

# MORI

## Rules of Engagement?

Participation, Involvement and Voting in Britain

Research Analysis for  
The Electoral Commission  
and the Hansard Society

The  
Electoral  
Commission



August 2004



---

# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
Findings	4
Implications	6
<b>Analysis</b>	<b>8</b>
Factor Analysis	8
Regression ("Key Drivers") Analysis	12
Cluster analysis	19
<b>Appendices</b>	

# Introduction

---

This report details further analysis by MORI of data from the 2003 Political Engagement Poll which informed *An Audit of Political Engagement* published by The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in March 2004<sup>1</sup>. The analysis builds on that report and is aimed at deeper understanding of the relationship between the various attitudes and activities broadly described as political engagement or activism. In particular, the analysis considers how these relate to propensity to vote, with a view to gaining an insight into how far efforts to increase engagement might hope to lead to increased turnout. It will also inform planning of future audit surveys, by making it clear which indicators are the most valuable to track over time.

The MORI Political Engagement Poll, conducted in December 2003, interviewed almost 2,000 adults across the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup>. It made around fifty separate measurements of respondents' political engagement, which can be broadly grouped into three categories – knowledge, attitudes and (reported) behaviour. In addition the survey collected extensive demographic information about respondents, and in Great Britain (though not in Northern Ireland) a number of political attitudes (e.g. satisfaction with the performance of the government and party leaders and voting intention) were measured on the same Omnibus survey<sup>3</sup> and can therefore be cross-analysed with the Political Engagement Poll data. The dataset therefore offers the opportunity for more sophisticated statistical analysis of the relationship between the different variables measured, which may offer clues to the nature and causes of political engagement or disengagement in contemporary Britain.

Multivariate statistical techniques enable us to go beyond the simple report of overall results which formed our first look at the survey data and the report published in March. Although these show the way every question was answered, and how by different sub-groups, it is not always easy to pull out the underlying messages. Statistical analysis adds depth due its ability to reach beneath the summary data to look for themes, trends and groupings, and to help answer strategic questions. In this case, we are particularly interested to explore the factors that make people likely to vote, and to take part in other political and non-political civic activities: while the Audit report was able to consider *who* is voting and participating in other ways, and what their attitudes are, more sophisticated analysis is needed to help understand why – and to explore which factors may really be directly linked, and which correspond only coincidentally. Such analysis also points the way to what should be done next, both in terms of

---

<sup>1</sup> See The Electoral Commission/Hansard Society report *An Audit of Political Engagement* published in March 2004 and available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk).

<sup>2</sup> In Great Britain, interviews were conducted face-to-face, in home, as part of MORI's regular Omnibus survey, on 11-17 December 2003. In Northern Ireland, interviews were conducted face-to-face, in home on 6-15 December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> These questions make up the monthly MORI Political Monitor for December 2003, and were not sponsored by The Electoral Commission or the Hansard Society.

the most effective ways of promoting political engagement and in terms of further research.

# Executive Summary

---

## Findings

The 49 measurements of aspects of engagement and involvement taken in the Political Engagement Poll can be reduced to 14 dimensions by **factor analysis**.

- The factor analysis suggests that knowledge, behaviour and attitudes are independent of each other. In particular, likelihood of voting is distinct from knowledge (real or perceived), and satisfaction with the performance of the system and the politicians. Nor do engagement and activism in the non-political sphere either follow from these factors or lead to voting.
- The dimension we have named “voting” combines attitudinal and behavioural factors. Analysis shows that voting in practice (or at least the report of it) and attitudes to voting in theory are related as a single dimension of opinion, rather than being distinct and independent of each other.
- Similarities in the pattern of answers imply that belief in the efficacy of political action is related to belief in the importance of voting, which in turn is related to the propensity to vote in practice.
- Interest in politics proves to be most closely related to “claimed knowledge”: the pattern of respondents’ answers classifies it firmly with the five “How much do you know...?” questions. The fact that it is most closely related to perceived knowledge, not to satisfaction or voting, perhaps suggests that it is not a particularly useful measure in isolation as a benchmark of political engagement. Consequently, there might be less cause for alarm in the sharp fall in interest in politics reported in the Audit report than might otherwise be assumed.

**Regression (“key drivers”) analysis** looks for patterns we would expect to find in the data if the variables are causally linked. In this case, we discover which other dimensions of political engagement are the best predictors of propensity to vote; while the analysis cannot prove that one causes the other or that they share a common cause, it can be used to predict how propensity to vote is likely to change if levels of political engagement change in other ways.

- Only just over a third of the variation in propensity to vote seems to be related to other aspects of political engagement. Tackling political disengagement as distinct from disinclination to vote is not in itself, therefore, likely to be a panacea for low turnout, though it may help.

- The analysis suggests that the factors most closely related to propensity to vote are a belief that involvement in politics works (“efficacy”), which is much the most powerful influence, and a feeling of familiarity with political institutions and with politics itself (“claimed knowledge”).
- Inaccurate information about the political system is not necessarily an obstacle – those who gave wrong answers to some questions in the “political quiz” were more likely to vote than those who admitted they didn’t know.
- “Good causes activism” – being prepared to help organise charity events, for example, or playing an active part in non-political organisations – are *not* related to propensity to vote. These activities, which would normally be considered aspects of “good citizenship” and helpful in building up “social capital” do not, apparently, lead their participants to turn out at the ballot box.
- Demographic factors (even newspaper readership) contribute little to understanding likelihood of voting independent of other aspects of political engagement. Commitment to the various political parties, by contrast, is a highly significant factor – propensity to vote is closely related to knowing which party one intends to vote for. While this is not remotely surprising, it emphasises how important to turnout is the success of the parties in appealing to the public, and voters’ ability to discriminate between them.

**Cluster analysis** segments the public, dividing them up into natural groups with similar characteristics. It is particularly useful in planning marketing or political campaigns for identifying groups that would best be treated differently and can be separately targeted. The analysis identifies similarities between individuals based on all the different facets of political engagement; the clusters derived in this way turn out to have some distinctly different propensities to vote.

- The most convincing clustering derived from the audit survey divided the public into nine groups, with widely differing propensities to vote.
- A small group of highly-engaged **Enthusiasts** (6% of adults) stand out from the rest, and are probably the initiators and main driving force behind almost all political activity in Britain.
- Of the remainder, those who generally vote can be divided into four groups of roughly similar size – **Foot soldiers**, **Contented voters**, **Protest voters** and **Bustlers**. Each group has different motivations and a different view of the existing system, and each probably requires a different approach to reinforce and expand their voting turnout.
- At the other end of the scale, while there is a substantial “don’t know, don’t see the point” group of the **Utterly Disengaged** who never vote, there is an equally large group of **Passive onlookers** who rarely

vote even though they do see the point and admit they ought to turn out.

## Implications

- Political engagement has turned out to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, with various facets apparently independent of each other. This suggests that there is no single all-encompassing measure which can be read as a proxy for all the others and as being an indicator of Britain's civic health; nor, consequently, is there likely to be any "silver bullet" solution to tackle disengagement.
- This has particular implications for the interpretation (and encouragement) of electoral turnout. Most theorists, and most politicians, take it as read that voting is a facet of good citizenship. Morally justified as they may be in holding this, it is clear that the public – especially the young – do not necessarily make the same connection. They may be good citizens in other ways, yet not feel that voting is an important part of that. It is not simply a case of non-voters being on a lower rung on the citizenship ladder than we would like, they are on a different ladder altogether.
- The analysis suggests that turnout will not simply be increased by persuading the public to a greater recognition of their civic responsibilities. Politics, especially party or electoral politics, has become a world apart. The "disconnection" which researchers have adopted as a description of the public's opinions is just as evident in their reported behaviour.
- One key to voting behaviour is "efficacy" – a belief in voting, in the importance of politics and of the worth of having a say in the way the country is run. These attitudes seem not to be primarily driven by demographic factors; they may be matters purely of temperament, but there must be a suspicion that they can be taught. If education in citizenship (whether formally to children or in a broader sense to the whole adult community) is to revive electoral participation, it looks as if it should specifically concentrate on these factors, and not assume that they are implied by a more general exhortation to shoulder the burden of citizenship and civic involvement.
- The political parties have a clear role to play here, since it seems that the ability to choose between them is closely related to turnout; but the present survey offers comparatively little evidence on this point – further research may be indicated.

- Promoting the value of participation in the political system, and especially of voting, needs well-planned targeting. The distinctions between the attitudes and beliefs of different groups of the public are wide: the arguments that may persuade one group are likely to leave another cold, and the channels of communication that will reach some people will be entirely ignored by others.

---

©MORI/21029

Checked & Approved:

*Jessica Elgood*

---

Checked & Approved:

*Roger Mortimore*

*Mark Gill*

---

# Analysis

---

## Factor Analysis

The first stage in further exploration of the survey data was to use the technique known as factor analysis. The basic purpose of factor analysis is to identify when different questions are in effect measuring the same underlying attitude or characteristics that share the same causes and tend to go together. It enables the different dimensions in the data to be reduced to a more manageable number so that people's attitudes and behaviour can be more easily understood; and it also provides the groundwork for "key drivers analysis" (see below), as well as indicating which measurements in the survey might be redundant or inter-related, allowing future surveys which track attitudinal change to be streamlined.

The factor analysis was applied to 49 separate measurements from the survey, and revealed that they could be reduced to 14 distinct and clearly-defined factors. These 14 factors or dimensions explain 55.4% of all variation in responses. (Note that at this stage the analysis does not make use of demographics, which are considered later.)

For every respondent in the survey, his or her score can be calculated on each of these 14 derived dimensions. These factor scores are all calculated from the 49 original measurements, but for each dimension some of the original measurements are much more significant than others – in technical terms they have a "high loading".

It is important to remember that the composition of each of the 14 dimensions is entirely determined by the patterns in the data, and not by our expectations of what attitudes "ought to go together": the content of each dimension depends on the fact that respondents tended to give similar or highly correlated answers to each of the questions grouped within it. While the names given to each of the 14 dimensions are a subjective attempt to describe the attitude that dimension seems to represent, it is the contents of each dimension that are important, not its name.

It is perfectly possible, if the characteristics measured by the survey are not related to each other and reflective of underlying attitudes, that the factor analysis will not produce a "clean" model – a particular measurement might have a high loading on several of the derived factors, or the factors might make no obvious sense when we come to consider their components. But in this case the factor analysis seems entirely convincing. The high loading variables on each of the factors share obvious similarities, and we can easily characterise each with a simple description of a plausible general attitudinal or behavioural characteristic. Furthermore, there is an almost complete distinction between the behavioural, attitudinal and knowledge-based variables, each loading onto different factors, and indeed within those categories.

## Fourteen Dimensions of Political Engagement

The 14 factors isolated, together with their component variables, types and factor loadings, were as follows:

(A) =Attitudinal; (B) =Behavioural; (K) =Knowledge; secondary loadings italicised

† Negative loading indicates that the opposite applies (e.g. in dimension 6, an increased score is given by not agreeing that being active in politics is a waste of time.

### 1. Claimed knowledge

- (A) How much do you know about Politics? (+0.831)
- (A) How much do you know about The Westminster Parliament? (+0.820)
- (A) How much do you know about the role of MPs? (+0.792)
- (A) How much do you know about the European Union? (+0.775)
- (A) How interested are you in politics? (+0.607)
- (A) How much do you know about your local council? (+0.575)

### 2. Organising good causes activism

- (B) Helped organise a charity event (+0.709)
- (B) Helped on fund raising drives (+0.665)
- (B) Made a speech before an organised group (+0.631)
- (B) Been an officer of an organisation or club (+0.610)
- (B) Done voluntary work (+0.589)
- (B) Taken part in a sponsored event (+0.570)

### 3. Voting

- (B) Voted in the last general election (+0.824)
- (B) Voted in the last local council election (+0.742)
- (A/B) How likely would you be to vote in an immediate general election? (+0.711)
- (A) "It is my duty to vote" (+0.551)
- (A) *"I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote"* (+0.408)

### 4. Satisfaction

- (A) Are you satisfied with the way MPs in general are doing their job? (+0.823)
- (A) Are you satisfied with the way that Parliament works? (+0.812)
- (A) Opinion on present system of governing Britain - Works well (+0.676)
- (A) Are you satisfied with the way your MP is doing his/her job? (+0.537)

### 5. Passive involvement

- (B) Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (+0.631)
- (B) Discussed politics or political news with someone else (+0.584)
- (B) Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation (+0.542)
- (B) Signed a petition (+0.517)
- (B) Urged someone outside my family to vote (+0.489)

### 6. Efficacy

- (A) "When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run" (+0.706)
- † (A) "Being active in politics is a waste of time" (-0.640)
- (A) "I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote" (+0.593)
- (A) "I want to have a say in how the country is run" (+0.592)
- (A) *"It is my duty to vote"* (+0.493)

## **7. Communication**

- (B) Presented views to local councillor (+0.674)
- (B) Presented views to local MPs (+0.612)
- (B) Contacted my local council (+0.541)
- (B) Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP (+0.529)
- (B) Written a letter to an editor (+0.506)

## **8. Low impact of political bodies**

- (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Business (+0.713)
- † (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Westminster Parliament (-0.616)
- (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Media (+0.592)

## **9. Confused by numbers**

- (K) Believe it is true that "The European Union consists of 12 member states" (+0.683)
- (K) Believe it is true that "There has to be a general election every 4 years" (+0.592)

## **10. Local misconceptions**

- (K) Believe it is true that "You can only vote in a local election if you pay council tax" (+0.736)
- (K) Believe it is true that "Local councils have the power to set the school leaving age in their own area" (+0.627)

## **11. High impact of government**

- (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Cabinet (+0.767)
- (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Prime Minister (+0.536)

## **12. Politically knowledgeable**

- (K) Believe it is true that "Members of European Parliament are directly elected by voters like you and me" (+0.747)
- (K) Believe it is true that "Not all members of the Cabinet are MPs" (+0.602)
- (K) Believe it is true that "The House of Commons has more power than the House of Lords" (+0.364)

## **13. Local power greatest**

- (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Local Councils (+0.777)
- † (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? European Union (-0.577)

## **14. High impact of civil service**

- (A) What has most impact on people's everyday lives? Civil Service (+0.870)

Several results of the analysis are worthy of comment, in each case where the analysis has detected a correlation in responses where the similarity of questions is perhaps not immediately obvious. The dimension we have named "voting" combines attitudinal and behavioural factors, the only one to do so. It also includes the only question which is arguably a hybrid between an attitudinal and a behavioural measure, the predicted likelihood of voting at an immediate general election. Yet, although the questions differ in type, they all refer explicitly to voting by the respondent, and are the only five that do so. Voting in practice (or at least the report of it) and attitudes to voting in theory are related as a single dimension of opinion, rather than being distinct and independent of each other. Those who believe in voting practise what they preach – or, at least, they claim to do so.

It should also be noted that the two pure-attitudinal voting questions also appear with a high loading on another dimension, “efficacy”. These are the only two of the 49 factors to appear in more than one dimension, and indicate that the break between these two concepts is less clear-cut than between the other dimensions: belief in the efficacy of political action is related to belief in the importance of voting, which in turn is related to the propensity to vote in practice. This relationship is more explicitly displayed in the next section.

Finally, note that interest in politics falls out into the “claimed knowledge” dimension rather than any of the others. This is the only question of its type included in the survey, and has often been regarded as a valuable benchmark of political engagement (even though past trends have suggested little correlation between changes in levels of expressed interest in politics and changes in electoral turnout.) Arguably it has no inherent or “natural” similarities with any of the other questions in the questionnaire, but the pattern of respondents’ answers classifies it firmly with the five claimed knowledge questions. This partly, no doubt, is dependent on what the public mean by “politics”, and in this context it is also worth noting that feeling knowledgeable about “politics” is aligned with feeling knowledgeable about the various political institutions (which need not have been the case). The fact that interest in politics is most closely related to perceived knowledge, not to satisfaction or voting, perhaps suggests that it is not a particularly useful measure in isolation as a benchmark of political engagement; from which it would follow that there might be less cause for alarm in the sharp fall in interest in politics reported in the Audit report than might otherwise be assumed. It is an aspect of political engagement which is not unimportant, but is certainly not, on this evidence, all important.

Overall, the clear-cut nature of the factor analysis allows us to conclude that each of these dimensions are independent of each other and probably not closely related causally. Behaviour, knowledge and attitudes are not synonymous, and do not overlap. This has important implications. Likelihood of voting is distinct from, and not driven by knowledge (real or perceived), satisfaction with the performance of the system and the politicians, or belief in the efficacy of political action. Hence better civic education may be useful in itself but will not lead naturally to increased turnout, nor will politicians better satisfying their constituencies. Nor do engagement and activism in the non-political sphere either follow from these factors or lead to voting. However, these relationships (or the lack of them) can be more clearly delineated by multivariate regression analysis.

## Regression (“Key Drivers”) Analysis

Having isolated the discrete components of political engagement, the next stage was to conduct a regression analysis to identify the “key drivers” of propensity to vote. Regression is a technique that detects relationships between variables – in this case between attitudes, behaviours and knowledge patterns – and can predict how one will be affected if others change. Initially, we will attempt to discover how propensity to vote is related to the other 13 dimensions of political engagement already discussed above; later, we can also use demographic factors and some more directly political measures as possible explanatory factors, to see how far these seem to have an effect over and above these dimensions of engagement, and we can also examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and the dimensions themselves.

Propensity to vote is measured on an 11-point scale which is a composite of two questions from the original survey. Those respondents who rated their likelihood of voting in an immediate general election at 1-9 on a ten-point scale were given that rating as their score; those rating themselves as “10 – absolutely certain to vote” were subdivided on the basis of whether or not they claimed to have voted in the most recent local elections (scored as 11 or 10 respectively). This subdivision of a scale which would otherwise be top-heavy (since more than half the public claim to be absolutely certain to vote in a general election) enables the analysis to explore slightly more subtle factors, and in particular to take into account the causes of differences between those who vote even at local elections and those who vote only in general elections.<sup>4</sup>

To begin, we need to redo the factor analysis leaving out the variables that directly measure voting, so that they will not affect the construction of the other factors; in this way we can see whether propensity to vote is really independent of these factors or not. As would be expected, the results of this second factor analysis are very similar to those of the first, reducing the 46 variables now entered to 13 dimensions which correspond to the 13 factors (excluding “voting”) listed above. One significant difference is that the two attitudinal statements which in the first analysis were significant components of the “voting” dimension (“It is my duty to vote” and “I feel a sense of satisfaction when I vote”) now load more strongly on the “efficacy” dimension, and that factor is more powerful in explaining variation, moving up to third place in importance.

---

<sup>4</sup> The choice and construction of the dependent variable are discussed in more detail in the explanatory notes in the Appendices.

The dimensions identified by the regression as related to propensity to vote to a statistically significant degree were<sup>5</sup>:

Efficacy	(+0.467)
Claimed knowledge	(+0.250)
Passive involvement	(+0.187)
Satisfaction	(+0.137)
Communication	(+0.086)
Low impact of political bodies	(-0.048)
Confused by numbers	(-0.046)

The other six dimensions are not apparently related to propensity to vote.

The figures in brackets given with each dimension are *standardised beta co-efficients*; these indicate how closely related the variables are – the higher the absolute (positive or negative) size of beta, the bigger the change in propensity to vote associated with a given change in the named dimension. The sign indicates the direction of the relationship: a positive beta co-efficient shows that propensity to vote increases as the factor increases, a negative co-efficient the reverse. For example, beta for “low impact of political bodies” is negative, which indicates that the *more* likely a respondent is to feel that political bodies have a low impact the *less* likely he or she is to vote.

A regression analysis can be thought of as a means of producing an equation which allows propensity to vote (the “dependent variable”) to be predicted for various values of the other factors (“independent variables”). Although it is often reported as if it detects a causal relationship between the variables (that is, suggesting that X is a “key driver” or cause of Y), it does not in fact assume this, and it may well be that all the variables are in fact driven by other factors not included in the analysis. But it does imply that – whatever the real causal relationship – if the values of the independent variables can be changed then the dependent variable will change in line with the equation. So the analysis implies that if the level of the “efficacy” dimension could be increased, propensity to vote would also increase, and that a given increase in “efficacy” would have almost twice the effect of an equivalent increase in “claimed knowledge”.

But the regression also measures how much of the variation in propensity to vote seems to be related to the combination of the various explanatory factors. In this case the measure, called  $R^2$ , is 0.348, meaning that only 34.8% of the variation is explained by this regression model, a comparatively low proportion. Almost two-thirds of what determines a person’s likelihood of voting is, it seems, unrelated to the other dimensions of political engagement.

A few of the results of the regression stand out. “Efficacy” is much the most closely-related dimension to propensity to vote, with a beta value almost double

---

<sup>5</sup> For the full results of the regression, see Appendices, Table 1.

that of any other variable<sup>6</sup>. Claimed knowledge is the next most important, with five other factors demonstrating a statistically significant effect.

It is also worth noting that the “organising good causes activism” factor is *not* a statistically significant independent predictor of propensity to vote. This lack of a connection with a behavioural variable closely tied in with many aspects of community involvement and “good citizenship” tells us a lot about the way in which politics as a collective activity has become marginalised. If those who are sufficiently motivated to organise voluntary activities and to be active in organisations or clubs are nevertheless so disconnected from party politics that they are not significantly more likely to vote than the rest of the public, so much the worse for party politics. On the other, “passive involvement” *is* one of the predictors – a willingness to be persuaded to take part in worthwhile activities extends to voting as well as to the non-political sphere.

When the regression is re-run using only factors which make a statistically significant contribution<sup>7</sup>, the value of  $R^2$  is barely reduced, to 0.346, which we may take as a measure of the overall impact that political engagement in its various guises (as measured in the survey) has on turnout – a little over a third.

The next stage is to add demographic variables to the mix. This we do in two stages – adding them as factors into the full regression, so that we can judge how far factors such as age and class influence propensity to vote independent of the 7 factors already found to be significant; and using the demographics as explanatory (independent) variables in regression analyses of each of the 12 dimensions (significant or not) in turn, which will indicate how far the demographics have already played their part by influencing the other factors that make up political engagement. The demographic factors entered at this stage were: sex, class, region, ethnic group, work status, number of children in household, and level of education.<sup>8</sup>

The inclusion of the demographics raised the explanatory power of the model a little, to 38.6%, though only three demographic variables – age (older people being more likely to say they will vote), gender (women more likely to vote) and work status (full-time workers more likely to say they will vote) – were statistically significant<sup>9</sup>. With these demographic factors included, the “low impact of political bodies” and “confused by numbers” factors drop out of the model. Interestingly, social class is *not* significant as an independent predictor of propensity to vote, nor are the variables for level of education. This does not mean, of course, that there are no differences in likelihood of voting by class and education, but only that their effects do not go beyond what is already reflected in other aspects of political activism and engagement – likelihood of voting is not in this sense a separate or different factor. Similarly, there are no differences by ethnicity.

---

<sup>6</sup> When a regression is run using this factor as the sole independent variable, the  $R^2$  is 0.218, that is that almost 22% of the variation in propensity to vote coincides with variation in the efficacy factor.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendices, Table 2.

<sup>8</sup> See explanatory note for full details.

<sup>9</sup> For the full results of the regression, see Appendices, Table 3.

The full list of significant factors is:

Efficacy	(+0.437)
Claimed knowledge	(+0.208)
Age	(+0.207)
Passive involvement	(+0.170)
Satisfaction	(+0.129)
Gender - female	(+0.072)
Communication	(+0.051)
Full time worker	(+0.048)

The demographics so far added have excluded newspaper readership, which needs to be viewed separately: since there is a political element in many people's choice of newspaper, readership may be as much an effect as a cause of attitudes and could blur any causal relationships unless treated with care. However, at this stage it is possible to add regular readership of each of the national dailies to the regression, and see whether it contributes anything to the model; in the event, it adds so little (raising  $R^2$  from 0.386 to 0.389, with none of the newspapers having statistically significant effects) that it can be discounted. Readership does nothing to explain likelihood of voting independent of the other measures of political engagement and demographics.

Having come this far, we still have more than three-fifths of the variation of likelihood of voting unexplained (and, therefore, with no knowledge of the effective levers that might be operated to raise turnout). But we have, so far, avoided including any explicitly political factors in the model. It turns out that by adding six further variables<sup>10</sup> – four related to voting intentions and two derived from satisfaction with the party leaders' performance – to those already found to have a statistically significant effect in the earlier analyses we can make a dramatic improvement in the model, raising its predictive power by more than a quarter, increasing  $R^2$  from 0.386 to 0.507. But it is only the four voting intention variables that are statistically significant, and all four have positive coefficients – in other words the difference is not between the parties, but simply reflects that those with a higher propensity to vote are more likely than average to have chosen which party they would vote for, whichever it is. While this is hardly startling, it reflects a very real factor not otherwise measured by the Political Engagement Poll, that propensity to vote is closely related to having a preference between the various candidates or parties; voting in the abstract, without having any interest in the outcome, is a very much weaker motivation.

---

<sup>10</sup> Note that these variables were measured only in Great Britain, as part of the regular MORI Political Monitor survey, and were not available for Northern Ireland; this final regression analysis therefore excludes the respondents from Northern Ireland.

The regression model including voting intention variables together with the factors found statistically significant in the earlier analyses is detailed below<sup>11</sup>.

Voting Intention Labour	(+0.380)
Voting Intention Conservative	(+0.361)
Efficacy	(+0.331)
Voting Intention Liberal Democrat	(+0.309)
Age	(+0.187)
Claimed knowledge	(+0.158)
Passive involvement	(+0.143)
Voting Intention Other Party	(+0.140)
Satisfaction	(+0.104)
Gender - female	(+0.080)

However, it is clear that voting intentions encompass many of the motivations and opinions that make up the 13 dimensions of engagement derived earlier, and that to treat them as independent causes of propensity to vote is misleading; they will be to a considerable extent effects rather than causes. (This can be seen by the degree to which the explanatory power of the dimensions is lower in this model than in the preceding tables.) Although it is perfectly true, as far as it goes, that these factors are closely related, and that for example by increasing the number of people intending to vote Labour the overall propensity to vote would be increased, it is not on the face of it very useful. (In effect it simply states the rather obvious proposition that decreasing the number of people not intending to vote increases the likelihood of voting!) On the other hand, as a reminder that the onus in persuading electors to vote must be above all on the parties and candidates between which they will choose, it is perhaps not entirely superfluous.

It should be noted that this survey measured party political commitment only in the crudest possible way (current voting intention). It seems clear that political opinions are – as might be expected – in fact closely related to people’s degree of political engagement, and it might well be that this could be demonstrated much more clearly by a survey that measured more facets of political commitment. This might well be a useful direction for future research.

---

<sup>11</sup> For the full results of the regression, see Appendices, Table 4.

## Demographic causes of attitudes detected by factor analysis

While the demographic variables have comparatively little explanatory power on propensity to vote over and above that offered by the dimensions of political engagement, they have a significant role in explaining some of those dimensions in the first place. For each of the dimensions where demographics could explain at least 10% of the variation, the following table lists the demographic factors having a statistically significant effect in order of their influence, together with the total degree of variation in each dimension explained by the regression model:

### **Claimed knowledge (27.1% of variation explained)**

- Age (Positive effect)
- London (Positive effect)
- Gender Male (Positive effect)
- No formal qualifications (Negative effect)
- Graduate (Positive effect)
- Social Grade (Positive effect with higher class)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Guardian (Positive effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Independent (Positive effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Times (Positive effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Sun (Negative effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - Daily Mail (Positive effect)
- Number of children in household (Negative effect with higher number of children)

### **Organising good causes activism (10.4% of variation explained)**

- Daily Newspaper Readership - Daily Telegraph (Positive effect)
- Social Grade (Positive effect with higher class)
- Graduate (Positive effect)
- No formal qualifications (Negative effect)
- Number of children in household (Positive effect)
- Gender Female (Positive effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Times (Positive effect)
- Age (Negative effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Guardian (Negative effect)

### **Passive involvement (12.5% of variation explained)**

- London (Negative effect)
- No formal qualifications (Negative effect)
- Social Grade (Positive effect with higher class)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - The Guardian (Positive effect)
- Gender Female (Positive effect)
- Graduate (Positive effect)
- Daily Newspaper Readership - Other (Negative effect)
- Age (Positive effect)

The following dimensions cannot be substantially explained by demographic characteristics measured in the survey:

- Efficacy (4.9% of variation explained)
- Satisfaction (3.6%)
- Communication (7.8%)
- Low impact of political bodies (5.9%)
- Confused by numbers (7.4%)
- Local misconceptions (5.7%)
- Politically knowledgeable (3.3%)
- High impact of government (2.7%)
- Local power greatest (3.7%)
- High impact of civil service (2.7%)

## Cluster analysis

Cluster analysis allows us to group people who give similar answers together into a convenient number of groups; in this case the cluster analysis looked for similarities in scores on the 14 dimensions of political engagement identified during the factor analysis.

The public falls easily into nine groups, listed in order of their propensity to vote:

1. **Enthusiasts** (6% of the adult British population: 69% vote in local elections and 73% are certain to vote in a general election) believe in making their voice heard and their weight felt. They have more likely than not contacted their MP, local councillor and the council recently, and have urged other people to do the same. They are active in all sorts of community activities, and are likely to have made speeches in public and to have been an officer of some organisation or club. Almost everybody who writes to the newspapers falls in this group. They tend to be very interested in politics and to feel they know a fair amount about it (which their high “quiz” scores confirm) except, perhaps, the EU. They tend to be satisfied with their own MP, though less so with MPs in general or the system, and get a sense of satisfaction when they vote. They are overwhelmingly middle class (55% are social grade AB and 82% ABC1), white (none of the respondents to the survey who fell into this category was from an ethnic minority), and elderly or middle-aged (71% are aged 45-or-over). They are much more frequent in the South-East than elsewhere, but very thin on the ground in London.
2. **Foot soldiers** (11% of the adult British population: 52% vote in local elections and 69% are certain to vote in a general election) are followers rather than leaders, prepared to participate whether in voting or non-political activities, and enthusiastic in discussion of politics, but less likely to take the initiative. They usually vote and will urge others to do so, and are likely to have signed petitions, taken part in boycotts and contributed to or paid to join a charity or campaigning organisation. They are more likely to have urged somebody else to get in touch with a councillor or MP than to have done so themselves. They are as interested in politics as the enthusiasts and feel as almost as knowledgeable, except in relation to their local council, which only two in five feel they know much about; though in fact it is in their knowledge of central not local government that the “political quiz” tends to catch them out. They are less satisfied with MPs in general or with their own MP than the enthusiasts, but still feel a sense of satisfaction when they vote. They are mostly middle class (35% are social grade B and 32% C1), and more likely than average to be middle-aged (47% are aged between 35 and 54).
3. **Contented voters** (16% of the adult British population: 50% vote in local elections and 68% are certain to vote in a general election) are people who are fairly satisfied with the way the political system works and well informed about local government but perhaps less interested in the intricate detail of institutional mechanisms. (As a group they are

distinguished by being likely to have got the two “quiz” questions involving numbers – the number of years between general elections and the number of countries in the EU – wrong.) Few are active in community activities except turning out to vote, and they do not tend to write to the newspapers or to present their views to their MP. They are found fairly evenly in all classes, age groups and ethnic groups, and are more likely to be women than men, but only slightly so.

4. **Protest voters** (15% of the adult British population: 49% vote in local elections and 63% are certain to vote in a general election) are a little less likely to vote than the preceding groups, but the majority still do so, despite feeling a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the system and the people involved in it (just 10% think the present system of governing Britain works well, and 4% are satisfied with the way MPs are doing their job). Voting is their main political activity (only a quarter have made a donation or paid a subscription, and seven in ten have not signed a petition in the last two or three years, dissatisfaction notwithstanding). Although they vote themselves they are unlikely to have urged anybody outside their family to do the same; only a minority say they are interested in politics or feel they know much about it. Three in five protest voters are female, and few are in the youngest age group (18-24).
5. **Bustlers** (11% of the adult British population: 31% vote in local elections and 58% are certain to vote in a general election) are primarily characterised by their ignorance of local government – almost three-quarters think that you can’t vote in local elections unless you pay the council tax, and they are the only group of whom a significant proportion (three in ten) guess that councils have the power to set the local school-leaving age. Despite this they are more likely than not to say they are interested in politics and to feel that they know a fair amount about it and about its institutions. They may well be the sort of people who like the sound of their own voice – they are unusually likely to have made a speech before an organised group and to have been an officer of some organisation or club (though these are minority activities even for this group), but are less likely than average to have boycotted goods for some ethical reason or signed a petition. This group includes a higher-than-average proportion of Asian and Black respondents, but is spread evenly across all age groups and classes and both sexes. A quarter of all Bustlers live in London, making them twice as common there as across the country as a whole.
6. **Desk warriors** (9% of the adult British population: 36% vote in local elections and 53% are certain to vote in a general election) tend to feel the civil service is the one of the most influential institutions on their everyday lives, but are otherwise an average group in most respects. They are a little more likely than average to have contacted their MP or councillor and to have urged somebody else to do so as well. Most are interested in politics, though they feel they know less about it than the Contented Voters or Bustlers, and only three in five say they voted in the last general election. They are a little more likely to be middle-aged than the population as a whole, though many of the young and elderly are still

included within their ranks; they are especially common among the professional classes (social grade B) – perhaps many are civil servants themselves?

7. **Downing Street diehards** (4% of the adult British population: 27% vote in local elections and 49% are certain to vote in a general election) believe overwhelmingly in the influence of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and perhaps as a result this group has a bigger proportional difference in local and general election turnout than all-but-one of the others; but even so only half are certain they would vote in the next general election. They are happier than average with the way the present system of governing Britain (only the Contented Voters are more likely to be satisfied with it). Given their own comparatively low likelihood of voting they are unusually likely to have urged someone else to turn out. They are the most male-dominated group (57% men), and are predominantly middle-class (60% social grade B or C1).
  
8. **Passive onlookers** (14% of the adult British population: 6% vote in local elections and 27% are certain to vote in a general election) seem to lack the energy to act out their own convictions. Three in five admit it is their duty to vote, and two-thirds want a say in how the country is run, but that isn't enough to get them to the polling station. They are unlikely to have taken part in any political or civic activity: only 18% say they voted in 2001, but their non-political involvement is as low, only 9% having helped on fund-raising drives, 19% having signed a petition and 13% having done any voluntary work. This lack of involvement is despite a greater belief than any other group that there might be some point in getting involved: half of them agree that "When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run", and just 7% feel that being active in politics is a waste of time, the lowest proportion among any of the nine groups; but since half also believe that the present system of governing Britain works well, perhaps they feel this gives them an excuse for their inactivity. Uniquely they are more likely to say they are satisfied with MPs in general than with their own MP. This is a group that is much younger than average (a third are 24 or less), and one in ten are Black or Asian. It is possible that, although the survey did not explore it, this is a group who while admitting the merits of the political and social system feel personally excluded from it.
  
9. The **utterly disengaged** (14% of the adult British population: 0% vote in local elections and 2% are certain to vote in a general election) don't vote because they don't see the point. Only one in ten believe that "When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the UK is run" and, crucially, just 15% feel it is their duty to vote. Half think being active in politics is a waste of time; but since they feel neither interested in nor knowledgeable about it, this is perhaps unsurprising; they were far more likely than any other group to admit they didn't know the answers to the political quiz, and probably didn't care either. They are a young group – almost three-quarters are 45 or under – and two in three are working class (C2DE), but are found equally in all ethnic groups.

# Appendices

---

## Notes

### **“Political Quiz”**

Of the seven statements used in the “Political Quiz” element of the questionnaire, three are in fact true:

“Members of European Parliament are directly elected by voters like you and me”

“Not all members of the Cabinet are MPs”

“The House of Commons has more power than the House of Lords”

The other four are/were false:

“There has to be a general election every 4 years” (The maximum period between general elections is just over five years)

“The European Union consists of 12 member states” (At the time of the survey there were 15 EU member states)

“You can only vote in a local election if you pay council tax” (The right to vote is not dependent on paying any form of tax)

“Local Councils have the power to set the school leaving age in their own area” (The school-leaving age is determined by Parliament)

### **Factor analysis: choice of factors**

The choice of a 14-component solution for the initial analysis and of a 13-component solution to use in the regression was made on the basis that this offered the cleanest break between factors while minimising the number of components based on only a single high-loading variable. Experimentation found that the models produced with a greater or smaller number of components seemed less intuitive.

While factor analysis can always produce a solution of sorts, a clearly-defined solution based on obviously coherent combinations of variables is a clear indication that it represents real dimensions in respondent attitudes. With poorly or unfortunately-designed datasets, questionnaires that fail to communicate with respondents or tap their feelings, or simply when investigating attitudes that are only distantly related or poorly defined, factor analysis can often fail to give a clear-cut solution. Answers to a particular question may contribute significantly to several of the factors uncovered, or the combinations of attitudes that define a factor may lack any obvious coherence. This was not the case here. The selection of high-loading variables in each case clearly defined the nature of the factor without ambiguity or redundancy.

### **Selection of a variable to represent propensity to vote**

We also had to decide how to measure propensity to vote (the “dependent variable”) in the regression analysis. The survey includes three separate questions which are relevant – certainty of voting in the next general election (on a 1-10 scale), claiming to have voted at the last general election, and claiming to have voted at the last local elections. We could attempt to construct a model predicting each of these in turn, but if there is really (as the first factor analysis suggested) a single underlying motivation that tends to drive all of these, we would learn more if we could find a composite measure encompassing all of them. In effect we surmise that everybody can be placed at a point on a single likelihood of voting scale related to the importance of the election in question – the keenest vote at every election, including local elections, unavoidable circumstances permitting; a little less keen are those who do not bother to vote at local elections but always vote at general elections; less keen still are those who vote at some general elections but not others, depending how important the outcome of that particular election seems to them. Finally at the other end of the scale are those who would never or almost never vote at any general elections. This is of course a simplification, but is one which the data seems to fit.

A composite propensity measure was constructed as a simple four-point scale:

1. Those who claimed to have voted at the last local elections and to be “absolutely certain” (10/10) to vote in an immediate general election (34% of the sample)
2. All those not in category 1 who say they voted at the last (2001) general election (28%)
3. All those not in categories 1 or 2 who rate their likelihood of voting in an immediate general election at 5 or more on the 10-point scale (18%)
4. The remainder, who are those who rarely or never vote (21%)

It will be seen that group 1 alone (34%) represents roughly the same proportion of the population as votes when council election turnout is at its lowest, groups 1 and 2 combined (62%) close to the record low (59%) turnout at the 2001 general election, and groups 1-3 combined (79%) around the turnout in 1992, the last general election where turnout was high. The categories therefore seem to correspond to reasonable distinctions.

However, when a regression was run using the 13 dimensions as independent variables, they were fractionally better at explaining variation on the single 10-point scale than on the composite 4-point scale. ( $R^2$  of 0.324 against 0.319), suggesting that the composite 4-point scale adds nothing to our understanding, and can be discarded. But a simpler composite scale, combining the 10-point scale with the claim to have voted in the last council election (i.e. giving those claiming a likelihood of 10/10 and to have voted in the council election a score of 11) was more closely related to the 12 factors, the regression producing an  $R^2$  of 0.348. All attempts to collapse this scale reduced the explanatory power of the

regression, suggesting that the distinctions were valid and that the 11-point scale is a reflection of a real attitudinal/behavioural characteristic.

**Demographic variables used in regression analyses**

Gender: male/female

Class: social grade A, B, C1, C2, D, E

Region: dummy variables for 11 of the 12 Government Office Regions, with Northern Ireland used as the reference category

Ethnic group: white/other

Work status: whether or not working full time

Number of children in household

Level of education: whether or not a graduate, and whether or not any formal educational qualifications had been achieved.

**Political attitude variables used in regression analyses**

Voting intention: four dummy variables for Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Other voting intentions, leaving “don’t knows” as the reference category

Total satisfaction with the three party leaders (“Leaders”)

Difference between satisfaction with Tony Blair and Michael Howard, i.e. the degree of discrimination between them (“ldrdiff”).

## Detailed regression results

Throughout, \*\*\*=significant at 99.9%, \*\*=significant at 99%, \*=significant at 95%.

**TABLE 1: LINEAR REGRESSION**

*Dependent Variable: Propensity to vote (composite 11-point scale)*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	7.843	0.062		125.93	0.000	***
Efficacy	1.622	0.062	0.467	26.042	0.000	***
Claimed knowledge	0.868	0.062	0.250	13.940	0.000	***
Passive involvement	0.651	0.062	0.187	10.450	0.000	***
Satisfaction	0.476	0.062	0.137	7.642	0.000	***
Communication	0.298	0.062	0.086	4.781	0.000	***
Low impact political bodies	-0.165	0.062	-0.048	-2.649	0.008	**
Confused by numbers	-0.158	0.062	-0.046	-2.540	0.011	*
Politically knowledgeable	-0.077	0.062	-0.022	-1.242	0.215	
Local power greatest	0.064	0.062	0.018	1.031	0.303	
Local misconceptions	-0.056	0.062	-0.016	-0.891	0.373	
High impact of civil service	0.048	0.062	0.014	0.763	0.445	
High impact of government	0.039	0.062	0.011	0.628	0.530	
Organising good causes activist	0.028	0.062	0.008	0.455	0.649	

**$R^2=0.348$**

**TABLE 2: LINEAR REGRESSION**

*Dependent Variable: Propensity to vote (composite 11-point scale)*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	7.843	0.062		125.97	0.000	***
Efficacy	1.622	0.062	0.467	26.051	0.000	***
Claimed knowledge	0.868	0.062	0.250	13.945	0.000	***
Satisfaction	0.476	0.062	0.137	7.645	0.000	***
Passive involvement	0.651	0.062	0.187	10.453	0.000	***
Communication	0.298	0.062	0.086	4.783	0.000	***
Low impact political bodies	-0.165	0.062	-0.048	-2.650	0.008	**
Confused by numbers	-0.158	0.062	-0.046	-2.541	0.011	*

**$R^2=0.346$**

**TABLE 3: LINEAR REGRESSION***Dependent Variable: Propensity to vote (composite 11-point scale)*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error				
(Constant)	4.936	1.757		2.809	0.005	**
Efficacy	1.522	0.063	0.437	24.088	0.000	***
Claimed knowledge	0.722	0.071	0.208	10.097	0.000	***
Age	0.038	0.004	0.207	8.900	0.000	***
Passive involvement	0.589	0.066	0.170	8.987	0.000	***
Satisfaction	0.447	0.062	0.129	7.173	0.000	***
Gender - female	0.502	0.136	0.072	3.695	0.000	***
Communication	0.175	0.064	0.051	2.744	0.006	**
Working Full Time	0.067	0.028	0.048	2.407	0.016	*
Region: South East	0.096	0.121	0.039	0.794	0.427	
Region: Eastern	0.099	0.125	0.033	0.795	0.427	
Region: North East	0.127	0.135	0.030	0.941	0.347	
Region: Scotland	0.090	0.125	0.030	0.721	0.471	
Region: East Midlands	0.082	0.128	0.025	0.641	0.521	
Region: South West	0.041	0.126	0.013	0.323	0.746	
Region: West Midlands	0.012	0.125	0.004	0.096	0.924	
Ethnic minority	0.006	0.066	0.002	0.089	0.929	
Region: North West	-0.023	0.124	-0.008	-0.187	0.852	
Graduate	-0.026	0.048	-0.011	-0.548	0.584	
Low impact political bodies	-0.040	0.065	-0.011	-0.621	0.535	
Region: Wales	-0.053	0.133	-0.013	-0.399	0.690	
Region: York/Humber	-0.041	0.125	-0.013	-0.328	0.743	
No. of children in household	-0.049	0.066	-0.015	-0.745	0.456	
Social grade	-0.038	0.056	-0.015	-0.674	0.501	
Region: London	-0.039	0.124	-0.015	-0.313	0.754	
No formal qualifications	-0.205	0.175	-0.026	-1.175	0.240	
Confused by numbers	-0.108	0.064	-0.031	-1.691	0.091	

**R<sup>2</sup>=0.383**

**TABLE 4: LINEAR REGRESSION***Dependent Variable: Propensity to vote (composite 11-point scale)*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	3.081	0.402		7.658	0.000	***
Voting Intention Labour	2.878	0.223	0.380	12.896	0.000	***
Voting Intention Conservative	3.170	0.255	0.361	12.433	0.000	***
Efficacy	1.177	0.084	0.331	14.072	0.000	***
Voting Intention LibDem	2.921	0.263	0.309	11.127	0.000	***
Age	0.035	0.005	0.187	7.596	0.000	***
Claimed knowledge	0.563	0.084	0.158	6.696	0.000	***
Passive involvement	0.494	0.078	0.143	6.309	0.000	***
Voting Intention Other Party	2.184	0.380	0.140	5.751	0.000	***
Satisfaction	0.366	0.087	0.104	4.195	0.000	***
Gender - female	0.567	0.169	0.080	3.357	0.001	***
leaders	0.105	0.060	0.044	1.756	0.079	
Working Full Time	0.042	0.035	0.030	1.229	0.219	
Communication	0.016	0.077	0.005	0.210	0.834	
ldrdiff	-0.032	0.058	-0.013	-0.559	0.577	
<b>R<sup>2</sup>=0.507</b>						