Scotland – poll position

Public attitudes towards Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections
Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500
Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Our mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process.

Scotland – poll position
This report presents the findings of a research project undertaken by GfK NOP Social Research and Professor John Curtice.

Copyright © The Electoral Commission 2006

ISBN: 1-904363-83-0
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Introduction</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Main findings</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with politics</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scottish Parliament</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scottish Executive</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes towards voting and registration</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Conclusions and recommendations</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections are due to be held on 3 May 2007. These elections will see the use of the Additional Member System and Single Transferable Vote electoral systems in a combined election for the first time across Scotland, a unique event in the electoral history of the country.

The Electoral Commission, in partnership with the Scottish Executive, is developing and co-ordinating a public awareness and education campaign in Scotland in advance of the May 2007 elections. The Commission will also prepare and publish a report on the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. To inform both of these exercises, the Commission has commissioned this research study to understand better the public’s attitude towards the Scottish Parliament and local government, their knowledge of the electoral systems used in the respective elections and the factors that might motivate people to vote in 2007.

The Commission is committed to a programme of research which investigates what motivates people to vote and what stops some people from voting. This research assists the Commission in developing, in discussion with other stakeholders, a clearly targeted programme of voter education. It is also used to inform the Commission’s statutory reviews of the administration and conduct of elections.
This report presents the findings of a research project undertaken by GfK NOP Social Research and Professor John Curtice at the University of Strathclyde. The project involved a scoping study of recent opinion research, new survey research and focus groups, which explored attitudes towards devolution, the Scottish Parliament, local government and voting at elections to these bodies. Overall responsibility for the report rests with the authors, and it should be noted that the findings and conclusions are those of the authors and not of the Electoral Commission.

Sir Neil McIntosh CBE
Electoral Commissioner
Chair of the Scotland – poll position research steering group
September 2006
The Electoral Commission commissioned GfK NOP to research attitudes towards the Scottish Parliament and local government, and towards voting for these institutions. The research comprised three elements: a scoping study to put the issues of voter turnout in context; a quantitative survey to establish figures for comparison with previous data; and a qualitative research study to look in greater depth at people’s knowledge and attitudes.

**Turnout**

Turnout was 59% and 49% for the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliamentary elections respectively. Turnout at the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election was 10 percentage points lower than in 1999 and the UK Parliamentary general election in 2001. Turnout has varied among a variety of social groups, with the sharpest differences in turnout being by age. Younger people are far less likely to vote than older people. There are several factors that clearly influence turnout, including perceived differences between the parties, attitudes towards the Scottish Parliament and elections, interest in politics and a sense of having a duty to vote.

**Attitudes towards devolution**

Overall, there continues to be widespread public support for Scotland having its own Parliament. The view of the Scottish electorate which emerged from the 2006 research however, particularly the qualitative research, is that devolution is not thought to have made much difference to how well Scotland is governed or to the outcomes of public policy. The Scottish Parliament is thought to have less influence over what happens in Scotland than the UK Government, though there are some signs that its perceived influence is increasing.
Attitudes towards and knowledge of the Scottish Parliament

Findings from the focus groups suggest that the Scottish Parliament is highly trusted and accessible. It is seen as having more integrity than the UK Parliament and as having Scotland’s interests at heart, as well as being more relaxed and having an approachable image. The Scottish Parliament is thought to be modern, accessible and likely to listen to people.

However, the groups also highlighted a lack of understanding of the role and remit of the Scottish Parliament, which leads to perceptions that the Parliament has low relevance and the assumption that it has fewer powers than it actually does. This lack of clear understanding has also led to a reliance on guesswork as to the powers of the Parliament, which are largely based on high-profile policy changes such as the smoking ban and known differences in service delivery between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Indeed, the smoking ban provided a positive, top of mind association with the Scottish Parliament for many people.

Attitudes towards voting

As found by past research, the qualitative work confirmed that propensity to vote appears to be linked to family voting behaviour and education and a sense of a duty to vote. There are fears associated with voting which relate to the lack of knowledge with which to make a decision and to the process of voting. The latter is particularly true of younger, first-time voters. Fewer people felt that the outcome of a Scottish Parliamentary election would make a difference in 2003 than did in 1999, and this trend does not appear to have been reversed in the intervening years.

Attitudes towards voting systems

Filling in the ballot papers used in the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliamentary elections does not appear to have caused voters much difficulty, but levels of understanding about how the Additional Member System (AMS), the system used at Scottish Parliamentary elections, works are relatively low, and were even lower in 2003 than they were in 1999. The qualitative work confirmed that most voters are at best uninformed and at worst confused about Single Transferable Vote (the system to be used for Scottish local government elections from May 2007) and AMS, although most had a fairly
good understanding of, and positive reaction to, proportional representation in general.

Motivating people to participate
Our findings highlight the importance of conducting an effective public information campaign for the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. Our research suggests that people need educating about the different electoral systems that will be used at the 2007 elections and that people’s knowledge of the powers of the Scottish Parliament and local government needs to be improved.
1 Introduction

The Electoral Commission contracted GfK NOP, working with Professor John Curtice of the University of Strathclyde, to undertake research into public attitudes towards the Scottish Parliament and local government, examining understanding of its role and responsibilities, exploring the factors that might motivate people to vote in the 2007 elections and knowledge of the electoral systems to be used at these elections. The project involved a scoping study of recent attitudinal surveys, followed by primary research, both quantitative and qualitative, among the Scottish electorate. It follows Scotland votes?, a report published by the Commission in 2002.

Background

1.1 The third set of Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections are scheduled for May 2007. In accordance with its statutory responsibilities and a request made by the Scottish Executive, the Electoral Commission will prepare and publish a report on the administration of elections. It will also develop public awareness and education campaigns with the Scottish Executive in advance of the 2007 elections.

1.2 In 2002, the Commission published Scotland votes?, a research report designed to inform the public awareness campaign for the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. GfK NOP Social Research, in conjunction with Professor John Curtice of the Department of Government at the University of Strathclyde, have been contracted by the Electoral Commission to undertake a similar study to inform the 2007 awareness campaign.

1.3 Scotland – poll position comprises qualitative and quantitative public opinion research and scoping desk research. The research aims to inform the Commission’s efforts to:

• raise awareness of the 2007 Scottish elections
• further voter understanding of the voting procedures being used in the elections
• encourage people to register in advance of the elections
1.4 The research project team comprised:
- Alison Palmer, Divisional Director, GfK NOP Social Research
- Amrita Sood, Associate Director, GfK NOP Social Research
- Tim Buchanan, Associate Director, GfK NOP Social Research
- Joy Mhonda, Senior Research Executive, GfK NOP Social Research
- Professor John Curtice, Department of Government, University of Strathclyde

1.5 The project team reported to a steering group comprising:
- Sir Neil McIntosh, Electoral Commissioner
- Andy O’Neill, Head of the Electoral Commission’s Scotland Office
- Katy Knock, Senior Research Officer, the Electoral Commission
- William Reburn, Research Officer, the Electoral Commission
- Dr Stephen Herbert, Senior Research Specialist, Scottish Parliament
- Russell Bain, Team Leader, Local Democracy Team, Scottish Executive
- Catherine Bromley, Principal Research Officer, Scottish Executive

Research objectives
1.6 The objectives of the research were to examine:
- public attitudes towards the Scottish Parliament
- public understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament
- attitudes towards local government in Scotland
- public understanding of the role and responsibilities of local government
- factors that might encourage voting in the Scottish Parliamentary elections and local government elections

Method and sample
Scoping study
1.7 The scoping study examines the survey evidence on public attitudes towards participation in Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. It is based primarily on existing data sources. However, where possible, we also show how the answers to the questions asked in the survey undertaken specifically for this study compare with the answers obtained by previous surveys. This enables us to identify what changes may have occurred in public opinion more recently.

Qualitative focus groups
1.8 Eight focus groups were carried out with the general public across Scotland. Locations covered each of the eight Scottish Parliamentary regions, including urban and rural areas.
1.9 Each focus group lasted two and a half hours with between seven and 10 participants attending each. A total of 70 people participated in the qualitative stage. Table 1 shows the make-up of each focus group.

1.10 Focus group recruitment was undertaken using recruiters based in the locations where the focus groups were conducted. All focus groups were conducted between 3 May and 7 May 2006.

Quantitative public opinion research

1.11 One thousand and thirty-four interviews were conducted with a demographically representative sample of residents aged 18 and over in Scotland. A questionnaire, equivalent to a 10-minute interview, was developed by GfK NOP and the Electoral Commission. Interviews were conducted using computer assisted telephone interviewing. Quotas were set on age, gender and working status. The data were weighted on age, gender, working status, social class and region, to adjust the sample to reflect the population of Scotland. Fieldwork took place between 25 May and 7 June 2006.

1.12 A random sample of postcode sectors within Scotland was identified, and a random sample of telephone numbers was obtained for each postcode area. Respondents were asked to confirm their postcode prior to interviewing, to ensure that only residents living in Scotland were interviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Quotas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Edinburgh                 | 18–24, spread of socio-economic grade, students | • Did not vote in Scottish elections in 2003 (some were too young)  
• 3–4 non-registrants  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
| Inverness                 | 25–44, BC1                            | • 3–4 voted in 2003  
• No quota on registration  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
| Glasgow                   | 25–44, C2DE                           | • 3–4 voted in 2003  
• 3–4 non-registrants  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
| Inverurie                 | 45–60, BC1                            | • 3–4 voted in 2003  
• No quota on registration  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
• No quota on registration  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
| East Kilbride and Hamilton| 18–24, C1C2                           | • Minimum of 2 voted in Scottish elections in 2003 (some were too young)  
• No quota on registration  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
| Eyemouth                  | 45–60, BC1C2                          | • 3–4 voted in 2003  
• No quota on registration  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
| Greenock                  | 18–24, C2DE, non-students             | • Minimum of 2 voted in Scottish elections in 2003 (some were too young)  
• No quota on registration  
• 3–4 intend to vote in 2007 |
This chapter explores turnout at previous elections to the Scottish Parliament, public attitudes towards devolution and the Scottish Parliament, and towards voting, voting systems and electoral registration.

Turnout

2.1 Table 2 shows the turnout levels for the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliamentary elections: 59% and 49% respectively. To help place these turnout rates in a broader context, the table also displays figures for turnout in other major elections since 1999 – those for the National Assembly for Wales and UK Parliamentary general elections. Turnout at the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election was 10 percentage points lower than in 1999 and for the UK Parliamentary election in 2001.

2.2 As shown in Figure 1, 58% of respondents to the 2006 survey said that they were absolutely certain to vote in the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary election, though percentages for those saying that they were absolutely certain to vote were lower for 18–34-year-olds and for unskilled manual workers. These figures, however, should be viewed with caution, as people are likely to overstate their likely voting behaviour. For example, 60% of respondents to the 2003 Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA) survey said that they had voted in the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election when the official turnout was 49%.

---

1 The first SSA survey was launched by NatCen Scotland in 1999 to provide data on social and political attitudes in Scotland.
Who votes and who doesn’t vote

2.3 Looking at who votes and who does not enables us to identify those social groups whose participation in the electoral process is particularly low. It may also help us identify why participation is low or declining. As Table 3 shows, the reported level of turnout in both the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election and the 2001 UK Parliamentary general election varied by social group. It can be seen that the sharpest differences in turnout are in age, with younger people far less likely to vote than older people. At the same time, those living in rented accommodation are less likely to vote than owner occupiers, those in manual occupations are less likely to vote than those in more middle class occupations, and both unemployed people and people who are permanently sick and disabled are less likely to vote than those in employment. The retired are even more likely to vote than those in employment. On the other hand there is no difference in turnout between men and women.

2.4 Such differences in turnout are not, however, particularly new and are found in most

---

**Figure 1: How likely is it that you personally will vote in the next Scottish Parliamentary election in May 2007, on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you are absolutely certain not to vote and 10 means you are absolutely certain to vote?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – Absolutely certain not to vote</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–9</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – Absolutely certain to vote</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages total more than 100% due to rounding.

**Table 2: Turnout rates in recent elections, UK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Turnout (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Parliament, 1999</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Assembly for Wales, 1999</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Parliament, 2001</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Parliament, 2003</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Assembly for Wales, 2003</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Parliament, 2005</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Electoral Commission.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Turnout in 2001 and 2003, by demographics</th>
<th>% voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–44</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–54</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–64</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently sick/disabled</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social class</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/managerial</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate occupations</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small employers</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower supervisory</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-routine/routine</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing tenure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner occupier</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social renter</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private renter</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

recent elections in the UK. Indeed, as we can see from the table, the pattern of differences in the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election are much the same as those found in the UK Parliamentary general election two years earlier. Turnout at last year’s UK Parliamentary general election also followed similar trends.

Rationale for not voting

2.5 People’s reasons for not voting in the Scottish elections also follow familiar routes. Lack of trust in politicians and the feeling that politics is boring or irrelevant are frequently mentioned reasons for individuals choosing not to exercise their right to vote.

2.6 Many feel that just one vote will not make a difference in determining political leadership and that there is little discernible difference between the main parties, so voting for one or the other is irrelevant.

People don’t vote because they feel that they’re not being heard, there is only one vote out of however many million and it doesn’t count. They’re not going to have a direct impact.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.7 The one dominant theme emerging across the groups, however, was the feeling of a lack of information on which to base their choice. This view is held across age groups, though it is most prevalent among the young. Many feel that they lack information at a number of different levels, and are unaware of the decisions being made within the Scottish Parliament and local councils, as well as the parties’ policies and stance on key issues. This leaves many with the sense that they are not clear on what is at stake in each election.

A lot of people don’t understand the system. If you don’t understand then you don’t really know what you’re voting for or how much of an influence they have. I opted out of modern studies, and I don’t have a clue how it works, and I think a lot of people don’t.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.8 As well as the sense of duty to vote, there is also a strong sense that one’s vote should be used wisely. For some focus group participants, a feeling of a lack of information on which to base their vote for party or candidate left them feeling anxious and uncertain about voting in general.

It’s quite daunting to make a decision based on something you don’t know much about.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.9 Many young people say that they simply follow their parents’ choice of candidate. As well as being daunted by the decision of who to vote for, there is also worry about the process among some younger people. Some are anxious that they might not know what to do once they arrive at the polling station and are afraid of appearing foolish.

When I last went to vote, they [polling station staff] were pretty vague, I was thinking ‘what do I do here?’.

Edinburgh, 18–24
2.10 For some young people who have not yet voted, there is a view that politics does not yet hold any relevance for them, as there are few aspects of policy which affect them directly. For these young people, voting can be deferred until they are working homeowners, as they believe that politics will then begin to have more direct relevance.

It’s not something that I would probably do yet because I’m still young and it’s not that relevant to me. Maybe when I leave university. 

Edinburgh, 18–24

Other factors affecting turnout

Knowledge of the Scottish Parliament

2.11 Survey research also identifies other important factors that influence turnout in Scottish Parliamentary elections. Table 4 suggests that there is a strong relationship between someone’s knowledge of the Scottish Parliament and turnout. Seventy per cent of those who correctly identified all three statements about the Scottish Parliament claim to have voted in the 2003 Scottish Parliamentary election compared with half as many (36%) who did not identify any of the items correctly.

2.12 However, this does not necessarily mean that turnout in Scottish Parliamentary elections would increase if people were better informed about the powers of the Scottish Parliament. It is likely that knowledge is dependent upon a person’s prior interest in politics and devolution because if people have an interest in a subject they are more likely to acquire knowledge of it through pursuing that interest.

Attitudes towards the Scottish Parliament and elections

2.13 It would appear that for the most part attitudes towards the Scottish Parliament and elections in Scotland do not make a great deal of difference to the probability that someone will vote in a Scottish Parliamentary election. In 2003 turnout was highest among those who would prefer Scotland not to have any kind of Parliament (65%), while those in favour of devolution were only a little more likely to vote (63%) than those who favoured independence (58%). In 1999 the level of turnout among all three groups was virtually identical.

2.14 On the other hand there is evidence that the more importance people attach to the institution they are voting for the more likely they are to vote. As shown in Table 5, there is nearly a 40 point difference between those who think it makes a great deal of difference who wins a Scottish Parliamentary election and those who think it does not make any difference at all.
Difference between the parties

2.15 Past research also points to a relationship between propensity to vote and believing that there is a difference between the parties. As shown in Table 6, those who do not think there is much difference between the parties are less likely to vote. It appears that those who do not think there is much difference between the parties are typically about 20% less likely to vote than are those who think there is a great deal of difference.

2.16 It would seem that in the recent past most Scots have not felt there was a large difference between the parties. For example, in 1999 30% of respondents to the SSA survey felt there was a great deal of difference between the Conservative and Labour parties compared with 23% in 2003. Similarly, 41% said there was a great deal of difference between Labour and the Scottish National Party (SNP) in 1999 compared with 31% in 2003. This lack of perceived difference between the parties may have discouraged some voters at recent elections, and this may well be more important than the perceived lack of influence of the Scottish Parliament (as compared with the UK Government at least) in explaining why turnout fell between 1999 and 2003.

### Table 5: Turnout in 2003, by perceived impact of who wins a Scottish Parliamentary election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much difference it makes who wins a Scottish Parliamentary election</th>
<th>% voted 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 6: Turnout by perceived difference between the parties, 1999, 2001 and 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived difference between...</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conservative and Labour</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great deal</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labour and the SNP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great deal</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interest in politics 2.17 Interest in politics also appears to be a key driver of turnout. As illustrated in Table 7, which shows the level of turnout in 2003 broken down by interest in politics, there is nearly a 50 point difference in the level of turnout between those with a great deal of interest in politics and those with none at all. Furthermore, our 2006 survey found that 73% of those respondents who said that they had a great deal/quite a lot of interest in politics also said that they would be certain to vote in the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary election. This compares with 37% who said that they had not much/no interest in politics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest in politics</th>
<th>% voted 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Engagement with politics 2.19 Our 2006 focus groups demonstrated that levels of interest and engagement in politics vary considerably, influenced by factors such as family background, living circumstances, media consumption and study of political subjects at school or university. The focus of political interest, however, appears to fall into fairly distinct categories, with two main types of engagement.

Types of engagement 2.20 The first type of engagement can be described as ‘community-focused’ and develops via involvement in a close-knit local community. Political engagement of this type is characterised by an individual’s interest in local life and their community. People who are politically engaged in this way have a greater level of interaction with others in their immediate community and a greater knowledge and awareness of local facilities. Young people living independently are less likely to be politically engaged in this way, though younger people living at home with their parents may be.

Attitudes towards the party leaders 2.18 In the 2003 SSA survey, respondents were asked to give a mark out of 10 to indicate how good a job they thought each of the four main Scottish party leaders, and the leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, would do as First Minister. An inability to rate the Scottish party leaders was strongly related to turnout. Half of all respondents felt able to rate all five leaders, and among these nearly three-quarters voted. By contrast, less than one in five of those who could not rate any of the party leaders voted. It seems that when leaders are considered to be anonymous, voters tend to be less politically engaged.

Issues of interest to the community-focused include facilities such as parks and leisure centres; maintenance of the local area, including roads and cleansing; and local service provision, including schools and healthcare.
A second route to political engagement can be described as an ‘informed overview’. This type of engagement has often developed through a background of early interest in politics, via regular discussion of political topics at home in the family, or through study of politics or modern studies at school or university, and can apply to people of all ages. Interests are wide-ranging and not necessarily focused on issues of immediate personal or community interest. Rather, the focus of interest tends to be on having knowledge of, and opinions on, issues of importance. Key topics for interest include party politics, health and education.

**Sources of information**

Information on politics comes via newspapers, television news and discussion with friends and family. Among the community-focused, many read a London-based daily tabloid (of which some have a Scottish edition) such as The Sun, The Daily Mirror or The Daily Mail. In addition, most read or scan their local newspaper. These include the Edinburgh Evening News, the Glasgow Evening Times, the Aberdeen Press & Journal and Berwickshire Today. There is recognition that politics-related news from these sources, particularly the tabloids, tends to be limited and focused on single issues or sensational topics.

It's all the scandal you get in The Sun, really.

Eyemouth, 45–60

Readership of local newspapers is particularly important for the older people among the community-focused. Politics-related discussion with family and friends tends to focus on issues of local relevance such as facilities and services. Others in the community-focused category of political engagement claimed to consume little or no politics-related news media.

Those focus group participants who fell into the informed overview category of engagement said that they were more likely to read a London-based daily broadsheet newspaper, with some younger people also saying that they read the Metro. Discussion of politics-related issues was wide-ranging, though for younger people it tended to focus on specific issues of legislation such as the smoking ban.

Both the community-focused and the informed overview groups watch BBC and ITN news programmes, and Scottish news on both BBC and ITV. Those among the informed overview groups were more likely to access a wider variety of news programmes, including BBC News 24, Channel 4 News and Sky News, which reflects their general interest in politics and related topics. Some among this type had studied politics or modern studies at school or university, providing them with a better understanding of systems and processes.

It would seem then that information on politics in general comes from south of the border both in terms of newspapers and television news. Most focus group participants felt that this focuses on the UK Parliament, neglecting Scottish politics.
Whenever you watch on TV and it’s something to do with politics, they say ‘this is happening in the country’, and by that they mean England. It’s only when it’s something really big comes up like the smoking ban.

**East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24**

**The Scottish Parliament**

**Attitudes towards devolution**

2.28 This section focuses on attitudes, both towards devolution in general and towards elections to the Scottish Parliament and local councils in particular. The focus group discussions demonstrated a very positive response to the concept of devolution, with most feeling strongly that Scotland should be self-governing at least to some degree. For most, the key benefit to this is the proximity of the politicians to local communities in Scotland, and the resulting advantage to their understanding of local issues.

We may not like how they’re doing it, but at least it’s our own Parliament.

**Inverurie, 45–60**

Having people in power sitting in Edinburgh rather than Westminster has made a difference because they’re closer to the people in Scotland…they’re coming from constituencies across Scotland so they know about Scotland and they’re a bit more bothered about what goes on in Scotland.

**Perth, 25–44**

2.29 Survey data also show that the Scottish Parliament is regarded as an institution that has the distinctive interests of the Scottish nation at heart. As Table 8 shows, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have consistently been far more likely to be trusted to look after Scotland’s long-term interests than the UK Government. From 2000 onwards, little more than one in five has been prepared to trust the UK Government ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ in that respect, whereas the equivalent figure for the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive has never dropped below a half. In a 2006 MORI survey for the Scottish Parliament’s corporate body, as many as 48% agreed that the Parliament ‘can be trusted to make decisions in the best interests of Scotland’, while only 32% disagreed.

2.30 This picture is also confirmed by the results of a survey undertaken by MORI for the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body between January and April 2006 (Herbert 2006). As can be seen in Table 9, the Scottish Parliament is thought to have improved the accessibility of government in Scotland and given ordinary people more control over important decisions, although it does not necessarily make people feel more in touch with how they are governed. Meanwhile, in apparent contradiction to the evidence from the SSA surveys, more people said they agreed that having the Scottish Parliament has weakened Scotland’s influence on the UK Government than said they disagreed. Overall, the same survey found that no less than 61% reckoned that the Scottish Parliament could either be ‘improved quite a lot’ or needed ‘a great deal of improvement’, while
2.31 Despite devolution being seen as having been beneficial in encouraging the Scottish people to have a sense of pride in Scotland as a nation, there was also a sense of disappointment among the groups that devolution has not resulted in the level of change that many had expected it to.

There’s that nagging feeling you have that they [Westminster] are still in the shadows, telling them what to do.

**East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24**

2.32 This feeling that Scotland acts as a testing ground for policy implementation in the rest of the UK was also exemplified by the citation of the early introduction of the Poll Tax in Scotland, and there is continuing concern over this in the aftermath of devolution.

---

2 Prior to 2004, this question referred to the Scottish Parliament. In 2004 an experiment was run whereby half the sample was asked about the Scottish Parliament and half was asked about the Scottish Executive. The change of wording made negligible difference to the responses given, so the combined results are shown here.
I get the feeling we’re just a testing ground for things that they want to implement – it’s the [UK] Government saying ‘we’d like to try this’.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

Knowledge of role and remit of the Scottish Parliament

I don’t know how much the Scottish Parliament has a say in any of this.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.33 The 2006 focus groups demonstrated that there was low knowledge and understanding of the role and activities of the Scottish Parliament, except among those most engaged in politics. Most were not able to describe the remit or responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament, and do not feel that they are well informed.

Eyemouth, 45–60

2.34 The few who do have a good understanding of the Scottish Parliament have often developed this via a strong personal interest in politics, or through contact with the Parliament as part of their job. As noted above, information on politics tends to be taken from local or London-based media.

2.35 Sources of information on Scottish politics tend to come from Scottish television news or from coverage in Scottish editions of newspapers. As well as the media, blame for
this lack of knowledge is often attributed to the Scottish Parliament itself.

Maybe they’re just not very good at telling us what they’re doing.

Perth, 25–44

2.36 However, many also profess a lack of interest in the activities of the Scottish Parliament, saying that they would be unlikely to seek knowledge or information proactively. This can be attributed to a general lack of interest in politics, rather than a specific lack of interest in the Scottish Parliament.

I wouldn’t sit and talk with my uni friends about it, unless it’s something big like the smoking ban.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.37 This general lack of understanding of the remit of the Scottish Parliament, and lack of awareness of its activities, has led to perceptions that the Parliament has low relevance.

It would be nice to say that the Scottish Parliament is important, but I’m not really seeing any huge changes.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.38 As described in this section, there is low awareness and understanding of the Scottish Parliament’s role. This results in people guessing as to the powers and remit of the Parliament.

The Scottish Parliament’s relationship with the UK Parliament

[Westminster] are in control of everything, even the things the Scottish Parliament do.

Greenock, 18–24

2.39 As described, there is limited understanding of the role and remit of the Scottish Parliament, except for a minority with specialist knowledge via higher education, special interests or their occupation. This lack of concrete knowledge results in perceptions based on conjecture as to the role of the Scottish Parliament, its responsibilities, its relationship to the UK Parliament and its power to make final decisions.

2.40 Answers to questions regularly asked in the SSA surveys provide further evidence that the Scottish Parliament is not perceived to be as powerful as many would like it to be (see Table 10). As shown in Table 11, these have consistently shown that at least two-thirds of the Scottish public would like the devolved tier of government to have most influence on the way that Scotland is run. Moreover, in 1999 at least as many people expected that the Scottish Parliament would have most influence as thought the UK Government would. However, ever since then less than one in four has reckoned that the devolved tier is actually the most influential (see Table 10).

2.41 The focus groups suggest that the Scottish Parliament is conceptualised as a regional government, answerable to the UK Parliament and bridging the gap between
Table 10: Who has most influence in Scotland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of these has most influence over the way Scotland is run:</th>
<th>1999*</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Scottish Parliament/Executive⁴</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK Government at Westminster</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local councils in Scotland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The European Union</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *In 1999 the question wording was: ‘When the new Parliament starts work, which of the following do you think will have most influence over the way Scotland is run.’ In 2005 the question asked which has ‘the most influence’ (emphasis added).
Where columns do not total 100% this is because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ or refusing to answer have been excluded.

Table 11: Who should have most influence in Scotland?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which of these should have most influence over the way Scotland is run:</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Scottish Parliament/Executive⁴</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK Government at Westminster</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local councils in Scotland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The European Union</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Where columns do not total 100% this is because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ or refusing to answer have been excluded.

³ Prior to 2004, the question referred to the Scottish Parliament. In 2004 an experiment was run whereby half the sample was asked about the Scottish Parliament and half was asked about the Scottish Executive. The change of wording made negligible difference to the responses given, so the combined results are shown here. In 2005 the question referred once more to the Scottish Parliament.

⁴ Again, prior to 2004, this question referred to the Scottish Parliament. In 2004, an experiment was run whereby half the sample was asked about the Scottish Parliament and half was asked about the Scottish Executive. The change of wording made negligible difference to the responses given, so the combined results are shown here.
the local authority and the UK Parliament. In this sense, it is perceived that the Scottish Parliament fulfils two key roles: one in providing local knowledge and representation within the UK, and another in implementing policies and budgets handed down from the UK Parliament. This assumption that the Scottish Parliament provides a link in the chain of command compounds the sense of low relevance.

Everything gets passed down the chain, there’s a chain of command – they’re at the top dictating, everyone else falls into line.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.42 According to these assumptions, the UK Parliament remains in control of decision making, dictating policy to Scotland. Also according to assumption, although the Scottish Parliament may have some power to decide on how policies are implemented in Scotland, power to make the final decision rests with the UK Parliament.

They don’t actually have the final decision; they’ve got a certain amount of decision but they have to ask for permission.

Inverness, 25–44
The GfK NOP/Electoral Commission 2006 survey illustrates this further, showing that Scots believe that the Scottish Parliament has less influence on the way that Scotland is run compared with the UK Parliament. As shown in Figure 2, 24% of respondents said that the Scottish Parliament had a lot less influence compared with 11% who said it had a lot more.

2.44 The fact that the UK Parliament is in charge of the bloc grant to Scotland is seen by some as the key factor in securing the UK Parliament’s power to make the final decision.

We can’t go in and say ‘we’re going to do this’ because we’re still funded by the British Government.

Inverness, 25–44

2.45 As such, financial independence is seen as the key factor in determining Scotland’s potential to be independent from the rest of the UK. Some participants in the focus groups thought Scotland should able to be more independent financially and take more autonomy in this way.

I don’t think they can ever be powerful until they are funding themselves.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

Areas of responsibility

2.46 Although the UK Parliament is thought to hold the power to make final decisions, there is some debate involved in identifying the policy areas where Scotland has at least some power to make its own decisions.
There is little concrete knowledge of what these areas are, though some patchy, anecdotal knowledge exists. I believe they can vary tax rates…but I don’t know too much about it.

Inverurie, 45–60

2.47 The 2006 GfK NOP/Electoral Commission survey suggests that there is poor overall knowledge of the powers of the Scottish Parliament, with 56% of respondents stating that it is ‘definitely true’ or ‘probably true’ that the Scottish Parliament cannot change the basic rate of income tax in Scotland (see Figure 3).

2.48 The focus groups suggested that it is through guesswork based on service differences between Scotland and England that assumptions are made about the decision-making powers of the Scottish Parliament. For example, there was a particularly strong awareness of Scotland’s unique education system which led to the assumption that education must fall under the Scottish Parliament’s remit.

Education must be the Scottish Parliament, if they weren’t there would be the same system for the exams.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.50 In Edinburgh and in the Highlands, the Scottish Parliament is credited with acting to preserve Scottish culture and heritage, and with promoting tourism.

I think they’re spending money on tourism and showing that Scotland is a good place to come. In Falkirk they’ve built a big wheel. And tourists will go to Falkirk just to see the wheel, and it encourages them to go to other places. And in the last few years they’ve been promoting the [Edinburgh] Festival and it’s got even more popular, there’s adverts everywhere. They’re obviously spending more money on promoting that.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.51 On the other hand, some concern was expressed in the groups held furthest from Edinburgh and Glasgow that there might not be an even distribution of funding across Scotland, and that the central belt might be favoured for spending.

Scotland – poll position: main findings
2.52 Among younger people, particularly those involved in higher education, there is a good awareness of legislation on tuition fees, and this is attributed to the Scottish Parliament. Abolition of university tuition fees is viewed highly positively, both in promoting equality of opportunity and as an investment in Scotland’s economic future. Despite some anecdotal awareness that the Scottish Parliament holds the power to make decisions in certain policy areas, the feeling remains that the UK Parliament still holds the power to make final decisions on these matters.

It encourages people more to go to uni who wouldn’t be able to afford it otherwise. That means that there are more different types of people going to university.

Edinburgh, 18–24

You get the feeling that ultimately, the UK Parliament can override anything that happens in the country. It’s like they’re the manager, and the SP is the assistant manager.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.54 There is a sense, however, that Scotland is currently in an early stage of its growth as a nation, and there is hope for the future power of the Scottish Parliament as it develops.

I’d say they have moderate power and they’re still establishing themselves.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.55 For supporters of independence for Scotland, the current power of the Scottish Parliament is not adequate when compared with their ideal of full independence.

It’s a good idea unfinished.

Inverness, 25–44

2.56 The perception that the Parliament lacks power may be a result of a poor understanding of its remit and low knowledge of its record. As such, the most informed tend to have a more positive view of the extent of the Scottish Parliament’s powers.
Some people will tell you that Scottish Parliament is a toy parliament, it’s not got real powers. I disagree. Scottish Parliament is responsible for health and education, which are two of the most important things in the country.

Inverurie, 45–60

When provided with information on devolved and reserved powers, there was surprise among many at the extent of devolved powers and at the power of final say on devolved matters.

The aspect about asking the SP permission on devolved matters, that surprised me. I thought it would be the other way around.

Edinburgh, 18–24

Although unaware of the extent of current powers, Figure 4 shows that two-thirds of the electorate are keen for the Scottish Parliament to have more power, with 66% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the Scottish Parliament should be given more powers. As explained previously, this keenness for the Parliament to have more powers may reflect a lack of understanding of the powers the Parliament has and, as such, a desire for it to have more.

Scotland – poll position: main findings

| Strongly agree | 39% |
| Agree | 27% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 11% |
| Disagree | 9% |
| Strongly disagree | 12% |
| No opinion | 2% |

**Image and achievements**

**Scottish Parliament building**

2.59 Two key issues dominated the spontaneous focus group discussion of the image of the Scottish Parliament: the Parliament building and the smoking ban. These two issues are pivotal to the formation of perceptions of the Parliament, representing the dual focus of media attention on the Scottish Parliament among a plethora of coverage about the UK Parliament.

2.60 In considering the image and reputation of the Scottish Parliament, the Parliament building itself is a top of mind issue for all. Substantial media coverage of the problems associated with the building, beginning at the Scottish Parliament building’s inception, has resulted in a strong awareness of the budget overspend. The problems with the roof of the Parliament building at the time of the research were high in the awareness of the participants and compounded existing negative views.

*It just seems that whenever I hear about the Parliament, it’s mostly to do with the building. The ceiling caving in or something like that.*

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.61 There is evidence that this negative publicity continues to damage positive perceptions of the Parliament and to fuel fears of wasteful incompetence.

I think they got off to a sorry start…I think it sticks in everyone’s throat how much it cost to build that building.

Inverness, 25–44

2.62 The building overspend created the perception for many that the Parliament is focused on superficial issues rather than on improving life in Scotland.

*It’s a waste of money that could have been used for schools and hospitals rather than a big building for them to go into and use for their meetings.*

Inverurie, 45–60

2.63 There are negative views on the aesthetics of the building, with particular criticism of its juxtaposition with Edinburgh’s historic buildings. In addition, there is criticism of the fact that a Scottish architect did not design the building.

*I think Edinburgh is a beautiful city, and it looks so out of place.*

Inverness, 25–44

2.64 Such controversy over the building was apparent even before the Parliament had occupied its new premises. According to the 2003 SSA survey, no less than 46% felt that the building ‘should never have been built in the first place’. Meanwhile, 45% felt that the building ‘needed to be built but should never have cost so much’ and only 7% said that ‘the building will be worth it in the end’.
Smoking ban

2.65 While highly publicised problems associated with the Parliament building have given the Scottish Parliament a heritage of negative association with overspend and lack of focus on important issues for Scotland, there is evidence that the smoking ban that came into force in March 2006 has been extremely effective in ameliorating some of these negative associations. In particular, the smoking ban gives a clear signal that the health agenda is being prioritised in Scotland, which focus group participants overwhelmingly found to be a positive message.

Even though it’s caused a lot of controversy, they’ve overridden that because of people’s health. I liked it because it showed strong leadership, good initiative, and prioritising people’s health.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.66 The speed of implementation of the ban also suggests that the Scottish Parliament has the power to take strong and decisive action and to act independently of the UK Parliament. However, on the flip side there are lingering doubts among a minority that the smoking ban is an indication that Scotland continues to act as a test market for policy implementation, as they said it did at the time of the introduction of the Poll Tax.

The Scottish Parliament have delivered an answer to Westminster, simple as that. They [Westminster] held back on the decision, to test if it worked here first. If it didn’t, then they’ve not lost anything, if it did, then they’ve gained something.

Perth, 25–44

Accessibility and trust

2.67 Members of the Scottish Parliament are seen as highly accessible and approachable. Key figures in Parliament are seen as more ‘everyday’ and less remote than their counterparts in the UK Parliament, and are thought to understand well the needs and concerns of people in Scotland. Young people in particular are conscious of the approachability of the Scottish Parliament, and feel that it would be likely to listen to their concerns.

You see people from the SP walking down the street. You could write to them or try to contact them, and it seems like you might actually get somewhere.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.68 Focus group participants, however, perceive that the lack of media coverage and resulting poor knowledge of the activities of the Parliament distance people from it.

They obviously don’t talk to us because I didn’t know of any of that…if they are doing things for us they should tell us.

Perth, 25–44
2.69 Despite this, few can see why they would wish to contact the Scottish Parliament. Although it is perceived to be more approachable and accessible than the UK Parliament, poor understanding of its remit reduces the likelihood of approaching the Scottish Parliament. In addition, though more approachable, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) are thought likely to have less influence than their counterparts in the UK Parliament. If local representation were sought, most say they would approach their local council.

My first line of contact would be the local council, unless it was something major. Then it would be the MP because they have more clout.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.70 As well as being highly approachable, participants felt that the Scottish Parliament is well trusted in comparison with the UK Parliament. Despite a general distrust of politicians, the Scottish Parliament is seen as genuinely holding the interests of the people at heart.

I feel that they’re less party political…they genuinely seem to be more interested in their area and helping you solve your problems and less about the party.

Perth, 25–44

2.71 Participants within the focus groups felt that proportional representation contributes to a sense of greater democratic decision making. They believed this would result in an outcome that is more likely to reflect the needs of the people rather than the views of one party.

Labour and Lib Dems are a coalition in the Scottish Parliament. The Lib Dems have a lot of say in Scotland as well as Labour. Because they run it jointly, it makes it a bit easier. If you are a Labour supporter you may try to get some stuff done, but if you are a Lib Dem person then you might get a few things you like from the Lib Dems.

Greenock, 18–24

2.72 The Scottish Parliament and the MSPs also seem more relaxed and measured than their counterparts in the UK Parliament, and less confrontational in style. This is attributed at least in part to the layout of the Scottish Parliament with its theatre style seating in contrast to the House of Commons’ opposing green benches. This is viewed highly positively and contributes to the sense of approachability. The visual layout of the Parliament itself contributes to the view that the Scottish Parliament is modern.

I think the set-up in Scotland any time you see it is a bit more relaxed; they’ve got their own little boxes. In Westminster it’s big leather seats and they’re all shouting!

Glasgow, 25–44
The Scottish Executive

2.73 Among the focus group participants there was a low awareness of the role of the Scottish Executive, except among the most knowledgeable. Those who are aware of the Scottish Executive’s role as the devolved government in Scotland are often involved in contact with the Scottish Executive through their occupation.

The Scottish Executive are mostly the civil servants.

Inverness, 25–44

2.74 Though most people in the groups had heard of the Scottish Executive, there was little knowledge of the part it plays.

I really have no idea what it is or what it does.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.75 Even those who are least aware that the Scottish Executive is associated with government in Scotland often do not understand its role in relation to the Scottish Parliament and other bodies.

Do the Executives report to Scottish Parliament or is it the other way around?

Perth, 25–44

2.76 Also, many comment that they are not aware of media coverage of the Scottish Executive. For many, publicity is limited to logos on television advertisements, particularly those relating to health. There are patchy areas of awareness of the activities of the Scottish Executive, based on personal interests.

Do they run all the Scottish government bodies like SNH [Scottish National Heritage]?

Inverness, 25–44

2.77 For younger people, the Scottish Executive is associated with student finance, and the logo is recognised from paperwork on grants and loans. Lack of knowledge and understanding of the role of the Executive is uncomfortable for most, with many feeling that they would prefer to know more, particularly when briefed that the Scottish Executive is the devolved government in Scotland. The following was voiced in a tone of acute embarrassment.

It’s terrible that none of us knew that.

Inverness, 25–44

Local government

I suppose they do the most important things a lot of the time because they do things that matter to you in the area...things that you notice.

Inverness, 25–44

Engagement and accessibility

2.78 There is evidence from the 2006 focus groups of considerable public engagement with local government in Scotland, with a particularly strong sense of ownership among the community-focused participants. The local
council is felt to play an important part in the local community in its capacity as a provider of essential services.

2.79 The 2006 survey shows that there are comparable levels of interest in the Scottish Parliament and local councils, with a fifth saying that they have 'quite a lot' of interest in both the Scottish Parliament and their local council (see Figure 5).

2.80 The local council is seen as a core part of the community and as approachable and accessible. Highly positive views of the council's accessibility mean that it is seen as ultimately accountable to the local people, as they can intervene or complain at any time. The council's image is everyday, accessible and hard working in comparison with other institutions. There is a sense that the council deals with the reality of daily life, having a more practical understanding of the needs of local people than the Scottish Parliament or the UK Parliament.

They’re the workers…the grass roots.

Inverness, 25–44

Figure 5: How much interest do you generally have in what is going on with the Scottish Parliament/your local council?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Level</th>
<th>Scottish Parliament</th>
<th>Local council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages total less than 100% because of rounding and because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ have been excluded.
Source: GfK NOP/The Electoral Commission 2006.
Unweighted base: 1,034.
2.81 All feel confident in contacting their council and that action would be taken to address their problems. The practical focus of the council as a deliverer of services leads people to feel that they are more likely to achieve results by approaching the council than other bodies.

I think you’d have more joy going to them [the local council] than with the Scottish Parliament.

Perth, 25–44

2.82 Councillors themselves are seen as everyday, ‘real’ local people with a good understanding of the needs and priorities of local communities. Councillors are also considered to be ultimately accountable, particularly in smaller communities, as they live and work in the local area and are personally known to the people.

Councillors are like everyday people, they’re not like politicians, they know the area really well.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.83 Despite this sense of local accessibility, there were some negative views expressed about councillors seeking votes rather than genuinely holding the best interests of local people at heart.

Areas of responsibility

2.84 The focus groups suggest that there is a good understanding overall of the areas of responsibility of the council, though there is some debate over who is likely to make the final decision over some matters. In general, the council is thought to have the final say over decisions relating to service delivery and execution of policy at a local level, covering services such as waste, recycling, roads and leisure facilities. Where interpretation of policy is required in delivering key services such as schools, health services, agriculture and transport, the Scottish Parliament (or in some cases the UK Parliament) is thought to make the decision.

2.85 Similar to the remit of the Scottish Parliament, people tend to make guesses about the council’s power to make decisions based on service differences between bordering areas. A good example cited by participants in the groups was the differences in licensing restrictions between local council areas.

Our curfew is 11.30 but even up the road in Bishopton it is later. You can’t get a drink after half past 11, but up in Glasgow you can get one till one or two o’clock.

Greenock, 18–24

2.86 The subject of the environment and recycling is a highly positive, top of mind association with the council. There is a strong awareness that councils have prioritised recycling policies, and there is a highly positive response to this in terms of the commitment it demonstrates to improving the environment.

It’s a lot more environmentally friendly now because they do three different types of bins.

Inverness, 25–44
2.87 Such policies are linked in people’s minds to the promotion of tourism and general improvements to Scotland’s environment and are positive moves attributed jointly to the Scottish Parliament and to local councils. Evidence of the Scottish Parliament’s and the local council’s action in these areas represents a highly positive symbol of commitment to Scotland’s future in terms of tourism and the economy.

2.88 There is general satisfaction with service delivery and accessibility of the councils. However, they also seem to perform an important psychological function in providing a sense of control and representation at the local level. On consideration, this is an emotive issue for many, and the idea of local communities having their say in the wider political field is inspiring. It is not, however, a top of mind association with local councils, which are often seen as service deliverers with little power to make decisions.

They just don’t seem to have a lot of influence over people’s lives…you pass on the message to them and they’ll pass it down the line. They’re at the bottom of the food chain, really, in terms of power.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

2.89 Indeed, for many of the least engaged, the local council is not seen as a political entity in its own right, but rather as the implementer of policy handed down from the UK Parliament and the Scottish Parliament.

They’re not making decisions like the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament are.

Edinburgh, 18–24

Information sources

2.90 The sources of information used by group participants to find out about issues concerning their local council depend heavily on a person’s level and type of engagement with politics. Community-focused participants who are highly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12: Civic duty to vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which of these statements comes closest to your view about elections?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s everyone’s duty to vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People should only vote if they care who wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s not really worth voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Columns do not total 100% because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ have been excluded.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
involved in their local communities are likely to have considerable personal contact with the council’s service departments on issues such as housing or planning. This group is also likely to discuss council issues with their family, friends and neighbours. They are also more likely to read council-produced leaflets and local papers.

2.91 Those who are less engaged with their immediate local communities, though they may have a strong engagement with politics in other ways, are less likely to read council-produced materials or discuss their council with friends and family. Messages from the council in relation to key services such as recycling form the core of their engagement with the council. Other contact with their council takes place only in relation to problems with basic service delivery. They may also notice council logos at entertainment events or in relation to other services.

Attitudes towards voting and registration

2.92 While recent Parliamentary and local government elections in Scotland, in common with much of the rest of Great Britain, have registered disappointing turnouts, it appears that most people in Scotland still believe that people have a duty to vote in elections. As can be seen in Table 12, the two surveys conducted on behalf of the Electoral Commission in 2003 and 2006 show that 70% and 79% of respondents chose ‘it’s everyone’s duty to vote’ out of three possible responses about their view on elections. Similarly, the 2001 British Election Study found that 86% of people in Scotland agreed that ‘It’s everyone’s duty to vote’, while only 8% disagreed.

2.93 This sense of duty associated with voting in Scotland was reflected in the 2006 focus groups, where the propensity to vote is strongly aligned with family background and upbringing. Those who feel strongly about voting in every election have often had parents who voted and highlighted to them the importance of voting. Alternatively, they may have studied a politics-related subject such as modern studies at school.

My mum and dad always did it, and I was brought up to do it.

Inverness, 25–44

2.94 The view of many who participated in the research is that voting is a hard-won right and that it should be valued as such. There is a great deal of criticism of people who do not vote.

You usually find after elections…the ones that moan the most are the folk who haven’t actually bothered to vote.

Perth, 25–44

2.95 For many, recollections of voting for the first time are filled with nostalgia and positive associations. People of all ages, though older people in particular, recall the excitement of polling day and the sense of atmosphere in their local area.
I love voting, ‘cos everyone in the community is out, and you see people, and you bump into folk that you’ve not seen for ages.

Glasgow, 25–44

There is also a debate as to the relative importance of the various elections, and in the focus groups there was clear evidence that people’s attitudes to voting depended on the type of election. Many people’s views on voting in each of the elections tend to reflect their views on the power of the institutions, with many feeling that their vote in the UK Parliamentary general elections is most important, as it holds the power to make the important decisions.

The most important one to me is to change the party to try and make a difference to the area…I suppose it’s Westminster.

Inverness, 25–44

2.96 There is also a debate as to the relative importance of the various elections, and in the focus groups there was clear evidence that people’s attitudes to voting depended on the type of election. Many people’s views on voting in each of the elections tend to reflect their views on the power of the institutions, with many feeling that their vote in the UK Parliamentary general elections is most important, as it holds the power to make the important decisions.

2.97 However, even if voters do not have much interest in politics or the work of particular governmental institutions in Scotland, an election may grab their interest and attention if they think that the outcome might make a difference to their lives or to the country as a whole.

2.98 Such a perception will be more likely to exist if voters think that the institution being elected is powerful or influential and that the outcome of an election makes a difference. For example, in the focus groups some participants took the view that the Scottish Parliamentary elections are most important, as the decisions

---

Table 13: Perceived importance of voting in different kinds of election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important do you think it is to vote in …</th>
<th>Scottish Parliament elections?</th>
<th>UK House of Commons elections?</th>
<th>Local council elections?</th>
<th>European Parliament elections?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>47 %</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>49 %</td>
<td>35 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly important</td>
<td>31 %</td>
<td>30 %</td>
<td>31 %</td>
<td>29 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>10 %</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>4 %</td>
<td>9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t choose</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>5 %</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not answered</td>
<td>1 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Columns do not total 100% because of rounding.
made in the Scottish Parliament are more likely to have a tangible impact on local life. The scale of the Scottish elections also provides an incentive to vote. Participants felt that due to the smaller electorate their vote is more likely to count than in the elections to the UK Parliament and that their vote is therefore more valuable.

I would feel much more like voting if it was in the Scottish elections than in the UK elections. There are far fewer people voting, so it seems like my vote would count more.

Edinburgh, 18–24

2.99 As shown in Table 13, people are just as likely to say it is ‘important’ to vote in Scottish Parliamentary and local council elections as they are in UK Parliamentary general elections – a feeling that does not extend to the same degree to European Parliamentary elections.

However, it would appear from the focus groups that in general terms the Scottish Parliamentary elections are seen as more important than local elections, which in part is reflected by the view that local councils do not have the power to make important decisions.

When you’re voting for your country [Scottish Parliament] it’s like you’re voting for somebody that’s going to run the country. In the local ones it’s like – what are they going to do?

Edinburgh, 18–24

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14: Perceived difference it makes who wins elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>House of Commons elections</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Columns do not total 100% because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ or refusing to answer have been excluded.

* In 2006, respondents were asked how much difference they thought it made who wins elections to the Westminster Parliament.
In Table 14 we can see the extent to which people in Scotland have in recent times felt it makes a difference who wins elections. According to the SSA survey, the perceived importance of both Scottish Parliamentary and UK Parliamentary general elections dropped sharply between 1999 and 2001, when of course turnout dropped to a record modern low in that year’s UK Parliamentary general election.

2.102 Meanwhile, although the perceived importance of UK Parliamentary general elections recovered a little between the surveys conducted in 2001 and 2003, that of Scottish Parliamentary elections did not. As a result, at 41% the proportion in 2003 who thought that it made ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’ of difference who wins Scottish Parliamentary elections was well down on the 56% who felt that way in 1999. Moreover, this was also lower than the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scottish Parliamentary elections</th>
<th>SSA</th>
<th>Commission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local council elections</th>
<th>Commission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None at all</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Columns do not total 100% because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ or refusing to answer have been excluded.
Table 15: Subjective knowledge of Scottish Parliamentary electoral system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you feel you know about how the voting system for Scottish Parliamentary elections works?</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a lot</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very much</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing at all</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Columns do not total 100% because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ have been excluded.

Figure 6: Over three-quarters of respondents in the quantitative survey were unsure of the voting systems used in the Scottish Parliamentary and local council elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Scottish Parliament</th>
<th>Scottish local council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportional representation</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First past the post</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Transferable Vote</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Multiple responses to this question were allowed.
Source: GfK NOP/The Electoral Commission 2006.
Unweighted base: 1,034.
proportion who reckoned the outcome of a UK Parliamentary general election could make that much difference. True, the Electoral Commission’s own 2003 survey found that a slightly higher proportion thought that the outcome of both kinds of election mattered – as we might anticipate from a somewhat more politically interested sample\(^5\) – but it also found that the outcome of a Scottish Parliamentary election mattered a great deal or quite a lot to fewer people (42%) than did the outcome of a UK Parliamentary general election (52%). Now in the Commission’s most recent survey we find that just 40% think that the outcome of a Scottish Parliamentary election matters that much.

\(2.103\) Taken together, this evidence suggests that elections to the Scottish Parliament have not yet attained the same significance as UK Parliamentary general elections in the minds of the Scottish public.

**Voting systems**

\(2.104\) Scottish Parliamentary elections are held using a variant of the Additional Member System (AMS) rather than the first past the post system used in UK Parliamentary general elections and, until 2007, in local council elections in Scotland.

\(2.105\) It would appear from two surveys conducted for the Electoral Commission in 2003 and 2006 that subjective knowledge of AMS is a little lower than it is of the Scottish Parliament itself. Whereas in the 2006 survey 68% felt that they had at least ‘some’ knowledge of what the Parliament does, only 60% felt the same way about the Parliament’s electoral system (see Table 15).

\(2.106\) Our 2006 survey also shows that over three-quarters of respondents do not know which voting systems are used in the Scottish Parliamentary and local council elections.

\(2.107\) Moreover, objective knowledge of AMS is seen from survey evidence to have been lower in 2003 than it was in 1999. A set of true or false questions was asked in the SSA surveys for these years to assess people’s grasp of AMS. Objective knowledge was consistently lower in 2003. For example, 78% of respondents correctly answered that ‘You are allowed to vote for the same party on the first and second vote’ in 1999, whereas only 64% answered correctly in 2003. It would appear that voters need reminding of how the system works at each and every election; they cannot necessarily be assumed to remember how it works from last time around.

\(2.108\) In the focus groups there was almost no unprompted awareness and minimal prompted awareness of the AMS or the Single Transferable Vote (STV), though some had heard of specific aspects of the systems. A few were aware of the party list system, and there was good awareness that the Scottish

\(5\) For example, according to the 2003 SSA survey, no less than 47% of those with a great deal of interest in politics thought that the outcome of a Scottish Parliamentary election mattered ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a lot’, compared with just 8% of those who said they did not have any interest in politics at all.
Parliament is elected in part by proportional representation. Many were also familiar with the acronym PR.

It’s a list system isn’t it?

Inverurie, 45–60

You’ve got two papers, one for the person and one for the party.

Glasgow, 25–44

2.109 Focus group participants tended to view PR positively and people in all age groups, including young and inexperienced voters, were comfortable talking about PR.

It’s good because each region is going to get represented equally.

Inverness, 25–44

2.110 There was also awareness in the groups that this will give a greater spread of parties in the Scottish Parliament.

That’s what is good about proportional representation, getting a mix of the politics rather than just one…party in power.

Inverurie, 45–60

2.111 SSA survey data suggest that voters’ knowledge of the electoral system may vary considerably depending on which particular aspect of the system is being considered. One feature of an electoral system is the task that voters have to undertake in order to complete a ballot paper. This part of the Scottish Parliamentary electoral system does not in fact appear to cause voters much difficulty. In 1999, 9% thought that it was ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ difficult to fill in the ballot papers, and in 2003 this figure had risen marginally to 12% (Table 16).

2.112 By contrast, voters do appear to have difficulty understanding how votes are translated into seats. The 1999 and 2003 SSA surveys found that 40% said that this was ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ difficult to understand. While clearly it would be a recipe for confusion if voters were to find the ballot papers difficult to complete, their understanding of how seats are allocated is arguably less important and appears not to have made any substantial difference to their willingness to vote. As shown in Table 17, in both 1999 and 2003 turnout among those who thought the way in which votes are translated into seats was difficult to understand was almost as high as it was among those who did not think it was difficult.

2.113 However, when people are told in any detail about the two different systems of election – STV and AMS – they appear to be even more confused than when they are told about just one of these systems. At the focus groups, the moderator provided a simplified description of each of the voting systems. Following this, it was clear that for most people, having two different systems of voting seemed complicated and difficult to understand. It was thought that confusion among voters would be likely to lead to spoiled ballot papers.
When people go to vote they have three bits of paper that they have to fill out in different ways, so if people go to vote, and they rank it on one paper that they’re not supposed to etc, then it will be a spoiled ballot paper. You might not fill out the complicated one.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

Many feel that AMS and STV create an additional concern to an already daunting process. There is evidence that an incomplete explanation of the systems could be off-putting to people who are already intimidated by the process of voting.

Table 16: Difficulty of filling in ballot papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complexity</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly difficult</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very difficult</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all difficult</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t choose</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Columns do not total 100% because respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ or refusing to answer have been excluded.
Sources: SSA surveys, 1999 and 2003.

Table 17: Turnout 1999 and 2003, by understanding of electoral systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to fill in/understand and voted (%)</td>
<td>Not difficult to fill in/understand and voted (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballot paper</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How seats are allocated</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: SSA surveys, 1999 and 2003.
Now that you’ve explained it, it’s not too bad, but if I had only a vague understanding then it might put me off.

Edinburgh, 18–24

Finally, the overall impression from the discussions was that voting systems themselves were not top of mind concerns for most people and there was little or no reaction to the impending change to STV.

Voter registration

The focus groups explored the subject of voter registration. It was clear from the discussions that there is lack of clear understanding of the process of voter registration. For most people, there is little recall of their registering, although there is a feeling that they must have done it at some stage and will need to repeat the process if they move addresses.

It was clear that there are a number of assumptions associated with registering to vote, the key one being that registration is automatic, either via the census or through payment of the council tax. Some believe that registration is triggered through payment of the council tax, but that a registration card is then sent for completion by the occupant at the address.

You have to return it and add anybody’s name on it who’s not on the list.

Perth, 25–44

For many young people, there was no clear understanding of how to go about registering to vote, and they had little impetus to discover proactively how to register themselves. Some did mention, however, that they could register to vote as part of the university matriculation process, while others tended to rely on their parents to take responsibility for doing it for them.

I don’t know (if I’m registered), I don’t know if my mum sent the leaflet back.

Edinburgh, 18–24

Previous Commission research (Understanding electoral registration, 2005) has found that some people choose to register to vote as result of a desire to secure credit. However, participants in the 2006 focus groups expressed concern that registration might negatively affect a person’s credit rating, and that it can enable creditors to locate their debtors. This may act as a disincentive to register, particularly for some of the less affluent people interviewed.

That’s the whole reason some people don’t register to vote, it’s ‘cos they’re owing money it’s a no-no for them.

Glasgow, 25–44

Because the majority of the sample was recruited as registrants it is not possible to arrive at any conclusions about non-registrants from the focus group work.
This chapter draws together the project’s conclusions as to how to mobilise people to participate in the 2007 Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections.

People are only concerned with what affects them individually, so tell them how it affects them in their daily life.

East Kilbride and Hamilton, 18–24

Institutions

3.1 A number of positive elements emerged in people’s attitudes to the institutions, and there is a potential for these to be harnessed in any campaign relating to the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections.

Scottish Parliament

3.2 The Scottish Parliament in particular is highly trusted and accessible. It is seen as having more integrity than the UK Parliament and as having Scotland’s interests at heart. In addition, it has a more relaxed and approachable image. The Scottish Parliament is thought to be modern, accessible and likely to listen to people.

3.3 However, there is a poor understanding of the powers of the Scottish Parliament, with most assuming that it has very limited power to make final decisions. There is also a poor understanding of the remit of the Parliament. There is evidence from the qualitative research that a description of the powers of the Scottish Parliament enhances assessment of its relevance – a key concern for voters – so this is one potential area for promotion.
A lot of people don’t know how much influence the Parliament and the local councils have, so I would emphasise that these people are making decisions that really affect your life.

**Edinburgh, 18–24**

**Local government**

3.4 The focus groups demonstrated a strong sense of ownership of local government, and most feel that their council is highly accessible and understands local people. When given a chance to consider, most feel that local government performs a highly important role in providing representation that is ‘in touch’ with the local people. This is an emotive and inspiring concept, although it is not a top of mind association for most. Though local government is accessible and important, some do not see it as a political entity but more as a service provider. A campaign could remind potential voters of the capacity of local government to provide representation to local people at higher institutions and to impact on daily life in Scotland.

We need to be told that an extra councillor isn’t just going to be another layer of bureaucracy, that it is going to actually mean something.

**Inverurie, 45–60**

**Messages**

3.5 As part of the focus groups, participants were asked to come up with ideas that may encourage someone to vote at the 2007 Scottish elections. People were asked to come up with reasons why someone would decide not to vote in the 2007 elections and then come up with as many ways as possible for encouraging this person to vote. Two key ideas emerged as motivating potential voters.

**Idea 1: Voting as a celebration of Scottish identity and pride in local communities**

3.6 The first idea that participants had concerned the pride of potential voters in their Scottish identity, and in particular their pride in the country’s tight-knit local communities. The key perceived benefits of the Scottish Parliament and local councils are their local knowledge and ability to provide representation to local people. It was felt that a campaign based on a celebration of Scotland’s communities could also appeal to the nostalgic emotions associated with voting, in its role of unifying a community and bringing people together.

**Idea 2: Voting as an expression of pride in Scotland as a nation and its economic and social potential**

3.7 The second idea was one which appeals to Scotland’s sense of identity but focuses on its potential as a nation. Participants felt that it would be good to highlight issues relevant to Scotland’s future, including its physical environment, tourism, health and education.
Motivating messages

3.8 Through both of these ideas it is possible to identify the message that each vote is valuable and will count.

Make a point of saying that ‘your vote will count’. I was saying to my mum and dad ‘who do I vote for?’ and they said you can’t do that. You have to vote for who you think is best. It is quite valuable. That is more interesting.

Greenock, 18–24

3.9 The tone of a message that might strike a chord with a potential voter takes into account the fear and boredom associated by some people with voting and avoids a tone that might exacerbate this. A gentle and non-confrontational tone that reassures potential voters that voting need not be daunting is most appealing. People within the focus groups also favoured a publicity campaign that included information about the overall voting process, provided this is communicated in a very simple, highly accessible way.

3.10 Many suggested including a celebrity as part of a campaign, to provide interest and cut-through. The ideal celebrity was seen as being both reassuring and humorous, and would have Scottish national characteristics with which Scottish voters could identify.

Maybe if they get famous people involved, because sometimes it is very boring.

Greenock, 18–24

Voting systems

3.11 Participants in the groups felt that there was danger in attempting to explain the complexities of the voting systems in too much depth. It was likely that people would fail to understand, and this would confuse and put them off rather than encourage them to vote.

It’s going to be really confusing. It will mean that people are put off placing their vote because they don’t know what to do.

Edinburgh, 18–24

3.12 To address this, participants felt there is a need for a highly simplified explanation of the systems, focusing on the process voting rather than concentrating on the detail of how the votes are counted. Finally, people thought it would be a good idea to be given an explanation of the voting systems in advance of the election, through advertising and media coverage.

You need something dead simple with a couple of pictures.

Greenock, 18–24
We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. Our mission is to foster public confidence and participation by promoting integrity, involvement and effectiveness in the democratic process.

Democracy matters