

Audit of Political Engagement 14

The 2017 Report

Acknowledgements

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FOREWORD

This study, now in its 14th year, is an important source of information for Parliament. We know that many people don't understand Parliament's role and are sceptical about its effectiveness. It is important for us to be able to understand and track the public's attitudes to Parliament. After all, the public send elected representatives to the House of Commons and it is important it works for them and is seen to work.

One headline from this survey is that a clear majority of the public believes that Parliament is essential to democracy (73% - equalling last year's record score). Parliament's legitimacy was also shown through strong support for some of its core functions: that it should represent 'the interests of people like you', 'amend laws proposed by the government', and most strongly, check the way public money is raised and spent.

There were also some positive indicators of engagement with Parliament: more than half of respondents had engaged in some way (a 10-point increase from Audit 13), with 22% having created or signed an e-petition on the Parliament site, 12% contacting an MP, 12% visiting Parliament's website and 7% following Parliament's social media accounts.

But set against this, the public do not think that Parliament is doing a good job for them. Fewer than a third of people were satisfied with the way that Parliament works, and just 29% think that Parliament is doing a good job of representing their interests. These findings are amplified when we look at particular social groups: knowledge of and engagement with Parliament are lowest among less affluent and younger groups. These scores were also lower among those who voted leave in the EU referendum.

This Audit highlights the challenge for Parliament, and presents opportunities. The public see Parliament as essential to our democracy, but a large proportion do not know much about Parliament, and are not satisfied with it. Across Parliament and beyond, we need to work to

increase knowledge of Parliament and to increase engagement.

So, what can be done? One positive development is the e-petitions system. This Audit found that more than one in five people had signed an e-petition in the last year. Since 2015 there have been more than 31 million signatures (from 14 million different email addresses). This is a significant number of individuals getting involved with parliamentary processes. And some of these petitions have led to debates in the House of Commons and to government action, or to raised awareness.

In addition, the participation teams within Parliament are doing some great work to engage the public, particularly among less-engaged groups. Examples include UK Parliament Week, where we already have 1,000 organisations around the country signed up to run events; or the 'Parliament on the High Street' events we recently ran in Birmingham.

So the public think Parliament is important, and we believe that if more people know about its work and contribute to it, then public satisfaction with Parliament will rise.

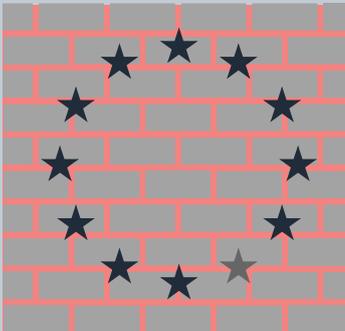
One particularly positive score in this year's Audit was on likelihood to vote. Fifty-nine percent of the public said that they would be certain to vote in an immediate general election - the same share as in the last Audit, which was the highest proportion recorded since the study began. In June, unexpectedly, we will be given the chance to see whether this translates into an increased turnout at a general election.



Penny Young
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KEY FINDINGS

A POSITIVE 'REFERENDUM EFFECT' FAILS TO MATERIALISE



There has been no positive 'referendum effect' on public attitudes after the June 2016 EU vote, of the kind witnessed after the Scottish independence referendum in 2014. On many of the key indicators of political engagement, public attitudes have either remained stable or have fallen back to pre-general election levels, after the post-election boost we observed in last year's results.

Claimed interest in (53%) and knowledge (49%) of politics have declined (by four and six percentage points respectively) compared to last year. Satisfaction with the system of governing Britain has barely changed and remains low at 31%.

The proportion of people feeling they have influence over national decision-making has risen by a statistically insignificant 3 points, to just 16%. Given the referendum result, one might have expected those who voted 'leave' to feel quite influential in national decision-making. In fact, only 16% do so, in line with the national average. Despite being on the losing side, marginally more 'remain' voters (20%) claim to feel influential.

There is almost no change in the proportion of people who think that if people like themselves get involved in politics they can change the way the country is run (32%). 'Remainers' (40%) are more likely than 'leavers' (30%) to feel that their involvement in politics can make a difference.

CHANGES IN POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR?



Although the public's attitudes are proving hard to shift, there are some positive signs of change in political behaviour. After the high turnout in the EU referendum, people's certainty to vote remains at a high watermark. As last year, 59% say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' – the highest level recorded in the 14-year life of this Audit study – and a further 16% say they are 'likely to vote'. However, the post-2015 election increase in the number of people claiming to be a strong supporter of a political party has not been sustained, dropping by 10 points to 31%. This is on a par with what we have seen in previous Audits, suggesting that last year's peak was linked to the post-general election boom in engagement.

There are signs of some improvements in public engagement with Parliament. Just over half the public say they have engaged with Parliament in some way in the previous 12 months – a 10-point increase on last year. The proportion of the public saying they have signed an e-petition is up from 15% to 22%, and 40% say they would be prepared to do so in future if they felt strongly about an issue. The number of people who report watching or listening to a parliamentary debate or committee meeting has also increased from 31% to 39%.

PERCEPTIONS OF PARLIAMENT

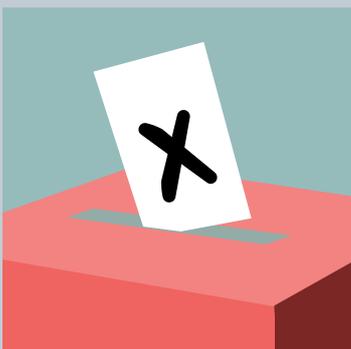


The public clearly value Parliament, with a substantial majority (73%) believing it is essential to democracy. However, overall satisfaction with the way Parliament works (30%) is now six points lower than when the first Audit was published in 2004. Claimed knowledge of Parliament has declined by seven points from last year to 45%, but remains higher than at the same stage of the political cycle after the 2005 and 2010 elections. It is also 12 points higher than when the Audit started in 2004 (although the question wording was slightly different so the results are not directly comparable).

The number of people who believe that Parliament holds government to account has increased by four points, to 46%, the second-highest figure recorded in the life of the Audit. The proportion of the population thinking that Parliament debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to them (56%) and encourages public involvement in politics (28%) are essentially unchanged. In relation to its core functions, the public think Parliament could do a better job of scrutinising the use of public money, representing ordinary people's interests, and encouraging public involvement in politics.

MPs are deemed the most effective group or institution in holding the government to account (44%), ahead of the media (34%), the courts/judiciary (30%) and the House of Lords (23%). The public thinks that representing the views of local people remains the most important way MPs should spend their time (47%), ahead of representing the UK's national interest (35%), and holding the government to account (34%). But barely a third of the public (32%) think that debating important issues in the House of Commons is an important way for MPs to spend their time.

THE EU REFERENDUM



Support for more referendums has declined by 15 points. But a clear majority of British people (61%) still think referendums should be used more often for determining important questions. By nation and region across Britain, support for more referendums is now lowest in Scotland: 55% of Scots support more referendums for deciding important questions, a drop of 19 points. 74% of those who say they voted 'leave' support more use of referendums for determining important questions compared to just 47% of 'remainers'. Eighty-eight percent of UKIP supporters support the use of more referendums compared to just 42% of Lib Dems who say the same, while the views of Labour and Conservative supporters are broadly identical (59%). Of those who say they do not support a political party, 69% would like to see greater use of referendums in the future.

Just 43% claim to feel knowledgeable about the EU, a rise of just five points since last year's study. However, this is almost twice as high as in the first Audit in 2004, when just 24% felt knowledgeable about the EU. Although 'experts' were widely criticised during the EU referendum campaign, they are still more trusted than many other sources. Experts were rated as the second most trusted (21%) and useful (20%) source of information, behind only TV and radio news programmes (34% trusted and 37% useful).

2016: YEAR IN REVIEW

					
JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
<p>Internal dissension continued to beset the Labour Party with frontbench resignations prompting several reshuffles.</p> <p>In an effort to head off a Conservative Party rebellion the Prime Minister announced that ministers would be able to campaign on either side in the EU referendum.</p> <p>Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt grappled with the consequences of a strike by junior doctors in England over pay and working hours.</p> <p>Unemployment fell to 5.1%, the lowest level in a decade.</p> <p>The House of Commons debated banning Donald Trump from Britain after more than 500,000 people signed an e-petition calling for his exclusion.</p> <p>Arlene Foster became the first female leader of the Democratic Unionist Party and First Minister of Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>The Prime Minister announced that the referendum on the UK's EU membership would be held on 23 June, after agreeing with his counterparts a 'new settlement' for the UK in the EU. The reforms included limits on EU migrants' in-work benefits in the UK for up to 4 years, reductions in child benefit payable for EU migrants' children resident in their home states, safeguards for non-euro states against the Eurozone, increased powers for national parliaments, and future EU treaty amendments to exempt the UK from 'ever-closer union'.</p> <p>Justice Secretary Michael Gove and several fellow cabinet ministers announced they would campaign to leave the EU, as did Mayor of London Boris Johnson.</p> <p>The Independent and Independent on Sunday newspapers ceased printing, becoming online titles only.</p>	<p>Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith resigned from the Cabinet following the Chancellor's spring budget in protest at efforts to 'salami slice' the welfare budget and cut disability benefits by £4 billion. He was replaced by Stephen Crabb.</p> <p>Tata Steel announced their intention to sell off their British operations, putting thousands of jobs at risk and threatening the closure of the Port Talbot steel plant in Wales. Ministers launched an emergency effort to try to save the plant and associated jobs.</p> <p>Thirty-two people died and over 300 were injured at the airport and a metro station in Brussels after three co-ordinated suicide bomb attacks by terrorists, with ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) subsequently claiming responsibility.</p>	<p>President Obama warned that if the UK voted to leave the EU it would be at the 'back of the queue' for a trade deal with the USA.</p> <p>Allegedly anti-semitic comments by former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone led to his suspension from the Labour Party and the launching of an internal inquiry into anti-semitism.</p> <p>The widespread use of tax havens, including by the Prime Minister's late father, was detailed in the 'Panama Papers' based on leaked documents taken from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca.</p> <p>The Queen celebrated her 90th birthday, the new National Living Wage came into force, high street retailer British Home Stores went into administration, and an inquest declared that the victims of the 1989 Hillsborough disaster were unlawfully killed.</p>	<p>Elections for the devolved legislatures, local councils, and police and crime commissioners were held across the UK.</p> <p>Labour's Sadiq Khan was elected Mayor of London to replace Conservative Boris Johnson, becoming the first Muslim Mayor of the city.</p> <p>Thousands of parents took part in an unofficial protest against changes to the testing of seven year old pupils.</p> <p>Plain packaging for cigarettes and other tobacco products was introduced.</p> <p>In one of the greatest sporting upsets of all time, Leicester City won football's Premier League.</p>	<p>Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered by a Nazi sympathiser in her Batley and Spen constituency.</p> <p>In the EU referendum, 'Leave' won by 51.9% to 48.1% on a 72.2% turnout.</p> <p>In the aftermath, sterling and the stock market posted among their largest-ever one-day losses. David Cameron announced he would resign once his party had elected a new leader.</p> <p>Several candidates emerged, including Home Secretary Theresa May and Justice Secretary Michael Gove, but Boris Johnson announced he would not stand.</p> <p>Dozens of Labour shadow ministers resigned in protest at Jeremy Corbyn's perceived lack of leadership during the campaign. He lost a no-confidence motion among Labour MPs by 172 to 40 but did not step down.</p>



JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
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<p>The Conservative Party leadership race came to an earlier than expected conclusion when Andrea Leadsom withdrew from the final round.</p> <p>David Cameron resigned to make way for the new Prime Minister, Theresa May. In the reshuffle that followed, Chancellor George Osborne and Education Secretary Nicky Morgan were among the high-profile ministers dismissed from office.</p> <p>An effort to oust Corbyn as Labour leader was launched with Angela Eagle and Owen Smith both campaigning to take over. A leadership election was also required at UKIP after Nigel Farage resigned.</p> <p>In Nice, 86 people were killed and hundreds injured in another terrorist attack.</p> <p>The Chilcot Inquiry into the War in Iraq finally published its report.</p>	<p>Team GB enjoyed success at the Rio Olympics, finishing with 67 medals, and second place in the medal table, ahead of China.</p> <p>The Bank of England cut interest rates for the first time since 2009, from 0.50% to 0.25%.</p> <p>Controversy continued to engulf the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse when chairwoman Dame Lowell Goddard tendered her resignation but failed fully to explain her reasons for doing so. She subsequently refused a request to appear before the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee to explain her decision.</p> <p>Southern Rail was disrupted for five days, the longest rail strike in decades, and junior doctors opted for further strike action after ministers announced they would impose a new contract on them.</p>	<p>David Cameron announced his retirement as an MP.</p> <p>Former Education Secretary Ed Balls joined the BBC's Strictly Come Dancing competition.</p> <p>Following a review, the government gave the go-ahead for the £18 billion Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant.</p> <p>A Joint Committee recommended that MPs and Peers temporarily move off the parliamentary estate to facilitate a multi-billion pound refurbishment programme.</p> <p>Jeremy Corbyn beat Owen Smith in the Labour leadership contest, winning 62% of the vote.</p> <p>Diane James was elected leader of UKIP but resigned a few weeks later citing personal and professional reasons.</p>	<p>Theresa May announced she would trigger Article 50 by the end of March 2017, to begin formally the process of leaving the EU.</p> <p>The government's decision to support a third runway at Heathrow Airport prompted Conservative MP for Richmond Park Zac Goldsmith to resign in protest, triggering a by-election.</p> <p>Steven Woolfe became embroiled in a fight with a fellow UKIP MEP at the European Parliament. He was subsequently excluded from the leadership race having failed to submit his papers on time.</p> <p>At Westminster, MPs voted to strip the former owner of British Home Stores, Philip Green, of his knighthood following Select Committee inquiries into the collapse of the company with a pension black hole.</p>	<p>Businessman and reality TV star Donald Trump won the US presidential election against former First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.</p> <p>In London, the High Court ruled that the government could not use prerogative powers to invoke Article 50 but must receive parliamentary authorisation. The government subsequently announced it would challenge the decision.</p> <p>At the Old Bailey, the man found guilty of murdering Labour MP Jo Cox was sentenced to life imprisonment.</p> <p>Paul Nuttall was elected as the new leader of UKIP.</p> <p>The government announced that it would not proceed with implementation of the Strathclyde Review to curb the powers of the House of Lords in relation to Statutory Instruments.</p>	<p>Zac Goldsmith, standing as an Independent, lost the Richmond Park by-election to the Liberal Dems by 1,872 votes in a campaign dominated by Europe as much as Heathrow. Mindful of local sensitivities, the Conservatives declined to field a candidate for the first time since 1963.</p> <p>Another by-election was triggered when Labour's Jamie Reed announced he was standing down as MP for Copeland to take a job at the Sellafield nuclear plant in the constituency. A persistent critic of the Labour leadership, he was particularly opposed to Corbyn's anti-nuclear stance.</p> <p>Twelve people were killed and dozens injured in another terrorist attack when a truck was deliberately driven into the Christmas market next to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin.</p>
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INTRODUCTION



The EU referendum of 23 June 2016 is the biggest democratic event that has taken place in the 14-year life of this Audit study and one of the biggest in British electoral history. Thirty-three and a half million people voted, 72.2% of those eligible to participate, in the highest recorded turnout in the UK since the 1992 general election. It was also the highest turnout for a UK-wide referendum, comparing favourably with the 64.7% who participated in the 1975 referendum on EU membership and dwarfing the 42.2% turnout for the 2011 referendum on the alternative vote system for the election of MPs.

The result sent shockwaves around the globe. By a narrow majority – 51.9% to 48.1% – the British people had voted to leave the European Union, putting the country on a path to ‘Brexit’ with profound implications across all areas of domestic and international policy.

In the immediate aftermath, sterling plummeted to its lowest level in decades, after the biggest one-day fall in living memory. The political landscape was also dramatically redrawn as the Prime Minister, David Cameron, resigned and three of the main political parties – the Conservatives, Labour and UKIP - plunged into internal turmoil.

Important constitutional tensions came into sharp focus. The splintered nature of the result – with England and Wales voting to leave, Scotland and Northern Ireland voting to remain – placed fresh pressure on the future of the Union. And the country found itself embarked on the most significant undertaking in its post-1945 history

without this having been the official policy of either the governing party or the main opposition, and with less than a quarter of all MPs reckoned to have backed ‘leave’.

Underlying public discontent with the political status quo had been clear for some time, with successive Audit reports sounding early warning bells. Barely a third of the population have ever been satisfied with our system of governing and inequalities in political engagement have been a persistent feature of the study. Previous Audit reports have looked at public attitudes through the prism of the ‘disgruntled, disillusioned and disengaged’,¹ the ‘disenchanted and disinclined’,² and the ‘logic of compromise versus the emotion of betrayal’.³ We have reported on focus group discussions in which MPs’ behaviour and character have been described by



David and Samantha Cameron shortly after he announced his intention to step down as Prime Minister following the EU referendum result on 23 June.

representative groups of citizens as embodying sly, deceitful creatures such as rats, snakes, pigs, weasels, foxes and vultures.⁴

Throughout the Audit series, the 'local' element of politics has been looked on relatively favourably, with all things European deemed distant and unaccountable by comparison. In Scotland, even after the independence referendum, when political engagement levels shot up, people did not believe that they had much influence over decision-making.⁵ Alienated and feeling politically powerless, a significant proportion of the electorate, particularly low skilled members of the C2DE social classes, have long seen politics as a largely futile exercise. 'Politics as usual' made it difficult to motivate people to engage with politics, even those who were otherwise knowledgeable and interested. The referendum provided the disruptive opportunity.

Given the chance to vote in a poll in which every ballot could genuinely make a difference, and when all the major parliamentary party leaders were aligned together in support of 'remain' (having previously often blamed 'Europe' for problems at the drop of a hat), the previously politically marginalised found a powerful outlet for the expression of their dissatisfaction.

It is estimated that of those people who did not vote in the 2015 general election but did turn out for the referendum, 60% voted for 'leave'.⁶ They delivered a sharp blow to what they had long perceived to be a self-serving, out-of-touch political class who did not understand the daily lives of the people they served, working in a democratic system that failed to address their interests or those of their family.

The result was a form of electric shock therapy to the body politic that will be felt for a long time to come. It remains to be seen whether the raised hopes and expectations of 'leave' voters can be realised, given the complexity of what is to come in the months and years ahead.



Prime Minister Theresa May signs the Article 50 letter of notification setting out the UK's intention to withdraw from the European Union.

The results in this Audit demonstrate that attitudinally little has fundamentally changed in terms of people's political engagement: the public are still disengaged, they feel that they lack influence, and they remain dissatisfied with our system of government. All these factors may yet prove corrosive if and when the Brexit process hits choppy waters.

If public dissatisfaction rises, a key reason will surely be rooted in the inadequacies of the referendum process itself. Compared to the experience in Scotland in 2014, the level of civic engagement was limited, the quality of political debate was poor, and much media coverage was banal, or focused on the battle between the 'remain' and 'leave' political campaigns and within the Conservative Party, rather than bringing in other voices.

The assassination of the Labour MP Jo Cox in her Batley and Spen constituency during the campaign brought only a temporary cessation in hostilities. For a short while, media and public comment on the role and work of MPs became more positive, but it did not last long. Even allowing for raised emotions, the tone of debate in the immediate weeks before and after the result was alarming for

INTRODUCTION

anyone who cherishes the value of civility in politics.

The country went into a referendum campaign of such importance with, according to last year's Audit, fewer than four in 10 people feeling knowledgeable about the European Union.⁷ Despite criticism of them by leading campaigners, experts were still more trusted than many other sources, and rated as the second most trusted and useful source of information, behind only TV and radio news programmes. With the campaign behind us, the proportion of the public feeling knowledgeable about the EU has risen by just five points. Knowledge levels are almost twice as high as in the very first Audit in 2004, but still disappointingly low after a campaign costing millions of pounds. The public deserved better in the form of a more informed debate, focusing not just on the principle of in or out, but on the 'how' as well as the 'why'.

Following this recent experience, support for referendums as a mechanism for deciding important issues has declined this year by 15 points. However, referendums remain the most popular form of decision-making, for some important constitutional questions at least.

But events following the referendum have demonstrated the indispensable role of Parliament, with the Supreme Court confirming the need for a parliamentary vote to trigger our exit under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

The referendum result initiated the exit process but there is still a need for decisions to be made by our representatives as we seek to navigate the complex political and policy landscape created by the Brexit vote. Whereas more direct forms of democracy tend to entrench views and attitudes and give a megaphone to those prepared to shout the loudest, parliamentary democracy can mediate between and balance competing interests. If there

were to be another referendum in the next few years, much greater thought should be given to the interface that any decision thus taken would have with Parliament.

The Audit results also challenge the arguments of those pressing for more participatory reforms. Of all the functions of Parliament, the public set least store by it encouraging public involvement in politics. They would rather it focused on scrutinising how public money is raised and spent. Less than half the public say that they would like to be involved in decision-making locally or nationally (of which just one in 10 want to be 'very' involved); a quarter want no involvement and just under a third want little involvement. There is, in short, no burning desire on the part of the public to get involved and participate. Where there is participation potential to be tapped, it is largely unequal and unrepresentative. And many people appear content to be onlookers but want Parliament to do a better job in carrying out its core functions.

Public perceptions of Parliament (if not MPs) have been slowly but steadily improving over the years, with the exception of satisfaction. This remains the case in this latest report. A solid majority believe that Parliament is essential to democracy and there is evidence of increased levels of engagement with Parliament in some areas. This report also sheds light on areas where the public think Parliament could improve, such as scrutinising the use of public money, representing ordinary people's interests, and encouraging public involvement in politics.

Parliament faces many tests as a result of the Brexit decision, not least because the process risks empowering the government at the legislature's expense. 'Leave' campaigners promised a restoration of parliamentary sovereignty; anything less could give rise to accusations of betrayal. If it rises to the challenge, Parliament can retain its

place at the centre of national political life. The aftermath of the referendum has demonstrated why the institution is so essential in our democracy; the Audit results shine a light on what more it needs to do to affirm its place in public esteem.

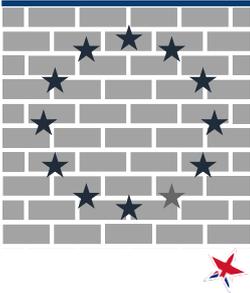
Guide to the results

This 14th Audit report is based on an annual survey of the public conducted by Ipsos MORI between 2 December 2016 and 15 January 2017 with a representative quota sample of adults aged 18+ across Great Britain. Booster samples were included to make comparisons between England, Scotland and Wales and between the white and black and minority ethnic (BME) populations more statistically reliable. The data was then weighted to match the national population profile.

Figures in some graphs and tables may not add up to 100% as 'don't knows' or refused responses are not always included. Percentages may not always add up to exactly 100% because multiple answers were permitted for a question, or because of computer rounding.

Throughout the report we refer to previous Audits - for example, Audit 1 published in 2004, and Audits 4 and 9 in 2007 and 2012 at the same stage of the post-general-election cycle as the present survey. Each Audit is based on an annual survey of the public undertaken in late winter, with the report published the following spring. Throughout the report, unless otherwise specified, any date associated with an Audit refers to the date of publication. For example, Audit 4 (2007) was published in Spring 2007, but the data was derived from a survey undertaken in early December 2006. Because of space constraints, particularly in the topline result tables, the Audits are sometimes referenced by the acronym APE (Audit of Political Engagement) and the publication number – e.g. APE4.

A 'REFERENDUM EFFECT'?



After one of the most consequential acts of democratic decision-making ever seen in this country, the British public – beyond the act of voting – appear to be no more politically engaged this year than last. There has been no ‘EU referendum effect’ of the kind we witnessed after the Scottish independence referendum in 2014.

As Figure 1 illustrates, on many of the key indicators of political engagement – particularly in relation to interest and knowledge, efficacy and satisfaction – public attitudes have either remained stable or have fallen back to pre-general election levels, after the post-election boost we observed in last year’s results.

Claimed interest in and knowledge of politics have all modestly declined compared to last year, and satisfaction with the system of governing Britain has barely changed and remains stubbornly low.

Despite the seismic impact of the referendum, the number of people who feel that they have influence over decision-making nationally has increased by just three points to 16%. Conversely, the number who think that if people like themselves get involved in politics then they can change the way the country is run has declined by three percentage points to 32%. Neither are statistically significant shifts.

Given the referendum result, one might have expected those who voted ‘leave’ to feel quite influential in national decision-making. In fact, only 16% do so, in line with the national average. In contrast, despite being on the losing side,

marginally more ‘remain’ voters (20%) claim to feel influential, although the gap between ‘leavers’ and ‘remainers’ is not a statistically significant one.

Some of the political participation indicators – particularly in relation to questions about voting – have improved, driven by the referendum turnout. And people’s certainty to vote in the event of an immediate general election remains at the highest level recorded in the Audit series (59%), matching what we saw in the immediate post-general election period in last year’s report. However, at 31%, the proportion of people claiming to be a strong supporter of a political party has dropped by 10 points.

The conduct and content of the referendum campaign – the quality of public debate and the accuracy of claims made by both sides – was widely criticised during and after the vote. Bitter and divisive, it split families, towns and cities and political parties, and was tempered only briefly in the traumatic days immediately following the assassination of Labour MP Jo Cox in her constituency.

Given the nature of the campaign, perhaps unsurprisingly one of the biggest shifts in public attitudes can be seen in relation to referendums. As the next chapter explores in more detail, support for them has declined by 15 percentage points in a year; but a clear majority – six in 10 people – still favour more of them as a mechanism for determining important questions.

Referendum voters: ‘activists’ versus ‘non-activists’

Unsurprisingly, those who did not vote in the referendum score much lower across the range of politics and Parliament indicators than do those who participated.

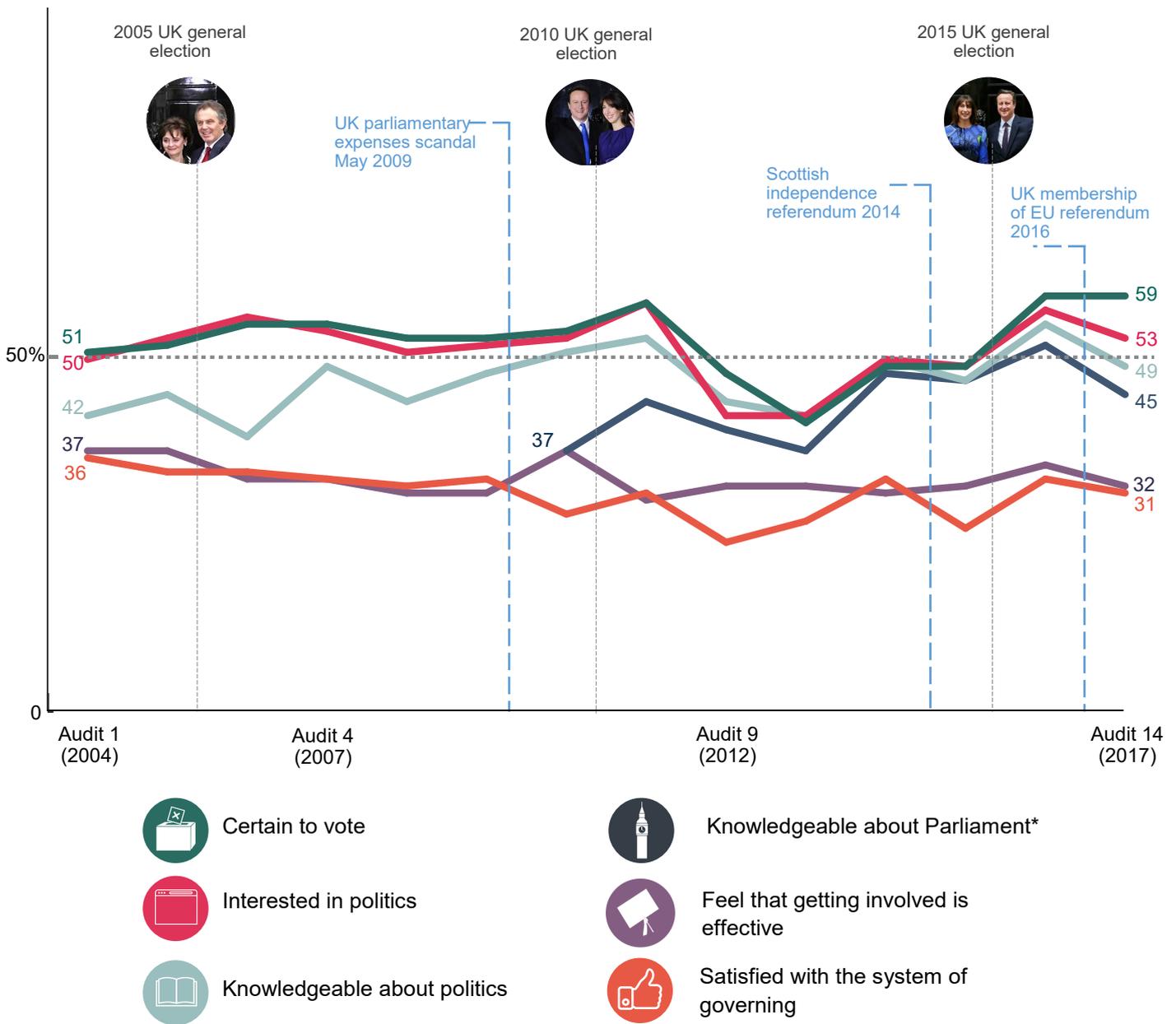


Figure 1: % Core engagement indicators and major political events

*People’s claimed knowledge about Parliament was also explored periodically prior to Audit 8 (Audits 1, 4 and 7). However, it was asked as ‘The Westminster Parliament’ so comparisons with later waves are only indicative. See page 26.

Those who did not vote are more likely to be unsure of what Parliament does generally, and, as one would expect, they are less likely to engage in political activities to influence decisions than are those who did vote in the referendum.

‘Non-activist non-voters’ – those who did not vote in the referendum and who do not claim to have

engaged with any other form of political activity to influence decisions – are the least likely to be knowledgeable about and interested in politics.

‘Activists’ – those who say they have tried to influence decisions by engaging in some form of political activity besides voting – are most likely to think that they have some degree of political

A 'REFERENDUM EFFECT'?

influence, particularly at the local level.

However, 'non-activist voters' – those who say that they voted in the referendum but have not engaged in any other political activity to influence decisions – are less likely to feel influential. They are also more likely than average to trust TV/radio news and the 'leave' or 'remain' campaigns and to have found these sources of information useful.

The new Brexit divide: 'leavers' versus 'remainers'

Of those who did vote in the referendum, those who supported the proposition to 'leave' the EU are generally more politically disengaged than those who opted to 'remain'.

'Leave' voters are more likely (71%) than both 'remainers' (64%) and those who did not vote at all (57%), to say that the present system of governing Britain could be improved 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal'. This may partially explain why 74% of them think that referendums should be used to determine important questions more often than today, compared to just 47% of 'remainers' who agree. They are more likely to select a referendum as the best way to take decisions in the country's interest, rather than leave a matter to be determined by the executive, local government or Parliament.

When asked about the most important ways MPs should spend their time, 'leave' voters are more likely to choose 'representing the national interest' (40%) than 'remain' voters (33%) or those who did not vote (30%). They are also less likely than 'remainers' to think that MPs should spend their time representing the views of local people in the House of Commons (46% versus 55% respectively).

In relation to how Parliament has carried out its core functions in recent years, the biggest gap between the two groups can be discerned in

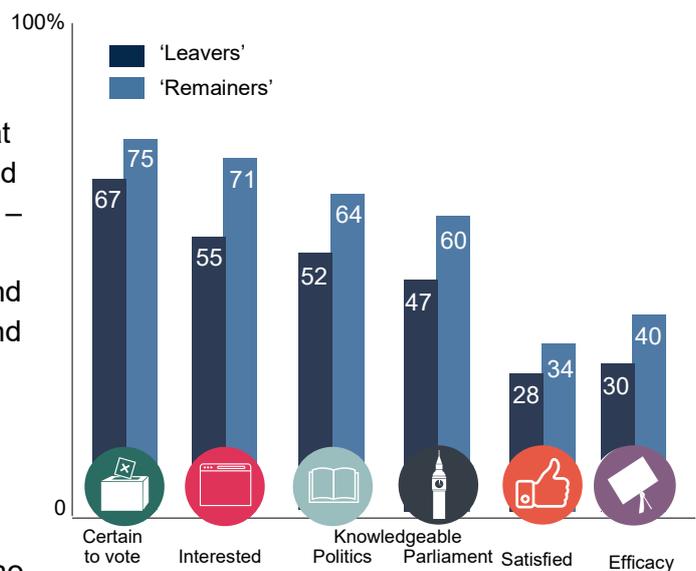


Figure 2: % Core engagement indicators: 'leavers' v 'remainers'

relation to whether Parliament has done a good job debating issues of public concern: only 38% of 'leavers' agree, compared to 48% of 'remainers'.

There is very little difference between the attitudes to Parliament of 'leavers' and 'remainers' in terms of whether the institution holds government to account (49% versus 50%) or encourages public involvement in politics (27% versus 29%). The gap opens, however, in relation to Parliament being essential to democracy (76% versus 82%) and debating decisions that matter to them (56% versus 66%).

However, 'leavers' are far less likely than 'remainers' to have engaged with Parliament in some way in the last 12 months – whether that is contacting an MP or Peer, creating or signing an e-petition, viewing debates and committees on television or listening to them on the radio, or visiting Parliament's website (see pages 32-33 for more details). Given seven possible options to choose from, 46% of 'leavers' said that they had done none of these things to engage with Parliament, compared to 32% of 'remainers' who said the same.

There are also few differences between the two groups in relation to whether the media is effective in holding government to account (37% and 38% respectively), or whether local government (19% each) or business (17% each) does likewise.

However, 'remainers' are more likely than 'leavers' (51% to 44%) to think that MPs are effective in holding government to account. This is also the case in relation to the effectiveness of the courts (41% versus 28%), and the EU itself (25% versus 15%), in holding the government to account.

'Remain' supporters are significantly more interested in politics (71%) than are 'leavers' (55%). They are also more likely to be a strong supporter of a political party (44% versus 30%, respectively). Their certainty to vote (i.e. scoring 10 out of 10 on this question) is higher than that of 'leavers' (75% versus 67%), but if one looks at the aggregation of those who are 'certain' (scoring 10 out of 10) and 'likely' (six to nine out of 10) to vote, then the gap narrows to 89% versus 83%.

The self-perceived knowledge of 'remainers' about politics (64% versus 52%) and the European Union (56% versus 42%) is also higher. 'Remainers' also

score more strongly on the perception of Parliament indicators: they are more knowledgeable about (60% versus 47%), and satisfied with (34% versus 28%), the way the institution works. When asked about the best way of taking decisions in the country's national interest, they are more likely to select Parliament than the executive, local government or a referendum.

Their personal sense of political efficacy is higher than that of 'leavers': four in 10 (40%) 'remainers' think that if people like themselves get involved in politics they can change the way the country is run. This falls to three in 10 (30%) among 'leavers'.

'Remainers' (33%) are also more likely than 'leavers' (19%) to think that they have influence on decision-making at the local level, but, conversely, there is no difference between the groups in terms of perceived influence over national decision-making (20% and 16% respectively – a statistically insignificant difference). Just under half of 'leavers' (47%) and over half of 'remainers' (56%) say that they would like to be involved in local decision-making, whilst 42% and 50% respectively claim that they would be willing to be involved in decision-making nation-wide.

Those groups who are more likely to have voted 'remain' are more affluent, white, and from London and the South of England. These groups are also the most likely to think that experts provided both trustworthy and useful information during the referendum.

Knowledge of the European Union

One finding in this year's results that ought to provoke considerable thought is that although more people than ever in the life of the Audit now claim to be knowledgeable about the EU, at 43%, that is still barely more than four in 10 people. This indicator has increased by only five points in a year, despite the referendum.

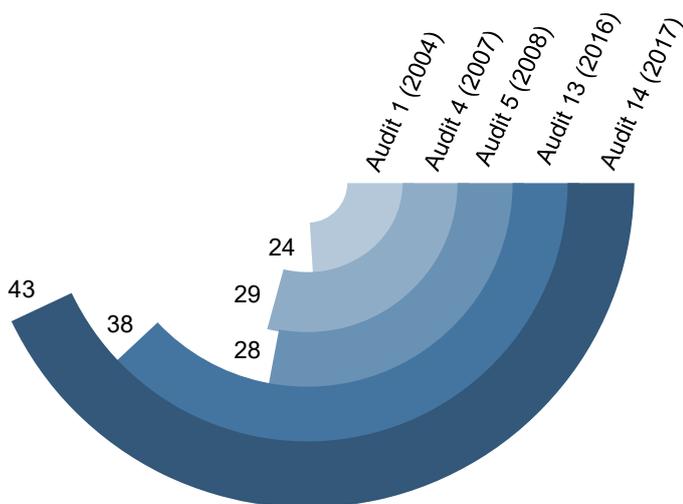


Figure 3: % Knowledge of the EU (great deal / fair amount)

A 'REFERENDUM EFFECT'?

As in Audit 13, the more affluent groups are among the most likely to say that they feel knowledgeable about the EU. Barely three in 10 people in the C2 (31%) and DE (29%) social groups claim to know at least a 'fair amount' about the EU, compared to nearly six in 10 of ABs (59%). Similarly, those with graduate level education (63%) are more than twice as likely to feel knowledgeable as those with no qualifications at all (25%).

Those living in London perceive themselves to be quite knowledgeable about the EU - at 55% significantly above the national average. So too Scots (49%) and those living in the South of England (47%) claim to be knowledgeable, in contrast to the Welsh (31%) and those living in the North of England (35%), whose knowledge levels are significantly below the national average.

Among supporters of political parties, it is Liberal Democrats who are the most likely to say that they feel knowledgeable about the EU.

What about the 'experts'?

Although 'experts' were widely criticised by prominent 'leave' campaigners, many of the public found them to be among both their most trusted and most useful source of information about the referendum, second only to TV and radio news programmes, and considerably ahead of the official 'leave' and 'remain' campaigns.

TV and radio news programmes were considered among the most useful by 37% of the public, and most trustworthy by 34%, far in front of any other source of information.

No other source attracted the support of more than two in 10 members of the public. Experts were valued by 20% as a most useful source and 21% found them most trustworthy. Newspapers were viewed as useful to 18% of the public, and to 16% they were a trusted source.

Online sources of information – websites, online forums and social media – were considered most useful and trustworthy by only one in 10 of the population. Although the campaigns, particularly the 'leave' campaign, focused a lot of effort on digital targeting of their messages, the position of such media in this list compared to TV and radio and newspapers would suggest that their role as a conduit for information in this and future campaigns should not be overstated.

The official campaigns had only a limited impact on the public in terms of providing information; barely one in 10 people say that they were a most useful or trustworthy source. The significant effort put in by the campaigns to highlight the support of the business sector may also have been wasted effort; no more than 5% found business – large or small – to be a useful information source.

Seventeen percent of the public found none of the options listed to be a trustworthy source of information, and 13% found none of them to be a useful source.

Those groups most likely to have voted 'remain' are also the groups most likely to say that experts provided both trustworthy and useful information on the referendum.

More than five times as many people with graduate level education (37%) said that they found experts



Figure 4: Sources of trustworthy information during EU referendum campaign

to be the most trustworthy source of information compared to those with no formal educational qualifications (7%).

Similarly, four times as many people in social group AB (32%) said that experts were the most trustworthy source, compared to just 8% of DEs.

People living in Wales (21%) and the South of England (26%) were most open to the usefulness of information provided by experts; those living in the North of England found them half as useful (12%) and Scots only a little more so (16%).

'Remain' voters (31%) were twice as likely to consider experts to be a useful source as those voting to 'leave' (15%).

Looking at the rating of the sources of information through the prism of non-activist non-voters, activists, and non-activist voters, the last of these – who had not engaged in any activity other than voting in the referendum – were more likely than average to trust TV/radio news and the 'leave' and 'remain' campaigns, and to find these sources to be the most useful.

Experts were particularly trusted by activists (people who had tried to influence decisions by engaging in some form of political activity in addition to voting).

Activists were also more likely than non-activists to find online sources of information to be both most useful and trusted, suggesting that here at least online routes were less effective at reaching those who were not already engaged with politics prior to the referendum.

What has happened in Scotland?

Following the independence referendum in 2014, we reported a clear 'referendum effect' in Audit 12,

with those living in Scotland much more engaged across a range of political indicators than they had been in previous years, and more engaged than any other part of Great Britain. Scottish engagement considerably outstripped the national average on the certainty to vote, interest in and knowledge of politics indicators, as well as on respondents' sense of the efficacy of their own personal involvement in politics.

Two years on, and after another referendum and elections to the Scottish Parliament, the situation in Scotland has deteriorated, with engagement levels falling back to more accustomed levels, although the picture is not uniform. And, as the next chapter explores in more detail, support for more referendums has plummeted to 55%, six points below the average across Great Britain.

Interest in politics is above the national average: 58% of Scots claim to be interested, compared to 53% of the population as a whole. This is a decline of four percentage points in Scotland since Audit

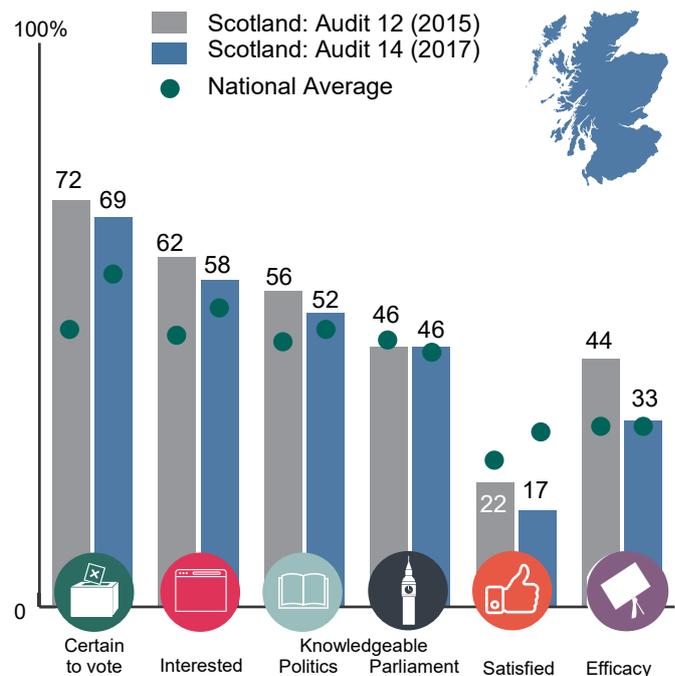


Figure 5: % Core indicators: Scotland v national average

A 'REFERENDUM EFFECT'?

12. Knowledge of politics has declined four points in two years: 52% of people living in Scotland now claim to be knowledgeable, compared to 49% across Great Britain.

On their knowledge of Parliament (46% compared to the GB average of 45%) and their personal sense of political efficacy (33% versus 32%) – the belief that if they get involved in politics they can make a difference to how the country is run – Scots are now much closer to the national average.

As was also true two years ago, Scots' satisfaction with our system of governing is lower than the national average. However, the gap that stood at four points below GB-wide satisfaction levels in Audit 12 has grown to 14 points this year, placing the Scots joint bottom with Wales in the satisfaction table by geography.

Nearly seven in 10 Scots (69%) say that they are certain to vote in the event of an immediate general election, 10 points higher than the national average, and just three points below the high watermark of 72% reported in Audit 12. This is the highest score recorded in any part of Great Britain.

Scots also continue to record relatively high levels of political activity, outstripped only by people in the South of England. Seventy-three percent say that they have undertaken some form of activity in the last 12 months (four points above the national average), and 89% say that they would be prepared to do so in the future if they felt strongly about an issue, seven points above average.

However, Scots do not feel that they have much influence over local decision-making (14% say that they do, compared to 23% nationally) or national decision-making (9% compared to 16% GB-wide). On both indicators, Scots are at the bottom of the geographical league table.

Coupled with their low sense of satisfaction, this may help explain why Scots' desire for involvement both locally and nationally is also at the bottom of that table. Just over a third (35%) desire involvement nationally, compared to 41% across Great Britain, while 38% say that they would like to be involved in local decision-making, eight points below the national average (46%).

Support for political parties

Levels of support for parties have dropped considerably. Just 31% say that they are a strong supporter of a political party this year, compared to 41% who said the same in the last Audit.

This result is on a par with what we saw in Audits 11 and 12, and suggests that last year's peak might have been an outlier linked to the post-general election boom in engagement across the board.

As previously, levels of support for political parties increase with age and affluence. Younger citizens (18-34s) are much less likely than older people (aged 55+) to describe themselves as a 'strong supporter' of a political party (22% versus 41% respectively).

Those in social group C2 are the least engaged at a partisan level: just 20% say that they are a strong supporter of a party, lower than the 26% of DEs who say the same. However, ABs remain the most

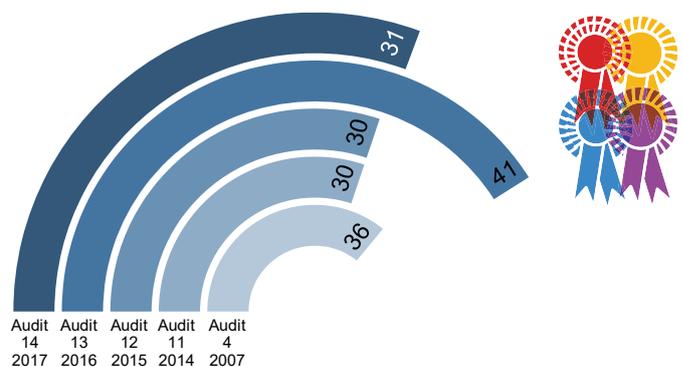


Figure 6: % Party support (very / fairly strong supporter)

engaged, with 44% indicating support for a party.

The gap in relation to educational attainment is narrower than on many other indicators: when it comes to party support, 25% of those with no formal qualification indicate that they strongly support a party, and 39% of graduates say the same.

Last year there were no significant differences by ethnicity in the results. However, this year, white adults are more likely than their BME counterparts to describe themselves as a 'strong supporter' of any party.

Certainty to vote

The proportion of people saying that they are 'absolutely certain to vote' in the event of an immediate general election has remained stable at 59%. It thus continues to be the highest level recorded for this indicator in the Audit series.

Previously, at the same stage of the post-general election cycle, certainty to vote had declined after the 2010 election (48% in Audit 9) but, as now, remained stable after the 2005 election (55% in Audit 4).

As Figure 7 shows, though there was considerable fluctuation in certainty to vote during the years of coalition government (Audits 9-12), the indicator now stands eight points higher than it did at the start of the Audit series 13 years ago.

The groups least likely to say that they will vote are the same this year as last. In terms of age, those groups most certain to vote are the oldest, aged 55+ (75%), compared to the youngest (44% of 18-34s). The least affluent groups – by social class, housing tenure and income level – are also less likely to say that they will vote. Educational attainment levels are also relevant: three-quarters of graduates are certain to vote, compared to just under half (49%) of people with no formal qualifications.

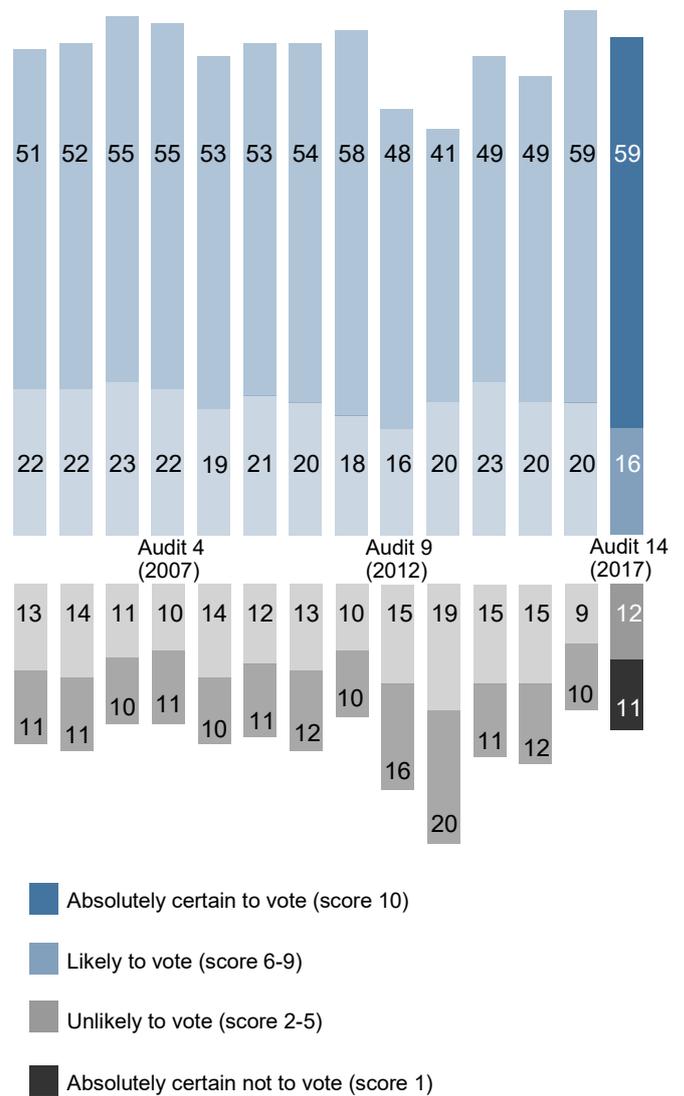


Figure 7: % Certainty to vote

There is also a significant difference in terms of ethnicity: 62% of white people say that they will vote, compared to just 41% of BMEs who say the same.

ATTITUDES TO REFERENDUMS



After four referendums in six years – two UK-wide (EU and AV), one Scotland-wide (independence), and one Wales-wide (devolution) – the public exhibit declining support for more of this method of decision-making to determine important questions. Support for referendums has declined particularly in Scotland, a development that may not bode well for the prospects for a second independence referendum.

Support for referendums: fatigue sets in?

A clear majority – three in five British adults (61%) – agree that important questions should be determined by referendums more often than they are today.

However, as Figure 8 shows, this is significantly below the level of support for more referendums recorded in Audits prior to the EU referendum. When this question was asked in Audit 13 (2016) and Audit 9 (2012), support for referendums stood

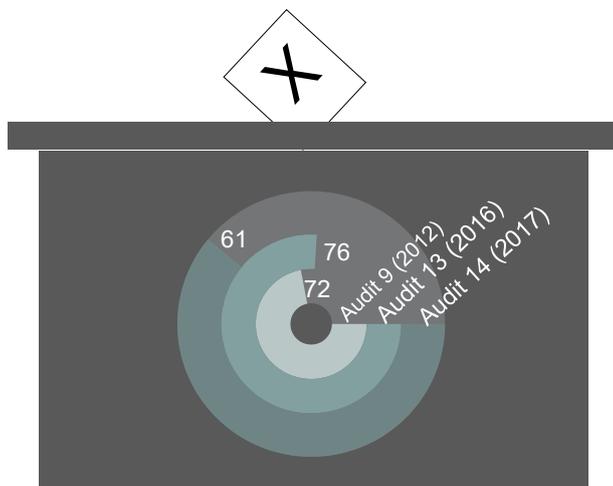


Figure 8: % Important questions should be determined by referendums more often (agree / disagree)

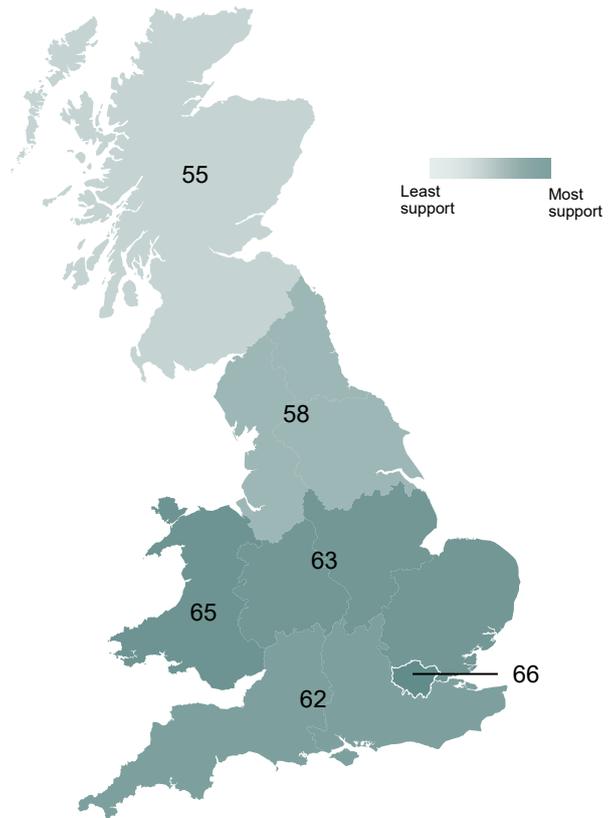


Figure 9: % Support for more referendums

at 76% and 72% respectively.

A decline of 15 percentage points in a year suggests a level of dissatisfaction with the EU referendum experience among many members of the public.

Interestingly, as Figure 9 illustrates, support for more referendums is lowest in Scotland compared to other parts of Britain, indicating perhaps a level of 'referendum fatigue' following two referendums in less than two years and with the Scottish government talking of a third when the EU referendum result had barely been counted.

Support for more referendums among Scots has declined to 55%, a drop of 19 percentage points from the 74% recorded in the last Audit wave (2016). Net support for referendums in Scotland now stands only at +11%, compared to the national average of +26% and the +58% recorded in

Scotland in the last Audit.

Looking at party affinity, unsurprisingly those who are strong supporters of UKIP are most likely to support the use of referendums to determine important questions. Nearly nine in 10 (88%) UKIP supporters do so. In contrast, the supporters of the most avowedly pro-EU party, the Liberal Democrats, are least likely to support the use of referendums as a decision-making mechanism; only four in 10 (42%) of their supporters do so.

The views of Labour and Conservative supporters are broadly identical; 59% of them support greater use of referendums to decide important questions.

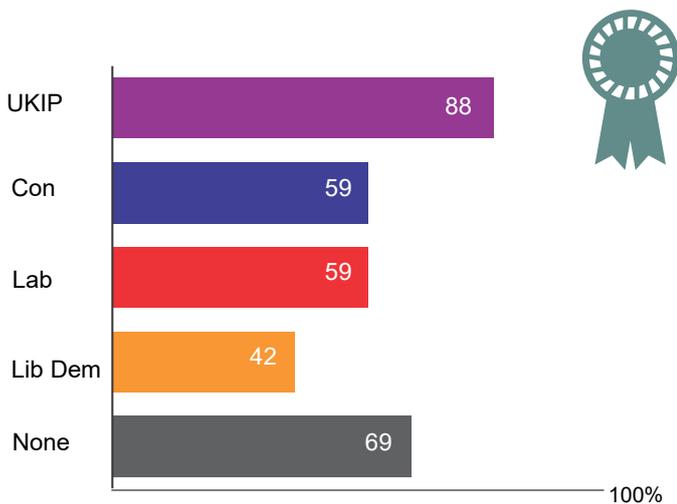


Figure 10: % Support for more referendums by party

In contrast, those who say that they do not support a political party are more likely than either party's supporters to favour referendums; nearly seven in 10 (69%) would like to see greater use of referendums in the future.

Younger people are also more likely to support referendums: two-thirds (66%) of 18-34 year olds agree that referendums should be used to determine important questions more often than today. This contrasts with just 54% of those aged 55 and above who say the same.

As with so many other indicators, social class,

income levels and educational attainment are important determining factors. For example, two-thirds (67%) of people with no formal qualifications favour referendums, compared to 45% of graduates.

Unsurprisingly, three-quarters (74%) of 'leave' voters support greater use of referendums in the future; just under half (47%) of 'remainers' agree.

The best way to make a decision?

In the aftermath of the EU referendum, when questions were raised about how government and Parliament would take the decision forward, we decided to test public attitudes to a range of decision-making mechanisms across several different policy scenarios.

We asked which mechanism people thought would work best to produce a decision in Britain's best interest: government taking a decision without a vote in Parliament; a parliamentary vote; local government deciding for their own area; or the public deciding through, for example, a referendum.

Each option was put across five different policy areas, covering national and local issues, constitutional and ethical matters:

- the method for electing MPs – a national, constitutional question – like that posed in the 2011 AV referendum;
- a financial matter in relation to the NHS - a key national policy area with local delivery implications;
- 'fracking', a controversial environmental issue with important local ramifications;
- assisted dying - a moral or conscience issue where citizens might arguably have stronger personal views or indeed knowledge than they might, for example, have on constitutional questions; and
- our future relationship with the EU, the subject of the recent nation-wide referendum.

ATTITUDES TO REFERENDUMS

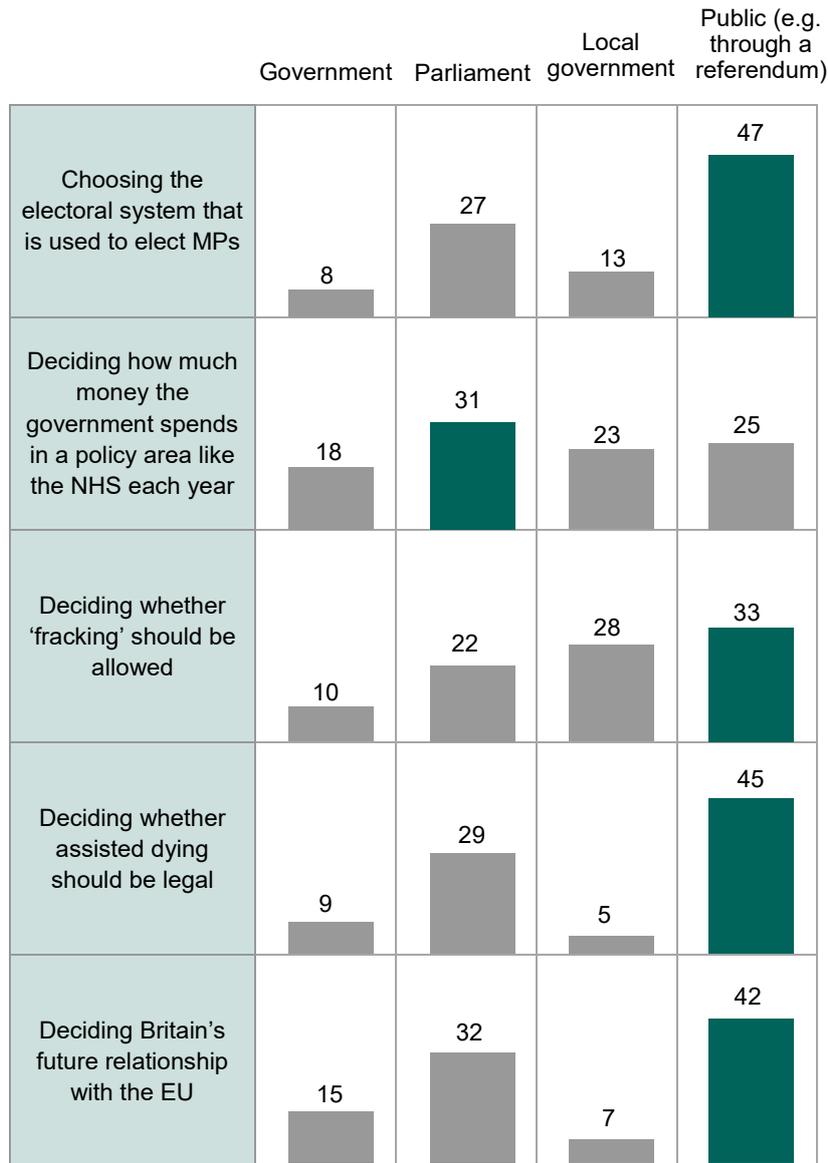


Figure 11: % Best at producing decisions in Britain's best interest

The results are indicative only of the public's attitudes to the decision-making mechanism proposed. They should not be interpreted more widely, for example in terms of implied support for the policy option concerned.

Overall, public opinion was split; no decision-making mechanism attracted majority support for any of the policy scenarios. However, as Figure 11 illustrates, overall, decisions by the public, through a referendum, were the most popular. The option

that was closest to attracting a majority was a referendum to choose the electoral system used to elect MPs, which was supported by 47% of the public.

Some patterns of preference can be discerned. On the constitutional (election of MPs and EU future) and ethical questions (assisted dying), four in 10 of the public selected themselves – the public via something like a referendum – as the best way to take a decision in the country's interest,

significantly ahead of the decision being taken by government or Parliament.

Only in relation to deciding how much money the government should spend in a policy area like the NHS did the public think that Parliament would be better placed to decide than citizens through a referendum or similar mechanism. And almost as many people thought that local government should decide as thought the public should do so.

And while a decision by the public was still the most popular option to address the difficult issue of fracking, here support was lower than in relation to the constitutional and ethical questions. Only three in 10 opted for a decision by the public, and it was on this question that a decision by local government attracted the most support compared to others.

Young people apart, those who voted 'remain' are less likely to think that important questions should be determined by referendums and more likely to select a vote in Parliament as the best way to make a decision across all the scenarios we tested.

Conversely, older people apart, those who voted 'leave' (e.g. UKIP supporters, those in the lower social groups, with lower income and educational attainment levels) are more likely to think that the public should decide, for example through a referendum, across all the policy areas outlined.

Young people are more likely than other age groups to support not just a public decision by referendum on the question of our future relationship with the European Union, but also whether assisted dying should be legalised.

Reflecting the power of incumbency, those who claimed to be a supporter of the Conservative Party are generally more likely than supporters of other parties to select government deciding alone without reference to Parliament across the range of policy options under consideration.

PERCEPTIONS OF PARLIAMENT



Last year's Audit recorded some strong results in public attitudes to Parliament, and this progress has largely been sustained. The public clearly value Parliament, with a substantial majority believing it is essential to democracy. There has also been some improvement in public engagement with the institution. And MPs are identified as the most effective group or organisation in holding the government to account. However, overall satisfaction with the way Parliament works is lower than in the first Audit in 2004.

Knowledge of the UK Parliament

Forty-five percent of the public claim to know at least 'a fair amount' about Parliament, compared to 52% who said the same last year. Despite this decline, however, knowledge levels stand five points (Audit 9) and seven points (Audit 4) above where they did at the same stage after the 2005 and 2010 general elections respectively.

Perceived knowledge is also 12 points higher than it was at the start of the Audit in 2004 (Audit 1). Although there is some fluctuation year-to-year and across the election cycle, the trajectory has clearly been upwards over the life of the Audit, and, apart from last year's peak, has been relatively stable over the last three years at 45% or above.

As ever, the least affluent groups, those with lower educational attainment levels, and younger people are among those least likely to perceive themselves to be knowledgeable about Parliament.

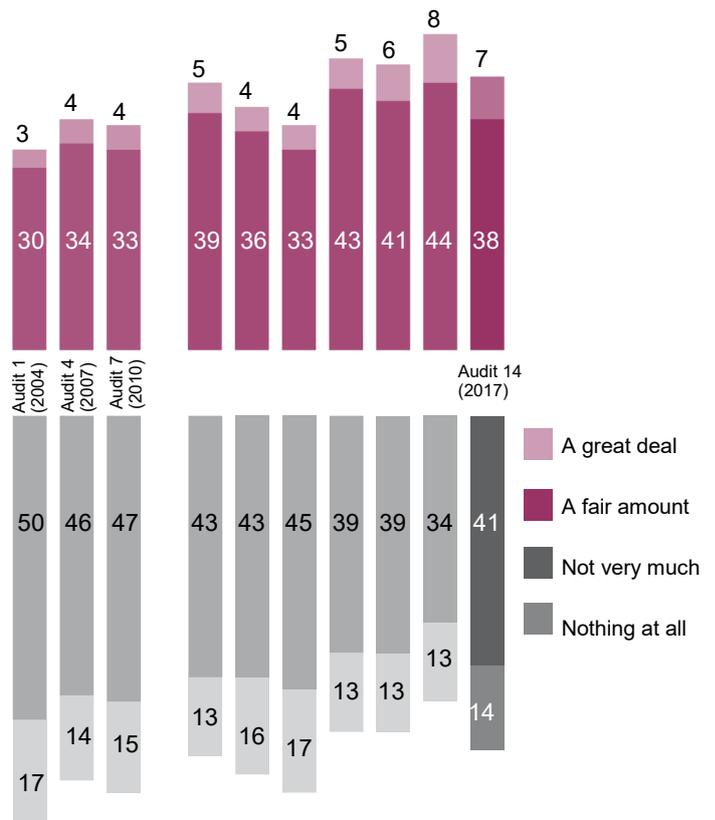


Figure 12: % Knowledge of Parliament

Two-thirds (67%) of those aged 18-34 feel that they know not very much or nothing at all, compared to just under half (47%) of those aged 55 or above who say the same. Three-quarters (75%) of DEs claim little or no knowledge, compared to just over a third of ABs (36%). Three times as many people with graduate level education (68%) feel knowledgeable as do those with no formal qualifications (23%). BME adults also claim lower levels of knowledge than white members of the public, at 35% versus 46%.

In Scotland, the proportion of people claiming to feel knowledgeable about Parliament (46%) has decreased to average levels, below the levels of knowledge reported by people in the South of England.

Satisfaction with the UK Parliament

Satisfaction with Parliament over the course of the Audit series has been on a shallow downward trajectory, and this year the situation is largely unchanged. Only three in 10 people (30%) report being at least 'fairly satisfied' with the way Parliament works, just over a third (34%) are at least 'fairly dissatisfied' and a similar proportion (35%) do not feel strongly either way.

As we also find in relation to satisfaction with the system of governing, there are fewer demographic disparities on this question than many other indicators, and where there are differences these tend to be narrower than on many other questions. There is a seven-point difference in the satisfaction levels of men (33%) and women (26%). Younger people are less satisfied than older ones; just two in 10 (21%) of those aged 18-24 claim to be so, compared to 38% of those aged 65-74. Although there is a divide between the satisfaction levels of ABs and DEs, the gap is not as great on this question (just nine points) as on many others. And despite claiming less knowledge than white members of the public, BME satisfaction levels

(34%) are a little higher than those of their white counterparts (29%).

Two-thirds (66%) of those people who say that they are a supporter of UKIP say that they are dissatisfied with the way Parliament works, 20 percentage points higher than the level recorded for supporters of any other party. Forty percent of Labour supporters and 42% of Liberal Democrats say that they are dissatisfied. In contrast, half of Conservative supporters (51%) claim to be at least 'fairly satisfied' with the way Parliament works.

Geographically, dissatisfaction levels are at their most marked in the devolved nations. Nearly five in 10 people in Scotland (48%) and Wales (49%) say that they are dissatisfied. Satisfaction appears to improve the nearer you are to Westminster; people in London (35%) and the South of England (35%) top the satisfaction table.

Attitudes to Parliament

As Figure 13 shows, a clear majority (73%) believe that Parliament is essential to democracy. This is unchanged since last year and seven points higher

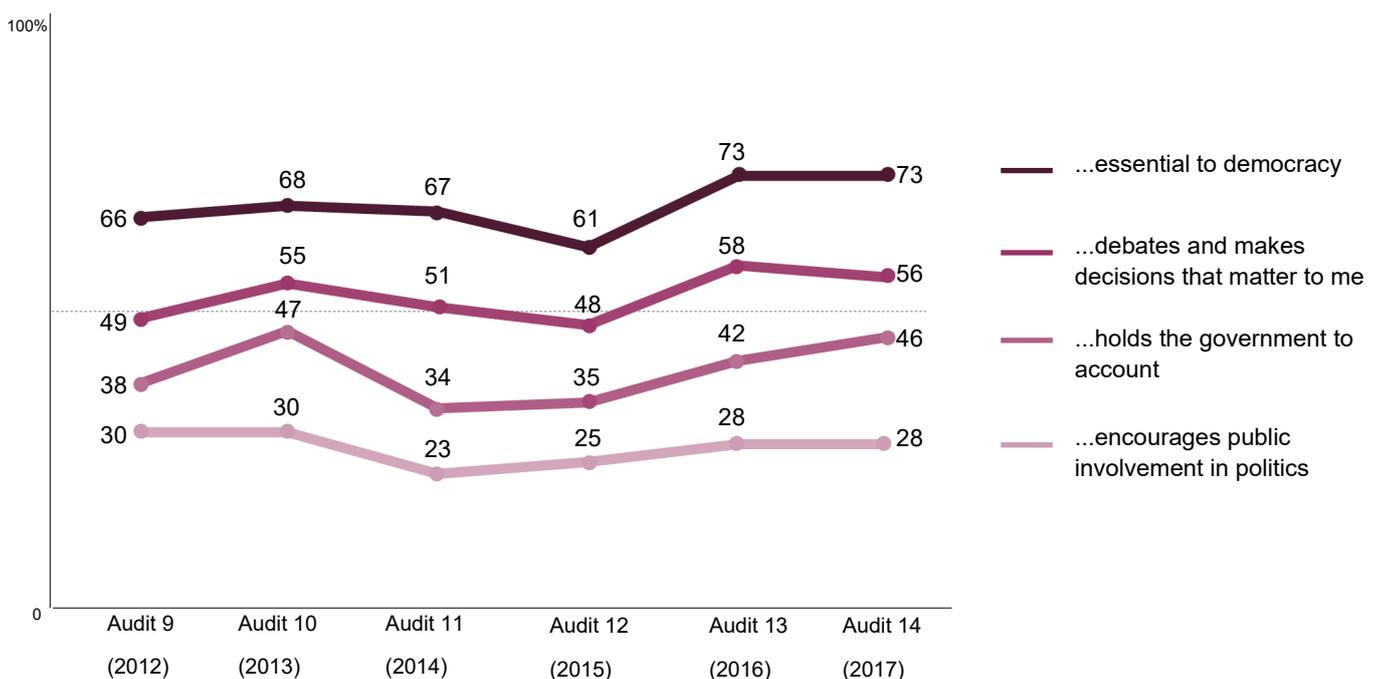


Figure 13: % Attitudes to Parliament (strongly / tend to agree)

PERCEPTIONS OF PARLIAMENT

than at the same stage of the post-general election cycle in Audit 9.

Similarly, more people agree that Parliament holds government to account than did so last year; this indicator has improved by four percentage points to 46%. The second-highest result in the Audit series, the current measure stands just one point behind the peak recorded in Audit 10 (2013).

The proportion of the public who think Parliament debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to them is unchanged, having declined by a statistically insignificant two percentage points. This too is the second-highest score recorded for this question in the Audit series.

Just over a quarter of the public (28%) – the same as last year – believe that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics.

More men (51%) than women (42%) believe that Parliament holds government to account. Those belonging to the AB social group and graduates are more likely to agree that Parliament debates issues that matter to them, and that it is essential to democracy. However, they are also more likely to disagree with the proposition that Parliament holds government to account and that it encourages public involvement in politics. Last year, these two groups were more likely than average to agree that Parliament holds government to account.

When it comes to whether Parliament debates issues that respondents think matter to them, there are no significant differences by ethnicity. However, BMEs are more likely than average to think that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics (40% versus 26%) and holds the government to account (52% versus 46%), while being less likely to think it is essential to democracy (66% versus 74%).

Geographically, those living in the South of England

are more likely than average to agree with the statements, except that concerning 'encouraging public involvement in politics'. Scotland stands with London on this question; a third of the public in each place agree that Parliament encourages public involvement in politics, higher than the national average.

Around three-quarters of the population in Wales (74%), the Midlands (74%) and Scotland (77%) believe that Parliament is essential to democracy; this rises to eight in 10 people in the South of England (81%). However, just 68% of Londoners agree and even fewer (65%) in the North of England say the same.

Core functions: what Parliament should do, and how well it does it

In this year's survey, we have introduced a new battery of questions to explore perceptions of Parliament in relation to six core functions (see Figure 14), asking how important they are to people, and to what extent people think that Parliament has done a good job in relation to each of them in the last few years.

Unsurprisingly, a majority of the public think it is important that Parliament performs each of the responsibilities tested. At least eight in 10 people say that each of the functions is important. There are three functions that at least six in 10 people say are 'very important' to them: representing the interests of people like them; debating issues of public concern; and checking the way public money is raised and spent by the government. The latter function tops the table with nearly two-thirds rating it 'very important' to them. In contrast, although 82% say that encouraging public involvement in politics is important to them, they feel less strongly about this function than the others, with just 44% reporting it as 'very important'.

Despite ranking all the functions highly, far fewer

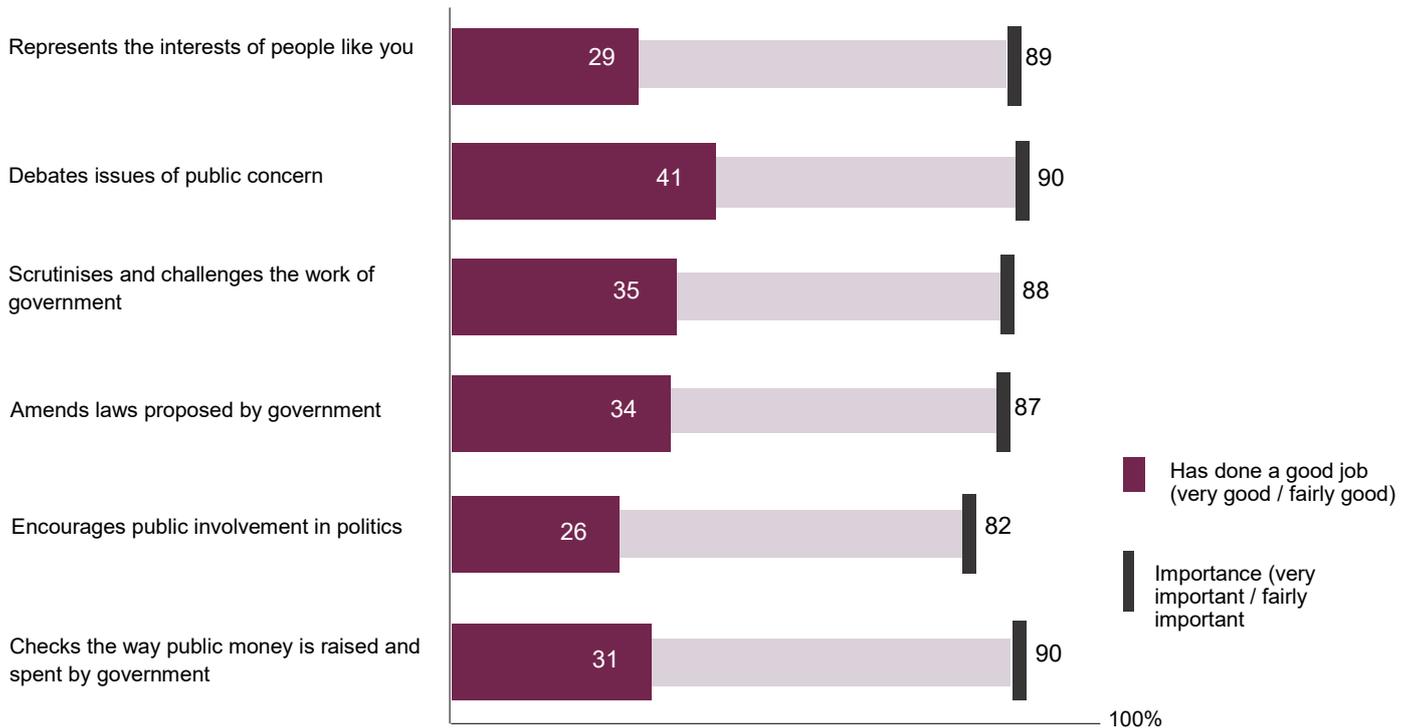


Figure 14: % Parliament's core functions: how important vs done a good job in recent years

people – never more than four in 10 – believe that Parliament has done a good job in carrying out these responsibilities in the last few years. And between three and four in 10 do not have a view one way or the other in relation to all the statements.

Parliament's current perceived strengths are in debating the issues that matter to people and scrutinising the government; but there is clearly significant scope for improvement in relation to financial scrutiny and representing ordinary people's interests. There is also scope for improvement in encouraging public involvement in politics, but this appears to be less of a priority than the other functions.

Debating issues of public concern is the joint top ranked function in terms of its importance to people; and it also tops the performance table, with 41% thinking that Parliament has done a good job in doing this in recent years. However, only 31%

agree that it has done a good job in checking the way public money is raised and spent by the government, despite this being the other joint top ranked function.

Three of the functions have a positive net 'good' performance rating: debating issues of public concern (+15); amending laws proposed by the government (+12); and scrutinising and challenging the work of the government (+7). But Parliament has a net negative rating in relation to checking the way public money is raised and spent (-4); representing the interest of people like you (-9); and encouraging public involvement in politics (-11).

Those living in Scotland tend to be among the most likely to think that Parliament is doing a bad job in relation to the functions identified, except in relation to encouraging public involvement in politics.

UKIP supporters are the most likely to say that Parliament is doing a bad job across the range of

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functions identified. Conservative supporters, in contrast, are generally more likely than other party supporters to think that Parliament is doing a good job.

There are no discernible differences in attitude by age group on the question of Parliament's effectiveness in scrutinising public money. Similarly, although ABs are generally more positive about Parliament's performance across most functions, particularly debating issues of public concern and representing the interests of people like them, they are no different to the average in their views about how Parliament checks the way public money is raised and spent.

Who holds the government to account?

The outcome of the referendum has raised important questions about how, and by whom, the government is held to account. By some distance MPs in the House of Commons (44%) top the list of institutions or groups considered to be the most effective at doing so, followed by the media (34%) and then the courts and judiciary (30%). Just under a quarter of the public chose the House of Lords (23%) putting it fourth in the hierarchy.

People in Scotland (38%) and the North of England (38%) are less likely to choose MPs than people in other parts of the country, particularly the South of England (56%). The courts rank particularly low for Scots; only 17% said that the courts were effective in holding the government to account, well below the 30% average across Great Britain.

As one would expect, more people in Scotland and Wales believe that the devolved governments are effective at holding the UK government to account than do people in other parts of the country. But even in the devolved nations, only 20% of Scots and 19% in Wales say this.

Interestingly, in the context of the referendum



Figure 15: % Most effective in holding UK government to account

outcome and aftermath, 31% of respondents in London, a city which voted strongly to 'remain', believe that the EU is effective in holding the UK government to account. This is nine points higher than in any other part of the UK, and 13 points higher than the national average (18%).

Young people, less affluent groups (those with lower incomes, in the lower social groups, and with lower educational attainment levels), and BMEs are among those least likely to select any institutions on the list.

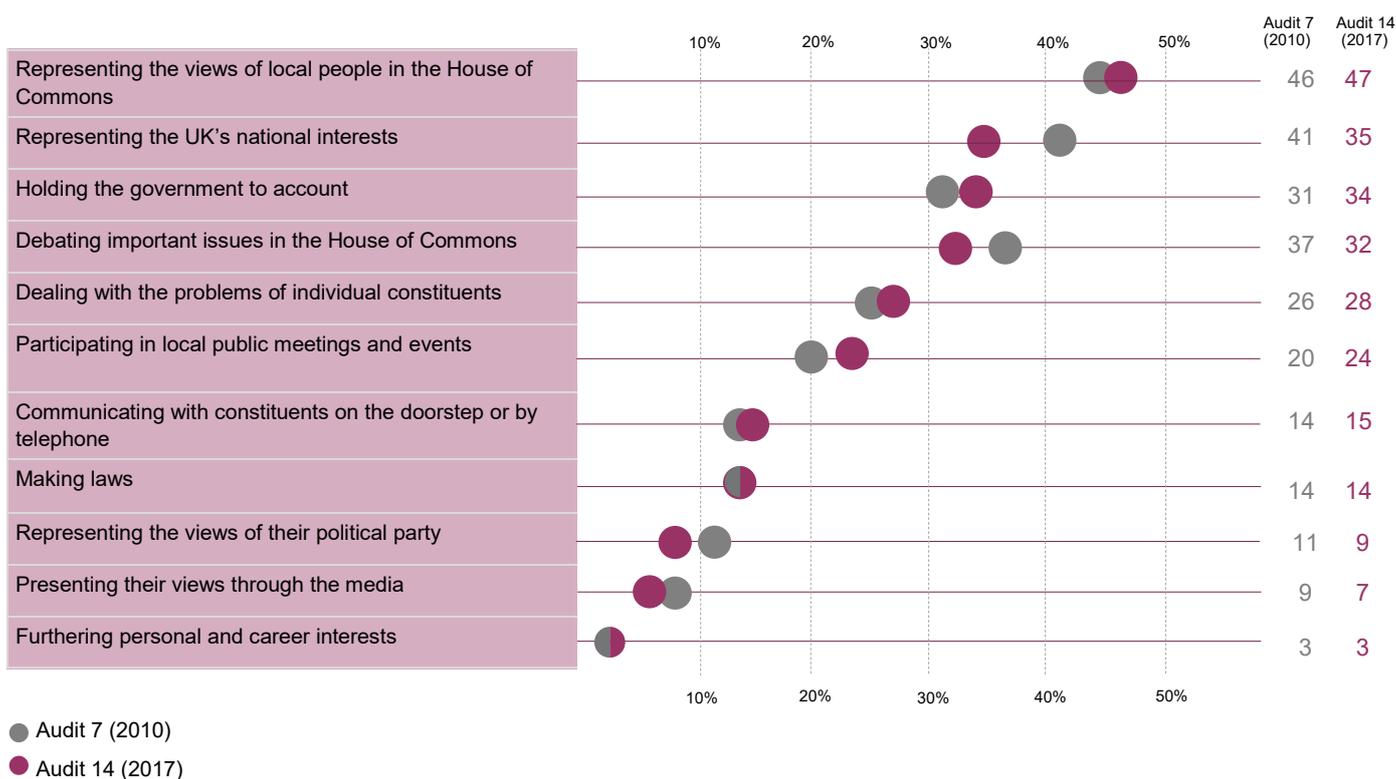


Figure 16: % Most important ways MPs should spend their time

How should MPs spend their time?

Given that the public believe that MPs are the most effective group in holding the government to account, what MPs do and how they spend their time is key in carrying out their responsibilities. To explore this issue, we repeated a question last asked in Audit 7 (2010), following the MPs expenses crisis, to gauge what the public thought were the most important ways MPs should spend their time, selecting from a list of 11 potential options. The list of responsibilities is not perfect, but it does reflect the range of activity undertaken by MPs, and the use of the same question as in Audit 7 allows for comparison over time.

MPs do not have a job description – within the constraints represented by the demands of party whips, they are free to decide how they spend and prioritise their time. Over the last quarter century there has been growing concern among academics and political commentators that MPs have become

increasingly parochial in their focus, prioritising the constituency and performing a local grievance-chasing role rather than focusing on national and international issues in their role as scrutineer and legislator. The results (as illustrated in Figure 16) suggest a mixed picture in terms of what the public want from their MPs.

Representing the views of local people remains today, as in Audit 7, the most important way that people think MPs should spend their time. There has been no change in the proportion of people who support this option. Just under half the public (47%) say this, 12 points ahead of the next-ranked priority.

Representing the UK's national interest remains the second-ranked priority, but fewer people prioritise this today: 41% said that this was important to them in Audit 7, but just 35% now say the same.

Holding the government to account is third in the

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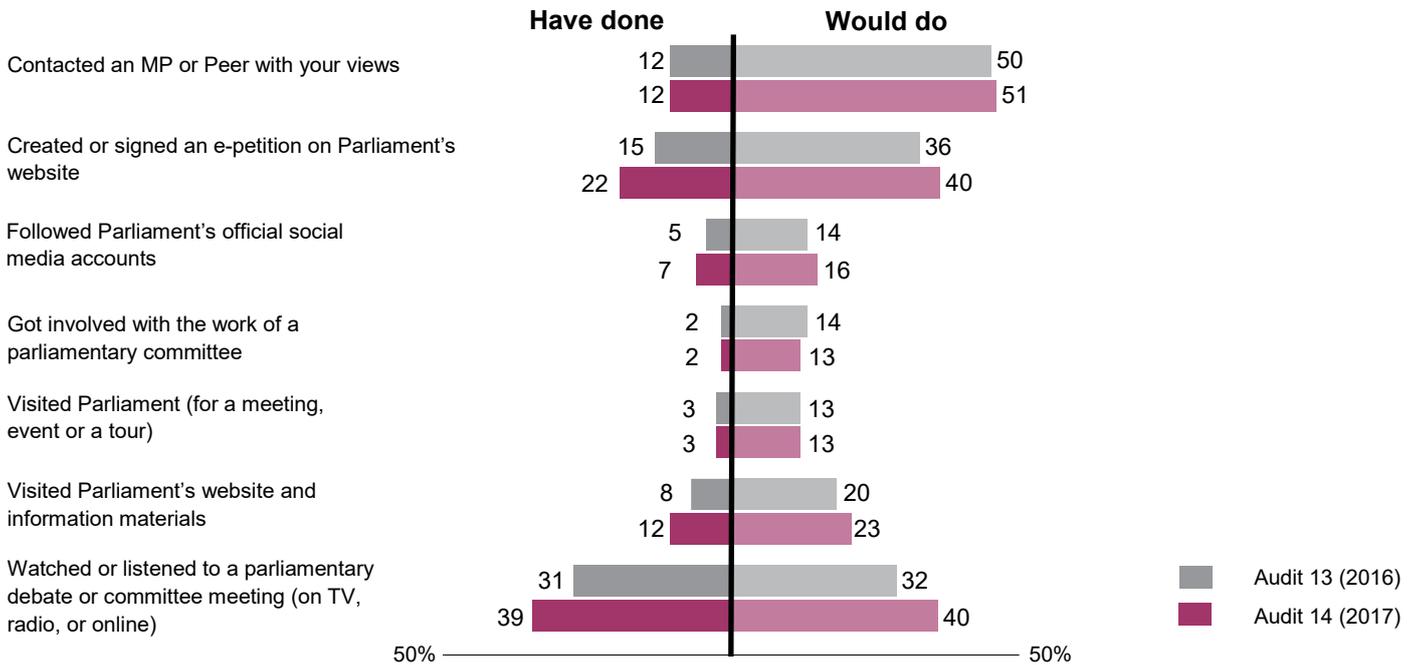


Figure 17: % Engagement with UK Parliament: have done in last 12 months vs would do in future

list, with just over a third of the public choosing this option (34%), marginally more than chose it in Audit 7 (31%).

Despite attaching importance to the need to debate issues of public concern, as identified in the previous section, fewer people today think that debating important issues in the House of Commons is an important way for MPs to spend their time: just under a third (32%) say so, compared to 37% seven years ago.

The only other significant change is in relation to participating in local public meetings and events. Just under a quarter (24%) say that this is important, compared to just one in five (20%) previously.

Scots are more supportive of MPs spending their time representing the views of their political party than are people in any other part of Great Britain. Sixteen percent of them chose this option, compared to the national average of nine percent. People living in Scotland are also more likely to think that MPs should spend their time making laws; 23% chose this option, compared to a

national average of just 14%.

Public engagement with Parliament

Given the spotlight thrown on Parliament during and after the referendum, we were interested in whether there would have been any change in the way the public engaged with it this year.

In the last Audit we explored in what ways, if any, the public had engaged with Parliament in the previous 12 months, providing a list of eight possible ways they could have done this, whilst also giving them the option to define their own responses. We also asked which options they would be prepared to take up if they felt strongly about an issue. We repeated these questions for this latest Audit (see Figure 17).

The list of options is varied and reflects different levels of engagement, in terms of the time and commitment required. Contacting an MP or Peer, getting involved in the work of a parliamentary committee by reading reports or submitting evidence, or visiting Parliament for a tour, all require a degree of effort and commitment. Signing

an e-petition, following Parliament’s social media presence, visiting the website, or listening to or watching a debate or committee meeting on TV, radio or online, are all less labour intensive and more sedentary in nature.

Last year 56% of the public said that they had done none of these options. This has declined in this latest Audit by 10 points to 46%.

The most significant areas of growth can be found in the number of people who say that they watched or listened to a parliamentary debate or committee meeting in the last year; that figure has risen from 31% to 39%.

Twenty-two percent also say that they have created or signed an e-petition, compared to 15% a year ago. (This is consistent with the 23% who say that they had signed an e-petition in the last 12 months to influence decisions, laws or policies, in our traditional activity indicator question.)

There has also been an improvement in the number of people visiting Parliament’s website and information materials: this has risen by four points to 12%.

Younger and less affluent groups report undertaking fewer activities than other groups to engage with Parliament, as do BMEs. They and the less affluent are also less willing to undertake activities in the future. There are few differences among people living in Scotland, Wales and the Midlands, but northerners are somewhat less likely to have engaged than people in all other parts of Great Britain.

Turning to what people would be prepared to do if they felt strongly about an issue, contacting an MP or Peer with their views is by far the most popular option in this Audit (51%), as in the last (50%). The most significant growth can be seen in the number of people who say that they would be

prepared to watch or listen to a parliamentary debate or committee meeting; this has risen eight points, to 40%, since the last Audit.

There has also been a modest increase in the number of people who say that they would be prepared to create or sign an e-petition on Parliament’s petition website, rising from 36% last time to 40% today.

Overall, British adults would be prepared to undertake on average 1.99 activities if they were motivated by strong feelings on an issue.

How should Parliament provide information to the public?

Like many Parliaments around the world, Westminster places importance and value on its public engagement work, providing a range of mechanisms to convey impartial information to the public about how our democracy works. During the referendum campaign, for example, impartial briefings from library staff were a key resource used by many campaigners and journalists.

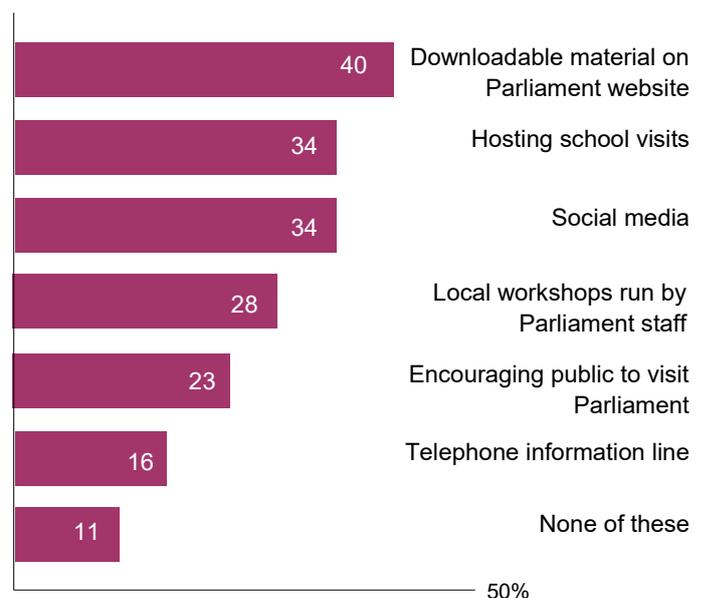


Figure 18: % How Parliament should provide information to the public

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Not everyone can or wants to come to Westminster, so how can Parliament best reach the public to provide this information to those who want it?

We asked the public to select, from a list of six options, the ways in which they would most like to receive this information.

The top two choices reflect the dominance of digital as a means of reaching the public. Four in 10 people (40%) chose material that can be downloaded from Parliament's website, and just over a third (34%) chose information via social media.

Vying with social media for the joint second spot was hosting school visits in Parliament, at 34%. Just over a quarter (28%) selected local workshops about how Parliament works, and just under a quarter would encourage the public to visit Parliament (23%). Somewhat less popular was a telephone information line, which attracted the support of only 16% of the public.

Focusing on the most disengaged groups, how would they like Parliament to provide information about our democracy? The results are remarkably similar. Although the order of priority may be slightly different, but only ever by a few percentage points, the top three options for those aged 18-34, those in social group DE, and BMEs, are: providing material for download from the website; information on social media; and hosting school visits in Parliament. BMEs would also encourage the public to visit Parliament.

Parliament has been experimenting with and growing its social media presence, and the new Education Centre, opened in 2016, will enable Parliament to increase the number of school pupils visiting Westminster from approximately 40,000 per year to around 100,000. There are thus improvements underway to address two of the top

three routes for Parliament to reach out to and disseminate information to the public.

Work is also underway to revamp Parliament's website, which has long been the subject of criticism for its limited search capability, and hampered by the difficulties of conveying a high volume of complex material, not helped by the fact that much parliamentary language remains inaccessible to the public. The Digital Democracy Commission launched by the Speaker of the House of Commons set out several important recommendations when it published its report in early 2016. To date, however, only a few of these have been implemented. The results here highlight the need for investment in and ongoing development of Parliament's digital presence.

Restoration and renewal



The Palace of Westminster, part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is in a state of considerable disrepair. Many parts of the building require major renovation; some areas have had no real work on them since the Palace was re-built in the 1800s. In 2012 a feasibility study was commissioned which concluded that unless significant restoration work was carried out, the building could be irreversibly damaged. Improvements to fire safety are required; the roof, windows and stonework need repairing; asbestos must be removed; and the plumbing, which keeps failing, must be replaced. The heating, electrical and drainage systems all need a major overhaul.

A Joint Select Committee of MPs and Peers considered the issues in 2015-16 and concluded that the best approach would be for Parliament to vacate the estate for a number of years to enable the work to be done as quickly and efficiently as possible. MPs could move to a new purpose-built chamber in Richmond House on Whitehall, and Peers might relocate into the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre off Parliament Square sometime after 2020. As yet, this plan has not been debated or approved by Parliament. A key problem is the likely cost, which will run to billions of pounds.

Authorising this level of expenditure in the current financial climate is very difficult for MPs and Peers. However, the longer the issue is deferred, the greater the risks are of a catastrophic systems failure on the estate, which could have serious ramifications not just for the building but for those who visit and work there.

Although the expenditure would be considerable, the 'restoration and renewal' programme, as it is known, would present a once-in-a-century-and-a-half opportunity to change the way Parliament looks, feels and works.

But will public dissatisfaction with MPs and Parliament get in the way of much-needed change? Will the public support investment in the core institution of our democracy on the scale required? A clear majority think that the institution is essential to our democracy; but how do they feel about spending such a significant sum of public money on it?

Two years ago (Audit 12) we asked a split sample question to compare public attitudes to the use of taxpayers' money for the restoration of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, thus comparing responses to a political and non-political building within the World Heritage Site. The results then suggested that the public was more willing to sanction investment in one of the country's leading church institutions than a political one. Forty-seven percent

said that they would be satisfied with taxpayers' money being spent on the restoration of Parliament, compared to 58% saying the same about the Abbey.

This year we posed another split sample question, the only difference being that one half of the sample received a question which specified how much the work on Parliament might cost (£3 billion), and the other did not. Our intention was to see whether the level of cost involved would make a difference to public attitudes.

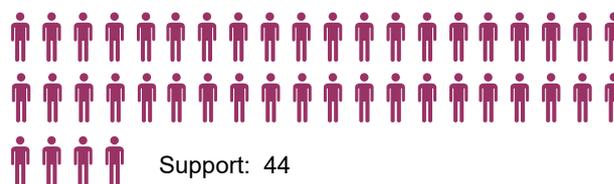


Figure 19: % Support for taxpayers' money (approx. £3bn) being spent on repair and restoration of Parliament (strongly support / tend to support)

The results show that cost does not appear to have a detrimental impact on levels of public support. Forty-seven percent of the public (the same as in Audit 12, albeit on a different question) said that they supported taxpayers' money being spent on the repair and restoration of Parliament. Forty-four percent of those who were told about the potential cost also indicated their support. Three in ten are opposed to the proposal: 30% of those who were not told how much it would cost, rising to 34% of

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those who were told the potential scale of the investment required. Exactly 22% on both questions said that they had 'no feelings either way', so this group could be converted into potential supporters in the future in the right circumstances.

Those who are most likely to support the restoration and renewal programme are those who are more engaged in politics: the older and more affluent groups in the higher income brackets, higher social groups and those with higher levels of educational attainment. Just three in 10 (30%) of C2DEs support restoration and renewal, rising to 65% of ABs. Similarly, 57% of those aged 55+ support it, but just 32% of 18-24s. Six in 10 of those living in the South of England support it, but just one third of Scots (33%) and the Welsh (35%) do so.

Conservative Party supporters are more likely than other groups to support the programme. Sixty-nine percent do so, compared to 60% of Liberal Democrat supporters and 40% of Labour supporters. By far the most negative are UKIP supporters; only a third of them (33%) say that they would support the work, only marginally more than the 29% of those who claim not to support any political party.

KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST

The public's perceived knowledge of and interest in politics has declined since the last Audit, falling back to pre-general election levels. This mirrors the 'rise and fall' pattern witnessed over the same stages of the political cycle in the two years after the 2010 general election.

Almost half the British public (49%) claim to know at least 'a fair amount' about politics. This is six points lower than in the last Audit. In pushing the net knowledge score back into negative territory (-1 point), it compares unfavourably with last year's +11 net result. Nonetheless, the knowledge indicator remains higher (by five percentage points) than in Audit 9, at the same stage of the political cycle after the 2010 general election, and is the same as the score recorded in Audit 4 (49%) at the same juncture in the cycle following the 2005 election.

Just over half the public (53%) claim to be at least 'fairly interested' in politics, a decline of four percentage points since last year. Net interest in politics now stands at +7 points, exactly half what it was in last year's Audit. However, the level of interest is 11 percentage points higher than it was at the same stage in the previous Parliament (42% in Audit 9), and is just one point lower than at the same stage following the 2005 election (54% in Audit 4).

As in previous Audits, those who claim to be least interested in and knowledgeable about politics are younger (those aged 18-34), female, BME citizens, and those from the less affluent and least educated groups, as well as those living some distance from Westminster.

The gender gap has re-asserted itself in this Audit, with a decline in the number of women who claim that they feel knowledgeable about politics. The proportion who say that they know at least a 'fair

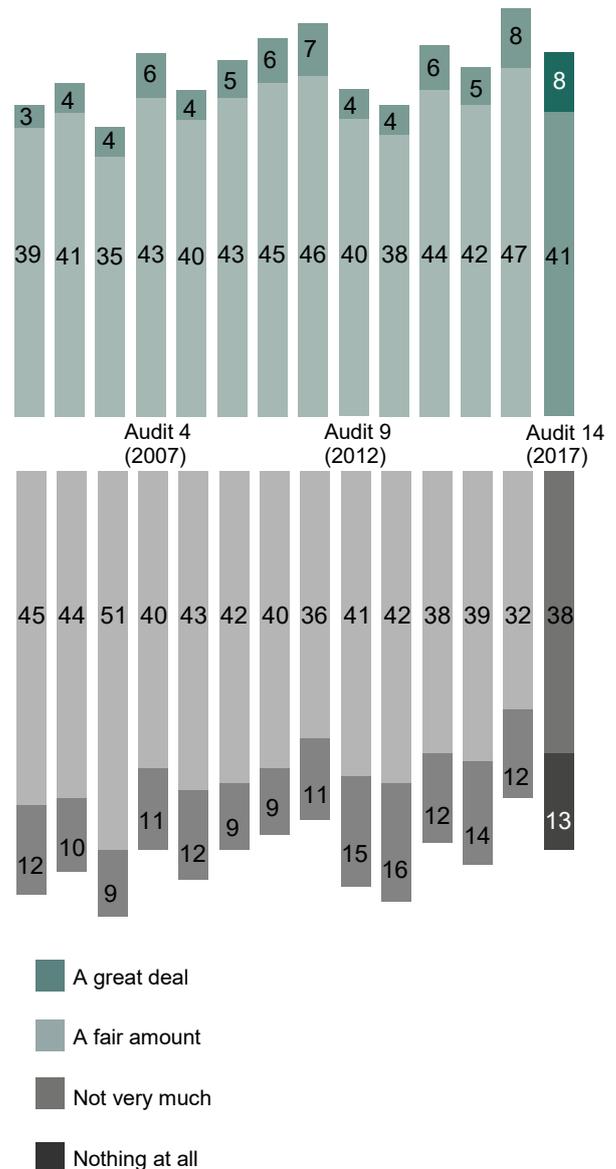


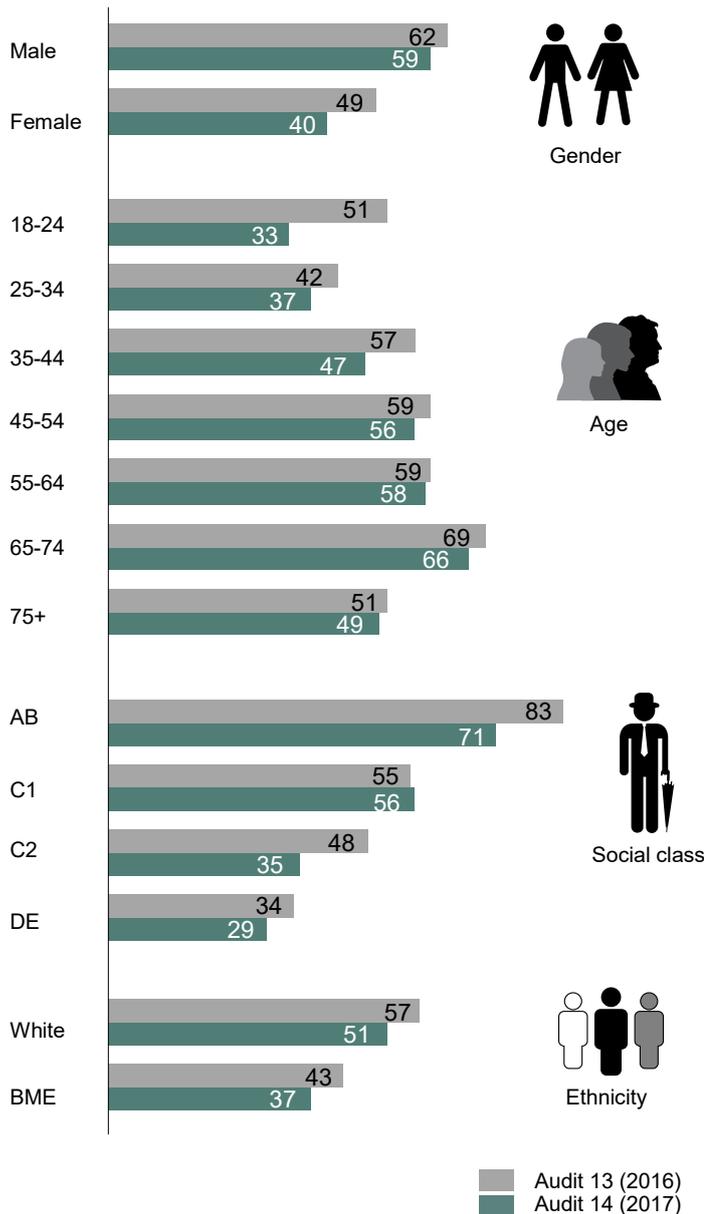
Figure 20: % Knowledge of politics

amount' has declined by nine percentage points in a year to 40%, whereas it has fallen only three percentage points among men (from 62% to 59%).

The net 'knowledge gap' between men and women now stands at 38 points (+18 versus -20 respectively). It should be noted, however, that in previous Audit studies, when claimed knowledge

has been put to an actual test, we have found that men tend to over-claim and women to underestimate what they know; the same is likely to be true here.

The gender gap in relation to interest in politics is much less stark. Women are only a little less interested in politics than the national average (49% versus 53%) and their level of interest has declined only modestly, by four percentage points, in a year. And, at 18 points, the net 'interest gap' between men and women is less than half that of the 'knowledge gap'.



As last time at the same stage of the post-election cycle, there has been a decline in the perceived knowledge levels of those aged 18-24 (down 18 points to 33%). It is important to note, however, that the post-election knowledge indicator for this age group in Audit 13 was exceptionally high and an outlier compared to the results recorded in the previous 12 Audits. Excluding last year's result, this latest score is more in line with the trend.

Looking at 18-34s as a group, they are much less likely than those aged 35 and older to feel knowledgeable about politics. Thirty-five percent of the youngest group claim to know at least a 'fair amount', compared to 52% of those aged 35-54 and 58% of those aged 55 or above. In terms of interest in politics, the gap between 18-34s and those aged 55+ remains large (41% versus 62% respectively).

Those in social classes AB are twice as likely to feel knowledgeable about politics as those in the C2 and DE groups (71% versus 35% and 29% respectively). This is similarly reflected in relation to interest in politics: 77% of ABs claim to be at least 'fairly interested' but just 35% of C2s and 31% of DEs say the same.

A large gap in claimed knowledge can also be discerned in relation to educational qualifications. Seventy-two percent of those with degree-level education claim to know at least a 'fair amount' about politics, compared to just over a quarter (27%) of those with no formal qualifications who

Figure 21: % Knowledge of politics by demographic group (great deal / fair amount)

KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST

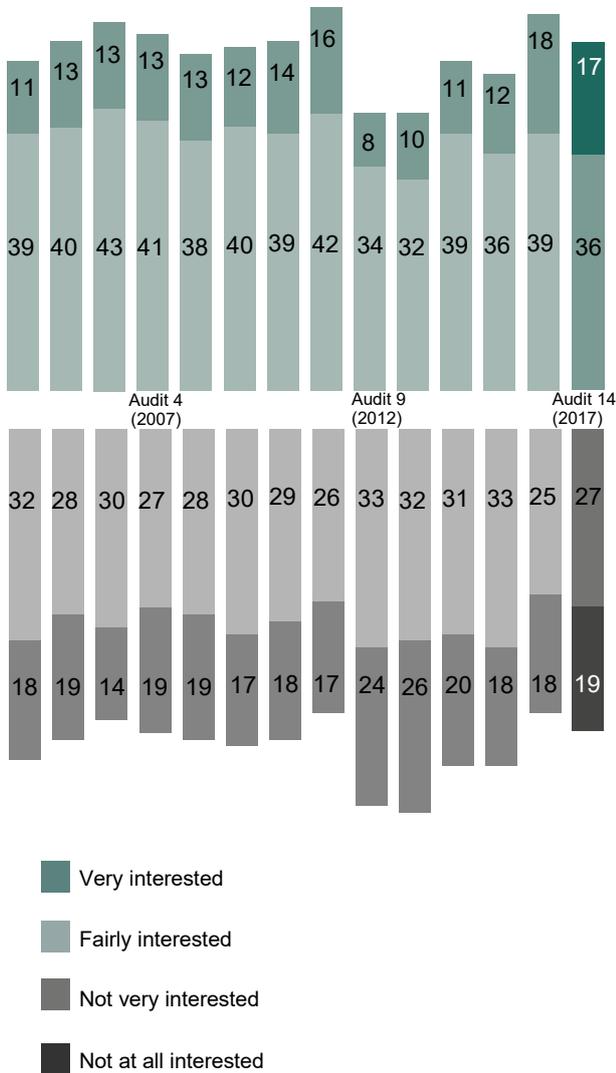


Figure 22: % Interest in politics

say the same. Similarly, only three in 10 people (30%) with no formal qualifications claim to be at least 'fairly interested' in politics, compared to three-quarters (76%) of those with at least degree-level education.

BME citizens are less likely to feel knowledgeable about and interested in politics than white citizens. Roughly half (51%) of all whites claim to know at least a 'fair amount', but fewer than four in 10

(37%) BMEs say the same. Fifty-six percent of whites claim to be at least 'fairly interested' in politics but just 34% of BMEs agree. Whereas among other groups perceived interest in politics scores more highly than claimed knowledge, the reverse is true among BME citizens. The gap in interest between white and BME citizens (22 points) is bigger than in relation to knowledge (14 points).

In the last two Audits we have reported a significant increase in knowledge and interest levels in Scotland following the 2014 independence referendum: an initial boost in Audit 12 in the immediate aftermath of the vote, which was subsequently sustained with the post-general election bounce in last year's study. In Audit 13 last year, we questioned whether, given the forthcoming Scottish parliamentary elections and the EU referendum, these relatively high engagement levels would be maintained.

The answer is a negative one: on both indicators, engagement levels in Scotland have dropped. Perceived knowledge of politics among Scottish respondents has declined by 13 points to 52%, although this still places Scottish knowledge levels a little above the national average (49%). Levels of interest in politics among Scots have similarly deteriorated, by 16 points to 58%, somewhat above the national average (53%).

More widely, those living in the South of England continue to be more likely to say that they feel knowledgeable about and interested in politics, while those in the North of England and Wales are less likely than average to say so.

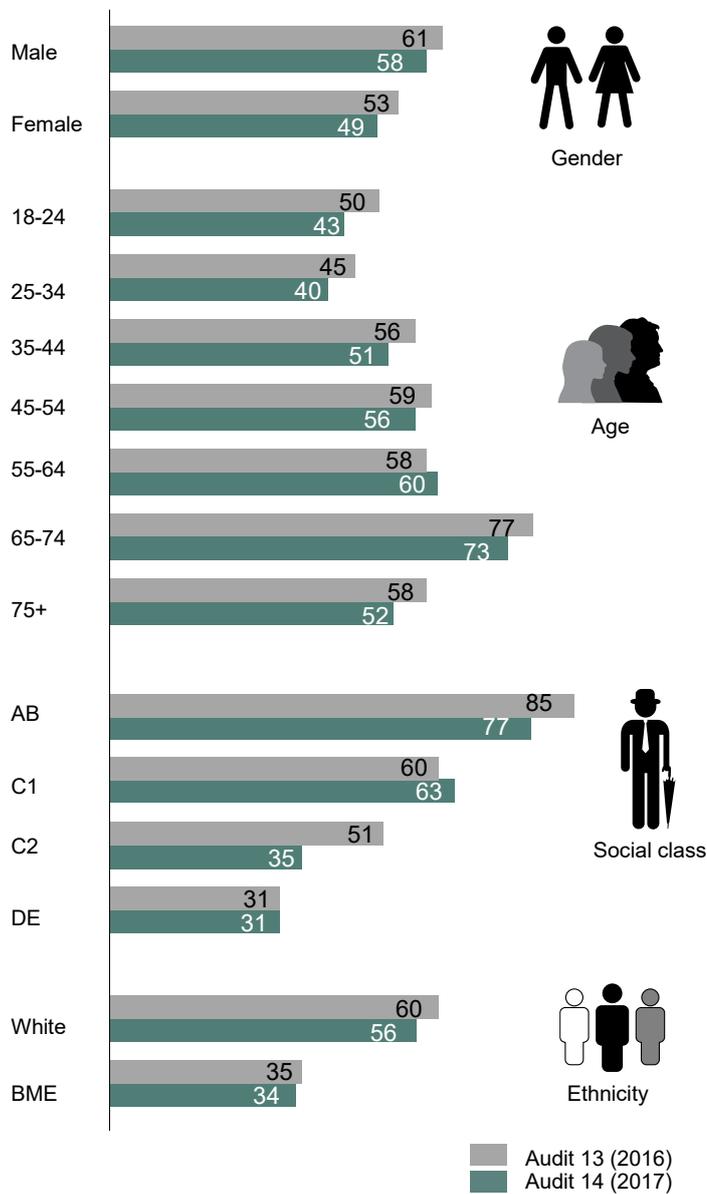


Figure 23: % Interest in politics by demographic group (very / fairly interested)

ACTION AND PARTICIPATION

There has been an increase in the number of people who say that they have undertaken some form of political activity to influence decisions, laws or policies in the previous year, boosted by the number of people who say that they voted.

Just three in 10 people (31%) claim not to have undertaken any of the 13 activities listed (see Figure 24), a decline of eight points compared to Audit 13, and a significant improvement on the five in 10 who said the same in Audits 10, 11 and 12.

The most significant change can be discerned in relation to those who say that they voted in an election, which has risen 10 points from 47% in Audit 13 to 57% in this latest survey. Whilst people in Scotland and Wales have had elections to the devolved legislatures, and some parts of England had local elections, it is highly likely that this increase also reflects the increased turnout for the EU referendum.

To preserve the validity of the tracking data we did not change the wording of this question to take account of the referendum. However, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the increase in voter activity recorded here reflects the boost in voter turnout for the referendum, and includes people who do not usually vote and are not politically active in other ways.

Beyond voting, the most significant change is in the number of people who claim to have created or signed an e-petition in the last year, which has risen by five percentage points to 23%. This is the highest score recorded on this question since it was first asked in Audit 10 (2013); the measure now stands 14 points higher than it did then (9%).

The number of people who say that they have donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation has declined

by five percentage points to 19%. Voting apart, these are the only two activities which more than 15% of the public report undertaking in the last 12 months.

When asked what activities they would be prepared to undertake if they felt strongly enough about an issue, nearly eight in 10 (82%) say that they would be prepared to do at least one of the options outlined. There is thus a 13-point 'potential participation' gap between those who have done something and those who would be prepared to do something in the future. However, one in five members of the public would still not be prepared to do any of the actions listed, regardless of how strongly they felt about something.

As previously, willingness to vote in an election (61%) is the top potential activity that people report they would consider doing. This has increased by six percentage points in a year, and stands four points higher than those who report having voted (57%), and two points higher than those who say that they are 'absolutely certain to vote' in the event of an immediate general election (59%).

This willingness-to-vote score is the highest recorded result on this question since it was first asked in Audit 10 (2013). It now stands 19 points higher than it did four years ago, suggesting a significant improvement in the public's perception of voting as a means to exercise influence if they felt strongly about an issue. This may perhaps reflect an increase in the perceived efficacy of voting after a general election and referendum which both delivered results contrary to the expectations of most commentators, politicians and pollsters.

The number of people who would consider contacting their elected representative in the future if they felt strongly about an issue has declined by ten points to 42%, but this remains the second most popular form of potential participation. The

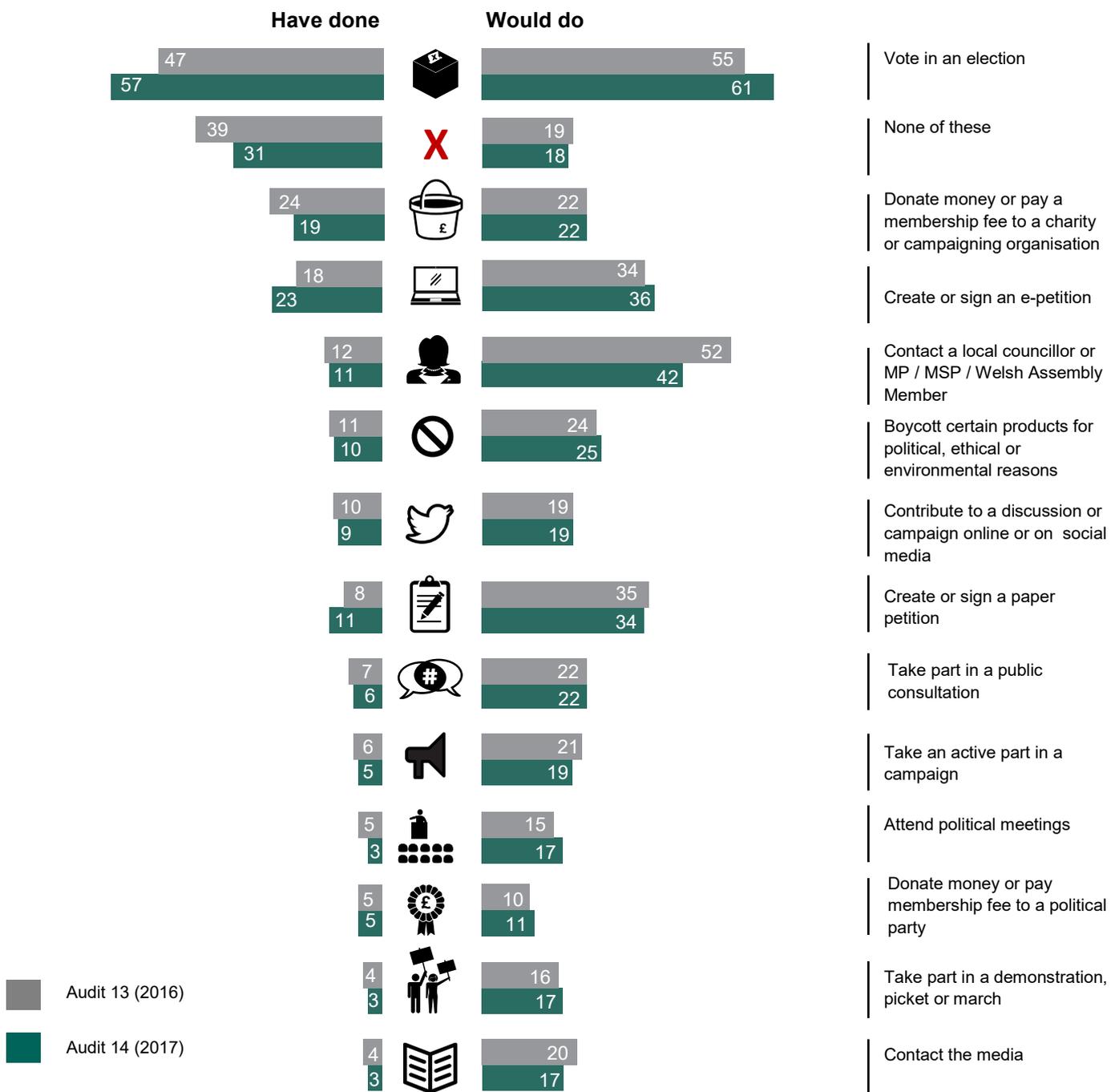


Figure 24: % Political activities: have done in the past 12 months vs would do if felt strongly enough about an issue in the future

ACTION AND PARTICIPATION

public's willingness to undertake other actions on the list remains largely unchanged compared to Audit 13.

There has been much discussion in the last few years, particularly on the left, about the potential to build a political 'movement' predicated on the politics of protest (such as boycotts, demonstrations, marches, and public meetings) which reaches beyond traditional party models and members to embrace the disaffected, disillusioned and disempowered. However, the Audit data does not bear out the potential for such a breakthrough. Although there has been a modest increase in the number of people who think that MPs should prioritise 'participating in local public meetings and events' (see page 31), there has been no real change in terms of the public's potential or demonstrable involvement in such activities. A boycott of products is the most popular form of these kind of protest activities: one in 10 report having taken part in a boycott in the last year, and one in four would be willing to do so in the future if they felt strongly about an issue. However, just 3% report having attended a political meeting in the last year or having taken part in a demonstration, picket or march. And 17% would be prepared to do both in the future. These kinds of activities remain a minority form of current and prospective political participation, as they have been throughout the 14-year life of the Audit study.

As in previous Audits, those who are most likely to have been politically active in the last year are white, older, more affluent, and better educated citizens. There is no gender gap; the propensity of women to be political participants is marginally higher than that for men.

BME citizens are a little more active this year than last, reflecting the overall boost driven by higher voter participation. They have a mean activity score of 1.03 compared with 0.76 in Audit 13. The political

activity of white citizens remains stable with a mean score of 1.7.

As ever, the older and more affluent groups are those with the greatest propensity for future political participation. Those in the AB social groups have a mean score of 5.23 for the number of activities they mention being willing to undertake if they felt strongly about an issue. This is significantly above the national average 3.39 mean score. Those in social group C1 are marginally above the national average, with a mean score of 3.56, whereas C2s and DEs are below the average at 2.35 and 2.05 respectively. The youngest citizens, aged 18-34, also fall below the national average at 2.82, compared to the score of 3.45 among those aged 55 and above. However, it is those in the 35-54 age bracket who show the greatest potential for future participation, with a mean score of 3.8.

Those who say they would vote for the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties, and those who live in the South of England, are also more likely than their counterparts to score highly on these indicators.

EFFICACY AND SATISFACTION

Despite the political upheaval of the last year, with significant implications for the way we are governed, satisfaction with our system of governing remains stubbornly low. This is one of the most consistent indicators across the Audit series. Regardless of events, and changes in other engagement indicators, the public's satisfaction with the system of governing Britain remains consistently poor.

Only three in 10 people (31%) are satisfied with the way our system of governing works, with almost two-thirds (65%) saying that it needs improvement. The two-point decline in satisfaction compared to last year is not statistically significant, but the current level is considerably better than was recorded in Audit 9 at the same stage of the post-2010 general election cycle (24%). It is, however, broadly consistent with the position recorded at the same stage after the 2005 general election (33% in Audit 4).

Those living in the devolved nations are most likely to think that the system needs to be improved either 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot'; eight in 10 people say this in both Wales (82%) and Scotland (83%). In contrast, twice as many people in London (36%) and the South (39%) are likely to say that the system could not be improved or could be improved in small ways as do people living in the devolved nations (17%).

Those who say that they support UKIP are the most dissatisfied with the system of governing; this clearly reflects the party's anti-establishment credentials as a home for those who are disappointed by and alienated from the political mainstream. Over eight in 10 UKIP supporters (85%) think that the system could be improved 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal'. They are more dissatisfied with the system than those who claim to support no party at all (64%). The next most dissatisfied are Labour supporters; nearly three-quarters of them think that the system needs

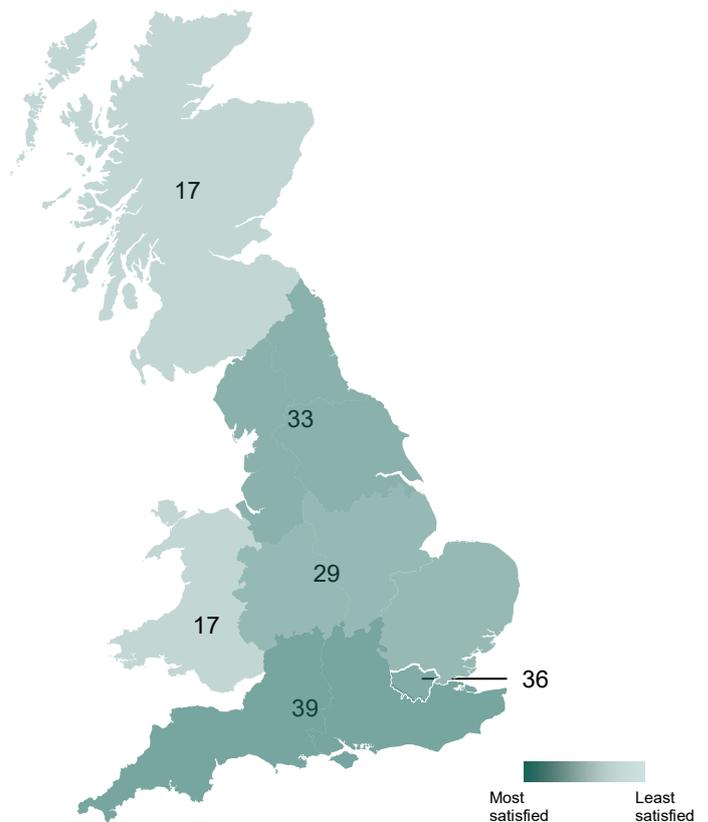


Figure 25: % Satisfaction with present system of governing Britain (works well)

significant improvement. In contrast, over half of those who claim to support the Conservative Party (53%) are content with the system as it is, a finding almost certainly linked to their party providing the incumbent government.

Net satisfaction with our system of governing among women (-37%) has narrowed relative to men (-31%) in the last year, comparing to -36% versus -26% in Audit 13. Thirty-five percent of ABs claim to be satisfied with the system, as do the same proportion of those in social group C1, falling to 29% among C2s and 26% of DEs. However, this nine-point difference between the highest and lowest social groups is much narrower than we see on most other engagement indicators. The difference among age groups is similarly narrow, with satisfaction levels ranging from 25% to 36%. The single exception is the oldest group, those

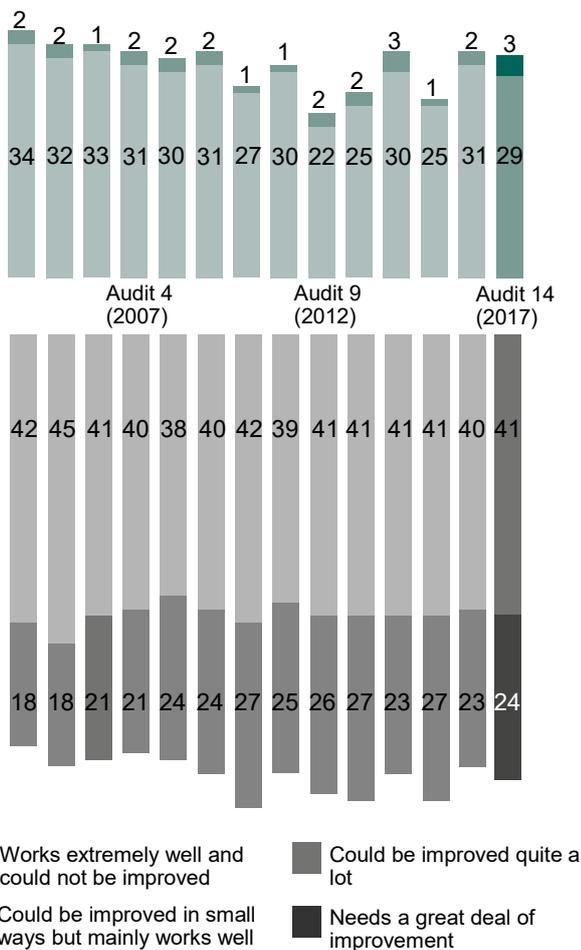


Figure 26: % Satisfaction with present system of governing Britain

aged 75+, who are far more positively disposed towards the system, with 42% expressing satisfaction with the way it works.

As in previous Audits, the public's dissatisfaction with our system of governing is broadly matched by their sense of disempowerment in terms of their own capacity to influence that system. The pattern of public attitudes on this question has been remarkably stable, ranging only from a nadir of 30% to a peak of 37% feeling able to exercise influence, regardless of circumstances. Less than one in four people have ever felt that their involvement in politics can make a difference to the way the country is run, and the same remains true this year.

Just 32% of the public agree that if people like themselves get involved in politics they can change the way the UK is run. The change since last year is not statistically significant (at three points), and the score is almost the same as that recorded in Audit 4 (33%) and Audit 9 (32%) at the same stage of the previous post-general election cycles.

As noted in the first chapter, despite being on the losing side in the EU referendum, those who voted to 'remain' are more likely to feel that their involvement in politics can change the way the country is run. Four in 10 'remainers' (40%) feel positively about their own personal political efficacy, compared to three in 10 'leavers'. Despite their vote having seismic implications for the future direction of the country, nearly half of all 'leavers' (47%) disagree with the proposition that the involvement of people like themselves in politics can change the way the UK is run. It will be interesting to see whether this changes in the year ahead. Many

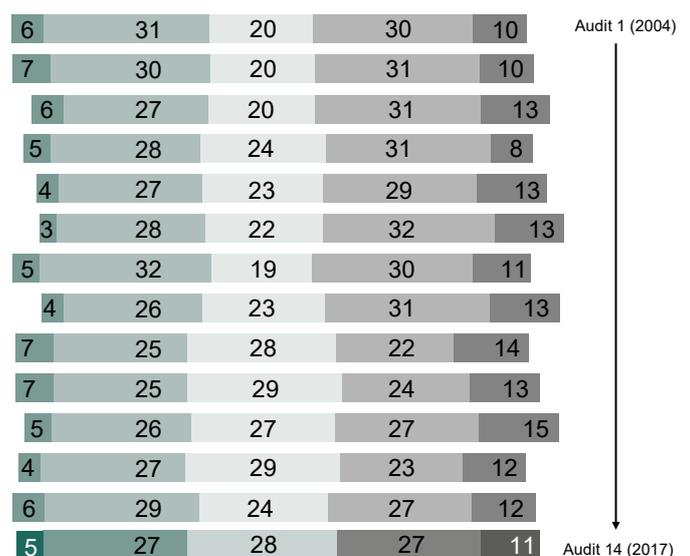


Figure 27: % When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run

EFFICACY AND SATISFACTION

'leave' voters are disaffected, distrusting, and disillusioned with politics. It is possible they are sceptical about whether Brexit will truly be delivered, and it is thus too early to see any increase in positivity arising from the outcome of the referendum.

The key characteristics of 'leave' voters – particularly in relation to often having been non-voters, and being less affluent (in terms of income, socio-economic group, and educational attainment) – mean that they are less likely than 'remainers' to be politically engaged generally, notwithstanding the referendum and its outcome. In contrast to the situation for the satisfaction indicator, socio-economic group, income level and educational attainment are all important determining characteristics as to whether a person feels their own involvement in politics is likely to be efficacious.

Those in social class AB are the most likely to agree that their involvement in politics can make a difference (37%), but C2s are the least likely to agree (25%). Unusually, DEs (30%) are more likely to recognise their potential for influence than are respondents in this more affluent C2 social category.

Only three in 10 people with no formal qualifications (31%) are likely to feel empowered to change the way the country is run; but this rises only to nearly four in 10 (38%) among those with the highest qualifications at degree level and above.

Citizens living in London are, by some way, the most likely group by geography to feel positively about the efficacy of their own potential involvement in politics. Four in 10 Londoners (41%) agree that when people like themselves get involved in politics they can change the way the UK is run. In Wales, there has been an improvement in attitudes on this question: 35% agree, compared to

26% of Welsh citizens who said the same in last year's Audit. Distance from Westminster is not an adequate explanation for attitudes on this question, for the highest proportion of people who think that their own involvement cannot make a difference to the way the UK is run are found in the South (44%), almost double the share of Londoners who say the same (23%).

As with satisfaction with our system of governing, white adults (32%) are less positive about the efficacy of their own potential involvement in politics than are BME citizens (37%). The latter have a net positive efficacy score of 15%, whereas white citizens record a net negative score of -8%, leaving a significant 23-point gap in attitudes between the groups on this question.

Generally, across the range of Audit indicators, older adults tend to be more engaged than younger ones. However, in the last two Audits, the usual level of engagement has been inverted on this question in relation to different age groups. In Audits 12 and 13, the older a person was, the less likely they were to agree that if people like themselves got involved in politics they could change the way the country is run. That pattern does not hold true this year: the oldest citizens aged 75+ are as likely to be positive about their sense of political efficacy as those aged 18-24 (30% and 31% respectively). And, unlike in recent years, those aged 55-74 are more likely than those aged 34 or under to feel positively about the potential of their own political involvement to influence the way the country is run.

INFLUENCE AND INVOLVEMENT

Despite the EU referendum, the public’s perceived sense of influence and their desire for involvement in local and national decision-making has barely changed since last year. Only one in four people think that they have influence over decision-making in their local community, falling to just one in six who say the same about influence at the national level. However, as in previous Audits, the public’s desire for involvement outstrips their sense of current influence, highlighting the level of potential engagement that so far remains untapped.

The public’s perceived influence over decision-making nationally has never fallen below 12% but never risen above 17% over the course of the Audit series. This year’s 16% score is 3 percentage points higher than in the last Audit. This is not a statistically significant change, but it makes for the joint second-highest score in the Audit series, and is three percentage points higher than at this stage of the previous post-general election cycle in Audit 9.

In contrast, the public’s perceived influence over decision-making at the local level (23%) has declined, albeit only by a statistically insignificant two points. This is the second-lowest score recorded for this indicator in the Audit series, although it is broadly in line with that in Audit 9.

Nearly half the population (46%) would like to be involved in decision-making at the local level, the same proportion as last year. The number who would like to be involved in decision-making at the national level has also been sustained at last year’s levels; here, four in ten (41%) indicate that they would like to be at least ‘fairly involved’. On both questions the number of British adults saying that they would like to be involved in decision-making, locally and nationally, has increased by eight percentage points since the same stage of the post

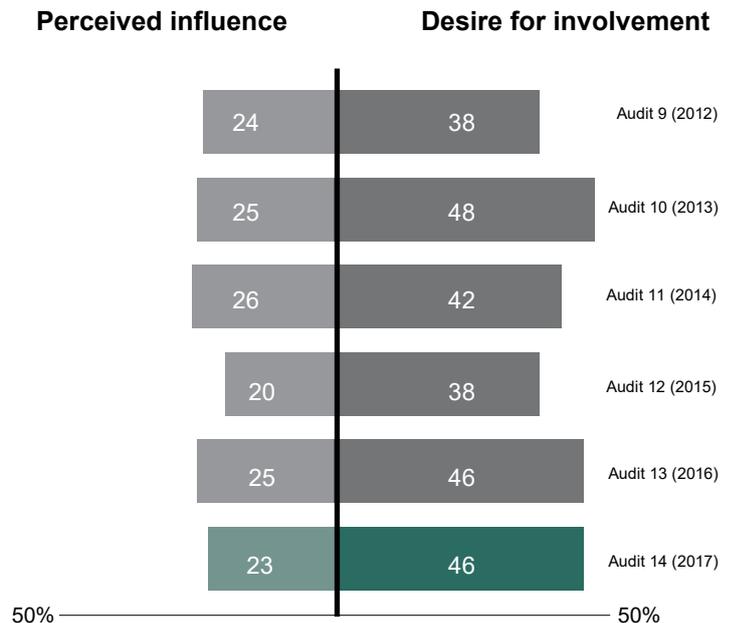


Figure 28: % Perceived influence vs desire for involvement in decision-making locally

-general election cycle five years ago as recorded in Audit 9.

Overall, the numbers claiming to want involvement at the local and national level have been broadly stable since we began tracking these questions in Audit 6 (2009).

The results highlight once again that although the British public may not feel particularly influential, there exists a substantial proportion of the population who would like to be politically involved locally and nationally, a potential that largely remains untapped.

There is very little difference in the views of white and BME adults on these questions. The perceived influence of men and women at both the national and local level is also virtually identical; however, men are a little more likely to want to be involved in local decision-making than are women (49% versus 44%).

As in previous Audits, it is the more affluent and better educated who are most likely to feel influential and to desire involvement, particularly in local decision-making. The attitudes of those in social classes C2 and DE are broadly the same as each other in terms of both perceived influence and desire for involvement. The views of those in social class C1 on these questions broadly reflect the national average; those who belong to social group AB, however, are much more engaged, being up to 20 percentage points or more ahead of C1s in their responses. Over six in 10 ABs (63%), for example, claim to want to be at least 'fairly involved' in local decision-making; and five in 10 (56%) desire involvement at the national level.

There are no age differences when it comes to perceived empowerment. However, the oldest citizens aged 75+ are much less likely than their younger counterparts to want to be involved in decision-making at both the local and national levels. Beyond this, the differences between other age groups are relatively small in terms of their

desire for involvement at all levels.

Those with at least degree-level education are almost three times as likely to feel influential in national decision-making as those with no qualifications (23% versus eight percent). Similarly, nearly six in ten graduates (59%) would like to be involved in national decision-making, just over three times as many as those with no qualifications (18%).

Most Scottish and Welsh citizens do not feel influential in national decision-making; only nine and 10% respectively claim to feel that they have at least 'a fair amount' of influence. Contrast this with London, where 17% of the public feel influential over decision-making in the country; or the South, where 23% claim to feel influential. Those in London (44%) and the South (50%) would also like more involvement in national decision-making. A lower proportion of Scots and Welsh citizens (35% each) would like to be involved in national decision-making. This pattern is repeated in relation to the desire for involvement in local decision-making: Scots' desire for involvement (38%) is the lowest, eight percentage points below that of the Welsh (46%), and significantly behind that of people in the South of England (54%).

Finally, as noted previously (see page 14), how people voted in the referendum does not appear to have had an impact, thus far, on how they perceive their influence over decision-making. At the local level, only 19% of 'leavers' - compared to 33% of 'remainers' - claim to feel influential over decision-making. More interestingly, only 16% of 'leave' voters claim to feel influential over national decision-making, in line with the national average; 'remainers' feel marginally more influential (20%), but the gap is not a statistically significant one. Among those who did not vote in the referendum, only 7% claim to feel influential in terms of national decision-making.

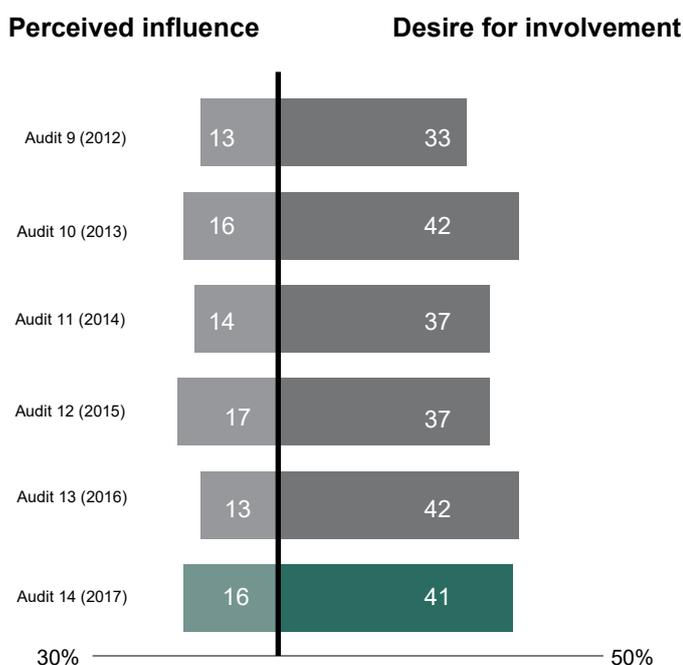


Figure 29: % Perceived influence vs desire for involvement in decision-making nationally

ABOUT THE AUDIT

The Audit of Political Engagement is a time-series study providing an annual benchmark to measure political engagement in Great Britain, gauging public opinion about politics and the political system, and more broadly the general health of our democracy.

Each Audit report presents the findings from a public opinion survey, providing detailed commentary on a range of measures that have been chosen as key measures of political engagement. Repeating questions in successive years enables us to chronicle the public's responses year on year and track the direction and magnitude of change since the Audit was first published in 2004, building trend data on public attitudes to key aspects of our democracy.

This 14th Audit report is based on an opinion poll conducted by Ipsos MORI between 2 December 2016 and 15 January 2017 with a representative quota sample of adults aged 18+ across Great Britain. Booster samples were included to make comparisons between England, Scotland and Wales, and between the white and BME populations, more statistically reliable. The data was then weighted to match the national population profile.

The study provides not a prediction but a snapshot of public perceptions of, and engagement with, politics at a given moment in time. Its findings go beyond the normal vicissitudes of the political and electoral cycle, offering greater depth and insight into public attitudes to politics than can be found in one-off polls and instant responses to events and news headlines.

Building blocks of engagement

In the Audit we look at core inter-locking areas that we know are vital facets, or 'building blocks', of political engagement. Given the multi-dimensional nature of political engagement, the indicators we

have chosen are not exhaustive. But in capturing aspects of public behaviour, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and values towards politics they help us understand the drivers of political engagement and the relationships between them. Across the Audit series several 'core' indicator questions have been asked each year, supplemented by a range of thematic and topical questions, some of which are re-visited on two- or three-year cycles

Levels of public knowledge and interest are explored because they are known to be important factors in engagement, given the strong correlation between familiarity and favourability. The more people know about an institution, service or process, the more positive they tend to be towards it and the more willing they may be to participate and get involved.

Political engagement can be measured in terms of what people think, but also in terms of what they do. We therefore look at levels of public action and participation in the political process, capturing both formal and informal forms of engagement that require varying levels of time and commitment. The Audit study was initiated in response to the drop in turnout at the 2001 general election, so tracking the public's propensity to vote has always been a key aspect of the study. But while public participation is



the lifeblood of representative democracy, politics is about more than casting a vote every so often, so the study also looks at a repertoire of other activities through which people can express their views between elections and without relying on political parties or MPs. And we look not just at what people claim to have done in the last year but what activities they say they would be willing to do in the future if they felt strongly enough about an issue, enabling us to chart the gap between actual and potential engagement.

Building on the familiarity indicators, we look at the public's favourability towards aspects of the political system through a series of questions in relation to their sense of efficacy and satisfaction. We explore public satisfaction with the way our system of governing Britain works and the extent to which people believe their involvement in politics would be worthwhile in bringing about change in the way the country is run.

Engagement operates at a number of levels. We therefore track the public's appetite for both local and national involvement in decision-making, and, as a further facet of their sense of political efficacy and satisfaction, the extent to which they feel they have any influence over decision-making at each level.

We also focus on public perceptions of Parliament as the core institution of our democracy. We look at the public's knowledge of Parliament, and their perception of its importance and relevance and its effectiveness in performing its accountability function, and in engaging with and addressing the issues that matter to them.

The relationship between elected representatives and the public is at the heart of our system of representative democracy. Power is vested in the public who turn out on election day to choose who will represent them in Parliament as their MPs, and they retain the right, next time round, to 'kick the rascals out' if they are dissatisfied with them. Periodically in the Audit series we therefore revisit

questions about public attitudes to MPs, exploring how well the public think they fulfil their representative function.

In our democratic system, political parties are the link in the chain between the public and their representatives. There has long been concern that parties are no longer representative of the wider public and therefore cannot mobilise mass participation in the political process, leading to a widening of the gap between the people and the political elite. We therefore look regularly at the extent to which political parties command public support and among which groups of the public.

The Audit results generally dispel the notion that the public are apathetic about politics. However, citizens are generally disenchanted with the workings of the political system and have a low sense of satisfaction with it. But low levels of satisfaction with the culture and practice of politics do not seem to undermine the public's faith in democracy overall. Nonetheless, politics remains a minority interest and most people are onlookers rather than active participants in formal political processes. And yet there is a latent desire among a significant proportion of the public to be involved in decision-making that remains untapped, particularly at the local level.

One of the clearest findings across the Audit series is the extent to which political engagement is unequal. There are important, often substantial, differences between the engagement levels of those in the highest and lowest socio-economic groups, between the youngest and oldest, and white and BME citizens across many indicators, including knowledge and interest, action and participation, and desire for involvement in politics. But in two areas – satisfaction with the system of governing, and the perceived efficacy of their own involvement – the public tend to possess a common – largely negative – view, regardless of social, economic, educational or ethnic background.

METHODOLOGY

This 14th Audit report is based on a public opinion survey conducted by Ipsos MORI with a representative quota sample of 1,771 adults aged 18+ across Great Britain. The research was carried out face-to-face in people's homes as part of Ipsos MORI's omnibus survey between 2 December 2016 and 15 January 2017.

Booster samples were included to make comparisons between England, Scotland and Wales, and between the white and BME populations, more statistically reliable. A total of 384 BME, 212 Scottish and 142 Welsh interviews were held.

As in previous Audit waves the data was then weighted to match the population profile by Ipsos MORI. These weights are regularly updated to incorporate the most recent national data.

Weighting

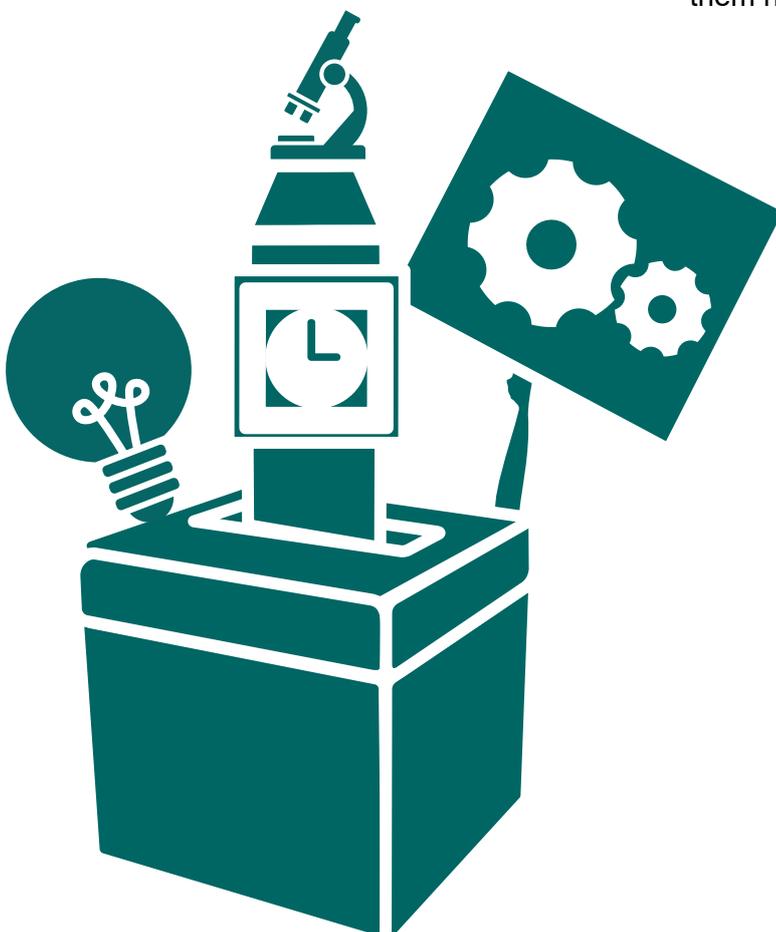
As the Audit is a tracking study, targets are updated to reflect population change where necessary but the changes in the weighting scheme are kept to a minimum to allow for longitudinal comparability. However, elements of the sample design (the inclusion of boosters) and other factors sometimes necessitate adding extra controls to prevent biases arising in the figures.

Last year (Audit 13) Ipsos MORI retained all the weighting factors used in previous Audit waves but refined two of them (tenure by region and social grade applied by age) to prevent sub-national distortions within the national totals, and added a new weight (education by age) to maximise the accuracy of the sample.

In this Audit, while retaining all the weighting factors used in Audit 13, the interactions between them have been simplified without losing the representativeness, thus maximising the effective base size: controls for tenure, social grade and education were applied separately to the whole sample.

Sampling tolerances

All results are subject to sampling tolerances. This means that not all differences are statistically significant. The people in the survey are only samples of the 'total' population of Great Britain, so we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody in Britain had been interviewed (the 'true' values). However, the variation between the sample results and the true values can be predicted from the knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is



Weight	Source
1. Age by sex	Office of National Statistics Mid-Year Estimates 2013
2. Work status by sex	Labour Market Statistics March 2014; Regional Labour Market Statistics March 2014; Labour Force Survey Quarterly Supplement Oct-Dec 2013
3. Social grade by age	National Readership Survey October 2014-September 2015
4. Car in household	National Readership Survey October 2014-September 2015 for region
5. Ethnic group	Office for National Statistics Census 2011
6. Tenure by region	National Readership Survey October 2014-September 2015 for region
7. Education attainments by age	Office for National Statistics Census 2011

Some graphs and tables may also not add up to 100% if 'don't knows' or refused responses have not been included.

Data has been analysed by rounding weighted counts of responses to the nearest whole number before calculating percentages. As a result there may in some cases be a difference of one percentage point between findings reported here and those in previous Audit studies.

given. The confidence with which this prediction can be made is usually 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range. The Audit sample size has a margin of up to +/-3.6% at the 95% confidence level. (This allows for the 'design effect': because the data is weighted, the effective sample size is smaller than the real sample size.) So if 50% of people give a particular response we can be sure (19 times out of 20) that the actual figure would be between 46.4% and 53.6%.

Percentages

Where percentages do not add up to exactly 100% this may be due to computer rounding or because multiple answers were permitted for a question.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hansard Society (2012), *Audit of Political Engagement 9: The 2012 Report: Part One*, (Hansard Society, London), pp.17-25.

² Hansard Society (2013), *Audit of Political Engagement 10: The 2013 Report*, (Hansard Society, London), pp.17-26.

³ Hansard Society (2011), *Audit of Political Engagement 8: The 2011 Report*, (Hansard Society, London), pp.27-29.

⁴ Hansard Society (2010), *Audit of Political Engagement 7: The 2010 Report*, (Hansard Society, London), pp.36-37. See also, V. Ram, 'Public attitudes to politics, politicians and Parliament', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 59 (1), January 2006, p.190 and V. Ram (2005), *Enhancing engagement: What people think, know and expect of Parliament* (Hansard Society, London), p.11.

⁵ Hansard Society (2015), *Audit of Political Engagement 12: The 2015 Report*, (Hansard Society, London), pp.18-21.

⁶ K. Swales (2017), *Understanding the Leave Vote*, (NatCen Social Research, London), p.2.

⁷ Hansard Society (2016), *Audit of Political Engagement 13: The 2016 Report*, (Hansard Society, London), p.20.

DEMOGRAPHICS

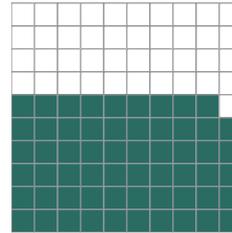
GENDER



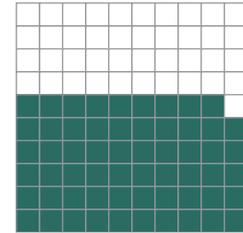
Male

Female

Certainty to vote
(absolutely certain - score 10
out of 10)

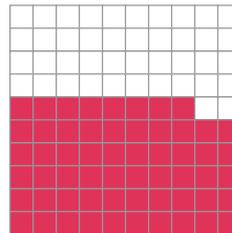


59%

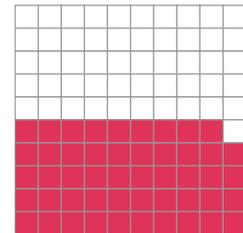


59%

Interest in politics
(very / fairly interested)

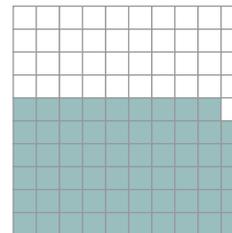


58%

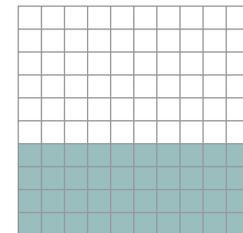


49%

Knowledge of politics
(knows at least a fair amount)

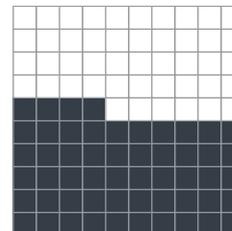


59%

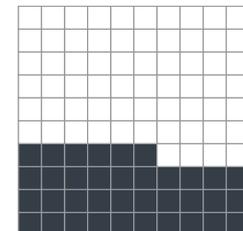


40%

Knowledge of Parliament
(knows at least a fair amount)

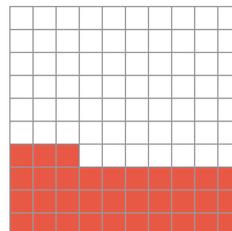


54%

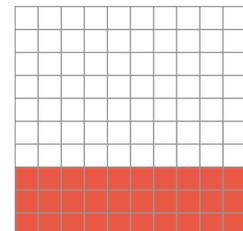


36%

Satisfaction with present
system of governing
(satisfied it works well)

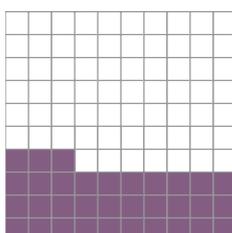


33%

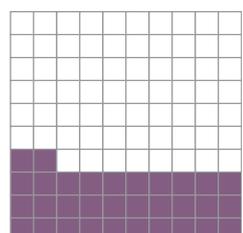


30%

Feel getting involved is
effective (agree)



33%



32%

AGE



18-24

25-34

35-44

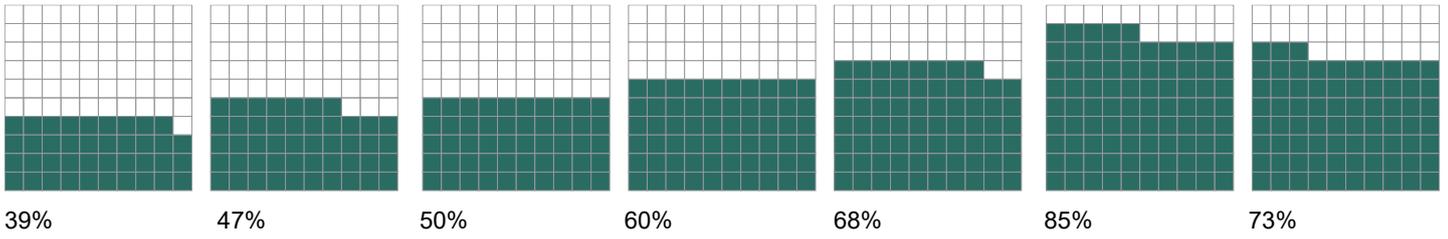
45-54

55-64

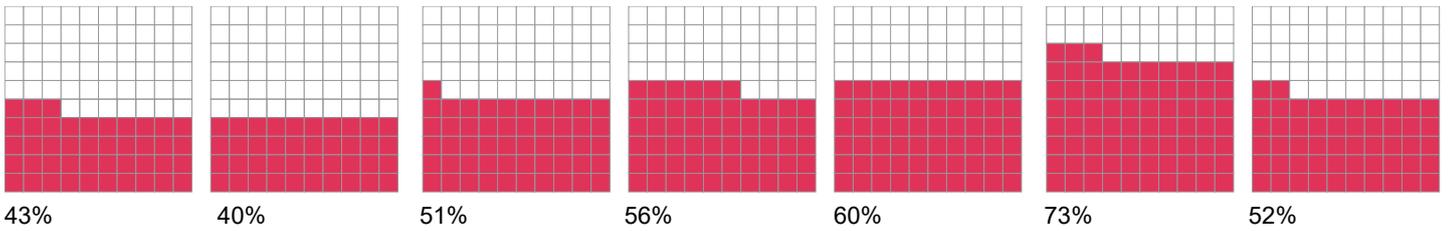
65-74

75+

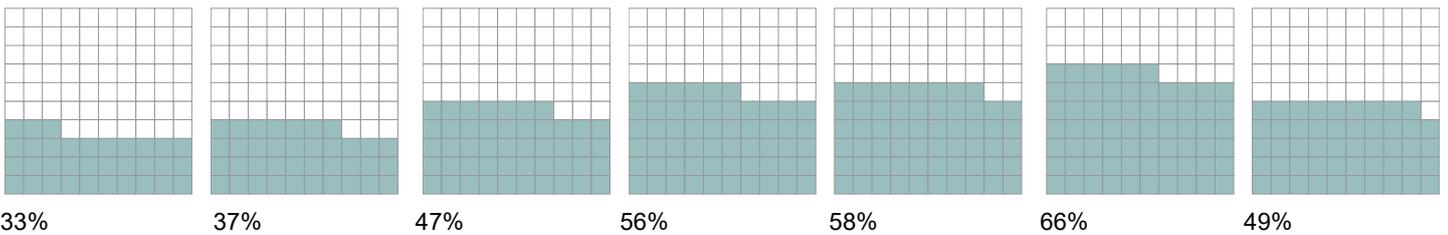
Certainty to vote
(absolutely certain - score 10 out of 10)



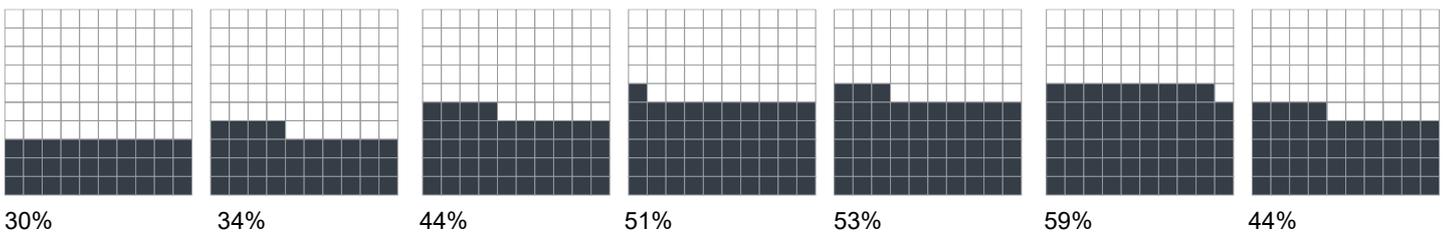
Interest in politics (very / fairly interested)



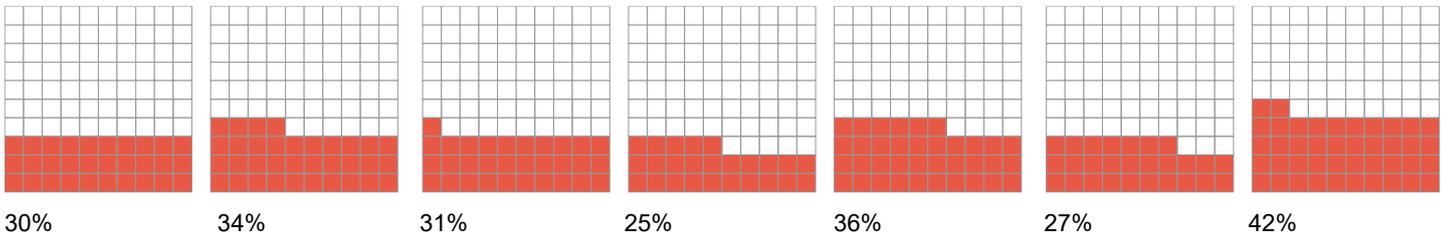
Knowledge of politics (knows at least a fair amount)



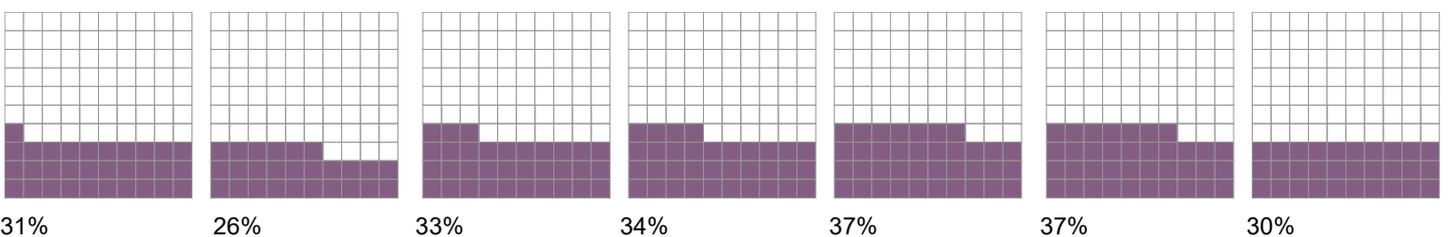
Knowledge of Parliament (knows at least a fair amount)



Satisfaction with present system of governing (satisfied it works well)

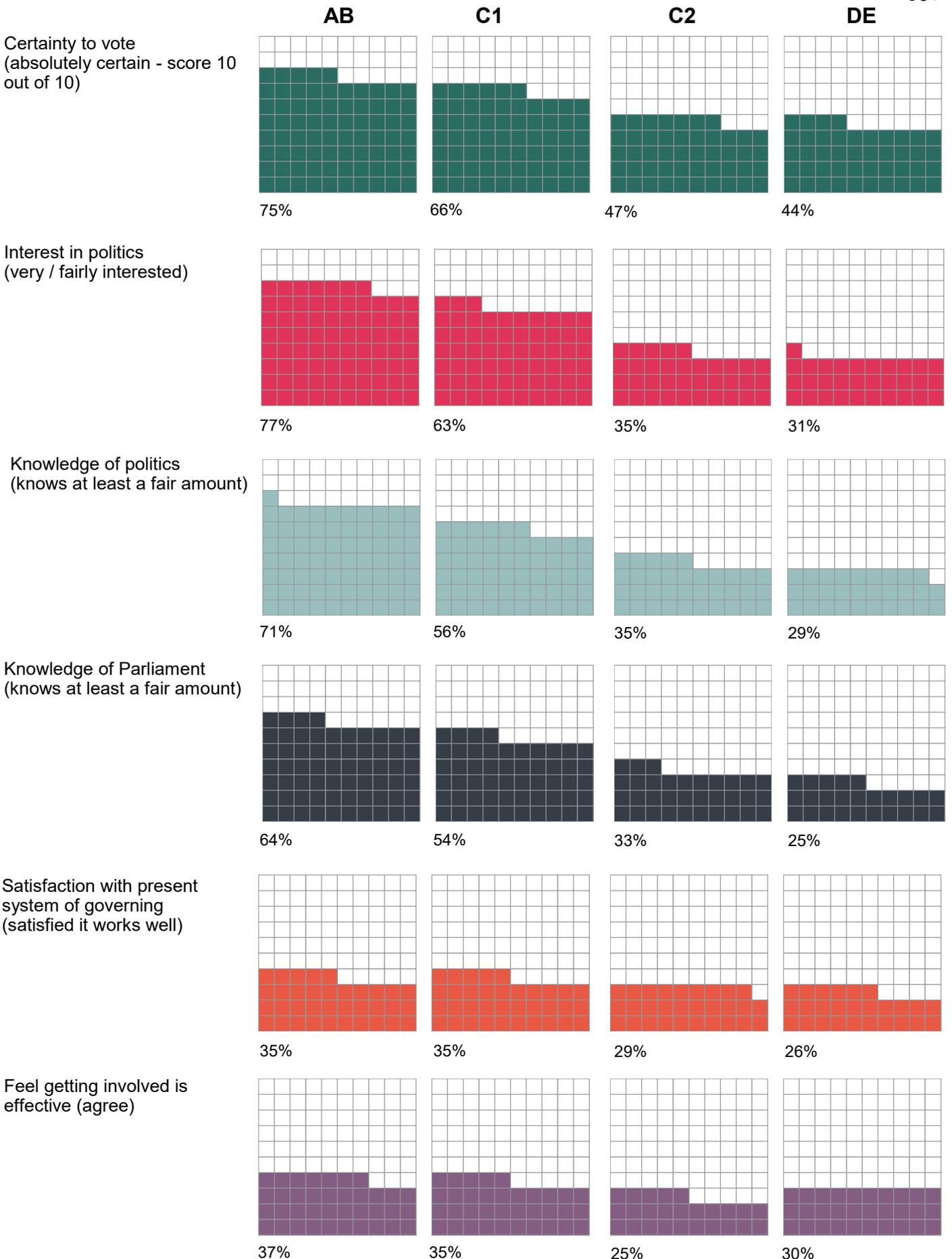


Feel getting involved is effective (agree)

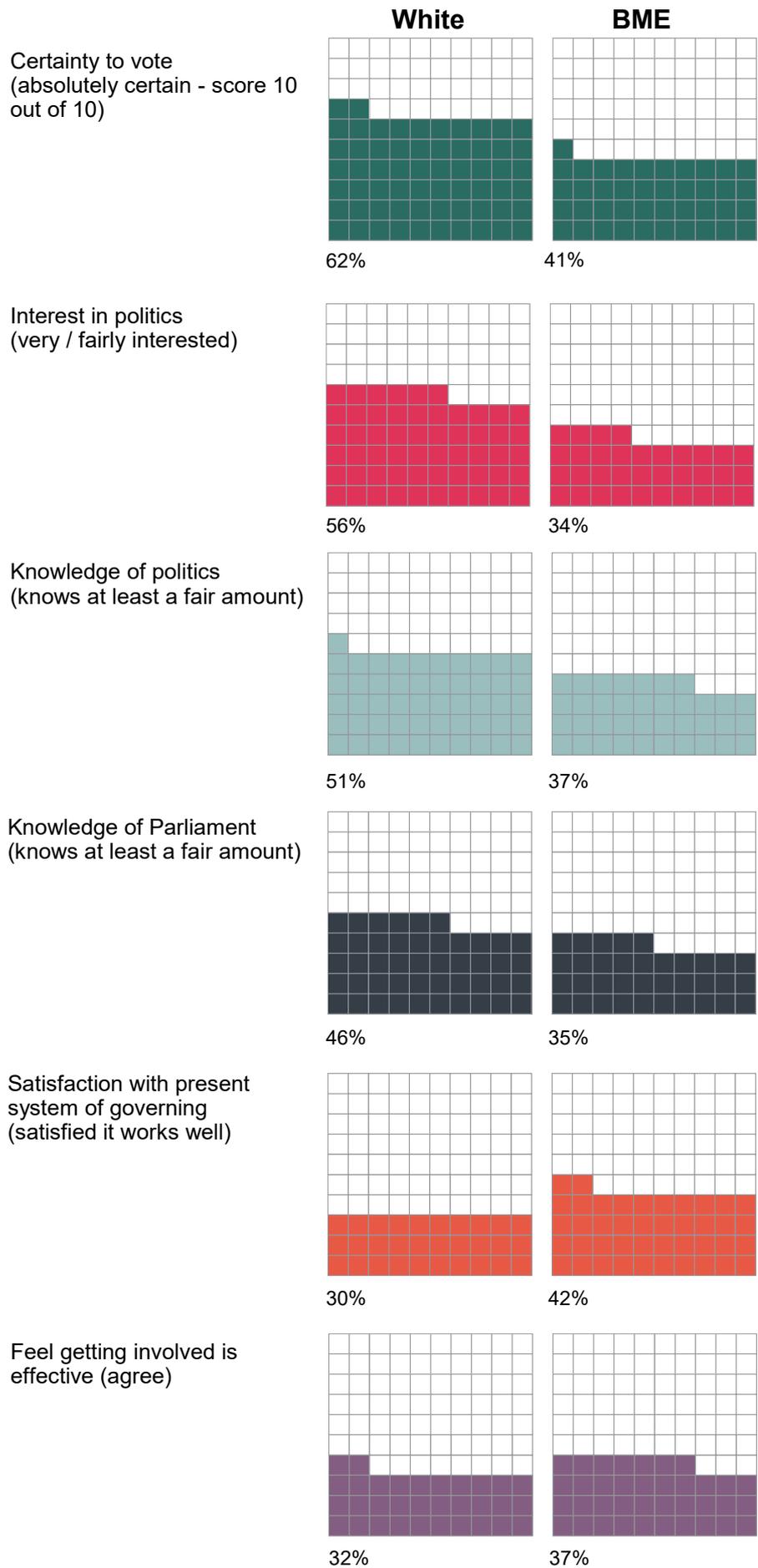
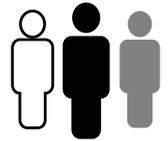


DEMOGRAPHICS

SOCIAL CLASS

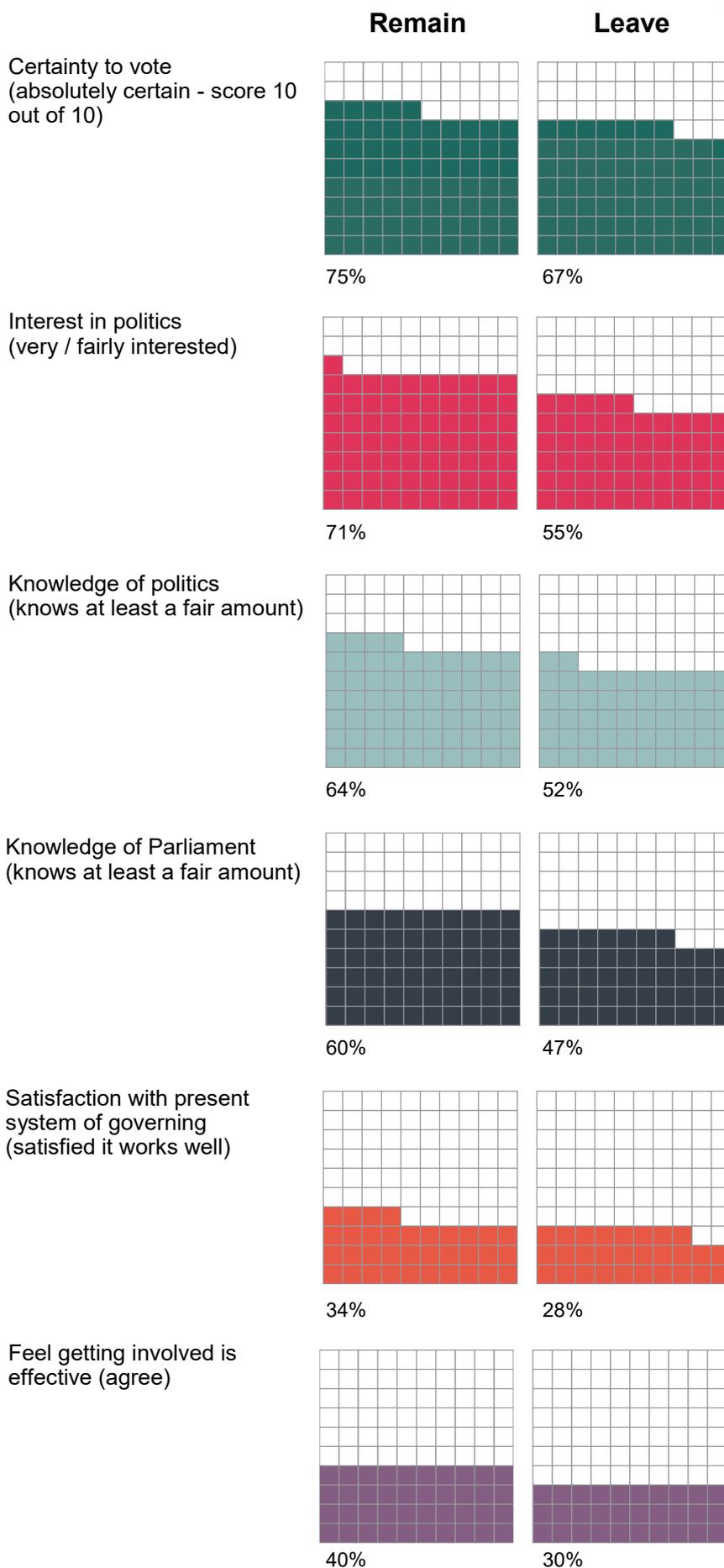


ETHNICITY



DEMOGRAPHICS

'REMAINERS' AND 'LEAVERS'



NATIONS AND REGIONS



Scotland

Wales

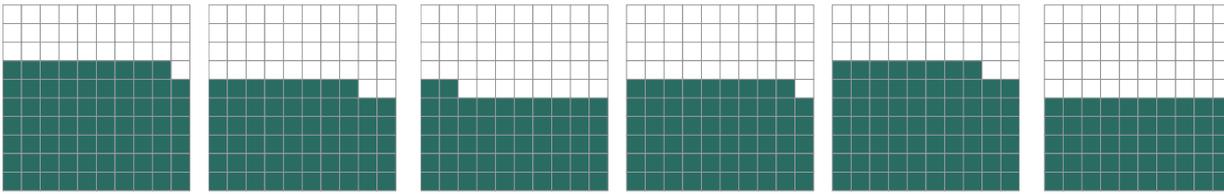
North

Midlands

South

London

Certainty to vote
(absolutely certain - score 10 out of 10)



69%

58%

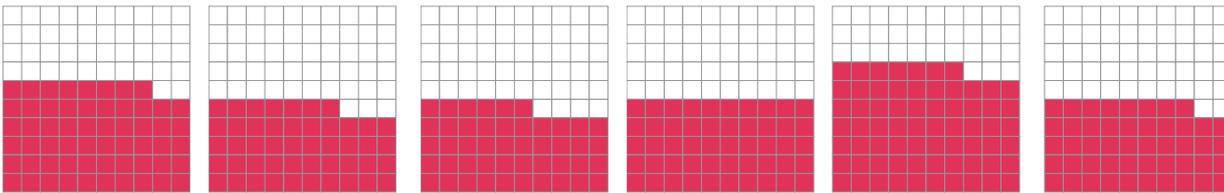
52%

59%

68%

50%

Interest in politics (very / fairly interested)



58%

47%

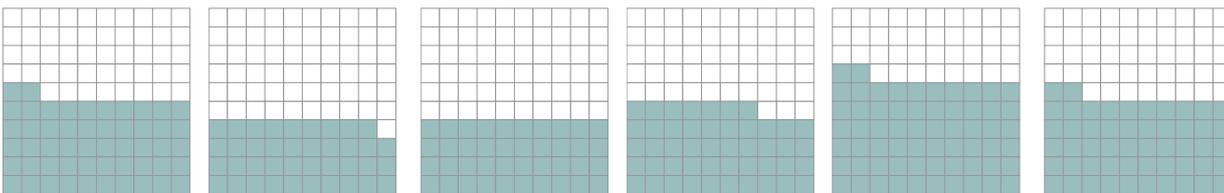
46%

50%

67%

48%

Knowledge of politics (knows at least a fair amount)



52%

39%

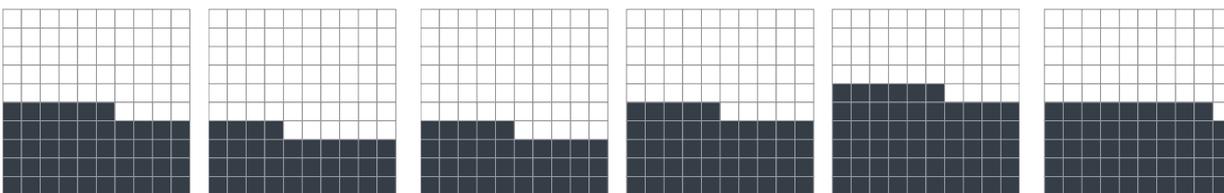
40%

47%

62%

52%

Knowledge of Parliament (knows at least a fair amount)



46%

34%

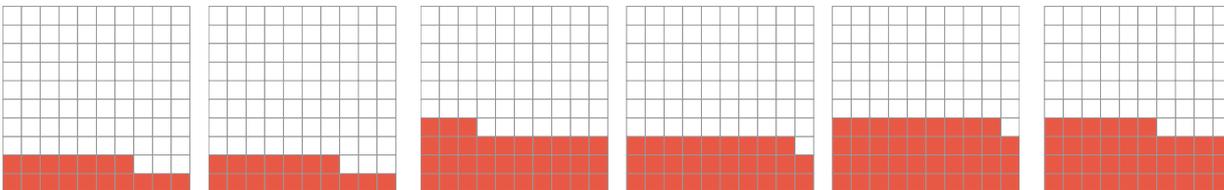
35%

45%

56%

49%

Satisfaction with present system of governing (satisfied it works well)



17%

17%

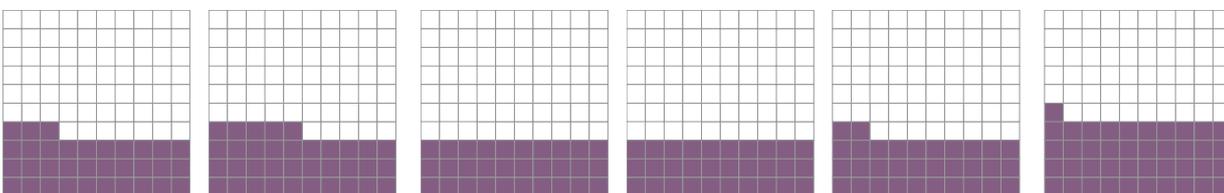
33%

29%

39%

36%

Feel getting involved is effective (agree)



33%

35%

30%

30%

32%

41%

POLL TOPLINE FINDINGS

Q1 How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?														
	APE1 (2004) %	APE2 (2005) %	APE3 (2006) %	APE4 (2007) %	APE5 (2008) %	APE6 (2009) %	APE7 (2010) %	APE8 (2011) %	APE9 (2012) %	APE10 (2013) %	APE11 (2014) %	APE12 (2015) %	APE13 (2016) %	APE14 (2017) %
10	51	52	55	55	53	53	54	58	48	41	49	49	59	59
9	6	6	7	6	4	5	6	4	4	4	6	4	4	4
8	8	8	7	7	7	8	7	7	5	7	7	6	7	6
7	5	5	7	6	5	6	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4
6	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	5	4	5	4	2
5	7	7	6	5	8	7	7	6	8	9	8	8	5	7
4	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	1
3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	5	2	3	2	2
2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	3	3	2	1	1
1	11	11	10	11	10	11	12	10	16	20	11	12	10	11
Don't know	2	1	1	0	3	2	2	2	3	*	2	3	2	1
Re-fused	0	0	0	1	*	*	*	*	2	1	-	1	0	0

Q2	In the last 12 months have you done any of the following to influence decisions, laws or policies?				
	APE10 %	APE11 %	APE12 %	APE13 %	APE14 %
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	20	20	13	24	19
Voted in an election	27	18	27	47	57
Created or signed a paper petition	8	16	9	8	11
Created or signed an e-petition	9	14	14	18	23
Contacted a local councillor or MP / MSP / Welsh Assembly Member	8	12	12	12	11
Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	6	10	9	11	10
Taken an active part in a campaign	2	7	4	6	5
Contributed to a discussion or campaign online or on social media	3	6	7	10	9
Taken part in a public consultation	4	6	5	7	6
Contacted the media	2	3	3	4	3
Attended political meetings	2	3	3	5	3
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	1	2	3	5	5
Taken part in a demonstration, picket, or march	1	2	3	4	3
None of these	50	52	55	39	31
Don't know	0	*	1	1	*

Q3	Which of the following would you be prepared to do if you felt strongly enough about an issue?				
	APE10 %	APE11 %	APE12 %	APE13 %	APE14 %
Donate money or pay a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	17	21	14	22	22
Vote in an election	42	46	35	55	61
Create or sign a paper petition	34	43	29	35	34
Create or sign an e-petition	25	31	23	34	36
Contact a local councillor or MP / MSP / Welsh Assembly Member	41	51	33	52	42
Boycott certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	14	25	15	24	25
Take an active part in a campaign	14	22	15	21	19
Contribute to a discussion or campaign online or on social media	8	14	14	19	19
Take part in a public consultation	14	21	16	22	22
Contact the media	16	22	17	20	17
Attend political meetings	10	15	15	15	17
Donate money or pay a membership fee to a political party	5	7	8	10	11
Take part in a demonstration, picket, or march	10	16	14	16	17
None of these	22	20	29	19	18
Don't know	-	1	3	1	1

Q4	How interested would you say you are in politics?					
	Very interested %	Fairly interested %	Not very interested %	Not at all interested %	Don't know %	Very / fairly interested %
APE 1	11	39	32	18	*	50
APE 2	13	40	28	19	*	53
APE 3	13	43	30	14	*	56
APE 4	13	41	27	19	*	54
APE 5	13	38	28	19	1	51
APE 6	12	40	30	17	*	52
APE 7	14	39	29	18	1	53
APE 8	16	42	26	17	*	58
APE 9	8	34	33	24	1	42
APE 10	10	32	32	26	*	42
APE 11	11	39	31	20	*	50
APE 12	12	36	33	18	1	49
APE 13	18	39	25	18	*	57
APE 14	17	36	27	19	0	53

Q5a	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...politics?					
	A great deal %	A fair amount %	Not very much %	Nothing at all %	Don't know %	A great deal / a fair amount %
APE 1	3	39	45	12	1	42
APE 2	4	41	44	10	*	45
APE 3	4	35	51	9	*	39
APE 4	6	43	40	11	*	49
APE 5	4	40	43	12	*	44
APE 6	5	43	42	9	1	48
APE 7	6	45	40	9	*	51
APE 8	7	46	36	11	*	53
APE 9	4	40	41	15	1	44
APE 10	4	38	42	16	*	42
APE 11	6	44	38	12	*	50
APE 12	5	42	39	14	1	47
APE 13	8	47	32	12	*	55
APE 14	8	41	38	13	*	49

Q5b	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...the UK Parliament?					
	A great deal %	A fair amount %	Not very much %	Nothing at all %	Don't know %	A great deal / a fair amount %
APE 1*	3	30	50	17	1	33
APE 4*	4	34	46	14	1	38
APE 7*	4	33	47	15	1	37
APE 8	5	39	43	13	*	44
APE 9	4	36	43	16	1	40
APE 10	4	33	45	17	*	37
APE 11	5	43	39	13	*	48
APE 12	6	41	39	13	1	47
APE 13	8	44	34	13	*	52
APE 14	7	38	41	14	*	45

*Asked as 'The Westminster Parliament'; comparisons with later waves should therefore be seen as indicative.

Q5c	How much, if anything, do you feel you know about...the European Union?					
	A great deal %	A fair amount %	Not very much %	Nothing at all %	Don't know %	A great deal / a fair amount %
APE 1	2	22	55	20	1	24
APE 4	3	26	52	17	2	29
APE 5	4	24	41	28	1	28
APE 13	6	32	46	16	*	38
APE 14	6	37	42	15	*	43

Q6	Which of these statements best describes your opinion on the present system of governing Britain?					
	Works extremely well and could not be improved %	Could be improved in small ways but mainly works well %	Could be improved quite a lot %	Needs a great deal of improvement %	Don't know %	Works well %
APE 1	2	34	42	18	4	36
APE 2	2	32	45	18	3	34
APE 3	1	33	41	21	4	34
APE 4	2	31	40	21	6	33
APE 5	2	30	38	24	6	32
APE 6	2	31	40	24	3	33
APE 7	1	27	42	27	4	28
APE 8	1	30	39	25	5	31
APE 9	2	22	41	26	10	24
APE 10	2	25	41	27	6	27
APE 11	3	30	41	23	3	33
APE 12	1	25	41	27	6	26
APE 13	2	31	40	23	4	33
APE 14	3	29	41	24	3	31

Q7 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that Parliament works?							
	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither / nor %	Fairly dissatisfied %	Very dissatisfied %	Don't know %	Satisfied %
APE 1	1	35	27	23	9	5	36
APE 4	2	34	24	24	9	7	36
APE 7	1	32	24	25	13	4	33
APE 8	1	26	33	24	11	4	27
APE 10	2	25	38	20	14	3	27
APE 13	2	30	30	23	11	3	32
APE 14	2	28	35	23	11	1	30

Q8 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run.							
	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	Agree %
APE 1	6	31	20	30	10	4	37
APE 2	7	30	20	31	10	2	37
APE 3	6	27	20	31	13	3	33
APE 4	5	28	24	31	8	4	33
APE 5	4	27	23	29	13	3	31
APE 6	3	28	22	32	13	2	31
APE 7	5	32	19	30	11	4	37
APE 8	4	26	23	31	13	3	30
APE 9	7	25	28	22	14	5	32
APE 10	7	25	29	24	13	2	32
APE 11	5	26	27	27	15	2	31
APE 12	4	27	29	23	12	5	32
APE 13	6	29	24	27	12	2	35
APE 14	5	27	28	27	11	1	32

Q9	To what extent do you agree or disagree that: Important questions should be determined by referendums more often than today?		
	APE9 %	APE13 %	APE 14 %
Strongly agree	33	33	25
Partly agree	39	42	36
Partly disagree	7	11	20
Strongly disagree	3	6	14
Not sure what a referendum is (spontaneous response)	7	2	1
Don't know	10	6	4
<i>Strongly / partly agree</i>	72	76	61

Q10a	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The UK Parliament...holds government to account.						
	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	Agree %
APE 7*	4	36	20	22	5	14	40
APE 8	5	33	27	18	8	10	38
APE 9	8	30	29	14	7	13	38
APE 10	11	36	31	13	5	5	47
APE 11	4	30	33	19	9	4	34
APE 12	5	30	30	17	9	9	35
APE 13	9	33	30	15	7	6	42
APE 14	11	36	30	15	5	3	46

* Audit 7 wording: 'The Westminster Parliament'

Q10b To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The UK Parliament...encourages public involvement in politics.							
	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	Agree %
APE 9	5	25	28	21	11	10	30
APE 10	6	24	30	27	11	3	30
APE 11	2	21	29	31	14	3	23
APE 12	4	21	27	23	17	8	25
APE 13	6	22	27	28	13	5	28
APE 14	4	24	29	30	11	2	28

Q10c To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The UK Parliament...is essential to our democracy.							
	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	Agree %
APE 9	31	35	19	5	2	9	66
APE 10	30	38	22	5	3	3	68
APE 11	30	37	19	7	4	3	67
APE 12	27	34	20	8	4	7	61
APE 13	39	34	16	5	3	3	73
APE 14	37	36	19	5	2	2	73

Q10d To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? The UK Parliament...debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to me.							
	Strongly agree %	Tend to agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Tend to disagree %	Strongly disagree %	Don't know %	Agree %
APE 9	14	35	26	11	6	8	49
APE 10	16	39	26	12	5	3	55
APE 11	12	39	26	15	6	2	51
APE 12	11	37	28	12	7	5	48
APE 13	18	40	23	12	4	3	58
APE 14	15	41	26	13	4	2	56

Q11		Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong, not very strong, or not a supporter at all of any political party?					
	Very strong %	Fairly strong %	Not very strong %	Not a supporter %	Don't know %	Refused %	Strong supporter %
APE 4	6	30	38	24	1	*	36
APE 11	7	23	36	33	*	*	30
APE 12	8	22	35	32	2	1	30
APE 13	8	33	33	25	1	-	41
APE 14	7	24	37	31	*	0	31

Q12a		How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in... ...your local area?				
	A great deal %	A fair amount %	Not very much %	Nothing at all %	Don't know %	A great deal / a fair amount %
APE 6	1	24	41	32	2	25
APE 9	2	22	39	32	5	24
APE 10	2	24	40	33	2	26
APE 11	2	24	44	29	1	26
APE 12	1	19	44	33	4	20
APE 13	2	23	39	34	2	25
APE 14	1	22	40	37	1	23

Q12b		How much influence, if any, do you feel you have over decision-making in... ...the country as a whole?				
	A great deal %	A fair amount %	Not very much %	Nothing at all %	Don't know %	A great deal / a fair amount %
APE 6	*	14	44	41	1	14
APE 9	*	12	40	43	5	12
APE 10	1	15	43	40	2	16
APE 11	1	13	46	40	1	14
APE 12	1	16	38	41	4	17
APE 13	1	12	42	43	1	13
APE 14	1	15	41	42	*	16

Q13a		To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in ...					
		...your local area?					
		Very involved %	Fairly involved %	Not very involved %	Not at all involved %	Don't know %	Very / fairly involved %
APE 6		5	43	32	18	2	48
APE 8		5	38	38	17	2	43
APE 9		5	33	33	25	4	38
APE 10		8	39	29	22	1	47
APE 11		6	37	35	21	1	43
APE 12		7	31	36	22	4	38
APE 13		11	35	29	23	1	46
APE 14		9	37	30	24	*	46

Q13b		To what extent, if at all, would you like to be involved in decision-making in ...					
		...the country as a whole?					
		Very involved %	Fairly involved %	Not very involved %	Not at all involved %	Don't know %	Very / fairly involved %
APE 6		5	38	33	22	2	43
APE 8		8	34	38	19	2	42
APE 9		6	27	34	30	3	33
APE 10		7	35	32	25	2	42
APE 11		6	32	37	25	1	38
APE 12		8	28	34	26	4	37
APE 13		9	32	30	27	1	41
APE 14		8	33	33	25	*	41

Q14	Which, if any, of the following do you believe are the most effective in holding the UK Government to account?
	APE14 %
MPs in the House of Commons	44
Members of the House of Lords	23
The devolved governments (i.e. the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly)	11
Local Government	18
The European Union	18
The Civil Service	9
Britain's Courts and Judicial system	30
Media	34
Businesses operating in the UK	14
Experts (e.g. academics, economists and think tanks)	14
Single issue campaign groups	11
Other	1
Don't know	8
None of these	6

Q15a	How important, if at all, is it to you that the UK Parliament does each of the following? ...represents the interests of people like you.					
	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %	Important %
APE 14	61	28	6	2	3	89

Q15b	How important, if at all, is it to you that the UK Parliament does each of the following? ...debates issues of public concern.					
	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %	Important %
APE 14	61	29	6	2	3	90

Q15c	How important, if at all, is it to you that the UK Parliament does each of the following? ...scrutinises and challenges the work of the Government.					
	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %	Important %
APE 14	58	31	6	2	3	88

Q15d	How important, if at all, is it to you that the UK Parliament does each of the following? ...amends laws proposed by the Government.					
	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %	Important %
APE 14	49	38	7	2	4	87

Q15e	How important, if at all, is it to you that the UK Parliament does each of the following? ...encourages public involvement in politics.					
	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %	Important %
APE 14	44	38	12	3	3	82

Q15f	How important, if at all, is it to you that the UK Parliament does each of the following? ...checks the way public money is raised and spent by the Government (e.g. taxes and the Government's spending programme).					
	Very important %	Fairly important %	Not very important %	Not at all important %	Don't know %	Important %
APE 14	65	25	5	2	3	90

Q16a	Putting aside your own party preferences and your views on the current Government, do you think that generally the UK Parliament, in recent years, has done a good or bad job in each of the following? ...represents the interests of people like you.						
	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither %	Fairly poor %	Very poor %	Don't know %	Good %
APE 14	3	25	31	25	13	3	29

Q16b Putting aside your own party preferences and your views on the current Government, do you think that generally the UK Parliament, in recent years, has done a good or bad job in each of the following? ...debates issues of public concern.							
	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither %	Fairly poor %	Very poor %	Don't know %	Good %
APE 14	5	36	30	19	7	3	41

Q16c Putting aside your own party preferences and your views on the current Government, do you think that generally the UK Parliament, in recent years, has done a good or bad job in each of the following? ...scrutinises and challenges the work of the Government.							
	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither %	Fairly poor %	Very poor %	Don't know %	Good %
APE 14	5	30	34	20	8	4	35

Q16d Putting aside your own party preferences and your views on the current Government, do you think that generally the UK Parliament, in recent years, has done a good or bad job in each of the following? ...amends laws proposed by the Government.							
	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither %	Fairly poor %	Very poor %	Don't know %	Good %
APE 14	4	30	40	16	7	4	34

Q16e Putting aside your own party preferences and your views on the current Government, do you think that generally the UK Parliament, in recent years, has done a good or bad job in each of the following? ...encourages public involvement in politics.							
	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither %	Fairly poor %	Very poor %	Don't know %	Good %
APE 14	4	22	34	27	10	3	26

Q16f Putting aside your own party preferences and your views on the current Government, do you think that generally the UK Parliament, in recent years, has done a good or bad job in each of the following? ...checks the way public money is raised and spent by the Government (e.g. taxes and the Government's spending programme).							
	Very good %	Fairly good %	Neither %	Fairly poor %	Very poor %	Don't know %	Good %
APE 14	4	27	31	24	11	3	31

Q17a	There are a number of ways the public can engage with Parliament. Which of the following, if any, have you done in the past 12 months?	
	APE13 %	APE 14 %
Contacted an MP or Peer with your views	12	12
Created or signed an e-petition on Parliament's petition website (petition.parliament.uk)	15	22
Followed Parliament's official social media accounts (e.g. Twitter / Facebook)	5	7
Got involved with the work of a parliamentary committee (e.g. read reports, submitted evidence)	2	2
Visited Parliament (for a meeting, event or a tour)	3	3
Visited Parliament's website and information materials	8	12
Watched or listened to a parliamentary debate or committee meeting (on TV, radio, or online)	31	39
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	1	1
Don't know	2	1
None of these	56	46

Q17b	And which of the following, if any, would you be prepared to do if you felt strongly about an issue?	
	APE13 %	APE 14 %
Contact an MP or Peer with your views	50	51
Create or sign an e-petition on Parliament's petition website (petition.parliament.uk)	36	40
Follow Parliament's official social media accounts (e.g. Twitter / Facebook)	14	16
Get involved with the work of a parliamentary committee (e.g. read reports, submit evidence)	14	13
Visit Parliament (for a meeting, event or a tour)	13	13
Visit Parliament's website and information materials	20	23
Watch or listen to a parliamentary debate or committee meeting (on TV, radio, or online)	32	40
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	1	*
Don't know	2	2
Attend a demonstration/rally/protest/march	1	*
None of these	28	20

Q18	Parliament staff can provide impartial information about how democracy works. Which of the following ways, if any, would you most like Parliament to provide this information?	
	APE14 %	
Local workshops run by Parliament staff about how Parliament works	28	
Telephone information line	16	
Information about the work of Parliament on social media	34	
Hosting school visits in Parliament	34	
Providing material that you can download from the Parliament website	40	
Encouraging the public to visit Parliament	23	
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	1	
Don't know	4	
None of these	11	

Q19	Which TWO or THREE, if any, do you feel are the most important ways that MPs should spend their time?	
	APE 7 %	APE 14 %
Debating important issues in the House of Commons	37	32
Representing the views of their political party	11	9
Presenting their views through the media	9	7
Dealing with the problems of individual constituents	26	28
Representing the views of local people in the House of Commons	46	47
Holding the government to account	31	34
Participating in local public meetings and events	20	24
Representing the UK's national interests	41	35
Communicating with constituents on the doorstep or by telephone	14	15
Making laws	14	14
Furthering personal and career interests	3	3
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	*	1
Don't know	1	2
None of these	6	3

Q20a		For each of the following issues, which of these do you think works best at producing decisions which are in Britain's best interests? ...choosing the electoral system that is used to elect MPs.					
	The Government should decide without needing a vote in Parliament %	There should be a vote in Parliament to decide %	Local government should decide for their own areas %	The public should decide (e.g. through a referendum) %	Other %	Don't know %	None of these %
APE 14	8	27	13	47	*	3	1

Q20b		For each of the following issues, which of these do you think works best at producing decisions which are in Britain's best interests? ...deciding how much money the Government spends in a policy area like the NHS each year.					
	The Government should decide without needing a vote in Parliament %	There should be a vote in Parliament to decide %	Local government should decide for their own areas %	The public should decide (e.g. through a referendum) %	Other %	Don't know %	None of these %
APE 14	18	31	23	25	1	2	1

Q20c		For each of the following issues, which of these do you think works best at producing decisions which are in Britain's best interests? ...deciding whether 'fracking', that is the process of drilling down into the earth and blasting water in order to get gas from rocks should be allowed.					
	The Government should decide without needing a vote in Parliament %	There should be a vote in Parliament to decide %	Local government should decide for their own areas %	The public should decide (e.g. through a referendum) %	Other %	Don't know %	None of these %
APE 14	10	22	28	33	*	5	2

Q20d		For each of the following issues, which of these do you think works best at producing decisions which are in Britain's best interests? ...deciding whether assisted dying should be legal.					
	The Government should decide without needing a vote in Parliament %	There should be a vote in Parliament to decide %	Local government should decide for their own areas %	The public should decide (e.g. through a referendum) %	Other %	Don't know %	None of these %
APE 14	9	29	5	45	1	4	2

Q20e		For each of the following issues, which of these do you think works best at producing decisions which are in Britain's best interests? ...deciding Britain's future relationship with the European Union.					
	The Government should decide without needing a vote in Parliament %	There should be a vote in Parliament to decide %	Local government should decide for their own areas %	The public should decide (e.g. through a referendum) %	Other %	Don't know %	None of these %
APE 14	15	32	7	42	*	3	1

Q21

Thinking back to the referendum, which of the following, if any, did you feel provided you with the most trustworthy information about the issue?

	APE14 %
Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)	9
Experts (e.g. academics, economists and think tanks)	21
TV and radio news programmes	34
Newspaper (printed or online)	16
Websites or online forums	10
Large businesses	5
Small businesses	3
The leave campaign	10
The remain campaign	9
MPs	6
Foreign politicians	2
Single issue campaign groups	2
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	1
None of the above	17
Don't know	4

Q22	Thinking back to the referendum, which of the following, if any, did you feel provided you with the most useful information about the issue?
	APE14 %
Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)	10
Experts (e.g. academics, economists and think tanks)	20
TV and radio news programmes	37
Newspaper (printed or online)	18
Websites or online forums	11
Large businesses	5
Small businesses	4
The leave campaign	10
The remain campaign	9
MPs	4
Foreign politicians	2
Single issue campaign groups	2
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	1
Don't know	13
None of these	3

Q23a	As you may have heard, the Palace of Westminster, the building that houses the UK Parliament, is in need of significant repair and restoration. A joint committee of MPs and Lords that looked at the issue recommended that, although the financial costs will be high, it is necessary to do the work in order to protect and preserve the building for the future. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose taxpayers' money being spent on the repair and restoration of the UK Parliament?						
	Strongly support %	Tend to support %	No feelings either way %	Tend to oppose %	Strongly oppose %	Don't know %	Support %
APE 14	19	29	22	14	16	2	47

Asked to half sample (n=778)

Q23b As you may have heard, the Palace of Westminster, the building that houses the UK Parliament, is in need of significant repair and restoration. A joint committee of MPs and Lords that looked at the issue recommended that, although the financial costs will be high (potentially approximately £3 billion), it is necessary to do the work in order to protect and preserve the building for the future. To what extent, if at all, do you support or oppose taxpayers' money being spent on the repair and restoration of the UK Parliament?

	Strongly support %	Tend to support %	No feelings either way %	Tend to oppose %	Strongly oppose %	Don't know %	Support %
APE 14	16	28	22	15	18	1	44

Asked to half sample (n=993)

- An asterisk (*) indicates a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero.
- A dash (-) indicates that nobody chose a response.

IMAGES AND ICONS

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'EU referendum result: Prime Minister's statement' photo (page 10). Credit: Tom Evans under Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

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Exploring the evolution of representative democracy: offering evidence-based ideas for reform of political and parliamentary institutions, processes and culture to help foster democratic renewal.

Educating citizens, particularly young people: so that they have the knowledge and confidence to play an active role in our democracy and be future leaders in civic and political life.

Connecting citizens with parliamentarians and policy-makers: through innovative on and offline initiatives to address the democratic deficit.

Convening debate on topical political issues: providing a non-partisan forum for the exchange of ideas about our democratic future.

Enquiries about membership or the work of the Hansard Society should be addressed to Dr Ruth Fox, Director and Head of Research, Hansard Society, 5th Floor, 9 King Street, London EC2V 8EA, by email to contact@hansardsociety.org.uk, or visit the website at www.hansardsociety.org.uk.

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The 2017 Report

The Audit of Political Engagement is the only annual health check on the state of our democracy. Now in its 14th year, each Audit measures the 'political pulse' of the nation, providing a unique benchmark to gauge public opinion across Great Britain about politics and the political process.

Following one of the biggest democratic events in British history, this year's report explores whether there has been a post-EU referendum bounce in public engagement with politics. It looks at whether public attitudes to referendums have changed, whether people feel more knowledgeable about the EU.

It also explores public attitudes to Parliament and MP's – how knowledgeable people feel about the institution, how important they think the core functions of the institution are and the extent to which they believe Parliament has done a good job in performing those functions in recent years. It examines how the public engage with Parliament now, and how they would like to do so in the future.

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