



in Lancashire

Local democracy

Fieldwork 11 June – 18 July 2008

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1 Executive Summary

This wave of the Life in Lancashire panel aimed to find out how interested and knowledgeable residents are in local democracy including how likely they are to vote in elections. The survey was sent to all 3301 members of the panel. In total 2553 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 77%. The key findings from the survey are listed below.

- Most respondents would vote in elections, though more would vote in a general election (66%) than a local election (55%). There were few people who would not vote in either. It is older people and white residents who are more likely to say they would vote in elections.
- The most common activity respondents have done is vote in elections, more for the general election (81%) than local council election (76%), and is higher among people over 60.
- Almost twice as many people had heard of their MP (78%) than their local or district councillor (41% and 38% respectively). The people who are most likely to know the name of their local representatives are over 60 (88% for MP, 51% for county councillor, 52% for district councillor).
- Almost three-quarters of respondents have discussed politics or political news with someone (72%). Two-thirds of respondents have also donated money (or paid membership) to a charity or campaigning organisation (64%) or signed a petition (62%).
- The majority of people were interested in politics, though most only fairly interested (52%). The people who were more likely to be interested in politics were older (over 45), men and in the highest social groups (AB).
- Most respondents said they knew a fair amount about politics (55%), and a third said they didn't know very much (36%). People's knowledge of politics reflects their interest in it as those who have the most knowledge are most interested.
- Respondents were divided about how much influence they felt they have in politics. This comes from the results that more people disagreed than agreed that they can change the way the country is run by getting involved in politics (40% and 29% respectively); and they can influence decisions affecting their local area (39% and 33% respectively). It is white residents who are less likely to think they have influence in politics.

The survey findings can be used to try and increase involvement in local democracy and civic engagement among the groups of people in Lancashire who have less knowledge or interest in them at the moment.

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Life in Lancashire regularly since August 2001. A panel of willing participants is recruited and is approached on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics and themes. Panel members are voluntary participants in the research they complete and no incentives are given for completion.

The panel has been designed to be a representative cross-section of the county's population. The results for each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the county's population.

The panel provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population so that reliable results can be reported at a county wide level. It also provides data at a number of sub-area and sub-group levels.

Each Life in Lancashire wave is themed. Firstly, it enables sufficient coverage on a particular topic to be able to provide insight into that topic. And secondly, it comes across better to the residents completing the questionnaires if there is a clear theme (or 2-3 clear themes) within each survey.

The panel is refreshed periodically. New members are recruited to the panel and some current members are retired on a random basis. This means that the panel remains fresh and is not subject to conditioning i.e. the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to find out how interested and knowledgeable residents are in local democracy including how likely they are to vote in elections, their knowledge of their local politicians, and how involved they are in political activities.

4 Methodology

This wave of Life in Lancashire research was sent to 3301 members of the panel on 11 June. A reminder was sent on the 2 July, and the fieldwork ended on 18 July 2008. In total 2553 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 77%.

All data are weighted by age, ethnicity and district to reflect the Lancashire overall population, and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated. The weighted responses have been scaled to match the effective response of 2147, which is the equivalent size of the data if it had not been weighted and was a perfect random sample.

4.1 Limitations

The table below shows the sample tolerances applying to the survey results. Sampling tolerances vary with the sample size and percentage results. On a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 1000 respond with a particular answer, the chance are 95 out of 100 that the answer would be between 47% and 53% (ie +/- 3%), versus a complete coverage of the entire Lancashire population using the same procedure.

Number of respondents	50/50 + / -	30/70 + / -	10/90 + / -
50	14%	13%	8%
100	10%	9%	6%
200	7%	6%	4%
500	4%	4%	3%
1000	3%	3%	2%
2000	2%	2%	1%

In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

National results are available for some of the questions included in the survey from the Audit of Political Engagement 2008 report¹. When comparing the two sets of results it must be borne in mind that the methodological differences between the two surveys affect their comparability. The main difference is that the national survey was a face-to-face, randomly sampled survey; whereas the Life in Lancashire survey was postal and respondents opt-in to the surveys (and as a result could be more likely to be civically engaged).

¹ Source: Audit of Political Engagement 5 2008 Report (data from the Political Engagement Poll undertaken by Ipsos MORI who interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain)

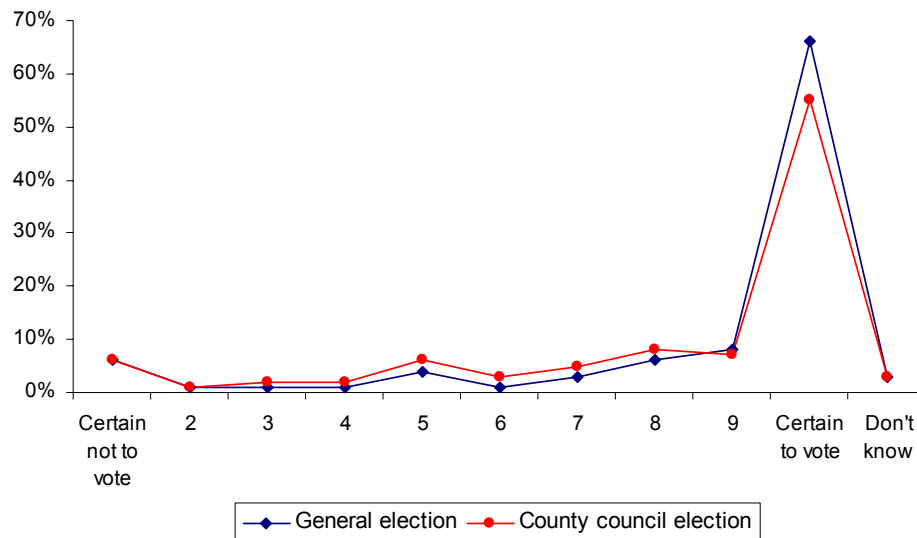
5 Main research findings

5.1 Interest in voting in elections

The panel were first asked how likely they were to vote in an immediate general and local election. Most respondents would vote in both types of election, though more would vote in a general election (66%) than a local election (55%). There were only a small proportion of people who were certain not to vote in either election (both 6%).

In a national survey carried out by the Ministry of Justice in December 2007 respondents were asked a number of questions around political engagement². In the national survey 53% were certain to vote in a general election. This percentage is lower than the Life in Lancashire finding, which could be due to the methodological differences between the surveys (see the limitations on page five).

Chart 1 - How likely would you be to vote in both an immediate general election, and a county council election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote, and 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2482, Weighted 2097)

Older members of the panel were more likely to say they would vote in both an immediate general and county council election (45 to 59 73% and 69% certain to vote in a general and county council election respectively, over 60s 71% and 59% certain to vote in a general and county council election respectively). People’s ethnic background also has an effect on their

² Source: Audit of Political Engagement 5 2008 Report (data from the Political Engagement Poll undertaken by Ipsos MORI who interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,073 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain)

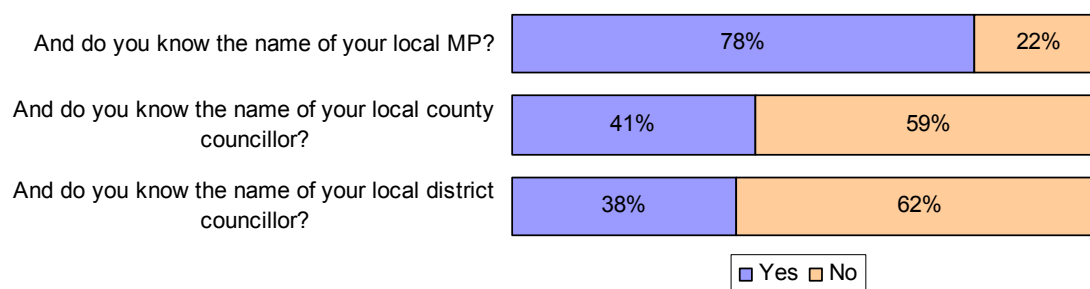
likelihood of voting in a general election as white people (68% certain to vote, mean of 8.9) were more likely to vote than people from a BME background (28% certain to vote, mean of 8.2). A quarter of BME respondents didn't know if they would vote (23%). People who own their own homes were also more likely to vote in a general election (69% certain to vote) compared to those living in council or housing association accommodation (55% certain to vote).

5.2 Knowledge of political representatives

Respondents were then asked a series of questions around their knowledge of local politicians, and interest in politics.

Firstly, respondents were asked if they knew the names of their local MP, county councillor and district councillor. Almost twice as many people had heard of their MP (78%) than their local or district councillor (41% and 38% respectively).

Chart 2 - And do you know the name of...?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2412, Weighted 2048)

In terms of residents' knowledge of their local political representatives it is the older residents (over 60s) who are most likely to know who each person is (88% know their MP, 51% know their county councillor and 52% know their district councillor).

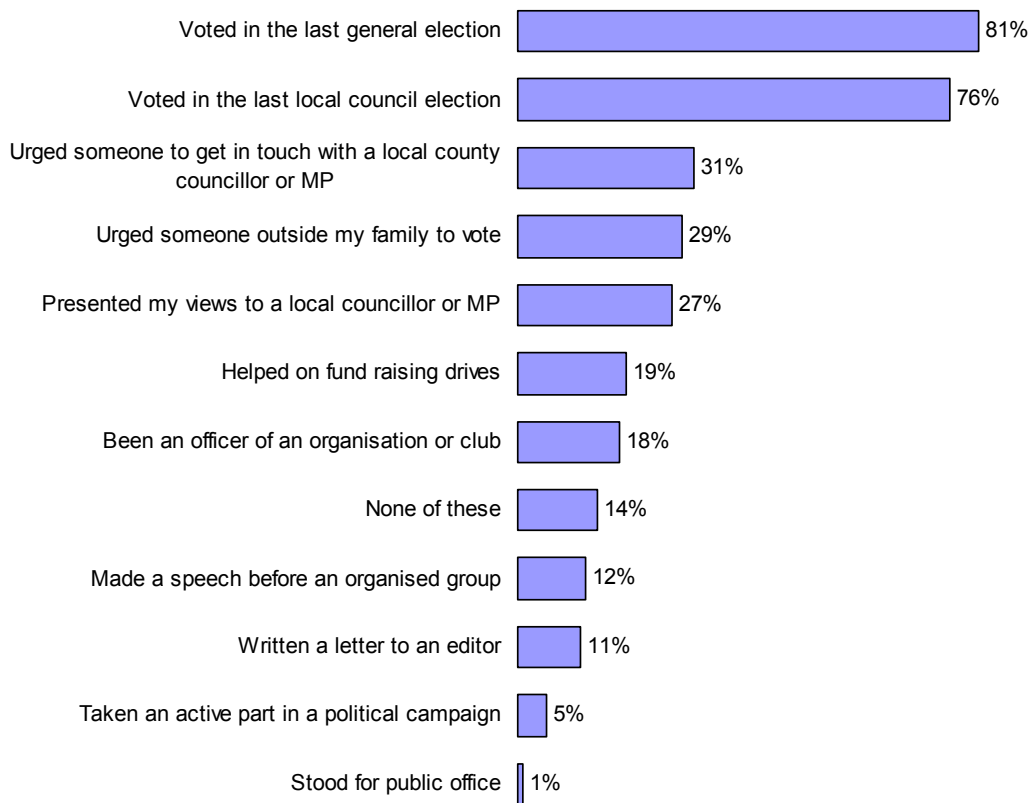
Residents living in Wyre (74%), South Ribble (70%), West Lancashire (68%) and Preston (65%) were significantly less likely to know their name of their MP. Whereas Lancaster residents are less likely to know the name of their county councillor (31%), and Wyre residents are less likely to know the name of their district councillor (27%).

Men were more likely to know the name of their district councillor than women (43% and 35% respectively), and people in social group DE were least likely to know the name of their MP (76%).

5.3 Involvement in politics and local democracy

Out of a list of political activities, respondents were asked which they had done in the last two or three years. By far the activity most people have done is voting in elections – more for the general election (81%) than the local council election (76%). Three in ten people had also urged someone to get in touch with a local county council or MP (31%), or urged someone outside their family to vote (29%), and presenting their views to a local councillor or MP (27%). There were 14% of people who hadn't done any of the things on the list. The national comparison for the number of people voting in the last general election is 62%³.

Chart 3 - Which, if any, of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2522, Weighted 2128)

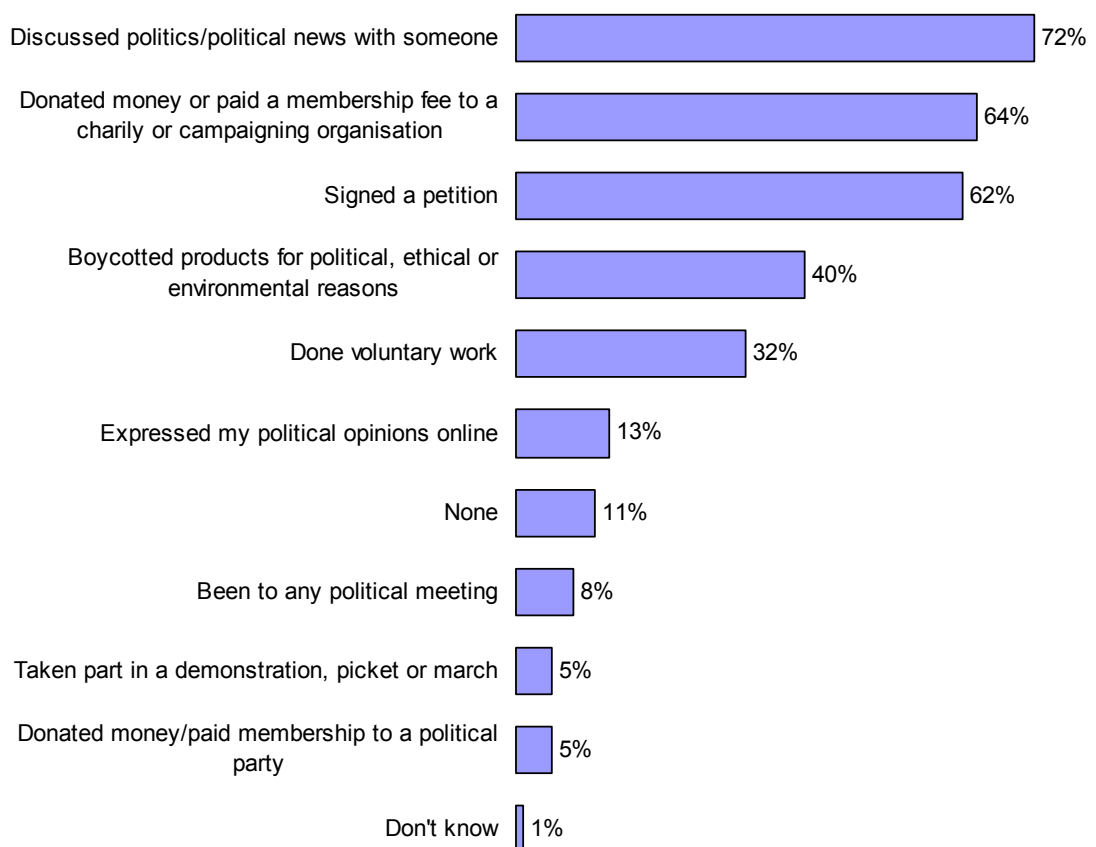
From this list of political activities it is the over 60s who were more likely to have voted in the last general and local council election (88% and 83% respectively). It is people in the higher social groups (AB and C1) who are most likely to have helped on fund raising drives (22% and 23%

³ Source: Audit of Political Engagement 5 2008 Report (data from the Political Engagement Poll undertaken by Ipsos MORI). See limitations on page five for an explanation of the comparability of the two surveys.

respectively), made a speech before an organised group (17% and 14% respectively), and to have been an officer of an organised club (24% and 20% respectively). People who work were also more likely to have helped on a fund raising drive (23%).

Almost three-quarters of respondents have discussed politics or political news with someone (72%). Of the other activities, the ones people had most commonly taken part in were donating money (or paying membership) to a charity or campaigning organisation (64%), signing a petition (62%), boycotting products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (40%), or doing voluntary work (32%). One in ten people hadn't taken part in any of the activities listed (11%).

Chart 4 - And which of these activities, if any, have you done in the last two or three years?



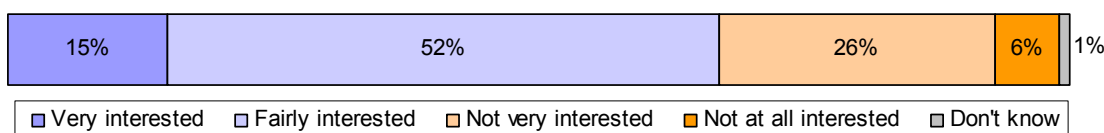
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2507, Weighted 2115)

There are certain groups of people who are less likely to take part in these activities. These people include the over 60s (22% none), people who live in council or housing association properties (24% none), those in social groups C2 and DE (15% and 17% respectively), and light users of county council services (16%).

They were then asked how interested they were in politics. The majority of people were interested in politics, though most were only fairly interested (52%). Almost a third weren't interested in politics (32% not very and not at all interested). The people who were more likely to say they are interested in politics were older (45 to 59 70% interested, over 60 74% interested), men (76% interested) and in the highest social groups (AB 76% interested).

The national comparison⁴ for interest in politics is that just over half of people are interested in it (51% very or fairly interested). People on the Life in Lancashire panel were more interested in politics by 16%, although this difference could be due to the surveys methodological differences.

Chart 5 - How interested would you say you are in politics?

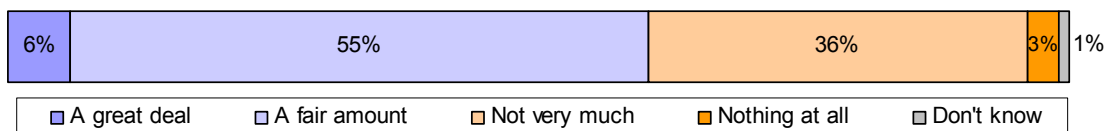


Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2495, Weighted 2106)

When asked about how much people knew about politics, most thought they knew a fair amount (55%), and a third not very much (36%). Only 6% felt they knew a great deal, and very few said they knew nothing at all (3%). People's knowledge of politics reflects their interest in it as those who have the most knowledge are most interested. The people who are more likely to know a great deal or fair amount about politics are older (45 to 59 65% and over 60 69%), men (73%) and in the highest social groups (AB 74%). Part time workers were less likely than full time workers and people who don't work (including retired people) to know a great deal or fair amount about politics (50% compared to 62% and 63% respectively).

On the national survey two-fifths of respondents knew at least a fair amount about politics (44% a great deal or fair amount). Again this is lower than the Life in Lancashire responses by 17% and reflects the difference for interest in politics.

Chart 6 - How much, if anything, do you feel you know about politics?



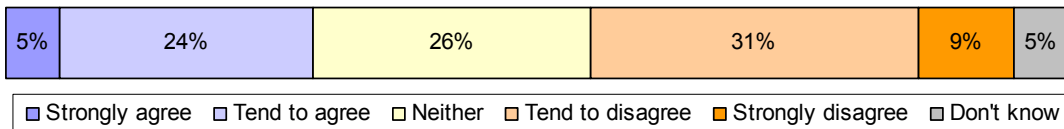
Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2499, Weighted 2108)

⁴ Source: Audit of Political Engagement 5 2008 Report (data from the Political Engagement Poll undertaken by Ipsos MORI). See limitations on page five for an explanation of the comparability of the two surveys.

Respondents were divided about how much influence they felt they have in changing the way the country is run by getting involved in politics because more people disagreed (40%) than agreed with the statement (29%). Three in ten respondents didn't give a definite opinion (26% neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% don't know). More white respondents disagree than BME respondents (41% and 20% disagree respectively), and more homeowners disagree than council or housing association residents (42% and 26% disagree respectively).

These results are similar to the national figures (42% disagreed and 31% agreed with the statement)⁵ despite panel members showing more interest and knowledge in politics.

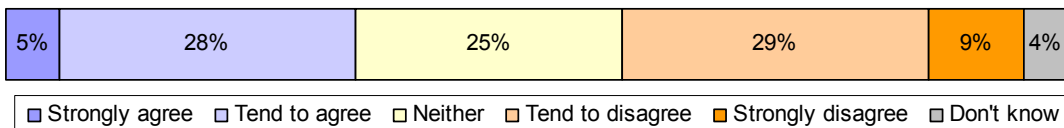
Chart 7 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? When people like me get involved in politics, they really can change the way that the country is run.



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2496, Weighted 2109)

Following on from this, the next question asked people if they agreed that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. Again opinion was divided with a third agreeing that they can influence decisions affecting their local area (33%) and slightly more people disagreeing (39%). Three in ten respondents again didn't give a definite opinion (25% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% don't know). Once again it was white residents who are less likely to think they have influence over decisions affecting their local area (39% disagree, compared to 18% of BME residents).

Chart 8 - Do you agree or disagree that you can influence decisions affecting your local area?



Base: All respondents (Unweighted 2491, Weighted 2104)

⁵ Source: Audit of Political Engagement 5 2008 Report (data from the Political Engagement Poll undertaken by Ipsos MORI)

6 Appendix

6.1 Socio-Economic-Group Definitions

These groups are based on Market Research Society definitions and on the respondent. They are graded as A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Group A

- Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows

Group B

- Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications
- Principle officers in local government and civil service
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments
- Retired people previously grade B, and their widows

Group C1

- Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements
- Retired people, previously grade C1, and their widows

Group C2

- All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers for responsibility for other people
- Retired people, previously grade C2, with pensions from their job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group D

- All semi skilled and unskilled manual workers, and apprentices and trainees to skilled workers
- Retired people, previously grade D, with pensions from their late job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group E

- All those entirely dependant on the state long term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons
- Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months (otherwise classified on previous occupation)
- Casual workers and those without a regular income