Public Opinion Research: Winter 05/06

Research Study Conducted for
The Electoral Commission

The
Electoral
Commission

December 2005 – January 2006

Contents

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a research study conducted by the MORI Social Research Institute on behalf of The Electoral Commission.

Methodology

Over the course of three face to face Omnibus surveys in Great Britain, and an ad hoc face to face survey in Northern Ireland, MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,134 adults aged 18+ in UK, of whom 1,067 were interviewed face-to-face in home in Great Britain on 5-10 January 2006 and 67 interviewed face-to-face in home in Northern Ireland on 1-5 December 2005. A supplementary survey of 225 adults in Scotland took place in home, face to face, on 19-23 January 2006.

Not all the questions covered in this report were asked of the full sample, and therefore the base sizes and interview dates for each question are shown in the topline results, appended. Data are weighted to the national population profile.

Report Layout

Following this introduction and an executive summary, the report is divided into three sections:

- Voter registration;

- Voting channels and confidence in voting; and

- The Electoral Commission

A marked-up questionnaire showing the percentages giving each response to each question and technical details of the survey methodology, are appended.

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Interpretation of the Data

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.

Acknowledgements

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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.

MORI is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules on disclosure of data and methodology from published surveys. The rules can be seen on the BPC's website, www.britishpollingcouncil.org

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Executive Summary

The process of registering to vote, and the process of voting

- 77% of respondents say that they are satisfied with the system of registering to vote in the UK – no significant change since May 2003.

- Levels of satisfaction with the actual *process* of voting follows a similar pattern, with 77% of participants claiming to be either very or fairly happy with the process. This figure represents a minor rise of 3% since May 2003.

- A third (33%) of people believe that being on the electoral register makes it easier to borrow money, whilst a similar proportion (36%) believe that you are automatically put on the electoral register if you pay Council Tax. Nine in ten (90%) of respondents agree that you have to be on the electoral register in order to vote in an election in the UK.

- 92% of respondents say they are registered to vote in elections in the UK, a figure not significantly different from the 93% level reported in 2003 and in 2004. This figure includes big subgroup differences, with the level of registration falling to 76% amongst 18-24 year olds, and 85% of 25-34 year olds. Black and minority ethnic respondents are also less likely to be registered – 21% are unregistered, representing a rise of 5% compared with the 2004/5 figure.

- 42% of respondents mentioned contacting the local council as their preferred method of registering to vote, and a similar proportion (44%) would contact the local council to check if their name was on the electoral register. However, 19% of respondents did not know how to register to vote.

- Five in six respondents agreed that their household had received the electoral registration forms in August or September last year, though this figure drops to 67% in London.

- Almost three in ten (28%) say that they would not know how to apply for a postal vote if they wanted to do so.

Voting channels and confidence in voting

- Overall 'my vote being safe from fraud or abuse' was the most important feature of voting for most respondents, mentioned by 32% of respondents. This represents a similar finding to the 2004/5 survey.

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Three in ten (31%) believe that electoral fraud is a 'very big' or 'fairly big' problem in Britain. A third (33%) think that voting by post is unsafe, though only 2% think the same of voting at polling stations.

- Awareness of postal voting on demand has risen slightly over the last twelve months, with three quarters of people (77%) claiming to be aware of their right to apply for a postal vote. At 17%, the proportion of people who have registered for a postal vote is not significantly from the 2004/5 figure of 18%.

- Nearly nine in ten (88%) of respondents agree that 'voting is important', though a much smaller proportion (53%) say that they 'know enough about the way that politics works to get involved if they want to'.

Transparency in party spending and funding

- Only a quarter (26%) of respondents believe that party funding is open and transparent, and a similar proportion (25%) believe that party spending is transparent, 43% and 42% respectively disagree.
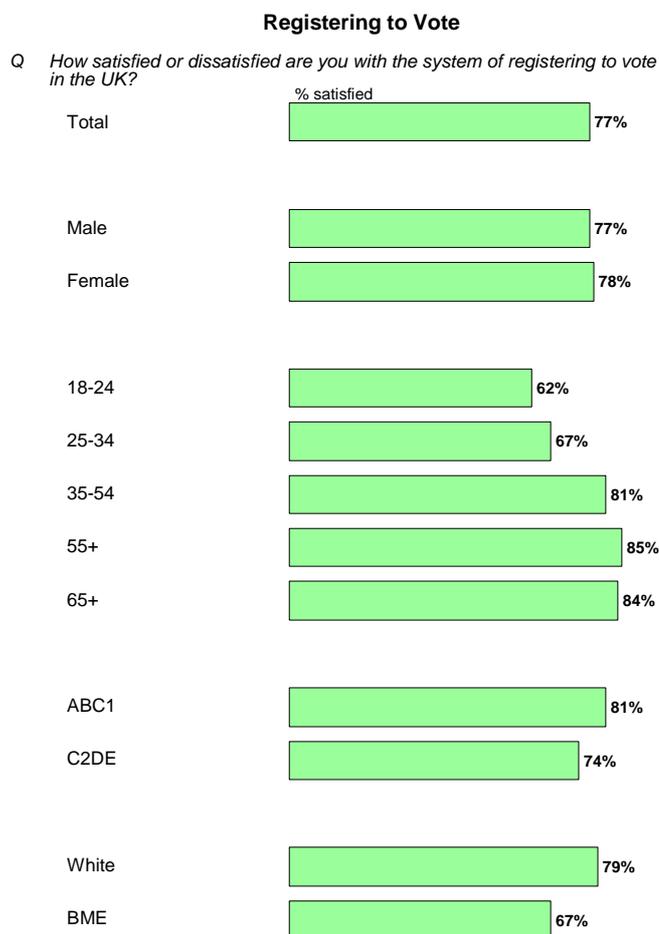
The Electoral Commission

- Nearly three in five people (65%) claim to have at least heard of the Electoral Commission, though few say that they know much about it.

- Some 35% of respondents correctly identified the Commission as an independent body separate from Government, though only 1% of the general public claim to have visited the aboutmyvote.com website.

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Voter registration

Attitudes to, and knowledge about, registration

Over three quarters of respondents (77%) say they are satisfied with the system of registering to vote in the UK, an increase of some 2% compared with May 2003. The level of satisfaction varies by age, with older respondents more satisfied with the system of registering than their younger counterparts: some 85% of those aged 55-or-over are satisfied, as compared to 62% of 18-24 year olds. The level of satisfaction also varies according to ethnicity – with BME respondents less likely to be satisfied with registration than whites (67% and 79% respectively) – as well as by social class, with those in groups ABC1 somewhat more likely to be satisfied with the system of registration (81%) as compared to C2DEs (74%).

Registering to Vote

Q   How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the system of registering to vote in the UK?

% satisfied

Total	77%
Male	77%
Female	78%
18-24	62%
25-34	67%
35-54	81%
55+	85%
65+	84%
ABC1	81%
C2DE	74%
White	79%
BME	67%

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

The small number who said they are not currently registered to vote are, predictably, less likely to be satisfied with the system than those who are registered, yet they do not express dissatisfaction, suggesting that few of those

unregistered feel disfranchised by the system – in fact more than half of those not registered to vote, 55%, had no opinion on the system of registering to vote.

While there is no difference in overall satisfaction with the registration system between those who are, and those who are not, registered for a postal vote under the postal vote on demand (PVD) arrangements (79% in each group are "satisfied"), there is a marked contrast in their degree of satisfaction, with the PVDers splitting equally between "very" (40%) and "fairly" (39%) satisfied, while those not registered for a postal vote are predominantly (49% to 30%) fairly rather than very satisfied. This would seem to suggest that the availability of postal votes on demand is significantly contributing to the satisfaction with the system of those who take advantage of it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the level of satisfaction in the actual *process* of voting at elections in the UK also follow a similar pattern, with 77% of participants claiming to be very or fairly satisfied with the process – representing a minor rise of 3% as compared with May 2003. Indeed, the split between those "very satisfied" and "fairly satisfied" is identical when asking about the system of registration and about the process of voting (30% very satisfied, 48% fairly satisfied in each case), and in each case the improvement since 2003 has been an increase in those declaring themselves "very satisfied", increasing its significance.

On the voting process as on registration, younger respondents tend to be less satisfied, with some 59% of 18-24 year olds, and 67% of 25-34 year olds "very" or "fairly" satisfied with the process of voting in elections, compared with 84% of those aged 65 and above.

Voting process

Q How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the actual process of voting at elections in the UK?

% Satisfied

18-24	59%
25-34	67%
35-54	81%
55+	86%
65+	84%
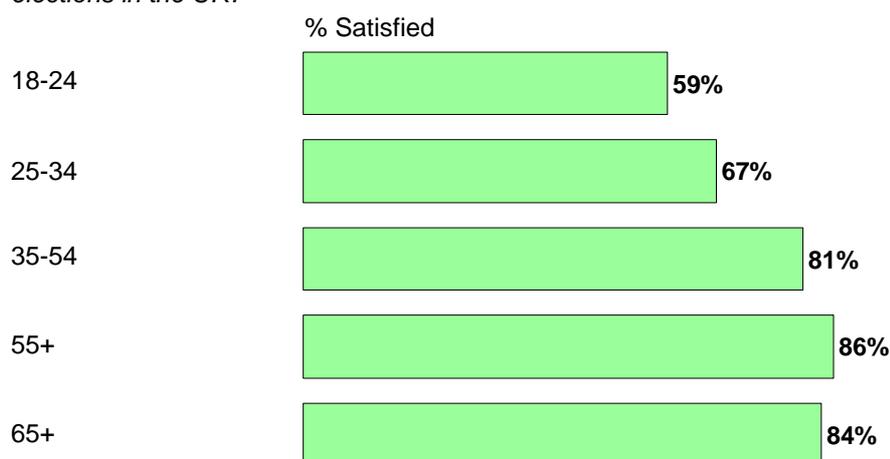
Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

Notably, there also appears to be a relationship between the level of satisfaction with the voting process and the level of voter registration, with 81% of

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respondents registered to vote also reporting satisfaction with the system of voting, compared with a satisfaction level of less than a third (31%) of those who say they are not registered to vote. As in the case of satisfaction with the registration system, however, almost all the remainder of the unregistered respondents (56% of all the unregistered) do not express dissatisfaction, but simply say they have no opinion of the process of voting. Therefore it does not seem that dissatisfaction with the system is driving people away from registration; more likely this results from disengagement and complete indifference, and their low levels of satisfaction with both the registration system and voting process simply follow from the natural ignorance of those who do not use them. In fact, satisfaction with the system of registration is so closely correlated with satisfaction with the voting process that it is not practical within the survey data to disentangle the causes or effects of one from the other, and it may indeed be that most respondents make no meaningful distinction between the two.

We can also note that, whilst almost nine in ten (86%) of those "certain to" vote at the next general election are satisfied with the process of voting in elections, less than half (42%) of those "certain not" to vote are similarly satisfied. But again, this does not imply high dissatisfaction levels among non-voters, merely higher levels of indifference. In the same way, 6% of those who "always" vote in general elections are dissatisfied with the process of voting, the same as the 7% who "never" vote.

Respondents were next asked to say whether they thought each of a series of statements about some of the results of registering to vote was true or false:

Do you think the following statements are true or false?

	True	False	Don't know
Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1st-5th Dec 2005 NI	*%*	*%*	*%*
Being on the electoral register makes it easier to borrow money	33	29	38
You are automatically put on the electoral register if you pay Council Tax*	36	43	21
You have to be on the electoral register in order to be able to vote at an election in the UK	90	3	6
			Source: MORI

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* "…if you pay the rates" in Northern Ireland

The first statement produced the greatest degree of uncertainty amongst respondents, with a third under the impression that being on the electoral register makes it easier to borrow money, whilst 29% disagree. A relatively high proportion, however – nearly four in ten (38%) – are uncertain about the correct answer to this question.

A similar lack of consensus exists in responses to the second statement. Again, around a third (36%) believe here that you are automatically put on the electoral register if you pay Council Tax (or "pay the rates" in Northern Ireland), though a higher proportion (43%) believe the statement to be false. Again, there is a relatively high degree of uncertainty, with one in five (21%) of respondents unsure about the relationship between Council Tax and voter registration. As with other questions, there is a differentiation in responses according to age. In particular, 18-24 year olds are more likely than older respondents to not know the answer to the question (38% say they don't know if you are put on the register if you pay rates, compared with 18% of those aged 55+ who are similarly unsure) – though this could partly be because more people in this age group will never yet have had to pay Council Tax compared to their older counterparts. Apart from this youngest age group, however, a consistent 36%-to-40% across all age groups are under the impression that paying Council Tax is sufficient to ensure they will be put on the electoral register.

This misconception is also significantly more prevalent among BME respondents (49% think it is the case) than among whites (35%). It is far rarer in Northern Ireland, where only 18% thought that paying the rates would automatically ensure they were on the register, and 66% said that this was untrue.

The final statement, in contrast, produced a higher degree of consensus, with nine in ten (90%) of respondents agreeing that it is necessary to be on the electoral register in order to vote in an election in the UK. Notably, responses to this statement vary depending on whether the respondent is registered to vote or not. Amongst those who *are* registered, 93% believe that it is necessary in order to be able to vote. This figure falls to 77% amongst those who are not registered – potentially meaning that a proportion of those not registered to vote would wish to do so were it not for the fact that they are not registered to do so. Indeed, a small minority (3%) of those who claim to be *certain* to vote also believe that registering to do so is not essential.

Registering to vote

Over nine in ten adults (92%) aged 18 years or more say they are registered to vote in an election in the UK. This figure is not significantly different to the 93% level of reported registration reported by MORI for the Electoral Commission in 2004[1] and in 2003.[2] One in twenty (5%) say they are not registered and 2% say they do not know.

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[1] *Public Opinion Research 04/05*, Electoral Commission

[2] *Attitudes Towards Voting and the Political Process in 2003*, Electoral Commission

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Registering to Vote

Q   *As far as you are aware, are you registered to vote in an election in the UK?*
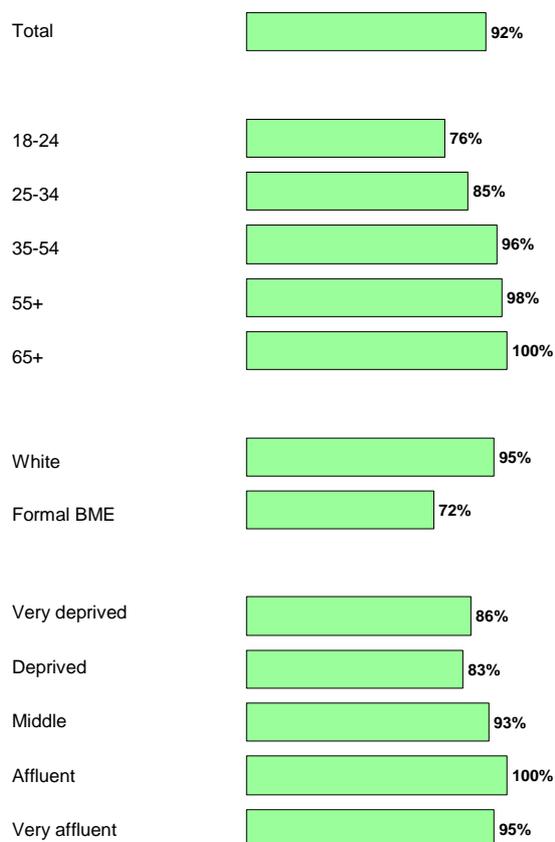
Group	%
Total	92%
18-24	76%
25-34	85%
35-54	96%
55+	98%
65+	100%
White	95%
Formal BME	72%
Very deprived	86%
Deprived	83%
Middle	93%
Affluent	100%
Very affluent	95%

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

Reflecting claimed knowledge about how to register to vote, there are big sub group differences. In particular:

- 76% of 18-24 year olds say they are registered to vote, as do 85% of 25-34 year olds, compared to 98% of those aged 55 years or over.

- Black and minority ethnic (BME) respondents are less likely to be registered (21% are not registered) – a rise of 5% compared with the 2004/5 figure.

- Perhaps reflecting its transient population as well as its ethnic composition, London has one of the highest proportions of non-registrants, with almost one in six (15%) saying they are not registered. The figure for Northern Ireland is also similarly high, at 16%.

Following the initial question on registering to vote, respondents were also asked if they were *definitely* sure of their response. Notably, there is considerably more confidence in the responses of those who are registered (some 95% of those who claim to be registered say that they are definitely sure of their response), as compared to those who are not registered – some 57% of whom are definitely

not registered. Those who think they are registered to vote but are unsure are found disproportionately in the same groups and places that claim lower registration in the first place – the young and ethnic minorities, London and Northern Ireland – implying that the differential revealed by the initial registration question may be an underestimate.

Registered to Vote

Q *Are you definitely sure you are registered to vote or do you think you are probably registered to vote?*

Q *Are you definitely sure you are not registered to vote or do you think you are probably not registered to vote?*
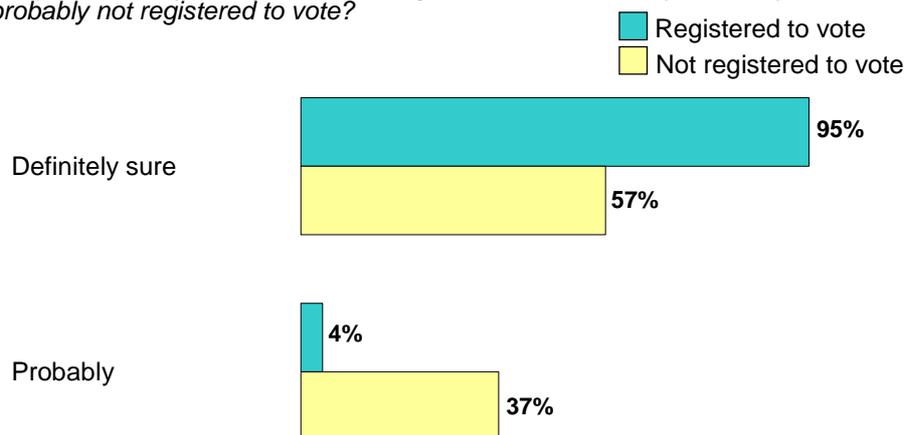
Base: All registered to vote (1,047); All not registered to vote (62) 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI
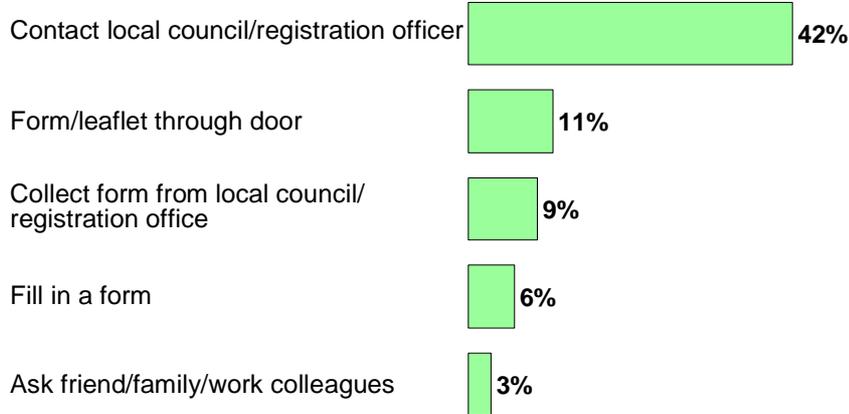
Source: MORI

The next stage of the survey asked respondents – without any prompting as to what answer they should give – how they would go about four separate tasks connected with the voting system: registering to vote, checking that their name was included on the register, applying for a postal vote and finding out where to vote and how to do it. In each case the most popular answer was to contact the local council or electoral registration officer, mentioned by just over two-fifths in all cases except that of applying for a postal vote (where it was less frequently suggested, by only around a third), and a further one in ten in each case more specifically mentioned visiting the council offices or filling in a form obtained there.

There were also significant numbers of don't knows in each case, ranging from 15% who did not know how to go about finding out how and where to vote up to 28% who could not suggest how they would go about claiming a postal vote.

We now consider each of the four questions in more detail. When asked their preferred **method of registering to vote**, 42% said simply that they would contact the local council, 9% would go to the council offices or collect a form from there and 2% would use a council website. Some one in ten (11%) mentioned the possibility of waiting for a form to come through the door before completing it, and 2% said they would wait for a canvasser to come to the door. One in five (19%) said they did not know how they would do it.

Registering to Vote [top 5 responses]

Q   If you wanted to register to vote, how would you do it?

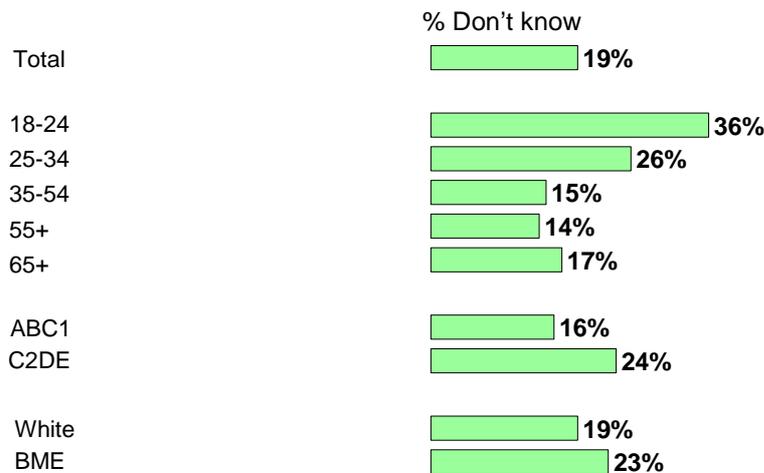|	
Contact local council/registration officer	**42%**
Form/leaflet through door	**11%**
Collect form from local council/ registration office	**9%**
Fill in a form	**6%**
Ask friend/family/work colleagues	**3%**

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the subgroups less knowledgeable on other aspects of registration were also less sure about the process of initially registering. As such, age is an important factor here, with older participants much more likely to contact the local council (48% of those aged 55+ mention this option, compared with 22% of 18-24 year olds), whilst younger respondents were more likely to simply not know how to register (36% of 18-24 year olds said this, compared with 14% of those aged 55 and above).

Registering to Vote

Q   If you wanted to register to vote, how would you do it?

% Don't know

Total	**19%**
18-24	**36%**
25-34	**26%**
35-54	**15%**
55+	**14%**
65+	**17%**
ABC1	**16%**
C2DE	**24%**
White	**19%**
BME	**23%**

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI
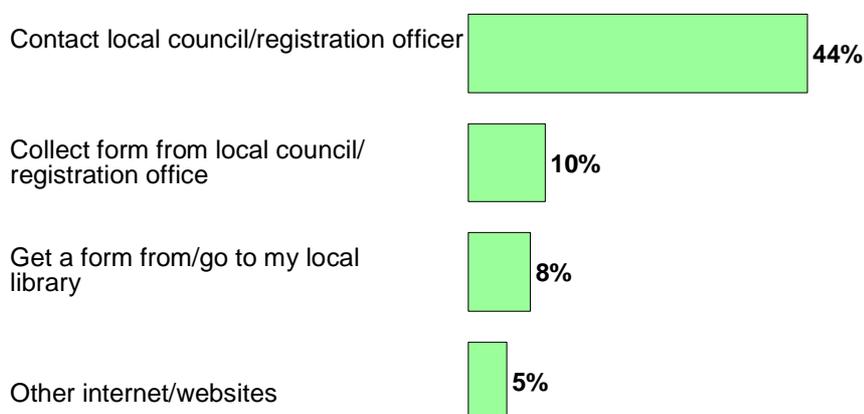
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Similarly, those in social class C2DE are more likely to be unaware about how to register (24%, as compared to 16% of ABC1s). However, while the figure for BME participants is higher than that for white (23% as compared with 19%) this difference is not statistically significant.

A similar pattern of results is manifest when respondents were asked about **how they would check if their name is on the electoral register**. Again, by far the most popular response was to contact the local council or registration officer (44%), followed by the more proactive choice of going to the council offices or contacting the registration officer in person (10%)

Electoral Register

Q If you wanted to check that your name was on the electoral register, how would you do it?

Contact local council/registration officer **44%**

Collect form from local council/
registration office **10%**

Get a form from/go to my local
library **8%**

Other internet/websites **5%**

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI
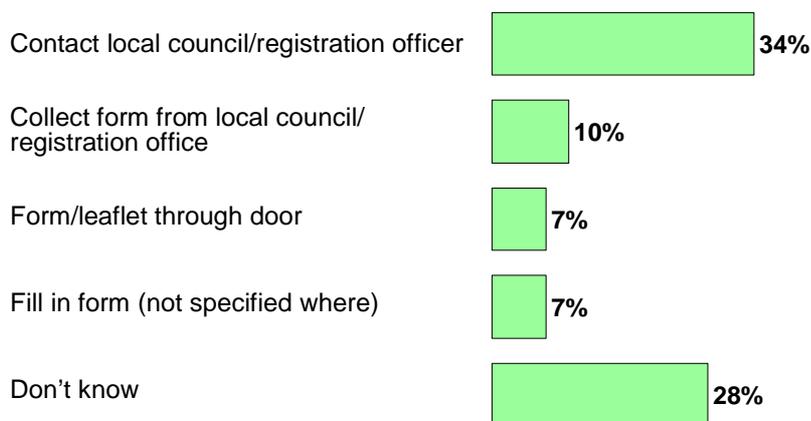
The third most frequently named method of checking whether one's name is on the register is to visit the local library, mentioned by 8%; this was more frequently suggested by those aged at least 35, and especially those aged 55+ (among whom it was the suggestion of 13%), than among the younger generations. This may well reflect memories of the old registration arrangements, when the display of the register together with the proposed lists of deletions and insertions at local libraries during the annual objections period was an integral part of the process. (Local libraries were far less frequently cited on the other three questions).

Again, here younger respondents are less likely to know how to check if their names are on the register (48% wouldn't know how, compared with 15% of those aged 55+), as are those in social classes C2DE – who are twice as unlikely to be unaware on checking their registration status as those in classes ABC1, 15% and 31% respectively). A similar pattern is also apparent amongst BME respondents, with some 36% claiming that they don't know how to check on their registration status, compared to 21% of whites.

When asked about **applying for a postal vote**, again the most popular choice amongst participants was to contact the local council registration officer – around a third (34%) of respondents mentioned this option. But almost three in ten, 28%, say they would not know how to apply for a postal vote, rising to half (51%) of 18-24 year olds. The class differential is very substantial, 22% of ABC1s but 36% of C2DEs unable to say how they would go about applying for a postal vote.

Voting by Post (top 5 responses)

Q *If you wanted to apply to vote by post, how would you do it?*

Contact local council/registration officer	**34%**
Collect form from local council/registration office	**10%**
Form/leaflet through door	**7%**
Fill in form (not specified where)	**7%**
Don't know	**28%**

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

When asked about finding out information about where to vote and how to go about voting, again the local council proved to be the most popular choice, chosen by 41% of participants. Interestingly, only 2% suggested that they might contact a political party or candidate for advice, even though it is well within living memory that local parties and their canvassers routinely assumed it was part of their job to ensure that their own supporters, at least, had this information. Again, as with registering to vote, as many as one in ten are content to wait for a leaflet or form to come through the door rather than suggesting a way in which they might find out the information for themselves, though only 15% say they don't know how they would find out.

In this case, too, the don't knows are much more frequent among C2DEs (23%) than ABC1s (9%), with obvious implications if anything were to be amiss with the delivery of polling cards or other information before an election.

Knowledge of electoral registration forms

Five in six respondents (84%) in Great Britain agreed that their household had received the electoral registration form in August or September, though this figure varies somewhat according to region. At 96%, the South West is the area with the highest level of awareness about electoral registration forms, whilst London, with 67%, represents the lowest level of reported receipt of forms – again, perhaps because of its transient population.

Cross reference with other questions in the survey suggests that the differences owe more to lack of awareness of the forms than real differences in levels of successful delivery. For example, 93% of those who say they always vote but only 60% of those who "never" vote at general elections reported receiving the forms, a much bigger discrepancy than could be accounted for by the less interested also being members of hard-to-reach groups. This is probably worth bearing in mind when noting that less than half (45%) of those who say they are not registered to vote say they received the forms last year; three in ten (29%) of the unregistered positively state that their household received no form, but it would certainly be simplistic to blame this for their not being registered.

Of those who *did* receive the form, three quarters (75%) in Great Britain personally checked that all of the information on the form was correct, and a further 18% let somebody else check for them. Only 4% admit that they don't know who checked the form, or suggest that nobody checked the information for them.

In Northern Ireland, forms are distributed on an individual (rather than household) basis. Here, a smaller proportion overall claim to have received the appropriate form – some 78% in total. However, here a higher proportion personally completed the form than in Great Britain (87%) – perhaps unsurprisingly given the personalised nature of the forms in Northern Ireland – and a further 6% had somebody else check for them. 6% claim not to know who checked, or do not think that anybody at all checked.
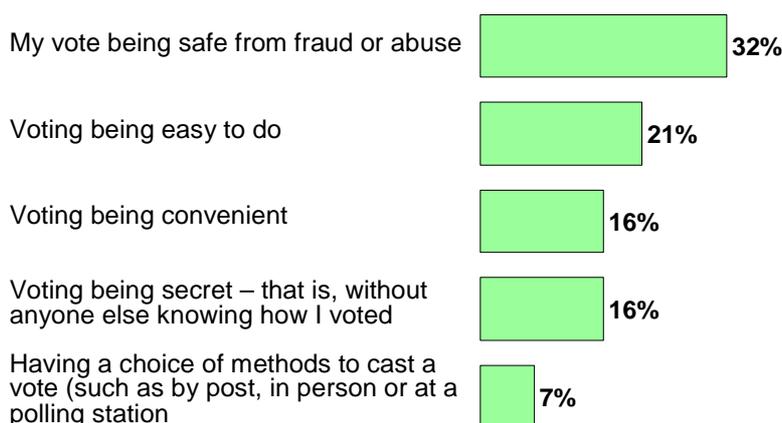
Voting channels
and confidence in voting

This section of the report considers public attitudes to different voting channels, before looking at views of postal voting in more detail.

Overall, voting being "safe from fraud or abuse" was the most important feature of voting for most respondents. This represents a similar finding to the 2004/5 survey, though the proportion in 2005/6 who named this as the most salient feature (32%) represents a minor fall from the 2004/5 figure (36%). Voting being easy to do (21%) and convenient (16%) were the second and third most popular features of any given system.

Importance When Voting

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

My vote being safe from fraud or abuse	32%
Voting being easy to do	21%
Voting being convenient	16%
Voting being secret – that is, without anyone else knowing how I voted	16%
Having a choice of methods to cast a vote (such as by post, in person or at a polling station	7%

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

As with attitudes about registering to vote, and voting more widely, there are significant differences across age groups of the population. In particular, younger people are less likely to state the importance of their vote being safe from fraud or abuse, with 25% of 18-24 year olds saying this. Partly reflecting age differences, people in higher social classes and with higher educational achievement also put more emphasis on their vote being free from fraud or abuse

Furthermore, younger people put much less emphasis on their vote being secret, with just 12% of 18-24 year olds, and 7% of 25-34 year olds saying this was one of the most important features – less than half the level among over 35s. On the other hand, the youngsters are considerably more likely than average to say that none of these considerations is important to them, or that they don't know which they consider most important. This implies the differences may arise simply from

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having given less thought to the voting process, rather than any deep attitudinal or cultural differences between age groups.

However, there seem to be links between the importance people put on different features of a voting system and their current attitudes to voting and politics. Security is favoured more highly by those who have *not* registered to vote by post (24%, as compared to 35% of those who request a postal vote on demand), which may suggest that fears about the security of postal voting are inhibiting the uptake of PVD. Those who are interested in politics are also more likely to prioritise votes being secure from fraud and abuse (41% - as opposed to 22% of those who are not interested), as are those respondents who are "certain" to vote in a general election (35%), and security is also more likely to be a matter of concern amongst those living in affluent or very affluent areas (37% of those in *very* affluent areas name security as an area of concern, compared with 24% of those in living in deprived areas, and 17% in *very* deprived areas). But then security is also a greater concern among ABC1s than among C2DEs, and among those educated at least to A level standard than with no qualifications. Whether the key factor is one of social class as such, of degree of engagement with the political system or even of the character of the local neighbourhood where one votes is by no means clear.

Those with no formal educational qualifications are significantly more likely than average to say that voting should be "easy to do" (32%, compared to 21% of all adults). While it is of course not possible to draw an entirely rigid line between the choice of "easy" and "convenient", since some respondents may interpret the former as meaning the latter, it is also possible that this finding reflects a fear of effective disfranchisement among those of low educational achievements if faced with a complicated voting system which they would not be confident of understanding.

Knowledge of postal voting on demand

Awareness of postal voting on demand has risen slightly over the past twelve months, with over three quarters of people (77%) claiming to be aware of their right to apply for a postal vote – a rise of some 4%. The level of knowledge remains at around the three-quarters level throughout the country, apart from in London, where – as with other measures of awareness – it is lower, at 61%. Three of the four 2004 all-postal vote regions also had figures above the national score (the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, the North East and the East Midlands) at 78%. Following the pattern for registering set above, awareness is also related to the age of people, with older respondents claiming to have more of an awareness of the changes - 88% of those aged 55 are aware, compared with 53% of those aged 18-24.

Registering for a postal vote

Almost one in five people (17%) say they are registered for a postal vote, not a statistically significant difference from the 18% who said so a year ago. Predictably the level is much higher than average (25%) in the regions of

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Northern England where the 2004 elections were all-postal, and especially in the North East (40%), but also in the South West (26%).

The main differences by subgroup here are by age, with older respondents more likely to have registered. Surprisingly, however, there isn't a great deal of subgroup difference by the intention to vote here, with 16% of those "certain not" to vote registering for a postal vote, as compared with 18% of those "certain" to do so. Similarly, there isn't a great deal of differentiation by interest in politics, with 18% of those who are *not* interested in politics registered for a postal vote, compared with 17% of those *are* interested.

Fraud and abuse

Electoral fraud is judged by fewer respondents to be a big problem than either benefit fraud or false insurance claims, with less than a third (31%) claiming that electoral fraud or abuse is a very or fairly big problem. This is a considerable fall from the 46% who stated this in our survey during the 2005 general election[3] (when the issue had been receiving considerable media coverage, partly arising out of the coming to court of the Birmingham City Council petitions); it remains, however, a slightly more widespread concern than in December 2003 when 24% saw electoral fraud as a very or fairly big problem.

In terms of attitudes to electoral fraud, there are not huge differences between subgroups – though as in previous questions, younger participants are more likely than their older counterparts to say they "don't know" the answer. Moreover, a slightly higher proportion of those who never vote (13%) also feel that fraud is a very big problem, compared to those who always vote (8%).

Asked to judge the security from fraud and abuse of both voting at a polling station and voting by post, respondents were much more likely to see voting at a polling station as more secure than voting by post. Following the pattern for the overall level of concern about fraud in the electoral system, BMEs (69%), those who aren't interested in politics (74%), and those who never vote (53%) are all less likely to express confidence that voting at a polling station is safe than the overall figure of 83%, as are 18-24 year olds (72%). Only a tiny minority in any of these groups, though, say they feel voting at polling stations is unsafe; the rest don't know or declare it "neither safe nor unsafe".

When these respondents who feel that voting at a polling station is not safe from fraud or abuse are asked *why* they say that, the most common responses centre on identity. The fact that polling booths could potentially allow someone to vote in your place was the most commonly mentioned reason (36%), whilst the fact that the voter's identity can't be checked (24%), or the idea that someone else could steal your vote (16%) were variants on the same theme which were also mentioned.

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[3] This was a telephone survey and not strictly comparable, but the difference is far greater than could conceivably be explained by the interview mode.

Fraud and abuse

Q   When it comes to being safe from fraud or abuse, would you say that voting . . .?
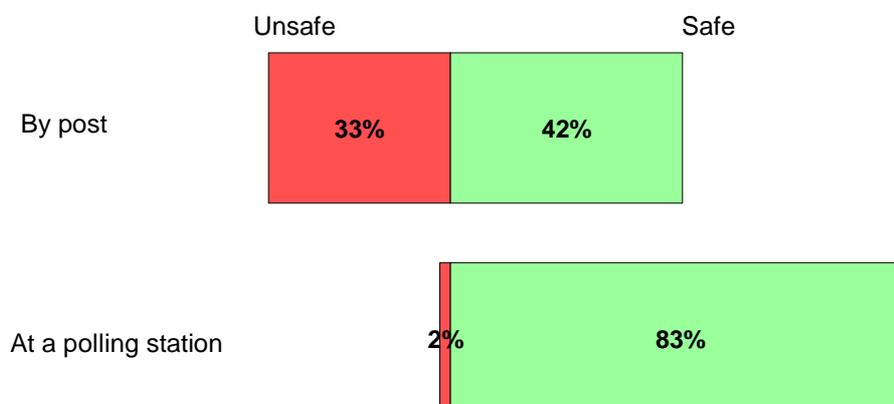
Unsafe   Safe

By post

| **33%** | **42%** |

At a polling station

| **2%** | **83%** |

A much higher level of scepticism exists about the security of postal voting, with a third of the public saying they think it is unsafe. Nevertheless, there has been a considerable easing of concern since the telephone survey conducted during the 2005 election campaign, in which 19% said that postal voting is "very unsafe"; now only 7% say the same.

Unsurprisingly, those who have requested a postal vote are much more likely to feel that this method is safe (66%) than those who have not (38%). Again, there is also an attitudinal difference here between those who claim to always or sometimes vote in general elections (44% of whom feel that postal voting is safe), and those who claim never to vote – some 33% of whom feel that postal voting is safe – but as in the case of the previous questions these groups are more likely to be non-committal than to express direct fears about the system. In fact, those who "always vote" are also more likely than those who "never vote" (34% to 26%) to say postal voting is unsafe.

Strikingly, however, there is also a degree of differentiation here according to the level of deprivation which runs counter to the general pattern – those living in very deprived areas more likely to see postal voting as safe (51%), compared to those who live in average (41%), affluent (46%) or very affluent (36%) areas. Indeed, in the most affluent neighbourhoods, those who believe postal voting to be unsafe (40%) actually outnumber those who say it is safe (36%).

Amongst those respondents who feel that voting by post is not safe from fraud or abuse, the fear that someone else could steal your vote was the most commonly mentioned area of concern (by 36%), but a number of other fears not widely raised in the case of voting at polling stations were also prevalent. A quarter (25%) of those who said postal voting was unsafe explained their fears in terms of being unable to guarantee your vote getting there, 18% raised concerns

about the secrecy of the ballot, and 12% stated more generally that it is safer to hand in your vote at a polling station than to post it. One in six (17%) also mentioned that they had fears because they had seen or heard cases of postal voting fraud in the media.

Notably, younger participants were less concerned about someone stealing their vote when compared to their older counterparts (21% mentioned this as a concern, compared with 39% of those aged 55+). Middle class (ABC1) participants, however, tend to be more worried than C2DE participants about people stealing or falsely appropriating votes. Reflecting other trends discussed above, those who never vote, and those who are certain not to vote, tended to have greater levels of suspicion about the security of the voting system, as compared to those who always vote – some 44% of those who never vote cited the fear that someone could steal their vote as an objection to postal voting, compared with just over a third (35%) of those who always vote.

Voting and involvement

Nearly nine in ten respondents (88%) agree that "voting is important", though a strikingly smaller proportion (53%) say that they "know enough about the way politics works to get involved if they want to". Perhaps unsurprisingly, but worryingly, the subgroups least likely to agree that voting is important are also more likely to feel they don't know enough about politics to get involved should they want to.

Importance of Voting

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

I think voting is important

	Disagree	Agree
Total	5%	88%
18-24	9%	81%
25-34	5%	80%
35-54	7%	88%
55+	2%	95%
65+	3%	95%
ABC1	2%	91%
C2DE	8%	84%
White	5%	89%
BME	4%	82%
Interested	1%	97%
Not interested	11%	77%

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI
Source: MORI

Reflecting a lower level of engagement with many aspects of the political process illustrated throughout this survey, young people are less likely to agree that "voting is important" (although even among 18-24 year olds, 81% agree with the statement), and much less likely to agree "strongly". They are also the age group *least* likely to agree that they "know enough about politics to get involved" – slightly over a third agree with this statement (35%), compared with six in ten respondents aged 55+ (59%).

Respondents in social groups C2DE are less likely to agree that voting is important (84%) than their ABC1 counterparts (91%), and are also less likely to agree that they know enough about politics to get involved if they want to (39%, compared to 65% of ABC1s).

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BMEs are less likely to agree (82%) than their white counterparts (89%) that voting is important, and are less likely to feel that they know enough about politics (41%).
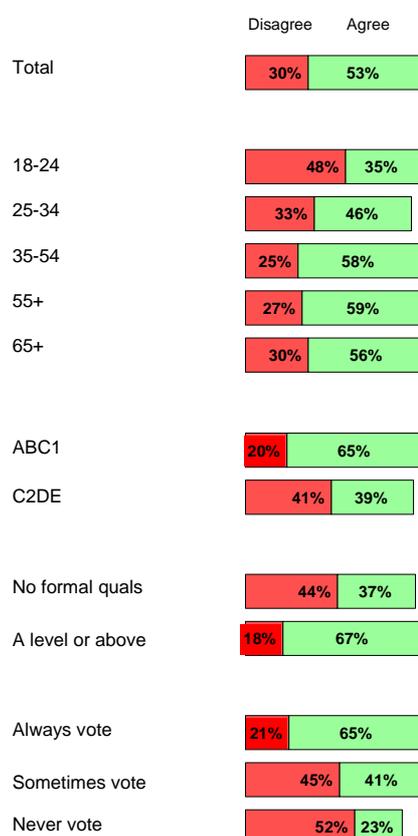
More educated respondents are much more likely to feel that they know enough about politics – 67% educated to 'A' Level or above agree, compared with 37% below 'A' Level standard.

Those who "always vote" are far more likely to agree that voting is important (98%) than those who "never vote" (44%); this group are also much more likely to state that they know enough about politics to get involved (65%) than those who "never vote" (23%).

Importance of Voting

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

I know enough about the way politics work to get involved if I want to

	Disagree	Agree
Total	30%	53%
18-24	48%	35%
25-34	33%	46%
35-54	25%	58%
55+	27%	59%
65+	30%	56%
ABC1	20%	65%
C2DE	41%	39%
No formal quals	44%	37%
A level or above	18%	67%
Always vote	21%	65%
Sometimes vote	45%	41%
Never vote	52%	23%

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI   Source: MORI

Transparency of spending and funding

Opinions about the funding and the spending of political parties are similar – a quarter of respondents believe that the funding of parties is open and transparent (26%), and a similar proportion believe that the spending is transparent (25%), while 43% and 42% respectively disagree.

Those with an interest in politics are much more likely to have an opinion on the spending or funding of parties than those who do not. However, those who think they are not transparent outnumber those who do regardless of interest in politics. Proportionately, those who are not interested in politics judge spending as *not* transparent by a wider margin (two-to-one, 39% to 19%) than those who are interested (three-to-two, 45% against 31%). On funding, the figures are very similar.
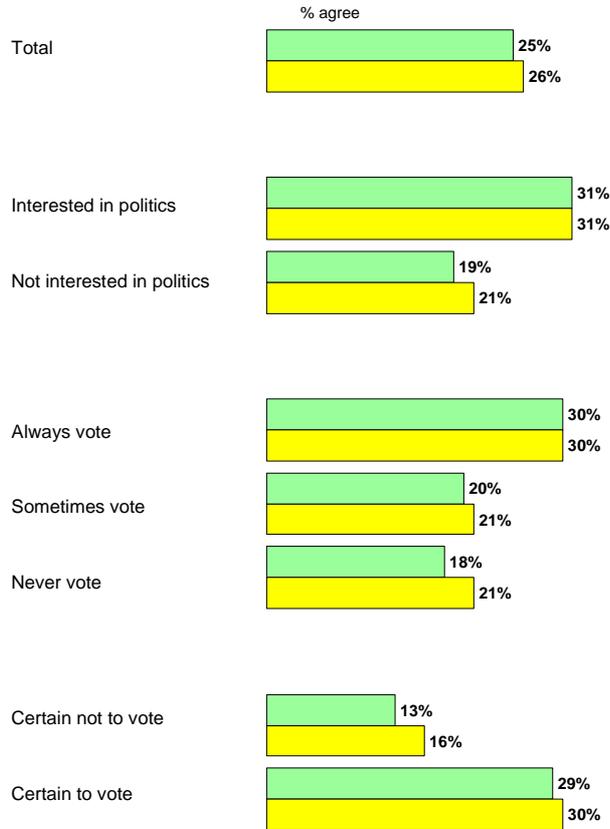
A more relevant contrast, perhaps, is between those who are "certain to vote" at an immediate general election and those who are certain not to. Almost identical proportions disagree that party funding is open and transparent (44% of those certain not to vote, 45% of those certain to do so), but almost twice as many of the voters as non voters agree (30% compared to 16%). Again, the figures on spending are very similar, within a couple of percentage points in each case. Whether this implies that doubts about the transparency of funding and spending are deterrents to voting or, more likely, that greater exposure to the process convinces some people of the openness and transparency without shaking the sceptics, is not of course clear from this data.

In both Wales and Northern Ireland the public are significantly more likely than average to disagree that either funding or spending are open and transparent. In London, by contrast, they are significantly less likely to disagree in each case.

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Political Party Spending

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

The spending of political parties and candidates at UK elections is open and transparent. ▢

The funding of political parties in the UK is open and transparent ▢

% agree

Total	25% / 26%
Interested in politics	31% / 31%
Not interested in politics	19% / 21%
Always vote	30% / 30%
Sometimes vote	20% / 21%
Never vote	18% / 21%
Certain not to vote	13% / 16%
Certain to vote	29% / 30%

Base: All respondents (1,134), 5th-10th January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI

Source: MORI

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The Electoral Commission

Perceived familiarity with The Electoral Commission

Nearly three in five people (65%) across the UK say they have at least heard of The Electoral Commission, though few feel they know much about it.
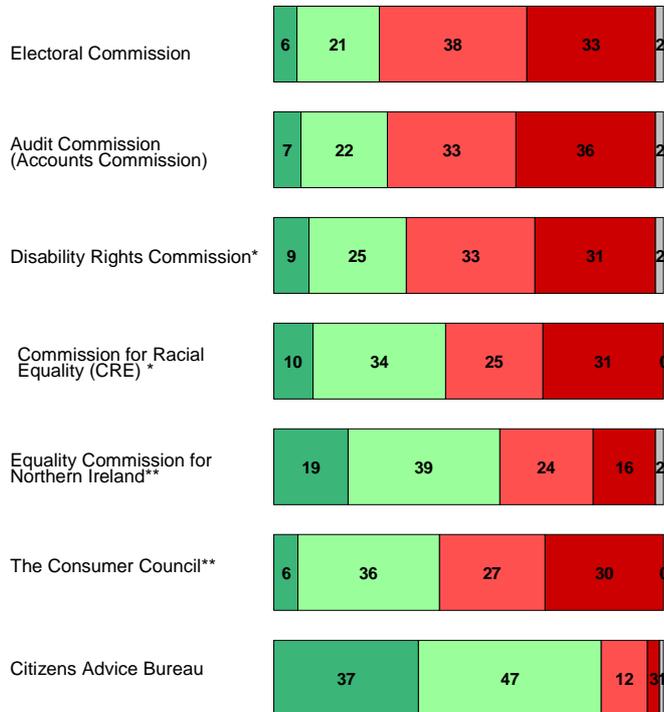
As is common in research about politics, men and people in higher social classes are most likely to claim to know at least a fair amount about the Electoral Commission. Perceived familiarity with the Commission also increases with people's age. Awareness is much higher in London, where 52% say they have heard at least "a fair amount", compared to 27% nationally.

When compared with public knowledge of other bodies, knowledge of the Commission appears to be relatively low – comparable with that of the Audit Commission which, although much longer established has less need of a public profile.

Awareness

Q   Before this interview, how much, if anything, had you heard about . . .?

■ Great deal   ■ Fair amount   ■ Not very much   ■ Not heard of it   ■ Don't know

	Great deal	Fair amount	Not very much	Not heard of it	Don't know
Electoral Commission	6	21	38	33	2
Audit Commission (Accounts Commission)	7	22	33	36	2
Disability Rights Commission*	9	25	33	31	2
Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) *	10	34	25	31	0
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland**	19	39	24	16	2
The Consumer Council**	6	36	27	30	0
Citizens Advice Bureau	37	47	12	3	1

Base: All respondents (1,178); 19th – 23rd January 2006 GB, 1-5 December 2005 NI

* All in Great Britain (1178); **All in Northern Ireland (67)   Source: MORI

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Favourability towards the Electoral Commission

Overall, a third (32%) of those who have at least heard of the Electoral Commission feel favourably, or very favourably towards it, whilst the majority (56%) have neutral feelings; only 3% report an unfavourable impression. Londoners who have heard of the Commission are significantly more likely (50%) to say they feel favourable towards the Commission than those in other regions of the country.

A third of respondents (35%) correctly identified the Electoral Commission as an independent body separate from Government – the most popular answer from the options provided. This figure represents a fall of 6% from the 2004/5 survey. Just under a quarter (22%) thought that the Commission was a part of central government, whilst a smaller proportion (7%) felt that it is part of local government. However, it is also notable that a third of respondents didn't know how best to describe the Commission, almost half as many again as a year ago.

Only 1% of the public in Great Britain say they have visited the aboutmyvote.com website, though another 9% at least say they have heard of it. In Northern Ireland, again just 1% say they have visited securemyvote.com, though a further 23% have heard about it but not visited it. Twelve months ago, less than one percent of respondents had visited the site, and 5% claim to have known about it.

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Appendices

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Survey Details

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
967 interviews	2	3	3
1,000 interviews	2	3	3
1,134 interviews	2	2	3

For example, with a sample size of 1,134 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.

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

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

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

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Marked up Questionnaire

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