

Cragg Ross Dawson

'UNINSPIRED TO VOTE'

**QUALITATIVE PUBLIC OPINION
RESEARCH ON THE 2005
GENERAL ELECTION**

REPORT

Prepared for:

The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW

June 2005
676RP

Contact at Cragg Ross Dawson:
Catherine Taylor

Cragg Ross Dawson
Qualitative Research
18 Carlisle Street
London W1D 3BX
Tel +44 (0)20 7437 8945
Fax +44 (0)20 7437 0059
research@crd.co.uk
www.craggrossdawson.co.uk

CONTENTS		PAGE NUMBER
A.	BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES	1
B.	METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE	2
C.	MAIN FINDINGS	5
	1. Introduction	5
	2. Ignorance about politics	6
	3. Disillusionment with politics and the media	8
	4. The difficulty of deciding who to vote for	13
	5. The perception that voting will make no difference	21
	6. A lacklustre campaign	25
	7. The electoral system	28
	8. Reasons for voting	29

Appendix

Recruitment questionnaires
Topic guide
Statements and statistics
Bubble drawing templates

A. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Electoral Commission is an independent public body whose role is to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the UK. The Commission is committed to the use of academic and social research to ensure that its recommendations, policies and strategic direction are evidence-based.

In accordance with its statutory obligations, The Electoral Commission will report on the 2005 general election, drawing on several, separate public opinion research projects, as well as on numerous other pieces of research including media content analysis, research reviewing the campaign strategies adopted by political parties and analysis of electoral data.

This document details the findings from one such research project: a qualitative study examining public opinion and perceptions of the election.

The broad objectives of this research were:

- to provide an effective evidence-base to inform the Commission's statutory reporting on the general election
- to provide insights into public perceptions of the general election
- to put this in the context of general political attitudes and behaviour
- to supplement The Commission's other research projects, notably the British Election Study (BES) survey

In order to meet these objectives, the qualitative research explored the following areas:

- people's attitudes towards this general election (set in the context of their attitudes towards elections and voting generally)
- their personal experience of the election
- the reasons they did or did not vote

A copy of the discussion guide is appended to this report.

B. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

1. **Recruitment criteria**

The research comprised eight group discussions spread across four locations across Britain (the Commission undertook separate research in Northern Ireland). The groups lasted 90 minutes and there were 6-8 respondents in each. The sample design took account of the following variables:

Voting intentions / behaviour

Six of the groups were recruited *after* the election had taken place, according to whether respondents had voted or not. Two were 'voter' groups, four were 'non-voter' groups.

The other two groups were recruited two to three weeks *before* the election. At the time of recruitment respondents in these groups had not yet decided whether or not to vote. Each respondent was asked to keep a diary during the period 25th April to 6th May, to record their experiences of the election campaign and their deliberations about voting. In the event, approximately two thirds of these respondents decided to vote.

Locations

In each group, all respondents lived in the same constituency. The locations were chosen in order to ensure a spread by constituency type (based on the results of the 2001 general election), as follows:

Edinburgh North and Leith: Labour, fairly safe, low turnout

Hertsmere: Conservative, fairly marginal, average turnout

Mid Dorset and North Poole: Liberal Democrat, very marginal, above average turnout

North Tyneside: Labour, very safe, below average turnout

Demographics

The sample was segmented by age and social class.

Attitude to politics

Each group represented a spread in terms of knowledge of and interest in current affairs. Anyone who declared a very strong interest in politics, or no interest whatsoever, was screened out.

A copy of the recruitment screener is appended to this report.

2. **Sample structure**

The sample was structured as follows:

- G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole
- G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh
- G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Tyneside
- G4: 26-35, C2DE, undecided, Poole (DIARY GROUP)
- G5: 36-49, ABC1, undecided, Edinburgh (DIARY GROUP)
- G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertsmere
- G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertsmere
- G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Tyneside

The groups were held between 16th and 19th May 2005. The researchers were Tim Porter and Catherine Taylor.

3. **Methodology**

The group discussions were unstructured but broadly followed a topic guide agreed with The Electoral Commission in advance. The moderators introduced stimulus material and employed enabling techniques where appropriate to aid discussion:

Diaries

In the two 'undecided' groups, respondents were asked to keep an election diary during the period 25th April to 6th May. During the group discussions these diaries were used as stimulus material: respondents were asked to talk about the sorts of comments they had written and to read out extracts if they wished. The diaries were then analysed after the fieldwork, along with transcripts of the group discussions. Extracts from the diaries (and verbatim quotations from the groups) have been used to illustrate the findings in this report.

Statements

Respondents were shown a selection of opinions and statistics about the 2005 general election and about voting in general, to prompt debate.

Bubble drawings

The research team prepared four election 'bubble drawings', variously depicting the process of voting and not voting, in person and by post. In each drawing there was a blank bubble representing the thoughts of the voter/non-voter. Respondents were asked to complete the thought bubble in one or more of these drawings, to help them express how they felt about voting/not voting.

Copies of the topic guide, statements and bubble drawing templates are appended to this report.

C. MAIN FINDINGS

1. **Introduction**

Underlying the specific objectives of this research was a broad, open-ended question: what did people make of the 2005 general election? The answer to this question was strikingly consistent across the research sample. With a very few exceptions, respondents said that they felt uninspired: by the state of politics in 2005, by the election campaign, and by the choice presented to them on May 5th. Variations on this theme emerged, and these are explored in greater detail below; but major differences were elusive.

One surprising aspect was the degree of similarity between voters and non-voters. Although voters tended to be better-informed about the political process, their attitudes were largely the same. The research sample had been intentionally weighted towards non-voters because it was assumed that these people would have the most useful things to say about why members of public felt disengaged from the democratic process; but, as it turned out, voters were equally eloquent on this point. Essentially, most felt the same about voting as non-voters – that their vote would make no difference, that they did not know who to vote for, that all the parties are the same – but unlike non-voters they felt compelled by duty or habit or family pressure to cast a vote nonetheless. Very few could be said to have voted with passion or enthusiasm. Two quotes, one from a non-voter and one from a voter, sum up the presiding view:

“I just didn’t feel motivated this time. Nothing really caught my attention.”

“I didn’t make a conscious effort not to vote. I was waiting to see. I wasn’t inspired.”

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

“[In my bubble drawing] I wrote: ‘Waste of time, can I really be bothered to vote next time, does my vote really make a difference?’”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

This lack of inspiration seems to have been underpinned by a combination of factors: respondents gave many reasons why the 2005 election left them feeling so flat. The rest of this report seeks to identify and examine the most important of these factors.

2. Ignorance about politics

One reason why voters felt uninspired to vote was that they did not know or understand enough about the process in which they were being invited to participate. There was widespread and in some cases wholesale ignorance about many aspects of politics.

Those who knew least tended to be younger (18-35) and from a C2DE background; to have not voted in this election; and to have little or no history of voting in previous elections. Several were extremely ill-informed; they did not know quite basic facts about the political process and the main parties, including the minimum voting age, the meaning of the word 'constituency', and the names of the three main party leaders.

"I learnt more about things I didn't know [through keeping the diary]. I knew who Tony Blair was, obviously, but I wasn't sure who the leaders of the other parties were. I found that out."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

At the other end of the scale was a very well-informed minority. These respondents tended to be older (40+), and were either well-educated and well-informed about current affairs generally (mostly BC1), or were life-long voters with a history of strong party alignment (C2DE respondents in the North East).

In between these two extremes the majority had a patchy understanding of the political system. Even the relatively well-informed often revealed gaps in their knowledge; for example, some were unsure of the name of their constituency or MP, or of the degree of marginality in their area. One common area of uncertainty, particularly among non-voters, was the link between MPs in local constituencies and the make-up of parliament. Some assumed that in a general election voters voted for their preferred party or party leader, rather than for a local candidate. In any case, many thought that voting for a Prime Minister would make more sense: local issues were rarely thought important when voting in a general election.

"I didn't have a clear idea of how the voting procedure works, until I did this [diary exercise]. I mean yes, you're voting for the government, but to me it was confusing because you're voting locally, and whoever wins that gets the seat in Parliament. And that makes up the government."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

Although respondents acknowledged their ignorance about the mechanics of the political process, many felt that the more important issue was their lack of understanding of the policies and beliefs of the main political parties. Many claimed that one of their main reasons for not voting was that they did not know enough about the parties to make a choice. Some blamed themselves for their ignorance, while others criticised the parties for not doing enough to inform the public (see below section 4.3).

"I didn't really know enough about each of them, and I didn't want to vote for the sake of it."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

"I've voted before, but I don't think I know enough about the policies and things. In the end I was confused and I didn't know who to vote for. I just couldn't make a decision in the end."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

"I didn't know much about what was going on. I didn't take much interest in it. I didn't know what would be good for me, and I didn't know who to ask."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

"I know they say you're wasting a vote if you don't vote, but I feel I'm wasting a vote if I do vote, because I don't know enough about it. So I'd be putting in a vote for no reason at all."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

This claim of ignorance should perhaps not be taken entirely at face value – some people may have been trying to justify and post-rationalise their decision not to vote – but ignorance about the parties clearly had some part to play in discouraging voting. A few younger and C2DE respondents complained that they had made some effort to inform themselves but had been hampered or put off by the nature of the media: they found TV and newspaper coverage dry and difficult to understand.

"I think they could make it more normal people friendly. I watch the news, and I'm not unintelligent, but I don't particularly know that much about the whole election. I would have to make quite an effort to go out there and research all the parties. It would be like doing a dissertation all over again. I'm not going to do it. I think it's made so hard that people get intimidated by it."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

"It was hard to understand some of the stuff they were talking about. It was just really hard, and by that point I would just switch off the telly."

"Too many big words."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

"A lot of the coverage is long words, big words, and some of my friends just don't understand politics or anything to do with it."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

In contrast, several spoke positively of an election feature on BBC Radio One in which the three main party leaders had been interviewed and answered questions. Younger respondents who had listened to this broadcast found it interesting and easy to digest.

25th April

Listened to a radio interview with Tony Blair on Radio 1. He was very upfront and honest about his thoughts on the war and many other issues. Very interesting.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

A number of respondents lamented their own and others' ignorance about politics and suggested that children should learn more at school about politics, history and citizenship.

"I can't remember ever being told anything about elections at school. I think there should be a class that teaches you all about every policy, so you're brought up with it. So by the time you're 18 you have your own opinion and you know how to vote about it."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

"One observation I have made is that the history of our country, the wars and things, with every year that passes we distance ourselves from our history. I feel that we're losing our history. Young people today don't really know much about history. Dad might say something to me about somebody and I'll say, 'Who's that?', and he'll say, 'How can you not know who that is?'. So maybe the younger generation are not really getting taught that much about our history anymore."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

3. **Disillusionment with politics and the media**

Cynicism about politics, politicians and the media was almost universal and played a significant role in undermining both the inclination to vote and any sense of enthusiasm among those who did vote. It was widely believed that the way in which politics is conducted has deteriorated significantly over the last two or three decades. This perceived decline

in the political culture was by no means confined to the election, but certain aspects of the campaign were thought to epitomise the political zeitgeist.

In general terms, respondents thought that politicians lacked conviction and passion, and that their motivations were suspect. The increase of 'spin' and the growing importance of the media were believed to have made politicians ever-fearful about how they are portrayed and to have dissuaded them from speaking their minds. The perceived similarity of the main political parties (see section 4.3 below) was also thought to play a part here: as the policy differences between the parties decline, the way in which they present themselves becomes ever more important. People in their 40s and above often spoke nostalgically of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, when politics was more tribal and politicians were unafraid to voice their beliefs.

*"Love her or loathe her, at least Maggie Thatcher would say something. She stood up and said what she thought."
 "And whatever she said, she stuck to. She didn't back down for no-one."
 "They never come out with a straight answer. Ask any politician a question now and they'll take ten minutes to answer it."*

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

The election campaign had brought this political culture into sharper focus. Respondents across the sample lamented what they perceived as the most 'negative' campaign they could remember. One aspect of this was the tendency of politicians to attack the opposition rather than promoting their own policies. Although this had always been true of election campaigns to a certain extent, the 2005 campaign was thought to represent a particular nadir. Of the three main parties, only the Liberal Democrats were believed to have run a positive campaign. The impact on respondents was twofold: they felt uninformed about each party's policies (see section 4.3 below) and switched off by the tone of the campaign.

"I know more policies from the Lib Dems. The only reason I know more policies from them is because they spent their time telling me their policies rather than slagging off the other parties. I heard perhaps two policies from Labour and Conservative each. The rest of what I heard from them was against the other."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

"A bit school-ish. 'My dad is bigger than your dad.'"

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

"The back-biting that goes on between them, they get really personal. They dig up whatever they can on each other, which is irrelevant to what their actual job is."

"Insincere, tedious, tiresome."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"When Howard came on, he didn't say what wonderful things he was going to do – he just clobbered Blair."

"They didn't do that 30 years ago. It was sort of honourable."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"There was a Labour party broadcast and it was completely silent, it just said, 'Howard cut the police force, Howard brought in the community charge, Howard did this'. Not anything that Labour did. I thought, 'Well, I know that anyway'. Negative thinking."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"[Negative campaigning] turns me right off. I don't want to hear from any of them if I hear any of it starting. I'll flick the switch. What do you get from it? You're not getting anything that gives you something concrete to make a decision."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

4th May

One of the correspondents summed up the election campaign by saying that it had been a generally negative campaign and stated his disappointment about the lack of parties promoting their own policies. These are sentiments that I echo. I would much rather that we had been told how each party was going to address issues such as the pension problem or how council tax was going to be resolved rather than whether we could trust certain individuals.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

The culture of presentation and media management was also thought to have dominated the election campaign. Even when politicians did talk about their policies, they were felt to give more thought to what would please voters than to their genuine intentions for government. They were also criticised for responding too slavishly to the agenda set by opposition parties rather than setting out their own stall; when one party made an announcement on immigration, for example, the others would all follow suit.

"The Conservatives said one thing one day, then Labour said it the next day."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

"[It was a] Public Relations exercise. It was obvious they'd all done their homework, and they love statistics and demographics, and they've done all their research on how to influence the voters. We don't like feeling threatened to vote one way or the other."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

"Is the agenda written for them? On Monday everyone seemed to be talking about health, on Tuesday it was finance."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

"I felt slightly manipulated, because the parties tell you what you want to hear rather than what they really believe. Towards the end I just lost interest."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

Political rallies and debates seemed staged for TV. Many people felt so cynically towards politicians that their default position was to doubt the sincerity of such occasions.

"They always have the supporters on one side with their little banners, and the press on the other. And all the banners were drawn by exactly the same person – it was blatantly obvious, it was the same pen and everything. [The press] went over and said, 'Did you make your own banner?', and immediately someone said, 'Are you the press?' and pushed them right out of the way."

"They had some anti-Conservative people at a Conservative rally and they said, 'No, we're not Labour', and the next day at the Labour event they were all there wearing VIP badges."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

"In the televised broadcasts both parties were trying to use real people, but somehow none of them rang true. There was no-one from a slum saying, 'Go on Tony, win another election'. They were all well-educated, well-dressed. Alright, they're not going to put a scruff on TV, but he might have something to say."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

Although politicians came in for the heaviest criticism, the media was also considered partly to blame for the negative tone of the campaign. Many regarded the media as guilty of biased and sensationalist reporting, with newspapers the worst offenders. Although most thought it acceptable that (non BBC) media owners and journalists have political affiliations, a few were indignant; and the majority felt that whatever their political leanings, the media have a duty to report the policies and activities of the various parties in an informative and relatively unbiased fashion. Few thought the media was fulfilling this role, and many questioned the motivation of journalists and media

owners. They thought that, for the most part, the media was interested only in chasing sales or ratings and would twist or prioritise stories to meet this end.

“When they were covering the issue of violent crime, suddenly the news started reporting every single murder that happened in the whole of Britain, so every day there was a different murder on for a couple of days.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“People read the headlines and they believe it. But they’re not telling the truth. If [the politicians] deny it, they say, ‘We apologise for getting the story wrong’. But it’s on page 10 at the bottom of the column. The news story was on the front page.”

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

“It’s all the papers’ fault. The papers wind you up. If you aren’t racist, you turn racist.”

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

“The Sun slated Tony Blair for goodness knows how long, then all of a sudden they made the big decision that they were going to back Labour. They totally changed their tune, which I thought was stupid.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“I read newspapers, but I don’t agree with the way they ridicule and criticise stars, footballers, politicians, anyone. They create the wrong impression.”

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

26th April

Keeping on the subject of newspapers, I find it annoying that they support particular parties (e.g. the Sun supports Labour). They should write about how it is, not from their point of view, it makes it harder to decide who to vote for, as you get mixed messages.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

A handful of respondents also questioned the relationships between media owners and politicians and the sincerity of political alignments.

“The first person Blair called into his office was Murdoch. ‘Come on, son, let’s get this sorted.’ You can’t trust them; they’re like two peas in a pod. The Daily Mail is all Tory, Tory, Tory, and The Sun was backing Blair. It’s not an impartial political view – it’s disgusting.”

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

The prevailing sense of cynicism that surrounded the election is further illustrated by the way in which respondents noted and recalled ‘genuine’ moments during the campaign; occasions when they felt that

they had been able to cut through the 'spin' and gain a genuine insight into the personality or policies of a politician or party. Different groups often talked about the same 'genuine moments'; these included a series on Channel 4 entitled 'Election Unspun', the Question Time debate, and an appearance by the three party leaders on BBC Radio One. In the latter two programmes respondents welcomed the fact that the party leaders were confronted directly by members of the public and forced to answer unscripted questions (although a minority suspected that the questions had been given to the politicians in advance).

"[Tony Blair] gave honest answers. 'This is what I'm going to do: if you like it, you like it.' That was on Radio 1. It was actually real people there instead of a spin doctor. People were asking him questions and he gave his honest answers."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

"I watched Blair when he had a couple of live audiences... I like that and I can watch that... I quite like it when they're not spouting off and making a speech. I like it when it's a live audience with unpredictable questions."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

There was also praise for the independent candidate who stood in Sedgfield on an anti-war ticket. Although most thought that too much prominence had been given to the Iraq war during the campaign, they found this candidate genuine and direct.

"The guy whose son died in Iraq, who stood against Tony Blair, that was brilliant. It was bringing it down to our level, because he [Blair] is so aloof... It was on the radio and I thought, 'This bloke is talking sense'. Instead of using big words and avoiding questions, to try and baffle us."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

4. **The difficulty of deciding who to vote for**

4.1 The weakening of political alignments

A major factor underpinning respondents' lack of inspiration to vote in the 2005 election was their inability to decide who to vote *for*.

"I took my [polling] card out with me but I didn't vote because I couldn't make the decision [who to vote for]."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

"I was in a terrible quandary about who to vote for. If I actually went down there, where would I put the cross? I just didn't know. I just felt, what will be, will be."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

It was clear from the discussion during the groups and from the election diaries that, among those who did vote, many did not make a final choice of candidate until they reached the ballot box.

"I wrote [in my bubble drawing] 'Eeny, meeny, miney, mo. Which one should I put my cross next to?'"

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

5th May

When we went to the polling station... I went in and handed my card over and was given a slip of paper. I very nearly crossed all the boxes and put a spoilt vote in as I wasn't sure who to vote for, and I think I was only doing that as I thought I should in my husband's eyes. Anyway I did vote properly then headed home to watch the results come through.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

5th May

I was reasonably sure of my options after brushing up from the BBC website which was, when looked at, pretty outstanding. Didn't really notice much else today; Mr Blair's threat of the looming Tory government in the wings if we didn't vote Labour seemed shallow, but maybe worked in putting that fear in some voters' minds. When I went to vote I still wasn't sure which box to tick until the last minute.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

5th May

Voted at 7pm, didn't know until I went in which party I would vote for. Panicked after chatting with a friend that if loads of people don't vote Labour the Tories will get in – oh no!

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

In part this indecision was due to respondents' ignorance about the parties, but this was not the only factor at work. Research conducted over the last few years has described a gradual breakdown in party political tribalism, and this trend was reflected in the current study. Only a small minority felt a strong alignment to a single party, mostly Labour voters in the North East. Some others regarded themselves as 'more Tory than Labour', or vice versa, but did not feel strongly enough about their preferred party to cast a vote for them in this election.

"I have always voted for the same party in the past, but I didn't feel strongly enough to vote for them this year, and I didn't feel strongly about any of the other parties. I just couldn't bring myself to vote."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

The rest were genuine floating voters who seemed to have little sense of alignment to any party.

"I don't know what made me not vote. I was busy at work, and then I went home, and I just didn't get the oomph. None of the parties gave me any inspiration to think, 'God, let's go for that one, let's give them a chance'."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"Younger people nowadays are more likely to vote for what's beneficial for them. Older people just vote for who they voted for before."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

4.2 Labour's record in government

Another factor that discouraged respondents from voting, or from voting with conviction, was the relative stability of Labour's period in office, particularly in economic terms. A commonly-held view was that the government had neither triumphed nor foundered. Many felt disappointed that Labour had not achieved more and were unhappy about specific issues such as the Iraq war and the NHS, so did not feel strongly inclined to cast a vote in their favour; but, at the same time, there was no sense of immediate crisis which might have inspired a vote for another party. Some felt almost nostalgic for the ups-and-downs of the past.

"Everything seems to have stabilised these days. In the last four or five years everything has hit a level. I know they say we're heading for another recession, but they've been saying that for years... You feel comfortable with the way you are at the moment, so why change things?"

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

"I normally do vote. In the past I would have felt quite bad if I didn't vote. I've always thought that if you don't vote you shouldn't moan about the situation you're in. But I just couldn't be bothered. Had there been someone else who I really wanted to win I might have made the effort, but it's a case of 'Better the devil you know'."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"I don't feel particularly like we are in a crisis, so I don't feel there's any point. I didn't have a particularly good reason to vote."

HAVE YOU VOTED BEFORE?

"Yes."

SO WHAT'S CHANGED?

"Nothing seems to be wrong. I'm not particularly pissed off with anybody."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

ARE THERE ANY ELECTIONS THAT STICK IN YOUR MIND AS PARTICULARLY EXCITING?

"The one when Tony Blair first got in. The Conservatives had been in for so long and people were very discontented with the way things were going. People were getting their homes repossessed. Now, ok, we've got a roof over our head, but so has half of Europe who are living here."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

4.3 The similarities between the main parties

Another factor that made it difficult to select a candidate was the perceived similarity between the only two parties respondents thought capable of winning the election (Labour and Conservative). At a broad level, the perception of Labour as a party of the left and the Conservatives as a party of the right was weak, particularly among younger voters who did not remember a time when these ideological divisions were strongly felt. Older voters recognised this historical difference between the parties but felt that it had steadily declined over the last couple of decades.

"Years ago it was different. Sixty years ago, when Labour was for the people and they set up trade unions because kids were working in pits – it was different then. Now all the parties have gelled into each other."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"New Labour repositioned themselves into the centre ground, which was [where] the Tories [were]. Now the Tories don't seem to know where to go, left or right."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

At a more specific level, respondents found it difficult to choose between the two parties on the basis of their policies. One notable feature of the group discussions was how little people talked about the changes they would like to see in the (historically) key areas of health, crime, education and tax. Although respondents expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of life in the UK, including in these areas, they talked mainly in the context of long-term changes in the socio-political culture in Britain, rather than about easily-defined problems with practical solutions. Many of the issues that they felt most strongly about (such as immigration, anti-social behaviour and 'nanny-stateism') were not those which have traditionally formed the basis of the differences between the political parties. This made it difficult for respondents to decide who to vote for because they did not

think that either of the two main parties was able or inclined to address the problems that concerned them most.

“One of the things that I am dead against is the fact that anybody from the EU can come into this country and live here. A friend of mine is in immigration at Heathrow and thousands upon thousands of people every day are coming in. And you can’t stop them. I watched a documentary and it was looking 10 years ahead in this country – and the government has allowed this to happen – about all these thousands of people and how it’s going to affect the National Health, schooling, housing, jobs, let alone the economy. I’ve got no faith in whoever is in.”

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

“[Constraints] are making this country a misery. We are becoming miserable as a nation of people, because we seem to have constraint after constraint... We’re photographed 350 times a day. It’s the state of Big Brother. You go to Europe, there aren’t cameras up your nostrils... You go into a shop and ask for your post-code and they know everything about you.”

AND YOU DON’T THINK ANOTHER PARTY WOULD CHANGE THAT?

“No.”

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

“I don’t see that any of us can make a difference.”

DO YOU MEAN IN TERMS OF WHO’S GOING TO WIN THE ELECTION?

“I don’t think we look after Great Britain. We’re a small country and we’re just getting lost. We’re becoming part of the EU, with all the immigrants coming in. We’re becoming a minority. It’s like, who is Great Britain anymore?”

“It’s not England anymore, it’s multi-cultural. Who’s being racist and who’s not, and the police being too scared to arrest someone who’s just come into the country.”

“People are suing everyone else.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

WHY DO FEWER PEOPLE VOTE THESE DAYS? WERE THERE BIGGER ISSUES BACK THEN?

“Not necessarily bigger issues, but the issues they put forward were beneficial to the people voting, not for everyone else. Not Tom, Dick and Harry coming in from god knows where.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

In an effort to distinguish between the parties, respondents turned to campaign materials and to the media. However, most of what they saw focused on the Iraq war and whether or not Tony Blair could be trusted, which they did not consider appropriate issues on which to base their choice. Even the heavy emphasis on immigration was unhelpful, because the parties did not seem to be offering viable solutions to the perceived problem.

1st May

Reading papers there seems to be a lot of squabbling and not enough about what they would like to do if they won the election.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

27th April

I don't think the Iraq war and Tony Blair's integrity over it would be the sole reason for me to make me not vote for Tony Blair/Labour. The Iraq war situation is serious of course but it doesn't come at the top of my priorities... If I was to vote, for the moment, I would have to make my decision based on more personal issues – or ones that affect me directly.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

Friday 29th April

All parties still seem to be harping on about the war in Iraq again. Getting a bit boring now, I thought that there was an election underway and they would be trying to persuade us to vote for them, not just annoy me by moaning about the past and trying to score points against each other. I would vote on the merits of a party's policy not the un-ethics of another party.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

Sunday 1st May

More about how voting Lib Dems could let Tories in the back door. I wish they would start campaigning on their policies and stop trying to persuade us not to vote other parties. Still haven't decided whether to vote on Thursday, but the way the campaigning is going, it won't be that that makes up my mind.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

Instead, many claimed to want more information about what the parties would do about health, education and the economy, which, in principle, seemed to be the kind of issues on which right-thinking people would make a decision about which way to vote. However, when they received this type of information, the majority did not seem to have found it particularly interesting or helpful, largely because they did not find the two parties' policies sufficiently different to enable them to make a choice. This is perhaps not surprising given the similarities between respondents themselves in terms of their views on these issues; as YouGov found in their quantitative research on the general election, opinions about economic issues now seem to be less important in positioning people on a left-right axis than views on crime and immigration.

"[It's] since Labour got in. Their policies almost mirrored the Tories'. They did a couple of little things a bit different here and there, but like this lady said, 'Better the devil you know'. But the parties are so similar now, you can't tell A from B."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"It seems that previously there was a lot of, 'This is what we're going to do', but now it's a case of, 'This is what we're going to do but we might not do it because they thought of it first'. [No campaign material] was coming through the door and I didn't have a clue, so I just thought, 'Who's got the best name?'"

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

"I didn't know enough about the individual parties. To me they sounded like they were offering the same thing."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

29th April

Astonishingly the UKIP make the same claims and have the same focus as the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats. Electioneering by most parties seems glib and insincere. The differences between the parties seem to be almost seamless – all promising sensible and good policies. I feel like I need further choices.

1st May

Still bewailing the lack of depth of debate. The leaders seem to run around like a travelling flea circus visiting key marginal seats. The election seems like a farce with no real choices.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

27th April

With a 2½ year old daughter I am interested in what the parties plan to do with education. They all say that they want to improve education and give more money to the department. (But they always seem to say this, cannot say I have noticed anything in the past).

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

26th April

All three main parties are pledging to improve school discipline. So that helps me decide who to vote for, doesn't it!!

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

The impression that many were left with was that there was no (major) party worthy of their vote.

"I think it was a case of who do you choose? There wasn't much between them."

"I couldn't go and vote and think that I was really doing any good. That I could change anything."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"We all want someone to help our situation, be it individually or as a whole country, and there's just nobody out there who I would put my cross on the paper for."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

3rd May

I won't be voting. I think they are all the same and can't answer a straightforward question. It makes it hard for me to decide.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

Given the apparent similarities between respondents in terms of their views on key policy issues, it is difficult to judge the extent to which a greater focus on policy by the main parties would have encouraged more people to vote. It is clear from the election diaries, however, that at least some people actively sought information about policy and found it helpful in distinguishing the parties. Moreover, it seems likely that a more positive campaign would have provoked less cynicism about the election as a whole.

30th April

Newspapers saying Michael Howard will continue to focus on immigration issues, the war in Iraq and will not back down on the personal attack on Tony Blair. There's definitely not enough about their manifesto. He's not doing the Conservatives any favours in my eyes. May have to look on the internet for their manifestos.

1st May

Having said all that yesterday, I watched a party election broadcast tonight for the Conservatives. Very good, easy to understand what they say they're going to do. Sounds all impressive. Hopefully I'll see Labour's and Lib Dems' broadcast soon... This is more like it.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

3rd May

Read the mini manifestos in Edinburgh Evening Newspaper election pull out. [It] was useful, each party had their policy under each headline: taxation, health, law and order, education, pensions, defence and immigration.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

"I had one leaflet which literally just had five main points, and that was the only thing that grabbed my attention. Rather than billboards saying, 'Tony is lying'... You want it in black and white."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

2nd May

The Lib Dems want to scrap mandatory life sentences for murder, violent crime and serious sexual crime. So what would take its place? Would the life sentence be 40 years? Or till the day they die? They also think that there should be no limit on refugees accepted by EU countries. Surely this would mean more asylum seekers in Britain causing the country more expenditure, causing taxes to rise! I feel that all parties need to listen to the nation more as a whole. The Tories however do have some very good points on their flyer, a point made by them is:

'You don't waste money so why let Labour?'

And they raise points like: 'Cut student debt.' 'Scrap tuition and top up fees.' 'Encourage NHS dentists.' 'Allow new schools to open.' 'Have tougher sentences for criminals.'

These all make very good sense to me.

Diary extract, G4 (26-35, C2DE, Poole)

30th April

There is an encouraging story that the Conservatives are going to change their approach in the election campaign; they are going to stop going on about the war and Blair's credibility. This is because they have made no inroads into the Labour lead, they are actually falling behind. In my opinion, this will be a positive step if they start to promote their own policies rather than a confirmation of the negative campaign we have witnessed so far... The [leaflet] that my wife received from the Labour party was the first one that I had seen which solely talked about the benefits of what the party would do (for parents) if they were elected. This is a refreshing change as these leaflets usually try to dissuade you from voting for other parties rather than trying to win your vote.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

5. **The perception that voting will make no difference**

5.1 The result is a foregone conclusion

In spite of predictions that the 2005 election would be a closer contest than 2001, and of speculation in some sections of the media that Labour might not gain an overall majority, most respondents appeared to have viewed the result as foregone conclusion. A Labour victory was seen as the only probable result; and a Labour or Conservative victory as the only possible results. Many said they would have liked to vote for another party (usually the Liberal Democrats or Greens) but saw no point because their preferred party was so unlikely to form a government. As a result, several said they had not bothered to vote at all or had voted but considered their vote wasted.

"[I wrote in my bubble drawing] 'I know I should vote, but I don't believe in the policies of Labour or the Tories, and the Lib Dems will never get in'."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

"We know who's going to win, so does it really matter if I vote for someone else? I came out of the voting box and said to my other half, 'Who did you vote for?', and she said, 'Who did you vote for?'. I said so-and-so, and she said, 'Why did you vote for them?'. I said, 'Well who's going to win? Probably Labour, so why does it matter who I vote for?'. When it's only ever going to be a Conservative or a Labour government, it doesn't really make any difference who you vote for."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

"I think because it was a foregone conclusion it took any excitement away that anyone might have felt. I can't be bothered with it."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"Scotland's done and dusted, really. It would be nice to have a bit of competition, for a change."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

"Next time, when there's [only] a 60 [seat] majority, I think more people will vote because there's a chance it can sway the other way, very easily."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

At a local level, a minority felt further discouraged from voting by the degree of marginality in their constituency. Some of those who lived in reasonably safe seats saw little point in voting against the incumbent, and a few felt resentful that the election campaign focused so heavily on the marginal seats.

"[The campaign was] non-existent. No leaflets. Let's be fair, we've got an MP who's got about a 16,000 majority. End of story. It's a no-hoper."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"[The degree of marginality] certainly made a difference to me. I thought the Conservatives would get in in the end, and I didn't think my vote really mattered."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"If I lived in an area where there wasn't such a massive majority then it might not be such an issue, but they won't win a seat up here."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

"I got disillusioned with the first past the post system. Everything you read in the papers or saw on the news was about this marginal seat or that marginal seat, so you got the impression that their vote counted more than yours did."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

4th May

Voting still seems futile in a solid Labour seat which has been so since before I arrived in Edinburgh. The [only] possible outcome with any effect is if a big swing to the Liberal Democrats ousts Labour or more likely reduces the margin... otherwise vote for a minority party and have the smug satisfaction of having influenced nothing save a blip on the statistical chart.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

3rd May

Seems like "Election Unspun" was correct, and the key marginal seats have been identified and have the brunt of the political parties' marketing of carefully choreographed messages. This behaviour highlights the failings of modern politics. It has a vision of four years and this is not enough for good and wise governance of these Islands. Politicians squabble over semantics and statistics, which all makes you despair and wonder what the point of voting is.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

Many were unaware of the marginality of their constituency, however, so did not take this into account. It is also worth noting that voters in Mid Dorset and North Poole, the most marginal of the constituencies in the research sample, did not seem to differ significantly from others in this respect. The majority seemed to think that the Liberal Democrat victory was a foregone conclusion, even though the majority was only 0.88% following the 2001 election.

5.2 Nothing will change, whoever wins

The other factor underpinning respondents' feeling that their vote would make no difference was a belief that life would change little regardless of who won the election, because the parties would not follow through their election promises. Many felt let down by what they regarded as the failure of successive governments to change Britain for the better. Some saw this as the result of ineptitude on the part of politicians; others believed more cynically that parties never intend to keep their manifesto pledges.

"It isn't going to affect an awful lot of people, who wins. It isn't going to make a difference to our day-to-day lives who is in Number 10."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

“Four years ago it was a whole new big thing and I thought, ‘I’ve got the chance to vote. What’s it going to be like?’. You bump into your friends and it’s a whole new experience. You go in and put down your cross and go out thinking, ‘I’ve made a difference here. Will my lot get in?’. Then over the years you become more and more pissed off because you get taxed more and you don’t see any benefits whatsoever from what your one vote did.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“Was it John Major before? Wasn’t it that he was good, then he was crap, and Tony Blair has gone exactly the same way? It’s going to be the same whoever’s Prime Minister.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“None of it means anything to me, and it doesn’t bother me. It’s going to happen so I might as well just go along with it.”

WHAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN?

“Whatever. They’re going to put my taxes up, they’ll put up cigarettes and alcohol. I pay my road tax and I don’t get anything for it. It’s just life.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“They always say they’re going to do this and that, and then when they get elected nothing happens. So if they actually did what they said they were going to do, then fine, I would vote. But nothing ever comes of their promises.”

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

“When they say they’re going to put so much into the NHS, so much into schooling... As a little menial person, where do you actually feel it? Where do you actually see the difference? They must be putting all this money in, but you don’t feel that you’re benefiting from anything.”

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

“There would be a change if we actually saw something happen during the political life of the party. I don’t think I’ve seen anything happen in the last four years that I thought was a benefit to anybody.”

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

Thursday 5th

Had a discussion at work re voting/not voting – people died to allow us to vote etc. But the parties are all so similar, self-centred and pretty bad at following through with their manifesto promises. They create manifestos to lure voters, then [they] can stay in power for four years without honouring many.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

Some also felt that their own personal circumstances or life-stage meant that they were not a high priority for government policy, and that any change of government was likely to leave them largely untouched.

"I don't think they've aimed the campaign at me in particular. I don't have a family and I'm not old. It's like with the budget: there's no point in me watching it because none of it ever really affects me. I don't smoke, and I very rarely drink, and I'm not going to get any child benefits, and pensions are not going to affect me because by the time I come to draw one it will be abolished completely. So I don't see the point."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

"If you're on the breadline and you need benefits and stuff, that's when you look [at parties and policies]. Or if you've got loads of money and you don't want to pay any more tax. But if you're a working class person, it doesn't affect you that much."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

5.3 The Scottish perspective

Although there were no significant differences between the Scottish and English groups, a few respondents in Scotland reported feeling less engaged by UK general elections since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, which they considered their true representative body. One or two thought that devolution had confused the electoral situation; they were no longer certain which aspects of political life were governed by Scotland and which by Westminster, and were not sure how their vote in the general election would affect life in Scotland.

"[UK general elections] are not as important any more, now we've got the Scottish Parliament..."

"It's very unclear, the lines of communication between Scotland and England."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

"Surely your voice in Scotland should be coming from the Scottish parliament?"

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

6. **A lacklustre campaign**

Another factor that seemed to have depressed interest in voting was the lacklustre nature of the campaign, particularly at a local level; few had been canvassed themselves or remembered seeing much activity in their constituency. For most, the local campaign had consisted of a handful of leaflets through the door and a few billboards.

"[MPs] are ghosts. We never see them. We don't know them as people."

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

"There was no positive campaigning. Nobody seemed to ask what the electors wanted. It was all what they wanted to give you. I remember when there were rallies, and halls were you could go and talk to MPs. You never see them on the street."

"I can remember my mum and her friends getting us all together at election time. Voting for John Mackay. John Mackay, he was going to win the day!"

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

"It's like they can't be bothered. The candidate who's in knows he's going to get in, and the other one doesn't stand a chance."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

"I think it's important that if they want you to vote for them, then they'd better come round and tell you why you should."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

Many called for a return to the more active campaigns of the past, though it should be noted that some seemed only too happy with a low-key approach.

"There wasn't any canvassing – but it's your biggest nightmare if they knock on the door when you're cooking dinner, and you don't really want to be listening anyway."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

Respondents living in the marginal constituency of Mid Dorset and North Poole appeared to have noticed more local activity, but only for the Liberal Democrat candidate. There was apparently little sense of competition for the seat.

"Down the Broadway you've got orange poster, orange poster, orange poster, orange poster, Simon Hayes [Conservative], orange poster."

"The Lib Dems just went berserk in their campaigning. It was orange everywhere."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

Even at a national level there was a sense of lack of excitement. One respondent characterised the election as a 'damp squib', and this summed up the views of many others. Many older people compared the 2005 poll unfavourably with elections past.

"[They should] go back to the '80s. For me, the '80s was like a rainbow, and the election this time was in duller colours, in sepias. There's no excitement. In the '80s it seemed to have more pizzazz."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"They were just plodding along, going through the motions, but nobody really gave a damn what was going on. Normally they've got a bit of oomph, but it was like they were reading from a script. I didn't find any of it interesting at all."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"To be honest it all seemed very quiet. Nobody seemed to be talking about it. It was happening, but it wasn't. It wasn't in my face. I didn't think there was much coverage on TV."

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

4th May

Watched news at 6.30 pm. Nothing really riveting considering it's only one day to go. Read in newspapers that this has been the dullest and most boring election for a long time. Tend to agree, although in the past admit didn't pay as much attention as I should.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

1st May

A week after starting this diary I will probably still vote, but I am less likely than I was a week ago. Nothing about the whole campaign has captured my attention.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

Media speculation about the date of the election appeared to have contributed to the lack of excitement by blurring the boundaries of the campaign period. There was no sense of a campaign 'launch', and many felt that, by the time the election was officially called, the campaign had already been dragging on for weeks.

"The way Tony Blair farted about on when the election day was going to be. For god's sake, what was all that about? Just tell us the bloody day."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

This sense of anti-climax seemed to have been compounded by the result, which made the election feel like a mere blip in the business of government.

"It was just a reshuffle of Tony's cronies... It was just another day. Nothing different."

G6: 36-49, C2DE, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"Life goes on. Nothing changes."

"It was like a non-election."

"I think it was the most bland election in my life."

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

"I asked dad at breakfast and he said, 'Of course Labour got in'. I guess it was just a mild disappointment. Just a sigh, off we go. The long uphill struggle of the next four years."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

7. The electoral system

One final factor which appeared to have undermined inspiration to vote was dissatisfaction with the first past the post system. Most respondents had little interest in the electoral system: some knew little about it, while others understood it but had given it little active thought. However, a sizeable minority had reservations about the design of the system and said that this had played a significant part in dampening their enthusiasm to vote.

Those who were well-informed about first past the post tended to criticise it for increasing the sense that individual votes do not make a difference. These respondents argued that, when an election is decided on the basis of a very small number of votes, it is effectively pointless to vote in a safe seat. They also understood (to varying degrees) and regretted the fact that a party could gain a parliamentary majority on the basis of a relatively weak mandate. A few also criticised the demarcation of constituency boundaries as unfair.

“Say the Conservatives lost a seat by ten votes, all of those votes just disappear. It’s the seat that they count.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“The first past the post system has been at its worst recently. They showed all the figures and you could see that even if the Conservatives got 5% more votes than Labour, Labour would still win because of the way the constituencies are laid out.”

“I think the figures are that 65% of the country voted Conservative this time around, but we still have a Labour government.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“I think proportional representation would definitely increase the amount of people that vote because you’re affecting the whole country, and your vote counts 250 times as much. So people will have the incentive to vote because they can make a difference. If you’re in a seat with a 20,000 Labour majority your vote doesn’t matter at all.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

“As I understand it, more people voted Conservative than they did Labour, but because of the way the voting wards have been set up, Labour won. They keep changing these boundaries. It’s cheating, as far as I’m concerned. They should introduce proportional representation, then the majority vote wins.”

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

27th April

Checked the BBC News website this morning: there was an item on there about how people have become disenfranchised with the first past the post electoral system. The report states that 425 constituencies could already be declared, [and] as a result the politicians effectively target only 2% of the population. This report reflects exactly how I feel about the election.

Diary extract, G5 (36-49, ABC1, Edinburgh)

“As long as we have the first past the post system, in which even if there’s a dozen people who feel exactly the same way as you it won’t make a difference... Whereas if you had proportional representation, if there are a dozen people who felt like you in every single constituency in Britain it would add up to nearly a seat, so you could actually make a difference. As it is you might as well vote BNP. Why not?”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

Respondents who were most critical of the current system tended to support a move to proportional representation. Some of these did not seem to have a clear understanding of how a PR system might work, however, and or two expressed concerns that a change to PR would undermine stability and decision-making.

“But [if it changes to proportional representation] then nothing will get passed because there will be so many different points of view in government. If you have 350 different views, how will you get anything passed? You’ll just be debating.”

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

8. **Reasons for voting**

Finally, in spite of largely negative views about the election campaign, it is worth bearing in mind that a sizeable number of the respondents in this research did decide to cast a vote and considered it important to do so. As noted right at the beginning of this report, those who voted generally did so because they felt a duty to vote or a passion for voting itself, not because they were inspired by the election campaign or felt strongly about any particular party or candidate.

“I always look forward to voting. It’s the only time you feel you can do anything. I always feel satisfied when I’ve voted.”

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

“That’s why I sent for [my postal vote], because I wanted to be part of it.”

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

A LOT OF WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS NEGATIVE, YET YOU ALL VOTED. WHY?

"Because you can't live without a government. Somebody has to take responsibility."

"People say, 'I can't be bothered to vote', and then they say, 'What's happening here? I feel strongly about that. I'm going to go to my local MP because I feel strongly about this.' So you're like, 'Well why didn't you stand up and vote when you had the chance?'"

"I think every vote counts. When you think how many people don't vote because they can't be bothered, or it's not convenient to go down there and queue up... But if they did, then all these votes would make a difference. You think how many people under 25 can't be bothered to vote, and how many older people or middle aged people do vote, and they vote for similar parties, similar opinions. If you had a lot more younger people who voted I think there would be significant changes."

"It wasn't that long ago that women couldn't vote... and many people live in regimes where they don't have their own say, and some people seem completely oblivious to that. In Australia it is illegal not to vote, and if you don't vote you get a hefty fine. I feel that if we had something like that in this country, and you had on the ballot paper a place where you could abstain, I think that would be so much better."

G1: 18-25, ABC1, voters, Poole

WHEN DID YOU VOTE?

"About quarter to ten at night."

SO YOU RUSHED OUT AT THE LAST MINUTE?

"People died for me to be able to vote. I had this nagging voice in my head."

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

"I felt I had to vote. In the past I hadn't bothered taking any notice. But because this time I felt a lot more involved [because of keeping a diary], if I hadn't gone and voted I would have been disappointed with myself. The fact that I'd done all the research, and listened and learnt a lot more, it would have felt kind of pointless if I hadn't voted."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

When asked what would make them more likely to vote in future, most doubted whether a quick-fix change to the system was the answer. Some thought that a move to electronic or postal voting might encourage greater participation, but the majority regarded this as a red herring; although it was a good idea to make other (secure) voting options available, the polling station system was very convenient and was not a genuine deterrent to voting. It is worth noting that the heavy media coverage of fraudulent postal voting did not appear to have had a significant impact on respondents. Although the issue was raised

from time to time and prompted calls for greater security, there was no sense that the postal voting system had been fatally undermined.

“The time will come, and I don’t think it will be much longer, when Sky will come up with, ‘Press your red button to vote Labour, your blue button for Conservatives and your yellow button for the Liberals’. The technology is here. Then you’d have high turnouts.”

G7: 50-65, ABC1, non-voters, Hertfordshire

“I think that if you’re not going to vote then you’re not going to vote, no matter how much easier they make it [e.g. text or touch screen].”

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

“No. It’s not hard, it’s just laziness I suppose. If you have to go in person then it can’t be as easily fixed [rigged]. If you believe in the policies enough, you can get to a polling station.”

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

“I feel safer the way it is now. Don’t make the jump if you don’t have to.”

“The other [way of looking at it] is don’t stay in the dark ages. Just because it’s always been down like that doesn’t mean it’s the best way of doing it. [Voting in person] is not always as secure as people think. Other options are there now.”

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

“[Postal voting] is a good idea. I’m out all day. That day I was up early and didn’t come back until late, so it suited me.”

G8: 50-65, C2DE, voters, Newcastle

Several supported the introduction of an ‘abstain’ box on the ballot paper to enable voters to register their dissatisfaction with all the options open to them. Although this idea appealed strongly to the politically active, particularly in the younger groups, it seemed unlikely to do much to engage others.

“There are people who feel very strongly that there were people who fought for us to have the vote, but obviously at that time people wanted to be included in a system. But if people don’t feel included in the system then they don’t want to be a part of that system. I think if you had an ‘Abstain’ box you’d be amazed how many people would tick it.”

G3: 26-35, ABC1, non-voters, Newcastle

“I think they should have a box next to each party saying, ‘I am really pissed off with you – this is your last chance’.”

G5: 36-49, ABC1, diary group, Edinburgh

Some also thought it would be helpful if a neutral body such as The Electoral Commission were to produce a digest of each party’s

manifesto. Given the difficulty that respondents had in distinguishing the parties on the basis of their policies, however, it seems unlikely that this would have made a significant difference.

"[It would be good] if someone like The Electoral Commission produced a leaflet for the constituency: basic points, black and white, all on one piece of paper, through every door."

G4: 26-35, C2DE, diary group, Poole

There was also some support for an impartial body to remind the electorate of the importance of voting. Several remembered seeing The Electoral Commission's advertising campaign and found it relevant and motivating. Ultimately, however, the majority believed that the responsibility for re-engaging the public and increasing turnout lay with politicians. Respondents wanted to see a change in the political culture that would restore their faith in politicians and parties.

"I did make a point of going to the BBC website and trying to look at the campaign issues, but even then I just thought, 'What's the point?'."

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO DO THAT?

"There were adverts saying it was important to take an interest. I do believe that, but at the end of the day they are more interested in what the other parties are saying than in what we are saying and what we want, and what they should be doing. I ended up just not bothering."

G2: 18-25, C2DE, non-voters, Edinburgh

Appendix

CONTACT QUESTIONNAIRE – POST ELECTION GROUPS

Name:

Address:

.....(include postcode) Tel:
.....

Constituency:(if in doubt, check with office)

Sex: Male () Female ()

Age: 18-25 () 26-35 () 36-49 () 50-65 ()

Occupation (HoH):

SeS: A () B () C1 () C2 () D () E ()

Ethnic origin:

HELLO, I WORK FOR A MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY CALLED CRAGG ROSS DAWSON AND WE ARE CARRYING OUT SOME RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICS. MAY I ASK YOU A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS?

QA Could I just check, do you, or your partner/spouse, work, or have worked in the past, in any of the following fields?

- Marketing ()
- Market Research ()
- Advertising ()
- Journalism ()
- Public Relations ()

CLOSE IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, OTHERWISE GO TO QB.

QB Have you ever been to a market research group discussion or interview?

Yes () TO QC No () TO Q1

QC How long ago was the last time?

WRITE IN _____

CLOSE IF ATTENDED WITHIN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS.

QD What subject(s) was/were the group(s)/interview(s) on?

WRITE IN _____

CLOSE IF RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. OTHERWISE TO Q1.

Q1 Could you tell me, did you vote in the 2005 General Election that has just taken place?

- Yes () GROUPS 1 & 8
No () GROUPS 2, 3, 6 AND 7

RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 1 AND 8 **SHOULD** HAVE VOTED IN THE 2005 GENERAL ELECTION.

TO Q2 IF APPROPRIATE.

RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 2, 3, 6 AND 7 **SHOULD NOT** HAVE VOTED IN THE 2005 GENERAL ELECTION.

TO Q3 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q2 And did you cast your vote in person or by post?

- In person ()
By post ()

PLEASE TRY TO RECRUIT ONE OR TWO RESPONDENTS IN GROUPS 1 AND 8 WHO VOTED BY POST. GO TO Q4

Q3 And which of the following applies to you?

- I was eligible and registered to vote in the election () TO Q3
I was eligible to vote but I'm not sure whether I was registered or not () TO Q3
I was eligible to vote but deliberately wasn't registered () TO Q3
I was planning to vote but it turned out that I wasn't registered () CLOSE
I'm not sure whether I was eligible to vote or not () CLOSE
I definitely wasn't eligible to vote () CLOSE

ALL RESPONDENTS SHOULD BELIEVE THEY WERE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE. NONE SHOULD HAVE PLANNED TO VOTE BUT BEEN UNABLE TO DO SO BECAUSE THEY DISCOVERED THEY WERE NOT REGISTERED. GO TO Q4 IF APPROPRIATE, OTHERWISE CLOSE.

Q4 Thinking now about past elections in general, which of the following best describes you?

- "I always vote in general elections" ()
"I usually vote in general elections" ()
"I sometimes vote in general elections" ()
"I rarely vote in general elections" ()
"I never vote in general elections" ()

IN GROUPS 1 AND 8 PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WHO ALWAYS OR USUALLY VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS, AND THOSE WHO SOMETIMES OR RARELY VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS.

IN GROUPS 2, 3, 6 AND 7 PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WHO NORMALLY OR SOMETIMES VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS, AND THOSE WHO RARELY OR NEVER VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS (PLEASE RECRUIT NO MORE THAN TWO RESPONDENTS PER GROUP WHO RARELY OR NEVER VOTE IN ELECTIONS). TO Q5 IF APPROPRIATE, OTHERWISE CLOSE.

Q5a How often, if at all do you read any of the following newspapers?

	Every day	At least twice a week	Less often or never
Daily Mirror	()	()	()
Independent	()	()	()
Daily Express	()	()	()
Times	()	()	()
Daily Star	()	()	()
Guardian	()	()	()
Sun	()	()	()
Daily Telegraph	()	()	()
Daily Mail	()	()	()

Q5b And how often, if at all do you watch the following types of programme on TV?

	Every day	At least twice a week	Less often or never
Travel programmes	()	()	()
Documentaries	()	()	()
The news	()	()	()
Reality shows	()	()	()
DIY/gardening	()	()	()
Soaps	()	()	()

ALL RESPONDENTS TO READ A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER AND/OR WATCH THE NEWS ON TV AT LEAST TWICE A WEEK. TO Q6 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q6 Which of the following statements most closely describes how you feel about politics and current affairs?

- A *"I have no interest in politics at all, and I find the news and current affairs very boring"* () CLOSE
- B *"I don't always understand what is going on in politics, but I know that at some level it affects me"* ()
- C *"I try to keep up with what is going on in government and current affairs, even if it's not always that interesting"* ()
- D *"I think it is important to keep in touch with what the government is doing and I try to catch up regularly with current affairs"* ()

E *"I am very interested in knowing what is happening in the world around me and I think politics is something that I should be informed about"* ()

F *"Politics is one of the main areas of interest in my life and I am always seeking out information so that I can keep right up to date with the latest developments at Westminster"* () CLOSE

PLEASE RECRUIT A SPREAD OF STATEMENTS CHOSEN, EXCLUDING ANYONE WHO HAS NO INTEREST IN POLITICS/CURRENT AFFAIRS (STATEMENT A ABOVE) AND THOSE WHO ARE VERY INTERESTED (STATEMENT F ABOVE). TO Q7 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q7 Do you belong to any of the following, or have you done so in the past 2-3 years?

Greenpeace ()
Sports club ()
Friends of the Earth ()
A political party () CLOSE
Motoring organisation ()
Amnesty International ()

IF POLITICAL PARTY MENTIONED, CLOSE – DO NOT RECRUIT. OTHERWISE TO Q8.

Q8 Finally, do any of the following apply to you?

I do voluntary work for a charity ()
I do paid work for a charity ()
I work for a local political party () CLOSE
I have made a donation to a charity in the last ten years ()
I have made a donation to a political party in the last ten years () CLOSE
I am a local councillor () CLOSE

IF RESPONDENT WORKS FOR A POLITICAL PARTY, IS A LOCAL COUNCILLOR OR HAS MADE A DONATION TO A POLITICAL PARTY, CLOSE – DO NOT RECRUIT. OTHERWISE RECRUIT AS APPROPRIATE.

CONTACT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Address:

.....(include postcode) Tel:
.....

Constituency:(if in doubt, check with office)

Sex: Male () Female ()

Age: 26-35 () 36-49 ()

Occupation (HoH):

SeS: A () B () C1 () C2 () D () E ()

Ethnic origin:

HELLO, I WORK FOR A MARKET RESEARCH COMPANY CALLED CRAGG ROSS DAWSON AND WE ARE CARRYING OUT SOME RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICS. MAY I ASK YOU A FEW QUICK QUESTIONS?

QA Could I just check, do you, or your partner/spouse, work, or have worked in the past, in any of the following fields?

- Marketing ()
- Market Research ()
- Advertising ()
- Journalism ()
- Public Relations ()

CLOSE IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, OTHERWISE GO TO QB.

QB Have you ever been to a market research group discussion or interview?

Yes () TO QC No () TO Q1

QC How long ago was the last time?

WRITE IN _____
CLOSE IF ATTENDED WITHIN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS.

QD What subject(s) was/were the group(s)/interview(s) on?

WRITE IN _____
CLOSE IF RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH TOPIC. OTHERWISE TO Q1.

Q1 Can I check, which of these applies to you?

- "I'm definitely registered to vote in the general election on May 5th" () TO Q2
- "I'm fairly certain that I'm registered to vote" () TO Q2
- "I'm not sure whether I'm registered to vote or not" () CLOSE
- "I'm probably not registered to vote" () CLOSE
- "I'm definitely not registered to vote" () CLOSE

Q2 Which of the following best describes how likely you are to vote in the General Election?

- Very likely () CLOSE
- Quite likely () CLOSE
- Have not yet decided () TO Q3
- Unlikely () CLOSE
- Definitely not () CLOSE

RESPONDENTS SHOULD HAVE NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER OR NOT THEY ARE GOING TO VOTE IN THE NEXT ELECTION. TO Q3 IF APPROPRIATE, OTHERWISE CLOSE.

Q3 Thinking now about past general elections, which of the following best describes you?

- "I always vote in general elections" () CLOSE
- "I usually vote in general elections" () SEE QUOTA
- "I sometimes vote in general elections" () SEE QUOTA
- "I rarely vote in general elections" () SEE QUOTA
- "I never vote in general elections" () CLOSE

IN GROUP 4, PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WHO SOMETIMES OR RARELY VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS.

IN GROUP 5, PLEASE RECRUIT A MIX OF THOSE WHO USUALLY OR SOMETIMES VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS.

TO Q4 IF APPROPRIATE, OTHERWISE CLOSE.

Q4a How often, if at all do you read any of the following newspapers?

	Every day	At least twice a week	Less often or never
Daily Mirror	()	()	()
Independent	()	()	()
Daily Express	()	()	()
Times	()	()	()
Daily Star	()	()	()
Guardian	()	()	()
Sun	()	()	()
Daily Telegraph	()	()	()
Daily Mail	()	()	()

Q4b And how often, if at all do you watch the following types of programme on TV?

	Every day	At least twice a week	Less often or never
Travel programmes	()	()	()
Documentaries	()	()	()
The news	()	()	()
Reality shows	()	()	()
DIY/gardening	()	()	()
Soaps	()	()	()

ALL RESPONDENTS TO READ A NATIONAL NEWSPAPER AND/OR WATCH THE NEWS ON TV AT LEAST TWICE A WEEK. TO Q5 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q5 Which of the following statements most closely describes how you feel about politics and current affairs?

- A *"I have no interest in politics at all, and I find the news and current affairs very boring"* () CLOSE
- B *"I don't always understand what is going on in politics, but I know that at some level it affects me"* ()
- C *"I try to keep up with what is going on in government and current affairs, even if it's not always that interesting"* ()
- D *"I think it is important to keep in touch with what the government is doing and I try to catch up regularly with current affairs"* ()
- E *"I am very interested in knowing what is happening in the world around me and I think politics is something that I should be informed about"* ()
- F *"Politics is one of the main areas of interest in my life and I am always seeking out information so that I can keep right up to date with the latest developments at Westminster"* () CLOSE

PLEASE RECRUIT A SPREAD OF STATEMENTS CHOSEN, EXCLUDING ANYONE WHO HAS NO INTEREST IN POLITICS/CURRENT AFFAIRS (STATEMENT A ABOVE) AND THOSE WHO ARE VERY INTERESTED (STATEMENT F ABOVE). TO Q6 IF APPROPRIATE.

Q6 Do you belong to any of the following, or have you done so in the past 2-3 years?

- Greenpeace ()
- Sports club ()
- Friends of the Earth ()
- A political party () CLOSE
- Motoring organisation ()
- Amnesty International ()

IF POLITICAL PARTY MENTIONED, CLOSE – DO NOT RECRUIT. OTHERWISE TO

Q7. Finally, do any of the following apply to you?

- I do voluntary work for a charity ()
- I do paid work for a charity ()
- I work for a local political party () CLOSE
- I have made a donation to a charity in the last ten years ()
- I have made a donation to a political party in the last ten years () CLOSE
- I am a local councillor () CLOSE

IF RESPONDENT WORKS FOR A POLITICAL PARTY, IS A LOCAL COUNCILLOR OR HAS MADE A DONATION TO A POLITICAL PARTY IN THE LAST TEN YEARS, CLOSE – DO NOT RECRUIT. OTHERWISE RECRUIT AS APPROPRIATE.

The Electoral Commission/CRD
TOPIC GUIDE
GENERAL ELECTION 2005: PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

KEY OBJECTIVES

- build up a picture of the public's experience of the general election
- thoroughly explore factors determining whether respondents voted or not; find out which factors are general and which were specific to the 2005 election

Introduction

Explain objective of research; nature of The Electoral Commission (*'an independent body overseeing elections, required by law to review the general election'*); intended use of results; research process (confidentiality etc).

Reassure that research is not political; we are not focussing on *how* people voted, but on what they thought of the election.

Background / warm-up

Personal introduction (name, make-up of household etc).

(Diary groups) establish who voted in the election and who did not.

Election diaries

Discussion in the diary groups would cover the same ground as in the other groups, but respondents would be asked to use their diaries as prompts and to talk about what they wrote. They would also be asked what they thought about the experience of keeping an election diary.

Election 2005: experiences

We are keen to encourage respondents to talk about the election from their own point of view: to focus on what they thought was notable and to use their own terminology. We would therefore start with a very open question and only use prompts later in the discussion to explore specific aspects of the election.

NB In Scotland, the moderator would look out for any apparent differences in the salience of the election, or respondents' attitudes towards it, in light of devolution.

What was their experience of the general election? How was it for them? What sort of things defined this election? Can they sum it up in a couple of words?

Respondents would be asked to spend a minute or so writing down a few words that express their feelings about the election, to encourage top-of-mind associations and strongest memories. This would be followed by a 'shout-out' session to share thoughts, moderator noting responses on a flipchart.

The campaign period

*Throughout this discussion, the moderator would note whether respondents are talking about the **national** campaign or the **local** campaign in their constituency.*

What do respondents remember about the campaign period? What stands out in their minds?

What factors are important to them in judging whether this was a 'good' or a 'bad' campaign? What do they see as the purpose of the campaign period? What do they look for from a campaign (e.g. information about the parties' policies; motivation to vote; very little – they've already decided whether/which way to vote)? When did the campaign start, in their view? To what extent did this campaign give them what they wanted? What were the highlights / low points, and why?

Moderator to note any feeling that the campaign was 'too little, too late'; that there needs to be more dialogue between politicians and public in the years between election. Also note any feeling that parties only target certain people during election campaigns (e.g. those in marginal constituencies), while others get left out.

How did this election campaign compare with others they remember? What seemed different, how and why? Would they like to see any changes to the way election campaigns are run? If so, what and why?

What sticks in their mind about the media coverage of the election campaign? How did different publishers and broadcasters compare? Do any particular articles or programmes stick out in their mind? What would they like to see from election media coverage? How does this compare to the reality? What part (if any) did the media coverage play in persuading them to vote / not to vote?

Voters (incl. respondents in diary groups who did decide to vote): When did they decide they were definitely going to vote? Did they waver during the election campaign? If so, how, when and why? What finally persuaded them to vote? If they are the type who always vote, did they feel any differently this time? Did anything nearly persuade them not to vote? If so, what and why?

Note/follow up any discussion of marginality as a factor in voting. Do respondents know the marginality of their seat? What impact if any does this have on voting?

Non-voters (incl. respondents in diary groups who decided not to vote): At what point did they decide they were not going to vote in this election? What were the important factors/moments, and why? Was there a point at which they thought they might vote? If so, what changed their mind? Put decision not to vote in context of voting history: are they the type who never vote or sometimes vote? If they sometimes vote, why did they not in this particular election? Are they likely to vote at the next election? Why/why not?

Voting / election day

Bubble drawing exercise: respondents would be asked to complete bubble drawings to express their feelings about voting. Each respondent would be given two drawings: one showing a voter at the ballot box and the other depicting a non-voter walking past a polling station. Respondents would be asked to complete a thought-bubble for each of the characters. Postal voters would be given alternative images: one of a voter posting a ballot paper envelope, the other of a non-voter throwing it in the bin.

Voters: What sticks in their mind about voting? What was it like for them? Respondents would be asked to talk about their bubble drawings: what did it feel like to vote in this election? What was going through their mind at the

time? How did they feel afterwards? How did voting at this election compare with previous elections? Did they feel any differently this time, and if so why?

Did voting in this election feel like they hoped it would? How would they *like* to have felt when they voted? What would have to change to make this happen?

What do they think voting day would have felt like for someone who *didn't* vote? Why?

What did they think about the administrative arrangements (e.g. receiving polling card, voting booth, ballot paper)? How convenient / satisfactory were these aspects of the election? What, if anything, did they add or detract from the voting experience? Would they like to see any changes to the arrangements for election day? If so what, and why?

Postal voters (*briefly*): Why did they decide to vote by post? What was their experience of voting by post? Do they think that voting by this method gave them a different experience of the election than if they had voted in person? If so, in what way? If they have voted previously at a polling station, how did the two experiences compare? Was postal voting better or worse, and in what way? Next time around, which method would they choose?

When did postal voters send their ballot papers in? How did they feel about the campaign after they had voted? Did they still pay attention to what was going on, or did they switch off? Did they have any misgivings about their choice of party after they had voted? Did they ever regret their choice to vote, and if so why?

Non-voters: What was election day like for them as non-voters (discuss bubble drawings)? What sticks in their mind about how it felt *not* to vote? What did they think when they saw others voting or talked to friends or family who had voted? How did this make them feel?

Did any of them make the decision not to vote *on election day itself*? If so, what prompted this decision? Was there anything about the administrative arrangements that dissuaded them from voting? If so, what and why?

What do they think voting day would have felt like for someone who *did* vote? Why?

The results

What was their experience of election night / the next morning? How did they feel during the 'waiting period' e.g. excited, indifferent, worried? How important a part of their personal 'election experience' was this period? Did they watch/listen to coverage of the results as they came out? If so, what sticks in their mind? What did they think of the coverage this year? If not, why not? What do they think about people who stay up all night waiting for the results?

How and when did they find out who had won the election? How did they feel then about their decision to vote / not to vote?

Would they like to see any changes in the way that election results are covered? If so what, and why?

When does an election end? Is there any sense of a post-election period? If so, how would they describe this? (e.g. does engagement with public continue, or do politicians retreat back in 'Westminster bubble'?)

Response to statements about the election

The moderator would show the following statements and ask respondents how they feel about them; do they agree, disagree, and why? Some of the statements may be introduced earlier, during the chronological discussion of the election, if they seem particularly pertinent to the debate.

Top priority

'There was no point voting in the election because all the parties are the same.'

'Voting in this election was convenient for people.'

'It's better not to vote at all than to vote for a party you're not really happy with.'

'Turnout at the 2001 general election was 59% – the lowest in any election since 1918. Turnout at the 2005 general election was 61%.'

'People were kept well-informed during the election.'

'It's only worth voting if you live in a marginal constituency.'

'Spoiling your ballot paper is a good way of protesting against all the political parties.'

Lower priority

'If you didn't vote in the election then your voice didn't get heard.'

'People in this country take democracy for granted.'

'We owe it to the suffragettes to use our vote.'

'Everyone in this country has a duty to vote.'

Listen out for references to the voting system (e.g. PR vs. first past the post), but only pursue if this is a key factor in decisions whether to vote.

Comparison with previous elections

How did the 2005 election compare with previous general elections? Which has been the most memorable general election in their lifetime? Why? What made this election stand out?

How would they describe their voting history: are they the type who always vote, never vote, sometimes vote? If they vote in some elections but not others, why is this? What determines whether they vote in a general election? How likely are they to vote in the next election? Why?

If they never vote, why is this? What puts them off? Has there ever been an election where they were tempted to vote? If so why, and why did they finally decide not to?

What does having the vote and using their vote mean to them? Have their feelings about this changed over the years – if so how and why?

Summing up

Overall feelings about the 2005 general election. What were the key factors that persuaded them to vote/not to vote? What do they think would encourage more people / them personally to vote in the next general election?

Statements and statistics

Top priority

'There was no point voting in the election because all the parties are the same.'

'Voting in this election was convenient for people.'

'It's better not to vote at all than to vote for a party you're not really happy with.'

'Turnout at the 2001 general election was 59% – the lowest in any election since 1918. Turnout at the 2005 general election was 61%.'

'People were kept well-informed during the election.'

'It's only worth voting if you live in a marginal constituency.'

'Spoiling your ballot paper is a good way of protesting against all the political parties.'

Lower priority

'If you didn't vote in the election then your voice didn't get heard.'

'People in this country take democracy for granted.'

'We owe it to the suffragettes to use our vote.'

'Everyone in this country has a duty to vote.'







