Modernising elections research

On this page Modernising elections research People value wide public participation in elections and like current methods for voting Improvements can be made but should not undermine the perceived importance of the process Most people know how they can cast their vote Not everyone knows why they should vote Download the full report First published: 14 October 2021 Last updated: 14 October 2021

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Modernising elections research This qualitative research looks at public attitudes to voting and the information available around elections. It considers views on current voting methods and explores ideas and attitudes about possible new ways of casting a vote in the future. This is part of a wider project looking at the future of voting. The evidence provided by the research will inform further work to examine the needs and aspirations of other key groups, including electoral administrators, campaigners and civil society organisations. Ultimately, this work will be used to support recommendations to the UK's governments about how the electoral system can continue to support participation in the democratic process. People value wide public participation in elections and like current methods for voting On the whole, people are content with the current options they have for voting and found them straightforward, especially once they had voted a couple of times and were familiar with the process. In-person voting is the default and preferred option for most people. Postal voting is mainly used in situations where people could not get to the polling station or were following their parents' usual method of voting. For those who had only voted in polling stations, postal voting was perceived to take more effort and be less reliable than in-person voting. However, everyone valued that there were different methods available as, above all, people wanted everyone be able to vote with ease and confidence. Whilst some issues were raised, such as around accessibility, there is no evidence to suggest that current voting processes are responsible for people choosing not to vote, or that people don't vote because they do not know how to cast their vote. For most people, procedural information was seen to be readily available. Improvements can be made but should not undermine the perceived importance of the process Innovations that made voting quick, convenient and physically accessible were seen as attractive by people who took part in the research. While ease of access to voting is important to people – and they therefore broadly support methods that might increase ease – there is also a strong sense that voting should not be so easy that it can be done with little thought. People saw it as crucial that the voting process continues to feel significant and important, and that it should allow for a sense of control, shared purpose and community. People also said that security was important and that they wanted to be certain that their vote had been counted correctly and would be stored securely. Privacy was also seen as a key element of voting. Some people were concerned that this might be lost with innovations for voting remotely, as people may be voting with others close by. Overall people liked the idea of online voting and saw it as being flexible, familiar to other online activities such as banking and shopping, and potentially could encourage more people to vote. However, there were some concerns about the security of online voting; the risk of not maintaining voters' anonymity; digital literacy; and the possibility that some people could be coerced to vote in a certain way. Most people know how they can cast their vote Overall, people had enough information to understand how to vote, except for a small number of people who had not yet voted. For young people and first-time voters to feel prepared to vote, it was important for them to know about the process of voting

and the electoral system, how candidates are elected, and the difference between elections. It was said to be important for people with mental health needs or physical disabilities to have clearer information about how to get 'extra support' if they needed it. People's knowledge about the nature of different voting methods varied considerably, with proxy voting being the option people were least familiar with. Not everyone knows why they should vote People told us that the main challenges to voting were knowing what elections were taking place and when, why it is important to vote, and how to make an informed decision about who to vote for. These challenges sometimes prevented people from voting, even though they practically knew how to cast their vote. People often said the information available during an election was 'overwhelming'. Some didn't know where to start searching, others were unsure how to identify sources they could trust, and others lacked confidence in analysing information to make a decision about who to vote for. In general, people had a desire for clear and comparable information in one place, as opposed to receiving lots of information from different sources. People also valued having 'neutral' sources of information about candidates and their policies from independent, non-partisan sources. How we carried out this research Methodology This was a large-scale qualitative project with a diverse sample covering all four nations. Interviews in Welsh were also carried out. The work was carried out by Revealing Reality. During January, February and March 2021 we conducted a total of 50 focus groups, 48 depth interviews and 15 follow up interviews, speaking to over 300 people about their voting experiences. The research covered: ages 18 to 85 in UK 16-17 in Scotland and Wales a range of socio-economic groups urban and rural locations across the four nations the disenfranchised and the highly engaged those who have voted all their lives and those who have never voted before those spanning the political spectrum The research also ensured representation from those with health needs, such as physical disabilities, hearing / visual impairments and mental health issues. It also included non-internet users and participants with low digital confidence. Objectives of the research To identify what the public think about the current ways people can cast their vote at elections in the UK To understand what is important to people when they vote To understand what would improve people's voting experience To explore what people think about proposed alternative ways of being able to cast their vote, and why they may prefer some options over others To understand whether there are differences in views and opinion by demographic or voting method To identify what information the public wants about elections, voting and politics To examine why people want this information, and what would change if they had it To explore what information is most important to different groups of people To understand how people assess whether information is good information To understand the importance to people of the source of any information Download the full report Electoral Commission Report: Future of voting Related content Electoral law is out of date. Find out where we want to see improvements Public attitudes Read our reports about public attitudes towards voting Elections Act about the UK Government's Elections Act and what it means for voting and campaigning Elections in your area Enter your postcode to find your electoral services team at your local council. You need to send your postal and proxy vote application forms to them.