

# **Attitudes towards Voting and the Political Process in 2003**

**Research Study Conducted for  
Electoral Commission**

The  
Electoral  
Commission

**August 2003**



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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
National Views	3
The Local Elections	4
<b>Political Engagement</b>	<b>6</b>
Interest in Politics	6
<b>Electoral Arrangements</b>	<b>9</b>
Voting system preferences	9
Salient criteria for a voting process	10
Views of compulsion	11
<b>Electoral Registration</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Funding of political parties</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Awareness of The Electoral Commission</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Turnout in the 2003 Local Elections</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Methods of voting</b>	<b>20</b>
Voting in person at a Polling Station	21
<b>Reasons for not voting</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Opinion of local elections</b>	<b>24</b>
Interest in the campaign	25
Pre-Election activities	26
<b>Appendices</b>	
Statistical Reliability	
Social Class Definitions	
Marked-up questionnaire	



# Introduction

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This report presents the findings of a research study conducted by the MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of The Electoral Commission. It looks at key issues around voting and elections for The Commission's policy review process and the views of people living in England about the local elections which happened in their district on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003.

## Methodology

MORI interviewed a representative sample of 1,500 UK (including Northern Ireland) adults aged 18+ by telephone. Interviews were carried out from 2nd – 11th May 2003. Quotas were set by gender, age, working status, and Government Office region. Fieldwork was monitored closely to ensure the number of people in the sample living in areas of England where there were local elections on 1st May 2003 was in line with the true proportion of the UK living in those areas (these results are based on 1,026 interviews, or 68% of the UK population). Data are weighted by gender, age, working status, social class, tenure and Government Office Region to the known population profile.

In order to compensate for the tendency of people to overclaim on whether they voted, the results to the question asking people whether they voted in the 2003 local elections has been separately weighted by actual turnout, in order to gain insight into differential turnouts among different demographic subgroups. The turnout figure for the 2003 local elections in England (35%) has been produced by Colin Rallings of the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth.

## Report Layout

Following this introduction, the report contains:

- An **Executive Summary** outlining the main themes to emerge in this document;
- A chapter looking at **interest** in politics, news about elections, local and national issues;
- A chapter exploring **public attitudes towards electoral arrangements in the UK**;
- A look at issues around **electoral registration**;
- A discussion of **public attitudes towards state funding of political parties**;

- A look at **knowledge of The Electoral Commission**;
- A discussion of **public opinion towards the 2003 local elections**, covering **turnout estimates, methods of voting, reasons for not voting**, and **attitudes to the local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003**.

A marked-up questionnaire is appended. Where reference is made to other research conducted by The Commission, this refers to research carried out as part of The Commission's evaluation of the local elections voting pilots, and is reported on in a separate volume.

## **Interpretation of the Data**

### **Quantitative Research**

It should be remembered that a sample, and not the entire population of the UK has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. A guide to statistical reliability is appended.

Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of “don't know” categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the volume, an asterisk (\*) denotes any value less than half a per cent but greater than zero.

In the report, reference is made to “net” figures. This represents the balance of opinion on attitudinal questions, and provides a particularly useful means of comparing the results for a number of variables. In the case of a “net satisfied” figure, this represents the percentage satisfied less the percentage dissatisfied. For example, if 40% are satisfied and 25% are dissatisfied, the “net satisfied” figure is +15 points.

### **Acknowledgements**

MORI would like to thank Ben Marshall at The Electoral Commission for his help and advice in developing this project. Special thanks also go to the 1,500 people who took part in this survey.

### **Publication of the data**

As The Electoral Commission has engaged MORI to provide an objective and representative programme of research, it is important to protect The Commission's interests by ensuring that it is accurately reflected in any press release or publication of the findings. As part of our standard terms and conditions, the publication of the data in this report is therefore subject to the advance approval of MORI. This would only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misinterpretation of the findings.

# Executive Summary

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## National Views

- The level of interest in politics among the public has increased over the year, close to its historic norm, though this could in part be caused by the recent debate about the war with Iraq. Most people *say* they are interested in politics, news about elections, and local and national issues. While men are most interested in politics, women are more interested in "local issues". Interest in politics is at its lowest among young people.
- The majority of the UK public are satisfied with the current process of voting and the system of registering to vote. Preferences for voting methods are diverse, but around a quarter or more say they would be encouraged to vote if voting by post, internet, telephone or polling stations in new locations were available (though other research suggests that changing the system will have a limited impact; wider disillusionment with politics must also be tackled). Although the traditional method of voting is still the most preferred, there is evidence that people would like a choice of channels through which to vote. Half the population (particularly young people) are unaware of the recent changes to the law regarding postal voting.
- Privacy, security, convenience and ease of use are all seen as important criteria, with privacy and security the most important - particularly among voters. Non-voters are more likely to emphasise the importance of convenience and ease of use, confirming that introducing new methods of voting can have an impact (among at least some of this target group), as seen in the recent local elections.
- There is still significant under-representation of certain minorities on the Electoral Register - only eight in ten young people, BMEs, Londoners and private renters say they are registered. While levels of interest in politics and local issues are slightly lower among those not registered to vote, the difference is not vast, suggesting apathy is not the only cause. However, they are almost four times more likely to be dissatisfied with the system of registering to vote - perhaps a proxy for disillusionment with the political process as a whole. There is confusion about the current system of voter registration, with many (even among those who think they are informed) being unaware of "rolling registration", the Electoral Register "opt-out" and the need to re-register every year.
- Funding of political parties is not a top-of-mind issue for most people, and only a quarter feel well informed about it. Hence, attitudes towards state funding of political parties are confused and

contradictory. The public is hostile to state support of political parties and think individuals should have the right to make voluntary donations. However, the public are also concerned about inequality in election spending between parties and undue influence being exerted by wealthy people or organisations. So, while 63% think that political parties should be funded totally or mainly through voluntary donations, 70% think there should be a limit to these donations. It should also be noted that there appears to be some cynicism that this issue will improve the integrity of British politics (reflecting the theme that changing processes and structure may only achieve so much - people desire deeper improvements in politics in Britain); 56% do not think politics would be more honest if it were funded by taxes.

- A minority of the public (30%) are aware of The Electoral Commission.

## **The Local Elections**

- The overall turnout for the local elections in 2003 was 35%. However, this varied significantly for different groups:
  - Age: 21% of 18-34 year olds say they voted, compared with 49% of those aged 55+;
  - Gender: 38% of women say they voted, compared with 31% of men;
  - Work status: 28% of full-time workers voted, compared with 41% of people who do not work full-time (including the retired).
- Voting in person was by far the most usual method of voting, but this trend changes significantly in areas where the pilot scheme is in place. Overall, 27% say they voted by post, and this is particularly important to those with a disability, BMEs and social renters.
- Reflecting other research, confidence in the process of casting the vote at polling stations is high, with a very high proportion of respondents rating the ease of use and level of privacy of polling stations as good, and feeling the system worked in keeping their vote safe from fraud and abuse.
- Although the main reason for given for not voting is that "circumstances on the day prevented me", local elections have a negative image for a large section of the population. There is a largely negative attitude towards local elections:

- 43% think that voting in this year's local elections did not make a difference (this compares unfavourably to general elections);
  - 31% think that none of the parties stand for policies they want to see;
  - 50% think there is little difference between the parties.
- Six in ten people found the campaign "boring", even though 59% received written communications, and 37% say they discussed it with friends and family.

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# Political Engagement

## Interest in Politics

Three in five (58%) claim to be interested in politics, with 14% claiming to be *very interested*. The level of interest in politics has significantly increased over the last year; now just below the level of a few weeks before the 2001 General Election. It will be interesting to see if this is sustained over the longer-term; fieldwork for the 2003 survey took place just after an unusual period of political activity during the war with Iraq. Evidence from the 1970s suggests that the level of interest in politics has remained largely unchanged over the last thirty years.

### How interested would you say you are in politics?<sup>1</sup>

	Mar 1991	Apr 1995	Apr 1997	May 2001	May 2002	May 2003
<i>Base: All</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%
Very interested	13	13	15	14	12	14
Fairly interested	47	40	44	45	40	44
Not very interested	26	30	29	29	29	30
Not at all interested	13	17	11	11	19	13
Don't know	1	*	*	1	1	*
<b>Interested</b>	60	53	59	59	52	58
<b>Not interested</b>	39	37	40	40	48	43

*Source: MORI except May 2002 NOP/EC poll*

Just under two thirds (63%) of men claim to be interested in politics, significantly more than women (52%). Those under 35 are less engaged by politics, with more claiming to be *not interested* (52%) than *interested* (48%). Three in five (58%) of the middle-aged (35-54) say they are interested in politics, rising to 65% of those over 55.

There is no significant difference in the level of interest in politics among black and minority ethnic residents (BMEs) compared with the rest of the population. However, one in five (21%) BMEs claim to have no interest in politics at all, compared with 11% of people describing themselves as White British.

Interest in politics is significantly higher among those who say they always vote in General *and* local elections. Around two thirds of this group of "avid voters" say they are interested in politics. In contrast around three-quarters of those who say

<sup>1</sup> The measures for 2001 and 2003 are based on a representative UK sample. All other measures are based on a representative GB sample.

they **never** vote in General or local elections say they are **not** interested in politics.

Similarly, those who are interested in politics are significantly more likely to say they know a great deal or a fair amount about the way the Westminster Parliament works, the system of registering to vote, and the way political parties are funded at the moment, compared with those who are not interested.

Three in five people (60%) also claim to be interested in news about elections, with 40% saying they are not interested. There are differences by subgroup:

- Men are more interested than women;
- Those aged 35+ are more interested than those aged 18-34;
- Owner-occupiers are more interested than social renters;
- Rural people are more interested than those living in urban areas.

Around four in five (78%) of people in the UK say they are interested in local issues, with 21% not interested. Slightly more (82%) say they are interested in national issues, with slightly less (18%) saying they are not interested.

There are differences between subgroups in the level of interest in local and national issues. People more likely to be interested in local issues than their counterparts are:

- Women;
- Older people;
- White people;
- and those living in rural areas.

People more likely to be interested in national issues than their counterparts are:

- Full-time workers;
- White people;
- Owner-occupiers;
- and those living in rural areas.

As can be seen in the table below, while just over half (52%) say they know a great deal or a fair amount about registering to vote, a minority say the same about the way the Westminster Parliament works (39%) and the way political parties are funded at the moment (27%). Knowledge of the Westminster Parliament has fallen significantly since 2001 (39% vs 44% in 2001); fieldwork timing might be the reason here - the 2001 survey was conducted three weeks before the General Election.

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**Knowledge about aspects of the political process**

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	<b>The way the Westminster Parliament works</b>	<b>How you can register to vote</b>	<b>The way political parties are funded at the moment</b>
<i>Base: All (1,500)</i>	%	%	%
A great deal	8	14	5
A fair amount	31	38	22
Just a little	30	29	32
Hardly anything at all	23	13	29
Never heard of	8	5	11
Don't know	1	2	2

*Source: MORI*

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# Electoral Arrangements

Around three-quarters (74%) of people are satisfied with *the process of voting* in the UK, a significant increase on 2002, when 70% were satisfied. Those who say they voted in the 2003 local elections are more satisfied (86%) than those who say they did not (67% satisfied).

What dissatisfaction there is is more likely to be found among men, middle aged people (35-54), full-time workers, and those dissatisfied with the system of registering to vote.

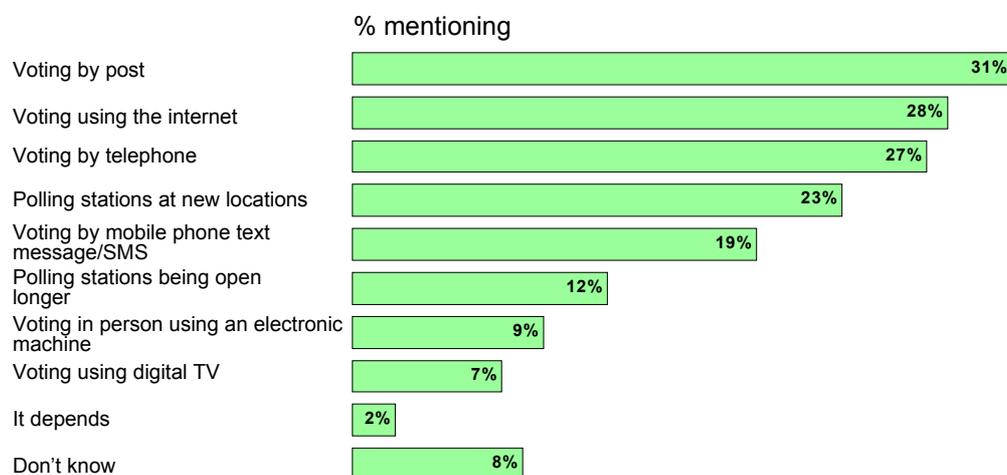
As in 2002, there is no significant difference in levels of satisfaction with *the system of registering to vote* as opposed to the *process*. Three-quarters (75%) say they are satisfied with the system of voter registration with one in ten (11%) dissatisfied. Satisfaction with registering to vote has not changed significantly over the last year.

## Voting system preferences

People's preferences on methods of voting are diverse, with no method emerging as a clear winner. Three in ten (31%) say that voting by post would be most likely to encourage them to vote at the next election, followed by voting using the internet (28%) and voting by telephone (27%). Almost a quarter say they would be encouraged to vote if there were polling stations at new locations such as railway stations and supermarkets (23%). However, we know from other research for The Commission that very few people claim to vote, or not to vote, because of the voting system - wider attitudes to politics play a more important role.

### Which voting method would encourage people to vote?

Q Please tell me which one or two, if any, would be most likely to encourage you personally to vote at the next election in your area



Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

Source: MORI

When asked how they would prefer to vote if they had a choice, in person at a polling station is still the most preferred method of voting, stated by a third of all people in the UK. However, opinions differ among subgroups. While almost half of those aged 55+ would prefer voting in person at a polling station, younger people see internet voting as the most preferred option, and among full-time workers internet voting is as popular a preference as polling station voting. This is likely to reflect some demand for the voting process to reflect the lifestyles of these groups. Overall, one in five would prefer to vote by post and 17% would prefer to use the internet.

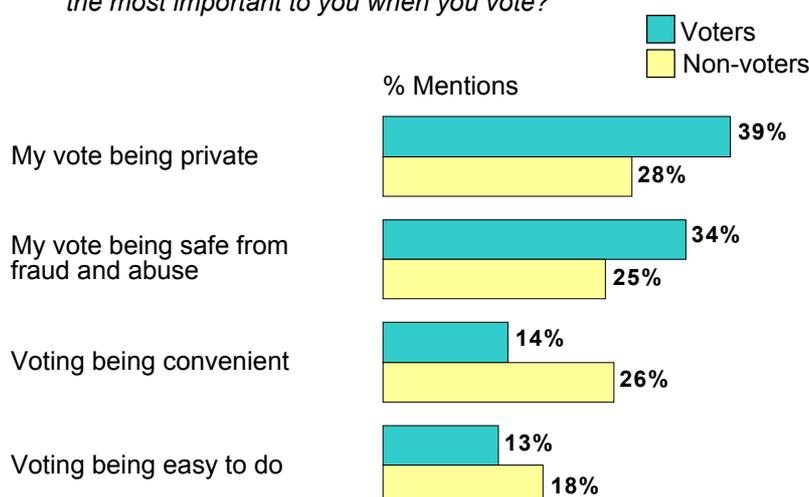
Again, there is no clear winner, suggesting that people would like to have a choice of channels to vote.

## Salient criteria for a voting process

There is no public consensus on the most salient aspect of the voting process. Privacy (seen as most important by 33%) and safety from fraud or abuse (30%) are seen as most important. However, convenience and ease of use are significantly more important to non-voters in the local elections than to voters, who are more likely to emphasise privacy and security. It should also be noted that respondents in focus groups tended to express more concern over security than privacy.

### Most Important Criteria for the Electoral Process

Q Thinking generally about elections, which of the following would you say is the most important to you when you vote?



Base: All those in areas where there were local elections on 1st May 2003 (1,026)

Source: MORI

Before the General Election in 2001, the law was changed so that all registered voters (except those in Northern Ireland) could obtain a postal vote if they wanted one. However, when people were asked if they were aware of this change in the law, nearly half of all Britons (48%) are still unaware of this change. Awareness of this is again particularly low amongst the younger age groups (60% of 18-34 year olds are unaware the law has changed, compared with 34% of those aged 55+), and BMEs (60% of whom are unaware).

Half of people (51%) say they would be interested in requesting a postal vote prior to the next election where they live. There are significant differences by gender, disability and ethnicity:

- Women are more interested in requesting a postal vote than men (56% vs 46%);
- Three in five (59%) of those with a disability are interested compared with 50% of those who are not disabled;
- Three in five (60%) of BMEs are interested, compared with just under half (48%) of whites.

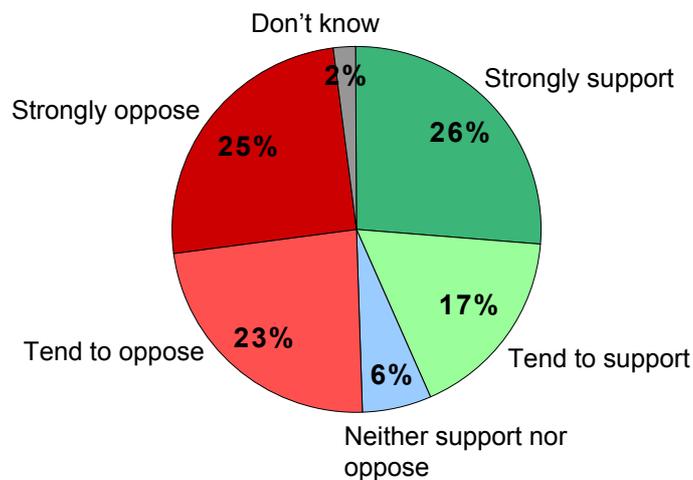
Interest in requesting a postal vote before the next election is higher among those who were not aware of the change in the law (57% of whom are interested), compared with those who were aware (45%). However, a significant minority (42%) of those not aware of the change in the law are not interested in requesting a postal vote in any event.

## Views of compulsion

In the qualitative research some respondents expressed the view that one way of increasing participation in the electoral process would be to make voting compulsory. Nationally, public opinion is evenly divided on the subject, and few (8%) are prepared to give an opinion either way. On balance, more oppose (48%) the introduction of compulsory voting than support it (43%).

### Compulsory voting?

Q Please tell me whether you support or oppose making voting in elections compulsory



Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

Source: MORI

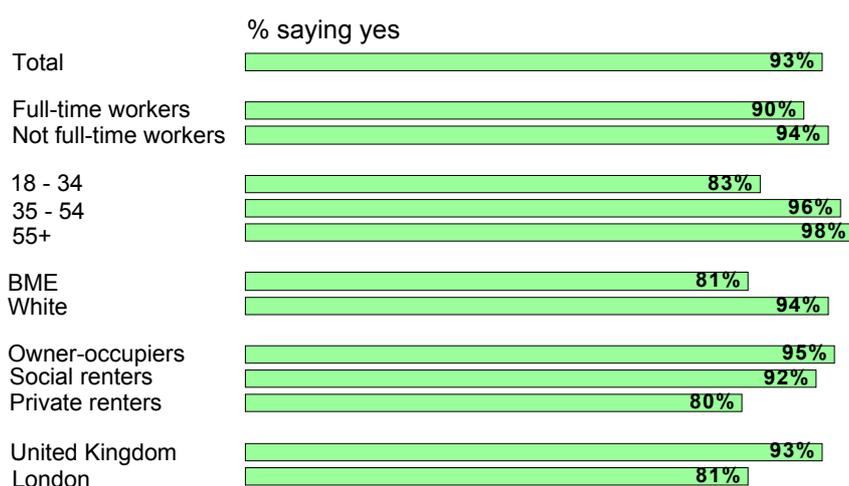
# Electoral Registration

As noted above, three quarters (75%) of people in the UK are satisfied with the system of registering to vote, mirroring last years results.

The vast majority of people (93%) in the UK recall being registered to vote, with 5% saying they are not. This is fewer than the 96% who said they were registered to vote in MORI's work for The Electoral Commission in 2001. Men, those aged 18-34, full-time workers, BMEs, private renters and those living in urban areas (especially London), as they traditionally have been, are significantly less likely to be registered than their counterparts. This mirrors what was found in 2001 when those aged 18-24 and ethnic minorities were significantly less likely to say they were registered to vote compared with the population as a whole.

## Registered to vote by subgroup

Q As far as you know, are you registered to vote or not?



Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

Source: MORI

The most common reason for not registering to vote was having 'just moved house', mentioned by almost a quarter (23%), followed by 'not knowing how to register' (10%) and 'not being eligible to vote' (9%).

A lack of interest in politics can in part explain people not registering to vote, although just over half (52%) of those who are not registered say they are interested in politics compared with 58% overall. Almost three quarters (71%) of those who are not registered say they are interested in local issues, again, just lower than the national figure at 78%. However, two-fifths of those not registered to vote say they are dissatisfied with the system of registering to vote (41%), compared with only 11% overall.

There appears to be considerable confusion about the current system of voter registration. Currently, people in a household need to register to vote every year even if the circumstances of people living in the household don't change. Just over half (53%) of the UK population are aware of this, but 44% think they do not have to re-register unless their circumstances change. Although knowledge of the way the system works was higher amongst people who claim to know a *great deal* or a *fair amount* about the registration system (59% being correct, compared with 47% of those who say they know little or nothing), two out of five of this group still incorrectly stated that people don't have to register every year. There is confusion across all subgroups, but particularly among men and those aged 18-34. Around half (49%) of those not registered to vote are aware you need to register every year.

The recent change to "rolling registration", where people can register to vote at any time of the year, does not appear to be widely known, with three out five (59%) believing that the old system of registering in the autumn is still in place. Again, a significant number of those that claim to know a *great deal* or *fair amount* about the process (55%), still thought the old system was in operation. Among sub-groups knowledge of "rolling registration" is significantly higher among men, younger people, and full-time workers - perhaps the groups most likely to have taken advantage of it. There is no significant difference in awareness of "rolling registration" according to whether people are registered to vote or not.

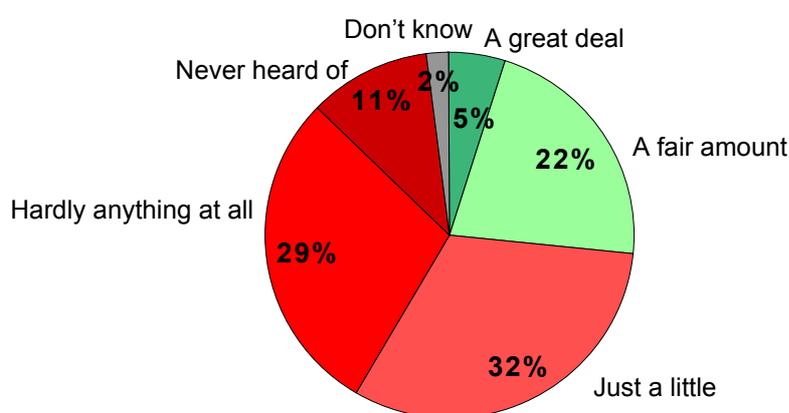
Only one in five (20%) people are aware that they can opt out of the electoral register that is available for sale. There are few differences in awareness among subgroups, although younger people are less aware of the "opt-out" option than other age groups, and those in shire England are more aware of the "opt-out" than those living in areas of the UK where there is unitary local government.

## Funding of political parties

Few people feel informed about how political parties are funded at the moment. Just over a quarter (27%) say they know a great deal or a fair amount, with 5% saying they know a *great deal*. Most (61%) say they know just a little or hardly anything at all.

### Knowledge of funding of political parties

Q How much do you feel you know about the way political parties are funded at the moment?



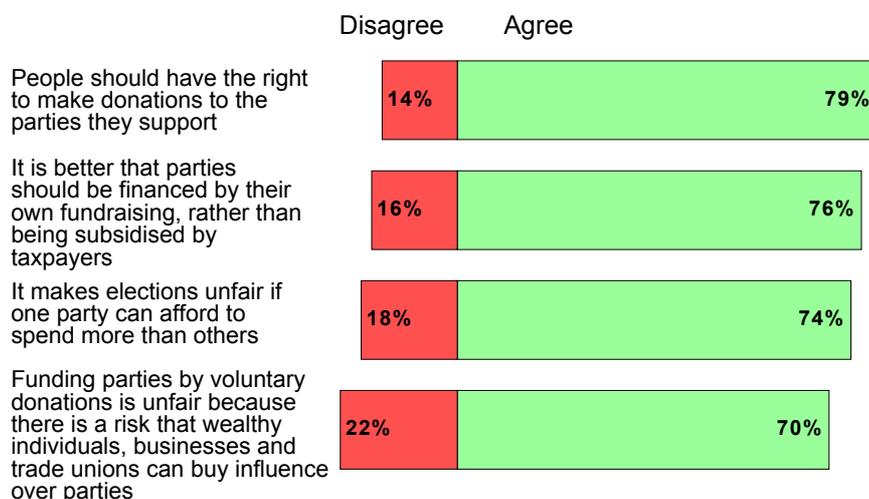
Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

Source: MORI

Reflecting this low level of awareness (and also the fact that many people may not have considered this issue before), views on state funding are somewhat confused and inconsistent. The main theme that emerges is the instinctive public hostility to political parties being funded by taxpayers' money. Three quarters (76%) think it is better that parties should be financed by their own fundraising, rather than being subsidised by taxpayers, with 16% disagreeing. Over half (53%) *strongly agree* that parties should rely on their own fundraising abilities. Likewise, most (56%) do not think politics would be more honest if parties were funded through taxes.

## Attitudes towards funding of political parties

Q I am going to read out a number of statements some people have made. For each one, please tell me whether you agree or disagree...



Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

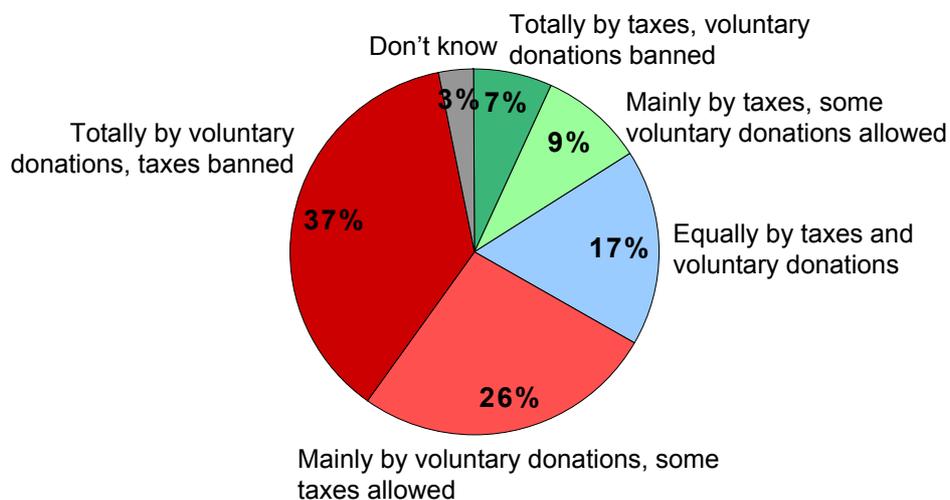
Source: MORI

Although people are strongly supportive of the principle that people should have the right to make donations to the parties they support (79% agree with this), the majority *also* feel that funding parties by voluntary donations is unfair because there is a risk that wealthy individuals, businesses and trade unions can buy influence over parties (70% agree). Similarly, three-quarters feel that elections are unfair if one party can spend more than others, despite their antipathy towards state funding, and support for the individual's right to donate. Given these different views then, we find that 70% think that there should be a limit on how much people can donate to political parties.

When presented with a series of options for the funding of political parties, the majority (63%) think they should be mainly or wholly funded by voluntary donations. This compares with the 16% who think they should be mainly or wholly funded by the taxpayer.

### How should political parties be funded?

Q Which of the following best reflects your view?



Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

Source: MORI

Views are consistent across subgroups, with no significant difference dependent on, for example, levels of knowledge about Parliament or voter registration. However, those who are interested in politics are more likely to favour total or partial state funding of political parties (20% favour this), compared with those who are not interested in politics (12% who favour state funding).

There is some hostility towards political parties themselves. Much of this was demonstrated in the qualitative research (from voters and non-voters) and a third (33%) do not think that political parties are so important for democracy that they should not be allowed to go bankrupt. There is scepticism about whether state funding would improve the integrity of British politics, with 31% thinking politics would be more honest if parties were funded through taxes - 56% disagree.

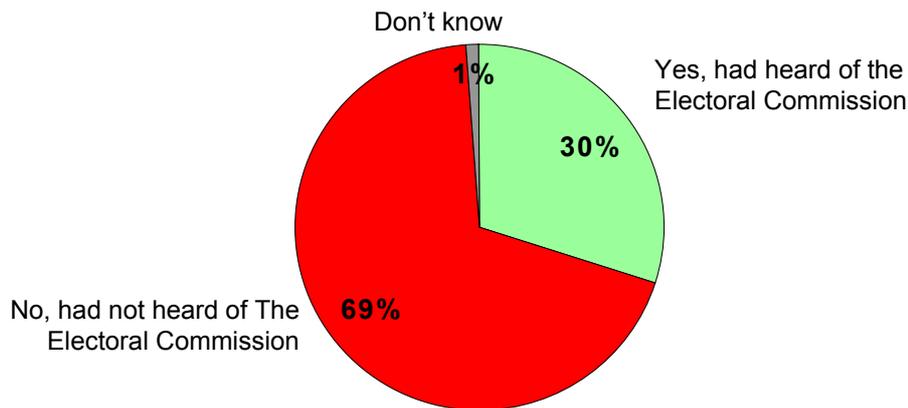
# Awareness of The Electoral Commission

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Seven in ten members of the public have not heard of The Electoral Commission. Awareness is particularly low amongst women and those not in full-time work. Three in five (61%) of those that had heard of The Electoral Commission were men. Nearly half of those who claim to have a *great deal* or *fair amount* of knowledge of parliament were aware of the organisation, as did two in five of those who said they were *interested* in politics. Awareness of the Electoral Commission is fairly consistent across demographic subgroups.

## Knowledge of The Electoral Commission

Q Before this interview had you heard of The Electoral Commission or not?



Base: 1,500 UK adults 18+, 2nd - 11th May 2003

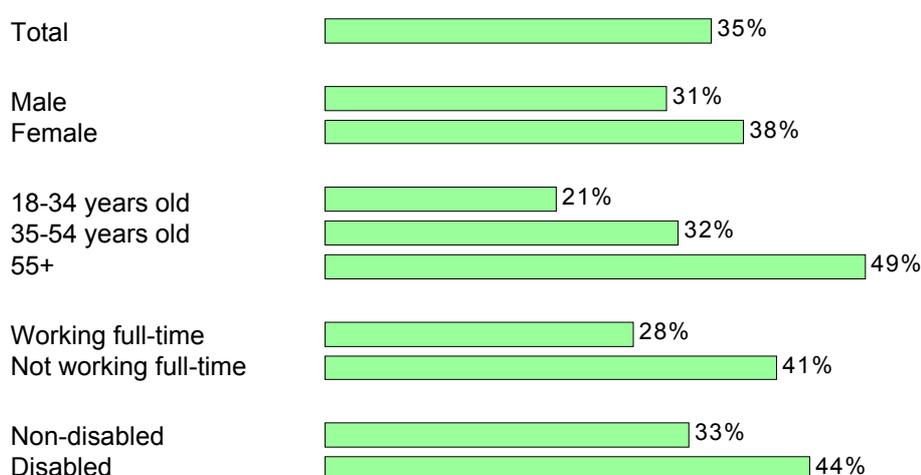
Source: MORI

# Turnout in the 2003 Local Elections

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In areas where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003, one in three people (35%) voted in those elections, while two thirds of people (65%) did not<sup>2</sup>.

## Voter turnout in local council elections



Base: All who live in areas where local elections were taking place 1 May 2003 (1,026) Source: MORI

A higher proportion of women voted, with 38% casting their vote compared to 31% of men.

There was a significant variation in voting rates between age groups, with people more likely to have voted the older they are. One in five of those aged between 18 and 34 voted, rising to one in three of 35-54 year olds, and increasing again to half of those aged 55 and over.

Two in five of those not working full-time voted (including retired people, see age above), a higher proportion than those in full time employment where less than three in ten cast their vote. There was a higher rate of voting among those with a disability where 44% of people voted, compared with only 33% of those without a disability. This result may again be a factor of age rather than disability, as those over 55 are more likely to have a disability than younger groups.

A significantly higher proportion of home owners voted than those renting privately. Over one in three people (37%) who owned their property or held a

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<sup>2</sup> The turnout figure for the 2003 local elections in England has been produced by Colin Rallings of the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth.

mortgage voted compared to just one in five (21%) of those in privately rented accommodation. Again this may be partly related to the different age structures of these groups; those who own their property are also likely to be older.

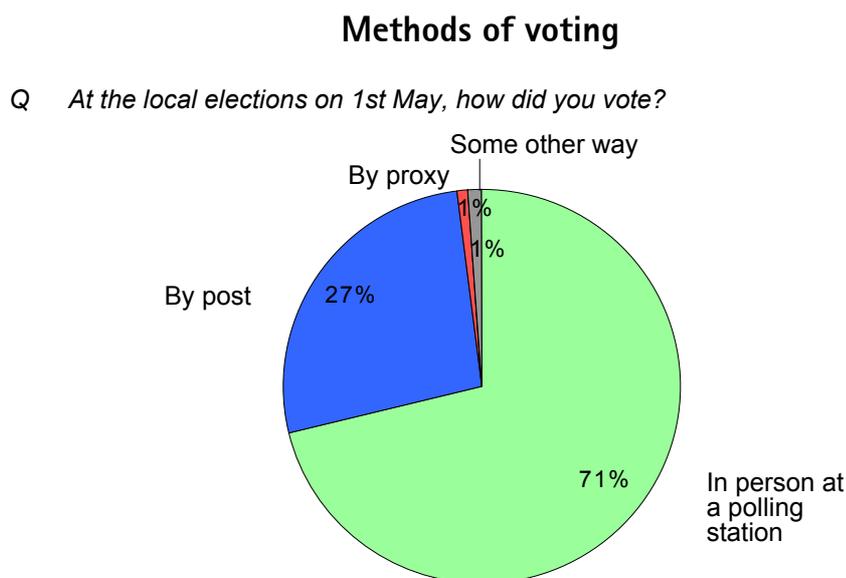
In areas where pilot schemes were in place, a higher proportion of people voted at 42%, compared to a 33% turnout in other areas. This is unsurprising, given that 33 of the 59 electoral pilots were all-postal ballots, and we know that significant increases in turnout have been recorded in all postal ballots.

Three-quarters (77%) of non-voters on 1<sup>st</sup> May claim they would have voted had there been a General Election on the same day. Although we should be sceptical about such claims (turnout was 59% at the last General Election), it does indicate that having what are perhaps seen as more salient elections on the same day as the local elections could boost turnout at local elections. It will be interesting to see the turnout figures in London in 2004, when the Mayoral, GLA and European elections will take place on the same day as the London local elections. The results to this question confirm there is a hard core of non-voters to whom what elections are being held will make little difference to their propensity to turnout - 36% of people who say they rarely or never vote at local elections say they would not have voted if there had been a General Election on the same day.

## Methods of voting

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By far the most popular method of voting was in person at a polling station, with seven out of ten voters (71%) choosing this method. Almost all other voting was done by post with nearly three in ten using the postal vote (27%). Just 1% voted by proxy.



Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they did vote (509)

Source: MORI

There was little difference between gender and age groups as to the preferred voting method and these groups reflected the overall trend to vote in person at a polling station. This differs, however, for those with a disability, and social renters:

- Only just over half (54%) of those with a disability chose to vote in person, with a significant proportion (44%) choosing instead to vote by post;
- While over seven in ten (73%) of owner-occupiers voted in person, only 57% of social renters did so. As with the disabled, the postal vote was the alternative method used with 43% of social renters posting their vote, compared to just 25% of owner-occupiers.

### The Effect of Pilot Schemes

Significantly, as would be expected the pilot schemes reduced the proportion voting in person.

- Only one in four voters in pilot scheme areas chose to vote in person. The postal vote was the most popular method here with over seven in ten voters (71%) casting their vote by post.

## **Voting in person at a Polling Station**

### **Ease of use and convenience**

As in other qualitative research carried out for The Commission, satisfaction with the current system of voting in a polling station is high. Of those that voted at a polling station, almost all (98%) found it easy to do.

The majority of people also found voting at a polling station *convenient* (94%). There were however some significant differences in opinion:

- Older voters (aged 55+) are more likely than younger people (aged 18-34) to find the level of convenience *very* good (76% compared to 43%).
- Those who say they always vote in general elections are also far more likely to have found the convenience *very* good (69%) compared to those who rarely vote (16%).

### **Fraud and Abuse**

When asked to rate voting at a polling station in terms of being safe from fraud or abuse, most voters (87%) rated it good for being safe from fraud or abuse. The balance of opinion among social renters, young voters and BMEs was more negative than among other groups.

### **Privacy**

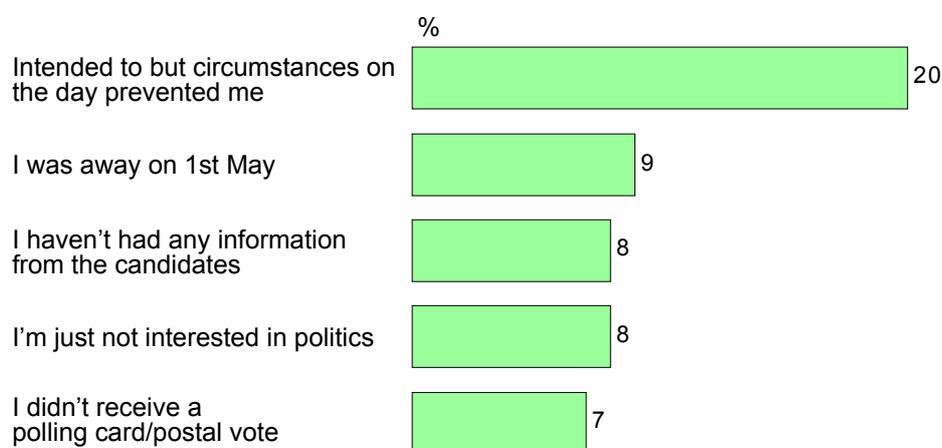
Very few voters are concerned about privacy in polling stations, with nineteen in twenty (95%) believing privacy to be either very or fairly good.

## Reasons for not voting

The most common reason given for not voting is 'I really intended to vote but circumstances on the day prevented me', with one in five non-voters citing this as a reason. Those with a disability are more likely than average to state this (34%). By contrast, those in rural areas are less likely to give this as a reason (15% compared with 24% of their urban counterparts).

### Reasons for not voting in local elections

Q For what reason did you not vote?



Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they did not vote (514)

Source: MORI

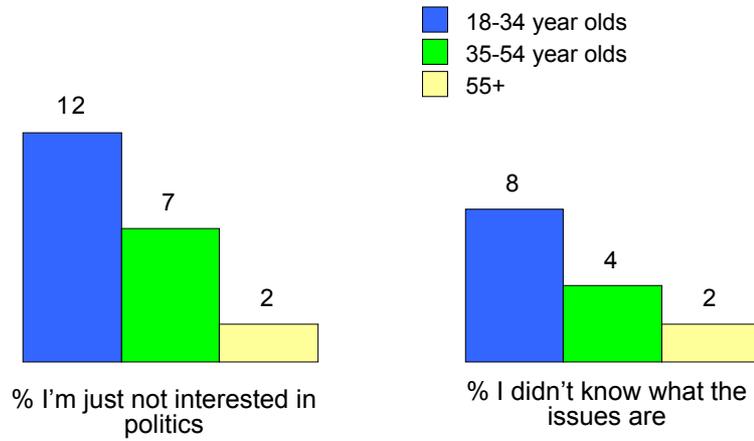
One in eleven say they were away on the date of the election (9%). Other reasons for not voting are a lack of information from candidates, no interest in politics (8% each respectively) or not receiving a polling card (7%).

Notably, while only 5% of people stated 'I didn't know there were local elections' as a reason for not voting, this is much higher for BMEs where one in five (20%) say this was why they did not vote.

Those in the younger age group are more likely than older non-voters to say they did not vote because they are not interested in politics (12% compared with 2% of over 55s).

## Reasons for non-voting

Q For what reasons did you not vote?



Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they did not vote (514)

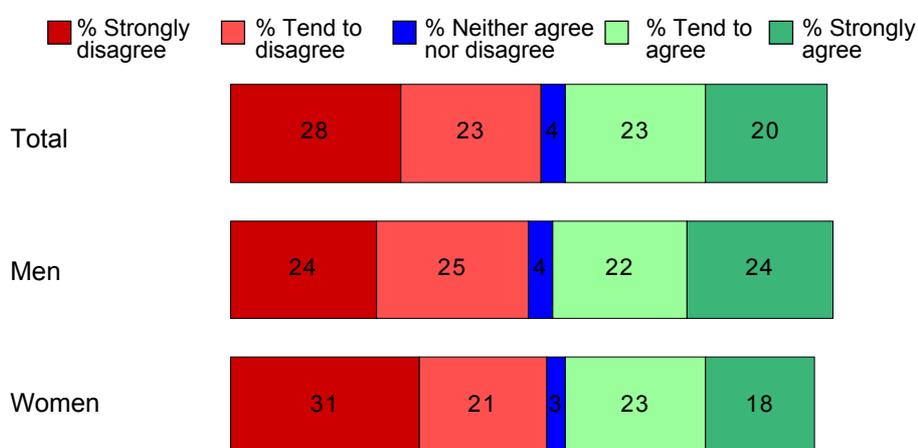
Source: MORI

## Opinion of local elections

Although over half of people where local elections were held felt that voting in the local elections would not make a difference, a significant proportion (44%) disagreed with this. In the 2001 General Election survey carried out by MORI for The Electoral Commission, 34% felt that voting in the *General Election* would not make much of a difference. Men are more likely to think that voting does not make much of a difference, with almost one in four (24%) feeling strongly about this compared to less than one in five (18%) of women.

### I did not believe that voting in the local elections would make much of a difference

Q How much do you agree or disagree with the above statement?



Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 (1,026)

Source: MORI

The significance of age on opinion is evident again, with almost half (48%) of those aged 18-34 agreeing that voting in the local elections would not make much of a difference compared to 39% of those over 55.

Three in ten of those in areas with local elections in 2003 feel that parties do not stand for policies they want to see (30%). This is exactly the same as in the 2001 General Election, but the proportion of people disagreeing then was much higher. Social renters and those not working full-time are more likely than average to feel this (39% and 34% each respectively).

Half believe that there was little difference between the parties (50%), compared to under a third (28%) who did not. Again, this is worse than the 2001 General Election figures. Older people are most likely to feel the parties are the same, with one in four *strongly* agreeing compared to less than one in five of 18-34 year olds. This may be explained by the fact that 13% of this young age group neither agreed nor disagreed (perhaps due to their lack of interest in politics) compared to just 4% of the over 55s.

<b>Q</b>	<b>Do you agree or disagree with the following?</b>		
	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<i>Base: All respondents (1026)</i>			
	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
I did not believe that voting in the local elections would make much of a difference	43	51	2
<i>2001 General Election<sup>3</sup></i>	<i>34</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>2</i>
None of the parties stood for the policies I would like to see	31	45	12
<i>2001 General Election</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>8</i>
There was very little difference between what the main parties were offering	50	28	14
<i>2001 General Election</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>4</i>
It was an interesting local election campaign	19	59	13
<i>2001 General Election</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>1</i>

*Source: MORI*

## Interest in the campaign

Many people found the election campaign uninteresting (59%), with less than one in five (19%) finding it interesting. More women feel *strongly* that the campaign was interesting (14%) than men (9%). These figures are similar to those for the 2001 general election. Here, slightly more people found the campaign interesting (29%), but two thirds of people still thought the campaign was uninteresting (66%).

BMEs are more likely to feel *strongly* that the campaign was dull, with 15% expressing this view compared to 7% overall. Perhaps reflecting their greater disengagement with politics, over one in five BMEs were unable to express an opinion about the campaign (22%).

<sup>3</sup> These figures are taken from The Electoral Commission's Phase Two survey at the 2001 General Election. Like this survey, the 2001 survey was conducted shortly after the election.

## **Pre-Election activities**

### **Reading political leaflets and letters**

Many people claim they had read political leaflets or letters that had been posted to them before the election, with almost three in five (59%) saying they had done so. The older age group are far more likely to have read posted letters or leaflets than younger respondents (70% of those aged 55+ compared 48% of 18-34 year olds). The overall figure is less than those who had seen political leaflets that had been posted to them during the 2001 general election (69%).

### **Television coverage**

Almost a third of people had watched local election coverage on TV (31%). A similar number (34%) had seen a party election broadcast.

- Men were more likely to say they had watched television coverage of the local elections than women (36% compared with 26%);
- Those aged over 55 were slightly more likely to have watched television coverage than younger groups (33% for those over 55 compared to 29% of those between 18-34);
- Social renters were more likely to have watched television coverage than owner-occupiers (43% compared to 29%).

Almost four in ten had discussed the election with friends or family (37%). Owner occupiers are more likely to have discussed the local election with friends and family, with almost two in five (39%) talking about it, compared to just over one in four (27%) of social renters. A third had also seen political advertisements on billboards (32%). One in five (20%) had received a personal call from a representative of a political party, while only 14% had done none of these things.

Billboard advertisements are less likely to have been noticed by the older age group. Here, 36% of those aged between 18-34 and 35-54 had seen billboard advertisements, compared to just 27% of those aged over 55.

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**Q** *During the election campaign did you do any of the following?*

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	<b>Yes</b>
<i>Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 (1,026)</i>	%
Read any political leaflets or letters put through your letterbox	59
Discussed the election with friends or family	37
Watched any party election broadcasts on TV	34
Seen any political advertisements on billboards	32
Watched any of the local election coverage on TV	31
Received a personal call from a representative of any political party	20
None of these	14
Don't know	*

*Source: MORI*

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# Appendices

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# Survey Details

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## Statistical Reliability

The respondents to the questionnaire are only samples of the total "population", so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the "true" values). For a random probability survey we can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the "true" values from a knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the "95% confidence interval":

---

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

For example, with a sample size of 1,500 where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the "true" value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of  $\pm 3$  percentage points from the sample result.

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

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Size of samples compared	Differences required for significance at or near these percentage levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
100 and 400	6	9	10
200 and 400	5	8	9
300 and 500	4	7	7
300 and 700	4	6	7
400 and 400	4	6	7
400 and 700	4	6	6
400 and 1,000	4	5	6
500 and 500	4	6	6
500 and 1,000	3	5	5
700 and 1,000	3	4	5
800 and 1,000	3	4	5
1,000 and 1,500	2	4	4

## Guide to Social Class Definitions

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

- A** Professionals such as doctors, surgeons, solicitors or dentists; chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior editors, senior civil servants, town clerks, senior business executives and managers, and high ranking grades of the Services.
- B** People with very responsible jobs such as university lecturers, hospital matrons, heads of local government departments, middle management in business, qualified scientists, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades of the Services.
- C1** All others doing non-manual jobs; nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, people in clerical positions, police sergeants/constables, and middle ranks of the Services.
- C2** Skilled manual workers/craftsmen who have served apprenticeships; foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as long distance lorry drivers, security officers, and lower grades of Services.
- D** Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, including labourers and mates of occupations in the C2 grade and people serving apprenticeships; machine minders, farm labourers, bus and railway conductors, laboratory assistants, postmen, door-to-door and van salesmen.
- E** Those on lowest levels of subsistence including pensioners, casual workers, and others with minimum levels of income

# Marked up Questionnaire

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# Local Elections 2003 National and Macro Survey

Final Topline, 05 June 2003

- MORI interviewed a representative sample of 1,500 residents aged 18+ across the UK.
- Quotas set by age, gender and work status.
- Data are weighted by age, sex, working status to the known profile (using 2001 Census data).
- Section B was asked of 1,026 respondents who lived areas where local elections took place on 1 May 2003.
- Fieldwork took place between 2 May – 11 May, 2003. Interviews were carried out by MORI Telephone Services.
- Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to multiple responses, computer rounding or the exclusion of don't knows/not stated
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated
- An asterisk (\*) represents a value of less than one half or one percent, but not zero
- Poll conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission

**QB Most people did not get along to vote at the local council elections on the 1<sup>st</sup> May. Can I just check, did you manage to vote at the local council elections on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, or not?**

<i>Base: All who live in areas where local elections were taking place 1 May 2003 (1,026)</i>		%
Yes		47 <sup>4</sup>
No		53
Don't remember		0

## A. Policy review and tracking questions asked of national sample

**Q1. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?**

	%
Very interested	14
Fairly interested	44
Not particularly interested	30
Not at all interested	13
Don't know	*

**Q How interested, if at all, would you say you are in the following...?**

	Very interested	Fairly interested	Not very interested	Not at all interested	Don't know
	%	%	%	%	%
Q2. News about elections	15	45	26	14	*
Q3. Local issues	27	51	16	5	*
Q4. National issues	30	52	13	5	*

<sup>4</sup> The figures presented here show the degree of overclaim about voting in the sample. For analysis and in the computer tables, this question has been reweighted by the turnout figure for the 2003 local elections in England (35%). This has been produced by Colin Rallings of the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre at the University of Plymouth.

**Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?**

		Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	No opinion
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Q5.	The system of registering to vote in the UK	26	49	9	7	4	4
Q6.	The actual process of voting at elections in the UK	26	48	9	9	5	3

**Q7. I am going to read out a number of suggestions that have been made for encouraging people to vote at elections.**

**Please tell me which one or two, if any, would be most likely to encourage you personally to vote at the next election in your area.**

	%
Voting by post	31
Voting using the internet	28
Voting by telephone	27
Polling stations at new locations such as railway stations and supermarkets	23
Voting by mobile phone text message/SMS	19
Polling stations being open longer	12
Voting in person using an electronic machine in a polling station or at other public locations	9
Voting using digital TV	7
It depends	2
Don't know	8

**Q8. And if you had a choice, how would you prefer to vote at future elections?**

	%
In person at a polling station	33
By post with a ballot paper automatically sent to you	20
Using the internet	17
By telephone	13
By mobile phone text message/SMS	6
In person somewhere else other than a polling station e.g. a railway station or a supermarket	4
Using digital TV	3
Using an electronic machine in a polling station and other public locations	2

Q9 Thinking generally about elections, which one of the following would you say is most important for you when you vote?

	%
Voting being easy to do	15
Voting being convenient	20
My vote being safe from fraud or abuse	30
My vote being private	33
Don't know	1

Q How much do you feel you know about...?

		A great deal	A fair amount	Just a little	Hardly anything at all	Never heard of	Don't know
Q10	The way the Westminster Parliament works	8	31	30	23	8	1
Q11	How you can register to vote	14	38	29	13	5	2
Q12	The way political parties are funded at the moment	5	22	32	29	11	2

Q13 As you may know, before the last General Election in June 2001, the law was changed so that all registered voters could obtain a postal vote if they wanted one. They could do this by ringing their local council and asking for a postal vote. Before this interview, were you aware of this or not?

	%
<i>Base: All those living in Great Britain (1,462)</i>	
Yes, was aware	52
No, not aware	48
Don't know	*

Q14 How interested, if at all, are you in requesting a postal vote from your local council/ electoral registration officer before the next election where you live? If you have already requested a postal vote, please say so. Would you say you

	%
Have already requested a postal vote	7
Are very interested in requesting a postal vote	20
Are quite interested in requesting a postal vote	24
Are not very interested in requesting a postal vote	22
Are not at all interested in requesting a postal vote	26
Don't know	1

Still thinking about voting at elections...

Q Please tell me whether you support or oppose...? Is that strongly or tend to support/oppose?

		Strongly support	Tend to support	Neither support nor oppose	Tend to oppose	Strongly oppose	No opinion
Q15	Making voting in elections compulsory	26	17	6	23	25	2

**Now thinking about a different subject...**

**Q I am going to read out a number of statements some people have made. For each one, please tell me whether you agree or disagree...**

		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q16	People should have the right to make donations to the parties they support.	34	45	5	7	7	1
Q17	It is better that parties should be financed by their own fundraising, rather than being subsidised by taxpayers	53	23	6	10	6	2
Q18	It makes elections unfair if one party can afford to spend more than others	46	28	5	11	7	2
Q19	Funding parties by voluntary donations is unfair because there is a risk that wealthy individuals, businesses and trade unions can buy influence over parties	40	30	6	13	9	2

**At the moment, political parties are *mainly* funded by voluntary donations – they raise money from party members, businesses, trade unions and from individual people. They receive some limited funding from taxes for their activities in Parliament and for some activities at elections.**

**Some people say that political parties should be funded through taxes, to prevent the risk of money being used to buy political power and parties with wealthy supporters having an unfair advantage. Others say that parties should depend on being able to raise money from their own supporters rather than automatically receiving money from taxes.**

**Q20 Which of the following best reflects your view?**

Political parties should be totally funded by taxes, with voluntary donations being banned	7
Political parties should be mainly funded by taxes, with some voluntary donations allowed	9
Political parties should be funded equally by taxes and voluntary donations	17
Political parties should be mainly funded by voluntary donations, with some funding from taxpayers	26
Political parties should be totally funded by voluntary donations, with no funding from taxpayers	37
Don't know	3

I am going to read out a number of statements some people have made. For each one, please tell me whether you agree or disagree...

		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Q21	Political parties are too important to democracy to be allowed to go bankrupt.	23	29	10	18	15	6
Q22	There should be limits on how much people can donate to political parties.	47	23	4	14	12	1
Q23	Politics would be more honest if parties were funded through taxes	13	18	8	27	29	4

On a different subject...

Q24 As far as you know, are you registered to vote or not?

	%
Yes, am registered to vote	93
No, not registered to vote	5
Don't know	3

Q25 Are there any particular reasons why you are not registered to vote?

	%
<i>Base: All who say they are not registered to vote (98)</i>	
Have just moved house	35
Didn't know how to do it/who to contact	15
I'm not eligible to vote	13
Haven't got around to it / will do it sometime	11
Am not interested in voting so there is no point registering	6
Couldn't be bothered	5
It should be automatic / down to the local council	4
Live in more than one place	3
Someone else in my household fills in the form/is in charge of registration	2
Invasion of privacy / register not confidential	0
To avoid paying tax	0
To avoid people I owe money to knowing where I live	0
Other	9
Don't know	2
Refused	2

Q26 **The following two statements are about registering to vote. One statement is true and one is false. Please can you tell me which statement you think IS TRUE.**

	%
A. Once the people living in your household are registered to vote, your household doesn't need to register again unless the circumstances of anyone in your household changes	44
OR	
B. Your household needs to register to vote every year, even if the circumstances of people living in your household don't change	53
Don't know	3

Q27 **Once again, one of these statements is true and one is false. Please can you tell me which statement you think IS TRUE**

	%
A. You can register to vote at any time of the year	35
OR	
B. You can only register to vote in the autumn of each year when your household receives an electoral registration form	59
Don't know	6

Q28 **Last year the registration process was changed so that all registered electors could ask for their details to be removed from the version of the electoral register that is available for sale. They could do this by ticking a box on the electoral registration form sent to them by their local council. Before this interview, were you aware of this change or not?**

	%
Yes, was aware	20
No, not aware	78
Don't know	1

Q29 **Before this interview had you heard of The Electoral Commission or not?**

	%
Yes, had heard of The Electoral Commission	30
No, had not heard of The Electoral Commission	69
Don't know	1

**B. 'Macro' sample asked in areas with local elections**

**Q30 Talking to people, we have found that a lot say they would have voted on 1<sup>st</sup> May if there had been a General Election rather than a local election. How about you, do you think you would have voted on 1<sup>st</sup> May if it had been a General Election, or do you think you would not have voted?**

<i>Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they did not vote (514)</i>	%
Yes - would have voted	77
No - would not have voted	21
Don't know	2

**Q31 At the local council elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May, did you vote...?**

<i>Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they did vote (509)</i>	%
In person at a polling station	71
By post	27
By proxy	1
Some other way	1
Don't know	*

**Q32 How would you rate voting at a polling station in terms of...**

*Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they voted at a polling station (367)*

		Very good	Fairly good	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor	Very poor	Don't know
Being easy to do	%	71	27	1	1	1	0
Being convenient	%	66	29	2	2	1	0
Being safe from fraud or abuse	%	53	34	4	3	1	4
Providing privacy for the voter	%	61	34	2	2	1	0

**Q33 People have given many different reasons for not voting in the local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003. How about you, why didn't you vote? Anything else?**

*Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 and who said they did not vote (514)*

	%
I really intended to vote but circumstances on the day prevented me	20
I was away on 1 <sup>st</sup> May	9
I'm just not interested in politics	8
I haven't had any information from the candidates	8
I didn't receive a polling card/postal vote	7
There was no point in voting because all the parties are the same	6
There was no point in voting because the local Council can't do very much/can't change anything	6
I forgot	6
I didn't know what the issues are	5
I didn't know there were local elections	5
I am not registered to vote	4
You just can't trust politicians to keep their promises	4
I was busy at work	4
I couldn't decide who to vote for	3
I wanted to vote by a more convenient method than going to a polling station	3
There was no point in voting because it was obvious who would win	2
I didn't know where the polling station was	2
I just don't care about the local Council	2
Lack of time/too busy	2
I didn't like the candidates	2
I am not eligible to vote	1
I couldn't be bothered	1
The candidates were unopposed/there was no point	*
Recently moved to the area/don't know about local politics or issues	*
For religious reasons	*
Other	10
None of these	1
Don't know	1

**Q34 I am going to read out a number of statements some people have made about the local elections campaign this year. Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each...**

*Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 (1,026)*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
I did not believe that voting in the local elections would make much of a difference	20	23	4	23	28	2
None of the parties stood for the policies I would like to see	12	18	12	28	18	12
There was very little difference between what the main parties were offering	21	29	8	17	11	14
It was an interesting local election campaign	7	12	9	25	33	13

**Q35 During the local election campaign did you do any of the following? Please only answer for things that were about this year's local elections.**

*Base: All those living in local authority districts where there were local elections on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003 (1,026)*

	%
Read any political leaflets or letters put through your letterbox	59
Discussed the election with friends or family	37
Watched any party election broadcasts on TV	34
Seen any political advertisements on billboards	32
Watched any of the local election coverage on TV	31
Received a personal call from a representative of any political party	20
None of these	14
Don't know/can't remember	*

**C. Demographics and 'voter-graphics'**

**QAge What was your age last birthday?**

	%
18-24	11
25-34	20
35-44	19
45-54	17
55-64	13
65+	20

Q37 How often do you vote in ... Would you say you ...

	General Elections	Local Council elections	European Parliament Elections
	%	%	%
Always vote	68	46	27
Usually vote	13	20	12
Sometimes vote	7	12	10
Rarely vote	3	8	7
or never vote	9	12	41
It depends	1	*	1
Don't know	*	*	2

Q38 You say you have never voted at a General Election. Is that because at the last General Election you were too young to vote, you were not registered to vote or for some other reason?

Base: All those 18-24 who have never voted at a General Election (51) %

Too young to vote	44
Not registered to vote	19
Some other reason	32
Can't remember/don't know	5

Q38 You say you have never voted at a Local election. Is that because at the last Local Council Election you were too young to vote, you were not registered to vote or for some other reason?

Base: All those 18-24 who have never voted at a Local Council election (55) %

Too young to vote	29
Not registered to vote	21
Some other reason	47
Can't remember/don't know	2

Q38 You say you have never voted at a European election. Is that because at the last European Parliament Election you were too young to vote, you were not registered to vote or for some other reason?

Base: All those 18-24 who have never voted at a European Parliament Election (95) %

Too young to vote	35
Not registered to vote	18
Some other reason	27
Can't remember/don't know	20

Thank you. Finally I need to ask a few questions to ensure that we talk to a representative sample of the population.

Q Gender

	%
Male	49
Female	51

Q Which of these best describes your ethnic or racial group?

	%
<b>White</b>	
British	87
Irish	2
Other White background	4
<b>Mixed</b>	
White and Black Caribbean	*
White and Black African	*
White and Asian	*
Other mixed background	1
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	
Indian	1
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	*
Other Asian background	*
<b>Black or Black British</b>	
Caribbean	1
African	1
Other Black background	0
<b>Chinese or Other Ethnic Group</b>	
Chinese	*
Other background	0
Other	*
Refused	*

Q Which of these best describes your working status?

	%
Working full-time (30+ hours a week)	45
Working part-time (9-29 hours a week)	10
Unemployed and seeking work	3
Unemployed and not seeking work	1
Retired	26
Looking after house/children	6
Invalided/disabled	3
Student	6
Other	1

Q Do you or does anyone else in your household have any long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits your/their daily activity or work you/they can do?

	%
Yes – respondent	13
Yes – other in H/H	8
No	80

Q **Social Grade**

	%
A	7
B	17
C1	27
C2	21
D	12
E	16

Q **Does your household....**

	%
Own the property in which you live outright	28
Is it being bought on a mortgage	43
Rented from the Council	12
Rented privately	12
Rented from a housing association	4
Is it tied accommodation	*
Or something else?	2

Q **Which one of these best describes the area where you live most of the time?**

	%
In the middle of a city or town	27
In a suburb	34
On the edge of the countryside	25
In the middle of the countryside	13

Q **It is possible that we may want to contact you again to ask questions about similar issues. Would you be prepared for MORI to contact you if this was the case?**

	%
Yes	90
No	10