Public Attitudes Towards the
Implementation of Electronic Voting
Qualitative Research Report

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1 Summary

• This project forms part of the Implementation of the Electronic Voting study commissioned by the DTLR. The focus of this report is the attitude of the general public towards the concept of voting electronically;

• The research aimed to explore the attitudes of the public towards the implementation of electronic voting. In particular the research sought to understand the potential barriers to using electronic methods, and to investigate the information needed by citizens in relation to implementation;

• The research adopted a wholly qualitative approach. Twelve group discussions were conducted with members of the public.

Attitudes towards the implementation of electronic voting

• The implementation of electronic voting was generally perceived as progress and a modernisation of the electoral process;

• Typically attitudes to methods of electronic voting were linked to respondents’ attitudes towards technology, their access to different mediums of technology, and their ability to use these;

• Many felt that the introduction of electronic methods would offer greater choice for people when casting their vote. In all cases, the groups stressed that electronic methods should be made available alongside polling stations;

• Overall, respondents felt that in order to maximise the benefits of electronic voting they would want to vote at home;

The potential benefits of electronic voting were defined as:

• The increased convenience, speed and ease of voting if able to vote from home;

• A faster and more accurate collation of votes;

• Access to information in connection with candidates and parties, via website links;

• Those on holiday or working away from home at the time of an election could vote more easily;

• Concerns raised by respondents related in the main to security, reliability, accuracy confidentiality, access, and privacy.
Overall, the security of an electronic system was the main concern. Issues raised were the ability of the system to combat:

- Organised and individual fraud;
- Sabotage;
- Hackers;
- Viruses;

In terms of reliability and accuracy issues related to:

- The logistical capacity of the system – it was commonly believed the system would be unable to cope with the number of people trying to access the system and would ‘crash’;
- It was questioned whether the system would receive and correctly attribute votes cast;
- The loss of anonymity and confidentiality related to respondent's fears that if casting their vote electronically it would be possible to trace both whether and how they had voted;
- Concern was expressed that those without access to potential electronic methods would become disenfranchised. Also that the equity of the present system would be lost and that those without access would be stigmatised if using publicly available methods to vote;
- The issue of privacy was linked to the location of potential electronic methods. The privacy of the booth at polling stations was felt to be intrinsic to the secrecy of voting. If electronic methods were to be located in public areas, booth-like barriers would be needed to shield screens from general view;

Other concerns expressed included:

- The cost of implementation to the individual in terms of taxation and the cost of casting their vote. It was strongly believed calls or internet connection would have to be free. In a small number of cases it was suggested the money to be spent on implementing electronic voting would be better spent on service provision such as healthcare;
• A fear that some people, with little or no interest in voting, would cast random votes because of the 'gimmicky' nature of REV;

• The loss of the tradition and ritual of visiting the polling station.

Information needs of the public

• Although respondents had expressed a number of concerns in connection with the implementation of electronic voting, it was expected that these concerns would be addressed in order for the public to have confidence in any new methods for voting;

• Respondents wanted to be told how the system would work in terms of ensuring the security, reliability and accuracy of the system and the confidentiality of their vote;

• Awareness of the implementation of electronic voting was thought to be best communicated via a large-scale advertising campaign. Television advertising was thought to be the most effective means of communication. It was suggested that this should be complemented with radio, newspaper and billboard advertising;

• News reports and television programmes dedicated to electronic voting were felt to be a useful medium for raising awareness and offering reassurance to the general public;

• Whilst it was felt such an advertising campaign should be the responsibility of central government, information connected with the mechanics of how to vote electronically was felt to be best communicated by local government. It was suggested leaflets which gave clear, easy to follow step-by-step diagrammatic instructions of how to vote electronically would be required by the public. It was argued that such information should be 'jargon-free’ so that the information could be easily understood.

Willingness to use

• Overall, respondents were willing to use electronic methods to vote, however a number of issues would need to be addressed for them to have confidence in the system;

• Many voters wanted to use electronic methods to vote, with the internet and telephone being the preferred options. However, others were as yet undecided. Whether they would choose to use an electronic option was largely dependent on the reassurances given in answer to their concerns. For others their use of electronic methods was largely dependent upon the methods implemented. Many respondents would use the telephone to vote. Those who already had access to the internet or digital television said they would use these methods to vote;
The implementation of electronic voting was generally perceived as progress and a modernisation of the electoral process. Older respondents and women from socio-economic groups C2DE were less likely to use REV methods, except the telephone, to vote. However, they generally supported implementation, in order that others could vote more conveniently;

Whilst some older respondents welcomed the implementation of REV, others felt it was an option for the young and that they were unlikely to use electronic methods;

Those non-voters who could be classified as ‘time-poor’ would be more likely to vote if they could use electronic methods;

Those who were unhappy in connection with the current political system or choice of political parties would not be encouraged to vote using electronic methods. These respondents were keen to stress that the method of voting was immaterial to their decision to abstain from voting - rather it was the political system that they felt should be changed.

Conclusions

Both voters and non-voters wanted to become more fully engaged in the political process and wanted more information concerning political parties and local candidates. Political apathy, particularly amongst the young, was often linked to feelings of disengagement due to low levels of political knowledge.

Overall most respondents were willing to use electronic methods to vote, however a number of issues need to be addressed in order for the public to have confidence in the system. Reassurances given by the government in regard to the process of electronic voting will be crucial to the take up of such methods.

A variety of information sources will be needed to both raise awareness of the methods available to vote and how these are used. There is a need to state explicitly how these work and what processes are in place in order to ensure the security, and reliability of the system;

Irrespective of the electronic method(s) to be implemented, a confirmation that the vote has been received, and for which political party it has been made, will be needed;

A national trial of REV would go some way to allaying fears and would reassure the public that the system worked.
• The use of the telephone and internet were the preferred options for electronic voting, but respondents are keen that a number of methods be made available.

• In order to maximise the benefits of electronic voting to the public they should be able to vote from home.

• Electronic methods will of necessity need to be available alongside polling stations.

• The implementation of electronic voting may lead to the increased likelihood to vote of those who currently don’t vote due to time pressures.

• An electronic system would need to have instant access and be easy to use.
2 Introduction

The views of the public need to be taken into account when considering the future of electronic voting in the UK. Whatever approach is adopted, the attitudes and understanding of the general public will be pivotal in the success or otherwise of the adopted method. This report focuses on the primary research conducted by BMRB Qualitative in connection with public attitudes towards the implementation of electronic voting.

2.1 Research aims

The aims of the research were:

- To explore the attitudes of the public towards the implementation of electronic voting;
- To explore the potential barriers to electronic voting from the point of view of the public; and
- To investigate the information needs of citizens in relation to dealing with electronic voting.

2.2 Methodology

The research adopted a wholly qualitative methodology. Twelve group discussions were conducted with members of the general public.

Examples of a mocked-up voting website for the internet and ATMs were shown in the focus groups and volunteers were given the chance to cast a vote following three scenarios. Respondents used a laptop computer to view the site. The examples were projected so that the groups could see the site, instructions and what was happening when these were used.

Researchers from BMRB Qualitative, trained in the techniques of non-directive interviewing, carried out all of the fieldwork. Each group discussion was guided by the researcher using a topic guide, or aide memoir, which allowed for questioning that was responsive to the issues arising. Copies of the topic guides designed for this project can be found in the appendices to this report.

Fieldwork was conducted during October and November 2001. The group discussions lasted for an hour and a half, and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcripts were then analysed in detail.
2.3 Sample profile

Twelve focus groups were conducted with members of the general public. Voting behaviour was taken as the key variable. Behaviour at the last general election was used to determine eligibility. Six groups were conducted with voters, including those unable to vote, but whose intention had been to vote. The remaining six groups were conducted with non-voters. Other variables included:

- Age;
- Socio-economic background;
- Ethnicity (groups were recruited to include respondents from ethnic minority communities);
- Attitudes towards technology; and
- Geographic region.

Groups were held with four age categories so that distinctions in attitude towards technology and voting could be investigated.

- 18-25;
- 26-44;
- 45 to retirement age;
- Over retirement age;

Two socio-economic categories were used.

- ABC1; and
- C2DE.

The groups were regionally spread in order that regional differences in terms of attitudes towards technology be taken into account. Also the lower turnout in London suggested the need to spread the fieldwork across the UK. Groups were conducted in:

- Southern England;
- Northern England;
- Scotland; and
2.4 **About qualitative research**

It is important to note that the methods employed in this research are qualitative in nature. This approach has been adopted to allow for individual views and experiences to be explored in detail. Qualitative methods neither seek, nor allow, data to be given on the numbers of people holding a particular view or having a particular set of experiences. The aim of qualitative research is to define and describe the range of emergent issues, and explore linkages, rather than to measure their extent.

2.5 **Report structure**

The following chapter describes the attitudes towards voting generally, and respondent's views and usage of technology. The process of voting, and the awareness of postal and proxy voting is also explored in this chapter. The reactions to the concept of electronic voting is investigated in chapter four. Within chapter five the benefits, disadvantages and willingness to use potential electronic methods is discussed. The key benefits attributed to the implementation of electronic voting are described in chapter six. Chapter seven discusses the public's concerns in connection with electronic voting. The information needs, and optimum approach of communicating information is explored in chapter eight. Chapter nine describes the willingness of voters and non-voters to use electronic methods to vote. The final chapter sets out the key conclusions of the research amongst the public.
3 Voting behaviour

3.1 Attitudes towards voting

3.1.1 Voters

Typically, voters perceived casting their ballot as a fundamental ‘right’ within a democratic society. Voting was perceived as the public’s mechanism to introduce political change. Voters argued if you did not vote, you were not entitled to voice opinions with regard to the outcome of the election, or the subsequent term of office.

‘It’s no good moaning afterwards if you don’t (vote).’

(Voter, aged 45-retirement age, C2DE, South)

The behaviour of their family was an important determinant of respondents’ voting behaviour. For example, voters said they had been ‘brought up to vote’. In some instances respondents had voted because of pressure to do so from other family members.

The low turnout at the last general election was raised by voters as an important issue. Respondents felt an additional requirement upon them to vote because of the declining numbers of people voting.

3.1.2 Non-voters

Political apathy was a major factor affecting those who had not voted at the last election. Many ascribed their failure to vote as a general loss of interest in politics. It was argued Britain had become a two party country, with little difference in what the Labour and the Conservative Parties offered the electorate in terms of leadership or policy. Amongst some ‘old Labour’ voters there was a disenchantment with the party, as the political change which they had expected Labour to implement in their previous term of office had not occurred. Another reason given was simply that they were not inspired by the choice available to them. In general, feelings of discontentment with political parties and politicians were widespread amongst both voters and non-voters.

‘I think it’s harder to sort of feel like you’re really voting for a change … You’re voting for personalities rather than what they’re saying.’

(Voter, aged 45-retirement age, C2DE, South)

‘There’s no-one there I think that’s got something I can say “right I believe in what they’re saying.” ’
Amongst younger ABC1 respondents a lack of knowledge of the policies of political parties at either a national or local level had deterred them from voting. They had felt unable to make an informed decision and so had decided not to vote.

Many non-voters felt that under the current political system ‘your vote’s not going to count for anything’. In these cases respondents often supported the introduction of proportional representation.

In other cases, respondents did not describe their failure to vote as political, but rather in terms of the difficulties of motivation. In these cases voting was perceived as a ‘chore’ and a ‘hassle’.

‘I just didn’t get round to it.’

Amongst younger ABC1 respondents a lack of knowledge of the policies of political parties at either a national or local level had deterred them from voting. They had felt unable to make an informed decision and so had decided not to vote.

A lack of information was a common source of discontent among both voters and non-voters. Respondents felt that they were not given enough information about candidates, or their policies. It was suggested candidates should be more proactive in their campaigning. Respondents wanted candidates to ‘doorstep’ in order that they could engage with them. Whilst some had received campaign leaflets at the previous general election, others had not. Where information had not been received, respondents were likely to feel alienated from the electoral process and were therefore less likely to vote. Feelings of disengagement were increased by a perceived lack of information in connection with parties and candidates at a local level. Nearly all respondents were unhappy with the contact they had with candidates or information received from the local party. There was some indication that respondents were less likely to vote for the political party which they would traditionally support, rather they were interested in the policies of individual candidates at a local level. Whilst voters supported political parties at a national level and were keen for their party of choice in be in power, it was suggested that candidates from other parties may offer better leadership and policies on a local level.

The presence of candidates and canvassers at polling stations was disliked. It was felt that they should have contact with the electorate prior to election day.

‘They are just promoting themselves for the election. I would like to see them before the election making an effort to do something.’

(Non-voter, aged 45-retirement Age, ABC1, Scotland)
Much dissatisfaction with the current political system was expressed by non-voters. In many cases non-voters perceived their decision not to vote as 'voicing' dissent.

In cases where respondents were disengaged from politics it was largely due to a feeling that political parties and politicians had nothing to offer them on an individual level.

‘If you’re not going to do something for me, I’m not going to vote for you.’

(Non-voter, aged 45-retirement age, C2DE, North)

The use of negative campaigning was disliked, it was felt that this had undermined confidence in the political system, and led the electorate to believe ‘nothing works’.

‘They’ve got nothing to say about themselves, all they’ve got is bad things to say about each other, and I just get fed-up with it.’

(Non-voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, Scotland)

3.2 The process of voting

3.2.1 Polling stations

The process of visiting the polling station was largely enjoyed by respondents. The polling station was felt to epitomise the tradition and ritual of voting. This emotional attachment was increased where respondents visited the schools they had attended as children in order to vote. Voting was in some cases perceived as a social occasion, where they would meet people that they knew.

Generally, polling stations were described as easily accessible.

‘The Polling Station is almost at your door, they try and bring the Polling Stations as near as possible to your home.’

(Voter, retirement age, C2DE, Wales)

However, although described as ‘a ten minute walk’ or ‘just down the road’ some complaints were received in connection with the lack of car parking available.

Others dismissed polling stations as ‘primitive’ and the electoral process in need of modernisation.
3.3 Voting by proxy or post

3.3.1 Voting by proxy

A small number of respondents had either voted by proxy in the past or had been nominated to vote on behalf of a family member working abroad. Where respondents had experience of this method of voting it was thought to be easy to arrange and use.

Whilst many were aware of the term proxy voting they were unaware of the regulations governing this method. It was often thought that only the elderly or those with a disability were entitled to utilise this method of voting. Some, particularly younger respondents, were unaware of proxy voting as a method of voting.

3.3.2 Postal voting

Generally there was a higher level of awareness of postal voting amongst respondents than proxy voting. Some respondents mentioned that they had seen advertisements prior to the last general election in connection with postal voting.

One respondent had arranged to vote by post in the last general election as they had been on holiday on election day. Other participants who had been unable to vote because of being away from home on the day of the election said that they had not thought about applying to vote by post. Other voters thought that arranging to do so would be a ‘hassle’.

In general, respondents were not aware of the changes to the regulations governing postal voting which had been implemented prior to the last general election.

3.3.3 Benefits and disadvantages of proxy and postal voting

It was felt that these methods of voting were of benefit to the elderly, those with disabilities which affected their mobility, those in hospital at the time of an election and people who lived in rural areas. However a number of disadvantages were discussed. Appointing a proxy was felt to be problematic, in that the person nominated may not vote as requested.

The foresight needed to arrange a proxy or postal vote was raised as an issue by a respondent who had become ill prior to the election. As this was an unforeseen circumstance, they had missed the deadline to apply to vote postally.

Some mistrust of postal voting was encountered within the discussions. Respondents questioned how they could be sure that their vote had been received and counted. There was some suggestion that ballots could be intercepted by postal staff and either spoiled or disposed of.
3.4 Attitudes towards technology

Attitudes towards technology were wide-ranging and were linked to both the age and socio-economic background of respondents. Technology in the form of mobile telephones was widely accepted and welcomed. The internet was most likely to be used by the young, and male respondents. Socio-economic background underpinned older respondents’ usage and attitudes towards the internet, with older respondents from socio-economic groups C2DE having not used the internet. Those from an ABC1 background often had internet access at home.

Those that had not used the internet often felt that this was primarily for the young and would not consider using it.

Others more readily accepted technological advancement, but were still not wholly enthusiastic.

'It's like everything else, I suppose you get used to it.'

(Voter, aged 26-44, C2DE, South)

Amongst a small number, concerns were expressed that technology was damaging to society. It was felt that personal contact was being diminished through automated systems, the internet and text messaging.

3.5 Usage of technology

Most respondents had mobile telephones. Whilst a key source of communication for younger respondents, these were used in cases of emergency by older respondents. Many respondents had internet access at home, with usage linked to both age and socio-economic background. In some cases the computer and internet were perceived as their children’s or partner’s, and respondents were either uninterested or frightened of using this technology. This was particularly the case amongst women from socio-economic groups C2DE. One female respondent remarked.

'The children will grow up with it and that’s all they’ll know, but for me I don’t like it, I don’t go near it, I don’t trust it.'

(Voter, aged 45-retirement age, C2DE, South)

Generally, users of the internet of all ages were concerned about the levels of security the internet afforded. Whilst a few rejected the idea of internet shopping and banking, many did utilise shopping services, and a small number used the internet for financial services. However, respondents said they would shop only from sites that they felt were secure,
usually those of well known brands or sites which friends of family members had used safely in the past.

Few respondents had access to digital television. Those from socio-economic groups C2DE were more likely to have digital television at home.
4 Reactions to remote electronic voting

4.1 Definitions of electronic voting

Respondents were asked to describe what the concept electronic voting meant to them, unprompted. It was envisioned by many to refer to electronic voting machines as used in the USA. Others suggested electronic voting meant the use of the internet or telephone to vote.

The introduction of electronic methods was taken in some instances to be a means of increasing turnout at future elections. For others it referred to the modernisation of the electoral process.

4.2 Initial reactions to the concept of electronic voting

The concept of electronic voting was explained to respondents by the researcher. The explanation given was:

*Electronic voting would allow people to cast their vote using electronic methods, such as the internet, email, the telephone, ATMs or via digital television.*

Initial reactions towards the concept of electronic voting were variable. Generally, attitudes were linked to respondents' attitudes towards technology, their access to different mediums of technology, and their ability to use these. Although, in some cases, older respondents were more resistant to the idea of using electronic methods to vote themselves, they perceived implementation as beneficial for younger voters. However, some older voters embraced the idea of electronic voting. In these cases it was felt as they got older, and maybe suffered mobility problems, they would be able to vote via the telephone.

‘You’ve got to move with the times.’

(Voter, aged over retirement age, C2DE, Wales)

Many felt that the introduction of electronic methods would offer a freedom of choice. In all cases, the groups stressed that electronic methods should be made available alongside polling stations.

Resistance to the concept of electronic voting was encountered in a few cases. These respondents perceived little benefit to implementing electronic methods.
‘I think it’s been like this all these years and there’s never been any real trouble. Why look for trouble? Why fix it if it isn’t broken.’

(Voter, 45-retirement age, C2DE, South)
5 Potential methods of electronic voting

A number of potential methods for voting electronically were discussed during the focus groups.

5.1 Telephone

In general, automated telephone systems were disliked. It was argued that using such a system to vote would be both time-consuming and irritating. It was envisaged that the process would entail listening to a number of menus and pushing the relevant keys. Some older respondents were ‘frightened’ of using automated systems.

Voice-activated systems were not always trusted. Respondents gave examples of systems not working correctly. Some questioned whether such a system would work correctly if users had a regional accent. Touch-tone technology was felt to be easier to use. However, it was mentioned that older people may not have access to a touch-tone telephone.

A few participants were concerned that voice-activated and touch-tone technology would be difficult to use and may lead to votes being cast incorrectly.

‘If it was made difficult, like the way they do now, pressing all these buttons, well I couldn’t be bothered with that.’

(Voter, aged 26-44, C2DE, South)

In some cases, particularly where respondents had reservations in connection with automated systems, it was suggested that telephone voting could be executed via a call centre. Others strongly disliked this idea as they felt this would undermine the secrecy of the ballot. In other cases respondents would not trust call centre personnel to cast their vote as they wanted.

It was suggested that a telephone voting system may work best if dedicated lines were set up in order for people to vote. Respondents were aware of the use of these on television shows where the public were called upon to vote. It was suggested that this would work well if linked to interactive television programming regarding the election.

5.1.1 Benefits of telephone voting

Voting by telephone was often perceived as an easy, convenient, and accessible option by participants. The key benefit attributed to telephone voting was the ability to vote from home.
Many older respondents were keen that telephone voting be implemented. In these cases it was argued that this would be of benefit to them as they got older and encountered mobility problems or hospitalisation.

‘I mean as long as we can walk its good, we can do it, but if I was unable to get out and vote I would like to know that I can pick up my telephone and I could phone my vote through.’

(Voter, aged over 65, Wales)

5.1.2 Concerns in relation to telephone voting

Security was a concern for respondents in relation to telephone voting. It was questioned how such a system would ensure that only those entitled to vote actually voted. Respondents were fearful that people may cast multiple votes by using the votes of others.

‘Other people could use your vote. I’m not sure how secure it would be.’

(Non-voters, aged 45 – retirement age, ABC1, Scotland)

It was feared that using the telephone to vote would raise issues of losing anonymity and confidentiality. Some respondents feared that calls could be traced in order to find out how they had voted.

There were also concerns about how a telephone voting system would work logistically. It was envisaged that the system would not be able to cope with the numbers of voters using the system, and lines would become ‘jammed’. Few would be prepared to keep trying to access the system if they did not connect on their first attempt.

‘You would lose people because they would give up, they wouldn’t have enough lines.’

(Non-voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, Scotland)
Voting via the telephone was thought to be more difficult than internet voting as it is not a visual medium. Some respondents worried they may vote incorrectly, and questioned how this could be rectified. It was suggested that the system would need to confirm that the vote had been received and for which candidate it had been cast.

It was felt the system would need to be quick to use, particularly where a number of people within a household would be voting.

Respondents questioned whether freephone numbers would be used. Few were prepared to use the telephone if they would have to pay for the cost of the call.

5.1.3 Willingness to use the telephone to vote

Although a number of concerns were expressed in connection with using the telephone to vote, this method was found acceptable by nearly all respondents.

5.2 Voting via text message

Although some respondents used text messaging as a means of communication this option was overall rejected.

5.2.1 Benefits of text messaging vote

Younger respondents, and those that used text messaging, felt that this method would offer an easy option to vote, but few would be willing to use this method.

5.2.2 Concerns in relation to text messaging

Generally, this concept was perceived as too frivolous to be used in order to vote. Text messaging was perceived to be a 'fun' tool of communication, not suited to voting.

'It's too much of a serious issue voting. I text my friends silly messages. I couldn't think of texting a vote that could change the country.'

(Non-voter, aged 26-44, ABC1, South)

Older respondents felt it was not an appropriate method for older voters as they did not know how to send text messages. However, some older respondents thought that it may be beneficial if it encouraged younger people to vote.

'A lot of youngsters don't vote and I think they've got to think of new ways to try and encourage younger people to vote, which I think could be electronically, be it mobile phones or whatever.'

(Non-voter, aged 45-retirement age, ABC1, Scotland)
Those that used text messaging felt that it would be too slow an option compared to internet voting.

‘I could imagine pressing buttons for ten minutes and I can see the internet taking seconds.’

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)

Some concern was expressed in terms of the reliability of this method. Respondents questioned whether their votes would be received and counted for example, if they had experienced problems in the past in sending text messages. If this method was to be implemented a receipt of the vote would be needed by voters.

As with the telephone, the confidentiality of using a mobile phone was questioned. It was argued that calls could potentially be traced.

Again cost to the individual was raised as an issue. Respondents were not prepared to pay in order to send their vote by text message.

5.2.3 Willingness to use text messaging to vote

Few respondents were willing to use text messaging to cast their vote.

5.3 PC based voting - the internet

Typically, there was an expectation amongst many respondents that electronic voting would utilise the internet as a method of voting.

5.3.1 Benefits of voting via the internet

Respondents who used the internet either at home or work generally welcomed the concept of internet voting. The internet was felt to offer a quick and easy option for voting from home.

‘I would definitely do the internet. It’s just so easy, you could do it in two minutes. You don’t have to go anywhere.’

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)

5.3.2 Concerns in relation to internet voting

The security of internet voting was of particular concern to respondents. It was felt that such a system would be the target of fraud, sabotage and hackers. In a small number of cases, respondents were concerned how they could be sure that they had reached and were voting via, the ‘official’ website.
Access was a concern for both those with and without access to the internet themselves. It was suggested computers could be made available at public locations for those without access. However, others argued that it was unlikely that they would use this method, as they did not know how to use a computer or the internet.

'I just feel it would be wrong for people like me.'

(Voter, aged 45-retirement age, C2DE, South)

Older respondents felt that the internet was an option for those younger than themselves and users of the internet. It was generally believed that the use of such technology was generational and that in the near future everyone would use computers and the internet.

The reliability of internet voting caused much concern amongst respondents. Technology, even among PC and internet users, was often found to be problematic, and it was suggested voting would be disrupted due to ‘glitches’ in the system. It was also doubted whether voters would be able to access a voting site due to the number of people voting.

Respondents were concerned about the reliability of the potential site. It was feared that the system may simply ‘lose’ their vote, or record it incorrectly. All of the groups agreed that a confirmation which stated that the vote had been received, and for which party it had been cast, was of critical importance. Having such a receipt was likely to reduce fears of reliability and inaccuracy.

The cost of logging on to the internet and voting was discussed. Respondents were unwilling to pay to vote, and the issue was raised as to how connection for the purpose of voting would be made free.

5.3.3 Willingness to vote using the internet

Those with access to the internet supported the concept of internet voting. However, older respondents and women were less likely to favour the internet as a potential method for voting.

5.4 Issues arising from using examples of electronic methods

Respondents volunteered to ‘vote’ using the mocked-up examples of a website and ATM in the group discussions.
The use of the examples highlighted a number of areas which could be potentially problematic for many sections of the electorate.

Whilst many respondents were keen to volunteer themselves and use the website, others, particularly older respondents and women not used to using computers, were often unwilling to do so.

Amongst those with experience of using a computer, the site was thought to be clear, simple and easy to use. The use of party colours and logos was appreciated as it was felt these made it easier to see who you were voting for.

To use the mocked-up electronic methods, a twenty digit PIN number was needed. Although this had been printed in large font, with a space separating groups of four digits, inputting this number was found extremely difficult by many respondents. The number of digits was found ‘unacceptable’ by both younger and older respondents. The maximum number of digits found acceptable varied between four and eight.

The site had been designed so that when the PIN number was input it was encrypted. Therefore each number appeared as an asterix on screen. This was found problematic by users as they could not see the numbers they had entered and led many to type invalid codes.

‘It was a real effort to get it done.’

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)

The PIN number was generally not thought to offer security. It was suggested that people may randomly change digits of their PIN number in order that they could make multiple votes. Others felt that people would make mistakes when inputting their PIN number and would use that vote rather than go back and type in their correct number. The screen which told people it would be illegal to do this was not thought to be a strong enough deterrent to stop such occurrences.

In some cases, confusion was caused as respondents did not know they needed to place the cursor into the box in order to enable them to use the mocked-up site.

The examples were found easy to use by those with experience of using a computer. However, difficulties were experienced by participants who had not used a computer previously. Problems were experienced if using the mouse to navigate the site. Respondents unused to using a computer found the mouse difficult to control, preferring to use the keyboard.
Also, in some instances respondents had trouble understanding the instructions. Words such as ‘click’ and ‘mouse’, which may be thought to be widely understood, were not.

‘With the best will in the world we’re all not as clever or intelligent as everybody else and this is causing me grief already.’

(Voter, over retirement age, C2DE, Wales)

Those without access to a computer, and fearful of technology, felt that it may further deter non-voters from voting.

‘If you’re not going to put a cross on a bit of paper, you’re definitely not going to go through that lot.’

(Non-voter, aged 45 to retirement age, C2DE, North)

The scenario which entailed respondents spoiling their ballot paper (see appendix) caused difficulties for many respondents. However, those that managed to do so appreciated the inclusion of the text box allowing them to send a message with their spoilt vote.

When asked to vote incorrectly, and change their vote respondents were unsure of how to do this. This was problematic as they expected a confirmation to be shown on screen as to how their vote had been cast, in order for them to check how they had voted. When this did not happen the vote was cast incorrectly.

It was felt that a voting website would of necessity need to offer clear instructions and be easy to use. However, it was argued that ‘it’s never going to be as simple as using a pen and paper’.

5.5 CD Rom

The idea of installing a CD ROM onto personal computers was also discussed, albeit in a limited fashion at a later stage in the research. Access was a key concern, as those without a computer questioned how they would vote. Some cynicism was expressed in terms of whether the CD ROM would work if it had been developed by the government.

Generally, internet voting was preferred to CD ROM. It was felt this would be an easier and faster option than installing a CD ROM onto a personal computer.

5.6 Electronic voting machines

Many respondents were aware of the use of electronic voting machines as a method for voting in the USA. In some instances this led to discussion surrounding the problems of the last presidential election, and so some mistrust of this method was expressed.
5.6.1 Benefits of using an electronic voting machine to vote

Generally it was thought this method of voting would be made available within polling stations. However, it was suggested that electronic voting machines could be installed in supermarkets, petrol stations, shopping centres, post offices and libraries. Having machines in a number of locations was thought to be useful, as people would not have to make a dedicated visit to a polling station, but rather vote when convenient whilst conducting other business.

Some respondents envisioned that the implementation of electronic voting machines would be a good way to introduce electronic voting. It was suggested that these could be introduced prior to other options in order that people would feel more comfortable and confident with the idea of electronic voting.

The idea of a touch screen system was felt to be beneficial. It was thought touch screens would be easier to use and aid those not confident with technology.

It was suggested that electronic voting machines would offer a higher degree of security than if personal computers were used to vote.

'It’s totally secure because it’s linked into the records at the government. It’s not like you’re at home on your computer doing it. You’re going to one place which is connected to one collection office.'

(Non-voter, aged 26-44, ABC1, South)

5.6.2 Concerns of using an electronic voting machine to vote

Older respondents were concerned that they would not know how to use the machines although, it was suggested that as these would be in a public space they could ask for help.

Concern was expressed that this method of voting would be slow as it would be likely that queues would develop at peak times.

Many respondents felt such machines would be of little benefit as they would still be required to venture out in order to vote. It was also argued that if machines were to be placed in public locations then they must of necessity offer the voter privacy whilst casting their vote.

'I wouldn’t want to be in full view of the library or supermarket pressing me buttons, I just like that bit of privacy around it.'

(Voter, over retirement age, ABC1, North)
5.6.3 Willingness to use an electronic voting machine to vote

Generally this method of voting was found acceptable. However, respondents expressed some reservations with regard to this method of voting.

5.7 Digital television

5.7.1 Benefits of using digital television to vote

Those with access to digital television were receptive to the idea of using their television to vote. Others who did not have digital television found some difficulty understanding how this method would work. Some respondents were aware that the analogue signal was to be turned off in 2008. It was thought that everybody would have access in the future and so this would be both a convenient and easy method to use, as it could be used to vote from home.

Voting via digital television was thought to be preferable to telephone voting as it would be visual and so easier to use, as you would be able to see what you were doing. The size of the television screen was also thought to be beneficial, particularly for older people.

5.7.2 Concerns in connection with using digital television to vote

It was questioned how this system would work. It was thought that if using a remote control to move through voting screens then this would be ‘fiddly’, and using a computer and keyboard would be easier. Those not used to using a computer or keyboard thought it easier to ‘zap it on the telly’ via a remote control.

Those without access were concerned that too few people currently had access to digital television to make this a viable option. Also, those who could not afford subscription to digital television would be unable to vote electronically.

5.7.3 Willingness to use digital television to vote

Many of those with access to digital television thought it would be easy to use. However, some reservations were expressed, particularly by women, in connection with the difficulty of using this technology to vote.

Generally, those with access to digital television at home were keen that such a method of voting be implemented. Those without access were keen that other options be implemented.
5.8 ATMs

The concept of voting via an ATM was overall disliked and generally rejected.

5.8.1 Benefits of using an ATM to vote

The only benefit attributed to ATMs as a potential method of electronic voting, was the vast number of ATMs available to use to vote.

5.8.2 Concerns in connection with voting via an ATM

A number of barriers were discussed in terms of this potential method of voting. The key concern was the perceived lack of privacy whilst voting. Respondents disliked using ATMs for financial services as they were not felt to offer enough privacy. It was often commented that people queued close to the machine when in use and could view the screen. The location of ATMs on the street also gave rise to fears of intimidation.

‘I wouldn’t do it at a cash machine, anyone could creep up behind you.’

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)

Respondents queried how they would access the system. The use of cash point cards was rejected as an infringement of confidentiality. It was also questioned how those without a bank account and cash card would use the system. An idea generated by respondents was the use of smartcards to overcome these problems.

It was suggested the use of ATMs would be slow as queues would develop at machines.

‘Everyone’s voting and some poor bloke just wants some money.’

(Non-voters, aged 26-44, ABC1, South)

Concerns were also raised in terms of the reliability of ATMs, they were reported as often out of use.

‘How many times have you went to the bank and all the computer systems are down.’

(Voters, aged 26-44, C2DE, Scotland)

The use of ATMs was generally felt to be inconvenient as voters would not be able to vote from home.

‘If you’re going to a cash point machine, why not just go to the polling station.’

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)
In a small number of cases respondents suggested that the use of ATMs would be ‘unethical’. It was thought that this method would lead to the commercialisation of voting.

5.8.3 Willingness to use an ATM to vote

Few respondents were willing to use an ATM in order to cast their vote.

5.9 Location for using electronic methods

Preference for the location of electronic voting was linked to both convenience and privacy.

Overwhelmingly, respondents felt that unless they could vote within the home, the implementation of electronic methods would offer no benefit over visiting a polling station. Respondents were questioned with regard to the issue of privacy if voting in the home. In most cases respondents valued the secrecy of the ballot and were likely to vote when alone. In other instances respondents said they discussed politics as a family and knew how family members voted, in which case they were unconcerned about privacy in the home. Others raised the issue of people either being coerced into casting their vote, or pressurised into voting for a party by a dominant family member.

‘There would be a problem I suppose when in some families the dominant member of the family would force a vote on other people.’

(Voter, aged over retirement age, C2DE, Wales)

Some older respondents said they would ask family members for help if voting electronically.

‘I think it’s confidential, but it wouldn’t matter with family obviously.’

(Voter, aged over retirement age, ABC1, North)

Few respondents were prepared to vote from work if voting electronically. It was feared that if using a computer-based method colleagues may look at the screen or voting may be monitored by senior personnel.

‘You’re giving access to your employer. Most of the computer systems they actually record what you’re doing, and even telephones are monitored.’

(Non-voter, aged 45 – retirement age, ABC1, Scotland)

Although it had been suggested that electronic methods, such as voting machines or computers, could be made available in public locations such as supermarkets, petrol
stations, libraries and post offices, many felt unwilling to use these. Privacy was expected in terms of booths surrounding publicly accessible methods of voting. Therefore the use of ATMs was rejected. Voting in an open space which was felt to offer little privacy was found to be unacceptable.
The benefits of the implementation of electronic voting

The key benefits attributed to electronic voting were convenience, speed and ease. It was felt electronic methods of voting would offer a convenient and fast option to the electorate as people would be able to vote at home.

'It instead of driving to the polling booth, registering your vote, driving home, it could take 25 minutes, half an hour. To send it on the computer is 30 seconds.'

(Voter, 45 to retirement age, C2DE, South)

As previously mentioned, voters were concerned with the decreasing number of people voting. It was suggested that electronic voting would increase turnout, as voting would become easier for those with busy lifestyles for whom going to a polling station was difficult. In addition, those away on holiday, or working abroad, would be able to access an electronic system and vote.

Younger, non-voters thought that if internet voting was implemented the voting site would contain links to information about political parties and candidates.

'It means you have a choice of getting your information, find out more before you get to vote.'

(Non-voter, 18-25, ABC1, Scotland)

In a few cases respondents argued that the count of votes would be more accurate if collated by an electronic system.

'I think computers make mistakes less often than people tend to, so you would have more faith it's counted properly.'

(Non-voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, Scotland)

Some mention was made with regard to the cost of electronic voting. In these instances it was believed an electronic system would be cheaper to run than the current expense to local authorities.

Electronic voting was believed to be of particular benefit to certain groups for whom visiting a polling station may be difficult: Busy people, those living in rural areas; the disabled specifically those with mobility problems; and older people.
7 Concerns regarding the implementation of electronic voting

Respondents voiced a number of concerns in connection with the implementation of electronic voting. These related to issues of security, reliability, accuracy confidentiality, access, and privacy.

As mentioned previously concerns were expressed in terms of the security of technology, including from current users of the internet. Whilst a small number of people were happy to shop on the internet, many respondents did not, due to fears of fraud. Those using the internet to make purchases were only prepared to use well established sites, or those that family and friends had used safely.

7.1 Security - concerns

A number of issues were raised in terms of the security of electronic voting. Respondents feared that an electronic system would lead to fraudulent voting behaviour both on an organised and individual level. In terms of organised fraud, it was suggested political groups may commit wide-scale fraud in order to further their own interests. It was also believed that an electronic system would enable individuals to cast multiple votes. It was thought they would be able to do so by changing random digits of their PIN number. It was suggested such behaviour would not only lead to the casting of fraudulent votes, but would also disenfranchise those whose PIN numbers had been randomly selected. However, it was pointed out by some respondents that the current procedures were not infallible. Eligibility and identity were not checked at polling stations which made it possible for people who were not entitled to vote to do so or for people to cast multiple votes.

Sabotage was a key concern with regard to the security of an electronic voting system. It was felt that the system would be a target for any group or individual wishing to disrupt the electoral process. The threat of sabotage was linked to politically extreme groups. However, many also feared that the system would be the target of hackers seeking either a challenge or publicity.

“They can hack, and have hacked into, what are the most secure computers in the world.”

(Voter, aged over retirement age, C2DE, Wales)

The effect of a virus on the system was feared. It was suggested that a virus could be used as purposeful sabotage, or if internet voting was implemented a virus could be inadvertently spread due to the number of people accessing the system from their own terminals.
7.2 Security measures

Respondents themselves suggested the use of PIN numbers during the focus groups. It was thought that name and date of birth, an identity card (if ID cards were to be implemented), National Insurance numbers, or postcodes could be used as a personal identifier. Others felt the use of such identifiers was unacceptable. It was believed if personal information was linked to the vote it could be determined both whether and how individuals had voted. It was mentioned that under the current system it could be determined whether individuals had voted.

A number of concerns were expressed in terms of the security of the distribution of PIN numbers. It was feared that these may be stolen or delivered to the incorrect address. To ensure that PIN numbers were not used by others changing digits of their own number, it was proposed that a code name could be used in conjunction with the PIN number.

It was also feared that people may sell their votes to others. However, it was argued that this could happen under the current system.

Given the problems associated with PIN numbers, it was felt that a smart card would be easier to use. It was believed smart cards would also offer a higher degree of security as it would be more difficult to commit random fraud.

The use of bio-identification methods was raised as a point of discussion. Generally, respondents felt that this was too ‘futuristic’ at present and not currently technologically viable. The logistics of scanning the electorate’s retinas or recording their voices or fingerprints was thought to be too big a task. However, many respondents were happy to have such information recorded if need be. Others were less enthusiastic and it was argued many people would not be willing to have such information made available to the government.

‘I think that’s really invading my privacy.’

(Non-voter, aged 26-44, ABC1, South)

7.3 Reliability

Concerns were expressed in terms of the reliability of an electronic system. These concerns related to the logistical capacity of the system. It was commonly believed that the system would be unable to cope with the number of people accessing it, and it would crash. Within the discussion respondents offered solutions to this problem. It was suggested that the period of voting could be extended for up to a week so that the system would not be over burdened in terms of the electorate voting over the course of one day. This was
dismissed by others who argued that everybody would leave voting to the last possible time available to them. The use of regional or local servers was also suggested. It was felt having one centralised server would increase the chances of the system crashing.

The concept of pressing a button or other interaction with an electronic system was of concern to some respondents. Compared to voting traditionally, where a physical mark was made on a ballot paper which would then be placed in the ballot box doubts were expressed in terms of the system correctly attributing electronic votes, or counting them. Respondents were keen that they receive confirmation both that they had voted and for which candidate the vote had been cast.

“When you do it in person you know it’s in the box and your vote’s going to count, whereas if you’re doing it by text message or just clicking a button on the internet, there’s no way of actually knowing that whoever counts these is actually receiving them. That’s the big thing that I’d be suspicious about.’

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)

7.4 Accuracy

Respondents who used computers at work or home were likely to feel that the counting of votes would be more accurate if collated by an electronic system. Indeed it was argued that the use of an electronic system would remove human error from the system. Those who had either little or no experience of using a computer suggested that people may lose confidence in the electoral process and outcome if electronic methods were implemented as they would be distrustful of the results. In some cases respondents felt that each electronic vote should be printed from the system and hand-counted in order to verify the result. Others argued that if this was to be done there would be little point in using an electronic system.

‘I think you’d have to trust the computer to just count it up.’

(Non-voter, aged 45 to retirement age, ABC1, Glasgow)

7.5 Access

Access was a key concern for respondents. It was felt that those without access to the necessary electronic methods would effectively become disenfranchised. It was suggested that although polling stations would be available to these people it would affect whether they would vote. It was feared that the equity of the current system would be lost, and those without access would feel stigmatised if using either a polling station or publicly available method of electronic voting.
‘I think bringing in new systems would make it very selective for certain groups of people, and people are going to get left behind.’

(Voters, over retirement age, C2DE, Wales)

In some cases it was argued that polling stations were likely to be abolished if electronic methods were implemented. Respondents were keen that a dual system of polling stations and electronic methods be made available to the electorate.

7.6 **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Some expressed concern that if voting electronically it would be possible to trace both whether they had voted and how they had voted. This was of concern to many respondents. The secrecy of the ballot was felt to be a critical to the electoral process.

7.7 **Cost**

Respondents questioned how much it would cost them as individuals to vote electronically. It was strongly argued that all electronic methods must be free to use. Whereas telephone voting could easily have freephone numbers, respondents were unsure how internet connection would be made freely available in order that people could vote without charge.

The wider implication of cost was raised in terms of how the development of such a system would be funded. The issue of the cost in terms of taxation was raised. Also some felt that money made available for the implementation of electronic voting would be better spent on areas of service provision, such as healthcare.

7.8 **The nature of electronic voting**

The ‘gimmicky’ nature of electronic voting was thought to have wider political implications. Some suggestion was received from voters that those who did not currently vote would cast random votes because of interest in the new system.

The loss of the tradition and ritual of visiting the polling station was key among older respondents. Some reservation was encountered that if people could vote electronically from home the nature of voting would change. Voting was perceived as a community based action which should not be taken into the private sphere of the home.

‘Voting is a communal thing in a sense. It’s something we do as a community to change the government, and I actually think that’s quite an important aspect of voting, for people to go away and do it in their own homes.’

(Non-voter, 45-retirement age, ABC1, Scotland)
7.9 Privacy

The issue of privacy was linked to the location of potential electronic methods. The privacy of the booth at polling stations was felt to be intrinsic to the secrecy of voting. If electronic methods were to be located in public areas, booth-like barriers would need to shield screens from general view.
8 Information needs

Although respondents had expressed a number of concerns in connection with the implementation of electronic voting, it was expected that these concerns would be addressed in order for the public to have confidence in the new methods of voting.

Respondents wanted to be told explicitly how the system would work in terms of ensuring the security, reliability and accuracy of the system and the confidentiality of their vote. Explanations of the provisions would need to be put in place to ensure it worked correctly. It was suggested a national ‘test’ vote would go some way to alleviating these concerns.

‘That it’s an incorruptible system.’

(Non-voter, aged 45 to retirement age, ABC1, Scotland)

‘How they are counted and how they can guarantee that your (PIN) number and details are safe.’

(Non-voters, aged 18-25, ABC1, Scotland)

Awareness of the implementation of electronic voting was thought to be best communicated via a large-scale advertising campaign. Television advertising was thought to be the most effective method of communication. It was suggested that this should be complemented with radio, newspaper and billboard advertising.

In many cases respondents felt that television advertising should be humorous, as this would ensure people took notice of the adverts. The current Inland Revenue campaign, which communicated the need to complete and return self-assessment forms, was mentioned as an effective method of government advertising.

‘If there’s an element of fun about it you’re more inclined to watch it, especially if you get somebody that’s quite famous and funny.’

(Non-voter, aged 45-retirement age, ABC1, Scotland)

It was thought that a television campaign would be the optimum method of demonstrating how to vote electronically. It was suggested that if people saw how easy it would be to use electronic methods they would be more willing to vote electronically.

News reports and television programmes dedicated to electronic voting were felt to be a useful medium of raising awareness and offering reassurance to the general public.

Whilst it was felt such an advertising campaign should be the responsibility of central government, detailed information connected with the how to vote electronically was felt to
It was often commented that advertising campaigns and information regarding electronic voting should begin in the near future. A long lead in time would allow people to become comfortable with the idea of voting electronically. Respondents commented that they were pleased they had participated in the research and were positive that the public was being consulted in connection with the implementation of electronic voting.

‘Every house should be notified, it’s a very important thing.’

(Voter, aged 45-retirement age, C2DE, South)

It was suggested that a telephone helpline would be useful for people to call if they had any queries regarding electronic voting.

It was often commented that advertising campaigns and information regarding electronic voting should begin in the near future. A long lead in time would allow people to become comfortable with the idea of voting electronically. Respondents commented that they were pleased they had participated in the research and were positive that the public was being consulted in connection with the implementation of electronic voting.
9 The willingness to use electronic methods - an overview

Overall nearly all respondents were willing to use electronic methods to vote, however a number of issues would need to be addressed for them to have confidence in the system.

The implementation of electronic voting was generally perceived as progress and a modernisation of the electoral process. In some cases older respondents and women from socio-economic groups C2DE were less likely to use methods other than the telephone. This was due to their general attitude towards technology, their lack of access to different mediums of technology, or their ability to use these. However, they generally supported the implementation of electronic voting in order that others may vote more conveniently.

In a very small number of cases respondents were unwilling to use electronic methods, due to a fear of electronic systems or disengagement with the political system.

9.1 Voters

In general voters said they would use electronic methods to vote. The internet and telephone were the preferred options. However, others were as yet undecided. Whether they would choose to use an electronic option was largely dependent on the reassurances given in terms of their concerns. For others, their use of electronic methods was largely dependent upon the methods implemented. Most respondents would use the telephone to vote. Those with access to the internet or digital television would use these methods to vote.

Respondents were keen that a number of options for voting, both traditional and electronic methods, be made available in order to give people a choice.

‘Make it the easiest way for people who want to vote to vote. If they want to walk they can walk. Computers, telephones, they’ve got the option to use what they want.’

(Voter, retired, C2DE, Wales)

Others however felt this may be problematic in terms of collating votes and was also thought to weaken the security of the system.

9.2 Non-voters

Those non-voters who did not vote due to time pressures would be more likely to vote if they could use electronic methods.

‘I don’t have to go out of the house. You have all day to do it, so you could do it at anytime, in fact I could do it from work.’
Those who were unhappy in connection with the current political system or choice of political parties were not encouraged to vote by the prospect of electronic voting. These respondents were keen to stress that the method of voting was immaterial to their decision to abstain from voting - rather the political system needed to be changed.

9.3 Increasing turnout

The low turnout at the 2001 general election was a source of concern for many respondents. Decreasing political participation was perceived as a threat to the democratic tradition of the country. It was feared that if turnout continued to fall, Britain would no longer be able to call itself a democracy.

The implementation of electronic voting was felt to have a limited influence in connection with increasing turnout. In a small number of cases non-voters felt that the idea that electronic voting would increase turnout was insulting.

'Surely, they’ve only got to look at themselves to say ‘hey, maybe it’s me’. They don’t think it’s them. They just think it’s because we’re too lazy to go and vote.'

(Non-voter, aged 45 to retirement age, C2DE, North)

It was suggested by many voters and surprisingly, non-voters that in order to increase turnout, voting should be made compulsory. It was argued that if this was to be introduced ballot papers should include a box for people who wished to abstain. Reference was made to countries such as Australia and Argentina where voting had been made compulsory.

Some non-voters suggested that proportional representation would lead to an increased turnout. In these cases, where respondents lived in constituencies deemed safe seats, they felt little obligation to vote for that candidate or to oppose them.

Younger respondents felt that education was a key factor in increasing turnout. Younger non-voters from ABC1 socio-economic backgrounds felt they and other young people did not know enough about politics to effectively participate.

'Increase their actual knowledge of politics, not too many people understand it.'

(Non-voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, Scotland)

Both voters and non-voters wanted to become more fully engaged in the political process and wanted more information concerning political parties and local candidates.
9.4 The suitability of electronic voting for different types of election

Electronic methods were generally thought to be suitable for use in all types of election. Many voters did not vote in local elections and felt they would be more likely to do so if they could vote electronically from home. It was suggested that electronic methods could be ‘trialed’ at local elections, in order that the public would feel confident that the system worked prior to implementation for a general election. If problems were to arise it was felt these could be amended prior to a general election. Others, however, disagreed and argued that few people voted in local elections and so this would not necessarily prove the system worked effectively.

It was generally agreed that if electronic methods were available they should be used in local, national and European elections.

Respondents were more reticent about the use of electronic methods in referendums. Many voters and non-voters did not support the idea of referendums as a political tool. It was felt that referendums would be swayed by those with a vested interest in the matter, or those with politically extreme views. Whilst a general election decided a four year term of office, from which a political party could be removed, it was felt a referendum would have far reaching policy implications which could not easily be overturned.

9.5 Spoiling ballot papers

Respondents were generally keen that, if voting electronically, people were still able to spoil their ballot paper if they wished to do so. It was suggested that a box could be incorporated which allowed people to mark that they were intentionally spoiling their vote. It was suggested this could be labelled ‘spoil vote’ or ‘none of the above’. The inclusion of such a category would allow people to register their discontent, whilst also lowering the opportunity of others to spoil their vote unintentionally.

*If someone has taken the time to do it they should at least make them do it right, why give them the opportunity to do it wrong.*

(Voter, aged 18-25, ABC1, South)
10 Conclusions

- Both voters and non-voters wanted to become more fully engaged in the political process and wanted more information concerning political parties and local candidates. Political apathy, particularly amongst the young, was often linked to feelings of disengagement due to low levels of political knowledge.

- The key factors which determined attitudes towards electronic voting and whether respondents were willing to use electronic methods to vote were linked to respondents’ attitudes towards technology, their access to different mediums of technology, and their ability to use these. These factors led some older respondents and women from socio-economic groups C2DE to reject the use of electronic methods, other than the telephone.

- Overall respondents were willing to use electronic methods to vote, however a number of issues need to be addressed in order for the public to have confidence in the system. Reassurances given by the government in regard to the process of electronic voting will be crucial to the take up of such methods.

- A variety of information sources will be needed to both raise awareness of the methods available to vote and how these are used. There is a need to state explicitly how these work and what processes are in place in order to ensure the security, and reliability of the system;

- Irrespective of the electronic method(s) to be implemented, a confirmation that the vote has been received, and for which political party it has been made, will be needed;

- A national trial of REV would go some way to allay fears and would reassure the public that the system worked.

- The use of the telephone and internet were the preferred options for electronic voting, but respondents are keen that a number of methods be made available.

- In order to maximise the benefits of electronic voting to the public they should be able to vote from home.

- Electronic methods will of necessity need to be available alongside polling stations.

- The implementation of electronic voting may lead to the increased likelihood to vote of those who currently don’t vote due to time pressures.

- An electronic system would need to have instant access and be easy to use.
Appendices