are more positive about how things work in their local area than those in safe seats (57% to 47%), and they believe they can make more of a difference in their local area than those in safe seats (54% to 48%). Participation in the voluntary activities listed in the Audit does not appear to be affected by the marginality of a seat; however one distinct difference is that those in safe seats are almost twice as likely to volunteer with a church or religious group as those in marginal seats (20% to 11%).

However, those in safe seats are more likely to believe that they can make a difference if they get involved in politics (33%) than those in marginal seats (26%) and super-marginals (27%).

Efficacy and satisfaction

Those in super-marginal seats are more satisfied with the way that Parliament works than those in safe seats (32% to 27%) and more likely to agree that the UK Parliament holds the government to account (46% to 35%). Respondents in super-marginal seats are more satisfied with the present system of governing Britain than those in marginals and safe seats (38% to 29%) while people in safe seats are more likely to believe that they can make a difference if they get involved in politics (33%) than those in marginal seats (26%).

8. Audit series indicator graphs

Figure 39: Summary of Audit series indicator results

Appendix A: Quantitative survey methodology

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,197 adults in Great Britain aged 18+, face-to-face in respondents' homes, between 3 and 9 December 2010 and an additional 98 interviews in Scotland conducted between 7 and 13 January 2011. In order to make comparisons between the white and BME populations more statistically reliable, an additional 225 booster interviews were conducted with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) adults, 197 extra in Scotland and 121 Wales using the same methodology. This gives a total of 225 BME interviews, 197 in Scotland and 121 in Wales.

All findings in this report – aside from those reported for Scotland only – are based on the total of 1,197 interviews conducted between 3 and 9 December 2010, which have then been weighted to the national population profile of Great Britain. In the case of findings in this report for Scotland only, that base includes data from an extra 98 interviews completed between 7 and 13 January 2011. These additional interviews in January 2011, outside the normal Audit reporting timescale of November/December each year, were required after particularly bad weather in Scotland made interview recruitment in line with the quotas difficult in December 2010.

Statistical reliability

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

Given that we have weighted our data to be representative of the profile of Great Britain,[29] this reduces the 'effective base size' from 1,197 to 778.[30] In practice this means that the additional interviews conducted in Wales, Scotland and with BMEs have no effect on the statistically reliability of the *overall* dataset, but they do mean that comparisons with the overall data (or other subgroups) which involve Wales, Scotland or BMEs *are* more statistically reliable. All statistical reliability has been calculated using this effective base size.

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

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

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

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

For example, with an effective base size of 778 where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of ±3.5 percentage points from the sample result (i.e. between 46.5% and 53.5%).

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

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
788 (APE8) and 801 (APE7)	**4**	**5**	**5**
183 (BMEs) and 664 (Whites)	**6**	**8**	**9**
150 (18-24s) and 64 (75+s)	**12**	**15**	**15**
322 (men) and 495 (women)	**5**	**7**	**7**
402 ('Interested' in politics) and 402 ('Not interested' in politics)	**5**	**7**	**7**
218 (ABs) and 241 (DEs)	**7**	**9**	**10**

Guide to social grade definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figures used in the report

- Audit of Political Engagement (APE) 8 topline results are based on 1,197 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 3–9 December 2010.
- Reported data for Scotland in APE8 includes an additional 98 interviews, completed 7-13 January 2011 using the same methodology, providing a total of 197.
- APE7 results are based on 1,156 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 13–19 November 2009.
- Where applicable trend data from the Audit of Political Engagement 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are included, as well as from Ipsos MORI's State of the Nation research for the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust and Expenses Poll for the BBC.
- APE1 results are based on 1,913 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 11–17 December 2003.
- APE2 results are based on 2,003 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 2–6 December 2004.
- APE3 results are based on 1,142 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 1–5 December 2005.
- APE4 results are based on 1,282 adults aged 18+ in the Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 23–28 November 2006.
- APE5 results are based on 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 29 November–7 December 2007.
- APE6 results are based on 1,051 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 11–17 December 2008.
- APE7 results are based on 1,156 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain. Interviewed face-to-face in respondents' homes between 13–19 November 2009.
- For the State of the Nation poll MORI interviewed 1,758 adults across Great Britain face-to-face between 21 April–8 May 1995, and 1,547 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain between 7–25 March 1991.
- For the *Independent on Sunday* poll MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,069 adults aged 18+ at 78 enumeration district sampling points across Great Britain in-home between 2–3 April 1997.
- For the *Times* poll MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 996 adults aged 18+ at 164 sampling points across Great Britain, face-to-face between 24–27 April 1998.
- For the Expenses Poll for the BBC Ipsos MORI interviewed 1,001 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain by telephone between 29 May–31 May 2009.

- Other trend data is included where appropriate.
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.
- Data are weighted to the profile of the population.
- An asterisk (*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't knows' or to multiple answers.

Note that reported figures in Audits 1-4 were based on UK data, whereas figures in Audits 5-8 are based on Great Britain data. When referenced in this report for the purposes of comparison, we have therefore amended the figures from Audits 1-4 to be based on Great Britain only (i.e., not including Northern Ireland).

Q1.	**How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?**							
	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	APE7	**APE8**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
10 (Absolutely certain to vote)	51	52	55	55	53	53	54	**58**
9	6	6	7	6	4	5	6	**4**
8	8	8	7	7	7	8	7	**7**
7	5	5	7	6	5	6	4	**4**
6	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	**3**
5	7	7	6	5	8	7	7	**6**
4	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	**1**
3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	**2**
2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	**1**
1 (Absolutely certain not to vote)	11	11	10	11	10	11	12	**10**
Refused	0	0	0	1	*	*	*	*****
Don't know	2	1	1	0	3	2	2	**2**

Q2.a	Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?							
	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	APE7	**APE8**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Voted in the last general election	64	61	70	70	62	58	49	**66**
Helped on fund raising drives	21	30	22	18	19	20	27	**18**
Presented my views to a local councillor, MP, MSP or Welsh Assembly Member	14	17	15	14	15	17	17†	**18**
Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP	14	16	14	10	16	12	15	**15**
Urged someone outside my family to vote	14	17	17	13	15	12	17	**18**
Made a speech before an organised group	11	17	13	11	12	8	14	**13**
Been an officer of an organisation or club	8	13	9	7	9	7	12‡	**9**
Written a letter to an editor	6	7	8	6	7	6	6	**7**
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	**4**
Stood for public office	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**1**
None of these	25	23	21	23	26	32	30	**23**
Don't know	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	*	**1**

† APE 7 wording for half the sample 'Contacted a…'.
‡ APE 7 wording for half the sample '…office holder…'.

Q2.b	**You said that you have presented your views to a local councillor or MP (or MSP/Welsh Assembly Member)** (SCOTLAND AND WALES ONLY). ENGLAND: **Was this to a local councillor, an MP or both?** SCOTLAND/WALES: **Was this to a local councillor, an MP or MSP/Welsh Assembly Member?**† *Base: All who have contacted/presented views to councillor, MSP or Welsh Assembly Member*					
	APE1 (258)	APE4 (180)	APE5 (171)	APE6 (165)	APE7 (192)	**APE8 (215)**
	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
MP/MSP/Welsh Assembly Member	27	29	29	28	43	**37**
Local councillor	48	41	48	44	40	**43**
Both MP/MSP/Welsh Assembly Member and Local Councillor	24	29	22	26	19	**21**
Don't know	2	1	1	2	2	**2**

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

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

† Note that the list of activities is different in Audits 1-4, comparisons with Audits 5-8 should therefore be seen as indicative only.
‡ APE 7 wording for half the sample '…march or strike'.

Q4.	How interested would you say you are in politics?						
		Very interested	Fairly interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested	Don't know	*Very/fairly interested*
MORI 1973	%	14	46	27	13	*	*60*
State of the Nation 1991	%	13	47	26	13	*	*60*
State of the Nation 1995	%	13	40	30	17	*	*53*
APE 1	%	11	39	32	18	*	*50*
APE 2	%	13	40	28	19	*	*53*
APE 3	%	13	43	30	13	*	*56*
APE 4	%	13	41	27	19	*	*54*
APE 5	%	13	38	28	19	1	*52*
APE 6	%	12	40	30	17	*	*52*
APE 7	%	14	39	29	18	1	*53*
APE 8	**%**	**16**	**42**	**26**	**17**	*****	***58***

Q5.-Q6.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about…?						
		A great deal	A fair amount	Not very much	Nothing at all	Don't know	*Great deal/ fair amount*
Politics							
APE 1	%	3	39	45	12	1	*42*
APE 2	%	4	41	44	10	*	*45*
APE 3	%	4	35	51	9	*	*39*
APE 4	%	6	43	40	11	*	*49*
APE 5	%	4	40	43	12	*	*44*
APE 6	%	5	43	42	9	1	*48*
APE 7	%	6	45	40	9	*	*51*
APE 8	**%**	**7**	**46**	**36**	**11**	*****	**53**
The UK Parliament							
APE 1†	%	3	30	50	17	1	*33*
APE 4†	%	4	34	46	14	1	*38*
APE 7†	%	4	33	47	15	1	*37*
APE 8	**%**	**5**	**39**	**43**	**13**	*****	***44***

† Asked as 'The Westminster Parliament', comparisons with APE 8 should therefore be seen as indicative.

Q7.	Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?							
	APE1	APE2	APE3	APE4	APE5	APE6	APE7	**APE8**
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	**%**
Works extremely well and could not be improved	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	**1**
Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well	34	32	33	31	30	31	27	**30**
Could be improved quite a lot	42	45	41	40	38	40	42	**39**
Needs a great deal of improvement	18	18	21	21	24	24	27	**25**
Don't know	4	3	4	6	6	3	4	**5**
Works well	*36*	*34*	*34*	*33*	*32*	*33*	*28*	***31***

Q8.	What is the name of your local member of Parliament?				
	APE1	APE3	APE4	APE7	**APE8**
	%	%	%	%	**%**
Gave correct answer	42	44	44	44	**38**
Gave wrong answer	10	9	6	10	**7**
Don't know/no answer	49	46	50	46	**55**

Q9.	Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way that Parliament works...?							
		Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know	*Very/fairly satisfied*
APE 1	%	1	35	27	23	9	5	*36*
APE 4	%	2	34	24	24	9	7	*36*
APE 7	%	1	32	24	25	13	4	*33*
APE 8	**%**	**1**	**26**	**33**	**24**	**11**	**4**	***27***

Q10.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run.							
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	*Strongly/ Tend to agree*
APE 1	%	6	31	20	30	10	4	*37*
APE 2	%	7	30	20	31	10	2	*37*
APE 3	%	6	27	20	31	13	3	*33*
APE 4	%	5	28	24	31	8	4	*33*
APE 5	%	4	27	23	29	13	3	*31*
APE 6	%	3	28	22	32	13	2	*31*
APE 7	%	5	32	19	30	11	4	*37*
APE 8	**%**	**4**	**26**	**23**	**31**	**13**	**3**	***30***

Q11.	From this list, which two or three of the following do you believe have most impact on people's everyday lives? You can select up to three options.			
	APE 1	APE 4	APE 7	**APE 8‡**
	%	%	%	**%**
Media	52	54	63	**42**
Local Councils	47	49	50	**40**
UK Parliament†	30	27	19	**30**
Business	41	37	44	**28**
Local people working together in their community	n/a	n/a	n/a	**26**
European Union	17	20	20	**16**
Community organisations e.g. youth clubs, social clubs	n/a	n/a	n/a	**16**
Civil Service	22	20	23	**15**
Prime Minister	25	24	17	**13**
Charities and voluntary organisations	n/a	n/a	n/a	**13**
Cabinet	8	7	5	**8**
Scottish Parliament/Welsh Assembly (asked in Scotland/Wales only)	n/a	n/a	6	**n/a**
Don't know	*	-	4	**4**
None of these	n/a	n/a	n/a	**1**

† Asked as Westminster Parliament in APE 1-7.

‡ Note that comparison of APE 8 data with previous waves should be seen as indicative only, as the response categories have changed in APE 8 from previous waves.

Q12.	How interested would you say you are in how things work in your local area?
	%
Very interested	14
Fairly interested	55
Not very interested	23
Not at all interested	6
Don't know	1
Very/fairly interested	*69*

Q13.	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about how things work in your local area?
	%
A great deal	4
A fair amount	42
Not very much	46
Nothing at all	8
Don't know	1
A great deal/fair amount	*46*

Q14.	Which of these statements best describes your opinion on how things work in your local area?
	%
Work extremely well and could not be improved	2
Could be improved in small ways but mainly work well	47
Could be improved quite a lot	36
Need a great deal of improvement	10
Don't know	5
Works well	*49*

Q15.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run.
	%
Strongly agree	8
Tend to agree	43
Neither/nor	26
Tend to disagree	15
Strongly disagree	6
Don't know	2
Agree	*51*

Q16.-Q17.	To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in…						
		Very involved	Fairly involved	Not very involved	Not at all involved	Don't know	*Very/fairly involved*
…your local area							
APE 6	%	5	43	32	18	2	*48*
APE 8	**%**	**5**	**38**	**38**	**17**	**2**	***43***
…the country as a whole							
APE 6	%	5	38	33	22	2	*43*
APE 8	**%**	**8**	**34**	**38**	**19**	**2**	***42***

Q18.	Please tell me how likely, if at all, is it that in the next few years you will spend time doing voluntary activities with each of the following groups:						
	Will definitely do	Will probably do	May do	Not very likely to do	Definitely won't	Don't know	*Will definitely/ probably do*
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Voluntary groups to help the sick, elderly or people in need	10	19	32	25	13	1	*29*
Sporting, social or recreational groups	11	17	22	24	25	1	*28*
Groups running activities for children/young people (e.g. sports clubs, scouts/ brownies)	9	16	25	24	25	1	*25*
Charity or campaigning organisation (e.g. animal welfare, environmental/conservation charity, internationalaid charity)	9	16	24	32	18	1	*25*
Local neighbourhood/ community group (e.g. residents' association, neighbourhood watch)	6	15	35	25	18	1	*21*
Church or religious group	8	7	13	28	42	1	*15*
Political party	2	5	12	32	48	1	*7*
Trade unions	2	5	9	28	53	2	*7*

Q19.	Which two or three, if any, of the following would most encourage you to get more involved with your local community?
	%
If I felt strongly about an issue	40
If it was relevant to me	33
If I had more time	28
If it affected my street	25
If important things about my local area were being decided	17
If things in my area got worse	16
If I was more confident that my involvement would make a difference	15
If my friends/family/neighbours were involved	12
If I trusted my local council more	10
If I understood more about local issues	8
If I knew more people in my local community	7
If lots of other people I know/in my area were doing it	5
If my local council was more accessible	5
If I liked people in my local community more	3
Other	1
Nothing	6
Don't know	2

Q20.	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?							
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	*Strongly/ Tend to agree*
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The UK Parliament…								
…holds government to account	APE 7†	4	36	20	22	5	14	*40*
	APE 8	**5**	**33**	**27**	**18**	**8**	**10**	***38***
…is working for you and me	APE 7†	3	35	22	25	9	5	*38*
	APE 8	**2**	**28**	**26**	**24**	**15**	**5**	***30***

† Wording in APE 7: 'The Westminster Parliament'

Appendix C: Engagement profiles

	Base	Total Sample	Group 1 Onlookers	Group 2 Satisfied but Unenthusiastic	Group 3 Already Active	Group 4 Willing Localists	Group 5 Disengaged & Apathetic	Group 6 Alienated	Group 7 Exaggerators
Unweighted:	n =	1,197	224	158	146	179	183	149	158
Weighted:	n =	1,201	245	176	166	165	167	146	136
All (weighted)	**1,201**	**100%**	**20%**	**15%**	**14%**	**14%**	**14%**	**12%**	**11%**
Gender									
Men	586	49%	56%	50%	46%	35%	43%	55%	53%
Women	615	51%	44%	50%	54%	65%	57%	45%	47%
Age									
18-34	345	29%	23%	18%	13%	38%	43%	28%	45%
35-54	434	36%	40%	38%	44%	36%	26%	30%	35%
55+	422	35%	37%	44%	43%	26%	32%	41%	20%
Social Class									
AB	317	26%	23%	46%	53%	21%	15%	11%	13%
C1	338	28%	29%	31%	30%	28%	23%	23%	32%
C2	259	22%	21%	17%	9%	25%	26%	32%	23%
DE	286	24%	26%	6%	8%	26%	36%	35%	32%
Type									
Urban	279	23%	22%	11%	25%	28%	29%	19%	32%
Suburban	677	56%	61%	56%	64%	52%	56%	64%	55%
Rural	245	20%	17%	33%	17%	20%	16%	17%	13%
Working status									
Full time	545	45%	49%	42%	56%	41%	35%	43%	51%
Part time	138	11%	7%	19%	14%	14%	12%	7%	8%
Not working	518	43%	44%	38%	30%	44%	54%	50%	41%
Children in household									
Yes	377	31%	29%	31%	27%	44%	32%	21%	36%
No	824	69%	71%	69%	73%	56%	68%	79%	64%
Ethnicity									
White	1,077	90%	93%	96%	95%	91%	82%	95%	70%
BME	120	10%	7%	4%	4%	9%	18%	4%	30%

	Base	Total Sample	Group 1 Onlookers	Group 2 Satisfied but Unenthusiastic	Group 3 Already Active	Group 4 Willing Localists	Group 5 Disengaged & Apathetic	Group 6 Alienated	Group 7 Exaggerators
Newspaper									
Quality	168	14%	9%	17%	38%	10%	4%	4%	17%
Popular	442	37%	39%	28%	31%	39%	39%	40%	41%
None	624	52%	52%	58%	41%	56%	54%	57%	45%
Politics									
Interested	692	58%	73%	73%	95%	34%	17%	40%	62%
Not Interested	505	42%	27%	27%	5%	66%	82%	60%	37%
Governing									
Works Well	370	31%	49%	54%	27%	6%	25%	27%	37%
Needs Improvement	770	64%	48%	42%	73%	91%	56%	73%	60%
Internet									
Use anywhere	930	77%	77%	87%	91%	77%	67%	65%	79%
Don't use	271	23%	23%	13%	9%	23%	33%	35%	21%
Voting									
Certain to Vote	699	58%	64%	69%	86%	50%	17%	40%	50%
Certain Not to Vote	125	10%	8%	3%	2%	18%	20%	18%	6%
Voting Intention (CTV)									
Conservative	336	28%	36%	42%	30%	17%	20%	18%	25%
Labour	401	33%	36%	28%	36%	27%	32%	35%	41%
Liberal Democrat	121	10%	10%	11%	12%	11%	4%	9%	15%
Other	71	6%	1%	6%	13%	10%	3%	6%	5%

Appendix D: Qualitative research methodology

The qualitative research was conducted in two tranches:

a) in two discussion groups of seven and eight adults in London on 8 December 2010, as part of Ipsos MORI's qualitative omnibus research, recruited to quotas on age, gender, social grade, newspaper readership and ethnicity.

Attendees:

	Group 1	Group 2
Male	5	4
Female	5	6
18-34	5	5
35+	5	5
ABC1	3	6
C2DE	7	4
Conservative	2	3
Labour	5	4
Lib Dem	2	2
Other	1	1

and

b) at a discussion day in south-east London on 22 January 2011. 57 participants were recruited that day to take part in on-going discussion groups throughout the day. Participants had to be eligible to vote in the UK and were recruited to achieve a spread across key demographics including: age (18 plus), gender, ethnicity and newspaper readership. Note that only in the age range of 65 plus did it prove difficult to meet the recruitment quota.

Recruitment quotas:

Quota	Attended
Male (20-30)	34
Female (20-30)	23
18-24 (10-15)	17
25-44 (10-15)	24
45-65 (10-15)	12
65+ (10-15)	4
AB (10-20)	17
C1C2 (10-20)	21
DE (10-20)	19
White (20-30)	38
BME (10-20)	19
Express/Mail/Sun/ Telegraph/Times reader (20-30)	18
Mirror/Guardian/ Independent reader (20-30)	17

Appendix E: Qualitative research discussion guides

A) 8 December 2010 – qualitative omnibus discussion groups

The discussion guide used by the moderators is below:

PARLIAMENT IN OUR DEMOCRACY	12-13 minutes

We are now going to talk about the UK Parliament.
WRITE ANSWERS ON FLIPCHART
What would you say the role of Parliament is?
What is it there to do?
FROM ANSWERS ON THE FLIPCHART:
And which is the most important?

Which of these things does it do well?
And which does it do less well?

IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:
How well do you think Parliament represents the views of people like you?
PROBE: Why do you think that? How does it represent your views?

INITIAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE COALITION	10 minutes

We are now going to talk a bit about the general election back in May and what happened afterwards.

What did you make of the days after the general election? What do you remember happening? PROBE ON NUMBER OF DAYS IT TOOK TO FORM THE COALITION, THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT TOOK PLACE

How did the fact that the Conservatives and Lib Dems formed a Coalition make you feel about:

- The election?
- The way you voted?
- Politics in general?
- The way Parliament will work?

PROBE FOR CHANGES IN ATTITUDE PRE+POST ELECTION AND IN THE MONTHS SINCE THE ELECTION

COALITIONS	12-13 minutes

Although this is the first time since the Second World War that we have had a coalition government in Britain, other countries such as Italy and Germany have them more often.

Thinking about coalition governments more generally then, what do you think are the good things about parties working together in a coalition compared to a single party government?

And what are the bad things?

PROBE ON EACH OF THE FOLLOWING: IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT CONSIDERATIONS/TRADE-OFFS, COMPROMISES, FAIRNESS, DEMOCRACY, EFFICACY ETC

MODERATOR NOTE: IF PARTICIPANTS STRUGGLING WITH THE CONCEPT USE THE STATEMENTS AS A PROMPT

STATEMENT A: I would prefer a system that produces a majority for one party which can govern on its own and fulfil its promises, even if it did not achieve a majority of votes in the general election

STATEMENT B: I would prefer a system where two or more parties work together in a coalition government and between them achieved a majority of votes, even if they have to compromise on election promises

B) 22 January 2011 – discussion groups, pre-questionnaire

Q1.	**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY FOR EACH ROW					
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
a)	It is my duty to get involved in my local community					
b)	People pull together in my local area to improve things					
c)	The government is responsible for improving public services and local areas, they shouldn't be calling on the public to help					

Q2.	Roughly what proportion of MPs in the Westminster Parliament do you think are:	
	Men:…%	
	Women:…%	
	White:…%	
	From an ethnic minority:…%	

Q3.	What are the three most important things you would like your MP to be doing for you? PLEASE WRITE IN ANSWER BELOW

Q4.	What are the three most important things you would like Parliament to be doing? PLEASE WRITE IN ANSWER BELOW

C) 22 January 2011 – discussion day guide

PLEASE NOTE: Before participants join a group they will be given some handouts.

One will be a 'welcome sheet' explaining what we are doing, and how the day proceeds as well as general 'rules' of participation

They will also be given stimulus material relating to all three modules – this will ensure they have some baseline knowledge and will help to "warm them up" for discussion.

Stimulus material

Module A: a sheet with some information on the Alternative Vote (what it is, how it works etc) and First Past the Post (what it is, how it works etc.), plus a definition of referendum.

Module B: an extract from a speech by David Cameron about the Big Society.

Module C: We will ask them to complete a short exercise:

- Please name the three most important things your MP does for people like you;
- Please name the three most important things your MP does for your country;
- What three main things would you like your MP to be doing for you?

NOTE: PARTICIPANTS MAY TAKE PART IN THE THREE MODULES IN ANY ORDER

Module A: AV referendum

We are going to talk a bit about how we elect MPs to Parliament and also about the possible referendum on the system we use.

To start with, I'd like you all to have a look at these cards and sort them in terms of which you think is most important to have in a voting system

STATEMENTS

a) Having one MP representing a clear geographical area
b) The elected MP winning at least 50% of votes in their constituency
c) The number of MPs a political party has should be roughly equal to the proportion of votes they get in the general election
d) A system that ensures an equal proportion of men and women are elected
e) A system that is likely to produce one party with a majority in Parliament to govern on its own
f) A system that is likely to produce a result where two or more parties have to form a coalition in order to govern

PROBES: Why did you put them in this order? Why is this most/least important? *Encourage discussion about the importance of each*

As some of you might know, there is probably going to be a referendum this year on whether or not to change the system we use to elect MPs to Westminster. The choice will be between the system we have at the moment called FPTP and a system called Alternative Vote or AV. You should have read something about both of these on the cards we gave you when you arrived.

What do you think the arguments in favour of AV are (compared to the current system)? And against?
Do you agree with them? Why? Why not?
PROBE FROM STIMULUS

ROTATE:

SHOW STIMULUS 'YES CAMPAIGN'
Do you like what they are saying? What is good about this argument? What is bad? Is there anything that attracts you to this argument/to vote for Yes?

SHOW STIMULUS 'NO CAMPAIGN'
Do you like what they are saying? What is good about this argument? What is bad? Is there anything that attracts you to this argument/to vote for No?
If the electoral system is going to change do you think it is right or wrong that there is a referendum on it?
Why is it right?
Why is it wrong?

Do you like the idea of holding a referendum? Should we hold more? What on? What sort of issues? And what sort of issue should there not be a referendum on?

Will you vote if there is a referendum on changing the electoral system? Why? Why not?

Module B: Big Society

You may have heard about something called the 'Big Society', that is what we are going to be talking about for the next 20 minutes or so.

FLIPCHART: So to start with, what do you think Big Society means?
PROBES: What do you associate with it? What sort of activities do you think are part of the Big Society?
Where have you heard about it? Who have you heard talking about it?

What do you make of the Big Society? Does it makes sense to you?
What are the good things about it?
The bad?
FLIPCHART: How else would you describe the Big Society? Are there are better words or terms that can/should be used?

Why do you think the government is encouraging the Big Society? What do you think they want it to do? (REFER TO CAMERON SPEECH IN STIMULUS IF NECESSARY) What will the government's role in the Big Society be?

Should the government be trying to establish this Big Society?
Are they right to encourage voluntary activities and community activities?
Does it matter if people get involved or not?

Does anyone do any voluntary or community activities? What sort of things do you do?
How and why did you start doing them? What made you do it?
Why do you do them?

Why do many people not do any community activities or voluntary work? What stops people from doing these things? What do you think could encourage these people to do more of these things? PROBE FULLY: local issues, shared interest, make a difference etc.

What sort of people do you think are likely to take part?

IF TIME: Do people have a duty to help their communities? How?

IF TIME:
Another part of the Big Society is encouraging you and the general public to personally hold government to account. The idea is that you will look online to see how much government is spending, hold the government to account etc

Is that something you think you'll ever do? Is it a good idea? What sort of people do you think will actually do this kind of thing?
Why? Why not?

Module C: Representation

For the next 20 minutes or so we are going to talk about the job MPs do, how they represent us, what sort of things you want from an MP.

So, to kick off, how well does your MP represent you? Why? Why not?
And how well does Parliament represent the public? Why? Why not?

In what ways do MPs represent their constituents? How should they represent you?

Now take a look at these cards, place them in order of what is most important to you about who your MP is.

- LIVES LOCALLY
- SAME GENDER AS ME
- SAME ETHNIC BACKGROUND AS ME
- I AGREE WITH THEIR POLICIES
- THEY ARE STANDING FOR THE PARTY I SUPPORT
- COME FROM A SIMILAR BACKGROUND TO ME
- BORN AND BRED LOCALLY ETC.

Why have you put them in this order? *Discussion about importance of each*

Now, I'd like you to read the statements on the poster/card:

A) 'I would prefer an MP who is generally similar to me in terms of background and experience'

B) 'It is more important for my MP to be well qualified for the job than be similar to me in terms of background and experience'

Which of the statements comes closest to your opinion? Why do you say that?
Do you want your MP to be similar to you in terms of education, background etc or do you want them to be better qualified?

Do you think men can represent women? Why? Why not?
What about people of different ethnic backgrounds?
What about people from the north and south? Different social backgrounds: middle – working class?

Who should an MP be representing? The people who voted for them? The people that are like themselves in terms of background, gender, ethnicity etc?

SHOW POSTER WITH FIGURES OF HOW MANY MALE/FEMALE, WHITE/BME MPs THERE ARE

Is this important? Does it bother you?
Why? Why not?

How representative should Parliament be? How far should it go, eg disability, religion, poor etc

Now I'd like you to read these:

A) 'I would prefer my MP to mainly trust his/her own judgement and experience to make decisions'

B) 'I would prefer my MP to mainly act on the views and opinions of their constituents to make decisions'

Which comes closest to your opinion? Why?
Do you think MPs should trying to represent their constituency or should they make decisions by exercising their own judgement?

IF TIME:
Who else do you think represents your views?
PROVIDE LIST ON A POSTER/CARD:

- Councils
- Police,
- Doctors
- Business people
- Charities
- Community organisations