

# Survey of public attitudes ○ towards conduct in public life 2008

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COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

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# FOREWORD BY CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE, SIR CHRISTOPHER KELLY



I am delighted to publish this report on the Committee's third biennial national survey into public attitudes towards conduct in public life. It was commissioned by the Committee and carried out by BMRB Social Research.

This third survey offers the opportunity to assess public attitudes, expectations and perceptions about the behaviour of those in public life against the baseline data established in 2004 and again in 2006.

This report contains some important new information compared to the previous two surveys. For the first time there are separate chapters on Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales so that we are able to make comparisons between the different jurisdictions. We have also included new questions on two specific areas. The first relates to the integrity of the electoral system, about which the Committee made a number of recommendations in its eleventh report. The second covers the role of the media in the public's perceptions of standards in public life.

Overall the survey tends to show that people's perceptions of standards in public life have been fairly stable over the three surveys. But there remain some worrying trends. For example, 41 per cent of respondents thought that standards had deteriorated over the past few years compared to only 30 per cent in both 2004 and 2006. People are also less satisfied with the way in which government ministers perform their jobs with only 38 per cent thinking that all or most government ministers do not use their power for their own gain compared to 49 per cent in 2006.

The public continue to show high levels of confidence in the honesty of front-line professionals such as doctors and teachers. National politicians whether MPs or ministers continue to languish near the bottom, along with estate agents and tabloid journalists. However, this year we have used a new measure which allows respondents to say how much they trust office holders to tell the truth, rather than simply whether or not they trust them to do so. This greater discrimination suggests a more positive assessment overall with 44 per cent saying that they would trust government ministers a lot or a fair amount to tell the truth. The corresponding figure for MPs is 45 per cent.

In the Committee's recent report on the Electoral Commission we made a number of recommendations to improve the integrity of the electoral system. A large majority of respondents to the survey expressed an overall preference for the system of individual registration currently operating in Northern Ireland rather than the current system of household registration in Great Britain.

The changes to the ethical culture over the last 14 years have, I believe, put in place greater transparency and accountability. Ultimately, however, it is the duty of all public servants to ensure that their behaviour is of the highest standard and that they consider how their own and their organisations' behaviour matches up to the expectations placed upon them by the public. What they can be sure of is that the public has clear and strong views about the standards that those in positions of public trust should be meeting and that it matters greatly that those standards are met.

I would like to thank the Committee's Research Advisory Board under the chairmanship of Dr Mark Philp and the team at BMRB led by Bruce Hayward for their hard work producing this report. I should also like to thank all those members of the public who gave of their time to respond to the detailed and comprehensive questionnaire.

**Christopher Kelly**

# INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a national survey of public attitudes towards the standards of conduct of public office holders in the United Kingdom (UK). The survey was commissioned by the Committee on Standards in Public Life as the third part of a long-term study to track public opinion about standards in public life. The survey was carried out in 2007/08 by BMRB Social Research. BMRB also conducted the benchmark survey across Great Britain in 2003/04, while Ipsos MORI carried out the second survey across the UK in 2005/06. The Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Executive provided financial contributions to enable this survey to be conducted on a UK-wide basis.

## Background and objectives

The Committee on Standards in Public Life was set up in October 1994 by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major MP. Its original terms of reference were:

*'To examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities, and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements which might be required to ensure the highest standards in public life.'*

The terms of reference cover a range of categories of public office holder, encompassing elected and appointed public office holders at national and local level.

On 12 November 1997 the terms of reference were extended by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Tony Blair MP: 'To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements'.

In its First Report in 1995, the Committee drew up the Seven Principles of Public Life, as a statement of the values 'inherent in the ethic of public service'. These Principles have been central to each of the Committee's subsequent reports, which have covered most of the major groups of public office holders. The Seven Principles, which are intended to apply to all public offices, are: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership. The scope of each Principle, as it relates to the conduct of public office holders, is defined by a short explanatory statement. The Seven Principles have been widely adopted by public institutions, and are broadly in line with the most common ethical principles adopted in the 29 OECD countries.

In 2001, it was decided that the Committee should undertake research in order to explore whether the Principles reflected the general public's priorities in relation to the conduct of public office holders, and to gauge public opinion on how well public office holders measured up to the Principles. A benchmark survey was carried out in 2003/04 across Great Britain by BMRB, and a second survey in 2005/06 across the UK by Ipsos MORI. This 2007/08 study is the third survey in this series and is designed as a follow-up to the two previous surveys. In 2005/06, a separate sample of people in Northern Ireland was included in the survey for the first time and the size of the survey sample in Scotland was increased to enable disaggregated results of public attitudes in these countries. In 2007/08, the size of the survey sample was also increased in Wales, so, for the first time, public attitudes can be compared across each of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This report compares findings from the 2007/08 survey in Great Britain with those from the 2005/06 and 2003/04 surveys. It also offers comparisons between the four countries of the UK.

The main aims and objectives of the third survey remain unchanged from the previous two surveys, these being to track:

1. What the public sees as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour on the part of elected and appointed holders of public office.
2. How far the public believes that the behaviour of holders of public office is, for the most part, acceptable or unacceptable.
3. How far the public believes that holders of public office are effectively held responsible and accountable for their conduct.

In addition to addressing these long-standing objectives the 2008 survey also included new objectives concerning people's attitudes and preferences in relation to electoral registration systems, their experiences of recruitment processes and their usage and attitudes in relation to coverage of politics in the media.

The eleventh report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, published in January 2007,<sup>1</sup> focused on reform of The Electoral Commission. The Committee's inquiry took place against a backdrop of continuing public concerns about the arrangements for voter registration and the link between postal voting on demand and a number of high-profile legal cases of electoral fraud. One of the recommendations that the Committee made in the report was that 'A decision should be made and legislation developed to implement a system of individual voter registration immediately following the next General Election or by 2010 at the latest'.

In the light of this focus on the electoral system, it was decided to include a section of questions in the 2008 survey examining people's perceptions of the current system of electoral registration and voting in their own country, and, specifically, to explore their views on the pros and cons of individual voter registration, as currently practised in Northern Ireland, and household registration, as practised across Great Britain.

Since the Committee first embarked on this programme of research in 2002, it has been interested in understanding what influences people's judgements of the conduct of public office holders, and specifically in understanding how external influences such as the media

might have a bearing on the views expressed by respondents. In order to provide further insight into these issues, new questions were included in the survey to explore people's exposure to political news in the media and their attitudes towards the media's coverage of this news.

Previous surveys in this series have examined the issue of fairness in public sector recruitment through general questions designed to explore the importance that people attach to principles such as merit, fairness and efficiency in relation to recruitment for public sector appointments; their views on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in recruitment situations; and their perceptions of how widely the principle of selection on merit is upheld in public life in Britain. Both the 2004 and 2006 surveys identified a widespread belief that proper procedures were frequently not used when recruiting people to public office. In 2008 it was decided to introduce a new set of questions exploring people's actual experiences of recruitment, and particularly of any unfairness in recruitment. It was felt that grounding the research on this issue in people's actual experiences, rather than in their general perceptions, would provide a more accurate and meaningful measure of unfair recruitment practices in the public sector.

## Methodology

The questionnaire for the survey was largely based on the 2003/04 and 2005/06 questionnaires, with further refinements made by the research team at BMRB in consultation with the Committee's Research Advisory Board. Table A (overleaf) shows how the behavioural attributes asked about in the questionnaire correspond to the Seven Principles of Conduct.

In order to better reflect the effects of devolution, several of the questions asked on the previous surveys were extended to cover elected members in the devolved administrations. The additional boost to the Wales sample also allowed a number of questions to be added that were specifically tailored for Welsh respondents. As noted above, new questions were introduced to examine preferences for individual and household electoral registration systems and personal experience of unfairness in recruitment, and to explore exposure to politics in the media and perceptions of media coverage of political issues. In order to keep the questionnaire length to 30 minutes, certain other questions were identified for deletion.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/11thinquiry.aspx>

<b>Table A: Behavioural attributes used in the research</b>	
<b>Behavioural attribute</b>	<b>Which Principle the attribute relates to</b>
They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public	Selflessness
They should not use their power for their own personal gain	Selflessness; Objectivity
They should not take bribes	Selflessness; Integrity
They should own up when they make mistakes	Accountability; Openness
They should explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	Accountability; Openness
They should make sure that public money is used wisely	Fiscal prudence – identified as an important consideration for some respondents in earlier qualitative work and included in all three surveys; not covered by the Seven Principles
They should set a good example for others in their private lives	Private behaviour – identified as an important consideration for some respondents in earlier qualitative work and included in all three surveys; not covered by the Seven Principles
They should tell the truth	Act in an honest manner – identified as an important consideration for some respondents in earlier qualitative work and included in all three surveys. Distinct from ‘Honesty’ Principle, which is concerned with declaring private interests and resolving conflicts of interest
They should be in touch with what the general public thinks is important	Identified as an important consideration for some respondents in earlier qualitative work and included in all three surveys; not covered by the Seven Principles
They should be competent at their jobs	Identified as an important consideration for some respondents in earlier qualitative work and included in all three surveys; not covered by the Seven Principles

The questionnaire was pilot tested in Ealing, West London, in November 2007. Respondents were recruited to a central location and interviewed by members of the research team. A total of 20 interviews were completed. A final version of the questionnaire was then prepared and approved in December 2007 by the Committee and the Committee’s Research Advisory Board.

The main survey was conducted face-to-face in respondents’ own homes using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between January and May 2008. Interviews were carried out by fully trained interviewers from BMRB’s national face-to-face field force. A total of 2,312 interviews with adults aged 18 or over were conducted across the UK: 913 in England,

538 in Scotland, 447 in Wales and 414 in Northern Ireland. The average interview length was just over 30 minutes. Respondents were offered a £10 gift voucher as a ‘thank you’ for taking part in the research.

When fieldwork was closed, a total of 4,590 addresses in 153 postcode sectors had been issued, yielding a total of 2,312 interviews at 4,041 eligible addresses. This represented a response rate at eligible addresses of 57.2 per cent.

At the analysis stage the data were weighted to equalise selection probabilities (design weights) and to take into account differential non-response among survey sub-groups. Full details of the weighting can be found in the appendices.



## Structure of the report

Following this introduction and an executive summary, the report is divided into the following chapters:

1. Overall perceptions of standards in public life
2. Trust in public office holders
3. Expectations and perceptions of national politicians
4. MPs and voting in Parliament
5. Public office holders and accountability
6. Trust in the electoral system
7. Exposure and attitudes to political news coverage
8. Experience of unfairness in recruitment
9. Attitudes in Wales
10. Attitudes in Scotland
11. Attitudes in Northern Ireland

Chapters on the political context and self-reported influences on the survey respondents, together with technical details of the survey methodology, are appended.

## Reporting conventions

The commentary in the following chapters is supported by summary tables and figures. These give the unweighted base of respondents answering the question(s) concerned, both for the sample as a whole and for any sub-groups shown in the table or figure. However, all data presented in the report are weighted. The statistics reported in tables and figures are generally percentages, unless otherwise stated. The symbol '\*' in a table represents less than 0.5 per cent, but not zero which is shown as '0'.

Percentages may not total to 100 per cent because the percentages shown are rounded to the nearest whole number. Similarly, where individual responses shown in a table or figure have been combined in the commentary, and the individual percentages do not add to the combined percentage, this will again be due to rounding. For example, the commentary in Chapter 1, page 1 states that 'Four in ten respondents (40%) rated the standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK as 'quite high' or 'very high' (Figure 1.1)'. The percentages in Figure 1.1 are 38 per cent (quite high) and 3 per cent (very high), but, when combined, the percentage rating standards as either quite or very high is 40 per cent.

Chapters 1-5 cover questions that have been asked in all three of the surveys to date. The findings reported in these chapters are based on the sample of adults in *Great Britain* (excluding Northern Ireland). The Great Britain base is used so that the findings of the 2008 surveys can be compared with those from both the 2006 survey and the 2004 survey, which was conducted in Great Britain only. Results for Northern Ireland are included in these chapters only in comparisons of the 2008 survey results by country of residence.

Readers should note that some questions in these chapters ask respondents for their views about issues concerning standards in public life with respect to the UK as a whole. This gives rise to a number of tables or figures in which judgements about the UK are being reported on the basis of the GB sample.

Chapters 6-8 cover questions that were included in the survey for the first time in 2008. The findings reported in these chapters are based on the sample of adults in the *UK* (including Northern Ireland). The 2008 survey results are compared by country of residence (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

In the country-specific chapters (Chapters 9-11), findings based on adults living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively are compared with those for adults living in the other countries in the UK.

Differences reported in the commentary between subgroups within the sample, or between the 2008 survey and the earlier surveys, are either statistically significant at the 95 per



cent confidence level,<sup>2</sup> or are judged by the researchers to reflect real differences, on the basis of similar findings elsewhere in the study.

### Logistic regression analysis

In order to identify variables that were significant predictors of attitudes towards standards in public life, logistic regression analysis was conducted on a number of relevant dependent variables in the dataset. An ANOVA procedure was used to rank the order of importance of each variable that was reported as being significant in the regression models. Full technical details and outputs of the regression analysis are provided in the Technical appendix.

This analysis identified party political affiliation as a key determinant of attitudes towards standards in public life on all of the variables tested. Age was a relatively important predictor on most of the variables tested. Other influential variables on one or more measures were: newspaper readership; educational attainment; whether or not the respondent said that their answers had been influenced by specific events related to the remit of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; level of exposure to media coverage of politics and political news; gender; and sector of employment.

The sub-group analysis reported in Chapters 1 to 6 and Chapter 8 focuses on the variables listed above, with the exception that analysis by level of exposure to media coverage is covered specifically in Chapter 7, which focuses on exposure and attitudes to coverage of politics in the media.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the support provided during the course of the project by Peter Hawthorne of the Committee's Secretariat. We would also like to thank the Committee's Research Advisory Board, in particular Dr Mark Philp, Jean Martin, Professor Cees van der Eijk, as well as Ceri Smith (Welsh Assembly Government), Neill Jackson (Northern Ireland Administration) and Kirstie Campbell (Scottish Government), for their input and feedback at all stages of the study. We would also like to thank the Kantar Operations project team, interviewers and supervisors for their hard work on the project. Above all, we would like to thank the members of the general public who gave up their time to take part in the survey.

<sup>2</sup> This means that we can be 95% certain that the difference between the results for the subgroups being compared is a true difference, rather than one that has occurred by chance.

# KEY FINDINGS

- i. As in the previous surveys in 2004 and 2006, people rate overall standards of conduct of public office holders in moderately positive terms. However, more people rate standards of conduct overall as 'low' in 2008 than in 2006 and more think that conduct has deteriorated in recent years.
  - Most people think that standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK overall are 'fairly high' (38%) or 'neither high nor low' (38%), but 20 per cent in 2008 rate standards as 'low', compared with 12 per cent in both 2004 and 2006.
  - One in four (25%) people in 2008 think that standards of conduct have improved over the past few years. Four in ten people in 2008 (41%) think that conduct has deteriorated, compared with three in ten (30%) in both 2004 and 2006.
- ii. People continue to show very high levels of confidence in the honesty of front-line professionals, but lower levels of trust in national politicians. However, a new survey measure suggests that confidence may have been underestimated in the past.
  - When asked how much they trust office holders to tell the truth, rather than whether or not they trust them to do so (the measure used in previous surveys), people give a more positive assessment overall. For example, only 27 per cent of respondents said that they trusted government ministers to tell the truth on the previous measure.
  - On the new measure, 44 per cent of respondents said they would trust government ministers 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth, compared with 94 per cent for family doctors, 83 per cent for head teachers and 79 per cent for local police officers. 45 per cent would trust MPs in general 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth, but 62 per cent would trust their local MP to do so.
- iii. People's beliefs in what values should underlie public office have remained similar over the three surveys.
  - While 'Telling the truth' remains the behaviour that people are most likely to value, fewer people in 2008 (47%) rank it among the three most important values than in previous years (53%) and almost as many people in 2008 (44%) choose financial prudence.
  - People are more likely to rank 'being in touch with what the general public thinks is important' as one of the most important values for politicians in 2008 (32%) than in 2004 (28%) or 2006 (27%).
- iv. People are less satisfied with the way in which government ministers perform their jobs in 2008 than in previous years.
  - 22 per cent of people in 2008 think that all or most government ministers tell the truth, compared with 27 per cent in 2006.
  - 38 per cent think that all or most do not use their power for their own gain, compared with 49 per cent in 2006.
  - 20 per cent think that all or most are 'in touch with what the general public thinks is important', compared with 27 per cent in 2006.
- v. People are less confident than in previous years that the authorities are committed to upholding standards of conduct or that public office holders will be punished for doing wrong. The public continues to express greater confidence in the media than in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing.
  - 52 per cent of people are confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards of conduct in 2008, compared with 59 per cent in 2006.

- 33 per cent are confident that public office holders will be punished for doing wrong in 2008, compared with 42 per cent in 2004.
  - 80 per cent are confident that the media will uncover wrongdoing, compared with 39 per cent for the authorities.
- vi. People continue to believe that the national interest and not self-interest should guide MPs when voting in Parliament. The majority is satisfied that most MPs are guided by acceptable influences.
- 94 per cent of respondents thought it reasonable for MPs to vote on the basis of the national interest, compared with 32 per cent who thought the same in relation to what the party leadership would want, and 12 per cent how the MP's family would be affected.
  - Nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) felt that MPs would be influenced by a factor that the respondent considered acceptable, an increase from around half (52%) in 2004.
- vii. Levels of confidence in the electoral registration system are reasonably high, but people are attracted to the greater security and accuracy of an individual registration system.
- Around two thirds (65%) of respondents in the UK sample thought that the electoral registration system in their own country was very or fairly safe from fraud or abuse. However, only 15 per cent felt that the system was 'very safe' and 18 per cent considered the system unsafe.
  - Nearly two thirds of respondents in the UK expressed an overall preference for the individual registration system in Northern Ireland, compared with 30 per cent preferring the household system in Great Britain.
  - Respondents in Northern Ireland were more satisfied than those in Great Britain that their current system was safe, and significantly more likely than those in Great Britain to favour individual registration.
- viii. Despite some perceptions of bias, few people report experiences of unfairness when applying for jobs, whether in the public or other sectors.
- Around one in ten people who had applied for a job in the previous five years felt that the application and selection process for their most recent job application had been unfair. 19 per cent thought that the organisation to which they had applied had been biased towards or against particular types of people and a third (33%) of respondents agreed that 'you needed to know the right people to get the job'.
  - Those who had applied for a job with a public sector employer were more likely to agree that the application process had been handled in a fair way (87%) than those applying to a private firm (78%).
- ix. The amount and type of media that people access are less influential in predicting their attitudes towards standards in public life than other factors, such as their political affiliation and age. However, there is an association between reading only tabloid newspapers and being critical of standards in public life.
- x. People are generally positive about the way in which the media covers political news, with the exception that they are widely critical of the tabloid press, which they see as setting out to tarnish the names of politicians, with little regard for the truth.
- xi. People living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are consistently more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than about standards in the UK as a whole.
- In Wales, 47 per cent of respondents rated standards in conduct in Wales as high, compared with 39 per cent rating standards in the UK as a whole as high. 35 per cent thought that standards were improving in Wales, compared with only 24 per cent who thought that they were improving across the UK.

- In Scotland, 47 per cent of respondents rated standards of conduct in Scotland as high, compared with 42 per cent for the UK. 38 per cent thought that standards in Scotland were improving, compared with 29 per cent for the UK.
- In Northern Ireland, 49 per cent of respondents rated standards overall in Northern Ireland as high, compared with 41 per cent for the UK. 60 per cent thought that standards in Northern Ireland were improving, compared with 45 per cent for the UK.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The aims of the survey

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has monitored public opinion about the standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK since 2002, when it commissioned qualitative research to inform the development of a time series survey which would track public opinion over time. The 2008 survey is the third in the series and follows the baseline survey conducted in 2004 and a second survey conducted in 2006.

The time series sets out to track people's opinions in four main areas:

- What people believe is acceptable and unacceptable in public office: how they understand the responsibilities of those in public office and the values that they should conform to.
- How people believe those in public office behave in office in relation to these values.
- Whether people think that holders of public office are effectively held responsible and accountable for their conduct.
- What people think and experience in relation to specific aspects of the political process and the procedures underlying public life: in 2008 the survey included modules exploring views about the electoral registration system and perceptions of fairness and unfairness in recruitment.

The survey also sets out to explore what influences people's judgments on these issues, including the media, the impact of political devolution and people's political views.

This summary gives an overview of the insights that the 2008 survey provides in relation to these questions.

## Beliefs on what values should underlie public office broadly reflect the Seven Principles and have remained stable over time

The Seven Principles attempt to capture values that are intrinsic to the nature of public office in a modern, representative democracy. It is to be hoped that the citizens of such a democracy would have some sense of what these values are and that the values are aligned with what citizens themselves expect of those in public office. The survey therefore sets out to examine the extent to which citizens recognise these values as important and the extent to which they also see other values as important.

The previous two surveys have shown that the Seven Principles largely succeed in articulating what the public expects of the ethical framework within which those in public office work, but that the public has a wider set of concerns that go beyond the scope of the Principles. These wider concerns include a broader sense of honesty than is implied in the 'Honesty' Principle, as well as attributes such as financial prudence, competence and 'being in touch with what the general public thinks is important'.

We should expect people's beliefs in what values should underlie public office to be reasonably robust: it would be a source of concern if people's sense of these core values fluctuated widely or showed much deterioration over time. That said, we might expect some fluctuation over time, perhaps as a result of events, with different aspects of the values underlying public life given greater or lesser emphasis – for example, putting more emphasis on financial prudence in a period of economic downturn.

It is encouraging, then, that the 2008 survey shows that people's priorities for behaviours considered as extremely important for public office holders (Table 3.1, p. 27) have shown little variation over the three surveys. This is a positive finding, which suggests that a widespread set of convictions about the character of public office exists in the UK.

At the same time, when people are pressed on the relative importance of different components of this scheme of values, fewer people in 2008 prioritise honesty as one of the most important values and more emphasise politicians 'being in touch with what the general public thinks is important'. 'Telling the truth' remains the value that people are most likely to choose as one of among the three most important, but almost as many people in 2008 choose financial prudence.

### **Different groups in the population prioritise different behaviours, but within a broad area of agreement**

There is some variation among members of the public in terms of the behaviours that they consider most significant. Women are more likely than men to stress the prudent use of public money and the importance of politicians being in touch with what the public considers important, while men place more emphasis on not taking bribes. Younger people put more weight than older people on financial prudence and dedication to the public service, while older people are more likely to emphasise honesty. Tabloid readers are more likely than broadsheet readers to emphasise financial prudence and honesty, whereas broadsheet readers give far greater prominence to not taking bribes.

These differences suggest that different groups in the population prioritise different behaviours, but they may also suggest that people interpret the scope of the question in different ways: for example, those prioritising issues related to financial impropriety may be interpreting the question within a relatively narrow ethical framework, while those emphasising 'being in touch with what the public thinks important' may be thinking of a broader definition of conduct in public life. Either way, while there are differences of emphasis between groups in the population, these differences exist within a broad area of agreement as to the significance of the various behaviours.

### **Satisfaction with standards of conduct in public office has declined, possibly reflecting a broader sense of dissatisfaction with government**

While we would expect people's sense of the core values underlying public office to remain relatively stable over time, their views on how far holders of public office live up to those values are more likely to change over time, and to be subject to influence by contingent and temporary circumstances.

There is evidence in the 2008 survey to suggest that satisfaction with standards of conduct in public office has declined since the last survey was conducted in 2006. More people rate standards of conduct of public office holders overall as 'low' in 2008 than in 2006 (Figure 1.2, p. 16) and more think that conduct has deteriorated over the past few years (Figure 1.6, p. 18). They are less confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards of conduct (Figure 5.2, p. 46) or that public office holders will be punished for doing wrong (Table 5.1, p. 48). And they are less satisfied with the way in which government ministers perform their jobs – in particular in the extent to which they keep in touch with what people think is important, tell the truth and use their power for their own gain (Table 3.6, p. 33).

How deep this sense of growing dissatisfaction goes remains to be seen. It could be a reflection of a temporary national mood, but could equally signal a loss of confidence in the institutions of government and their occupants. It is possible that the decline in satisfaction is associated with a broader sense of dissatisfaction with the government – that some people are, consciously or otherwise, projecting their perceptions of how the government is performing onto their views about standards of conduct in public life. This is a plausible explanation, given that the survey asks for people's judgements of national politicians on a wide range of criteria that go beyond ethical behaviour to cover matters such as competence, financial prudence and the extent to which the government is 'listening to the people'.

Our analysis shows that party political affiliation is a particularly strong determinant of people's perceptions of standards of conduct in public life. Being affiliated to a party per se is related to having more positive views about standards of conduct, while, among those with an affiliation, Labour supporters are most positive, supporters of the Liberal Democrats less so and supporters of the Conservatives less so still. It is possible that growing support for the Conservatives might (at least in part) explain the decline in satisfaction since 2006. However, it is worth noting that levels of satisfaction have declined among supporters of each of the three main parties, as well as among those with no affiliation. While it is not possible to say to what extent people's opinions on standards in public life at any one time are influenced by their perceptions of the government, it will be important in future surveys to ensure that measures are included to help separate one from the other.



## Levels of trust in public office holders to tell the truth are unchanged, but a new measure suggests they may have been underestimated in the past

The extent to which people say they trust public office holders to tell the truth has remained relatively stable over the three surveys. People continue to show very high levels of confidence in the honesty of front-line professionals and somewhat lower levels of trust in senior public officials, while national politicians are among the professions least trusted to tell the truth. Local politicians continue to be more widely trusted than national politicians, while tabloid journalists remain the least likely of the 17 professions covered in the survey to be trusted to tell the truth.

The survey also shows that, when people are given the chance to say how much they trust office holders to tell the truth, rather than to say simply whether or not they trust them to do so (the question used in 2004 and 2006 and in a number of other surveys of political trust), they give a more positive assessment overall. So, for example, while only 27 per cent of respondents said that they trusted government ministers to tell the truth when given a choice of answering 'Yes' or 'No', 44 per cent said that they trusted ministers 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth when given a choice of four points on a scale. While this is still hardly a ringing endorsement, it suggests that levels of confidence have been under estimated in previous surveys, and that the new question provides for a more nuanced and realistic reflection of people's opinions.

## People living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are consistently more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than about standards in the UK as a whole

The findings for the devolved administrations confirm the tendency for people to be more positive about institutions that are more local and known to them. While beliefs about what values should underlie public office were similar across the four countries, people in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all rated overall standards of conduct as higher in their own country than in the UK as a whole, and were more likely to think that standards were improving in their own country. They also tended to think that their own ministers were

more likely to exhibit positive behaviours than ministers in the UK government, especially in relation to 'being in touch with what the public thinks is important' and 'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public'. The Northern Ireland findings showed significant improvements over those reported in 2006, suggesting that there might be a substantial peace dividend for political institutions.

## Most people believe that MPs are guided by reasonable criteria when voting in Parliament

There is also some encouragement to be had in the findings about MPs (discussed in Chapter 4) in which the contrast is between what MPs *should* take into account when voting in Parliament (the values underlying public office) and what they actually do take into account. Here, again, the values themselves seem to be stable across the different surveys, but the beliefs about how MPs *would* behave have changed, with more thinking that they would base their decision on what would benefit the people living in the country as a whole, and fewer thinking that they would vote on party lines. Overall, people's judgments of how MPs actually behave have come closer to their beliefs about how they should behave: in 2008 two thirds of respondents (63%) thought that the voting behaviour of most MPs would be guided by criteria that they deemed acceptable, up from 52 per cent in 2004.<sup>3</sup>

## People tend to trust the electoral registration system in Great Britain, but are attracted to the greater security and accuracy of an individual registration system as used in Northern Ireland

Two further areas that relate to people's confidence in their political (in the broadest terms) environment that are examined in this survey are trust in the system of electoral registration, and trust in recruitment processes. The first asks respondents about their confidence in the electoral registration system, with respect to its security from abuse and fraud. Levels of confidence here are reasonably high – 65 per cent – with only a very small proportion (5%) expressing strongly negative attitudes. But respondents were also asked for a judgment about whether the individual system of registration in Northern Ireland or the household system in Great Britain was preferable. Here, despite thinking the system in Great Britain more

<sup>3</sup> Note that a questionnaire change in 2008 means that the findings from the two surveys are not wholly comparable (see page 42).



convenient and likely to lead to more people registering, a clear majority (63%) felt that the system in Northern Ireland would be preferable overall, being less susceptible to fraud and more accurate. This suggests that, while there is some confidence in procedures, people do have views as to how those procedures might be rendered more secure.

### **Despite some perceptions of bias, few people report experiences of unfairness when applying for jobs, whether in the public or other sectors**

The second area of confidence concerns the fairness of employment practices in the UK. In the past we have asked general, attitude-based questions about whether people believe recruitment in the public sector is fair. This has elicited a 'cronyism' response, with two thirds of respondents thinking that one needed to know someone to get a job in the public sector rather than getting it through the correct procedures and on the basis of impartial criteria.

In 2008 we asked about people's actual experiences, and about how they felt about them. While there is some tension in the results, the new questions suggest a high level of general confidence in the fairness of employment decisions in the private and public sectors among those who have had recent experience of these. Eight in ten respondents (80%) felt that the application and selection process for their most recent job application had been fair, and only 11 per cent that it had been unfair. Having said this, nearly twice as many (19%) thought that the organisation to which they had applied had been biased towards or against particular types of people and a third (33%) agreed that 'you needed to know the right people to get the job'.

People's experiences of applying for jobs did not differ to any notable extent according to the sector for which they were applying, although those applying for a job with a public sector employer were more likely to agree that the application process had been fair (87%) than those applying to a private firm (78%).

### **The influence of the media on attitudes is hard to characterise, but there is a clear relationship between reading only tabloid newspapers and being critical towards conduct in public life**

The questions about people's access to political information in the media show that TV and radio news is the most common source used, with 77 per cent using one or other 'often' in a typical week. Reading about politics in newspapers and tuning in to radio or TV programmes about political and social issues are both less prevalent, with about 30 per cent doing each regularly. Usage of websites which focus on politics is much less common: only 4 per cent of respondents said that they visited these websites often, and 12 per cent at least sometimes, in a typical week.

An analysis of the number of sources that people use on a regular basis suggests that about 20 per cent of adults are quite disengaged from political news (not using any of the sources regularly), and about 17 per cent actively engaged (using three or four of the sources regularly).

There is no clear and consistent relationship between exposure to media coverage and attitudes towards standards in public life. But our analysis does suggest that those who are disengaged are more critical than others of standards in general, but less critical about specific issues, such as whether wrongdoing is punished or how safe the electoral registration system is. Conversely, those who are actively engaged, regularly seeking information from two or more media sources, are more critical than those who engage with one source only, typically just following the news on the TV or radio. It may be that being more exposed to media coverage of wrongdoing in public life leads to a more critical viewpoint, but we cannot prove this relationship from the survey results.

There is a stronger association between reading only tabloid newspapers and being critical of standards in public life. Those who read *only* these newspapers have more critical attitudes than those who read only broadsheets, both broadsheets and tabloids, or no newspaper at all. Again, this is not to say that it is the reading of tabloid newspapers that leads to their readers having critical attitudes.

We also find that respondents who have specific events in mind which relate to behaviour in public life are more critical about standards. Given that their awareness of these events will often have come from the media, it is again possible to detect – but not to prove – a link between media coverage of politics and attitudes towards conduct in public life.

At most, we can conclude from the findings that there are certainly associations between the type and amount of exposure that people have to media coverage of news and politics and their attitudes towards standards in public life, but we cannot say that there is a causal effect between the two.

It is interesting to note in this context that tabloid only readers are not quick to defend the way in which their own newspapers cover politics. Indeed, their confidence in the veracity and political utility of their newspapers is not much greater than the negative attitude towards tabloids held by broadsheet readers (Table 7.3, p. 62). What is striking about this table is that the divergence of opinion between tabloid and broadsheet readers in assessing all newspapers comes in relation to positive statements – broadsheet readers are more positive about their paper helping accountability, being fair in representation and being informative, than are tabloid readers about broadsheets; and tabloid readers are more positive about tabloids on these issues than are broadsheet readers. But their views are very close on negative statements: both sets of readers rate tabloids very poorly as looking for any excuse to tarnish politicians, focusing on negative stories and being more interested in getting a story than telling the truth; and they are equally positive (c. 80%) about broadsheets avoiding these behaviours.

One conclusion to be drawn might be that people do not accept without question what they read. They are critical of their sources. So, while those who read only tabloids have a tendency to be more critical about politicians, they are also quick to distance themselves from their newspaper's treatment of politics.

# 1. OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

## 1.1 Summary

The previous two surveys in this series have shown that most people in Great Britain have a neutral or guardedly positive view of the overall standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK. Very few respondents in the previous surveys rated standards overall as being 'very high' and only a small minority thought that they were low. The third survey showed a broadly similar pattern. However, the proportion of people rating standards of conduct as 'low' has nearly doubled, from 12 per cent in both 2004 and 2006 to 20 per cent in 2008. Similarly, the proportion of people thinking that standards have deteriorated over the past few years has increased from 30 per cent in both 2004 and 2006 to 41 per cent in 2008.

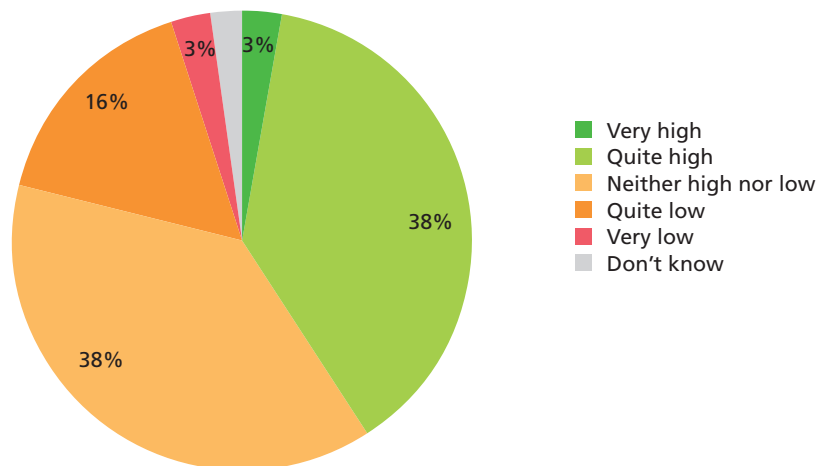
Respondents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were all more likely to rate standards as higher in their country of residence than they did for the UK as a whole.

## 1.2 Overall standards of conduct of public office holders

This opening chapter of the report examines people's overall perceptions of the conduct of public office holders, exploring how these compare with those reported in the previous two surveys and how people themselves perceive standards in public life to have changed in recent years.

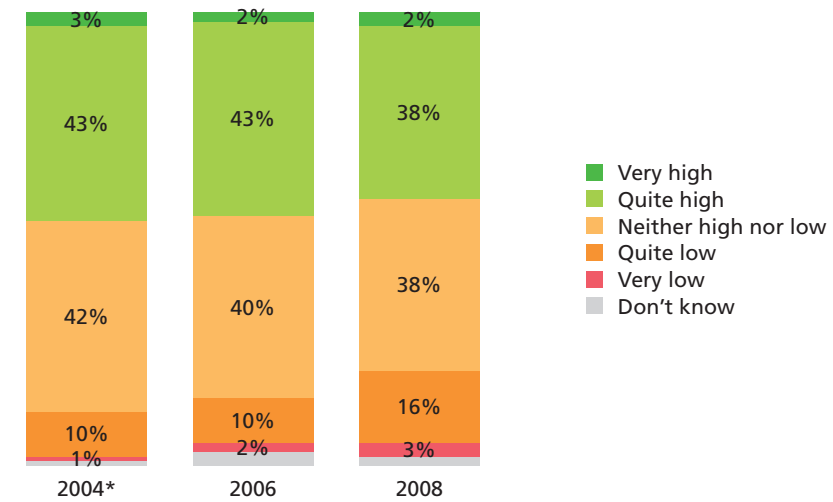
Four in ten respondents (41%) rated the standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK as 'quite high' or 'very high' (Figure 1.1). Almost as many (38%) said that they were 'neither high nor low'. Two in ten (20%) rated standards as 'low'. Very few people felt that standards were either 'very high' or 'very low'.

Figure 1.1 Overall rating of standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK



Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

**Figure 1.2 Overall rating of standards of conduct 2004-2008**



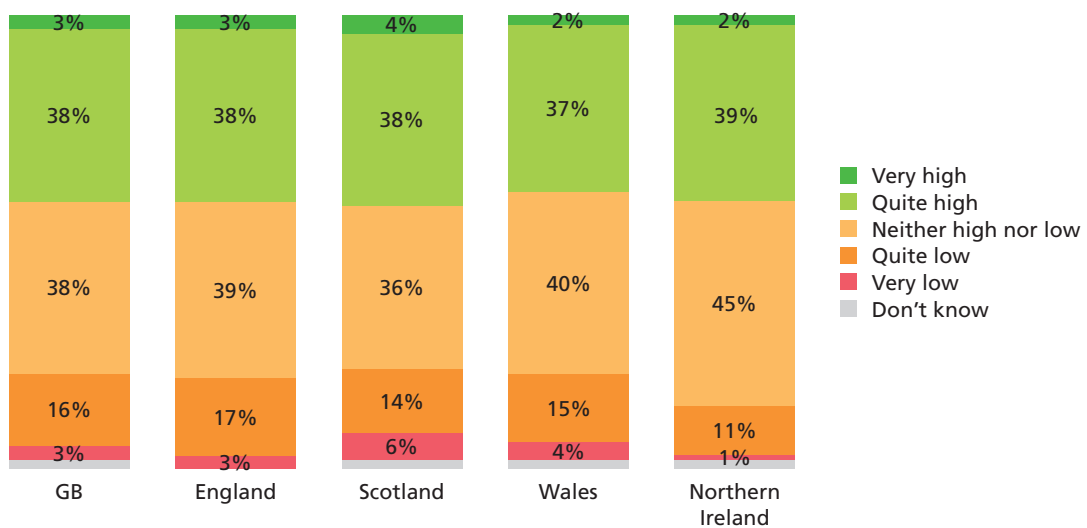
\*2004 question asked about Great Britain not UK

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,096), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

People rate standards of conduct less positively in 2008 than in either 2004 or 2006 (Figure 1.2). The proportion rating standards of conduct as 'high' in 2008 has dropped slightly since the previous survey in 2006, while the proportion rating standards as 'low' has nearly doubled, from 12 per cent in both 2004 and 2006 to 20 per cent in 2008.

Attitudes towards standards of conduct in the UK were broadly similar across the four countries. In particular, there was very little variation between the views of those living in England, Wales and Scotland. Adults in Northern Ireland had slightly different views. While they were no more or less likely than adults in Great Britain to rate standards as 'high', they were much less likely to rate standards as being 'low' (12% compared to 20% across Great Britain).

**Figure 1.3 Overall rating of standards of conduct by country**



Base: All respondents: England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

### 1.3 How perceptions of overall standards vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis was used to explore which of a range of variables had a significant influence on the way in which people in Great Britain rated standards of conduct in public life overall.<sup>4</sup> Party affiliation was the most influential variable in terms of predicting whether people rated standards as high, followed by newspaper readership and age. Educational attainment, politics coverage in the media and gender were also influential.

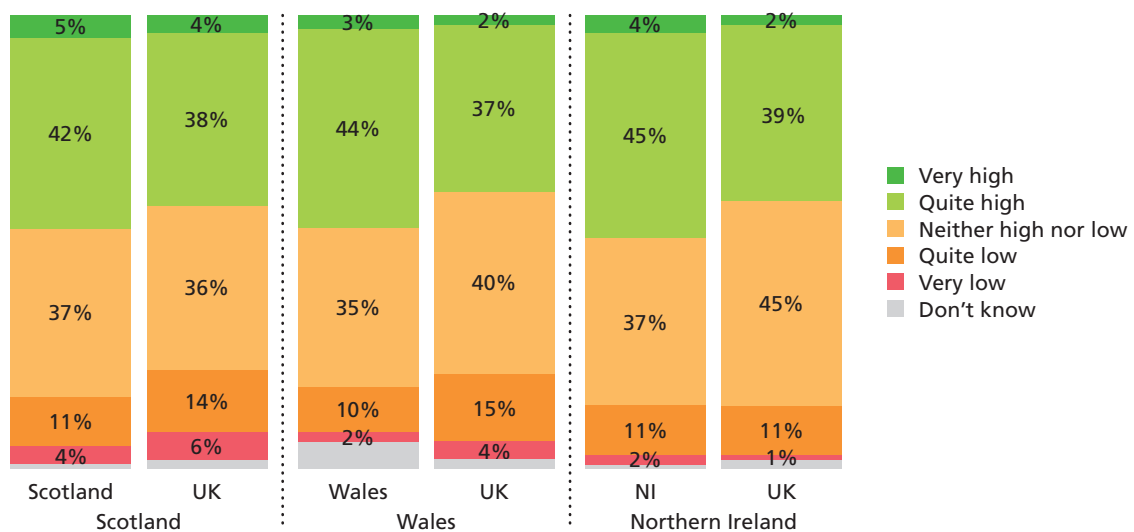
- **Party affiliation:** Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters (51% and 49% respectively) were more likely to rate standards as high than Conservative supporters (38%). Conservative supporters were more likely than those with no party affiliation (31%) to rate standards as high.
- **Newspaper readership:** Those who read only broadsheet newspapers (51%) were more likely than those who did not read a newspaper (44%) to rate standards as high. Those who read a tabloid newspaper only were less likely than any other readership group (including non-readers of newspapers) to rate standards of conduct as high: only 32 per cent of tabloid only readers rated standards as very or quite high.

- **Age:** Younger people were more likely than those aged 45 and over to rate standards as being high. 50 per cent of 18-24s and 46 per cent of 25-34 year olds rated standards as high, compared with 37 per cent of 45-54s, 32 per cent of 55-64s and 36 per cent of 65+.
- **Educational attainment:** There was a positive relationship between having a high level of qualification and rating standards as high. 51 per cent of those with a degree level (Level 4) qualification or higher rated standards as high, compared with 34 per cent of those with a Level 2 qualification or lower.
- **Gender:** Men were more likely than women to rate standards as being high (43%, compared with 38%).

### 1.4 Overall standards of conduct of public office holders in the devolved administrations

When asked specifically about standards in their country of residence, respondents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were all more likely to rate standards higher in their country of residence than they did for the UK as a whole. These results are looked at in more detail in the country-specific chapters (Chapters 9-11).

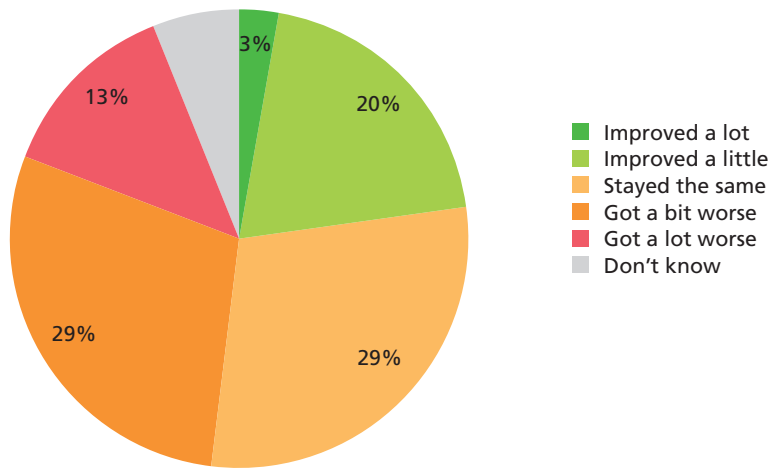
Figure 1.4 Overall rating of standards: UK and own country



Base: All respondents: Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

<sup>4</sup> See the technical appendix for details and outputs of this analysis.

**Figure 1.5 How standards in the UK compare with a few years ago**



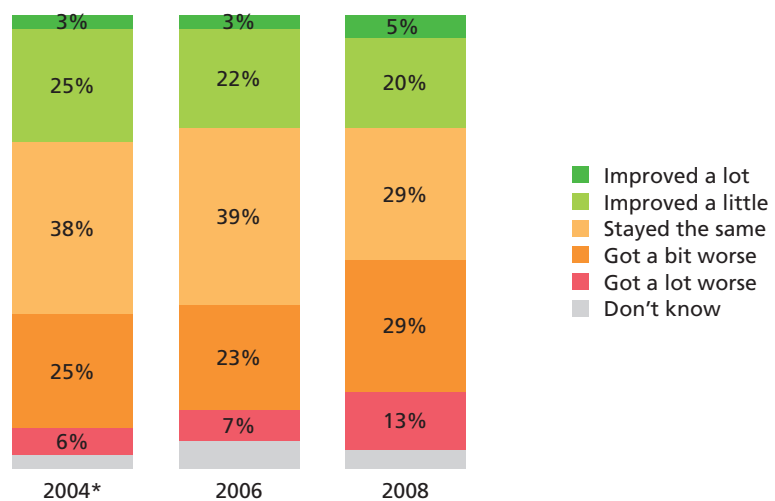
Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

### 1.5 How standards compare with a few years ago

Adults in Great Britain are more likely to think that standards of conduct among public office holders have deteriorated in the past few years than to think they have improved (Figure 1.5). A quarter of adults (25%) thought that standards had improved, with 5 per cent feeling that they had improved a lot. Around three in ten (29%) thought they had stayed the same and 41 per cent thought that they had got worse, with 13 per cent saying that they had got a lot worse.

These findings are again less positive than in 2004 or 2006, with the proportion of people thinking that standards had deteriorated over the past few years increasing from 30 per cent in both 2004 and 2006 to 41 per cent in 2008 (Figure 1.6).

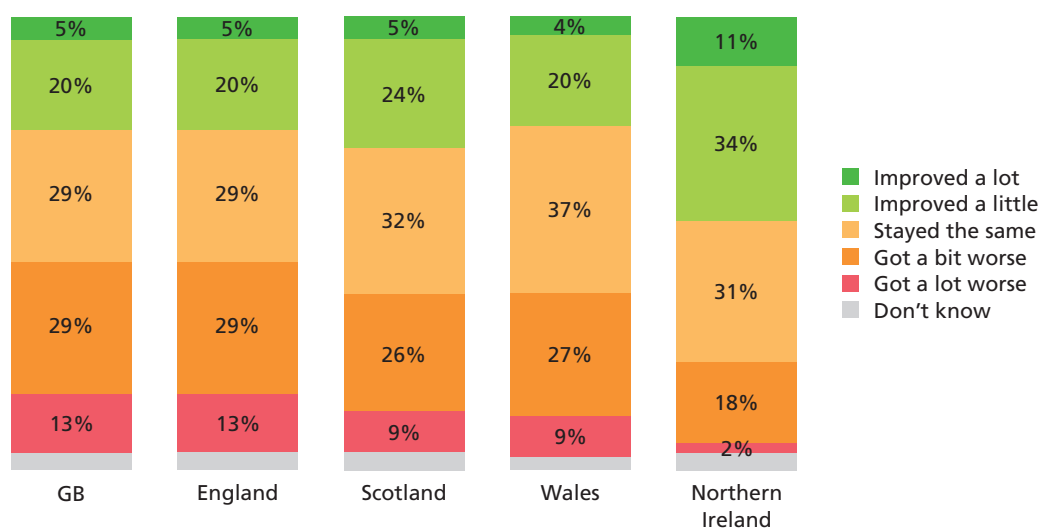
**Figure 1.6 How standards in the UK compare with a few years ago 2004-2008**



\*2004 question asked about Britain not UK

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,096), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

**Figure 1.7 How standards in the UK compare with a few years ago by country**



Base: All respondents: England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

Among adults living in Scotland and Wales, perceptions of how standards of conduct in the UK had changed over the past few years were similar to those of adults in Great Britain as a whole, with more people thinking standards had got worse than thought they had got better (Figure 1.7). In contrast, adults in Northern Ireland were more likely to say that standards had improved (45%) than to say that they had deteriorated (20%).

The findings in 2008 for Northern Ireland indicate that there has been a significant positive shift in the attitudes of people there since 2006. First, the findings suggest that the proportion of respondents in Northern Ireland who rate standards overall in the UK as high has increased, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion that rate them as low. While these changes are not statistically significant, they do seem to buck the trend towards more negative perceptions in 2008 among people in Great Britain. As a result, respondents in Northern Ireland, while no more or less likely than those in Great Britain to rate UK standards overall as high, are significantly less likely to rate them as low in 2008. This contrasts with the position in 2006, when respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in Great Britain to rate standards overall in the UK as high, and more likely to rate them as low.

Further evidence of a positive shift in attitudes is seen in the finding that 45 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland think that conduct in the UK has improved in the past few years, significantly higher than the 29 per cent who thought that conduct had improved in 2006. This supports the view that the higher ratings of standards overall among those in Northern Ireland in 2008 represent a genuine change since 2006.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.6 How perceptions of changes in standards vary within the Great Britain population

Multivariate analysis conducted on this question found that party political affiliation was again the most influential predictor of people's views on whether standards had improved or deteriorated. Age and whether or not people said that they had specific standards-related events in mind when answering the questions were also relatively influential, while newspaper readership had some influence. Educational attainment had some bearing on whether or not people said that standards had got worse, but was not a particularly influential variable in this case.

<sup>5</sup> There were some differences in the profile by educational attainment between the 2006 and 2008 samples in Northern Ireland. However, our analysis indicates that the changes observed in attitudes are not attributable to these differences.



Party affiliation was a very significant predictor of people's views on whether or not standards of conduct had improved or got worse. In particular, Labour supporters (37%) were considerably more likely than Conservative supporters (17%) to say that standards had improved. Among Conservative supporters, 53 per cent felt that standards had got worse, compared with 28 per cent of Labour supporters.

- Age: Younger people were again more positive than older people in their perceptions of whether or not standards of conduct had improved or declined. Among 18-24 year olds, 35 per cent thought that standards had improved and 25 per cent that they had got worse. 25-34 year olds were slightly less positive: 29 per cent thought that standards had improved and 32 per cent that they had got worse. In contrast, more than half of those aged 55 and over (51%) thought that standards had got worse, compared with only 21 per cent who thought that they had got better.
- Influence of recent events: Respondents who said that their opinions were informed by specific standards-related events were less likely than those who did not mention any of these events to say that standards had improved (19% vs. 29%) and more likely to say that they had got worse (50% vs. 36%).<sup>6</sup>

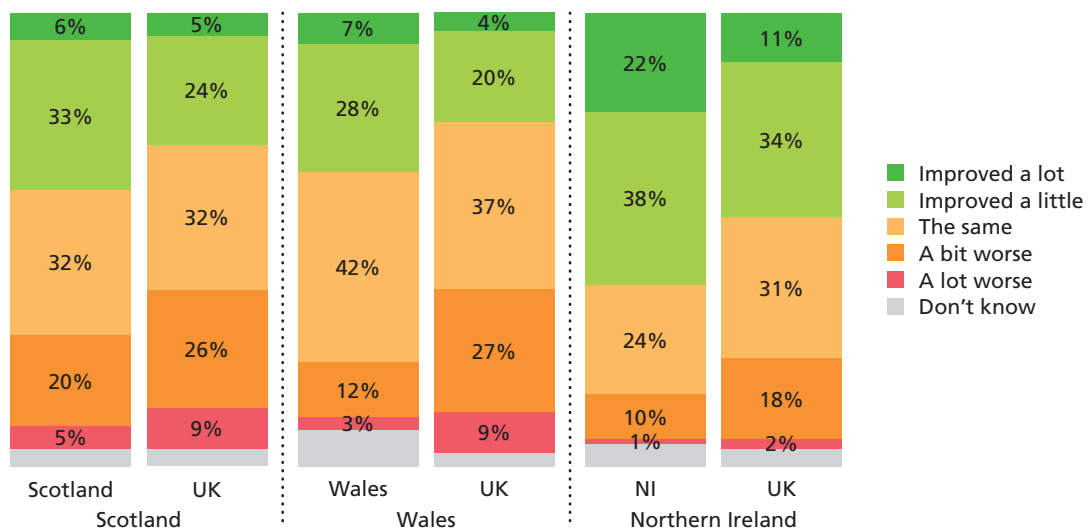
- Newspaper readership: Tabloid only readers were particularly likely to think that standards had deteriorated (50%), compared with 35 per cent of broadsheet only readers, 40 per cent of readers of both broadsheets and tabloids and 37 per cent of non-readers.

### 1.7 How standards compare with a few years ago in the devolved regions

Respondents in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland were also asked how they felt standards of conduct in their country of residence compared with a few years ago.

The findings, shown in Figure 1.8, are quite different from those relating to perceptions of standards of conduct in the UK as a whole. In each country there was net support for the view that standards had improved in the previous few years. The results in Northern Ireland are again particularly striking: six in ten respondents (60%) felt that standards of conduct had improved in Northern Ireland relative to a few years ago, compared with just one in ten who felt that they had deteriorated. These results are looked at in more detail in the country-specific chapters (Chapters 9-11).

**Figure 1.8 How standards in the UK compare with a few years ago: UK and own country**



Base: All respondents: Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

<sup>6</sup> Events that respondents mentioned were subsequently coded according to whether they represented activities that would potentially fall within the remit of the Committee.

## 2. TRUST IN PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS TO TELL THE TRUTH

### 2.1 Summary

*As previous surveys – both in this series and elsewhere – have shown, front-line professionals, such as family doctors, head teachers, judges and local police officers, are more widely trusted to tell the truth than other types of public official. Senior public officials, such as senior managers in the NHS and senior civil servants, are less widely trusted to tell the truth, while national politicians are among the professions least trusted to tell the truth. The proportions of respondents saying that they trusted the various professions to tell the truth were similar to those recorded in 2004 and 2006.*

*The proportion of respondents who said that they trusted front-line professionals ‘a lot’ or ‘a fair amount’ to tell the truth was 94 per cent for family doctors, 83 per cent for head teachers and 79 per cent for local police officers. In contrast, 44 per cent trusted government ministers and 45 per cent MPs, although 62 per cent said that they would generally trust their local MP to tell the truth.*

### 2.2 Introduction

In each of the three surveys respondents have been asked to say, for each of 17 professions, which they would generally trust to tell the truth and which they would not. This question has been included in the survey to enable the main survey findings to be set in a broader context, showing how public office holders of different types compare with other professionals in terms of the confidence that the general public has in them to tell the truth.

One criticism that could be levelled at this question is that it only allows respondents to choose between two response options – either they generally trust those in the profession to tell the truth or they do not. For the 2008 survey it was decided to introduce an alternative version of the question, whereby respondents were asked to rate how much they trusted each of the professions to tell the truth using a four point scale (‘Trust a lot’; ‘Trust a fair amount’;

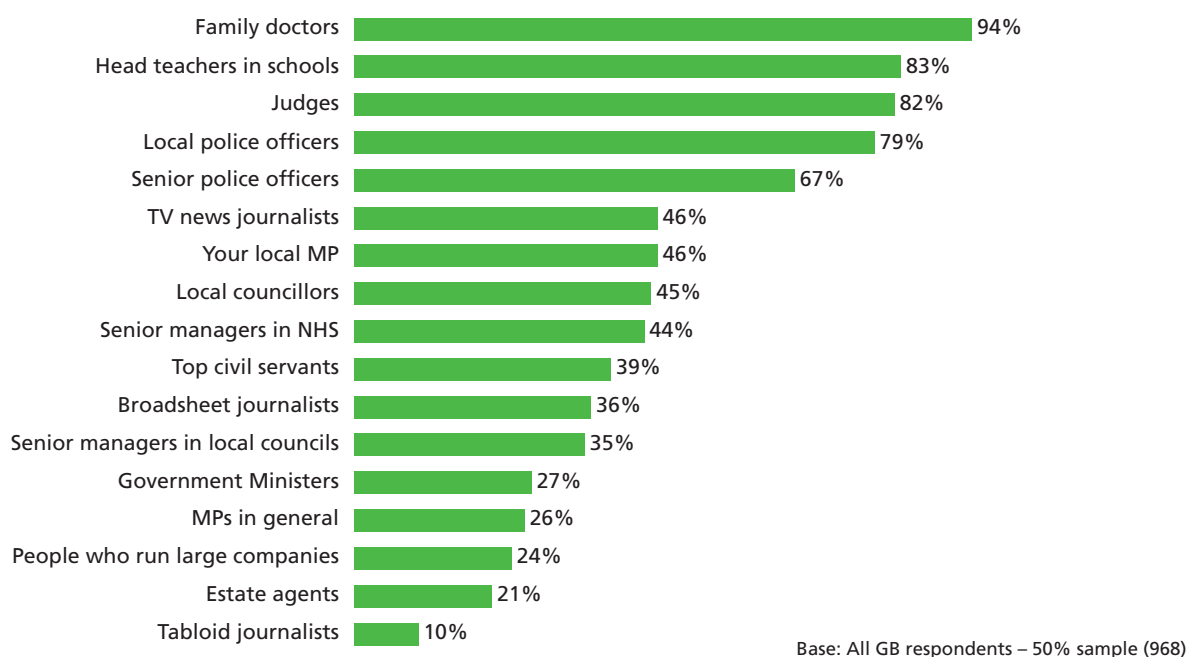
‘Do not trust very much’; and ‘Do not trust at all’). In order to ensure that comparisons could still be made with the earlier surveys, a split sample approach was used with a random half of respondents being asked the question used in 2004 and 2006 and half being asked the new question.

### 2.3 Trends over time

Figure 2.1 shows the proportion of respondents in 2008 who said that they would generally trust people from different professions to tell the truth. These data are based on the half of the 2008 sample who were asked the question used in the previous two surveys.

The findings are very similar to those reported in the previous surveys. They show that front-line professionals, with whom the public has more direct contact, such as family doctors, head teachers, judges and local police officers, are more trusted to tell the truth than other types of public officials. Senior public officials, such as senior managers in the NHS and senior civil servants, are less widely trusted to tell the truth, while national politicians are among the professions least trusted to tell the truth. Just as people are more likely to trust public office holders who are at the front-line of service delivery to tell the truth, so more people would trust their local MP and local councillors to tell the truth than would trust national politicians. Each type of journalist included among the professions covered in the survey was trusted to tell the truth by less than half of respondents, with tabloid journalists the least likely of the 17 professions to be trusted to tell the truth, by only 10 per cent of respondents.

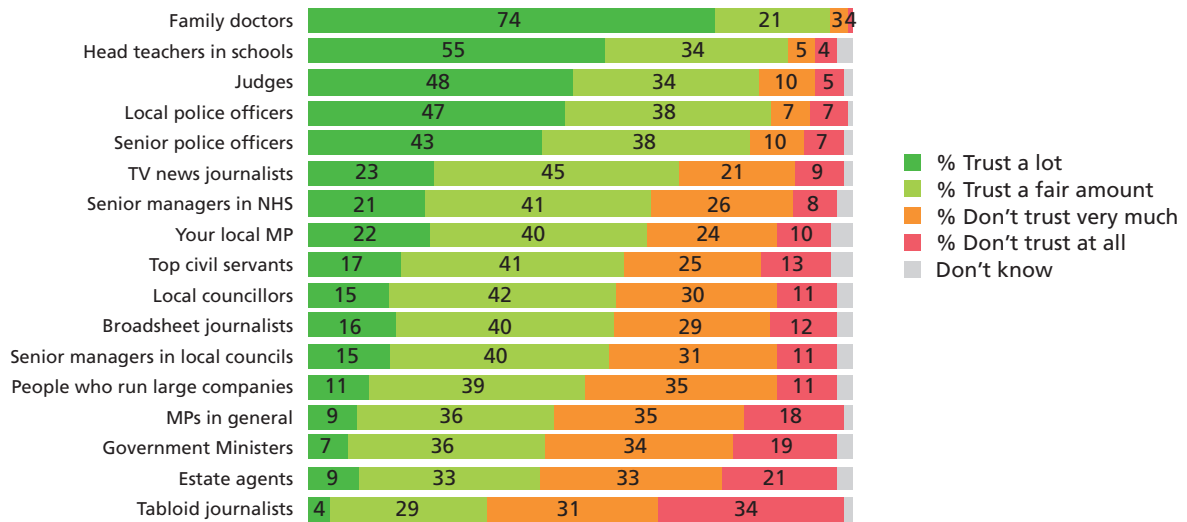
Table 2.1, which presents the results from the 2008 survey alongside those from the previous two surveys, shows that there has been very little change in the results over time. It should be noted that the apparent increase in trust for government ministers does not represent a statistically significant change.

**Figure 2.1 Trust in professions to tell truth****Table 2.1: Trust in professions to tell the truth over time**

	2004 %	2006 %	2008 %
Family doctors	92	93	94
Head teachers in schools	84	84	83
Judges	80	81	82
Local police officers	77	77	79
Senior police officers	68	69	67
TV news journalists	49	51	46
Your local MP	47	48	46
Local councillors	41	43	45
Senior managers in NHS	44	43	44
Top civil servants	37	37	39
Broadsheet journalists	38	39	36
Senior managers in local councils	35	36	35
Government Ministers	24	23	27
MPs in general	27	29	26
People who run large companies	24	24	24
Estate agents	20	24	21
Tabloid journalists	7	9	10

Base: 2004 (1,097) & 2006 (1,446) – All GB respondents; 2008 (968) – GB respondents (50% sample)

**Figure 2.2 Trust in professions to tell truth (4 point rating scale)**



Base: All GB respondents – 50% sample (968)

### 2.4 How far people trust public office holders to tell the truth

Figure 2.2 shows the 2008 survey results for the second version of the question, which used a four point rating scale. The rank order of the groups is based on a mean score for each group, derived by allocating a score of 100 (Trust a lot), 67 (Trust a fair amount), 33 (Do not trust very much) and 0 (Do not trust at all) to each response.

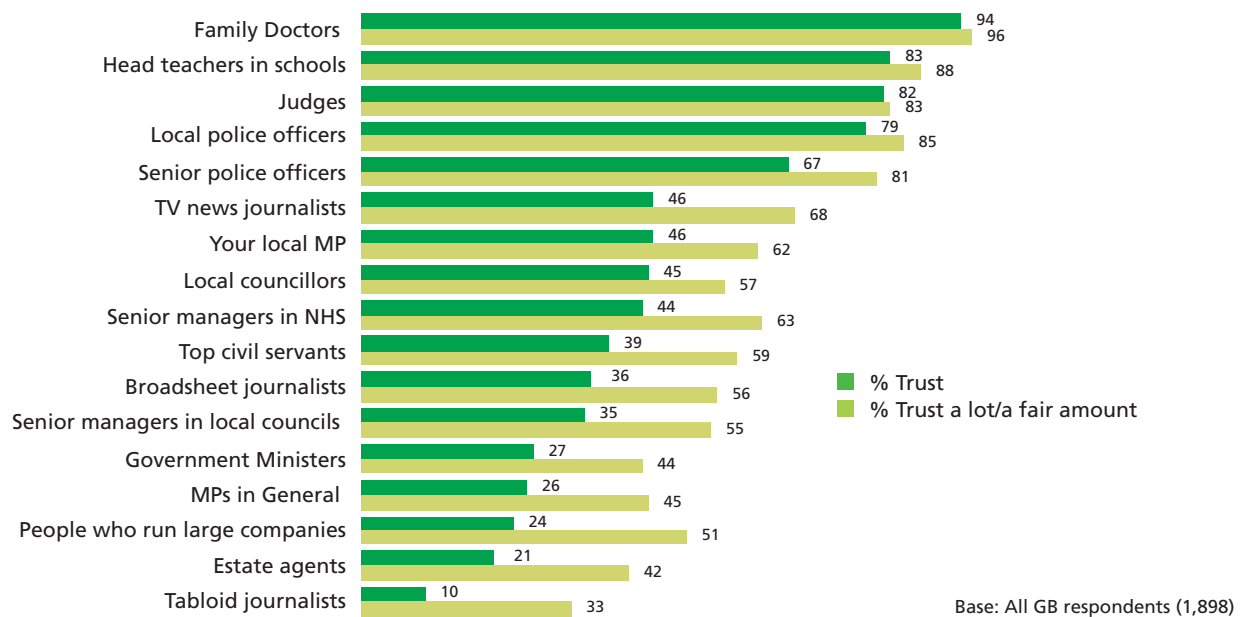
The findings are similar to those from the original question in terms of how far each profession is trusted to tell the truth relative to others, with the professions ranked in a similar order on the two measures.

The proportion of respondents who said that they trusted front-line professionals ‘a lot’ or ‘a fair amount’ to tell the truth was 94 per cent for family doctors, 83 per cent for head teachers and 79 per cent for local police officers. In contrast, 44 per cent trusted government ministers, and 45 per cent MPs, to tell the truth, although 62 per cent said that they would generally trust their local MP to tell the truth. Around four in ten respondents (42%) would generally trust estate agents, and a third (33%) tabloid journalists, to tell the truth.

Figure 2.3 compares the results for the two versions of the question. The chart shows the proportion of respondents who were asked the original version of the question saying that they generally trusted a profession to tell the truth alongside the proportion asked the second version who said that they trusted the same profession to tell the truth ‘a lot’ or ‘a fair amount’.

The comparison shows that the four point scale provides a more positive result than the two point option for all professions, with the degree of improvement tending to increase the lower the score on the first measure. This suggests that, when asked to answer on a two point scale, respondents who are in doubt will often default to saying that they ‘don’t trust’ a profession to tell the truth, when, in fact, they may have a reasonable level of trust in the profession to tell the truth. For most professions, between a quarter and a third of respondents who would say that they generally ‘don’t trust’ a profession to tell the truth would say that they trusted the profession at least ‘a fair amount’ on the four point scale.

Figure 2.3 Trust in professions to tell truth: 2 point vs. 4 point scale



Judged against this version of the question, trust in public office holders to tell the truth appears to be more widespread than the original question suggested. Each of the groups of senior public office holders included at the question was trusted 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth by more than half of respondents, as were local councillors (57%) and the respondent's local MP (62%). While only 26 per cent of respondents who were asked the original form of the question said that they generally trusted MPs to tell the truth, and 27 per cent that they trusted government ministers to tell the truth, these figures increased to 45 and 44 per cent respectively when based on the proportion saying that they trusted them 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth.

Among the media groups included in the question, 68 per cent trusted TV news journalists to tell the truth 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' (compared with 46% on the original measure), while 56 per cent trusted broadsheet journalists to tell the truth and 33 per cent trusted tabloid journalists to tell the truth (compared with 36% and 10% respectively).

Patterns of trust were similar across the four countries of the UK. However, as in 2006, respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in England, Scotland or Wales to say that they trusted local or senior police officers to tell the truth, and somewhat less likely to say that they trusted judges to do so. Adults in Northern Ireland were also less likely to

say that they trusted their local MP to tell the truth 'a lot' (11%), particularly when compared with those in England (23%), although the proportions trusting their local MP to tell the truth at least a fair amount were similar across the four countries. Respondents in England tended to express more trust in the media to tell the truth than those elsewhere in the UK.

Among other sub-groups within the sample variations in levels of trust in the different professions did not follow any consistent pattern.

As we have seen, the comparison between the two questions shows that the four point scale provides a more positive result than the two point option. This suggests that, when asked to answer on a two point scale, respondents who are in doubt will often default to saying that they 'don't trust' a profession to tell the truth, when, in fact, they may have a reasonable level of trust in the profession to tell the truth. It is reasonable to conclude from the findings that the use of a two point scale exaggerates the extent to which people in public life are not trusted to tell the truth, while the use of a four point scale provides for a more nuanced and realistic reflection of people's opinions and, for this reason, is a more appropriate construct for use in future surveys.

# 3. EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF NATIONAL POLITICIANS

## 3.1 Summary

People's views of how national politicians should behave and the priority that they attach to specific behaviours have remained similar since the survey was first conducted in 2004. The public regards all of the behaviours covered in the survey as important, but places particular emphasis on basic honesty, financial prudence and selfless dedication to public service. 'Telling the truth' remains the single most important consideration, while private behaviour is seen as less important than what politicians do in their public role.

Like the previous surveys, the 2008 survey suggests a mismatch between how people think national politicians should behave and what they think happens in practice. While people rate MPs slightly more positively than government ministers, both groups fall short of what people expect of them on all of the dimensions covered in the survey. The gap between what people think politicians should do and what they think they do in practice is at its largest in relation to:

- telling the truth;
- making sure that public money is used wisely;
- being in touch with what the general public thinks is important;
- and owning up to mistakes.

Satisfaction with the conduct of government ministers has declined on a number of measures in the period since the last survey was conducted. This is particularly noticeable in relation to ministers keeping in touch with what people think is important, telling the truth and using their power for their own gain.

Respondents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all tended to think that their own executive ministers were more likely to exhibit the positive behaviours than ministers in the UK government.

## 3.2 Introduction

As has been noted in the introduction to this report, this research set out to establish what people see as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour by elected and appointed public office holders, and how far they believe that the behaviour of public office holders is acceptable or unacceptable. Within the first of these aims, the research seeks to establish how far the Seven Principles of Public Life reflect the public's own priorities.

A set of questions was established in the baseline survey to address these aims. Respondents were first asked to say, in relation to ten behaviours, how important they thought it was for public office holders to exhibit these behaviours, and which they felt were the most important. They were then asked to say what proportion of public office holders they felt exhibited these behaviours.

The behaviours concerned were drawn up with reference to the Seven Principles and the qualitative research findings from Stage 1 of the programme of research.<sup>7</sup> The aim was to be able to assess and compare what behaviours people think are important and how they perceive public office holders to behave, in relation both to values implied by the Principles and values that emerged as important in the qualitative research.

<sup>7</sup> GRAHAM, J., O'CONNOR, W., CURTICE, J. and PARK, A. (2002) 'Guiding Principles: Public Attitudes towards Conduct in Public Life', London: National Centre for Social Research ([http://www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/pages/publications/conduct\\_in\\_public.pdf](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/pages/publications/conduct_in_public.pdf)) (accessed 29th August 2008).



In the 2004 and 2006 surveys respondents were asked these questions in relation to both elected and appointed office holders. Because the previous surveys indicated that people made little distinction between appointed and elected officials in their judgements of what behaviours were important, it was decided to ask these questions only in relation to national politicians in 2008.

In a further change from the earlier surveys, respondents in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were asked to rate the conduct of ministers in the relevant devolved administration and of ministers in the UK government, to allow for an assessment of whether people made distinctions between these two groups. Those in England were asked to rate the conduct of MPs and of ministers in the UK government, as in previous surveys.

The findings relating to these questions are reported in this chapter.

### 3.3 Expectations of national politicians

Respondents were given a pack of shuffle cards,<sup>8</sup> each showing one of the ten behaviours, and were asked to place each card on a section of a board to show how important they thought it was that national politicians did the things shown on the card. The response options available were:

- Extremely important
- Very important
- Quite important
- Not very important
- Not at all important

All respondents were asked to answer the question in relation to MPs and government ministers. Those in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were also asked to consider the equivalents in the devolved administrations.

The behaviours covered in this question represent attributes that people would be expected to think of as being important for politicians to exhibit. It is no surprise, then, that nine of the ten behaviours were rated as 'extremely' or 'very' important by more than 80 per cent of respondents.

While all of the behaviours are seen as important, people do differentiate between them. Figure 3.1 shows that basic honesty, financial prudence and acting selflessly and for the public good are key priorities. Exemplary private behaviour is the least important of the ten attributes, but is still considered extremely important by a third of respondents and at least very important by two thirds.

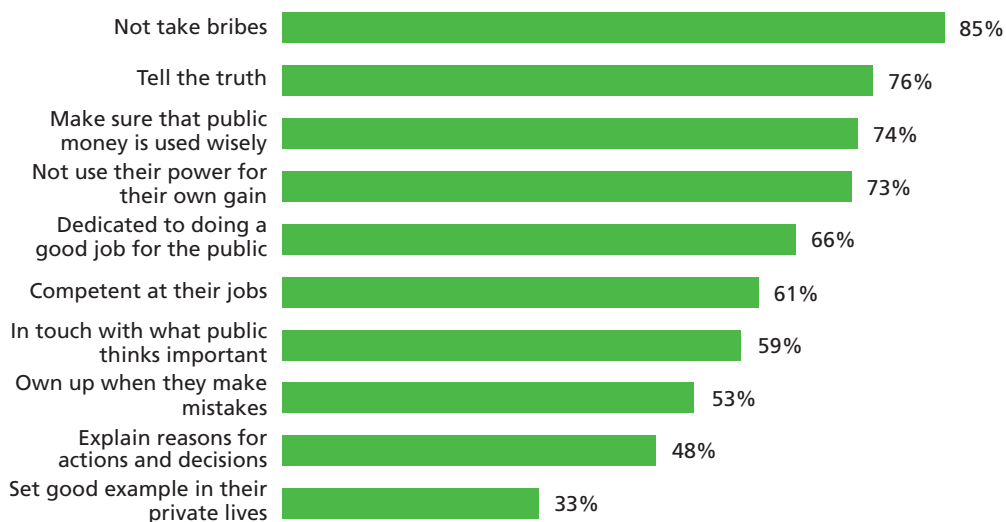
Table 3.1 shows that people's priorities have not changed over the four years since the survey was first conducted. Honesty, prudence and selflessness have remained their primary concerns throughout the lifetime of the survey. There is some indication that people are increasingly attaching importance to national politicians explaining the reasons for their actions and decisions and being in touch with the public's priorities. However, these behaviours still rank relatively low among the ten behaviours that the survey covers.

People's priorities are similar whichever part of the UK they live in (Table 3.2). The order in which people prioritise the behaviours varies only slightly between the four countries. The most notable difference between the countries is that, relative to other parts of the UK, those in Northern Ireland set greater store by dedication to public service. Respondents in Northern Ireland and Wales were also more likely than those in either England or Scotland to regard the way in which national politicians conducted their private lives as being extremely important.

<sup>8</sup> Small cards containing statements, which the interviewer shuffles before handing them to a respondent so that the statements are presented in a random order. The respondent then indicates his/her responses by sorting the cards into piles or on to a board showing a number of response options.



**Figure 3.1 Behaviours considered extremely important for public office holders**



Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

**Table 3.1: Behaviours considered extremely important 2004-2008**

	2004 %	2006 %	2008 %
They should not take bribes	88	85	85
They should tell the truth	75	75	76
They should make sure that public money is used wisely	73	72	74
They should not use their power for their own personal gain	72	73	73
They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public	64	63	66
They should be competent at their jobs	58	62	61
They should be in touch with what the general public thinks is important	56	52	59
They should own up when they make mistakes	55	52	53
They should explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	43	45	48
They should set a good example for others in their private lives	31	28	33

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,097), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

**Table 3.2: Behaviours considered extremely important by country**

	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	NI %
They should not take bribes	84	90	89	85
They should tell the truth	75	80	82	82
They should make sure that public money is used wisely	73	74	79	74
They should not use their power for their own personal gain	73	72	76	73
They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public	65	69	69	77
They should be competent at their jobs	61	57	66	63
They should be in touch with what the general public thinks is important	58	57	67	63
They should own up when they make mistakes	52	58	64	65
They should explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	48	47	53	55
They should set a good example for others in their private lives	33	32	42	45

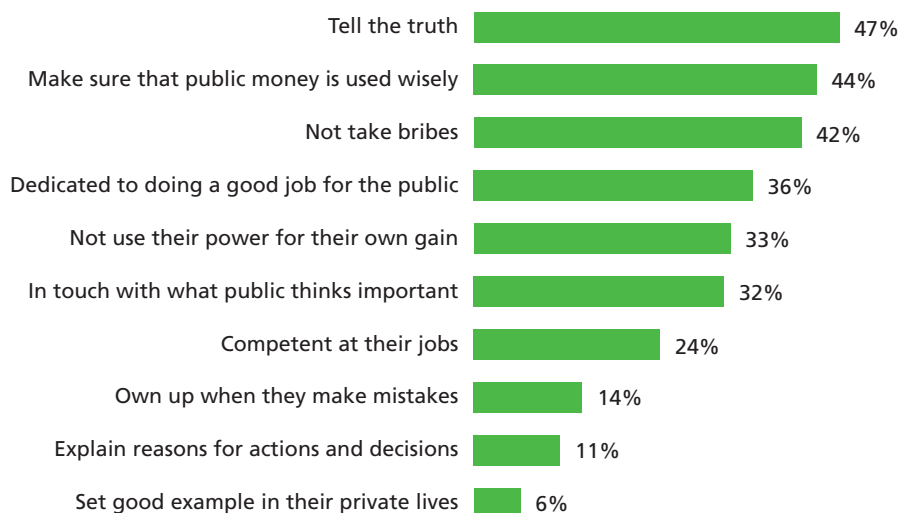
Base: All respondents: England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

Having sorted the cards to show how important they thought each behaviour was, respondents were given back the cards that they had rated as 'extremely important' and asked to pick out the *three* that they felt were most important.<sup>9</sup>

The rank order of the behaviours changes slightly when based on this measure, but the overall pattern of the findings remains similar. Honesty, prudence and selflessness remain the key criteria on which people are likely to judge national politicians, but 'telling the truth' emerges as the single most important consideration. 'Being in touch with what the general public thinks is important' emerges as a relatively higher priority when based on this measure than when based on the previous question.

An analysis of these findings across the three surveys (Table 3.3) again suggests that people's priorities have remained broadly stable over the period since the survey was first conducted. However, fewer people in 2008 prioritise 'telling the truth' as one of the most important values (47%, compared with 53% in both 2004 and 2006) and more emphasise politicians being in touch with what the public thinks is important (32%, compared with 28% in 2004 and 27% in 2006). While 'telling the truth' remains the value most likely to be chosen among the three most important in 2008, almost as many people (44%) choose financial prudence.

<sup>9</sup> If the respondent had rated only three characteristics as 'extremely important', these were coded automatically as the three most important. If the respondent had selected fewer than three as 'extremely important', any rated 'extremely important' would be coded automatically as among the three most important, with further attributes needed to make up the three most important chosen from those rated as 'very important' and, if necessary, 'quite important', etc.

**Figure 3.2 Three most important behaviours for public office holders**

Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

**Table 3.3: Three most important behaviours 2004-2008**

	2004 %	2006 %	2008 %
They should tell the truth	53	53	47
They should make sure public money is used wisely	43	46	44
They should not take bribes	46	42	42
They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public	37	36	36
They should not use their power for their own personal gain	34	36	33
They should be in touch with what the general public thinks is important	28	27	32
They should be competent at their jobs	23	25	24
They should own up when they make mistakes	17	15	14
They should explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	12	13	14
They should set a good example for others in their private lives	5	6	6

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,097), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

**Table 3.4: Three most important behaviours by country**

	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	NI %
They should tell the truth	46	52	47	55
They should make sure public money is used wisely	44	41	44	43
They should not take bribes	41	50	44	38
They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public	36	40	39	53
They should not use their power for their own personal gain	33	38	34	27
They should be in touch with what the general public thinks is important	33	21	30	27
They should be competent at their jobs	25	19	21	16
They should own up when they make mistakes	13	16	18	14
They should explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	11	10	9	13
They should set a good example for others in their private lives	7	4	4	6

Base: All respondents: England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

The ranking of the behaviours by country (Table 3.4) reinforces the finding that people's priorities are broadly similar across the four countries within the UK. However, the particular emphasis placed by people in Northern Ireland on dedication to public service is again evident here: 53 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland chose 'They should be dedicated to doing a good job for the public' as one of the three important behaviours, second only to telling the truth (which 55% included among the top three), while this statement was ranked only fourth of the ten by respondents in each of the other countries. Among respondents in Scotland, honesty emerges as particularly important, with telling the truth (52%) and not taking bribes (50%) the two behaviours most likely to be included in the three most important. There were some differences in the relative priorities of other sub-groups within the sample. The following were the most notable differences:

- **Gender:** Not taking bribes was the behaviour most likely to be chosen among the three most important by men (by 48%), but only the fifth most likely to be chosen by women (by 36%). The highest priority for women was ensuring that public money was used wisely. 48 per cent of women chose this among the three most important criteria, compared

with 39 per cent of men. Being in touch with what the public considers important was also more of a priority for women than for men. It ranked third in women's priorities (chosen by 38%), but sixth for men (chosen by 26%).

- **Age:** Younger people set more store by financial prudence and dedication to public service than older people, who were more concerned with honesty. Among 18-24 year olds and 25-34 year olds, making sure that public money was used wisely was the most likely attribute to be chosen among the three most important (by 52% and 57% of respondents respectively), and being dedicated to doing a good job for the public the second most likely to be picked (by 42% and 41% respectively). Among those aged 35-64, telling the truth was the top priority (chosen by 51%). Those aged 65 and over were most likely to select not taking bribes (also chosen by 51%), which was ranked second among those aged 55-64 and third by those aged 35-54, but only sixth by those aged under 35.

- Newspaper readership: Not taking bribes was the behaviour most likely to be chosen among the three most important by those who read broadsheet newspapers only (by 57%), but was less of a priority for tabloid only readers, chosen by 40 per cent. Tabloid only readers were more likely than broadsheet only readers to prioritise financial prudence (45% choosing this among the top three behaviours, compared with 36% of broadsheet only readers). Telling the truth was the highest ranked behaviour among tabloid only readers (50% of whom included it among the three most important behaviours).

### 3.4 Perceptions of the behaviour of national politicians

After they had assessed the relative importance of the ten behaviours for national politicians, respondents were asked to say what proportion of politicians they felt exhibited these behaviours. In the previous two surveys all respondents were asked at this question to rate the performance of MPs and, separately, that of government ministers. As noted earlier, a different approach was adopted in 2008. In order to explore whether people made distinctions between ministers in the devolved administrations and those in the UK government, respondents in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were asked to rate the conduct of these two groups. Those in England were asked to rate the conduct of MPs and of ministers in the UK government, as in previous surveys.

This chapter reports on people's perceptions of ministers in the UK government and the perceptions of MPs among adults in England. The views of respondents in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales on the conduct of ministers in the relevant devolved administration are reported in the chapters devoted specifically to the findings for these administrations (Chapters 9-11).

#### 3.4.1 Perceptions of the behaviour of ministers in the UK government

Table 3.5 shows, for each of the ten behaviours, the proportion of ministers in the UK government that respondents thought exhibited the behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

Broadly speaking, the results reflect those seen in the previous two surveys. Taken as a whole, they present government ministers in a relatively unflattering light.

While only a minority of people think that ministers are overtly corrupt, as many as 21 per cent do think that at least half of ministers take bribes. This could be seen as disappointing, particularly when added to the 20 per cent who say that they do not know whether or not ministers take bribes.

On each of the other dimensions, less than half of respondents felt that most or all ministers exhibited the positive behaviours. As in the previous surveys, ministers performed particularly badly on owning up to making mistakes (only 10 per cent felt that all or most ministers did this) and relatively poorly on being in touch with what the public think is important, telling the truth, explaining their reasons for actions and decisions, and making sure that public money is used wisely.

<sup>10</sup> In the table, two of the statements used in the questionnaire ('They take bribes' and 'They use their power for their own gain') have been translated to positive attributes ('They do not take bribes' and 'They do not use their power for their own gain'), in order to make for easier comparison with the other attributes. In presenting the data in this way, the assumption has been made that a respondent who said that a few government ministers take bribes would have said that most government ministers do not take bribes, had the original statement been expressed as a positive attribute (and similarly for the second concerning abuse of power).

**Table 3.5: Perceptions of UK government ministers**

	All/most %	About half %	A few/ none %	Don't know %
They do not take bribes	59	10	11	20
They are dedicated to doing a good job for the public	42	28	28	2
They are competent at their jobs	38	31	27	4
They do not use their power for their own personal gain	38	21	35	6
They set a good example for others in their private lives	36	25	32	8
They make sure public money is used wisely	26	29	41	4
They explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	26	22	47	5
They tell the truth	22	28	44	5
They are in touch with what the general public thinks is important	20	28	49	3
They own up when they make mistakes	10	14	71	4

Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

Table 3.6 shows these results alongside the equivalent results from the 2004 and 2006 surveys. It should be noted that, in 2004, respondents were not explicitly offered a 'Don't know' option. This was introduced in 2006 and retained in 2008 and explains the increase in the proportion of respondents answering 'Don't know' in 2006 and 2008. This means that the findings from 2008 are comparable with those from 2006, but not with those from 2004.

Looking at just the figures from the 2006 and 2008 surveys, it is evident that people's perceptions of the behaviour of government ministers have become less positive over the past two years. This is particularly noticeable in relation to ministers 'being in touch with what people think is important', 'telling the truth' and 'using their power for their own gain'. The proportion of respondents who thought that at least half of government ministers were in touch with public priorities has declined from 58 per cent in 2006 to 48 per cent in 2008, the equivalent figures for telling the truth being 58 and 50 per cent, and for not using power for personal gain, 66 and 59 per cent. There have been smaller declines for the other behaviours. Not all of the differences are statistically significant, but there is an overall sense that satisfaction with the conduct of government ministers has declined in the period since the last survey was conducted.

This decline may reflect a genuine sense among people that conduct is becoming worse, and may represent a response to standards issues that have arisen and come to the attention of the media and the public since the last survey was conducted. It is possible that the decline in satisfaction is more a reflection of the 'mood of the country' and of the fact that the popularity of the government at the time when the survey was conducted was at a relatively low ebb. Further analysis and future surveys may throw light on the validity of either or both of these explanations.

**Table 3.6: Perceptions of UK government ministers 2004-08**

		All/most %	About half %	A few/ none %	Don't know %
They do not take bribes	2008	59	10	11	20
	2006	63	9	7	21
	2004	77	10	9	3
They are dedicated to doing a good job for the public	2008	42	28	28	2
	2006	46	30	22	2
	2004	41	34	24	*
They are competent at their jobs	2008	38	31	27	4
	2006	42	32	22	4
	2004	39	36	23	1
They do not use their power for their own personal gain	2008	38	21	35	6
	2006	49	17	29	5
	2004	47	19	33	1
They set a good example for others in their private lives	2008	36	25	32	8
	2006	38	25	28	8
	2004	41	29	30	1
They make sure public money is used wisely	2008	26	29	41	4
	2006	29	31	34	5
	2004	28	34	38	1
They explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	2008	26	22	47	5
	2006	23	29	44	4
	2004	30	26	43	1
They tell the truth	2008	22	28	44	5
	2006	27	31	38	4
	2004	28	29	42	*
They are in touch with what the general public thinks is important	2008	20	28	49	3
	2006	27	31	39	3
	2004	23	35	42	*
They own up when they make mistakes	2008	10	14	71	4
	2006	10	18	69	3
	2004	10	17	72	1

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,097), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)



### 3.4.2 Perceptions of the behaviour of MPs

As noted above, respondents in England only were asked to assess MPs against the ten behavioural measures. Table 3.7 shows, for each of the ten behaviours, the proportion of MPs that respondents in England thought exhibited the behaviour.<sup>11</sup>

The results for MPs are broadly similar to those for government ministers, but MPs are rated slightly more positively than ministers.<sup>12</sup> This pattern was also found in the baseline survey in 2004, but was less apparent in the 2006 survey, when the ratings of MPs and ministers were much more similar.

The largest differences between perceptions of MPs and those of government ministers relate to being in touch with the public's priorities, being dedicated to serving the public and telling the truth. In each case MPs were rated more positively than government ministers. Six

in ten respondents (60%) thought that at least half of MPs were in touch with what the public thinks is important, compared with less than half (48%) who felt that the same applied to government ministers. The equivalent figures for being dedicated to doing a good job for the public were 76 and 70 per cent, and for telling the truth, 56 and 50 per cent.

The behaviours on which MPs are rated more positively than government ministers are all ones on which perceptions of government ministers have deteriorated in 2008. They are also relatively high priorities for the general public. 'Telling the truth' is the behaviour that people are most likely to include as one of the three most important of the ten behaviours; 'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public' ranks fourth out of the ten; and 'being in touch with what the public think is important', although it ranks only sixth, has become more important for people in 2008.

**Table 3.7: Perceptions of MPs**

	All/most %	About half %	A few/ none %	Don't know %
They do not take bribes	61	11	9	19
They are dedicated to doing a good job for the public	49	27	22	2
They are competent at their jobs	38	35	22	5
They do not use their power for their own personal gain	41	23	30	6
They set a good example for others in their private lives	37	26	29	8
They make sure public money is used wisely	29	29	38	3
They explain the reasons for their actions and decisions	27	26	43	5
They tell the truth	26	30	38	5
They are in touch with what the general public thinks is important	28	32	38	3
They own up when they make mistakes	10	17	68	5

Base: All England respondents (913)

<sup>11</sup> Two of the statements used in the questionnaire ('They take bribes' and 'They use their power for their own gain') have again been translated into positive attributes ('They do not take bribes' and 'They do not use their power for their own gain'), in order to make for easier comparison with the other attributes.

<sup>12</sup> The results shown in the report are not directly comparable because those for government ministers are based on respondents across Great Britain and those for MPs on respondents in England only. However, a comparison of the results for government ministers and MPs based on respondents in England only shows the same pattern.

Public perceptions of the standards of behaviour set by MPs and government ministers varied to some extent among different groups in the population. Generally speaking, confidence in the behaviour of national politicians was somewhat higher than average among those who read just broadsheet newspapers and those with higher education qualifications. These findings reflect the findings of the previous surveys in the series and those of other studies on political attitudes.

Perceptions of both MPs and government ministers tended to be more positive among Labour supporters, and to a lesser extent, Liberal Democrat supporters, than among Conservative supporters and those with no political affiliation. Men tended to have slightly higher opinions of national politicians than women, while young adults (aged 18-24) tended to be somewhat more positive than older adults (in particular those aged 55 and over).

### 3.5 Gap analysis

Thus far this chapter has examined how important people think it is for national politicians to exhibit a range of behaviours and the extent to which they believe that ministers in the UK government and MPs display these behaviours. By looking at the relationship between these two measures, it is possible to identify where the largest gaps exist between what people expect of national politicians and how well they think that politicians deliver against these expectations.

Figures 3.3 (for government ministers) and 3.4 (for MPs)<sup>13</sup> present such a 'gap analysis'. In each case, the perceived importance of each behaviour (the vertical axis)<sup>14</sup> is plotted against the perceived performance (the horizontal axis).<sup>15</sup> The figure is then divided into four quadrants:

- behaviours plotted in the top right quadrant are those which people perceive as particularly important and on which they rate performance as relatively good;

- behaviours plotted in the bottom right quadrant are those which people perceive as relatively unimportant and on which they rate performance as relatively good;
- behaviours plotted in the bottom left quadrant are those which people perceive as relatively unimportant and on which they rate performance as relatively poor;
- and behaviours plotted in the top left quadrant are those which people perceive as particularly important, but on which they rate performance as relatively poor.

The behaviours plotted in the *top left* quadrant (important behaviours, but poor ratings) represent the greatest cause for concern, and are key priorities for improvement, since they are areas of behaviour where the gap between expectations and delivery is at its largest.

For example, in Figure 3.3:

- 'Telling the truth' appears in the top left quadrant, because most respondents (76%) considered it 'extremely important' for government ministers to tell the truth, but only a small proportion felt that all or most government ministers did tell the truth (resulting in a net rating of -21%). It is therefore a high priority for improvement.
- 'Setting a good example for others in their private lives' appears in the bottom right quadrant: it has a relatively good net rating (+4%), but the public sees it as relatively unimportant. It is therefore a low priority for improvement.
- 'Not using their power for their own gain' appears in the top right quadrant: like 'telling the truth' it is widely seen as 'extremely important' (by 73%). However, it has a relatively good rating (+4), so is less of a priority for improvement than 'telling the truth'.

<sup>13</sup> The data for MPs are based on respondents in England only, since only those in England were asked to rate the performance of MPs.

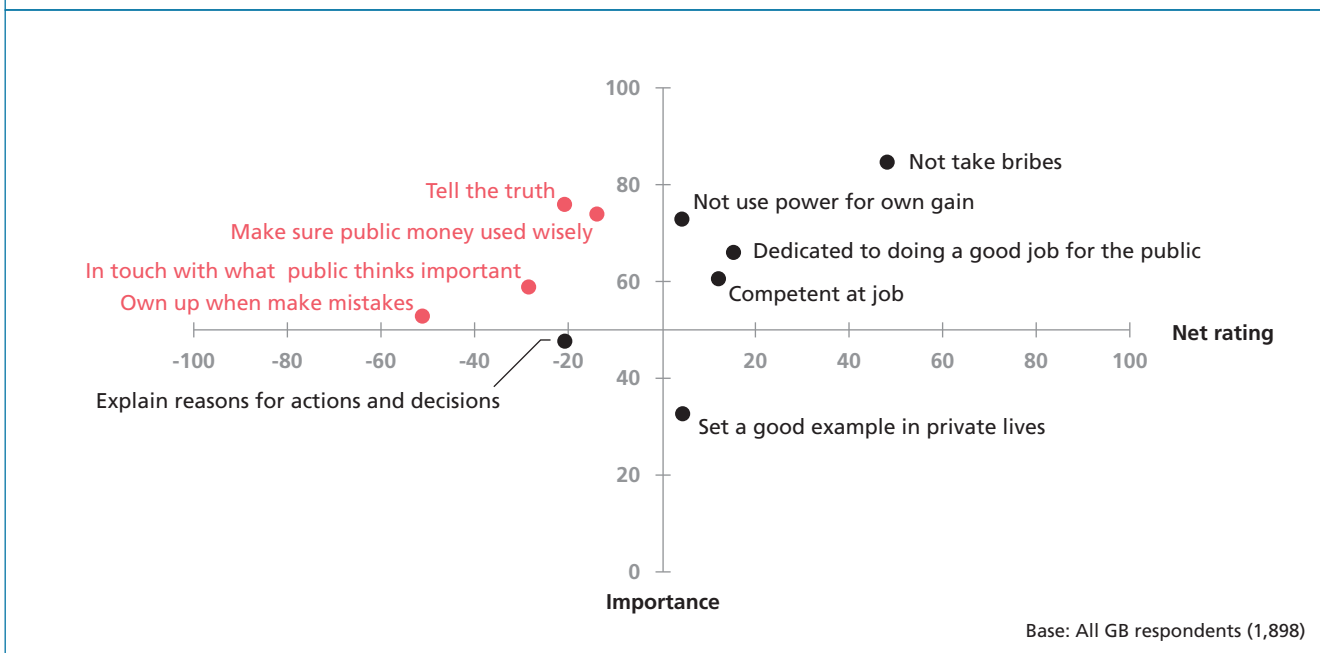
<sup>14</sup> The figures represent the percentage of respondents rating each behaviour as 'extremely important'.

<sup>15</sup> The figures represent the 'net rating', calculated as the percentage of respondents saying that few or no politicians exhibited the behaviour subtracted from the percentage saying that all or most politicians did so.

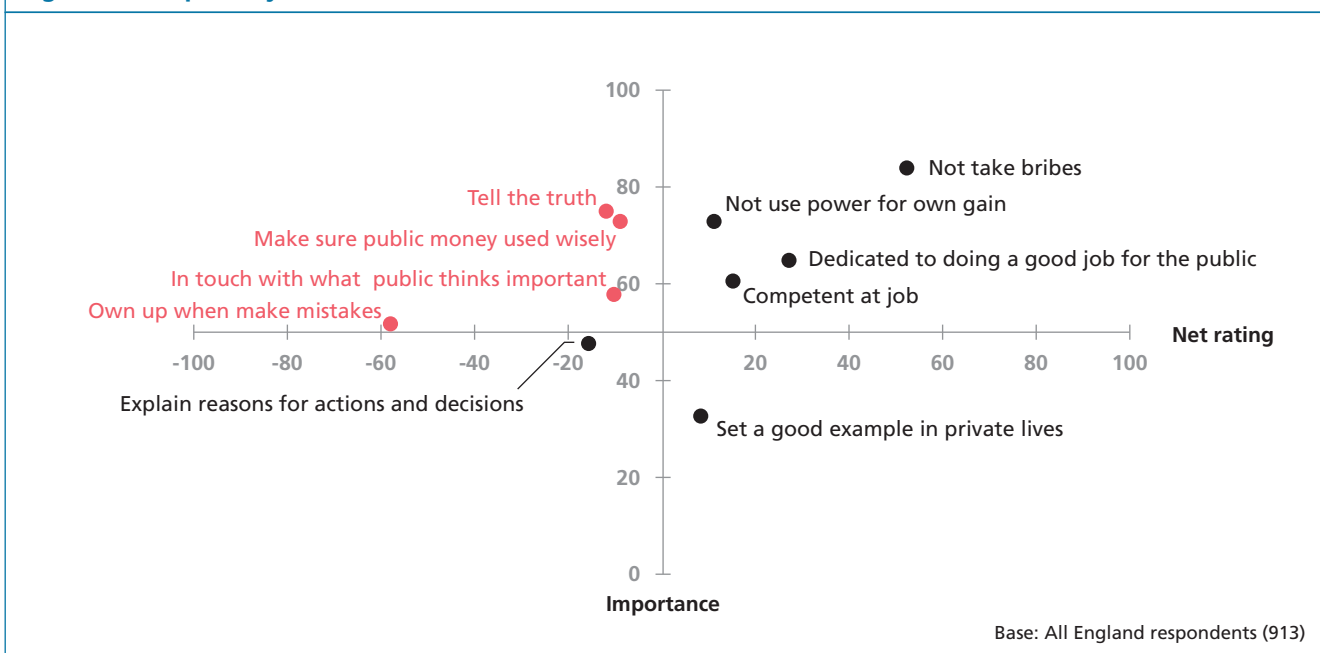
In the case of both government ministers and MPs, four behaviours appear in the top left quadrant and are therefore key priorities for improvement:

- ‘telling the truth’;
- ‘making sure that public money is used wisely’;
- ‘being in touch with what the general public thinks is important’;
- and ‘owning up to mistakes’.

**Figure 3.3 Gap Analysis: Government Ministers**



**Figure 3.4 Gap Analysis: MPs**



# 4. MPs AND VOTING IN PARLIAMENT

## 4.1 Summary

*When asked which of a range of factors an MP should take into account when voting in Parliament on a matter of national importance, people prioritised factors that related to acting in the public interest. Not surprisingly, people did not want MPs to prioritise their own interests. As in previous waves of the survey, many people also rejected party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on how MPs should vote.*

*There was little consensus on which single factor most MPs would take into account when voting. The most widely held view (by 25% of respondents) was that MPs would base their decision on the national interest. Nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents felt that MPs would be influenced by one of the factors that they had said was reasonable for MPs to take into account, an increase from around half (52%) in 2004.*

## 4.2 Views on what should influence MPs' voting behaviour

This chapter examines people's views about the factors that MPs should or should not take into account when deciding how to vote in Parliament, and what factors people believe that most MPs take into account in practice. One of the aims of these questions, which were also asked in the 2004 and 2006 surveys, was to explore the extent to which people recognise that MPs are part of a partisan political system, and therefore accept party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on the decisions that individual MPs take.

Respondents were asked to think of the scenario of an MP voting on 'an important national issue' in Parliament, and were given a set of cards showing factors that might have a bearing on how MPs vote, including factors associated

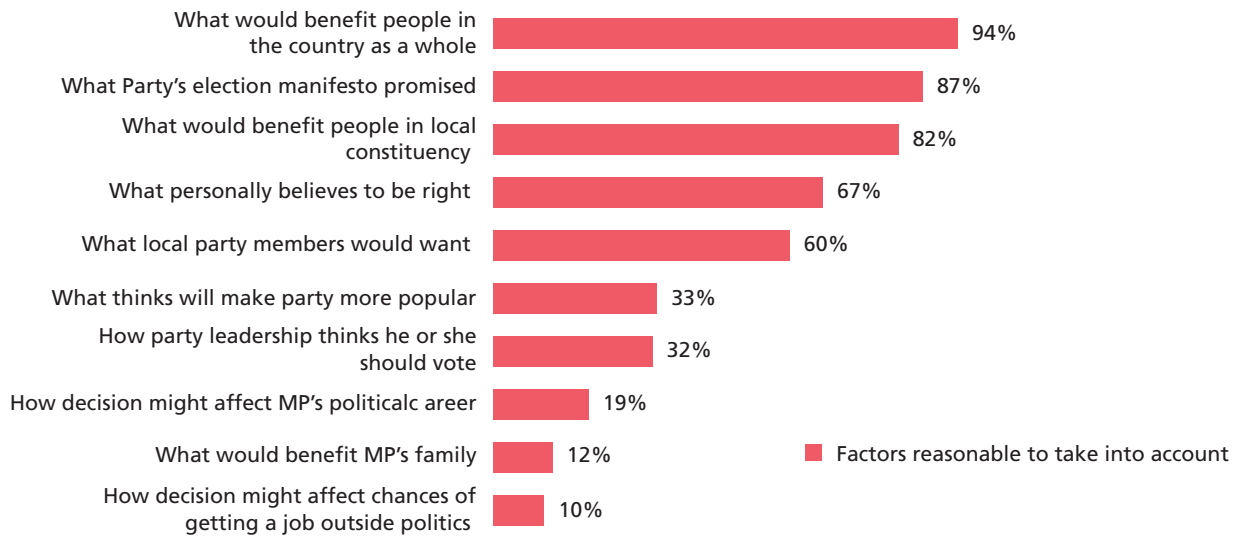
with party allegiance and others, such as the public interest, the MP's own self-interest and the MP's own personal beliefs. Respondents were then asked to sort the cards into factors that they thought were reasonable for MPs to take into account when deciding how to vote and those that they should definitely not take into account, and then to say which single factor they thought most MPs would base their decision on.

Figure 4.1 shows the proportion of respondents who felt that each factor was reasonable for an MP to take into account when voting.

As was the case in 2004 and 2006, the results indicate widespread endorsement of the Selflessness Principle.<sup>16</sup> Respondents were particularly likely to cite factors that related directly to acting in the public interest as being reasonable for MPs to take into account, such as 'what would benefit people living in the country as a whole' (94%) and 'what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency' (82%). Voting in accordance with what the MP's party election manifesto promised, and therefore honouring a pledge to the electorate, was also widely seen as acceptable (87%).

In contrast, most people did not want MPs to prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues. The majority thought that it was reasonable for MPs to take into account their own personal beliefs when deciding how to vote (67%), but were firmly opposed to any sort of personal gain being taken into account. Only 19 per cent of respondents said that it was acceptable for MPs to base their decision on how it might affect their political career and only 12 per cent thought it reasonable for MPs to take into account how their decision might benefit their family. An even lower proportion – 10 per cent – thought it reasonable for MPs to take into account how it might affect their chances of getting a job outside of politics.

<sup>16</sup> 'Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends'.

**Figure 4.1 Expectations of influences on MPs' voting behaviour**

Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

**Table 4.1: Views on what factors it is reasonable for MPs to take into account when voting – 2004-2008**

	2004 %	2006 %	2008 %
What would benefit people living in the country as a whole	94	95	94
What the MP's party's election manifesto promised	85	81	87
What would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency	81	80	82
What the MP personally believes to be right	69	71	67
What the MP's local party members would want	58	58	60
How the MP's party leadership thinks he or she should vote	32	36	32
What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular with the general public	31	31	33
How the decision might affect the MP's political career	15	17	19
What would benefit the MP's family	9	12	12
How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics	9	10	10

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,097), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

**Table 4.2: Views on what factors it is reasonable for MPs to take into account when voting – by country**

	GB %	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	NI %
What would benefit people living in the country as a whole	94	94	96	93	94
What the MP's party's election manifesto promised	87	87	88	82	90
What would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency	82	82	84	76	79
What the MP personally believes to be right	67	67	67	65	66
What the MP's local party members would want	60	60	61	52	53
How the MP's party leadership thinks he or she should vote	32	32	38	28	38
What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular with the general public	33	34	34	27	31
How the decision might affect the MP's political career	19	20	19	12	19
What would benefit the MP's family	12	12	15	12	11
How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics	10	9	12	8	10

Base: All respondents: GB (1,898), England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

As the previous surveys indicated, many people seem to reject party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on the decisions that individual MPs take, although the wishes of local party members are seen as a more legitimate influence than the interest of the party at national level. Six in ten respondents (60%) thought that it was reasonable for MPs to vote in accordance with local party members. However, only a third (33%) felt that voting according to what would make the MP's party more popular was acceptable, a similar proportion (32%) believing that it was acceptable for an MP to vote in accordance with how the party leadership thought that they should vote.

As Table 4.1 shows, people's views on what it is reasonable for an MP to take into account when voting in Parliament have remained very stable since the baseline survey.

Table 4.2 shows that people's views on what is reasonable for an MP to take into account were similar across the four countries of the UK. However, respondents in Wales tended to mention fewer factors than those in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland and were relatively less likely to accept party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences. Respondents in Northern Ireland and Scotland were the most likely to think it reasonable for MPs to take into account the views of their party leadership (each 38%), with those in Northern Ireland and Wales less likely than those in England and Scotland to see the views of local party members as a legitimate influence.

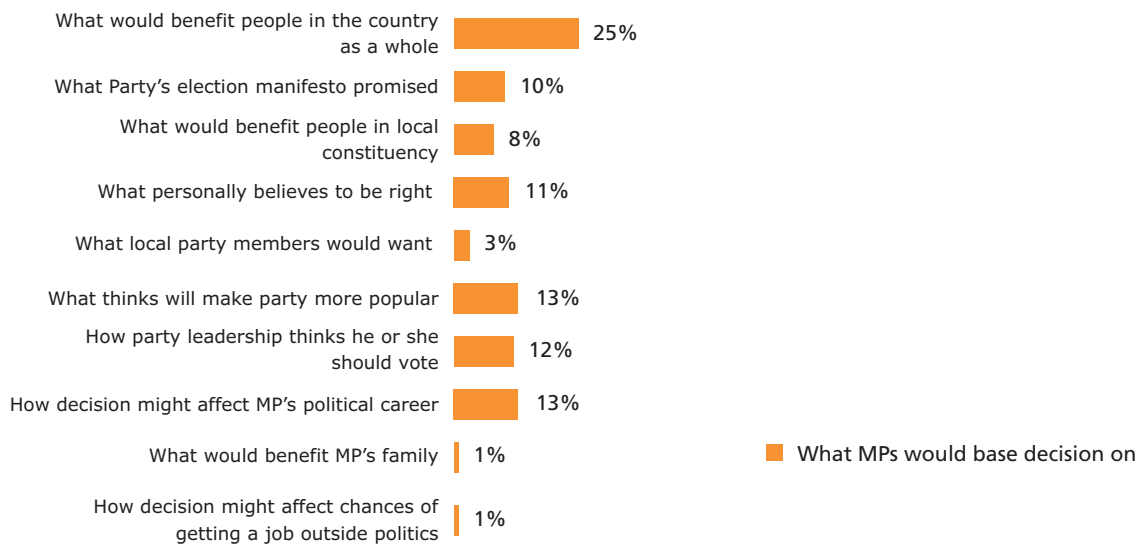
### 4.3 Views on what does influence MPs' voting behaviour

Moving on to look at what people think actually affects MPs' voting behaviour, Figure 4.2 shows that there is little consensus on which one of the factors MPs would be most likely to take into account when voting.

The most common view, given by a quarter of respondents (25%), was that most MPs would base their decision on what would benefit the country as a whole, which was also the factor most likely to be viewed as a reasonable basis for the decision.

Around a quarter of respondents thought that MPs would take a decision along national party lines, either according to what would make the party more popular (13%) or in line with the wishes of the party leadership (12%). Hence, while only around a third of people accept national party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on the decisions that individual MPs take, fewer still believe that these are the primary drivers of MPs' voting behaviour.

**Figure 4.2 Perception of main influence on MPs' voting behaviour**



Base: All GB respondents (1,898)



**Table 4.3: Perceptions of influences on MPs' voting behaviour 2004-2008**

	2004 %	2006 %	2008 %
What would benefit people living in the country as a whole	10	17	25
What the MP's party's election manifesto promised	10	9	10
What would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency	7	9	8
What the MP personally believes to be right	12	11	11
What the MP's local party members would want	6	4	3
How the MP's party leadership thinks he or she should vote	21	14	12
What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular with the general public	17	16	13
How the decision might affect the MP's political career	11	14	13
What would benefit the MP's family	1	2	1
How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics	1	1	1

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,097), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

As the previous surveys found, there is little evidence to suggest that people feel that MPs vote on the basis of self-interest. Although 13 per cent of respondents thought that most MPs would vote on the basis of how the decision might affect their political career, only 2 per cent felt that most would vote on the basis either of how their career prospects outside politics, or their family, would be affected.

While people's views on what it is reasonable for an MP to take into account when voting in Parliament have remained very stable since the baseline survey, their views on which of the factors would have most influence on MPs' decisions (Table 4.3) appear to have changed to some extent over time.

**Table 4.4: Perceptions of main influence on MPs' voting behaviour by country**

	GB %	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	NI %
What would benefit people living in the country as a whole	25	24	24	32	27
What the MP's party's election manifesto promised	10	10	13	9	13
What would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency	8	8	6	9	9
What the MP personally believes to be right	11	11	10	7	8
What the MP's local party members would want	3	3	3	2	3
How the MP's party leadership thinks he or she should vote	12	12	13	9	9
What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular with the general public	13	13	11	15	8
How the decision might affect the MP's political career	13	13	13	12	19
What would benefit the MP's family	1	1	2	2	1
How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics	1	1	1	1	2

Base: All respondents: GB (1,898), England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

The most notable change is the increase in the proportion of respondents who think that MPs would base their decision on 'what would benefit people living in the country as a whole', from 10 per cent in 2004 to 17 per cent in 2006 and 25 per cent in 2008. At the same time, there has been a decline in the proportion thinking that most MPs would base their decision along party lines, whether based on the wishes of their party leadership, the impact on their party's popularity or the wishes of local party members. The proportion of respondents who suggested that one of these three factors would be the main consideration for most MPs has declined from 44 per cent in 2004 to 34 per cent in 2006 and 28 per cent in 2008.

Opinions on which of the factors most MPs would base their vote on varied to some extent by country (Table 4.4). The most notable differences were that respondents in Wales were particularly likely to think that MPs would base their decision on what was in the national public interest, while those in Northern Ireland were most likely to think that MPs would vote on the basis of how the decision might affect their political career, and least likely to believe that they would be influenced by what would make their party more popular.

#### 4.4 To what extent do people think that MPs base their decisions on acceptable factors?

The findings shown above indicate that people in 2008 are more likely than before to think that, when voting in Parliament, MPs will be influenced by the national interest (widely seen as an acceptable influence) and less likely to vote along party lines (widely seen as unacceptable). This suggests that people's perceptions of what influences MPs when voting have become more aligned with what they think should influence them since the baseline survey was conducted.<sup>17</sup>

The extent to which people's views on what should influence MPs' voting behaviour are aligned with what they think happens in practice can be measured by calculating the proportion of respondents who thought that most MPs would base their decision on a factor which they themselves considered to be reasonable to take into account.

In the 2008 survey, just under two thirds (63%) of respondents in Great Britain thought that MPs would base their decision on a factor which they considered to be reasonable to take into account. Around a third (32%) believed that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they felt was not reasonable to take into account, with 'Don't know' responses at either question accounting for the remainder of responses. By comparison, just over half of respondents (52%) in the 2004 survey thought that MPs would base their decision on a factor which they considered to be reasonable to take into account. This analysis confirms that, notwithstanding the possible effect of the questionnaire change between the two surveys, people's views on what should influence MPs' voting behaviour and what they think happens in practice are more closely aligned in 2008 than in 2004.

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that there was a change in this section of the questionnaire in 2008. In the previous surveys, respondents were asked to say which one of the factors they thought should be the single most important factor that an MP **should** take into account and then what they thought MPs **would** base the decision on. In 2008, the question asking what MPs **should** base the decision on was dropped from the questionnaire. It is possible that the omission of this question might have affected the way in which respondents answered the subsequent question on what they thought MPs would base the decision on. However, it is not possible to be sure whether or not this is the case without conducting a separate experiment to test the hypothesis.

There were some differences between sub-groups on this measure of alignment in the 2008 survey:

- Respondents in Wales (59%) were less likely than those in England (64%), Scotland (65%) and Northern Ireland (67%) to believe that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account.
- Older people were more likely than younger respondents to think that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account. Whereas 69 per cent of 55-64s and 72 per cent of those 65 and over believed that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account, only 57 per cent of 18-24s and 59 per cent of 25-34s thought so.
- Those with no qualifications were also more likely to think MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account (70% compared with 56% of those with qualifications).

#### 4.5 Opinions by newspaper readership and educational attainment

People's opinions, both on factors that were reasonable for MPs to take into account and what would influence them in practice, varied to some extent among different sub-groups within the population. In particular, newspaper readership and educational attainment had a strong bearing on opinions on both measures. The relationship with newspaper readership is illustrated in Table 4.5, which shows how the views of tabloid only and broadsheet only readers differed on these variables. The measures on which the opinions of the two groups are most divergent are highlighted in the table.

Broadsheet readers were more likely than tabloid readers to include constituency interests and the MP's own beliefs as factors that they considered reasonable for MPs to take into account, and less likely to include populism and factors based on the MP's career interests.

In terms of the main factor that most MPs would take into account, broadsheet readers were far more likely than tabloid readers to think that the views of the party leadership would override other considerations in driving the MP's decision (27% selecting this factor, compared with 8% of tabloid only readers). In contrast with most groups, this was the most popular response among broadsheet readers. Broadsheet readers were also somewhat more likely than tabloid readers to think that MPs would base their decision on the interests of the people in their local constituency.

Tabloid readers, on the other hand, were more likely than broadsheet readers to think that MPs would be most influenced by what would benefit their career in politics (14% versus 6% of broadsheet only readers) and also somewhat more likely to think that the national interest would be the overriding factor (28% versus 20%).

Interestingly, while broadsheet readers are more likely than tabloid readers to think that MPs would vote in line with party instructions, they are no more likely to accept this as a legitimate basis for their decision: 32 per cent of tabloid only readers and 31 per cent of broadsheet readers included this among the factors that they felt it was reasonable for an MP to take into account.

Although broadsheet and tabloid readers differ in their judgement both of factors that are reasonable for an MP to take into account and those which would influence most MPs, similar proportions (63% of broadsheet only readers and 64% of tabloid only readers) thought that MPs would be influenced by a factor that they themselves considered to be a reasonable basis for the decision.

Response on this issue by educational attainment follows a similar pattern, with those with a degree level qualification or higher (who are disproportionately likely to read broadsheet newspapers) having similar views to broadsheet only readers, and those with lower level qualifications (who are disproportionately likely to read tabloids) more closely aligned with the views of tabloid only readers.

**Table 4.5: Views on what factors it is reasonable for MPs to take into account when voting and what actually influences how they vote – by newspaper readership**

	Tabloid only %	Broadsheet only %
<b>Factors reasonable to take into account</b>		
What would benefit people living in the country as a whole	93	97
What the MP's party's election manifesto promised	87	90
What would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency	<b>80</b>	<b>89</b>
What the MP personally believes to be right	<b>60</b>	<b>76</b>
What the MP's local party members would want	60	59
How the MP's party leadership thinks he or she should vote	32	31
What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular with the general public	<b>35</b>	<b>20</b>
How the decision might affect the MP's political career	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>
What would benefit the MP's family	10	8
How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Factors would take into account</b>		
What would benefit people living in the country as a whole	<b>28</b>	<b>20</b>
What the MP's party's election manifesto promised	11	9
What would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>
What the MP personally believes to be right	12	11
What the MP's local party members would want	3	2
How the MP's party leadership thinks he or she should vote	<b>8</b>	<b>27</b>
What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular with the general public	13	11
How the decision might affect the MP's political career	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>
What would benefit the MP's family	1	0
How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics	1	1

Base: All GB respondents reading: Tabloid only (748), Broadsheet only (222)

# 5. PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

## 5.1 Summary

*Fewer people are confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards of conduct in 2008 (52%) than in 2006 (59%) and fewer are confident that public office holders will be punished for doing wrong in 2008 (33%) than in 2004 (42%). People continue to see the media as more effective than the authorities in uncovering wrongdoing in public office.*

## 5.2 Detailed findings

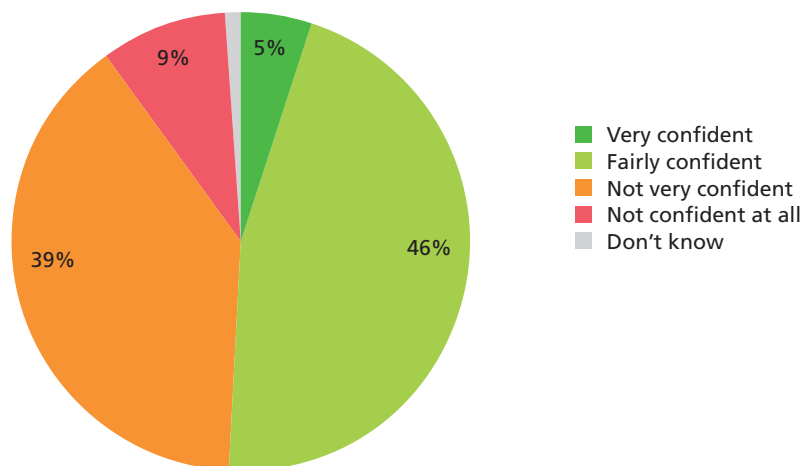
As in previous years, one of the aims of the study was to assess how far the public believes that public office holders are held accountable for their conduct; that is, to what extent people feel that public office holders will be exposed and punished for unacceptable behaviour.

In order to address this aim, respondents were asked:

- how confident they felt that the authorities in the UK were committed to improving standards in public life;
- how confident they felt that (a) the authorities and (b) the media would generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office;
- and how confident they felt that the authorities would punish people in public office when they were caught doing wrong.

Figure 5.1 summarises the responses to the first of these questions.

**Figure 5.1 Confidence in UK authorities' commitment to upholding standards in public life**

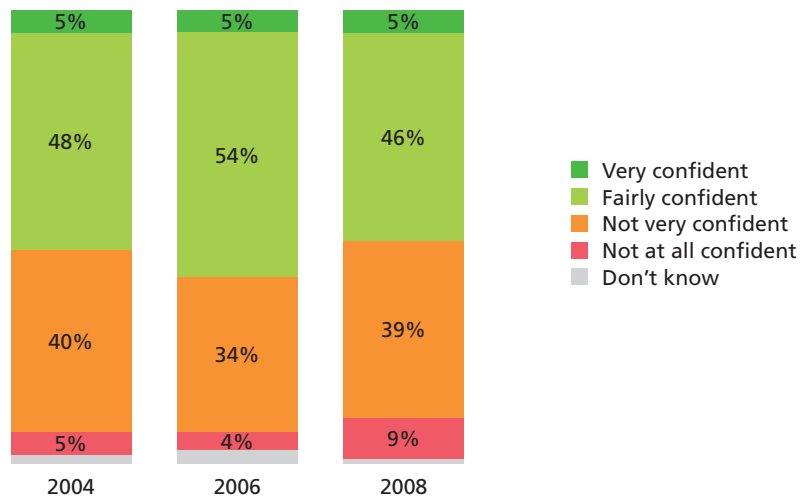


Base: All GB respondents (1,898)

Around half of respondents (52%) were confident that the authorities were committed to upholding standards in public life, although only 5 per cent were very confident. Almost as many respondents (47%) were not confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards, with 9 per cent saying that they were not at all confident.

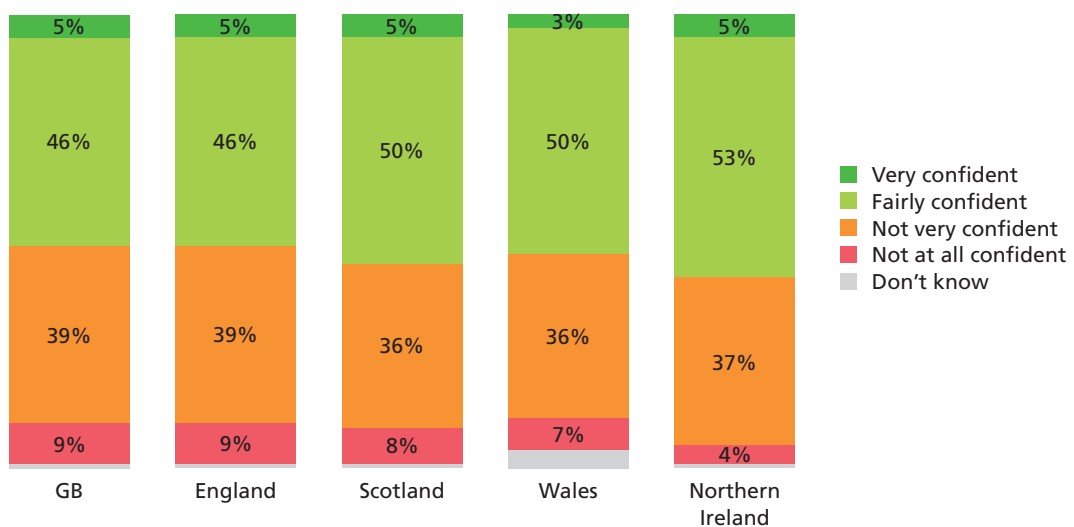
Figure 5.2, which shows how this result compares with a similar question asked in 2004 and 2006, suggests that there has been a decline in confidence on this measure since 2006, with the proportion who were very or fairly confident dropping from around six in ten (59%) to around half (51%).<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 5.2 Confidence in UK authorities' commitment to upholding standards 2004-2008**



Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,096), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

**Figure 5.3 Confidence in UK authorities' commitment to upholding standards by country**



Base: All respondents: England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that, in the previous surveys, respondents were asked how committed they felt the authorities were to *improving* standards in public life, rather than *upholding* them. In 2004 the question was asked in relation to the authorities in *Great Britain*, rather than the authorities in *the UK*.

Public confidence that the authorities in the UK are committed to upholding standards in public life was a broadly similar level across the four countries of the UK (Figure 5.3).

Multivariate analysis conducted on this question found that party affiliation and age were particularly influential in predicting how confident people felt about the authorities' commitment to upholding standards. Other variables that had some influence were newspaper readership, gender, sector of employment, and whether or not the respondent said that their views were influenced by specific standards-related events.

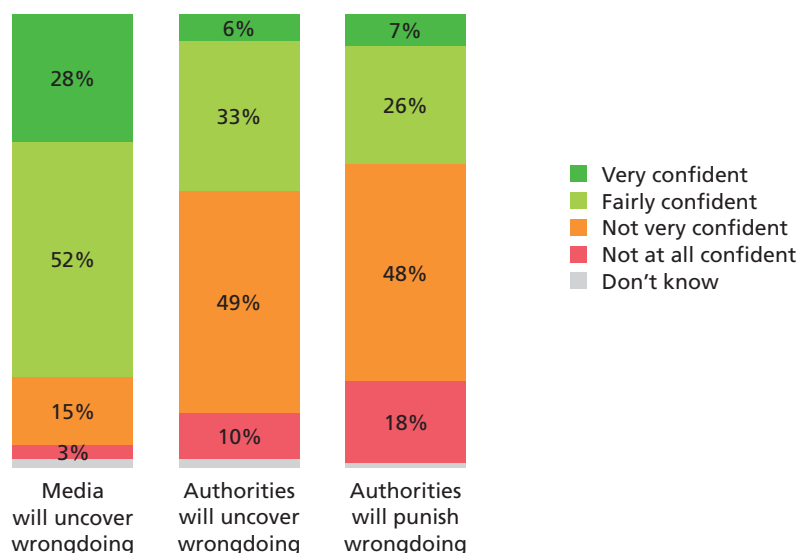
- Party affiliation: Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters (69% and 54% respectively) were more likely to be (fairly or very) confident than Conservative supporters (44%) and those with no party affiliation (43%).
- Age: 18-24s (73% confident) and 25-34 year olds (59%) were significantly more likely to be confident than those aged 55 and over (43%).
- Newspaper readership: Those who read only national tabloid newspapers were less likely to be confident (45%) than those reading only national broadsheets (57%), those reading both tabloids and broadsheets (50%) or those who did not read a newspaper at all (56%).

- Gender: Men were more likely than women to be confident in the authorities' commitment to upholding standards than women (56%, compared with 48%).
- Sector of employment: Those employed in the public sector (61%) were more likely to be confident than other working people (51%) and non-working people (48%).
- Influence of recent events: Respondents who said that their opinions were informed by specific standards-related events were less likely to be confident than those who did not mention any of these events (49% vs. 53%).

Figure 5.4 summarises the results for the remaining three questions in this section.

Eight in ten adults (80%) were confident that the media would generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office, compared with just four in ten (39%) having confidence in the authorities to do this. The higher level of confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing, which was also found in the previous studies, is unsurprising, since media activity in exposing the alleged misdemeanours of public figures is much more visible to the general public than official activity in the same area.

**Figure 5.4 Confidence that wrongdoing will be uncovered and punished**



Base: All GB respondents (1,898)



**Table 5.1: Confidence that wrongdoing will be uncovered and punished 2004-2008**

	2004 %	2006 %	2008 %
That the <b>media</b> will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office	80	81	80
That the <b>authorities</b> will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office	41	44	39
That when people in public office are caught doing wrong, the authorities will <b>punish</b> them	42	40	33

Base: All GB respondents: 2004 (1,097), 2006 (1,446), 2008 (1,898)

**Table 5.2: Confidence that wrongdoing will be uncovered and punished by country**

	GB %	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	NI %
That the <b>media</b> will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office	80	80	80	82	77
That the <b>authorities</b> will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office	39	39	44	36	45
That when people in public office are caught doing wrong, the authorities will <b>punish</b> them	33	34	31	28	30

Base: All respondents: GB (1,898), England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

Not only do a minority of respondents have confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing but even fewer people (33%) are confident that public office holders will be punished for it. As Table 5.1 shows, people have less confidence in the authorities to punish wrongdoing now than in previous years, with the proportion who are confident decreasing significantly over time from around four in ten (42%) in 2004 to a third in 2008. The level of confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing has remained stable over the three waves of the survey.

Levels of confidence in the authorities to uncover and punish wrongdoing were generally similar across the four countries of the UK (Table 5.2), although people in Scotland (44%) and Northern Ireland (45%) were significantly more confident in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office than those in Wales (36%).

Multivariate analysis was conducted on the questions relating to the authorities. In relation to *uncovering* wrongdoing, this analysis found that party affiliation was a particularly strong predictor of confidence, while whether or not people said that they had specific standards-related events in mind when answering the questions was also influential. Educational attainment also had a small, but significant, bearing on attitudes.

- Party affiliation: Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters (52% and 49% respectively) were more likely than Conservative supporters (34%) and those with no party affiliation (32%) to be confident that the authorities would generally uncover wrongdoing by public office holders.

- Influence of recent events: Respondents who said that their opinions were informed by specific standards-related events were less likely than those who did not mention any of these events to be confident that the authorities would generally uncover wrongdoing by public office holders (33% vs. 43%).
- Educational attainment: Those with Level 3 qualifications or higher (40%) were more likely than those with other qualifications (35%) to be confident that the authorities would generally uncover wrongdoing by public office holders, but no more likely to be confident than those with no qualifications (42%).
- Newspaper readership: Those who read only national tabloid newspapers were less likely than those who did not read a newspaper to be confident that the authorities would generally punish wrongdoing (28%, compared with 38%).
- Gender: Men (35%) were more likely than women (31%) to be confident that the authorities would generally punish wrongdoing.

In relation to *punishing* wrongdoing, the multivariate analysis found that party affiliation, whether or not people said that they had specific standards-related events in mind when answering the questions and educational attainment were most influential in predicting attitudes, with newspaper readership and gender also having some influence.

- Influence of recent events: Respondents who said that their opinions were informed by specific standards-related events were less likely than those who did not mention any of these events to be confident that the authorities would generally punish wrongdoing by public office holders (28% vs. 36%).
- Party affiliation: Labour supporters (42%) were more likely than Conservative supporters (32%) and those with no party affiliation (28%) to be confident that the authorities would generally punish wrongdoing by public office holders. Liberal Democrat (35%) and Conservative supporters (32%) were also more likely than those with no party affiliation to be confident.
- Educational attainment: Those with Level 3 qualifications or higher (37%) were more likely than those with other qualifications (26%) and those with no qualifications (32%) to be confident that the authorities would generally punish wrongdoing by public office holders.

## 6. TRUST IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

### 6.1 Summary

*The majority of respondents in the survey – around two thirds – thought that the system of registering to vote in their own country was at least fairly safe from fraud and abuse. However, only 15 per cent felt that the system was ‘very safe’ and 18 per cent considered the system unsafe. Concerns about the safety of the system were more widespread in Scotland and England than in Wales or Northern Ireland.*

*These concerns were reflected in a preference among the public for the individual system of registering to vote, as practised in Northern Ireland, over the household system used across Great Britain. Nearly two thirds of respondents in the UK thought that the registration system in Northern Ireland was preferable, compared with 30 per cent preferring the system in Great Britain. The majority of respondents in the UK felt that the individual system would be less likely to result in fraud and more likely to be accurate, although the household system was felt to be more convenient and likely to result in higher registration levels.*

*Respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely than those in Great Britain to favour individual registration.*

### 6.2 Policy background

The eleventh report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, published in January 2007,<sup>19</sup> focused on reform of the Electoral Commission. The Committee’s inquiry took place against a backdrop of continuing public concerns about the arrangements for voter registration, postal voting on demand and the link to a number of high-profile legal cases of electoral fraud. One of the recommendations that the Committee made in the report was that ‘A decision should be made and legislation developed to implement a system of individual voter registration immediately following the next General Election or by 2010 at the latest’.

In the light of this focus on the electoral system, it was decided to include a section of questions in the 2008 survey examining people’s perceptions of the current system of electoral registration and voting in their own country, and, specifically, to explore their views on the pros and cons of individual voter registration, as currently practised in Northern Ireland, and household registration, as practised across Great Britain. This chapter of the report presents the findings from this part of the survey. Results are reported at a UK level unless otherwise stated.

### 6.3 Whether people are registered to vote and reasons for not being registered

Over nine in ten respondents in the UK (93%) thought that their name was on the electoral register, 5 per cent thought that their name was not on the register and 2 per cent were not sure whether or not they were registered to vote.

Respondents in Northern Ireland, where, as noted above, a system of individual registration is in place, were nearly twice as likely as those in Great Britain to say that they were not on the electoral register (9%, compared with 5%). Adults in Wales were significantly less likely than average to say that they were not on the register (2%).

Using ONS mid-2007 population estimates and data supplied to ONS by Electoral Registration Officers for December 2007,<sup>20, 21</sup> we can estimate the actual level of voter non-registration among all adults in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland as 7 per cent for Great Britain and 16 per cent for Northern Ireland. The figure for Great Britain is in line with the results from this survey, and the figure for Northern Ireland suggests that the disparity in voter level registrations between Great Britain and Northern Ireland may be larger than our survey results would suggest.

The likelihood for people to say that they were registered increased with age: almost all of those

<sup>20</sup> Office for National Statistics (2008) ‘Mid-2007 UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland’ (accessed via <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15106> on 16th September 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Office for National Statistics (2008) ‘UK Electoral Statistics – Local Government and Parliamentary Electors 2007’ ([http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_other/UK\\_ElectoralStatistics\\_2007.xls](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_other/UK_ElectoralStatistics_2007.xls))

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/11thinquiry.aspx>

aged 65 and over (99%) said they were registered, compared with 73 per cent of the 18-24s. Private sector employees (8%) were more likely than public sector employees (3%) to say that they were not registered. Not surprisingly, those with a party affiliation were more likely than those with no affiliation to say that they were registered to vote (95%, compared with 83%).

Among those who believed that they were not registered to vote (122 respondents), the two most common reasons given were having just moved house (34%) and not being eligible to vote (27%).

### 6.4 Whether people voted in previous elections

Respondents were asked whether they had voted in the previous general election. Around two thirds of respondents in England, Scotland and Wales claimed to have voted in the 2005 election. This compares with an actual turnout of between 61 per cent and 63 per cent in these three countries according to official figures.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, turnout was slightly understated in Northern Ireland, with six in ten (60%) claiming to have voted, compared with an official figure of 63 per cent.

Sub-groups particularly likely to say that they had voted in the last general election included:

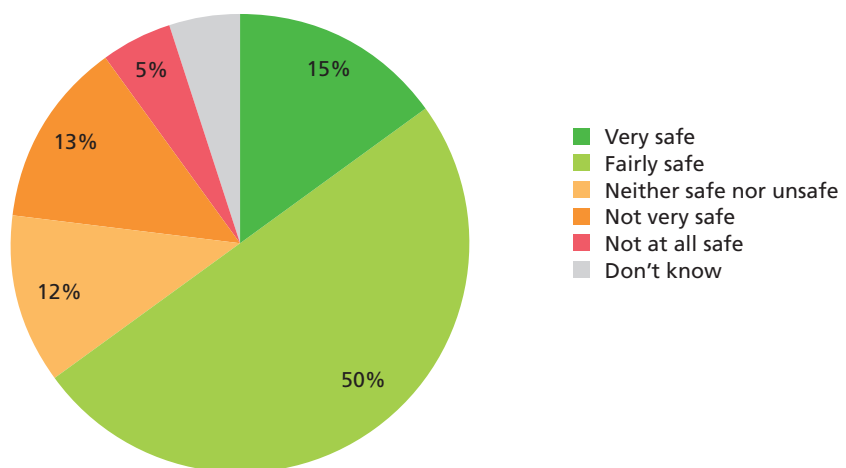
- older respondents (85% of 65 year olds and over, compared with 30% of 18-24 year olds);
- public sector workers (74%, compared with 58% of private sector workers);
- readers of broadsheet newspapers (80%, compared with 66% of tabloid only readers and 58% of non-readers of newspapers);
- respondents who were affiliated to a political party (72%, compared with 37% of those with no affiliation).

Respondents who said that they had not voted in the previous general election were asked whether they had voted at any election in the previous five years. Overall (including those who said that they had voted in the previous general election), 77 per cent of respondents in the UK sample said that they had voted at an election in the previous five years.

### 6.5 Perceived safety of the registration system

As a way of measuring people’s trust in the electoral registration system, respondents were asked how safe they thought that the system of registering to vote in their own country was from fraud and abuse (Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1 Perceived safety of electoral registration system from fraud or abuse**



Base: All GB respondents (2,312)

<sup>22</sup> Surveys typically over estimate turnout at elections. This is generally accepted to be because voting is perceived to be a socially desirable behaviour, so a proportion of people who did not vote will be reluctant to admit this to an interviewer, but also because people who vote are more likely to take part in surveys, particularly those on social and political topics. Some of the over-claim may also arise through people confusing different elections. To try to reduce the over estimation of turnout, the question was reworded for the 2008 survey, and so no comparison is made with reported turnout in previous surveys.

Around two thirds (65%) of respondents in the UK thought that the system was safe from fraud or abuse, with 15 per cent feeling that it was very safe. Around two in ten (18%) felt that the system was unsafe, with 5 per cent feeling that it was very unsafe.

There were some differences in terms of attitudes towards registering to vote between the individual countries. Respondents in Scotland (23%) and England (18%) were more likely than those in Wales (13%) or Northern Ireland (11%) to feel that the system in their country was unsafe.

Multivariate analysis conducted on this question found that whether or not people were affiliated to a political party had a particularly strong bearing on their views on the safety of the registration system. Age was also a relatively influential variable, while gender, sector of employment and newspaper readership had some bearing on people's answers.

- Party affiliation: Those with a party affiliation (69%) were more likely than those with no affiliation (46%) to think that the system was (very or fairly) safe. Among respondents in Great Britain, Labour supporters (76%) were particularly likely to think that the system was safe, when compared with supporters of the Conservatives (67%) and Liberal Democrats (66%).
- Age: Those aged 25-44 (58%) were less likely than adults aged 18-24 (68%) and those aged 45 and over (69%) to feel that the system was safe.
- Gender: Men were more likely than women to think that the system of registration was safe (68%, compared with 62%).
- Sector of employment: Those employed in the public sector (72%) were more likely to think that the system was safe than those employed in other sectors (62%).
- Newspaper readership: Broadsheet only readers (69%) were more likely than tabloid only readers (65%) to think that the system was safe.

## 6.6 Perceptions of individual voter registration versus household registration

As noted earlier in the chapter, the main focus for this section of the survey was to explore people's views on individual and household systems of voter registration. Under the current system in Great Britain, one person in

a household can register an entire household without needing to provide proof of identity. In Northern Ireland citizens have to register individually and provide proof of identity to do so. A series of questions were introduced in the 2008 survey to compare the perceived merits of the two systems.

Respondents were asked to compare the system of registering to vote in Great Britain with the system in Northern Ireland on a number of dimensions: susceptibility to fraud, accuracy, convenience, and impact on registration levels. Figure 6.2 shows the results for the UK sample.

Most people in the UK thought that the system in Northern Ireland would be less likely to result in fraud (80%) and more likely to be accurate (79%), whereas the system in Great Britain would be more convenient (77%) and more likely to result in more people registering (63%). However, a quarter (25%) of respondents in the UK thought that the system in Northern Ireland would be more likely to result in more people registering.

Having had the opportunity to consider the benefits and disadvantages of the two systems, respondents were asked which system they felt was better overall. Nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents in the UK thought that the registration system in Northern Ireland was preferable, with three in ten (29%) preferring the system in Great Britain.

Respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely than those in Great Britain to favour the registration system in Northern Ireland (Figure 6.3). Nine in ten respondents in Northern Ireland (91%) agreed that the system in Northern Ireland was less likely to result in fraud and was more likely to be accurate (90%), compared with 80 per cent and 78 per cent respectively in Great Britain. Similarly, while 77 per cent of respondents in Great Britain thought that their own system was more convenient, and 63 per cent that it was likely to result in more people registering, only 53 per cent and 59 per cent respectively among Northern Ireland respondents agreed. Overall, 87 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland preferred their own system, significantly higher than the 63 per cent of respondents in Great Britain who preferred the Northern Ireland system.

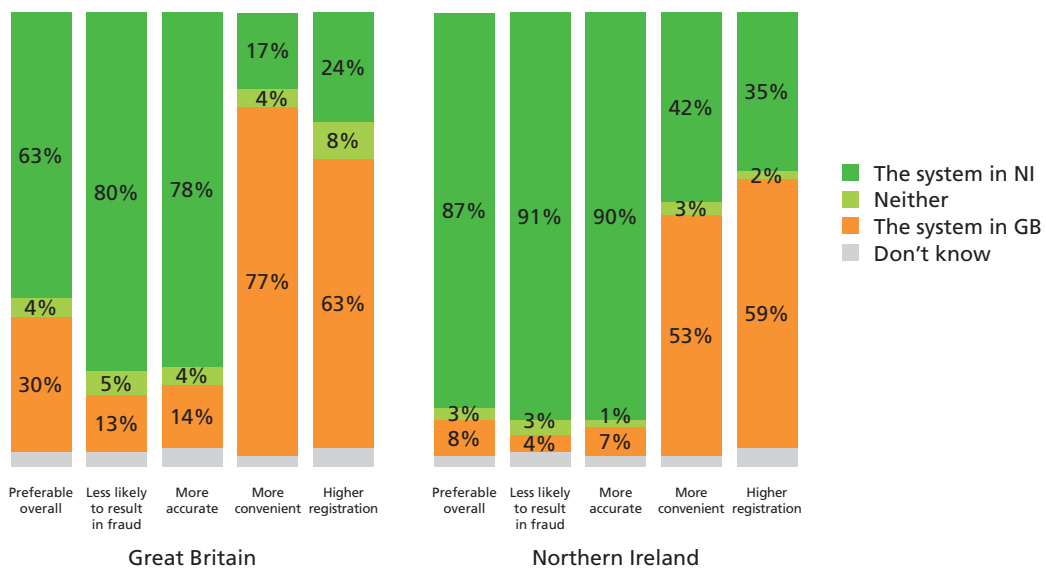
Within the UK sample, young adults (aged 18-24) were more likely than average to prefer the household system (41%), as were those living in Wales (40%). Among respondents in Great Britain, Labour supporters (41%) were

**Figure 6.2 Views on individual versus household voter registration**



Base: All UK respondents (2,312)

**Figure 6.3 Views on individual and household voter registration – Great Britain vs. Northern Ireland**



Base: All respondents: Great Britain (1,898), Northern Ireland (414)

more likely than Conservative supporters (23%) and those without a political affiliation (25%) to prefer the British system of household registration.

Among people in Great Britain, there was a strong link between how safe the respondent thought the current household system of registration was from fraud and abuse and which registration system they preferred. Those who felt that the current system in Great Britain was either very or fairly unsafe were considerably more likely to favour the Northern

Ireland registration system on each dimension, as well as overall. For example, 91 per cent of respondents in Great Britain who felt that the current system was unsafe thought that the system in Northern Ireland would be less likely to result in fraud, compared with 77 per cent of those who felt that the current system was safe. Overall, 79 per cent of respondents in Great Britain who said that the current system was unsafe preferred the Northern Ireland system, compared with 58 per cent of those who felt that the current system was safe.



# 7. EXPOSURE AND ATTITUDES TO POLITICAL NEWS COVERAGE

## 7.1 Summary

*TV and radio news is the most common source that people use to access information about politics, 77 per cent using one or other 'often' in a typical week. Reading about politics in newspapers and tuning in to radio or TV programmes about political and social issues are both less prevalent, with about 30 per cent doing each regularly. Usage of websites which focus on politics is much less common: only 4 per cent of respondents said that they visited these websites often, and 13 per cent at least sometimes, in a typical week. Two in ten adults (20%) were relatively disengaged from political news, not using any of the sources regularly, while 17 per cent were actively engaged, using three or four of the sources regularly.*

*While there is no strong or consistent relationship between engagement with media coverage of politics and attitudes towards standards in public life, there is an association between reading only tabloid newspapers and being critical of standards in public life. Those who read only tabloids were more critical than those who read broadsheets, or both broadsheets and tabloids, and those who did not read a newspaper at all. Those respondents who had specific events in mind which related to behaviour in public life were also more critical about standards.*

*People have a relatively positive view of the way in which TV, broadsheet newspapers and radio cover political news, but a predominantly negative opinion of coverage in the tabloid press. This negativity towards tabloids is not restricted to non-readers, but extends to those who read only these newspapers.*

## 7.2 Introduction

Since the Committee first embarked on this programme of research in 2002, it has been interested in understanding what influences people's judgements of the conduct of public office holders, and specifically in understanding how external influences such as the media and contemporaneous political events might have a bearing on the views expressed by respondents.

The report on the baseline survey emphasised the difficulty of establishing what influences people's opinions,<sup>23</sup> not least because people do not necessarily know themselves how they arrived at a particular opinion, and what they say has influenced them may be different from what has actually influenced them.

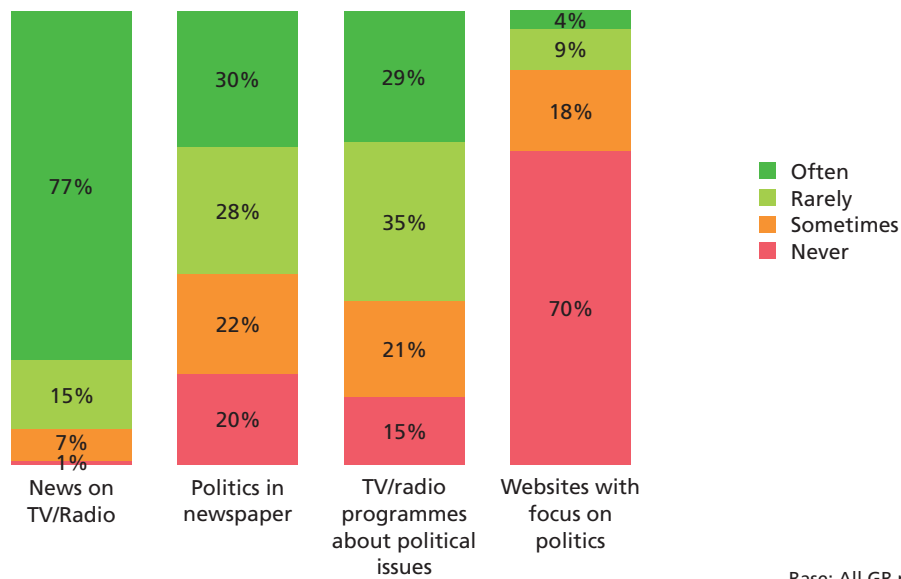
In spite of these uncertainties, the Committee was interested in using the 2008 survey to seek further insights into people's exposure to political news in the media and their attitudes towards the media's coverage of this news, and in understanding whether a discernible relationship can be identified between people's exposure to media and their attitudes towards the conduct of public office holders.

In order to address these new objectives, two new constructs were included in the 2008 survey. The first of these established which of a range of media people used to source news about politics. This construct was used to build a simple model of engagement with political news as a basis for exploring the relationship between exposure to political news and attitudes towards conduct in public life. The second comprised a set of statements designed to explore people's perceptions of the way in which political news was covered in four forms of media (the broadsheet press, the tabloid press, TV news and radio news).

<sup>23</sup> HAYWARD, B., MORTIMER, E., and BRUNWIN, T. (2004) 'Survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life', London: Committee on Standards in Public Life. <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/~media/assets/www.public-standards.gov.uk/researchreport%20pdf.ashx> (accessed 29th August 2008).



Figure 7.1 Exposure to political news



The analysis conducted in this chapter is based on the entire UK population. The pattern of response on these issues in the devolved administrations is dealt with in the respective chapters on Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### 7.3 Exposure to coverage of news and politics in the media

As a means of establishing how much exposure people had to news and politics in the media, respondents were asked how often they did the following:

- Watched or listened to news on TV or on the radio;
- Read about politics in a newspaper (including on a newspaper's website);
- Watched programmes about political and social issues on TV or on the radio (described to respondents as including 'programmes like Question Time, Dispatches, Panorama and the 'Today' programme'); or
- Accessed websites which had a focus on politics (respondents were given the examples of political blogs, podcasts and forums).

The results are summarised in Figure 7.1.

As would be expected, the most popular of the four activities was watching or listening to the news on TV or on the radio. Three quarters (77%) of respondents in the UK said that they often watched or listened to news on the TV or on the radio in a typical week, with over nine in ten (92%) doing so at least sometimes.

The likelihood of people watching or listening to the news on TV or on the radio increased broadly in line with age. 18-24 year olds were least likely to say that they often accessed TV or radio news (61%), while those aged 65 and over were the most likely to do so (91%). Those qualified to degree level or higher, and those with a political affiliation, were also more likely than average to watch or listen to the news on TV or radio.

Three in ten respondents (30%) said that they often read about politics in a newspaper (including on a newspaper's website), just under six in ten (58%) saying that they did this at least sometimes during a typical week. Similar proportions (29% and 64% respectively) said that they often or sometimes watched TV or listened to radio programmes about political and social issues.

Older people, those qualified to degree level or higher and those with a political affiliation were all more likely than average to engage with politics through these media. This was also true of those who worked in the public sector, those who lived in London and those who read broadsheet newspapers. Men were somewhat more likely than women to read about politics in newspapers.

Of the four sources of news and information about politics, the least widely used was websites which focus on politics, such as political blogs, podcasts and forums. Only 4 per cent of respondents said that they visited these websites often in a typical week, with 12 per cent saying that they did so often or sometimes.

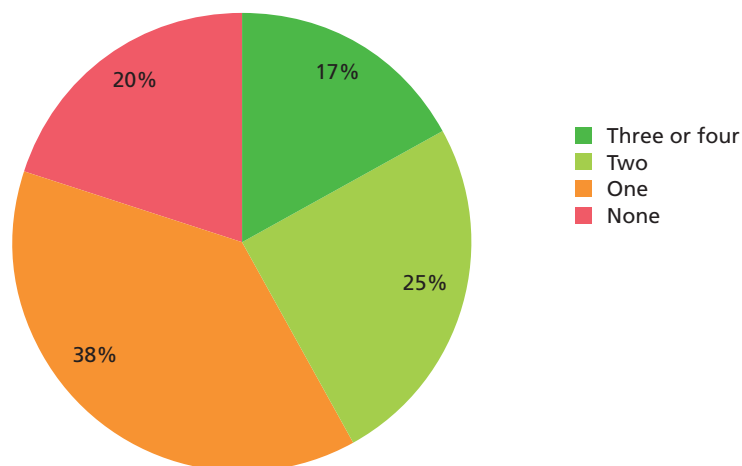
In contrast to users of the other sources of news and information about politics, usage of political websites was skewed towards younger people, 17 per cent of 18-44 year olds saying that they sometimes or often visited these websites, compared with 8 per cent of those aged 45 and over. This reflects higher usage of the internet generally among younger people.<sup>24</sup> However, among those who *had* used the internet in the previous month, those aged 65 and over were the most likely to say that they had sometimes or often visited websites which focused on politics, 22 per cent having done so, compared with 17 per cent of those aged under 65.

While users of political websites were younger than users of other media, differences in usage levels between sub-groups were otherwise similar to those for other media, although more accentuated in relation to usage of websites. For example, the following proportions of respondents visited political websites often or sometimes:

- 30 per cent of readers of national broadsheet newspapers, compared with 8 per cent of tabloid only readers and 9 per cent of those who did not read newspapers at all;
- 27 per cent of those with a degree level qualification or higher, compared with 4 per cent of those with Level 1 or no qualifications;
- 15 per cent of men, compared with 10 per cent of women;
- 13 per cent of those with a political party affiliation, compared with 9 per cent of those without one.

These questions on frequency of exposure to political content in the media were used to build a simple model of engagement with political news, based on the number of sources that people accessed 'often'. Figure 7.2 shows how the population segments according to this model. The results show that two in ten adults (20%) did not use *any* of the media covered to access political content on a frequent basis.

**Figure 7.2 Number of media sources of political news used frequently**



Base: All GB respondents (2,312)

<sup>24</sup> The proportion of respondents in the sample who said that they had spent 20 hours or more on the internet in the previous month declined significantly as age increased, ranging from 65 per cent among 18-24 year olds to just 7 per cent among those aged 65 or over.

Just under four in ten (38%) used one source only on a frequent basis, in almost all cases (94%) this source being TV and radio news. A quarter (25%) used two sources and 17 per cent three or four sources. The latter group included over eight in ten of those who said that they often used political websites.

The number of sources of political news that people used varied considerably among different sub-groups within the population, most notably in relation to age, educational attainment and newspaper readership.

As Figure 7.3 shows, there was a broadly linear relationship between frequent usage of at least three of the sources and age. Thus, while only 4 per cent of 18-24 year olds and 8 per cent of 25-34 year olds used three or more sources 'often', around a quarter of those aged 55 and over did so.

Usage of multiple media sources also tended to increase in line with the level of education that a person had attained: 30 per cent of those with a degree level qualification or higher used three or four of the sources 'often', compared with one in ten of those with Level 2 qualifications or below.

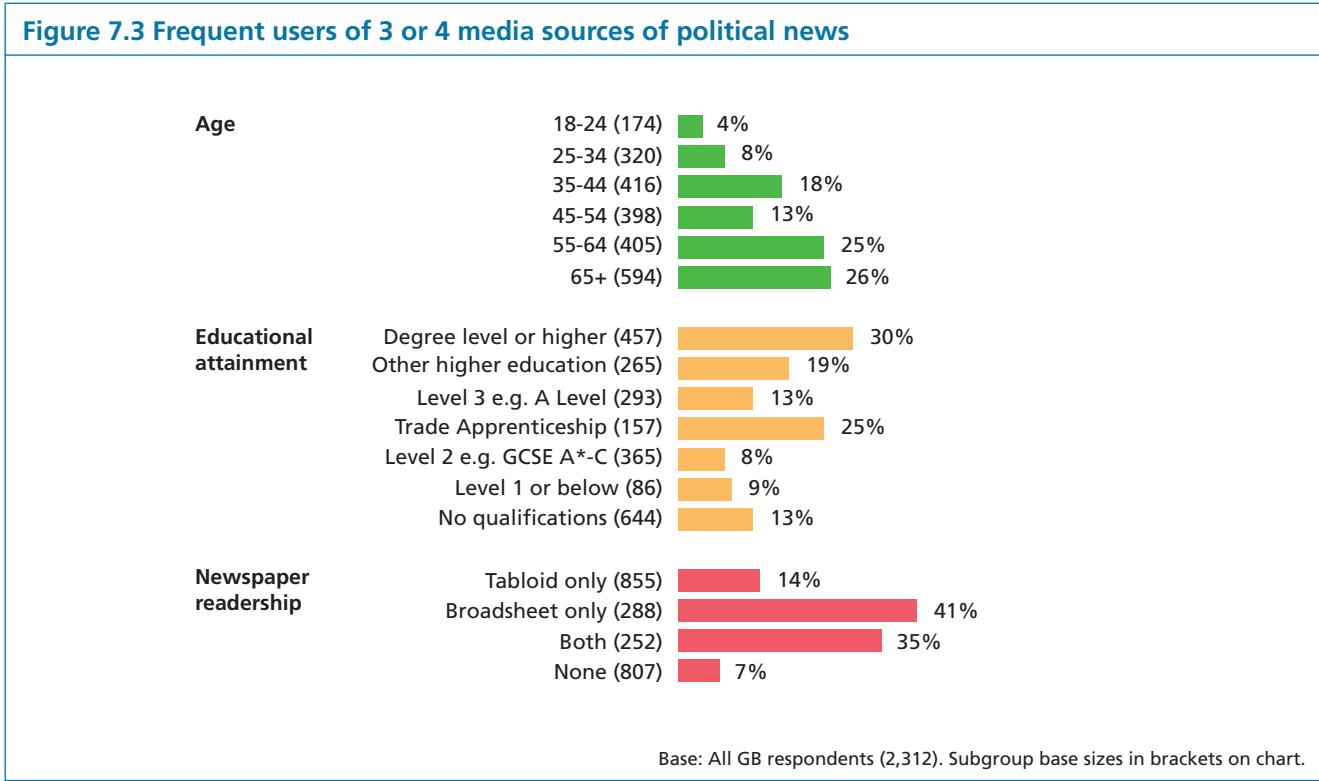
In terms of newspaper readership, those reading broadsheet newspapers only (41%) and both broadsheets and tabloids (35%) were considerably more likely than those reading tabloids only (14%) to use three or four sources 'often'.

### 7.4 Relationship between exposure to coverage of news and politics in the media and attitudes towards conduct in public life

The 'engagement' model described above was included alongside a range of other variables in the regression analyses described earlier in this report.<sup>25</sup> This enabled an assessment of whether the amount of exposure that people had to coverage of news and politics in the media was influential in predicting their attitudes towards standards in life.

In each case, the attitudes of respondents using one, two or at least three of the sources of information 'often' were compared with the attitudes of those who did not use any of the sources on a frequent basis. The variable featured as influential on five of the six measures tested.<sup>26</sup> However, its influence was small relative to variables such as party affiliation and age, and the direction of the influence was not consistent.

**Figure 7.3 Frequent users of 3 or 4 media sources of political news**



<sup>25</sup> Note that the regression analyses, with the exception of the model for perceptions of the safety of the electoral registration system, are based on the Great Britain sample, and thus exclude respondents in Northern Ireland.

<sup>26</sup> The exception being confidence that the authorities will generally uncover wrongdoing in public office.

**Table 7.1: Attitudes towards conduct in public life by newspaper readership**

	Tabloid only %	Broadsheet only %	Both %	None %
Rate standards overall as high	32	51	43	44
Believe standards have improved	24	23	33	25
Believe standards have got worse	49	34	39	36
Confident in authorities to uphold standards	45	57	51	56
Confident in authorities to uncover wrongdoing	37	46	40	39
Confident in authorities to punish wrongdoing	28	35	28	38
Believe electoral registration system is safe	65	69	59	65

Base: All UK respondents reading: Tabloid only (855), Broadsheet only (288), Both (252), None (807)

The analyses for each question found that those who did not use any of the sources on a frequent basis were:

- less likely than those who used one or two sources 'often' to rate standards as high, but not significantly different in their views from those using at least three of the sources 'often';
- less likely than those who used one or two sources 'often' to say that standards had improved in the past few years, and more likely to say that they had deteriorated. Again, the views of those using none of the sources 'often' were not significantly different from those using at least three of the sources;
- less likely than those who used one source 'often' to be confident that the authorities were committed to upholding standards in public life, but not significantly different in their views from those who used two sources, or those who used three or four sources;
- more likely than those who used two sources, or those who used three or four sources, to be confident that the authorities would punish people in public office who were caught doing wrong, but not significantly different in their views from those who used one source 'often'; and
- more likely than those who used two sources to think that the system of electoral registration in Britain was safe from fraud or abuse, but not significantly different in their views from those who used one source 'often' or from those who used at least three sources.

No clear and consistent pattern emerges from these results in terms of the relationship between an individual's exposure to media coverage of news and politics and their attitudes towards standards in public life. However, the results seem to suggest that:

people with low levels of exposure (those who do not use any of the four sources 'often') are more critical than those with higher levels of exposure when it comes to *general* measures of standards of conduct (how high standards are overall and whether they have improved), but less critical in relation to *more specific* measures (whether wrongdoing is punished; whether the electoral registration system is safe);

- for the *general* measures of standards of conduct, those who regularly seek information from three or more media sources are more critical than those who engage with one or two sources;
- and, for the *more specific* measures, those who regularly seek information from two or more media sources are more critical than those who engage with just one source only (which is almost always following the news on the TV or radio).

As we have seen earlier in the report, attitudes towards standards in public life are also influenced by newspaper readership. Table 7.1 shows a summary of the results by newspaper readership for the variables tested using multivariate analysis. The one consistent pattern that emerges here is that people who read only tabloid newspapers are more critical of standards than the other groups, including those who do not read a newspaper on a regular basis, as well as those who read broadsheets only and those who read both broadsheets and tabloids.

We have also seen earlier in the report that attitudes on certain measures varied according to whether or not respondents said that they were thinking of specific events relating to the conduct of those in public life when answering the questions. Those who did mention specific events had more negative attitudes in relation to whether standards had improved or deteriorated in the last few years, as well as in relation to their confidence that the authorities were committed to upholding standards and would uncover and punish wrongdoing (Table 7.2).

While it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions from these findings about how exposure to media coverage of news and politics influences attitudes towards standards in public life, we can make some observations from the findings.

First, there is a clear association between reading only tabloid newspapers and being critical of standards in public life. This is not to say that it is the reading of tabloid newspapers that leads to its readers having critical attitudes, but simply that those who read *only* these newspapers tend to have more critical attitudes than those who read broadsheets (including those who also read tabloids) and those who do not read a newspaper on a regular basis.

Second, those who do not engage with coverage of news and politics on a regular basis in any media tend to be critical of standards in general, but relatively uncritical about specific aspects of standards – perhaps because they are less informed about the issues and less likely to have come across examples of wrongdoing.

Third, those who engage regularly with multiple sources of media news and political coverage tend to be more critical than those who engage with one or two sources, for example people who watch or hear the news regularly, but do not actively seek out news or information about politics elsewhere. It may be that the greater exposure that the former group have to media coverage of wrongdoing in public life leads to a more critical viewpoint, but again we cannot prove this relationship.

Finally, respondents who say that they have specific events in mind which relate to behaviour (and usually wrongdoing) in public life tend to be more critical about standards. Given that their awareness of these events will often have come from the media, it is again possible to detect – but not to prove – a link between media coverage of politics and attitudes towards conduct in public life.

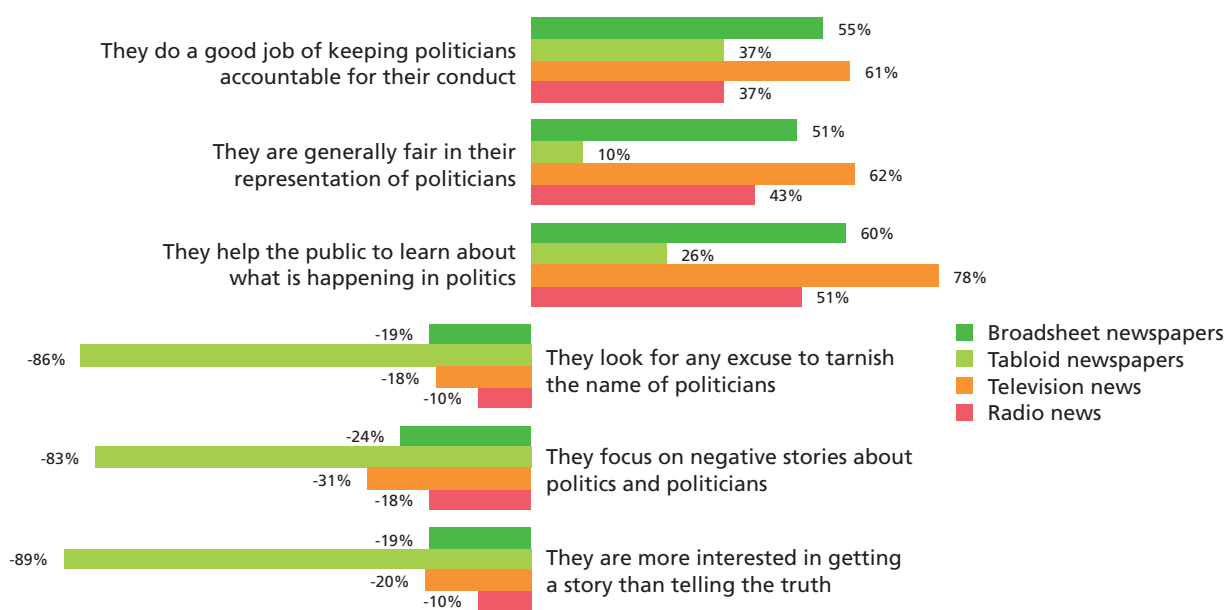
At most, we can conclude from the findings that there are certainly associations between the type and amount of exposure that people have to media coverage of news and politics and their attitudes towards standards in public life, but we cannot say that there is a causal effect between the two.

**Table 7.2: Attitudes towards conduct in public life by whether respondent had specific conduct-related events in mind when answering the survey**

	Had specific events in mind %	Did not have specific events in mind %
Believe standards have improved	19	30
Believe standards have got worse	49	35
Confident in authorities to uphold standards	50	53
Confident in authorities to uncover wrongdoing	34	43
Confident in authorities to punish wrongdoing	28	36

Base: All UK respondents who: Had specific events in mind (940), Did not have specific events in mind (1,372)

Figure 7.4 Attitudes towards news coverage in different media



Base: All GB respondents (2,312)

## 7.5 Views on political news coverage in different media

The research programme to date has unveiled a number of insights into people's attitudes towards the media, both in general and within the specific context of the study. The qualitative research which preceded the development of the baseline survey identified a perception of the media as performing a valuable role as a 'watchdog' in relation to standards of conduct in public life,<sup>27</sup> while at the same time exacerbating public mistrust in public office holders by focusing almost exclusively on improper behaviour. The surveys themselves have substantiated these findings, identifying widespread mistrust of the media – in particular of the tabloid press – but also a perception that the media is effective at policing the behaviour of public office holders and performs this role more successfully than official activity does.

As noted earlier in the chapter a new construct was included in the 2008 survey to explore people's perceptions of the way in which different media covered political news. Respondents were read six statements

and asked to which of four types of media – broadsheet newspapers, tabloid newspapers, television news programmes and radio news programmes – they thought each statement applied. Three statements were expressed positively:

- 'They do a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct';
- 'They are generally fair in their representation of politicians';
- 'They help the public to learn about what is happening in politics'.

The remaining three statements were expressed negatively:

- 'They look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians';
- 'They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians';
- 'They are more interested in getting a story than telling the truth'.

Respondents were able to mention as few or as many of the types of media as they wished for each statement. Results are summarised in Figure 7.4.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> GRAHAM, J., O'CONNOR, W., CURTICE, J. and PARK, A. (2002) 'Guiding Principles: Public Attitudes towards Conduct in Public Life', London: National Centre for Social Research. ([http://www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/pages/publications/conduct\\_in\\_public.pdf](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/natcen/pages/publications/conduct_in_public.pdf)) (accessed 29th August 2008).

<sup>28</sup> For ease of comparison, percentages mentioning the media type for the three negative statements are displayed as negatives.



Taken as a whole these findings suggest that people have a relatively positive view of the way in which TV, broadsheet newspapers and radio cover political news, but a predominantly negative opinion of coverage in the tabloid press.

The proportion of respondents making positive associations with TV, broadsheet newspapers and radio far outweighs the proportion associating these media with the negative statements. Calculating a simple ratio of positive to negative associations across the three media, radio has the highest ratio (3.4:1), followed by TV (2.9:1) and then broadsheets (2.7:1). Respondents were generally less likely to associate the statements with radio than with TV or the broadsheet press, which probably reflects a greater familiarity among the public with the way in which political news is covered on TV and in the press. Having said this, given readership levels of broadsheet newspapers, many people's views of how the broadsheets cover political news would not necessarily reflect a detailed knowledge of actual coverage.

Focusing on the three positive statements, these three media perform best on helping the public to learn about what is happening in politics, with somewhat lower proportions associating each medium with keeping politicians accountable for their conduct and with being fair in their representation of politicians. Looking at the negative statements, each of the three media was most likely to be associated with focusing on negative stories about politics and politicians, with somewhat smaller proportions of respondents thinking that they 'look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians' or that they are 'more interested in getting a story than telling the truth'.

In contrast to perceptions of these three media, the tabloid press is perceived in a very negative light. Each of the three negative statements was attributed to tabloid newspapers by more than eight in ten respondents, while the tabloids performed least well of the four media on the positive statements. Respondents did, however, differentiate between the three positive statements in their views on the tabloid press. Nearly four in ten respondents (37%) acknowledged that the tabloids did a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct, while a quarter (26%) thought that they helped the public learn about what was happening in politics. However, just one in ten (10%) thought that they were generally fair in their representation of politicians.

Opinions on the way in which the different media cover political news do not tend to vary to any great extent within the population. Perhaps the most interesting analysis is how the tabloid and broadsheet press are viewed by their readers (Table 7.3).

Looking first at perceptions of broadsheet readers, it is clear that those who read only broadsheets are particularly positive about them in relation to keeping politicians accountable for their conduct, representing politicians in an even-handed way and helping the public to learn about what is happening in politics. Readers of both broadsheets and tabloids are slightly less positive on these measures and tabloid only readers less positive still, although both groups view broadsheets in a reasonably positive light.

On the negative statements, broadsheet only and tabloid only readers have very similar views about broadsheets, although readers of both broadsheets and tabloids are somewhat more likely to associate broadsheets with focusing on negative stories about politicians and putting the story ahead of the truth.

Turning to opinions on tabloids, those who read tabloids (including those who also read broadsheets) are generally more likely than readers of broadsheets only to associate them with the positive statements. However, the three groups do not differ much in their views in relation to the negative statements.

Tabloid readers, then, are generally quite negative about the way in which the newspapers they read cover politics: they think that they represent politicians unfairly, focusing on negative stories and looking for any excuse to tarnish their name, with an eye on the story rather than the truth. Only a minority – albeit a large one – think that they do a good job of keeping politicians accountable for their conduct. On all six of the measures tabloid only readers have more positive views about broadsheets than they do about their own choice of newspaper.



**Table 7.3: Attitudes towards news coverage by newspaper readership**

	Readership of national newspapers		
	Tabloid only %	Broadsheet only %	Both %
<b>Associate statement with broadsheets</b>			
Do a good job of keeping politicians accountable	49	71	73
Generally fair in their representation of politicians	50	70	58
Help the public to learn about what is happening in politics	57	80	68
Look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians	22	17	19
Focus on negative stories about politics and politicians	21	21	32
More interested in getting a story than telling the truth	17	18	27
<b>Associate statement with tabloids</b>			
Do a good job of keeping politicians accountable	43	28	47
Generally fair in their representation of politicians	13	7	7
Help the public to learn about what is happening in politics	31	22	30
Look for any excuse to tarnish the name of politicians	90	88	90
Focus on negative stories about politics and politicians	87	88	85
More interested in getting a story than telling the truth	92	91	95
Base: All UK respondents reading: Tabloid only (855), Broadsheet only (288), Both (252)			

The tendency for tabloid readers to have relatively negative views about tabloids in relation to their news coverage is also apparent in the extent to which they say they trust journalists on tabloid newspapers to tell the truth. A third (34%) of tabloid only readers said that they trusted tabloid journalists 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth, barely higher than the figure for readers of broadsheets only (27%). Tabloid only readers were more likely to trust broadsheet journalists to tell the truth (52%) than they did tabloid journalists, but were less widely trusting of broadsheet journalists than broadsheet only readers, 78 per cent of whom said that they trusted them 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth.

While the survey finds, then, that those who read only tabloids have a tendency to be more critical about politicians and about standards of conduct in public life, they are also highly critical about the way that tabloid newspapers cover political news, effectively distancing their own opinions from those held by the newspapers that they read.

# 8. EXPERIENCE OF UNFAIRNESS IN RECRUITMENT

## 8.1 Summary

*For the most part people who had applied for a job in the previous five years reported positive experiences of recruitment practice. Only 11 per cent felt that the application and selection process for their most recent job application had been unfair. Having said this, nearly twice as many (19%) thought that the organisation to which they had applied had been biased towards or against particular types of people, and a third of respondents agreed that 'you needed to know the right people to get the job'.*

*Respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in Great Britain to perceive that the recruitment process had been biased, and considerably less likely to think that it was necessary to know the right people in order to get the job.*

*People's experiences of applying for jobs did not differ to any notable extent according to the sector for which they were applying. However, those who applied for a job with a public sector employer were somewhat more likely to agree that the application process had been handled in a fair way (86%) than those applying to a private firm (78%).*

*Perceptions of unfairness were considerably higher among those who had been unsuccessful in their application than among those who had been successful.*

## 8.2 Introduction

Previous surveys in this series have examined the issue of fairness in public sector recruitment through general questions designed to explore the importance that people attach to principles such as merit, fairness and efficiency in relation to recruitment for public sector appointments; their views on acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in recruitment situations; and their perceptions of how widely the principle of selection on merit is upheld in public life in Britain.

Both the 2004 and 2006 surveys identified a widespread belief that proper procedures were frequently not used when recruiting people to public office. Two in three adults in Great Britain (68% in 2004 and 66% in 2006) thought that people get jobs through someone they knew rather than through correct procedures either a lot or a fair amount of the time. A further quarter (26% in 2004 and 27% in 2006) thought that this happened occasionally. In both years, around a third (34%) of respondents thought that such 'cronyism' had increased in the previous few years.

In 2008 it was decided to replace these questions by a new set of questions exploring people's actual experiences of recruitment, and particularly of any unfairness in recruitment. It was felt that grounding the research on this issue in people's actual experiences, rather than in their general perceptions, would provide a more accurate and meaningful measure of unfair recruitment practices in the public sector.

Respondents in the 2008 survey were asked whether or not they had applied for a job in the previous five years. Those who had were then asked a number of questions in relation to the last job for which they had applied, in order to establish whether or not they perceived the application and selection process for the job to have been fair. Respondents were also asked in which sector the last job that they had applied for had been, so that comparisons could be made between perceptions of fairness in the public and private sectors. All figures are reported at the UK level unless otherwise stated.

## 8.3 Experience of recruitment

More than one in three respondents in the UK (37%) had applied for a job in the previous five years and around half of this group (19% of all respondents) had applied for a job within the previous 12 months. More than half (55%) of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years were aged between 18 and 34.

Two thirds (66%) of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years had last applied to a private sector firm. Less than one in ten (8%) had last applied to a nationalised industry or public sector corporation (such as the BBC or the Post Office), while a quarter (24%) had last applied to another public sector employer. Only 2 per cent had applied to the third sector.

Seven in ten respondents (72%) who had applied for a job in the previous five years had got the last job for which they had applied. A small proportion of respondents (5%) were still awaiting the outcome of their application at the time of the interview.

In order to establish perceptions of how fair or unfair the application and selection process had been in relation to this job, respondents were asked to say whether or not they felt that:

- the process had been handled in a way that was fair to everyone who applied;
- the organisation they were applying for a job with was biased towards or against particular types of people;
- ‘you needed to know the right people to get the job’.

Responses to these questions are summarised in Figure 8.1.

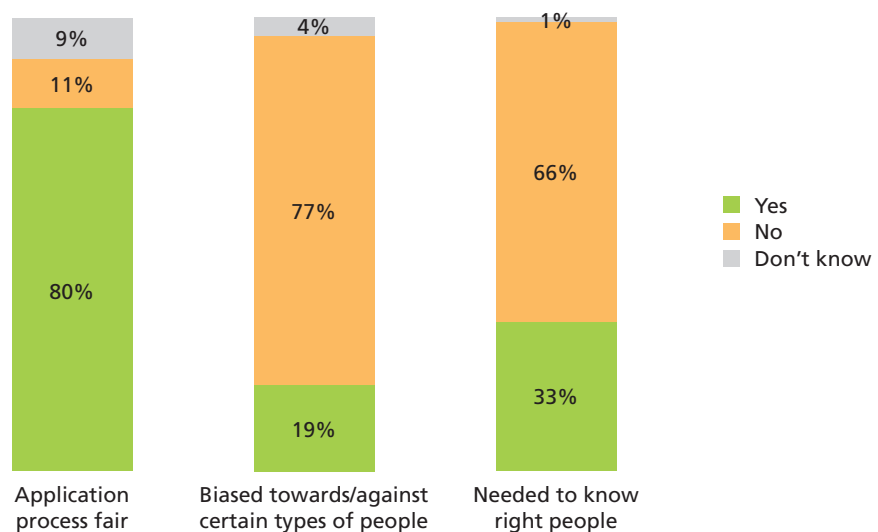
Overall, eight in ten (80%) of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years thought that the application and selection process had been handled in a way that was fair to everyone who applied. However, one in ten (11%) disagreed. 31 per cent of those who did not get the job felt that the application and selection process had not been fair, compared with 6 per cent of those who did.

Two in ten (19%) thought that the organisation to which they had applied had been biased towards or against particular types of people. Three quarters of respondents (77%) did not perceive such bias. Perceived bias was higher among those who did not get the job (29%, compared with 15% of those who did).

A third (33%) of respondents who had applied for a job in the previous five years agreed that ‘you needed to know the right people to get the job’ in relation to the job that they had last applied for. This view was again much more prevalent among those who did not get the job (53%) than among those who did (26%).

Perceptions of the application process were broadly similar among respondents in England, Scotland and Wales. However, respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in Great Britain to perceive that the recruitment process had been biased (11%, compared with 19%), and considerably less likely to think that it

**Figure 8.1 Fairness of process in applying for last job**



Base: All GB respondents who have applied for a job in the last 5 years (846)

was necessary to know the right people in order to get the job (16%, compared with 33%).

The scope for comparison between applicants for jobs in the public sector (n=206) and those applying for jobs in the private sector (n=555) is limited, because of the sample sizes involved. The limited evidence available suggests, however, that people's experiences did not differ to any notable extent according to the sector for which they were applying.

Those who applied for a job with a public sector employer were slightly more likely to agree that the application process had been handled in a fair way (86%) than those applying to a private firm (78%).<sup>29</sup> The latter were, however, more likely to be unsure whether or not the process had been fair (10%, compared with 5% applying for a public sector job). There was no discernible difference between the perceptions of those applying for public and private sector jobs in relation to bias towards or against particular types of people or needing to know the right people to get the job.

<sup>29</sup> Not including those who applied for a job with a nationalised or public sector corporation.

## 9. ATTITUDES IN WALES

### 9.1 Summary

*The findings for the sample in Wales are largely consistent with the overall survey findings. People in Wales value the same behaviours in public office as people living elsewhere in the UK, prioritising honesty, financial prudence, selflessness and dedication to public service above other behaviours. They have similar perceptions of the conduct of public office holders overall in the UK, and of UK government ministers specifically, and similar views on how far different public office holders can be trusted to tell the truth, and on the efficacy of systems of accountability in public office.*

*People in Wales are somewhat more confident than people elsewhere in Britain that the electoral registration system in Britain is safe. A small majority favour the individual registration system in Northern Ireland, compared with larger majorities elsewhere in the UK.*

*People living in Wales are more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than about standards in the UK as a whole. Nearly half of respondents in Wales (47%) rated standards of conduct in Wales as high and 35 per cent thought that standards were improving. In comparison, 39 per cent thought that standards in the UK as a whole were high and 24 per cent that they were improving.*

*Respondents in Wales were also more likely to trust Welsh Assembly Government Ministers (55%) and Assembly Members (51%) to tell the truth than to trust UK Government Ministers (42%) or 'MPs in general' (42%) to do so. But they were also more likely to trust their local MP (60%) than their local Assembly Members (55%).<sup>30</sup>*

*People in Wales generally thought their own executive ministers more likely to exhibit positive behaviours than ministers in the UK government. Most notably, 33 per cent of respondents in Wales said that all or most Welsh Assembly Government Ministers were in touch with what the public thinks is important, compared with 22 per cent for UK Ministers, and 49 per cent said that all or most Welsh Assembly Government Ministers were dedicated to doing a good job for the public, compared with 40 per cent for UK Ministers.*

### 9.2 Introduction

For the first time, a boost sample of interviews was conducted in Wales to provide a robust sample size for comparison of results in Wales with the other countries in the UK. This chapter summarises the key findings from the Wales results. Key differences between results from Wales and the other countries in the UK are also discussed.

Percentages shown in tables and figures in the report may not total to 100 per cent because the percentages shown are rounded to the nearest whole number. Similarly, where individual responses shown in a table or figure have been combined in the commentary, and the individual percentages do not add to the combined percentage, this will be due to rounding. Further details of the reporting conventions used can be found in the Introduction to the report.

Table 9.1 shows the demographic breakdown of the Wales sample.

<sup>30</sup> The figures quoted are the percentages who trusted the profession in question 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth.

<b>Table 9.1: Wales – sample profile</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	%
Male	48
Female	52
<b>Age</b>	
18-24	12
25-34	14
35-44	18
45-54	17
55-64	17
65+	23
<b>Working status</b>	
Working full-time	42
Working part-time	14
Retired	28
Unemployed – looking after house / home	10
Student	3
Unemployed	3
Other	*
<b>Highest qualification achieved</b>	
Degree or degree equivalent, and above	16
Other higher education below degree level	10
A levels, vocational Level 3 and equivalents	14
Trade Apprenticeships	8
GCSE/O level grade A*-C, vocational Level 2 and equivalents	20
Qualifications at Level 1 and below	2
No qualifications	27
<b>Welsh speaking ability</b>	
Fluent	8
Speaks a fair amount	6
Speaks a little	10
Can only say a few words	4
None	70
Base: All Wales respondents (447)	

There was a set of questions asked only of adults in Wales. Firstly, respondents were asked whether or not they spoke Welsh. The three in ten (30%) who said that they did speak Welsh were then asked to rate their fluency. Half of this group (14% of the total) said that they spoke a fair amount of Welsh or were fluent and the other half (again 14% of the total) said that they spoke only a little Welsh.

Respondents in Wales were also given a list of policy areas and asked to say which they thought the Welsh Assembly Government was responsible for. The list included three areas that the Welsh Assembly Government *is* responsible for (health, education and housing) and two areas that it *is not* responsible for (European and foreign affairs, and defence and national security). High proportions correctly identified health (90%), education (88%) and housing (84%) as falling under the remit of the Welsh Assembly Government, while relatively small proportions mistakenly thought that European and foreign affairs (14%) and defence and national security (13%) were areas that the Welsh Assembly Government is responsible for.

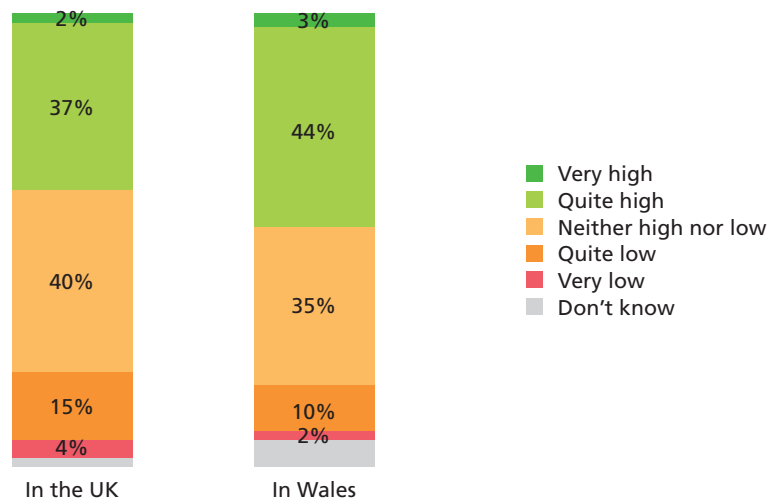
### 9.3 Overall perceptions of standards in public life

Respondents were asked to rate the standards of conduct of public office holders overall in the UK, and to say whether they thought that conduct had improved, got worse or stayed the same in the past few years. They were also asked the same questions in relation to the standards of conduct of public office holders in Wales.

Four in ten adults in Wales (39%) rated the standards of conduct in public life in the UK as 'very' or 'quite' high, with a similar proportion (40%) rating standards as 'neither high nor low' (Figure 9.1). Two in ten adults (19%) rated standards in the UK as low. These ratings were in line with those given by adults in Great Britain as a whole (Figure 1.3, p. 16).

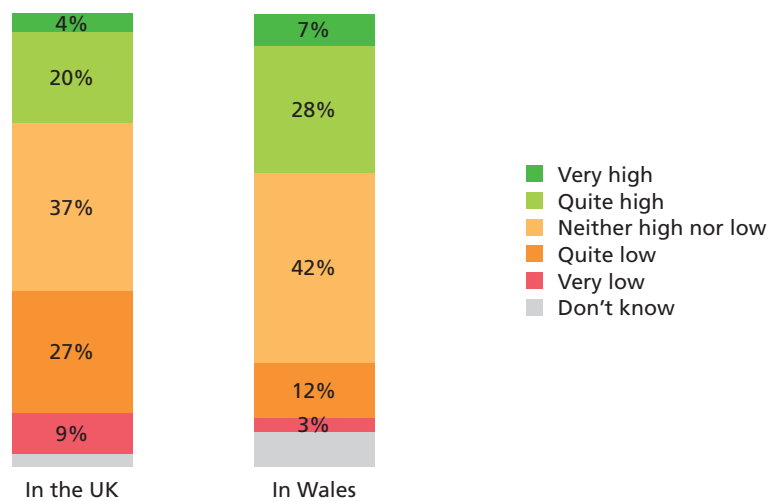
Adults in Wales were significantly more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than they were about standards in the UK. Nearly half (47%) rated standards in their own country as being 'very' or 'quite' high and only 12 per cent rated them as low.

**Figure 9.1 Overall rating of standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK and Wales**



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

**Figure 9.2 How standards of conduct compare with a few years ago**



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

A quarter of respondents in Wales (24%) felt that the standards of conduct of public office holders had improved in the UK when compared with a few years ago, while 36 per cent felt that standards had got worse (Figure 9.2).

Respondents in Wales were also significantly more positive about improvements in the standards of conduct of public office holders in their own country. When asked about standards in their own country, over a third (35%) of adults in Wales felt that standards had improved compared with a few years ago, with 16 per cent saying that standards in Wales had got worse.

## 9.4 Trust in public office holders

Table 9.2 shows the proportion of adults in Wales who say that they would generally trust people from different professions to tell the truth. As described in Chapter 2, in each of the three surveys respondents have been asked to say, for each of 17 professions, which they would generally trust to tell the truth and which they would not. This question has been included in the survey to enable the main survey findings to be set in a broader context, showing how public office holders of different types compare with other professionals in terms of



the confidence that the general public has in them to tell the truth.

One criticism that could be levelled at this question is that it allows respondents to choose between only two response options – either they generally trust those in the profession to tell the truth or they do not. For the 2008 survey it was decided to introduce an alternative version of the question, whereby respondents were asked to rate how much they trusted each of the professions to tell the truth using a four point scale ('Trust a lot'; 'Trust a fair amount'; 'Do not trust very much'; and 'Do not trust at all'). In order to ensure that comparisons could still be made with the earlier surveys, a split sample approach was used with a random half of respondents being asked the question used in 2004 and 2006 (Table 9.2) and half being asked the new question (Table 9.3).

	%
Family doctors	94
Head teachers in schools	84
Judges	81
Local police officers	78
Senior police officers	70
Your local MP	49
Senior managers in NHS	49
TV news journalists	46
Top civil servants	43
Local councillors	41
<i>Ministers in the Welsh Assembly Government</i>	41
<i>Your local Assembly Members (Wales)</i>	41
<i>Assembly Members (Wales)</i>	35
Journalists on Times/Telegraph/Guardian	33
Senior managers in local councils	32
MPs in general	30
Government ministers	29
People who run large companies	27
Estate agents	22
Journalists on Sun/Mirror/Star	7
Base: Wales respondents – 50% sample (226)	

Trust in professional groups in Wales tended to follow the same pattern as in Great Britain (Figure 2.1, p. 22): there were high levels of trust in front-line professionals, such as family doctors, head teachers and judges to tell the truth; senior public officials were less widely trusted to do so; and national politicians were among the professions least trusted to tell the truth.

Table 9.3 summarises the results for the new version of the question. The table shows the proportion of respondents in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who trusted each profession 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth. The table indicates that levels of trust among people in Wales are generally similar to those of people in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The findings suggest that respondents in Wales were more likely to trust Welsh Assembly Government Ministers (55%) and Assembly Members (51%) to tell the truth than to trust UK Government Ministers (42%) or 'MPs in general' (42%) to do so. But they were also more likely to trust their local MP (60%) than their local Assembly Members (55%). These differences are not statistically significant, but results elsewhere suggest that they represent genuine differences.

**Table 9.3: Proportion who trust professions 'a lot' or a fair amount' to tell the truth**

	England %	Scot %	Wales %	NI %
Family doctors	95	98	94	97
Head teachers in schools	89	89	86	91
Judges	83	82	76	79
Local police officers	86	85	80	74
Senior police officers	81	83	78	71
TV news journalists	69	62	62	54
Your local MP	63	58	60	57
Senior managers in NHS	62	69	60	63
Local councillors	58	52	54	60
Journalists on Times/Telegraph/Guardian	58	48	48	52
Top civil servants	59	55	54	45
Senior managers in local councils	56	52	51	52
<i>Your local Assembly Members (Wales)</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	55	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Ministers in the Welsh Assembly Government</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	55	<i>N/A</i>
<i>Assembly Members (Wales)</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	51	<i>N/A</i>
MPs in general	45	40	42	41
People who run large companies	51	47	51	42
Government ministers	45	38	42	38
Estate agents	42	44	46	39
Journalists on Sun/Mirror/Star	34	22	28	20

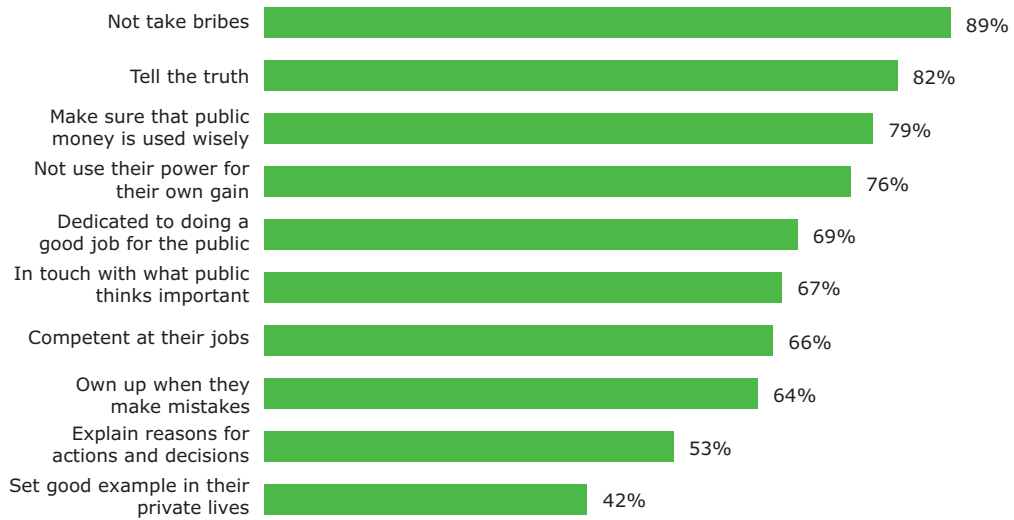
Base: All respondents – 50% sample: England (444), Scotland (265), Wales (221), NI (228)

## 9.5 Expectations and perceptions of national politicians

Respondents were asked to say, in relation to ten behaviours, how important they thought it was for national politicians to exhibit these behaviours, and which they felt were the most important. They were then asked to say what proportion of Welsh Assembly Government Ministers, and what proportion of ministers in the UK government, they felt exhibited these behaviours.

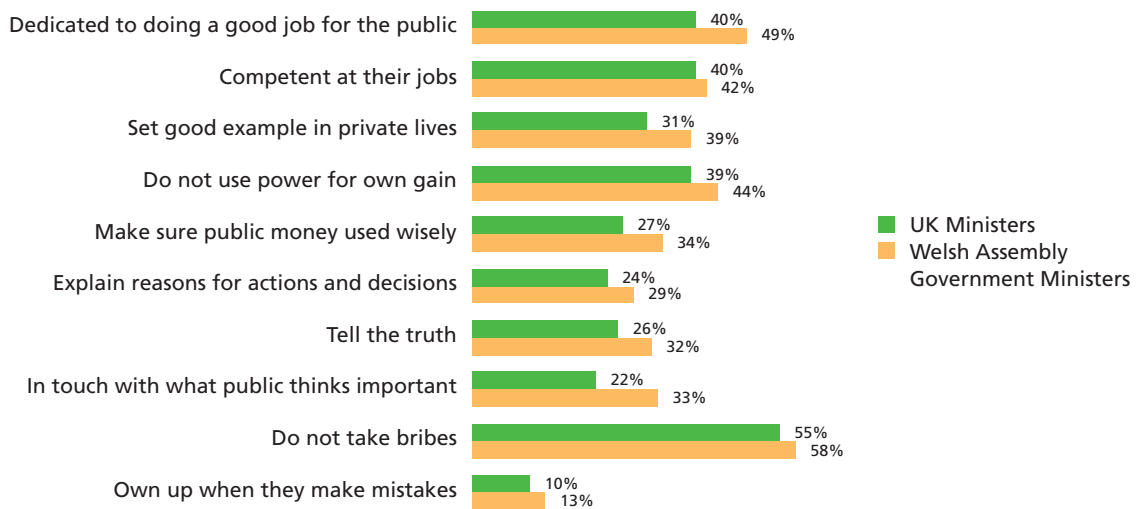
When asked how important they considered it for national politicians to exhibit a number of behaviours, respondents in Wales expressed similar priorities to those in Great Britain (Table 3.2, p. 28), particularly valuing honesty, financial prudence, selflessness and dedication to public service (Figure 9.3). While setting a good example for others in their private lives was least likely to be seen as extremely important by Welsh adults (42% thought it was), it was still significantly more likely to be viewed as extremely important in Wales than in England and Scotland.

**Figure 9.3 Behaviours considered extremely important for public office holders**



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

**Figure 9.4 Perceptions of Wales and UK Ministers – (% thinking all or most exhibit each behaviour)**



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

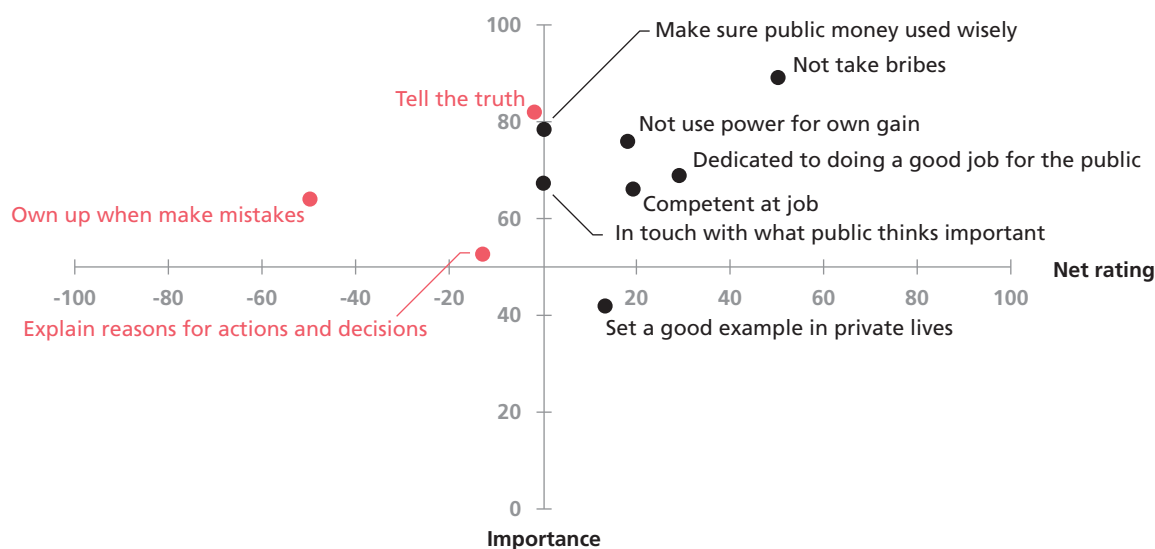
When asked to choose the three most important of these attributes for politicians, 47 per cent of respondents chose telling the truth, 44 per cent making sure that public money is used wisely and 44 per cent not taking bribes. These were also the top three most important attributes among all Great Britain respondents (Table 3.4, p. 30).

Respondents in Wales were asked to say what proportion of both ministers in the UK government and Welsh Assembly Government

Ministers exhibited these same ten behaviours. Figure 9.4 shows the proportion of respondents who felt that all or most of each group of politicians behaved in the ways shown.

As the chart shows, people in Wales tended to think that their own executive ministers were more likely to exhibit the positive behaviours than ministers in the UK government. The most notable differences related to being in touch with what the public thinks is important (33% of respondents said all or most Welsh Assembly

Figure 9.5 Gap Analysis: Devolved Ministers



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

Government Ministers did this; 22% that all or most UK Ministers did this) and being dedicated to doing a good job for the public (49% said all or most Welsh Assembly Government Ministers did this; 40% that all or most UK Ministers did this). Both of these differences were statistically significant.

The perceptions of adults in Wales of Welsh Assembly Government Ministers were broadly similar to the perceptions of adults in Northern Ireland (Figure 11.4, p. 97) and Scotland (Figure 10.4, p. 84) of the equivalent ministers in those administrations.

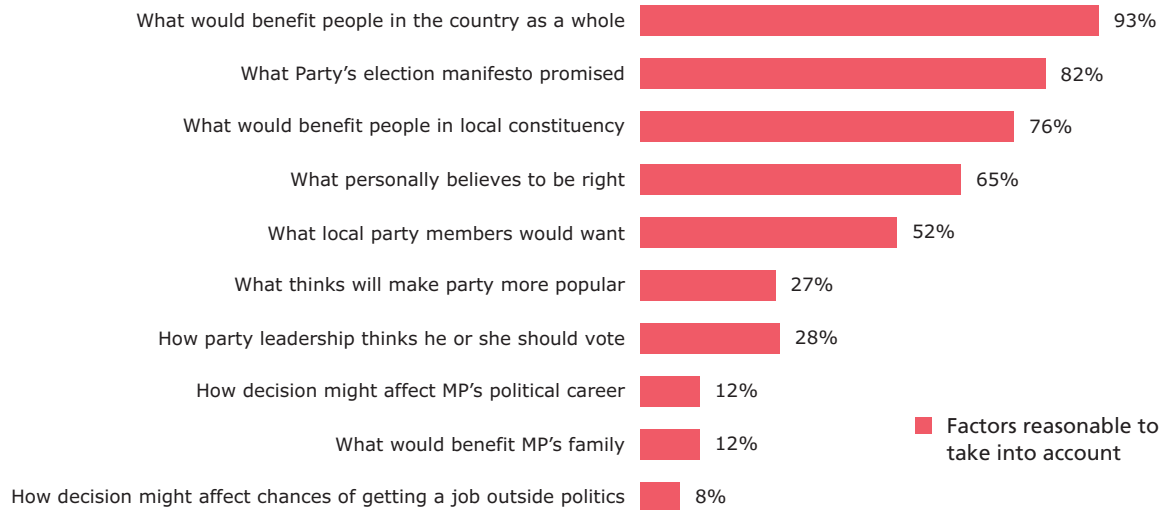
The gap analysis presented in Figure 9.5 (see Chapter 3 for explanations) shows that, in the case of ministers in the Welsh Assembly Government, three behaviours emerge as being key priorities for improvement:

- telling the truth;
- owning up to mistakes;
- and explaining reasons for actions and decisions.

'Being in touch with what the public thinks important' and 'ensuring that public money is used wisely' are also priorities.

## 9.6 MPs and voting in Parliament

Respondents were asked to say which of a number of factors they thought were reasonable for MPs to take into account when deciding how to vote on important issues affecting the whole country (Figure 9.6). In common with respondents elsewhere in the UK (Table 4.2, p. 39), the vast majority of respondents in Wales felt that it was reasonable for MPs to take account of what would benefit people living in the country as a whole (93%). Most respondents also felt that it was reasonable for an MP to take into account what the MP's party election manifesto promised (82%) and what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency (76%). However, respondents in Wales were less likely than those elsewhere in the UK to think these two factors were reasonable to take into account. Two thirds of respondents in Wales (65%) thought that it was acceptable for MPs to follow their own convictions when voting on an important national issue (Figure 9.6).

**Figure 9.6 Expectations of influences on MPs' voting behaviour**

Base: All Wales respondents (447)

There was also a broad consensus that it was not reasonable for MPs to prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues. Between eight and nine in ten adults in Wales said that it was not reasonable for MPs to take into account how the decision might affect the MP's political career (83%), what would benefit their family (86%) or how the decision might affect their chances of getting a job outside politics (90%).

Respondents in Wales were less likely than those in Great Britain as a whole to see the views of local party members as a legitimate influence.

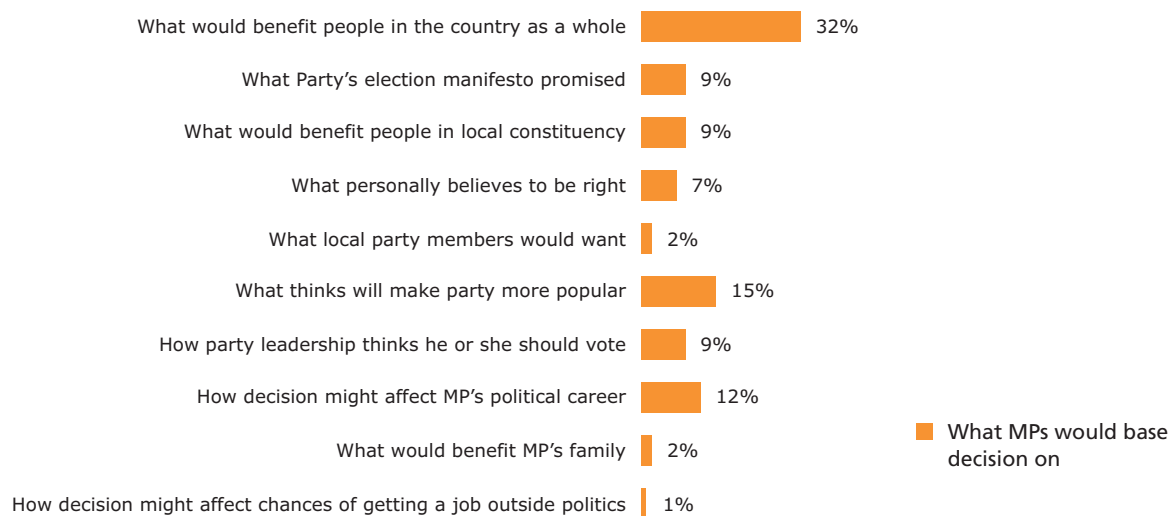
In terms of what MPs *would* base their decision on in practice (Figure 9.7), the results were again broadly similar when comparing Wales with the other countries in the UK (Table 4.4, p. 41). However, respondents in Wales were the most likely to think that MPs would vote on the basis of what would benefit the country as a whole (32%, compared with a Great Britain average of 25%).

Respondents in Wales (59%) were less likely than those in England (64%), Scotland (65%) and Northern Ireland (67%) to believe that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account.

## 9.7 Public office holders and accountability

Over half of respondents in Wales (54%) were confident that the authorities were committed to upholding standards in public life, although only 3 per cent were very confident. Over eight in ten (82%) were confident that the media would generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office, compared with just over a third (36%) having confidence in the authorities to do this.

Finally, when asked about punishment of wrongdoing, just under three in ten (28%) were confident that when public office holders were caught doing wrong the authorities would punish them for it. This level of confidence was a little lower than that found elsewhere in the UK (Table 5.2, p. 48).

**Figure 9.7 Perception of main influence on MPs' voting behaviour**

Base: All Wales respondents (447)

## 9.8 Trust in the electoral system

Adults in Wales were significantly less likely than adults elsewhere in the United Kingdom to say that they were not registered to vote (2%). The overwhelming majority (97%) thought that their name was on the electoral register.

Two thirds of respondents in Wales (66%) said that they had voted in the General Election in 2005 and 53 per cent that they had voted in the latest elections for the National Assembly for Wales. Eight in ten (79%) said that they had voted in an election in the previous five years. Two in ten respondents in Wales (20%) had voted by post on the last occasion they voted, higher than the proportion in other parts of the UK.

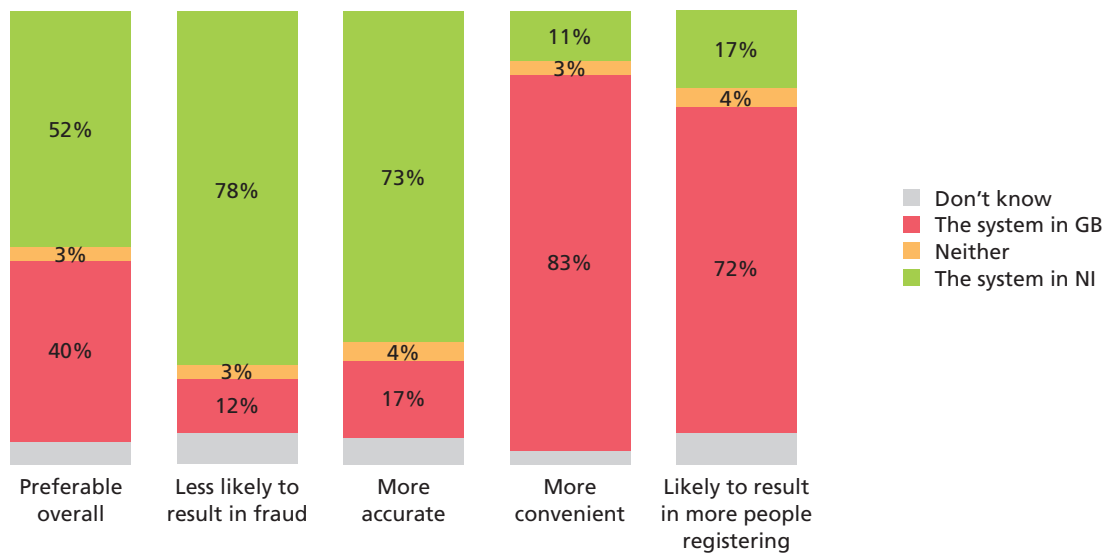
Seven in ten respondents (70%) thought that the system of registering to vote in Wales was safe from fraud or abuse, with 18 per cent considering it very safe. More than one in ten (13%) felt that the system was unsafe. These results were more positive than those in England or Scotland and were comparable to those in Northern Ireland.

Respondents were asked to compare the system of registering to vote in Great Britain (household registration without proof of identity) with the system in Northern Ireland (individual registration with proof of identity) on a number of dimensions: susceptibility to fraud, accuracy, convenience and impact on registration levels (Figure 9.8).

Respondents in Wales were more likely than those in any other part of the UK to favour the registration system in Great Britain. A substantial majority still agreed that the Northern Ireland system would be less likely to result in fraud (78%) and would be more accurate (73%). However, this was still lower than the 78 per cent of Great Britain respondents and 90 per cent of Northern Ireland respondents who thought the Northern Ireland system would be more accurate.

Adults in Wales were highly likely to think that the system in Great Britain was more convenient (83%) and more likely to result in more people registering (72%). While a small majority (52%) still thought that the registration system in Northern Ireland was preferable overall, this was significantly lower than the near two thirds (63%) of adults in England and Scotland and 87 per cent of adults in Northern Ireland who thought this.

**Figure 9.8 Views on individual versus household voter registration**



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

### 9.9 Exposure and attitudes to political news coverage

Two new sets of questions were included in the 2008 survey to explore people’s exposure to political news in the media and their attitudes towards the media’s coverage of this news.

Respondents were first asked which of a range of media they used to source news about politics.

Eight in ten respondents in Wales (80%) said that they often watched or listened to news on the TV or on the radio in a typical week, with over nine in ten (93%) doing so at least sometimes.

Three in ten (30%) said that they often read about politics in a newspaper (including on a newspaper’s website) and a quarter (26%) that they often watched TV or listened to radio programmes about political and social issues. Just over half (53%) said that they read about politics in a newspaper at least sometimes during a typical week, while six in ten (60%) watched or listened to programmes about political and social issues at least sometimes.

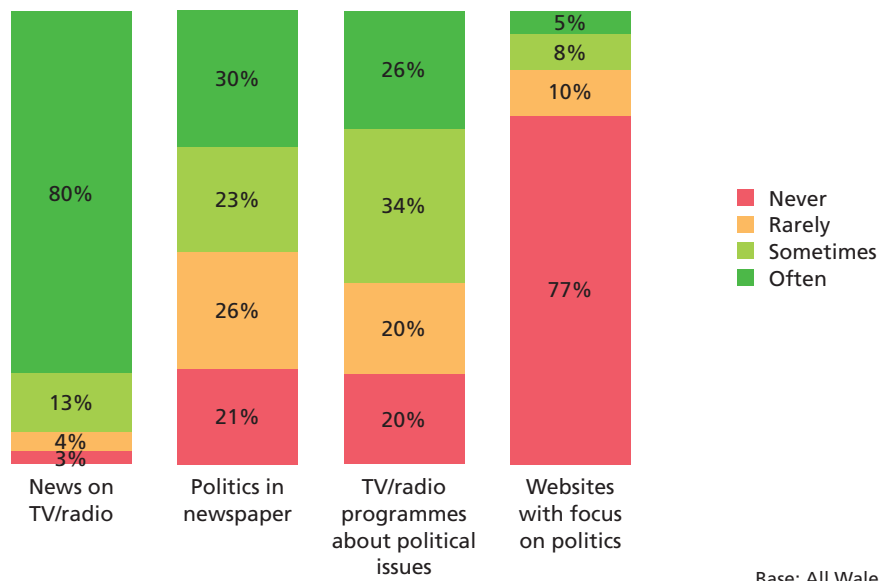
Only 5% of respondents said that they visited websites which focused on politics, such as political blogs, podcasts and forums, often in a typical week, with 13 per cent saying that they did so often or sometimes.

Two in ten adults in Wales (19%) did not use any of the media sources to access political content on a frequent basis. Four in ten (42%) used one source only on a frequent basis, 22 per cent used two sources and 17 per cent three or four sources.

Respondents in Wales had broadly similar levels of exposure to coverage of politics in the media to those in the other countries of the UK, although they were slightly less likely than those in England to at least sometimes watch or listen to political programmes (60% in Wales compared with 65% in England) or read about politics in a newspaper (53% in Wales compared with 59% in England).



Figure 9.9 Exposure to political views



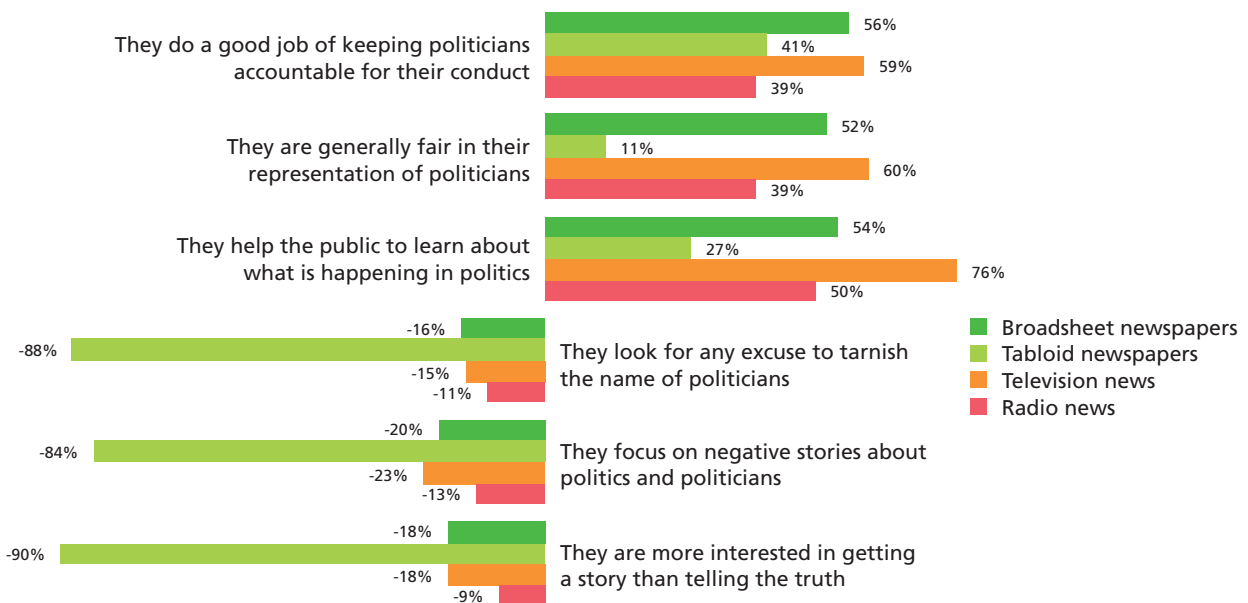
Base: All Wales respondents (447)

Those in Wales were asked an additional question about the sources they used to obtain most of their news about Wales and Welsh issues. Respondents were asked to choose one source from a list of ten that covered both UK-wide and Welsh-specific media. By far the most common source of news about Wales and Welsh issues was a terrestrial TV station, named by four in ten respondents (39%). A further 15 per cent said that they got most of their news about Wales and Welsh issues from a cable, satellite or broadband TV station, meaning that over half

(54%) cited television as their primary source. Other sources mentioned by at least one in ten respondents were: a Welsh or local radio station (14%), and a Welsh daily newspaper (11%).

Respondents were read six statements describing how the media might cover politics and asked to say to which, if any, of four forms of media (the broadsheet press, the tabloid press, TV news and radio news) they thought each statement applied.

Figure 9.10 Attitudes towards news coverage in different media



Base: All Wales respondents (447)

The attitudes of people in Wales towards coverage of politics and political news in different forms of media (Figure 9.10) were generally similar to those of people elsewhere in the UK (Figure 7.4, p. 60). On the whole, respondents in Wales, like those elsewhere, were relatively positive about the way in which TV, broadsheet newspapers and radio cover political news, but were predominantly negative about coverage in the tabloid press.

### 9.10 Experience of unfairness in recruitment

Around three in ten respondents in Wales (31%) had applied for a job in the previous five years, with a third of this group (11% of all Wales respondents) having applied for a job within the previous 12 months. Three quarters of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years (75%) had got the last job they applied for.

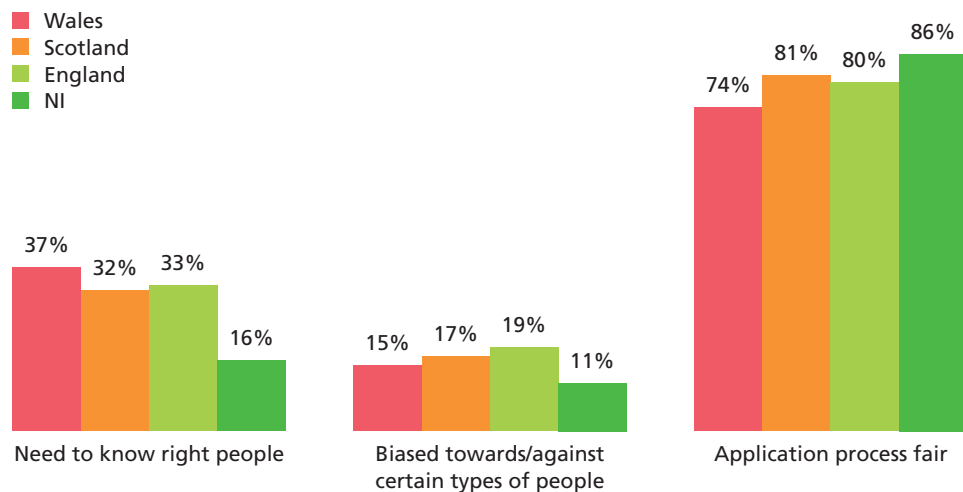
The majority of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years did so to a private sector firm (59%). A further 12 per cent had

last applied to a nationalised industry or public sector corporation (such as the BBC or the Post Office), while a quarter (25%) had last applied to another public sector employer. The proportion who had applied to the third sector was 4 per cent.

Three quarters (74%) of those who had applied for a job in the last five years thought that the application and selection process for the last job that they had applied for had been handled in a way that was fair to everyone who applied (Figure 9.11). This is lower (albeit not significantly so) than the corresponding figures of 80 per cent in England, 81 per cent in Scotland and 86 per cent in Northern Ireland. Only 15 per cent thought that the organisation they had applied to had been biased towards or against particular types of people and 37 per cent that 'you needed to know the right people to get the job'.

The sample size for Wales is too small to enable the experiences of those applying for public sector jobs to be compared with those applying for jobs in other sectors.

**Figure 9.11 Fairness of process in applying for last job**



Base: All respondents who have applied for a job in the last 5 years: England (297), Scotland (150), Wales (110), NI (137)

# 10. ATTITUDES IN SCOTLAND

## 10.1 Summary

*The findings for the sample in Scotland are largely consistent with the overall survey findings. People in Scotland value the same behaviours in public office as people living elsewhere in the UK, prioritising honesty, financial prudence, selflessness and dedication to public service above other behaviours. They have similar perceptions of the conduct of public office holders overall in the UK, and of UK government ministers specifically, similar views on how far different public office holders can be trusted to tell the truth, and broadly similar views on the efficacy of systems of accountability in public office.*

*People in Scotland were less likely to think that the system of registering to vote in their own country was safe from fraud and abuse (59%) than those in England (65%), Wales (70%) or Northern Ireland (72%). The majority of adults in Scotland (63%) preferred the Northern Ireland system of registering to vote over the system used in Great Britain.*

*People living in Scotland tended to be more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than about standards in the UK as a whole. Nearly half of respondents in Scotland (47%) rated standards of conduct in Scotland as high and 38 per cent thought that standards were improving. In comparison, 42 per cent thought that standards in the UK as a whole were high and 29 per cent that they were improving.*

*Respondents in Scotland also expressed higher levels of trust in Holyrood ministers to tell the truth than in Ministers in the UK government (47%, compared with 38%) and in MSPs (49%) than in MPs (40%).<sup>31</sup>*

*People in Scotland generally thought Holyrood Ministers more likely to exhibit positive behaviours than ministers in the UK government. Most notably, 31 per cent of respondents in Scotland said that all or most Holyrood Ministers were in touch with what the public thinks is important, compared with 23 per cent for UK Ministers; and 47 per cent said that all or most Holyrood Ministers were dedicated to doing a good job for the public, compared with 37 per cent for UK Ministers.*

## 10.2 Introduction

As in 2006, a boost sample of interviews was conducted in Scotland to provide a robust sample size for comparison of results in Scotland with other countries in the UK. This chapter summarises the key findings from the Scotland results and comments on differences between results from the 2008 and 2006 surveys. Key differences between results from Scotland and the other UK countries are also discussed.

Percentages shown in tables and figures in the report may not total to 100 per cent because the percentages shown are rounded to the nearest whole number. Similarly, where individual responses shown in a table or figure have been combined in the commentary, and the individual percentages do not add to the combined percentage, this will be due to rounding. Further details of the reporting conventions used can be found in the Introduction to the report.

Table 10.1 shows the demographic breakdown of respondents in the Scotland sample, compared with 2006.

The profiles for the Scotland sample in 2006 and 2008 were similar overall, with only minor differences between the two profiles.

<sup>31</sup> The figures quoted are the percentages who trusted the profession in question 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth.

**Table 10.1: Scotland – sample profile**

	2006 %	2008 %
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	47	47
Female	53	53
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	11	12
25-34	16	15
35-44	20	19
45-54	17	18
55-64	15	15
65+	21	20
<b>Working status</b>		
Working full-time	46	46
Working part-time	13	14
Retired	23	22
Unemployed – looking after house / home	4	7
Student	4	4
Unemployed	4	5
Other	5	2
<b>Highest qualification achieved</b>		
Degree or degree equivalent, and above	22	23
Other higher education below degree level	11	17
A levels, vocational Level 3 and equivalents	16	12
Trade Apprenticeships	7	8
GCSE/O level grade A*-C, vocational Level 2 and equivalents	8	11
Qualifications at Level 1 and below	6	3
No qualifications	26	24
Base: All Scotland respondents: 2006 (491), 2008 (538)		

### 10.3 Overall perceptions of standards in public life

Respondents were asked to rate the standards of conduct of public office holders overall in the UK, and to say whether they thought that conduct had improved, got worse or stayed the same in the past few years. They were also asked the same questions in relation to the standards of conduct of public office holders in Scotland.

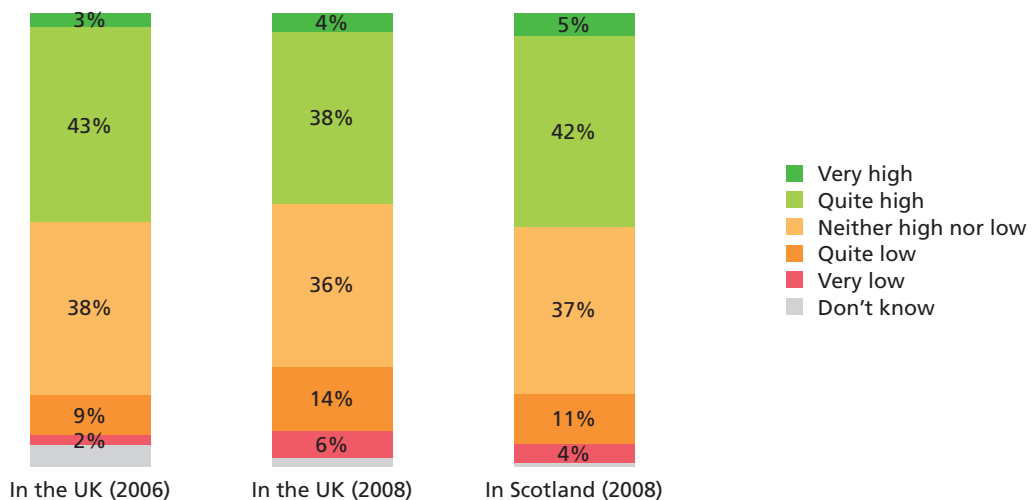
Four in ten adults in Scotland (42%) rated the standards of conduct in public life in the UK as 'very' or 'quite high', with a similar proportion rating standards as 'neither high nor low' (Figure 10.1). Two in ten adults (20%) rated standards in the UK as low.

In 2008, people in Scotland were less positive about overall standards of conduct in the UK than they had been in 2006, with an increase from 11 per cent rating standards as low in 2006 to 20 per cent in 2008. Adults in Scotland were also more likely to rate overall standards of conduct in the UK as very low than the other people in countries in Great Britain (6% compared with 3% in England and 4% in Wales – Figure 1.3, p. 16).

Respondents in Scotland were significantly more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than in the UK as a whole, with 47 per cent rating standards of conduct as high in Scotland, compared with 42 per cent rating UK standards as high. This question was asked for the first time in 2008, replacing a question in the 2006 survey, which asked respondents whether they thought that standards of conduct in Scotland were higher or lower than, or about the same as, those elsewhere in the UK. While the results from the two questions are not directly comparable, the 2008 finding reflects the finding in 2006 that people in Scotland were more likely to say that standards in their own country were higher than elsewhere in the UK (20%) than that they were lower (14%), with 58 per cent rating them as about the same.

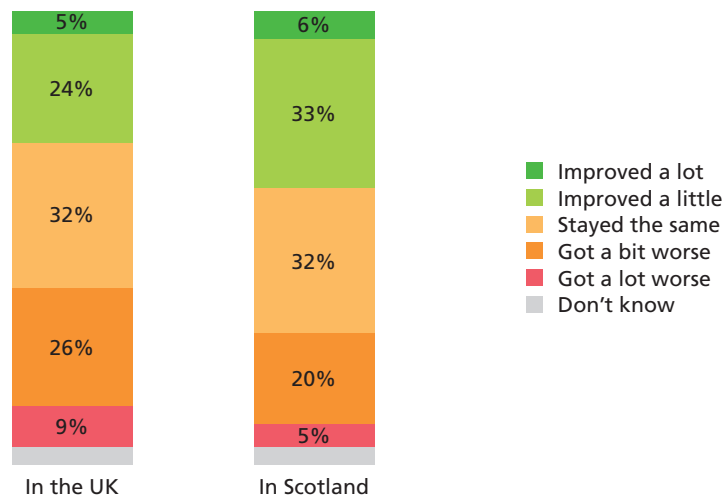
Around three in ten respondents in Scotland (29%) felt that the standards of conduct of public office holders had improved in the UK compared with a few years ago, although a higher proportion (35%) felt that standards had got worse (Figure 10.2).

**Figure 10.1 Overall rating of standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK and Scotland**



Base: All Scotland respondents: 2008 (538)

**Figure 10.2 How standards of conduct compare with a few years ago**



Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

The proportion of adults in Scotland who thought that standards had stayed the same compared with a few years ago decreased from 44 per cent in 2006 to 32 per cent in 2008. A higher proportion said that standards had improved (from 23% in 2006 to 29% in 2008) and that standards had got worse (from 28% in 2006 to 35% in 2008).

Respondents in Scotland were again significantly more positive about standards in their own country compared with those in the UK as a whole, with four in ten (38%) saying that standards had improved in Scotland, compared with three in ten (29%) believing that UK standards had improved. However a quarter of respondents (25%) still thought that standards in Scotland had got worse compared with a few years ago.

### 10.4 Trust in public office holders

Table 10.2 shows the proportion of adults in Scotland who said that they would generally trust people from different professions to tell the truth. As described in Chapter 2, in each of the three surveys respondents have been asked to say, for each of 17 professions, which they would generally trust to tell the truth and which they would not. This question has been included in the survey to enable the main survey findings to be set in a broader context, showing how public office holders of different types compare with other professionals in terms of the confidence that the general public has in them to tell the truth.

One criticism that could be levelled at this question is that it allows respondents to choose between only two response options – either they generally trust those in the profession to tell the truth or they do not. For the 2008 survey it was decided to introduce an alternative version of the question, whereby respondents were asked to rate how much they trusted each of the professions to tell the truth using a four point scale ('Trust a lot'; 'Trust a fair amount'; 'Do not trust very much'; and 'Do not trust at all'). In order to ensure that comparisons could still be made with the earlier surveys, a split sample approach was used with a random half of respondents being asked the question used in 2004 and 2006 (Table 10.2) and half being asked the new question (Table 10.3).

Table 10.2: Trust in professions to tell the truth – 2008 vs. 2006		
	2006 %	2008 %
Family doctors	96	91
Head teachers in schools	88	85
Judges	84	84
Local police officers	77	81
Senior police officers	74	70
<i>Chair of an area health board</i>	50	57
Your local MP	47	49
TV news journalists	51	46
Senior managers in NHS	44	45
Local councillors	40	45
Senior managers in local councils	31	40
Top civil servants	37	39
Journalists on Times/Telegraph/Guardian	40	34
<i>Members of the Scottish Parliament</i>	N/A	32
MPs in general	31	30
People who run large companies	24	30
<i>Holyrood Ministers</i>	N/A	28
Government ministers	23	26
Estate agents	23	26
Journalists on Sun/Record/Star	11	9
Base: 2006 – All Scotland respondents (491), 2008 – Scotland respondents – 50% sample (273)		

As was found for Great Britain as a whole (Figure 2.1, p. 22), the highest levels of trust in the honesty of public office holders are reserved for front-line professionals such as family doctors, head teachers and judges. The findings in Scotland mirrored the pattern in Great Britain, with senior public officials less widely trusted to tell the truth and national politicians among the professions least trusted to tell the truth.

There were no significant changes in the levels of trust for the professions listed between 2006 and 2008.

Table 10.3 summarises the results for the new version of the question. The table shows the proportion of respondents in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who trusted each profession 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the

truth. The table shows that overall levels of trust are generally similar across the UK.

Seven in ten adults in Scotland (72%) said that they would trust chairs of area health boards to tell the truth 'a fair amount' or 'a lot', marginally higher than the proportion trusting senior managers in the NHS to tell the truth (69%), although this in turn was a slightly higher figure than among adults elsewhere in the UK.

Respondents in Scotland also expressed higher levels of trust in Holyrood ministers to tell the truth than in ministers in the UK government (47%, compared with 38%) and in MSPs (49%) than in MPs (40%). These differences were not statistically significant, but results elsewhere suggest that they represent genuine differences.



## 10.5 Expectations and perceptions of national politicians

Respondents were asked to say, in relation to ten behaviours, how important they thought it was for national politicians to exhibit these behaviours, and which they felt were the most important. They were then asked to say what proportion of Holyrood Ministers, and what proportion of ministers in the UK government, they felt exhibited these behaviours.

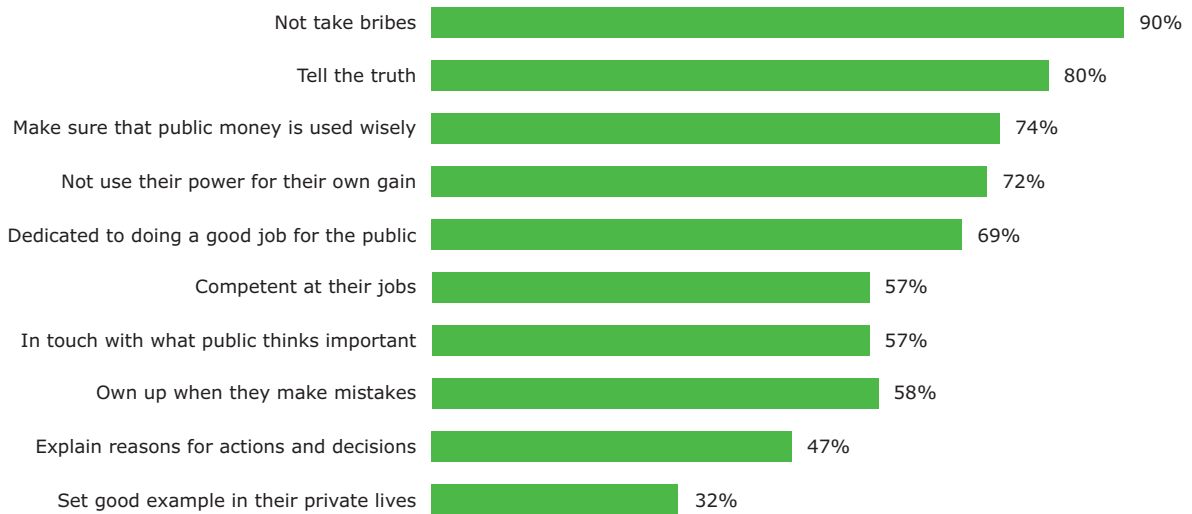
Respondents in Scotland considered the same behaviours as priorities as those in Great Britain overall (Table 3.2, p. 28), again valuing honesty, financial prudence, selflessness and dedication to public service (Figure 10.3). The three most important attributes for politicians were considered to be 'telling the truth' (52%), 'not taking bribes' (50%) and 'making sure that public money is spent wisely' (41%).

Adults in Scotland placed slightly greater importance on politicians owning up when they make mistakes (58%) than other respondents in Great Britain (Table 3.4, p. 30).

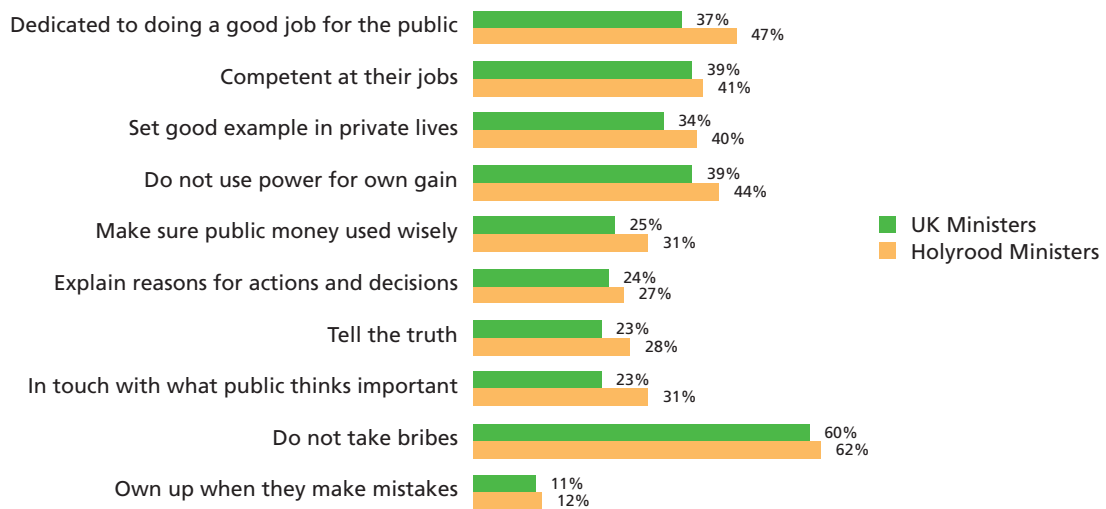
**Table 10.3: Proportion who trust professions to tell the truth 'a lot' or a fair amount'**

	England %	Scot %	Wales %	NI %
Family doctors	95	98	94	97
Head teachers in schools	89	89	86	91
Judges	83	82	76	79
Local police officers	86	85	80	74
Senior police officers	81	83	78	71
Chair of an area health board	N/A	72	N/A	N/A
TV news journalists	69	62	62	54
Your local MP	63	58	60	57
Senior managers in NHS	62	69	60	63
Local councillors	58	52	54	60
Journalists on Times/Telegraph/Guardian	58	48	48	52
Top civil servants	59	55	54	45
Senior managers in local councils	56	52	54	60
Holyrood Ministers	N/A	47	N/A	N/A
Members of the Scottish Parliament	N/A	49	N/A	N/A
MPs in general	45	40	42	41
People who run large companies	51	47	51	42
Government ministers	45	38	42	38
Estate agents	42	44	46	39
Journalists on Sun/Mirror/Star (Record in Scotland)	34	22	28	20

Base: All respondents – 50% sample: England (444), Scotland (265), Wales (221), NI (228)

**Figure 10.3 Behaviours considered extremely important in public life – holders**

Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

**Figure 10.4 Perception of Scotland and UK Ministers – (% thinking all or most exhibit each behaviour)**

Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

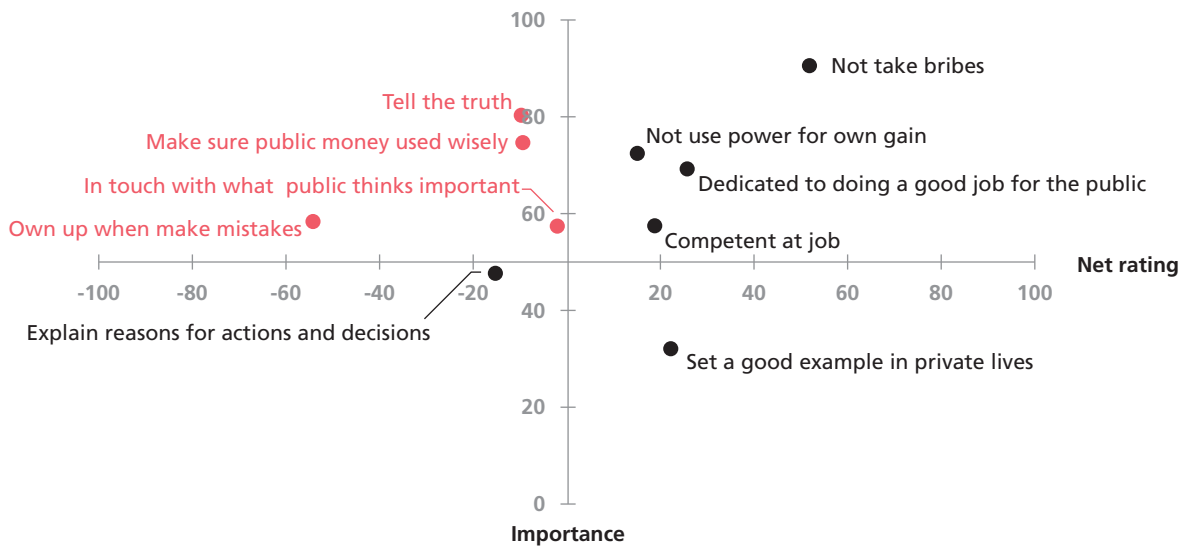
Respondents were asked to say what proportion of UK Government Ministers they thought displayed these behaviours. Respondents in Scotland were also asked about Holyrood Ministers. Figure 10.4 shows the proportion of respondents who felt that all or most of each group of politicians behaved in the ways shown.

Adults in Scotland viewed Holyrood Ministers more positively than they did ministers in the UK Government. The most significant

differences were respondents in Scotland being more likely to say that all or most Holyrood Ministers were dedicated to doing a good job for the public than UK Ministers (47% and 37% respectively) and that all or most were in touch with public priorities (31% and 23% respectively).

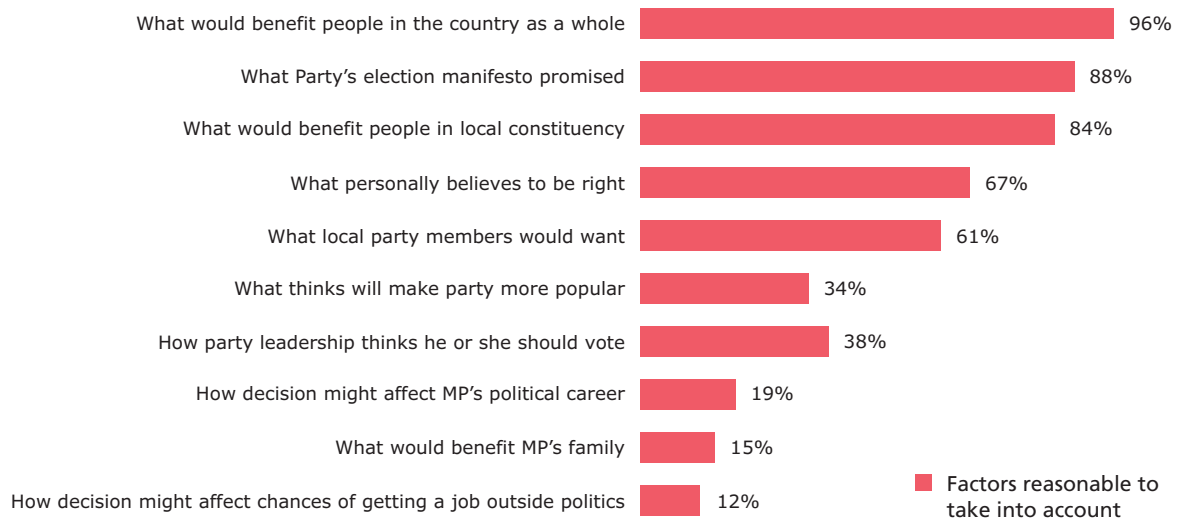
The perceptions of adults in Scotland of Holyrood Ministers were broadly similar to the perceptions of adults in Wales (Figure 9.4, p. 71)

**Figure 10.5 Gap Analysis: Devolved Ministers**



Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

**Figure 10.6 Expectations of influences on MPs' voting behaviour**



Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

and Northern Ireland (Figure 11.4, p. 97) of the equivalent ministers in those administrations.

The gap analysis presented in Figure 10.5 (see Chapter 3 for explanations) shows that, in the case of Holyrood Ministers, four behaviours emerge as being key priorities for improvement:

- telling the truth;
- making sure that public money is used wisely;
- owning up to mistakes;
- and being in touch with what the general public thinks is important.

## 10.6 MPs and voting in Parliament

Respondents were asked to say which of a number of factors they thought were reasonable for MPs to take into account when deciding how to vote on important issues affecting the whole country (Figure 10.6). In common with respondents elsewhere in the UK (Table 4.2, p. 39), most respondents in Scotland felt that it was reasonable for MPs to take account of what would benefit people living in the country as a whole (96%), what the MP's party election manifesto promised (88%) and what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency (84%).

Two thirds (67%) thought that it was acceptable for MPs to follow their own convictions when voting on an important national issue and 61 per cent that it was acceptable to vote in accordance with what the local party members would want.

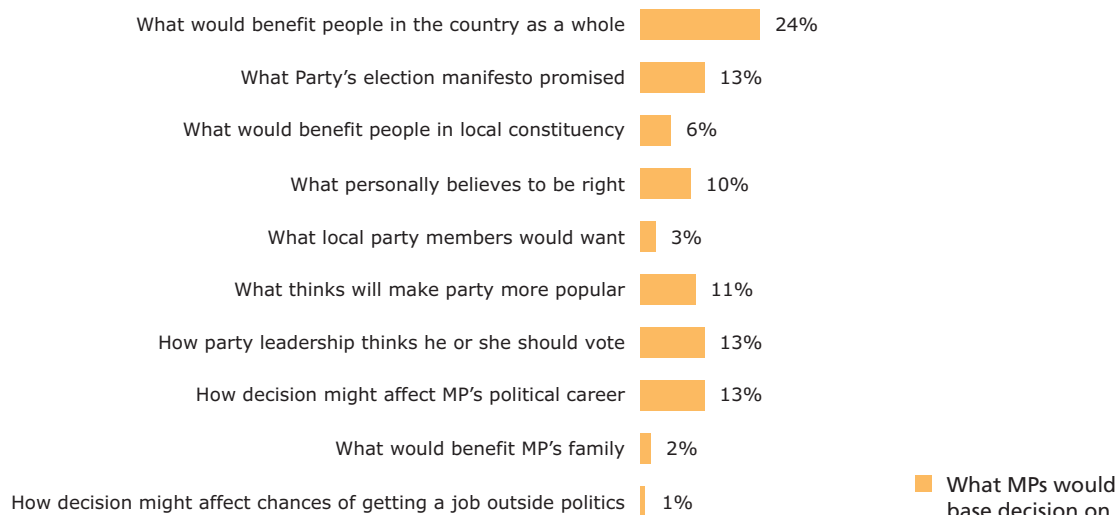
In common with respondents elsewhere in the UK, those in Scotland believed that MPs should not prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues. Around eight in ten adults or more in Scotland said that it was not reasonable for MPs to take into account what would benefit their family (83%) or how the decision might affect their own career in politics (79%) or their chances of getting a job outside of politics (85%).

Respondents in Scotland, along with those in Northern Ireland, were most likely to think it reasonable to take into account the views of the party leadership when voting on an important national issue.

As noted in Chapter 4, there is a dissonance between what people think it is reasonable for MPs to take into account when voting, and what they believe MPs actually base their voting decisions on (Figure 10.7). In common with respondents in Great Britain overall (Table 4.4, p. 41), those in Scotland were most likely to think that MPs would vote based on what would benefit people living in the country as a whole (24%). However, people in Scotland were more likely to think that MPs would make their decision based on their party's views, including what the manifesto promised and how the party leadership thought they should vote (both 13%). The same proportion thought that MPs would take into account how the decision might affect their political career. Around one in ten thought that MPs would base their decision on what would make the party more popular (11%) and on their own personal beliefs (10%).

Around two thirds (65%) of respondents in Scotland believed that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account, similar to the proportions in England (64%) and Northern Ireland (67%), and slightly higher than the proportion in Wales (59%).

**Figure 10.7 Perception of main influence on MPs' voting behaviour**



Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

### 10.7 Public office holders and accountability

Over half of respondents in Scotland (55%) were confident that the authorities were committed to upholding standards in public life, although only 5 per cent were very confident.

Eight in ten adults in Scotland (80%) were confident that the media would generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office, compared with less than half (44%) having confidence in the authorities to do this. Only three in ten respondents in Scotland (31%) were confident that the authorities would punish public office holders caught doing wrong.

As noted in Chapter 5 (Table 5.2, p. 48), people in Scotland (and Northern Ireland) were more confident in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office (44% in Scotland and 45% in Northern Ireland) than people in Wales (36%) or England (39%).

Adults in Scotland had as much confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing in public office in 2008 (80%) as they did in 2006 (81%). However, their confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing in public office has increased markedly from 37 per cent in 2006 to 44 per cent in 2008. At the same time, confidence in the authorities to punish wrongdoing has decreased from 38 per cent in 2006 to 31 per cent in 2008.

### 10.8 Trust in the electoral system

Over nine in ten respondents in Scotland (94%) thought that their name was on the electoral register and over eight in ten claimed to have voted in an election in the last five years (83%).

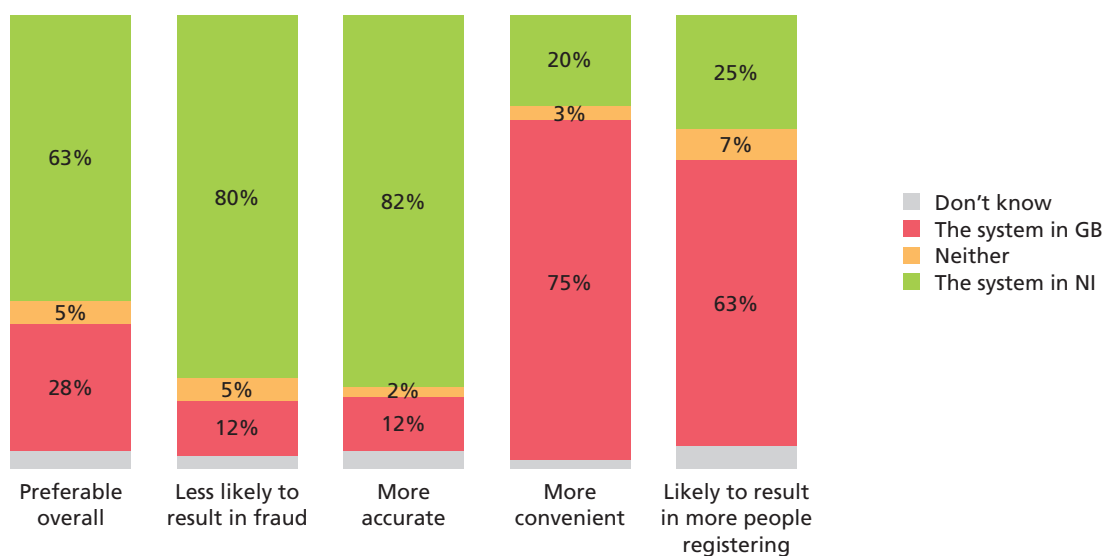
Two thirds (68%) of respondents in Scotland said that they had voted in the last General Election in 2005 and a similar proportion that they had voted in the last devolved elections (66%). On the last occasion, nine in ten voted in person at a polling station (89%) with the remainder voting by post (11%).

Adults in Scotland were less likely to think that the system of registering to vote in their own country was safe from fraud and abuse (59%) than those in England (65%), Wales (70%) or Northern Ireland (72%). Only one in ten respondents in Scotland said that the system of registering to vote was very safe (10%).

Nearly a quarter of respondents in Scotland viewed the system of registering to vote as unsafe (23%), around twice as many as in Northern Ireland (11%) and Wales (13%).

Respondents were asked to compare the system of registering to vote in Great Britain (household registration without proof of identity) with the system in Northern Ireland (individual registration with proof of identity) on a number of dimensions: susceptibility to fraud, accuracy, convenience, and impact on registration levels (Figure 10.8).

**Figure 10.8 Views on individual versus household voter registration**



Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

As noted in Chapter 6 (Figure 6.3, p. 53), respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely than those in Great Britain to favour the registration system in Northern Ireland. However, the majority of adults in Scotland (63%) also preferred the Northern Ireland system of registering to vote over the system used in Great Britain (28%).

Respondents in Scotland were slightly more likely to think that the Northern Ireland system of registering to vote would be more accurate than the system in Great Britain (82%), when compared with those in England (78%) and in Wales (73%), although this is still lower than the 90 per cent of adults in Northern Ireland who thought that their own system was more accurate. In terms of susceptibility to fraud, convenience and impact on registration levels, views of adults in Scotland were in line with those in Great Britain overall.

### 10.9 Exposure and attitudes to political news coverage

Two new sets of questions were included in the 2008 survey to explore people’s exposure to political news in the media and their attitudes towards the media’s coverage of this news.

Respondents were first asked which of a range of media they used to source news about politics.

Three-quarters of respondents in Scotland said that they often watched or listened to news on the TV or on the radio in a typical week (75%), with over nine in ten doing this at least sometimes (92%). Only 2 per cent said they never did this (Figure 10.9).

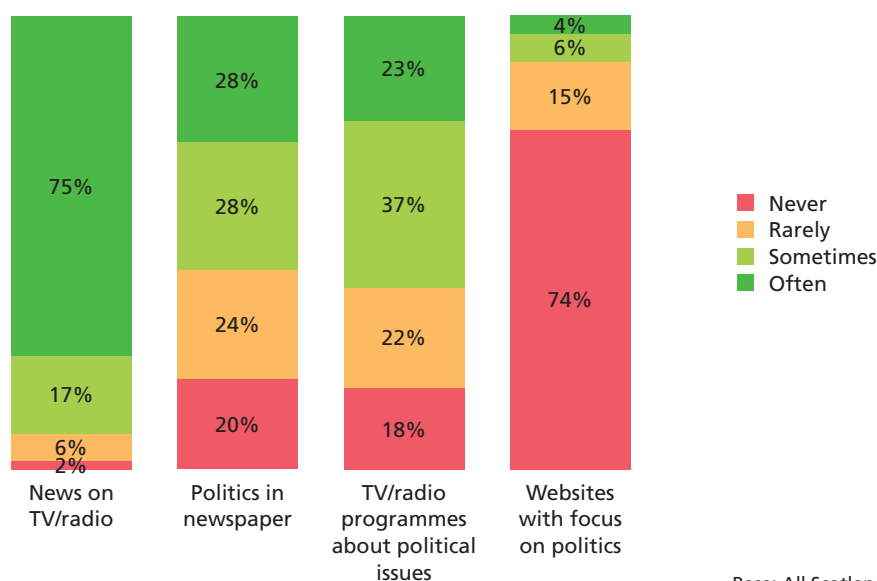
Over half of adults in Scotland (56%) said that they read about politics in a newspaper and 60 per cent that they watched or listened to TV and radio programmes about political issues at least sometimes, with around a quarter of respondents doing these activities often (28% and 23% respectively). Two in ten respondents said that they never read about politics in a newspaper (20%) or watched television or radio programmes about political issues (18%).

Only 4 per cent of respondents said that they often visited websites which focused on politics, such as political blogs, podcasts and forums, while 6 per cent said that they did this sometimes.

Overall, a quarter of adults in Scotland (24%) did not use any of the media covered to access political content on a frequent basis. Four in ten (40%) used only one source on a frequent basis, two in ten (22%) often used two sources and 14 per cent used three or four sources.

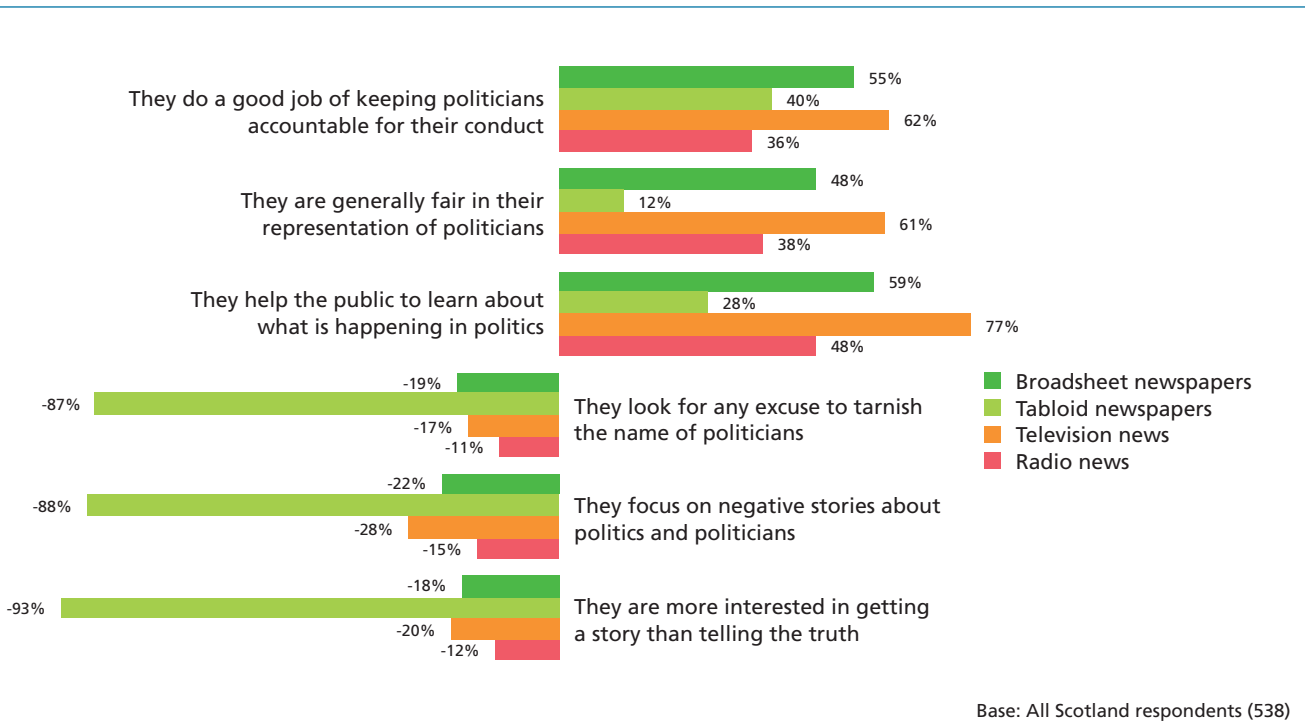
Adults in Scotland had similar levels of exposure to coverage of politics in the media to those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Figure 10.9 Exposure to political news



Base: All Scotland respondents (538)

**Figure 10.10 Attitudes towards news coverage in different media**



Respondents were read six statements describing how the media might cover politics and asked to say to which, if any, of four forms of media (the broadsheet press, the tabloid press, TV news and radio news) they thought each statement applied.

The attitudes of people in Scotland towards coverage of politics and political news in different forms of media (Figure 10.10) were generally similar to those of people elsewhere in the UK (Figure 7.4, p. 60). On the whole respondents in Scotland, like those elsewhere, were relatively positive about the way in which TV, broadsheet newspapers and radio cover political news, but predominantly negative about coverage in the tabloid press.

### 10.10 Experience of unfairness in recruitment

A third of adults in Scotland (33%) had applied for a job in the previous five years with around half this group having applied for a job in the preceding 12 months (15% of all respondents in Scotland). Three quarters (76%) of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years had got the last job they applied for.

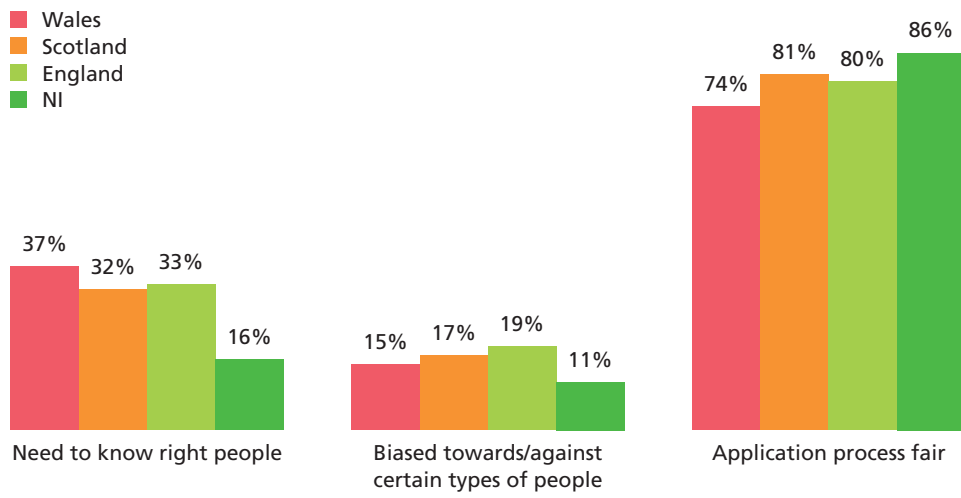
The majority of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years had done so to a private sector firm (63%). A further 8 per cent last applied to a nationalised industry or public sector corporation (such as the BBC or the Post Office), while around a quarter had applied to another public sector employer (24%). There were 5 per cent of adults in Scotland who had applied for a job in the third sector in the previous five years.

Eight in ten of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years (81%) thought that the application and selection process for this job had been handled in a way that was fair to everyone who applied (Figure 10.11). However, 17 per cent felt that the application and selection process had been biased towards or against certain types of people and a third (32%) felt that you needed to know the right people to get the job. The experiences of respondents in Scotland were similar to those found in Great Britain overall, but less positive than those reported by respondents in Northern Ireland.

The sample size for Scotland is too small to enable the experiences of those applying for public sector jobs to be compared with those applying for jobs in other sectors.



Figure 10.11 Fairness of process in applying for last job



Base: All respondents who have applied for a job in the last 5 years: England (297), Scotland (150), Wales (110), NI (137)

# 11. ATTITUDES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## 11.1 Summary

People in Northern Ireland value the same behaviours in public office as people living elsewhere in the UK, prioritising honesty, financial prudence, selflessness and dedication to public service above other behaviours. However, they place somewhat greater importance than those in Great Britain on being dedicated to doing a good job for the public.

Respondents in Northern Ireland were more positive about standards of conduct than in 2006, and more positive in 2008 than respondents elsewhere in the UK:

- In 2008, 41 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland rated standards overall as high and 45 per cent felt that they had improved, compared with 35 per cent and 29 per cent respectively in 2006. Trust in public office holders to tell the truth was also higher in 2008 than in 2006.
- Respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in Great Britain to rate standards as being 'low' (12%, compared with 20%) and more likely to think that they had improved (45%, compared with 25%).

Respondents in Northern Ireland were generally more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than about standards in the UK as a whole:

- Nearly half of respondents in Northern Ireland (49%) rated standards of conduct in Northern Ireland as high and 60 per cent thought that standards were improving.
- Respondents in Northern Ireland were more likely to trust their Executive Ministers to tell the truth than to trust UK Government Ministers (45%, compared with 38%) but less likely to trust MLAs (37%) than 'MPs in general' (41%).<sup>32</sup>

- 38 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland thought that all or most Executive Ministers were in touch with what the public thinks is important, and 45 per cent that they were dedicated to doing a good job for the public, compared with 24 per cent and 35 per cent who felt the same about UK Ministers.

Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents in Northern Ireland thought that their electoral registration system was safe from fraud or abuse, compared with 64 per cent of those in Great Britain who thought the British system safe. Overall, 87 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland preferred the Northern Ireland system over the system in Great Britain.

## 11.2 Introduction

As in 2006, a sample of interviews was conducted in Northern Ireland to provide a robust sample size for comparison of results in Northern Ireland with the other countries in the UK. This chapter summarises the key findings from the Northern Ireland results and comments on differences between results from the 2008 and 2006 surveys. Key differences between results from Northern Ireland and the other countries in the UK are also discussed.

Percentages shown in tables and figures in the report may not total to 100 per cent because the percentages shown are rounded to the nearest whole number. Similarly, where individual responses shown in a table or figure have been combined in the commentary, and the individual percentages do not add to the combined percentage, this will be due to rounding. Further details of the reporting conventions used can be found in the Introduction to the report.

Table 11.1 shows the demographic breakdown of the respondents in the Northern Ireland sample and how this compares with 2006.

<sup>32</sup> The figures quoted are the percentages who trusted the profession in question 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth.

**Table 11.1: Northern Ireland – sample profile**

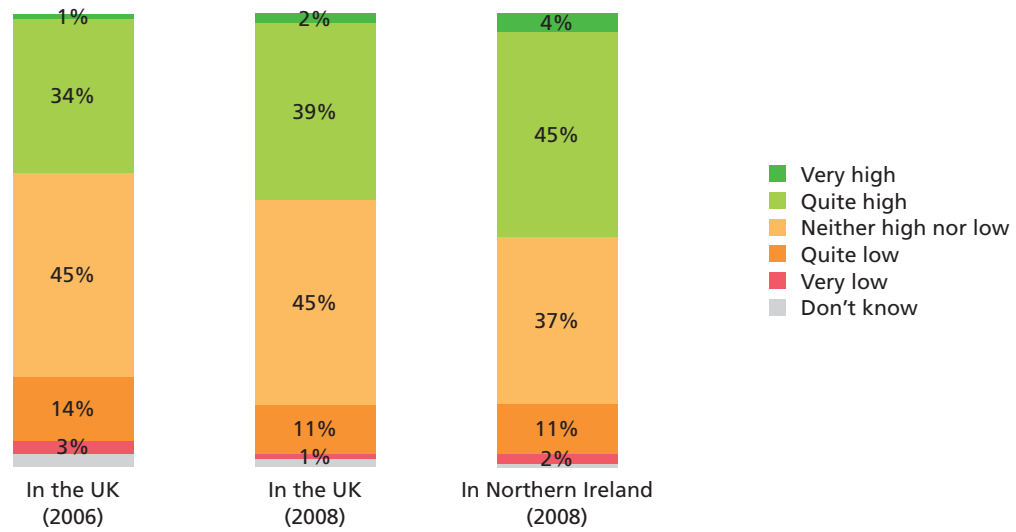
	2006 %	2008 %
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	48	48
Female	52	52
<b>Age</b>		
18-24	13	14
25-34	18	17
35-44	20	20
45-54	16	17
55-64	14	14
65+	18	18
<b>Working status</b>		
Working full-time	46	45
Working part-time	9	13
Retired	22	20
Unemployed – looking after house / home	11	10
Student	4	5
Unemployed	8	5
Other	-	1
<b>Highest qualification achieved</b>		
Degree or degree equivalent, and above	14	21
Other higher education below degree level	7	6
A levels, vocational Level 3 and equivalents	8	14
Trade Apprenticeships	9	8
GCSE/O level grade A*-C, vocational Level 2 and equivalents	14	19
Qualifications at Level 1 and below	16	3
No qualifications	29	27

Base: All NI respondents: 2006 (403), 2008 (414)

While on most variables the Northern Ireland sample profiles in 2006 and 2008 were similar, there were some differences in the profiles by highest qualification obtained. In the 2006 sample, 45 per cent of the weighted sample had achieved no qualifications or qualifications at Level 1 or below. This compares with 30 per cent of the 2008 weighted sample. Conversely, respondents in the 2008 sample were more likely than those interviewed in 2006 to have Level 3 qualifications or higher. The figures for the 2008 survey are more closely aligned

to those from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey. It should be noted that analysis conducted on the two data sets to control for these differences indicates that the changes reported in attitudes in Northern Ireland between 2006 and 2008 are not attributable to these differences in profile.

**Figure 11.1 Overall rating of standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK and Northern Ireland**



Base: All NI respondents: 2006 (403), 2008 (414)

### 11.3 Overall perceptions of standards in public life

Respondents were asked to rate the standards of conduct of public office holders overall in the UK, and to say whether they thought that conduct had improved, got worse or stayed the same in the past few years. They were also asked the same questions in relation to the standards of conduct of public office holders in Northern Ireland.

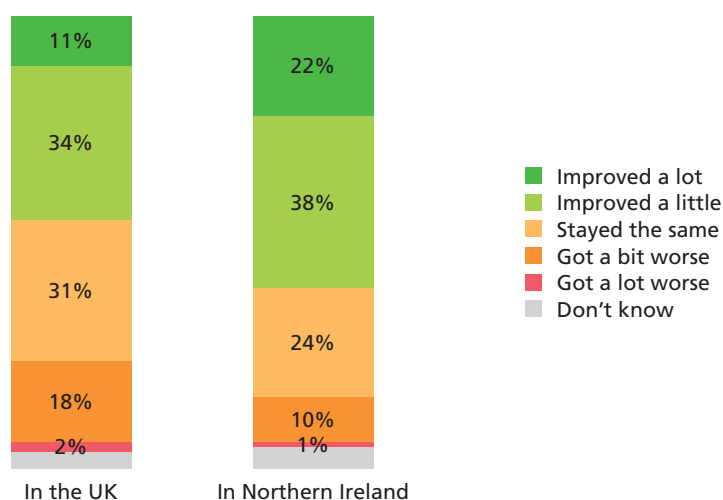
Over four in ten adults in Northern Ireland rated the standards of conduct in public life in the UK as 'very' or 'quite' high (41%), see Figure 11.1. The largest proportion (45%), however, rated standards as 'neither high nor low' and 12 per cent rated standards as low. People in Northern Ireland were more positive about overall standards of conduct in the UK in 2008 than they were in 2006. Just over a third (35%) rated standards in the UK as 'very' or 'quite' high in 2006.

People in Northern Ireland were no more or less likely than those in Great Britain (Figure 1.3, p. 16) to rate standards in the UK as 'high' (41% compared with the Great Britain level of 40%), but were much less likely to rate standards as being 'low' (12%, compared to the Great Britain level of 20%).

People in Northern Ireland were slightly more positive about standards of conduct in their own country than they were about standards in the UK. Nearly half of respondents (49%) in Northern Ireland rated standards in their own country as being 'very' or 'quite' high, compared with the 41 per cent reported above who rated standards of conduct in the UK as high.

In 2006, respondents in Northern Ireland were not asked to rate standards of conduct in their own country, but were asked how they thought that standards of conduct in Northern Ireland compared with those elsewhere in the UK. Similar proportions of people in Northern Ireland in the 2006 survey felt that standards in their own country were higher than those elsewhere in the UK (22%) as felt that they were lower (24%), with 49 per cent rating them as about the same.

Nearly half of respondents in Northern Ireland (45%) felt that standards of conduct of public office holders had improved in the UK when compared with a few years ago. This compares favourably with the 2006 result, when only 29 per cent felt that standards had improved.

**Figure 11.2 How standards of conduct compare with a few years ago**

Base: All NI respondents (414)

Supporting the findings reported above on overall perceptions of standards in the UK and in Northern Ireland, respondents in Northern Ireland were even more positive about improvements in standards of conduct of public office holders in their own country. When asked about their own country, six in ten adults in Northern Ireland (60%) felt that standards had improved compared with a few years ago, including just over two in ten (22%) who felt standards had improved 'a lot'.

#### 11.4 Trust in public office holders

The table below shows the proportion of adults in Northern Ireland who say they would generally trust people from different professions to tell the truth. As described in Chapter 2, in each of the three surveys respondents have been asked to say, for each of 17 professions, which they would generally trust to tell the truth and which they would not. This question has been included in the survey to enable the main survey findings to be set in a broader context, showing how public office holders of different types compare with other professionals in terms of the confidence that the general public has in them to tell the truth.

One criticism that could be levelled at this question is that it allows respondents to choose between only two response options – either they generally trust those in the profession to tell the truth or they do not. For the 2008 survey it was decided to introduce an alternative version of the question, whereby respondents

were asked to rate how much they trusted each of the professions to tell the truth using a four point scale ('Trust a lot'; 'Trust a fair amount'; 'Do not trust very much'; and 'Do not trust at all'). In order to ensure that comparisons could still be made with the earlier surveys, a split sample approach was used with a random half of respondents being asked the question used in 2004 and 2006 (Table 11.2) and half being asked the new question (Table 11.3).

Trust in professional groups in Northern Ireland tended to follow the same pattern as in Great Britain (Figure 2.1, p. 22), with high levels of trust in front-line professionals, such as family doctors, head teachers and judges to tell the truth, with senior public officials less widely trusted to do so and national politicians among the professions least trusted to tell the truth.

Looking at trust in politicians, 35 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland said that they generally trusted their Executive Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly to tell the truth, slightly higher proportions than said that they trusted 'MPs in general' (30%) and government ministers (31%).

	2006 %	2008 %
Family doctors	92	95
Head teachers in schools	81	88
Judges	74	87
Local police officers	66	71
Senior police officers	60	66
TV news journalists	51	53
Your local MP	42	53
Senior managers in NHS	44	51
Local councillors	39	46
Journalists on Times/Telegraph/Guardian	40	39
Top civil servants	35	46
Senior managers in local councils	37	45
<i>Northern Ireland Executive Ministers</i>	<i>N/A</i>	35
<i>Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)</i>	<i>N/A</i>	35
MPs in general	24	30
People who run large companies	25	21
Government ministers	20	31
Estate agents	23	20
Journalists on Sun/Mirror/Star	7	8

Base: 2006 – All NI respondents (403), 2008 – NI respondents – 50% sample (186)

In general, levels of trust in public office holders to tell the truth among people in Northern Ireland are higher than in 2006, with notable increases in the proportion saying that they trust judges (from 74% to 87%), the respondent's local MP (from 42% to 53%) and government ministers (from 20% to 31%) to tell the truth. Although most of the changes are not statistically significant, these results reflect the improved overall rating of standards of conduct by people in Northern Ireland in 2008. It is also notable that levels of trust in professions outside the public sector (those for journalists and estate agents) have not improved since 2006.

Table 11.3 summarises the results for the new version of the question. The table shows the proportion of respondents in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who trusted each profession 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' to tell the truth. The table shows that levels of trust among people in Northern Ireland are

generally similar to those of people in England, Scotland and Wales. Those in Northern Ireland were, however, slightly less likely than those elsewhere to say that they trusted local and senior police officers to tell the truth. They also showed slightly lower levels of trust in journalists, senior civil servants and those running large companies.

The results suggest that respondents in Northern Ireland were more likely to trust their Executive Ministers to tell the truth than to trust UK Government Ministers (45%, compared with 38%), but less likely to trust MLAs (37%) than 'MPs in general' (41%). However, these differences are not statistically significant.

**Table 11.3: Proportion who trust professions to tell the truth 'a lot' or a fair amount'**

	England %	Scot %	Wales %	NI %
Family doctors	95	98	94	97
Head teachers in schools	89	89	86	91
Judges	83	82	76	79
Local police officers	86	85	80	74
Senior police officers	81	83	78	71
TV news journalists	69	62	62	54
Your local MP	63	58	60	57
Senior managers in NHS	62	69	60	63
Local councillors	58	52	54	60
Journalists on Times/Telegraph/Guardian	58	48	48	52
Top civil servants	59	55	54	45
Senior managers in local councils	56	52	51	52
<i>Northern Ireland Executive Ministers</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	45
<i>Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	37
MPs in general	45	40	42	41
People who run large companies	51	47	51	42
Government ministers	45	38	42	38
Estate agents	42	44	46	39
Journalists on Sun/Mirror/Star	34	22	28	20
Base: All respondents – 50% sample: England (444), Scotland (265), Wales (221), NI (228)				

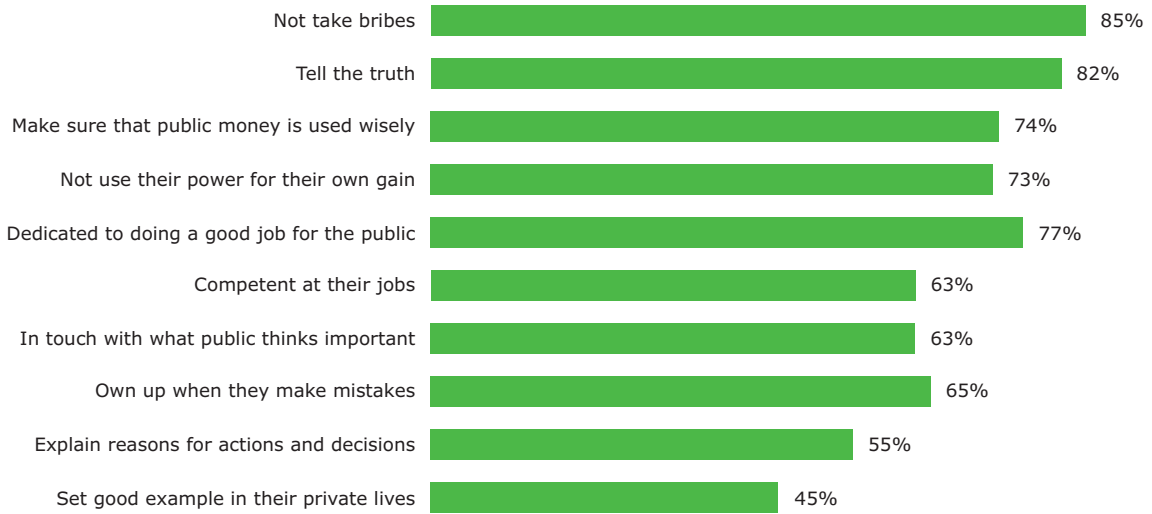
### 11.5 Expectations and perceptions of national politicians

Respondents were asked to say, in relation to ten behaviours, how important they thought it was for national politicians to exhibit these behaviours, and which they felt were the most important. They were then asked to say what proportion of Northern Ireland Executive Ministers, and what proportion of ministers in the UK government, they felt exhibited these behaviours.

When asked how important they considered it for national politicians to exhibit a number of behaviours, respondents in Northern Ireland (Figure 11.3) expressed similar priorities to those in Great Britain (Table 3.2, p. 28), particularly valuing honesty, financial prudence, selflessness and dedication to public service. When asked to choose the three most important of these attributes for politicians, 55 per cent of respondents chose telling the truth, 53 per cent being dedicated to doing a good job for the public and 43 per cent making sure that public money is used wisely. Respondents in Northern Ireland placed somewhat greater importance than those in Great Britain on being dedicated to doing a good job for the public (Table 3.4, p. 30).

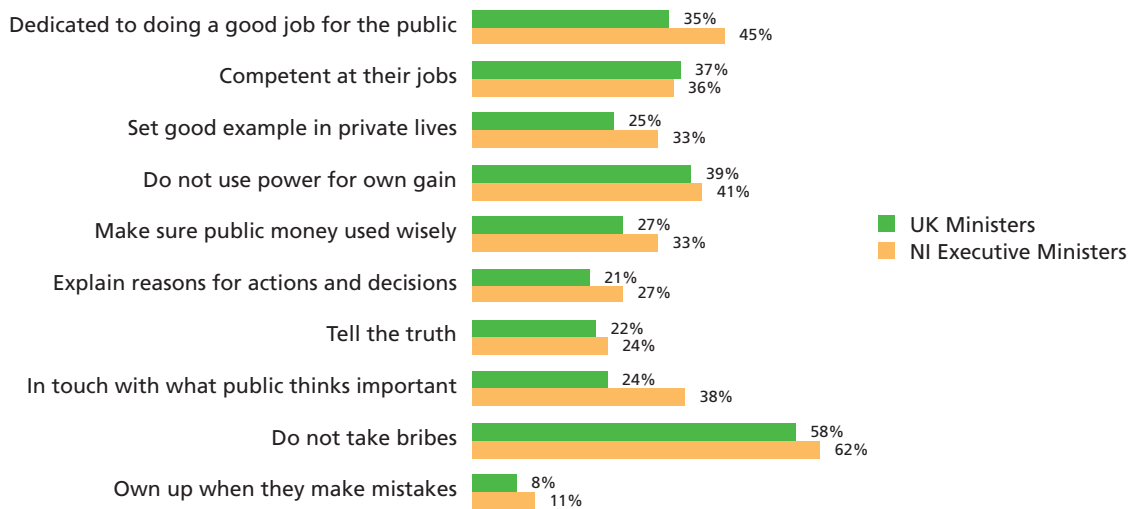


**Figure 11.3 Behaviours considered extremely important for public office holders**



Base: All NI respondents (414)

**Figure 11.4 Percentage of NI and UK ministers (% thinking all or most exhibit each behaviour)**



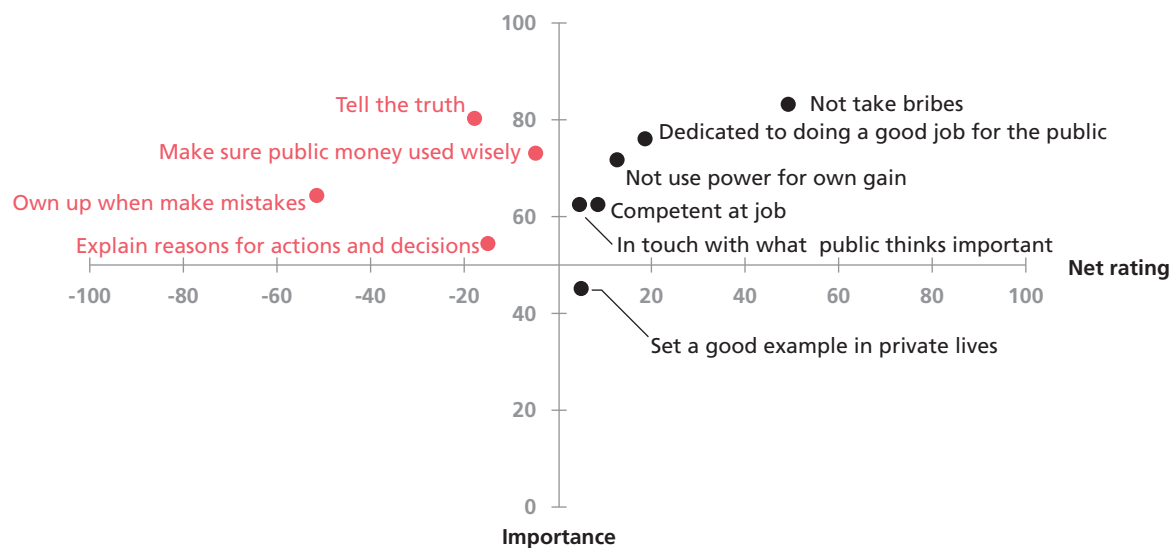
Base: All NI respondents (414)

Respondents in Northern Ireland were asked to say what proportion of both ministers in the UK government and Northern Ireland Executive Ministers exhibited these same ten behaviours. Figure 11.4 shows the proportion of respondents who felt that all or most of each group of politicians behaved in the ways shown.

As the chart shows people in Northern Ireland tended to think that their own Executive Ministers were more likely to exhibit the positive behaviours than ministers in the

UK government. One noticeable significant difference related to being in touch with public priorities, 38 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland saying that all or most Executive Ministers were in touch with what the public thought was important, compared with 24 per cent who felt that this applied to all or most ministers in the UK government.

Figure 11.5 Gap Analysis: Devolved Ministers



Base: All NI respondents (414)

The perceptions of adults in Northern Ireland of Executive Ministers were broadly similar to the perceptions of adults in Wales (Figure 9.4, p. 71) and Scotland (Figure 10.4, p. 84) of the equivalent ministers in those administrations.

The gap analysis presented in Figure 11.5 (see Chapter 3 for explanations) shows that, in the case of ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive, four behaviours emerge as being key priorities for improvement:

- telling the truth;
- making sure that public money is used wisely;
- owning up to mistakes;
- and explaining reasons for actions and decisions.

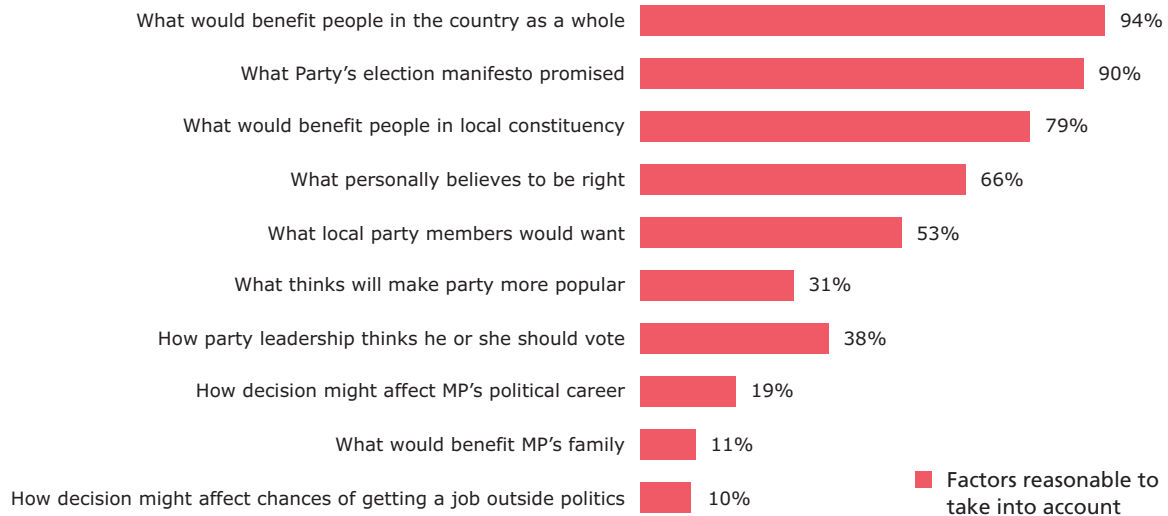
## 11.6 MPs and voting in Parliament

Respondents were asked to say which of a number of factors they thought were reasonable for MPs to take into account when deciding how to vote on important issues affecting the whole country (Figure 11.6). In common with respondents elsewhere in the UK (Table 4.2, p. 39), most respondents in Northern Ireland felt that it was reasonable for MPs to take account of what would benefit people living in the country as a whole (94%), what the MP's party election manifesto promised (90%) and what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency (79%).

Two thirds (66%) thought that it was acceptable for an MP to follow their own conviction when voting on an important national issue. They also believed that MPs should not prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues. Nearly nine in ten adults in Northern Ireland said that it was not reasonable for MPs to take into account what would benefit their family (86%) or how the decision might affect their chances of getting a job outside politics (88%).

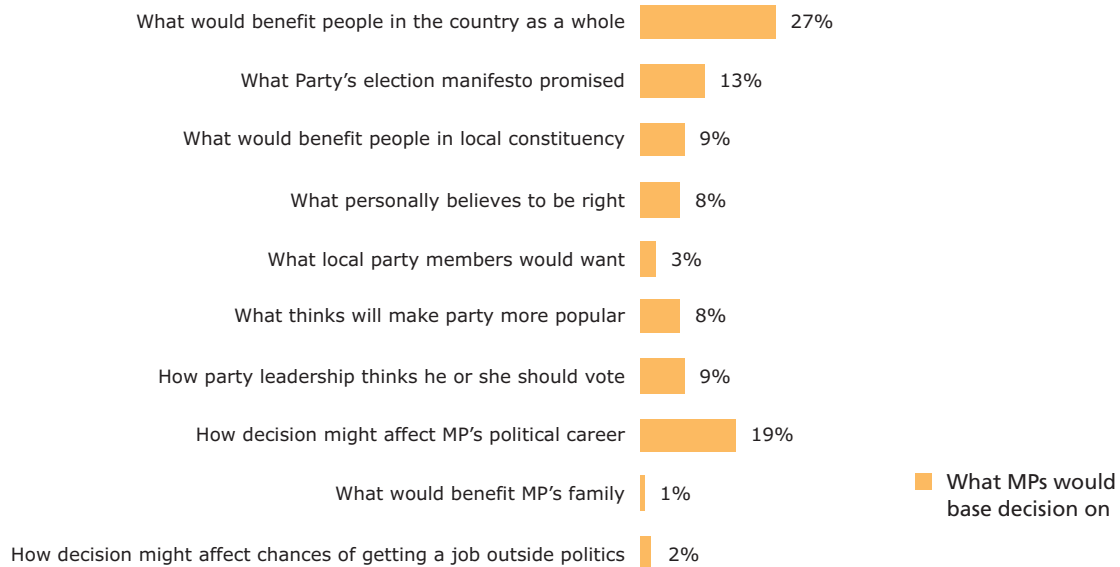
As noted in Chapter 4, respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in Great Britain as a whole to see the views of local party members as a legitimate influence and, together with those in Scotland, the most likely to think it reasonable for MPs to take into account the views of their party leadership.

**Figure 11.6 Expectations of influences on MPs' voting behaviour**



Base: All NI respondents (414)

**Figure 11.7 Perception of main influence on MPs' voting behaviour**



Base: All NI respondents (414)

In terms of what MPs *would* base their decision on in practice, the results were again broadly similar when comparing Northern Ireland with the other countries in the UK (Table 4.4, p. 41). However, as noted in Chapter 4, respondents in Northern Ireland were the most likely to think that MPs would vote on the basis of how the decision might affect their political career and least likely to believe that they would be influenced by what would make their party more popular (Figure 11.7).

Around two thirds (67%) of respondents in Northern Ireland believed that MPs would base their decision on a factor that they considered reasonable to take into account, similar to the proportions in England (64%) and Scotland (65%), and slightly higher than the proportion in Wales (59%).

### 11.7 Public office holders and accountability

Nearly six in ten respondents in Northern Ireland (59%) were confident that the authorities were committed to upholding standards in public life (although only 5% were very confident). Over three quarters (77%) were confident that the media would generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office, compared with just under half (45%) having confidence in the authorities to do this. Finally, when asked about punishment of wrongdoing, three in ten (30%) were confident that when public office holders were caught doing wrong the authorities would punish them for it.

The level of confidence among adults in Northern Ireland in both the media and the authorities to uncover wrong doing is broadly similar to that found in 2006 (77% and 45% respectively in 2008, compared with 81% and 41% in 2006). However, confidence in the authorities to punish wrongdoing has dropped since 2006, from 38 per cent to 30 per cent in 2008, reflecting a similar pattern in Great Britain (Table 5.1, p. 48).

People in Northern Ireland were more likely to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to upholding standards in public life than those in England (59%, compared with 52%) and more confident than those in Wales that the authorities would uncover wrongdoing by people in public office (45%, compared with 36% – Table 5.2, p. 48).

### 11.8 Trust in the electoral system

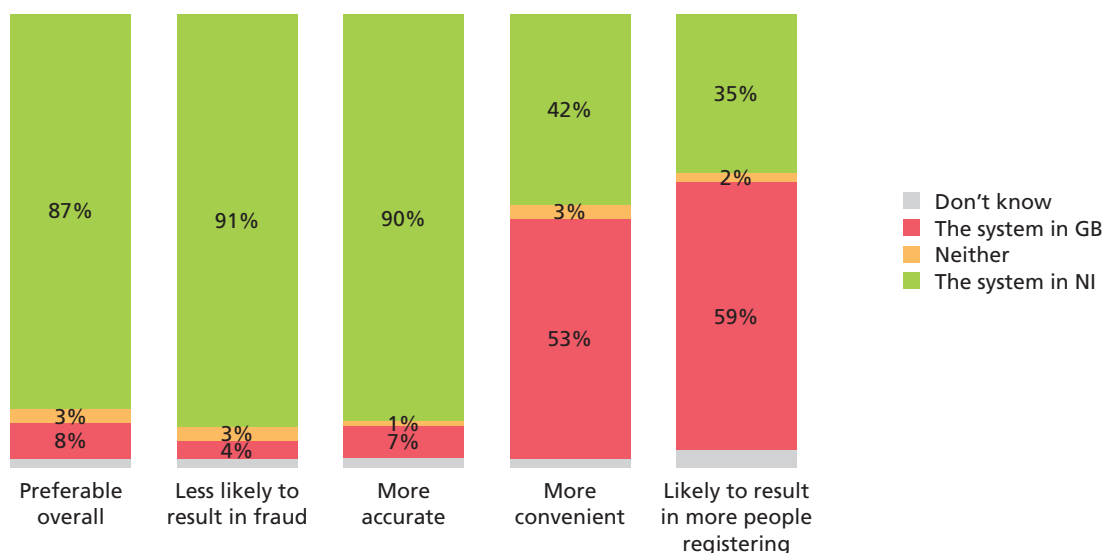
Nearly nine in ten respondents in Northern Ireland (89%) thought that their name was on the electoral register. Respondents in Northern Ireland were nearly twice as likely as those in Great Britain to say that they were not on the electoral register (9%, compared with 5%). This may be a reflection of the different systems of registration in place in Northern Ireland (individual registration) and Great Britain (household registration).

Six in ten respondents in Northern Ireland (60%) said that they voted in the General Election in 2005 and around three quarters (74%) that they had voted in an election in the previous five years. Almost all (98%) of those who had voted in an election during this period said that they had voted in person on the last occasion.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents thought that the system of registering to vote in their own country was safe from fraud or abuse, with 15 per cent considering it very safe. Just over one in ten (11%) felt that the system was unsafe, with 3 per cent feeling that it was very unsafe. Respondents in Northern Ireland were less likely than those in England or Scotland to consider the system unsafe.

Respondents were asked to compare the system of registering to vote in Great Britain (household registration without proof of identity) with the system in Northern Ireland (individual registration with proof of identity) on a number of dimensions: susceptibility to fraud, accuracy, convenience and impact on registration levels (Figure 11.8).

**Figure 11.8 Views on individual versus household voter registration**



Base: All NI respondents (414)

As noted in Chapter 6, respondents in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely than those in Great Britain to favour the registration system in Northern Ireland (Figure 6.3, p. 53).

Nine in ten respondents in Northern Ireland agreed that the system in Northern Ireland was less likely to result in fraud (91%) and was more likely to be more accurate (90%), compared with 80 per cent and 78 per cent respectively in Great Britain.

While over half (53%) of those in Northern Ireland thought that the system in Great Britain was more convenient, this was considerably lower than the equivalent proportion in Great Britain (77%). Six in ten respondents in Northern Ireland (59%) thought that the system in Great Britain was more likely to result in higher levels of registration (a similar proportion to the 63% found among the sample in Great Britain).

Overall, 87 per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland preferred their own system, significantly higher than the 63 per cent of respondents in Great Britain who preferred the Northern Ireland system and the 30 per cent of those in Great Britain who preferred their existing system.

### 11.9 Exposure and attitudes to political news coverage

Two new sets of questions were included in the 2008 survey to explore people’s exposure to political news in the media and their attitudes towards the media’s coverage of this news.

Respondents were first asked which of a range of media they used to source news about politics.

Just over seven in ten of respondents in Northern Ireland (72%) said that they often watched or listened to news on the TV or on the radio in a typical week, with over nine in ten (93%) doing so at least sometimes (Figure 11.9).

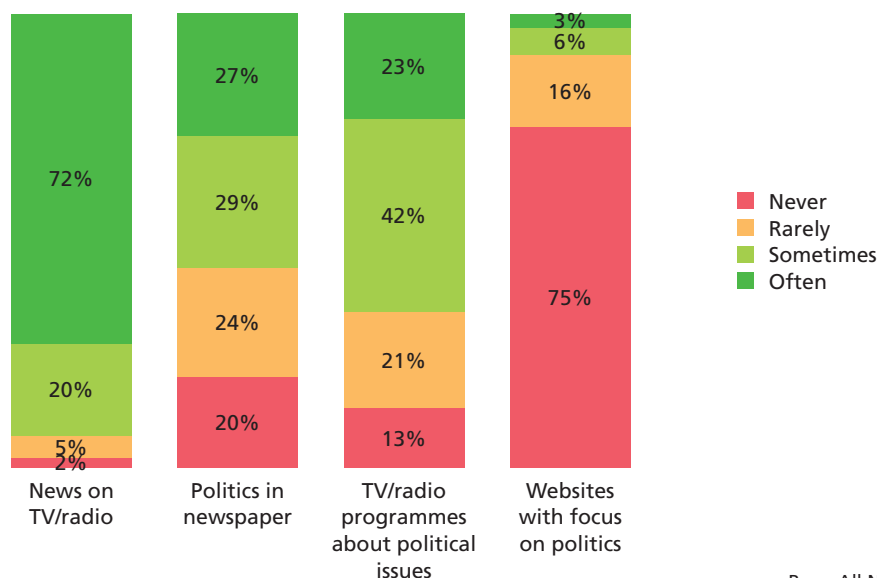
Just over a quarter (27%) said that they often read about politics in a newspaper (including on a newspaper’s website) and just under a quarter (23%) that they often watched TV or listened to radio programmes about political and social issues. Just under six in ten (56%) said that they read about politics in a newspaper at least sometimes during a typical week, while around two thirds (65%) watched or listened to programmes about political and social issues at least sometimes.

Only 3 per cent of respondents said that they visited websites which focused on politics, such as political blogs, podcasts and forums often in a typical week, with 9 per cent saying that they did so often or sometimes.

A quarter of adults in Northern Ireland (26%) did not use any of the media covered to access political content on a frequent basis. Four in ten (40%) used one source only on a frequent basis, just under two in ten (18%) used two sources and 16 per cent three or four sources.

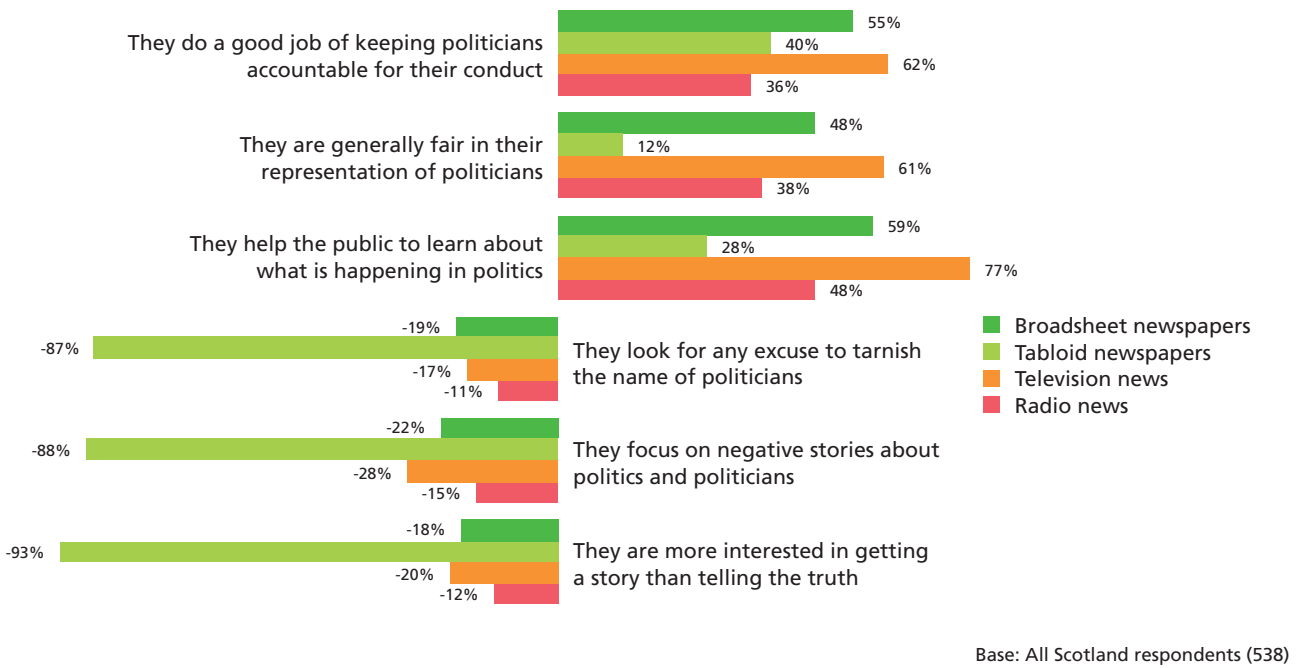
Respondents in Northern Ireland had broadly similar levels of exposure to coverage of politics in the media to those in the other countries of the UK, although they were slightly less likely than those in England to use political websites (75% in Northern Ireland said that they never did so, compared with 68% in England).

Figure 11.9 Exposure to political news

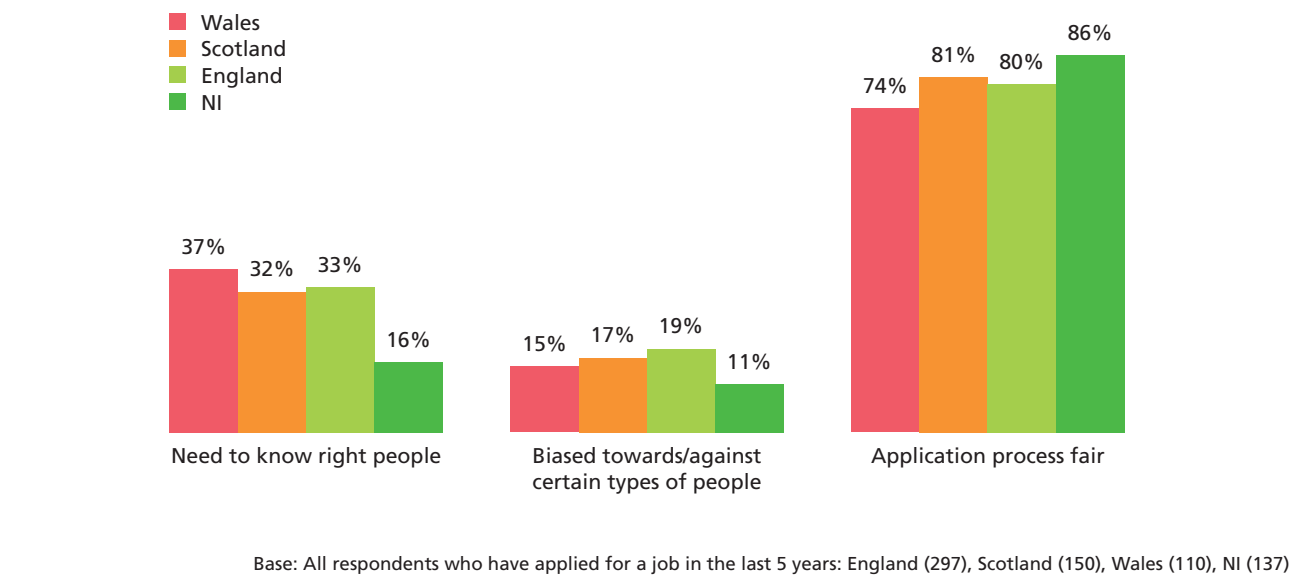


Base: All NI respondents (414)

**Figure 11.10 Expectations of influences on MPs' voting behaviour**



**Figure 11.11 Fairness of process in applying for last job**



Respondents were read six statements describing how the media might cover politics and asked to say to which, if any, of four forms of media (the broadsheet press, the tabloid press, TV news and radio news) they thought each statement applied.

The attitudes of people in Northern Ireland towards coverage of politics and political news

in different forms of media (Figure 11.10) were generally similar to those of people elsewhere in the UK (Figure 7.4, p. 60). On the whole respondents in Northern Ireland, like those elsewhere, were relatively positive about the way in which TV, broadsheet newspapers and radio cover political news, but predominantly negative about coverage in the tabloid press.

## 11.10 Experience of unfairness in recruitment

Around one in three respondents in Northern Ireland (35%) had applied for a job in the previous five years, with around half of this group (17% of all Northern Ireland respondents) having applied for a job within the previous 12 months. Three quarters of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years (76%) had got the last job they applied for.

The majority of those who had applied for a job in the previous five years did so to a private sector firm (69%). Just 3 per cent last applied to a nationalised industry or public sector corporation (such as the BBC or the Post Office), while more than two in ten (22%) last applied to another public sector employer. Applications to the third sector made up 5 per cent of latest job applications within the previous five years.

Over eight in ten (86%) of those who had applied for a job in the last five years thought that the application and selection process for the last job that they had applied for was handled in a way that was fair to everyone who applied. Only 11 per cent thought that the organisation they had applied to was biased towards or against particular types of people and 16 per cent that 'you needed to know the right people to get the job'. Respondents in Northern Ireland were a little less likely than those elsewhere in the UK to perceive that the recruitment process had been biased and considerably less likely to think that it was necessary to know the right people in order to get the job.

The sample size for Northern Ireland is too small to enable the experiences of those applying for public sector jobs to be compared with those applying for jobs in other sectors.



# APPENDICES – THE POLITICAL CONTEXT AND POSSIBLE INFLUENCES ON PUBLIC OPINION

People's opinions and beliefs about standards of conduct in public life are likely to be influenced by a range of factors. These may or may not include what they know or have heard about specific political events or media stories that concern standards of conduct. While awareness of such events or stories may not account for the beliefs they hold, it is nonetheless useful to ask respondents whether they had specific events in mind when answering questions, and also to map the political landscape in terms of key events that take place leading up to and during the survey period that might influence people's views on standards.

In each of the surveys, therefore, the research team has compiled a list of key political events during, and in the period prior to, the survey fieldwork period, and respondents have been asked a question to establish what events might have influenced their opinions.

This section reports on the events that respondents said that they had in mind when answering the survey questions and provides a list of key political events covering the period since the end of the 2006 survey fieldwork. A brief list of key events from April 2006 to May 2008 in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is also provided.

## Self-reported influences

As in 2004 and 2006, respondents were asked to report events that they were thinking about when answering questions that might have influenced their answers. In the previous surveys, respondents were asked directly whether their answers were *influenced* by recent events and, if so, which events. Around six in ten people in each survey said that their responses had not been influenced by specific events.

In 2008, it was decided to re-phrase this question, so that people were able to mention recent events that they '*had in mind*' when answering questions, rather than events that had influenced their answers. In addition, rather than ask first whether they had in mind any recent events (which will encourage many to answer 'No' rather than think about specific events) a single question was asked, as follows:

*People's opinions are influenced by many different factors. When you were answering the questions in this survey, what specific events that you might have heard or read about did you have in mind?*

These changes led to a much higher proportion of respondents (76% of those in the main Great Britain sample) giving an answer to the question, albeit not all mentioning specific individual events.

As would be expected, a very wide variety of verbatim responses were given. These were coded at the analysis stage into categories of similar answers. The table below shows responses mentioned by at least 3 per cent of respondents.

Events that respondents had in mind when answering the survey questions					
	GB %	England %	Scotland %	Wales %	NI %
MPs paying family members	14	14	14	13	13
General events/General media stories	11	11	6	11	7
Lack of transparency concerning MPs' expenses	8	8	7	10	4
The war on Iraq	6	6	4	5	1
Labour deputy leadership campaign donations	4	3	5	11	3
The Government's immigration policies	3	4	1	1	-
Local issue	3	4	2	1	2
The Government's running of the NHS	3	3	2	2	2
Cash for honours	3	3	2	4	2
General knowledge/instincts/opinion	3	3	*	3	1
Politicians taking bribes (general mention)	3	3	4	2	4
The Wendy Alexander case	1	-	6	1	-
The Tommy Sheridan case	*	-	6	-	-
The Ian Paisley Junior case	-	-	-	-	16
Don't know/No answer	24	22	33	31	36

Base: All respondents: GB (1,898), England (913), Scotland (538), Wales (447), NI (414)

The large majority of events that people mentioned concerned or implied wrongdoing or alleged wrongdoing. This is to be expected, however, since these are the events that will be reported in the media and will be prominent in respondents' minds.

The 2008 survey fieldwork period was dominated by political stories about MPs' expenses: Derek Conway was censured in January for paying his son too much from parliamentary allowances; in February, a spokesperson for House of Commons Speaker Michael Martin resigned after giving incorrect information to journalists concerning the use of taxis by the Speaker's household; in March, the House of Commons published a list of maximum prices per item that could be claimed on expenses; and it emerged in April that more than 100 MPs were employing family members using expenses. It is therefore unsurprising that the top two specific events mentioned by respondents were MPs paying family members (14%) and the lack of transparency concerning MPs' expenses (8%).

A further event that took place during fieldwork was the resignation of Peter Hain from his job as Work and Pensions and Wales Secretary in January 2008 after his Labour deputy leadership campaign donations were referred to the police. This followed earlier controversy around campaign donations to Harriet Harman. Labour deputy leadership campaign donations were mentioned by 4 per cent of respondents in Great Britain as a factor influencing their opinions, and this rose to 11 per cent in Wales.

There were a number of events specific to Scotland or Northern Ireland that only or mainly respondents in Scotland or Northern Ireland mentioned. In December 2007, former leader of the Scottish Socialist Party Tommy Sheridan was charged with perjury over allegations made during his successful libel trial against the *News of the World*. This case was referred to by 6 per cent of respondents in Scotland, as also was the case of Scottish Labour leader Wendy Alexander, who was reported to prosecutors in February 2008 after failing to record gifts to her leadership campaign in the MSPs' register of interests. In Northern Ireland, the most common event cited by respondents (even above MPs

paying family members) was the Ian Paisley Junior case (16%). This relates to the resignation of Ian Paisley Junior as a junior minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly in February 2008 following criticism of his links with property developer Seymour Sweeney.

Certain events have stayed in the public mind for a long period of time, with both the war on Iraq (mentioned by 6% of respondents) and 'Cash for honours' (mentioned by 3% of respondents) remaining in the list of top factors from the first survey in 2004 (albeit now mentioned by smaller proportions of people).

Other respondents were less specific in the events that they mentioned, with 11 per cent citing general events or media stories, 3 per cent

citing general knowledge, instincts or opinion, and others mentioning issues not obviously or directly related to standards of conduct, such as the government's immigration policies and its handling of the NHS. Three per cent of respondents mentioned politicians taking bribes, without naming any specific cases.

### The political context

The tables below list key political events covering the period since the end of the 2006 survey fieldwork, as well as key events in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These lists are not intended to be definitive, but are designed as an *aide memoire* to assist the reader in understanding and contextualising the 2008 survey findings.

Key national political stories between January and May 2008 (survey fieldwork period)	
10 January	Tony Blair takes a part-time consultancy post with US bank JP Morgan worth \$5m per year.
23 January	An advisor to Ken Livingstone, resigns after lying about accepting a free trip to a luxury resort in Africa.
24 January	Peter Hain resigns as work and pensions and Wales secretary after his Labour deputy leadership campaign donations are referred to the police.
28 January	Conservative MP Derek Conway is censured by the Standards and Privileges Committee after paying his student son too much from parliamentary allowances.
8 February	The London Assembly investigates 12 projects that were given grants totalling more than £2m.
17 February	The Chancellor announces that Northern Rock is to be nationalised as a temporary measure.
17 February	House of Commons Speaker Michael Martin is found to have used air miles earned on official business to fly relatives from London to Glasgow over New Year.
21 February	Liberal Democrat MEP Chris Davies calls on the EU's anti-fraud office to investigate MEP staffing costs spending with a reported £100m a year not properly accounted for. He claims there has been massive fraud and embezzlement.
23 February	A spokesman for the House of Commons Speaker Michael Martin resigns after giving incorrect information to journalists concerning the Speaker's household and the use of taxis.
5 March	MPs reject Conservative proposals to have a UK-wide referendum on whether to ratify the EU's Lisbon Treaty.
11 March	Michael Todd, the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police is found dead on Snowdon in a suspected suicide.
13 March	The House of Commons publishes a list of maximum prices allowed per item, including £10,000 for a new kitchen, under the additional costs allowance (ACA) for MPs.

<b>Key national political stories between January and May 2008 (survey fieldwork period)</b>	
14 March	Wall Street's fifth largest investment bank Bear Stearns becomes the latest victim of the global credit crunch, teetering on the brink of insolvency. It receives emergency funding before being bought by JP Morgan at a fraction of its previous value.
18 March	There are calls for individual voter registration after a Tory councillor is found guilty of using bogus postal votes to ensure he was voted into office in Slough.
21 March	Police announce that they cannot investigate MP Derek Conway due to the lack of systems for accounting for MPs' expenses.
26 March	The Financial Services Authority admits that it failed to adequately regulate Northern Rock.
10 April	A High Court judge rules that the SFO investigation into BAE and Saudi Arabia arms delays was unlawfully called off.
21 April	A Public Accounts Committee report concludes that the Government was entirely unrealistic in its estimation of the cost of hosting the 2012 Olympics.
22 April	Gordon Brown faces a large Labour rebellion over the abolition of the 10p income tax band.
25 April	More than 100 MPs declare family members they employ using their taxpayer-funded expenses.
28 April	A report by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust claims that elections in the UK fall short of international standards with the system vulnerable to fraud. Ministers are prompted to consider introducing individual registration for voters.
1 May	An enquiry is launched after polling station staff in Lambeth spoilt ballot papers by writing on them. In Barnet, five polling stations had not received their ballot papers by the time polls opened.
2 May	Labour suffers big losses of over 300 councillors and comes third in its popular share of the vote in the local council elections in England and Wales.
3 May	Boris Johnson wins the race to become the next mayor of London by defeating incumbent Ken Livingstone.
23 May	The Conservatives win Crewe and Nantwich from Labour in a by-election, their first such gain in 26 years.

<b>Key national political stories May 2006 – December 2007</b>	
30 May 2006	John Prescott faces calls for his resignation after being photographed playing croquet at his grace-and-favour country home when he was supposed to be standing in for the Prime Minister.
12 July	Labour's chief fundraiser Lord Levy is arrested by police investigating the cash for honours affair.
10 August	Scotland Yard claims to have foiled a terror plot to blow up ten planes on transatlantic flights.
7 September	Tony Blair announces that the upcoming Labour party conference will be his last as party leader.
24 November	Police probing the death of ex-Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko discover abnormally high levels of radiation, prompting claims that he was poisoned because of his criticism of the Russian Government.

Key national political stories May 2006 – December 2007	
14 December	Tony Blair is interviewed by police investigating cash for honours allegations, thought to be the first time a serving prime minister has been questioned by police conducting a criminal investigation.
19 January 2007	The Government is criticised by the international community's leading anti-bribery watchdog for halting a bribery investigation involving arms company BAE and the Saudi royal family.
3 March	The BBC is prevented from broadcasting a report into the cash for honours inquiry after the Attorney-General Lord Goldsmith is granted an injunction.
14 March	The presenters of Blue Peter are forced to apologise on air after it emerges that the programme faked the winner of a phone-in competition.
23 March	Fifteen British navy personnel on routine patrol are captured at gunpoint by Iranian forces, who claim they had illegally entered Iranian waters. They are returned home unharmed nearly two weeks later after a diplomatic stand-off.
2 May	More than 20,000 postal voters drop off the electoral register in Birmingham wards investigated over electoral fraud.
3 May	The Conservative Party make gains from both Labour and the Liberal Democrats in local council elections, but only manage to secure 40% of the vote.
27 June	Tony Blair steps down from being Prime Minister after ten years, and the Queen immediately invites Gordon Brown to form a new government.
30 June	A blazing vehicle packed with gas canisters is driven into the front of Glasgow airport's Terminal One building in a suspected terror attack.
20 July	The 16-month cash for honours probe ends with the CPS deciding not to bring charges against anybody.
23 July	Heavy and persistent rain leads to severe flooding in some parts of the UK, particularly around Gloucestershire. Hundreds of thousands of people are left without running water.
4 August	A UK-wide ban on the movement of livestock is imposed after cattle on a Surrey farm are found to have foot-and-mouth disease.
15 September	Customers form long queues to withdraw money from Northern Rock amid concerns over the bank's emergency Bank of England loan. The global credit crunch has made it hard for Northern Rock to borrow the cash to run its day-to-day operations.
6 October	Gordon Brown rules out calling a snap autumn general election after weeks of speculation and apparent indecision, during which the Conservatives drastically narrowed Labour's lead in the polls.
15 October	Sir Menzies Campbell resigns as leader of the Liberal Democrats after it becomes clear there will not be a snap general election. Campbell suffered from poor poll ratings and media accusations that he was too old.
20 November	Chancellor Alistair Darling reports that discs containing the personal details of 25 million people (all child benefit recipients) have gone missing in the post. A junior HMRC official was blamed for breaking rules by sending the discs unrecorded.
27 November	Harriet Harman returns a £5,000 donation given to her by a property developer through a third party.
18 December	Nick Clegg narrowly beats Chris Huhne to become the new leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Key national political stories in Scotland 2006–2008	
4 August 2006	Scottish Socialist Party MSP Tommy Sheridan wins his defamation case against the <i>News of the World</i> , which claimed he was a serial adulterer and swinger who used drugs.
3 May 2007	The SNP emerge from the Scottish Parliament elections as the largest single party with 47 MSPs to Labour's 46.
3 May	Labour suffers significant losses in Scotland's local government elections, held in tandem with the Scottish Parliament elections. It is the first time the Single Transferable Vote system has been used for council elections.
5 May	The Electoral Reform Society and international observers criticise the ballot papers used in the Scottish Parliament election after over 100,000 ballot papers were spoiled.
16 May	Alex Salmond becomes the first Nationalist First Minister of Scotland following his party's victory in the Scottish Parliament election.
14 August	Alex Salmond launches a 'national conversation', a white paper setting out plans for a referendum on Scottish independence.
23 October	Publication of Ron Gould's Independent Review of the May 2007 Scottish parliamentary and local government elections.
16 December	Tommy Sheridan, former leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, is charged with perjury over allegations made during his successful libel trial against the <i>News of the World</i> .
3 February 2008	Scottish Labour Leader Wendy Alexander is reported to prosecutors after failing to record gifts to her leadership campaign in the MSPs' register of interests.
28 February	MSPs vote to abolish the graduate endowment fee paid by students on finishing university.
13 March	Holyrood's local government committee accuses First Minister Alex Salmond of taking a 'cavalier' approach to his involvement with Donald Trump's £1bn Scottish golf resort.
20 March	A report says that a third of Scottish schools are still in a poor or bad condition despite billions of pounds of investment.
26 March	Alex Salmond calls for a referendum on independence for Scotland in 2010.
1 April	The cost of NHS prescriptions in Scotland is cut to £5 in the first stage of a move to free prescriptions in 2011.
17 April	The Scottish Government wins vote in Parliament on plans to replace council tax with a local income tax.
21 April	The shutdown of Grangemouth oil refinery starts ahead of planned strike action over pensions.
23 April	Scottish Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon announced that a public enquiry will be held into the transmission of Hep C and HIV by contaminated blood
29 May	Accounts Commission publishes Best Value report identifying failings and serious challenges at Aberdeen City Council.

<b>Key national political stories in Wales 2006–2008</b>	
4 July 2006	Two members of staff at Bridgend council are dismissed after an enquiry found irregularities in the running of the election department.
3 May 2007	Labour remains the largest single party in the Welsh Assembly but fails to win a majority, taking 26 of 60 seats. As a result, Labour forms a coalition Welsh Assembly Government with Plaid Cymru.
9 November	John Hopkins, the leader of Blaenau Gwent council resigns as he faces the prospect of losing a vote of no confidence. His deputy had already resigned after facing a complaint to the Ombudsman for Wales about alleged bullying.
14 February 2008	The chief and deputy chief constables of North Wales Police apologise to Wrexham MP Ian Lucas over comments made the previous November in a BBC Wales TV documentary.
27 February	Two police officers are forced to resign over claims they took patrol cars on seaside trips while on duty.
13 March	The Electoral Commission identifies financial flaws and inconsistencies in the way the previous year's Welsh Assembly election was run.
13 March	An NHS investigation into Powys community hospitals reveals serious failings in patient care.
19 March	Serious failings in the handling of weapons given to North Wales Police by the public for safe disposal are highlighted in an internal report.
29 March	A civil servant resigns after having been found guilty in court of sexually harassing a female Welsh Assembly Government colleague.
16 April	The Welsh Local Government Association defends the pay of senior council staff after it emerges that 40 are earning over £100,000.
18 April	A former councillor, Eunydd Thomas, who received £20,000 to stand down in 2004, is standing for election again.
21 April	Keith McNiffe, until recently mayor of Pembroke, is warned he may be jailed after being filmed refereeing football matches while claiming mobility and care allowances.
2 May	Labour loses control of six councils in Wales in the local elections.
7 May	The Independent Police Complaints Commission upholds claims that Terry Grange misused e-mails and a credit card when head of Dyfed-Powys police, leading to criticism of the decision to allow him to retire before the enquiry.



<b>Key national political stories in Northern Ireland 2006–2008</b>	
6 April 2006	Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern outline plans for restoring devolution to Northern Ireland.
15 May	Non-Legislative Assembly established at Stormont.
18 October	St Andrews Agreement provides blueprint for restoration of devolution.
24 November	Transitional Assembly meets.
7 March 2007	Elections to Northern Ireland Assembly.
8 May	Devolution restored to Northern Ireland. Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness become First Minister and deputy First Minister.
10 May	New NI Executive meets.
18 February 2008	Ian Paisley Jnr resigns as Junior Minister following controversy over links with local property developer.
4 March	Ian Paisley announces his intention to stand down from his post as Party Leader and First Minister.
17 April	Peter Robinson is confirmed as Leader of the DUP.
5 June	Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness nominated as First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

# TECHNICAL APPENDIX

## Research methods

### Questionnaire development

The questionnaire for the survey was based on the 2006 questionnaire with further refinements made by the research team at BMRB in consultation with the Committee's Research Advisory Board.

The questionnaire was pilot tested in Ealing in November 2007. Respondents were recruited to a central location and interviewed by members of the research team. A total of 20 interviews were completed. A final version of the questionnaire was then prepared and approved in December 2007 by the Committee following advice from the Committee's Research Advisory Board.

The main differences between the 2006 questionnaire and the 2008 survey were:

- A split sample approach to the questions on trust, to compare different scales.
- Asking about trust in Holyrood Ministers and Members of the Scottish Parliament in Scotland; Ministers in the Welsh Assembly Government, Assembly Members and local Assembly Members in Wales, and Northern Ireland Executive Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland.
- Questions on expectations, priorities and perceptions of elected national politicians were extended to include devolved administration politicians.
- Voting in Parliament on an important issue – 'Which factor is it most important for MP's to take into account' was dropped for reasons of questionnaire length.
- Questions on 'perceptions of behaviour of senior public officials' were deleted for reasons of questionnaire length.
- Questions about general perceptions of public sector recruitment were replaced by a section on the respondent's own experiences of unfairness when applying for jobs.
- Questions about public office holder privacy were deleted.
- Questions on whether standards in Scotland and Northern Ireland were higher or lower than in the rest of the UK were replaced by questions asking respondents in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales about overall standards of conduct in these countries.
- The confidence in the authorities question was changed in 2008 to ask about 'upholding' standards rather than 'improving' standards as in 2006.
- The question on participation in public life was deleted.
- Questions about political party affiliation were adapted in 2008, and the question wording for 'voting in the last general election' was amended.
- A section was added about registering to vote, comparing the system in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
- A new set of questions about exposure to politics in the media and perceptions of media coverage of political issues was added in 2008.
- Some additional 'country specific' demographic questions were added for Wales.
- Questions about newspaper readership were amended to include looking at newspaper websites as well as paper copies. Sunday newspaper readership was added. Internet use was also included for the first time in 2008.

- The social grade questions were removed for reasons of questionnaire length, although questions on working status, education and number of adults in the household remained.

## The national survey

The survey was conducted face-to-face in respondents' own homes using CAPI between January 2008 and May 2008. Interviews were carried out by fully trained interviewers from BMRB's national face-to-face field force. A total of 2,312 interviews with adults aged 18 or over across the UK were conducted, 913 in England, 538 in Scotland, 447 in Wales and 414 in Northern Ireland. The average interview length was just over 30 minutes. Respondents were offered a £10 gift voucher as a 'thank you' for taking part in the survey.

## Sample design

A conventional multi-stage design was used, similar to that used in the previous surveys. The small user Postcode Address File (PAF) was used as the sampling frame. As in previous surveys, the survey population was defined as adults aged 18 or over living in private households.

In summary, the sample design involved the following stages:

- A proportionately stratified sample of postcode sectors with probability proportional to address count was selected, using differential sampling fractions to achieve boost samples in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- A sample of 30 addresses in each sector was selected.
- In the rare cases where a selected address covered more than one dwelling, one dwelling was selected at random.
- One adult aged 18 or over was selected at random from all dwellings containing private households.

The different stages of the design are outlined in more detail below.

## Selection of sectors

Postcode sectors were selected from a listing of all postcode sectors in the United Kingdom. Before selection, small sectors (containing fewer than 500 delivery points) were amalgamated with neighbouring sectors, in order to ensure that the sample had a reasonable geographic spread in these areas.

Sectors were then stratified, with a view to maximising the precision of survey estimates as follows:

1. The population of postcode sectors was divided into twelve geographical areas: the nine Government Office Regions (GORs) in England, plus Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland and Northern Ireland were divided into two to three similarly sized geographical strata to ensure an adequate level of geographical representation within these countries.
2. Within each GOR, sectors were stratified by population density, with variable banding used to divide sectors in each GOR into three equal-sized density strata.
3. Within each population density stratum sectors were listed in ascending order of the percentage of individuals in non-manual occupations.

A total of 153 sectors were selected with probability proportional to address count by the method of random start and fixed interval, using differential sampling fractions to achieve boost samples in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## Selection of addresses

Within each sector 30 delivery points were selected by the method of random start and fixed interval. Addresses were ordered by postcode before selection to maximise the geographic spread within the sector. The selection of sectors and delivery points resulted in a total issued sample size of 4,590 delivery points.

### **Selection of households and individuals in households**

In the relatively infrequent cases where a PAF address generated more than one household, one was selected by the interviewers in the field using a random (Kish grid based) selection method. Individuals aged 18+ in each household were then listed in alphabetical order of first name and one selected for interview by a random (Kish grid based) method.

### **Response rates**

When fieldwork was closed a total of 4,590 addresses in 153 postcode sectors had been issued, yielding a total of 2,312 interviews at 4,041 eligible addresses. This represented a response rate at eligible addresses of 57.2 per cent.

In England 1,890 addresses in 63 post code sectors were issued, yielding a total of 913 interviews at 1,691 eligible addresses. The response rate at eligible addresses was 54.0 per cent.

In Scotland 990 addresses in 33 post code sectors were issued, yielding a total of 538 interviews at 896 eligible addresses. The response rate at eligible addresses was 60.0 per cent.

In Wales 900 addresses in 30 post code sectors were issued, yielding a total of 447 interviews at 775 eligible addresses. The response rate at eligible addresses was 57.7 per cent.

In Northern Ireland 810 addresses in 27 post code sectors were issued, yielding a total of 414 interviews at 679 eligible addresses. The response rate at eligible addresses was 61.0 per cent.

Co-operation on this survey has been lower than expected in previous years and 2008 was no exception. Although respondents who took part in the study generally seemed to find it interesting, persuading people to take part in the survey on the doorstep proved difficult – the subject matter, as is commonly found with political attitude surveys, was not generally motivating for respondents and this proved to be the case again for 2008.

The research design for survey 3 incorporated several tactics to boost the response rate. This included the use of a conditional £10 voucher incentive; increasing the minimum number of visits to addresses (8 per address); increased weekend and evening visits to addresses (4 of the 8 visits made by interviewers must be at the weekend or evening); the use of advance letters and leaflets and the quick turnaround of reissued sample (there was an average turnaround of 4 days between original assignments being returned and then re-issued to more experienced interviewers).

Having reviewed the feedback from our interviewers it appeared the key reasons for refusals were that respondents were just not interested in the subject matter and did not see the value of taking part in the survey.

BMRB took a number of steps to maximise response rates and minimise refusal rates on the survey, particularly in England (which performed less well than the other countries), including the following:

- A 3-page memo was sent out to interviewers, reminding them of the importance of achieving a high response rate and sharing tips from the more successful interviewers about what worked well on the doorstep. This included information on the Committee itself, the work it does, the role it plays and the recommendations it has made to the government over the years.
- Bespoke reissue letters were designed (by BMRB and the Research Advisory Board) for use with the reissued sample. Different letters were produced for both non-contacts and refusals. The letters had more of an emphasis on what impact the survey would have, as well as the fact it gives people the chance to have their say and highlighting the fact there is a £10 incentive.
- We ensured that our most experienced face-to-face interviewers were working on the re-issued sample in order to maximise the response rate. Where available we used supervisors to work on the project as well.

Despite the lower response rate in England, the overall target of 57 per cent was reached in the remaining three countries and also at the UK level.

Fieldwork outcomes and response rates															
	UK			England			Wales			Scotland			Northern Ireland		
	n	%	%	n	%	%	n	%	%	n	%	%	n	%	%
<b>Addresses issued</b>	4590	100	100	1890	100	100	900	100	100	990	100	100	810	100	100
<b>Out of scope</b>	549	12.0		199	10.5		125	13.9		94	9.5		131	16.2	
<b>Deadwood</b>	493	10.7		187	9.9		113	12.6		85	8.6		108	13.3	
Not yet built/under construction	9	*		5	*		1	*		1	*		2	*	
Derelict/demolished	36	0.8		7	*		8	0.9		9	0.9		12	1.5	
Vacant/empty housing unit	259	5.6		104	5.5		67	7.4		45	4.5		43	5.3	
Non-residential	89	1.9		22	1.2		18	2.0		18	1.8		31	3.8	
Institution	9	*		4	*		-	-		1	*		4	0.5	
Not main residence	76	2.0		38	2.0		17	1.9		6	0.6		15	1.9	
Other ineligible	13	*		6	*		1	*		5	0.5		1	*	
Nobody aged 18+ at address	2	*		1	*		1	*		-	-		-	-	
<b>Unknown eligibility</b>	56	1.2		12	0.6		12	1.3		9	0.9		23	2.8	
Address not attempted	1	*		-	-		1	*		-	-		-	-	
Inaccessible	10	*		2	*		1	*		7	0.7		-	-	
Unable to locate	45	1.0		10	0.5		10	1.1		2	0.2		23	2.8	
<b>In scope</b>	4041	88.0	100	1691	89.5	100	775	86.1	100	896	90.5	100	679	83.8	100
<b>Refused</b>	1214	26.4	30.0	586	31.0	34.7	219	24.3	28.3	243	24.5	27.1	166	20.5	24.4
Household contact but information refused	379	8.3	9.4	196	10.4	11.6	71	7.9	9.2	42	4.2	4.7	70	8.6	10.3
Office refusal	123	2.7	3.0	67	3.5	4.0	24	2.7	3.1	29	2.9	3.2	3	*	*
Refusal by selected respondent	626	13.6	15.5	274	14.5	16.2	117	13.0	15.1	159	16.1	17.7	76	9.4	11.2

<b>Fieldwork outcomes and response rates</b>															
Proxy refusal	83	1.8	2.1	48	2.5	2.8	7	0.8	0.9	12	1.2	1.3	16	2.0	2.3
Refusal during interview	3	*	*	1	*	*	-	-	-	1	*	*	1	*	*
<b>Non-contact</b>	195	4.2	4.8	65	3.4	3.8	32	3.6	4.1	35	3.5	3.9	63	7.8	9.2
No contact with anyone	161	3.5	4.0	54	2.9	3.2	21	2.3	2.7	27	2.7	3.0	59	7.3	8.7
No adult contact at selected dwelling unit	2	*	*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	*	*
No contact with selected respondent	32	0.7	0.8	11	0.6	0.7	11	1.2	1.4	8	0.8	0.9	2	*	*
<b>Other unproductive</b>	315	6.9	7.8	127	6.7	7.5	74	8.2	9.5	78	7.9	8.7	36	4.4	5.3
Broken appointment	71	1.5	1.8	23	1.2	1.4	17	1.9	2.2	22	2.2	2.5	9	1.1	1.3
Respondent ill/incapacitated	39	0.8	1.0	10	0.5	0.6	10	1.1	1.3	14	1.4	1.6	5	0.6	0.7
Respondent away/ in hospital	71	1.5	1.8	37	2.0	2.2	17	1.9	2.2	14	1.4	1.6	3	*	*
Respondent physically/ mentally unable	83	1.8	2.1	32	1.7	1.9	22	2.4	2.8	19	1.9	2.1	10	1.2	1.5
Language difficulties	31	0.7	0.8	17	0.9	1.0	2	*	*	5	0.5	0.6	7	0.9	1.0
Other unproductive	20	*	0.5	8	*	0.5	6	0.7	0.8	4	0.4	*	2	*	*
<b>Full interview</b>	2312		57.2	913		54.0	447		57.7	538		60.0	414		61.0

## Weighting

The survey data were weighted in three stages. Firstly, design weights were applied. These corrected for inequalities in selection probabilities arising from disproportionate sampling within and between country, address selection and selection of an individual from a household. Non-response weights were then applied to correct for differential non-response among survey sub-groups, and then population weights applied to ensure that each country was represented in its correct proportion in the sample.

### *Design weights*

The first stage applied a design weight, which accounted for the probability of selection for the issued sample.

These were based on the:

- Probability of PSU being selected, based on country and region
- Probability of address being selected
- Probability of dwelling being selected (where more than one dwelling at an address)
- Probability of respondent being selected from eligible adults identified in the household.

For each respondent these probabilities were multiplied together and then divided into one, to give a weight.

The design weights were capped, to reduce extreme weights.

### *Non-response weights*

The design weights were applied to the data, and the profiles of several demographic variables were examined to see how they differed from the population. Key measures in the data were examined by these demographics, to assess any bias that may arise. The non-response weights correct the data so that the proportions in the survey match those in the population. Non-response weights were calculated using RIM weighting (or raking) which is an iterative procedure that forces the overall proportions of key weighting variables in the sample to simultaneously match up with target proportions specified.

Data within each country were RIM weighted individually to the proportions shown in the table below.



<b>Non-response weighting: Target weights by country</b>				
	<b>Country</b>			
<b>Sex</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Wales</b>	<b>Northern Ireland</b>
Male	48.50%	47.49%	47.98%	48.24%
Female	51.50%	52.51%	52.02%	51.76%
<b>Age</b>				
18-24	11.83%	11.65%	11.97%	13.70%
25-34	16.87%	15.43%	14.28%	17.44%
35-44	19.60%	19.43%	18.09%	19.76%
45-54	16.39%	17.54%	16.54%	16.76%
55-64	14.98%	15.35%	16.54%	14.06%
65+	20.33%	20.60%	22.58%	18.28%
<b>Employment</b>				
Not working	38.90%	43.70%	39.00%	41.79%
Working – Full time	45.99%	42.27%	46.47%	45.37%
Working – Part time	15.11%	14.03%	14.53%	12.84%
<b>GOR (England only)</b>				
North East	4.99%			
North West (inc Merseyside)	13.31%			
Yorkshire and Humberside	9.95%			
East Midlands	8.55%			
West Midlands	10.5%			
Eastern	11.11%			
London	14.87%			
South East	16.47%			
South West	10.25%			

The final stage was to ensure that for analysis of results at the Great Britain and UK level, each of the four countries was represented in its correct proportion in the population.

The Great Britain dataset was created initially, and weighted to the following proportions:

Country	Proportion
England	86.13%
Wales	5.13%
Scotland	8.74%

A UK dataset was then produced to account for the inclusion of Northern Ireland, and was weighted to the following proportions:

Country	Proportion
Great Britain	97.2%
Northern Ireland	2.8%

### Standard errors, design effects and design factors

The survey used a complex multi-stage sample design which involved both stratification and clustering, and which produces data which require weighting in analysis. For this reason, it is not legitimate to calculate standard errors and confidence intervals using the standard textbook formulae which are based on the assumption of simple random sampling.

Instead, standard errors should be calculated individually using a method which takes account of both the complexity of sample design and data weighting. The SPSS complex samples module is used here to produce standard error, design effect and design factor estimates for eight of the survey variables. The table below shows the estimates based on the Great Britain sample. These estimates are calculated based on the complex design of the survey and take into account clustering, stratifications, and the design effect due to weighting.

A design effect is the ratio of the sampling variance for a complex sample design to that for a simple random sample of the same size, and a design factor is the corresponding ratio of standard errors (and therefore the design factor is the square root of the design effect). For example, a sample of 1000 selected by means of a complex sample design might have a design effect of 2. This design would therefore have a design factor of 1.41 (the square root of 2) and would have a standard error of 2.23 per cent around a 50 per cent estimate, which is 1.41 times the size of the standard error around a 50 per cent estimate for a simple random sample (1.58%).

For example, for a simple random sample the 95 per cent confidence interval around a mean proportion,  $p$ , and a sample size,  $n$  is:

$$P \pm 1.96 \times \text{standard error}$$

$$P \pm 1.96 \times \text{design factor} \times \sqrt{(P \times (1-p))/n} \text{ (f1)}$$

For a simple random sample, the design factor is always 1, since the ratio of variance in a simple random sample to itself is 1, and the square root of 1 is 1.

The confidence interval around the proportion,  $p$ , of 50 per cent (0.5), and a sample size  $n$  of 1000 is:

$$0.5 \pm 1.96 \times 1 \times \sqrt{((0.5 \times (1-0.5))/1000)}$$

$$= 0.5 \pm (1.96 \times 0.0158)$$

$$= 0.5 \pm 0.0310$$

$$= 50\% \pm 3.10\%$$

$$= (46.90\%, 53.10\%).$$

For a complex sample, the design factor is usually higher, so for the same example above with a design effect of 2, the design factor is the square root of 2, which is 1.41. Using 1.41 as the design factor in the formula (f1) gives:

$$0.5 \pm 1.96 \times 1.41 \times \sqrt{((0.5 \times (1-0.5))/1000)}$$

$$= 0.5 \pm (1.96 \times 0.0223)$$

$$= 0.5 \pm 0.0438$$

$$= 50\% \pm 4.38\%$$

$$= (45.62\%, 54.38\%).$$

Design effects and factors to account for stratification, clustering and design of survey					
		Linearised proportion	Standard error	Design effect	Design factor
Making sure that public money is not wasted as one of top three attributes		43.8%	1.8%	2.57	1.60
Do not trust MPs		72.7%	2.0%	1.84	1.36
Do not trust Govt Ministers		71.6%	2.3%	2.28	1.51
Not reasonable for MPs to take into account how party leadership thinks they should vote when deciding how to vote on an important national issue		38.9%	1.7%	2.10	1.45
Overall rating of standards of conduct of public office holders in GB	Very high	2.6%	0.5%	1.93	1.39
	Quite high	38.4%	2.1%	3.42	1.85
	Neither high nor low	39.0%	1.8%	2.63	1.62
	Quite low	16.6%	1.5%	3.10	1.76
	Very low	3.4%	0.6%	2.38	1.54
Proportion of senior public officials who own up when they make mistakes	All	1.2%	0.4%	1.50	1.22
	Most	9.2%	1.1%	1.22	1.11
	About half	18.3%	1.7%	1.71	1.31
	A few	52.3%	2.0%	1.38	1.18
	None	19.1%	1.8%	1.80	1.34
Party affiliation – Labour		27.0%	1.5%	2.20	1.48
Party affiliation – Conservative		27.6%	1.5%	2.10	1.45

## Multivariate analysis

### Method

Multivariate analysis was conducted using logistic regression in SPSS. There were several different models investigated, and the outputs from each are shown below. Stepwise regression was used to test a number of variables that had been chosen for inclusion based on their significance or strong association with the dependent variables. Many of the independent variables were suggested by researchers with good knowledge of the data, and were felt to have a potential importance in influencing the dependent variables.

Firstly the data was recoded where appropriate, to combine each of the dependent variables in to two categories. The independent variables tested in the regression were

- gender,
- age (varying bands),
- exposure to media (none, 1,2,3 +),
- highest qualification (varying bands),
- sector of employment (public, private, not working),
- newspaper readership (tabloid only, broadsheet only, mixed, no national papers),
- political party affiliation (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, other, no affiliation),
- whether the respondent was influenced by issues under remit of the Committee on Standards in Public Life,
- whether the respondent was influenced by wider events.

Logistic regression shows the impact that a response has on the dependent variable when the values of all other predictor variables are kept constant.

The tables below show the results from the regression, the odds ratios, and whether or not a category was significant in relation to the dependent variable. The Odds Ratios can be used to interpret how much more or less likely a respondent is to be part of the category the dependent variable is focussing on compared with the reference category. The higher the Odds Ratio, the more likely the event is to occur, and the lower the value, the less likely the event when it is compared to the reference category, and assuming all other values are kept constant. The reference category is marked with (ref) in the Odds Ratio column. For example, the table below shows that when controlling for all other variables in the table, men are 23% more likely than women to say overall standards in the UK are high (1.23 – 1)%. Where Odds Ratios (OR) are less than 1.0, it means that the event is less likely to happen, by (1 – OR)%. For example, those who have no qualifications or qualification lower than level 2 are 35% (1-0.65) less likely than those who have a degree to think that overall standards of conduct in the UK are high. Categories marked with an asterisk are significant.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This has not taken into account the complex sampling design, and so some variables that are significant may not be significant when taking the complex design into account.

<b>Overall standards of conduct in the UK are high</b>			
<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratio</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	*	1.23
	Female		(ref)
<b>Age band</b>	18 – 24	*	1.78
	25 – 34	*	1.63
	35 – 44	*	1.30
	45 +	*	(ref)
<b>Exposure to media</b>	none	*	(ref)
	1	*	1.50
	2	*	1.45
	3+		1.24
<b>Highest qualification</b>	Degree	*	(ref)
	Other HE		0.81
	A level & equiv		0.81
	Trade Apprenticeship		0.65
	Level 2 & below and none	*	0.65
<b>Party affiliation</b>	None/DK	*	(ref)
	Conservative	*	1.47
	Labour	*	2.53
	Lib Dems	*	2.02
	Others		0.91
<b>Newspaper readership</b>	Tabloid only	*	(ref)
	Broadsheet only	*	2.23
	Mixed	*	1.72
	None	*	1.87
<b>Constant</b>		*	0.20

Nagelkerke: 0.124

<b>Standards in UK have improved compared with a few years ago</b>			
<b>Independent variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratio</b>
<b>Age bands</b>	18 – 24	*	2.07
	25 – 34	*	1.77
	35 – 44		1.15
	45 – 54		1.26
	55 +	*	(ref)
<b>Exposure to media</b>	none	*	(ref)
	1	*	1.50
	2	*	1.69
	3+		1.20
<b>Party affiliation</b>	None/DK	*	(ref)
	Conservative		0.91
	Labour	*	2.52
	Lib Dems	*	1.72
	Others		0.91
<b>Whether influencing event under remit of committee</b>	No	*	(ref)
	Yes	*	0.54
<b>Newspaper readership</b>	Tabloid only	*	(ref)
	Broadsheet only		0.93
	Mixed	*	1.50
	None		1.16
<b>Constant</b>		*	0.15

Nagelkerke: 0.102

<b>Standards have got worse in UK compared with a few years ago</b>			
<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratio</b>
<b>Age band</b>	18 – 24	*	0.42
	25 – 34	*	0.45
	35 – 44		0.76
	45 – 54		0.83
	55+	*	(ref)
<b>Exposure to media</b>	None	*	(ref)
	1	*	0.71
	2	*	0.73
	3+		0.97
<b>Highest qualification</b>	Degree	*	(ref)
	Other HE		1.06
	A level & equiv		0.86
	Trade apprenticeship	*	1.79
	Level 2 & below and none	*	1.48
<b>Party affiliation</b>	None/DK	*	(ref)
	Conservative	*	1.85
	Labour	*	0.64
	Lib Dems		1.03
	Others	*	2.18
<b>Influenced by event under remit of committee</b>	No		(ref)
	Yes	*	1.78
<b>Newspaper readership</b>	Tabloid only	*	(ref)
	Broadsheet only	*	0.63
	Mixed	*	0.65
	None	*	0.63
<b>Constant</b>			0.88

Nagelkerke: 0.158



<b>Confident that authorities are committed to upholding standards in public life</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratio</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male		(ref)
	Female	*	1.55
<b>Age band</b>	18 – 24	*	3.42
	25 – 34	*	2.07
	35 – 44		1.21
	45 – 54		1.10
	55+	*	(ref)
<b>Exposure to media</b>	None	*	(ref)
	1	*	1.57
	2		1.27
	3+		1.15
<b>Sector of employment</b>	Public	*	(ref)
	Private/other	*	0.53
	Not working	*	0.58
<b>Party affiliation</b>	None/DK	*	(ref)
	Conservative		1.25
	Labour	*	3.39
	Lib Dems	*	1.61
	Others		1.00
<b>Influenced by wider issue outside those of committee</b>	No	*	1.44
	Yes		(ref)
<b>Influenced by issue under remit of committee</b>	No		(ref)
	Yes	*	0.74
<b>Newspaper readership</b>	Tabloid only	*	(ref)
	Broadsheet only	*	1.69
	Mixed	*	1.62
	None	*	1.72
<b>Constant</b>		*	0.35

Nagelkerke: 0.163

<b>Confident that authorities will uncover wrongdoing</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratios</b>
<b>Highest qualification</b>	A level & above	*	(ref)
	Other qualifications	*	0.74
	No qualifications		1.06
<b>Party affiliation</b>	Conservative	*	(ref)
	Labour		1.13
	Lib Dems	*	2.37
	Others	*	2.05
	None/DK		0.73
<b>Influenced by issue under remit of committee</b>	No		(ref)
	Yes	*	0.65
<b>Constant</b>		*	0.58
			Nagelkerke: 0.075

<b>Confident that authorities will punish wrongdoing</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratios</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female		(ref)
	Male	*	1.34
<b>Exposure to media</b>	none	*	(ref)
	1		0.81
	2	*	0.62
	3+	*	0.69
<b>Highest qualification</b>	A level & above	*	(ref)
	Other qualifications	*	0.54
	No qualifications	*	0.75
<b>Party affiliation</b>	None/DK	*	(ref)
	Conservative	*	1.50
	Labour	*	2.04
	Lib Dems	*	1.47
	Others		0.80
<b>Influenced by wider issue outside those of committee</b>	No	*	1.84
	Yes	*	(ref)
<b>Influenced by issue under remit of committee</b>	No	*	(ref)
	Yes	*	0.50
<b>Newspaper readership</b>	Tabloid only	*	(ref)
	Broadsheet only		0.93
	Mixed		1.18
	None	*	1.40
<b>Constant</b>		*	0.42

Nagelkerke: 0.093

<b>Believe electoral registration system is safe (UK sample)</b>			
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Odds Ratios</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female		(ref)
	Male	*	1.48
<b>Age band</b>	18 – 24	*	1.56
	25 – 44	*	(ref)
	45 – 54	*	1.64
	55 – 64	*	1.52
	65+	*	2.05
<b>Exposure to media</b>	None	*	(ref)
	1		1.12
	2	*	0.73
	3+		0.74
<b>Sector of employment</b>	Public	*	(ref)
	Private/other	*	0.55
	Not working	*	0.58
<b>Party affiliation</b>	None/DK	*	(ref)
	Conservative	*	2.46
	Labour	*	3.87
	Lib Dems	*	2.18
	Others	*	1.87
	NI party	*	4.13
<b>Newspaper readership</b>	Tabloid only	*	(ref)
	Broadsheet only	*	1.66
	Mixed		1.32
	None		1.23
<b>Constant</b>			0.74

Nagelkerke: 0.103

## Order of importance

To ascertain the order of importance of the variables, ANOVAs were used in SPSS to obtain Beta scores. The variables used in the ANOVAs were the ones that are listed for each of the above models. Beta scores that are produced are very similar to those that would be obtained in a linear regression. The scores from the ANOVAs are considered a fair proxy to determine relative importance of the independent variables in relation to the dependent variables, and the order of importance is used in the main report when commenting on the multivariate analysis.



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