

Research Report

Peterborough Recall Petition: Data Toplines and Key Findings

Prepared for: Electoral Commission

Prepared by: BMG Research

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1 Research Background & Technical Note

The Electoral Commission is an independent public body established under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The Electoral Commission's aim is to ensure integrity and public confidence in the democratic process, as well as regulate party and election finance, and set standards for well-run elections.

From 19th March 2019 until 1st May 2019, electors in the constituency of Peterborough were able to take part in a recall petition for their MP. This was the second recall petition to take place in the UK since the Recall of MPs Act was introduced in 2015.

The Electoral Commission asked BMG Research to carry out a quantitative survey of a representative sample of the Peterborough electorate to help aid the evaluation of the recall petition.

BMG conducted 159 telephone interviews with a sample of electors eligible to vote in UK Parliamentary General Elections who live within the Peterborough parliamentary constituency.

The sample for the fieldwork was compiled of a mix of purchased sample from a database provider and respondents contacted via random digit dialling (RDD).

Fieldwork took place between 3rd May and 23rd May 2019.¹

Quotas were set on age and gender to ensure that the respondents were as representative as possible of the population of the area.

Weights were applied at the analysis stage to correct any demographic differences between the interviewed sample and known population profile from the census population data.

The weighted and unweighted sample profiles are as follows:

Age	Unweighted base	Weighted base
18-34	12	53
35-54	61	51
55+	86	57

Gender	Unweighted base	Weighted base
Male	81	81
Female	78	79

¹ All fieldwork took place prior to the by-election in the Constituency of Peterborough (triggered by the recall petition) which was held on 6th June 2019.

2 Key Findings

2.1 Awareness of the recall petition

- A large majority (91%) of respondents were aware that a recall petition took place in Peterborough.
- While the majority of respondents were able to correctly identify five statements about the recall petition as true or false, almost half (46%) incorrectly suggested that the recall petition was an online petition to remove the local MP.
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents recall receiving a letter telling them that a recall petition was going to take place, while nearly one-fifth (17%) did not recall receiving it. One in ten (9%) say they are unsure or can't remember.
- Over two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the petition, while the remainder either did not know very much (13%), knew it was happening but did not know anything about it (12%), or did not know it was happening (7%).
- Respondents gained information on the petition from a wide variety of sources, but the most commonly cited were social media (53%), a letter from the local council (47%), and word of mouth (42%).

2.2 Signing the petition

- Three-fifths (59%) of respondents indicated that they signed the recall petition, while two-fifths (40%) did not do so. For comparison, official results show that a smaller proportion (27.64%) of all electors in Peterborough signed the petition².
- People aged 55 and over (79%), Conservative supporters (82%), females (69%), and those from a non-BAME background (73%) were significantly more likely to indicate that they signed the petition.
- Where voters signed the petition, they were most likely to say that this was because the MP broke the law and/or that she lied, with nearly seven in ten (69%) citing that rationale.
- A wide range of reasons were given for not signing the petition, but these were most commonly to do with a lack of time and/or being busy at work (23%) or being unaware that a recall petition was taking place (16%).

² Respondents are often influenced by social desirability bias when completing surveys about their past voting behaviour. See: Holbrook, Allyson L. and Krosnick, Jon A., '*Social Desirability Bias in Voter Turnout Reports: Tests Using the Item Count Technique*' (2010). Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1569295

2.3 Perceptions of the process

- The vast majority (98%) of those who signed the petition were satisfied with the process of doing so. The remainder either did not know or had no opinion (1%), or were dissatisfied (1%).
- Nearly nine in ten respondents (87%) were confident that the petition was well-run, while under a tenth (7%) were not confident and a small proportion 6% did not know.
- Where respondents were confident that the petition was well-run, most cited reasons to do with the voting system and procedure (31%), the information available (27%), or the signing place/slip (24%).
- Two-thirds (69%) believed that the recall petition was open for enough time, while a fifth (21%) believed that the time allotted was too long and a tenth (9%) felt it was too short.
- Over four-fifths (84%) of respondents agreed that they had enough information about the recall petition, while a tenth (11%) disagreed.
- Around a tenth (11%) agreed that their allocated signing place was too far away for them to get to easily, with almost two-thirds (64%) disagreeing with this.
- A quarter (27%) agreed that the hours available to sign the petition in person were not convenient for them, with three-fifths (58%) disagreeing. Amongst those who did not sign the petition, more people agreed than disagreed with this statement (40% compared to 34%).
- Of those who signed the petition, only 6% agreed that there was not enough privacy inside the signing place when signing the petition, while three-quarters (77%) disagreed.
- Of those who signed the petition, a sixth (16%) agreed that there was not enough privacy around the signing place as signing the petition in person meant people nearby could see you go in to sign.
- Overall, a majority of electors (54%) agreed that the process meant people were able to sign the petition in secret with a sixth (17%) disagreeing.
- Of those who signed the petition, a tenth (10%) agreed that there were not enough staff on duty to help at the signing place, while the majority (70%) disagreed. Two-thirds (68%) did not have to queue to sign the petition, while 12% did. Over a tenth (11%) had difficulty getting in or could not get in, while the majority (71%) had no such issues.
- Overall, a little over a tenth of signers (12%) felt that the building was not appropriate for use as a petition signing place, with two-thirds disagreeing (69%).
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) agreed that it is sufficiently anonymous that you complete the petition with your signature, while around one in eight (13%) disagreed.
- Almost all (99%) of those who signed the petition said that it was easy to fill in the signing sheet, including four-fifths (81%) that said it was very easy.

3 Topline Findings

3.1 Notation

Where results do not add up to 100%, this is due to rounding.

A dash (-) indicates no respondent selected that answer. An asterisk (*) indicates a value of less than one half of one percent, but not zero.

Results which are discussed as being higher or lower than other groups are done so in cases where these differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Where a result is statistically significantly higher than other groups, figures in the tables will be marked with the following symbol: ↑

Where a result is statistically significantly lower than other groups, figures in the tables will be marked with the following symbol: ↓

3.2 Context

3.2.1 Electoral register

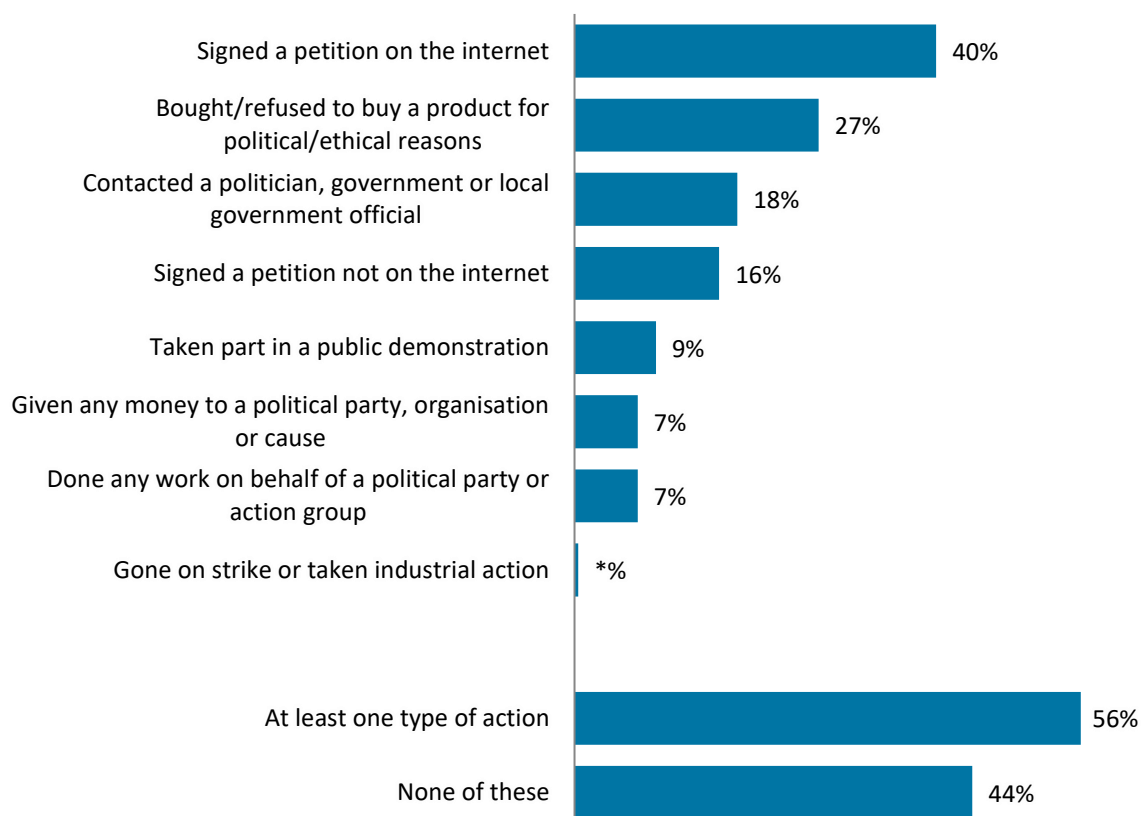
The vast majority (97%) of respondents believe that they are on the electoral register at their current address, with the rest stating that they are not on the register (3%).

3.2.2 Engagement in politics and community affairs

Respondents were asked about their engagement in a number of activities related to politics and community affairs. Over half (56%) indicated that they had taken at least one of the types of political action they were asked about within the last 12 months. The most common of these actions was signing a petition on the internet, which two-fifths (40%) said they had done within the last year, while a quarter (27%) had either bought or refused to buy a product for political or ethical reasons. A fifth (18%) had contacted a politician, government or local government official while a slightly smaller number (16%) had signed an offline petition. Other forms of action had been undertaken within the past year by a small proportion of respondents, including: taking part in a public demonstration (9%); giving any money to a political party, organisation or cause (7%); and doing work on behalf of a political party or action group (7%). A very small proportion (less than 0.5%) had gone on strike or taken industrial action.

Those who reported that they did not sign the recall petition were significantly more likely than those who did so to indicate that they had signed a petition on the internet (51% compared to 33%), and were also more likely to have bought or refused to buy a product for political or ethical reasons (35% compared to 22%) but this was not statistically significant.

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents who have taken the following types of political/community action during the last 12 months

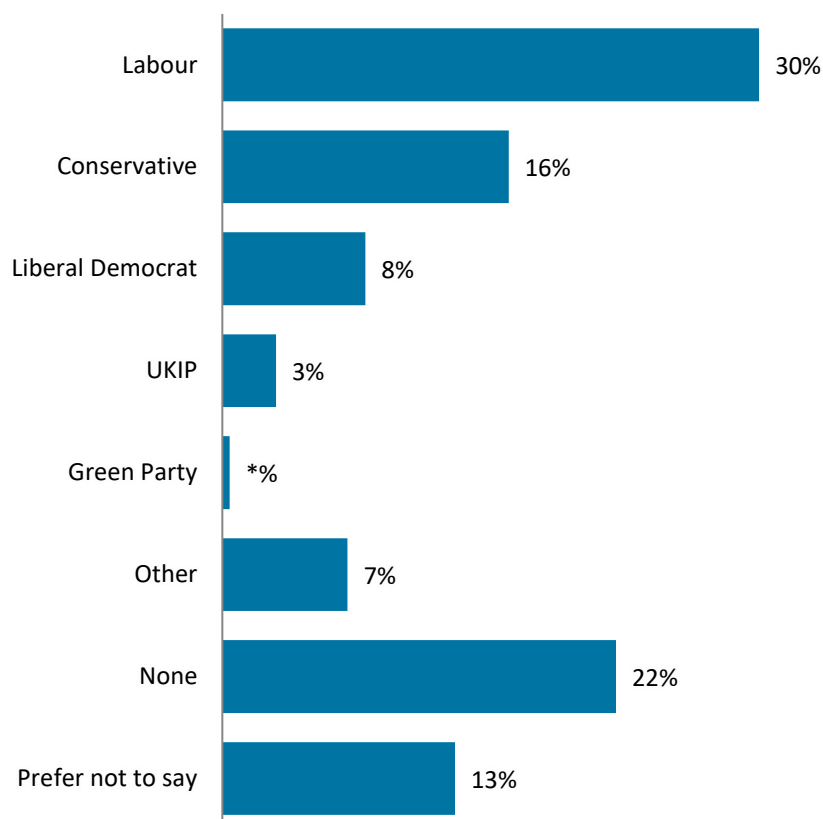


Q21. Thinking now about how active you are in politics and community affairs, during the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? Base: all respondents (159)

3.2.3 Political affiliation

Nearly a third (30%) said that they generally think of themselves as a supporter of the Labour Party, with around a sixth (16%) identifying as Conservative supporters. Smaller numbers identify with the Liberal Democrats (8%), UKIP (3%), or another party (7%). A very small proportion (less than 0.5%) recognise themselves as Green Party supporters. A fifth (22%) do not think of themselves as a supporter of any party, while just over one in ten (13%) preferred not to say.

Figure 2: Generally speaking, do you personally think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or something else?



Q22: Generally speaking, do you personally think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or something else? Base: all respondents (159)

3.3 Awareness of the petition

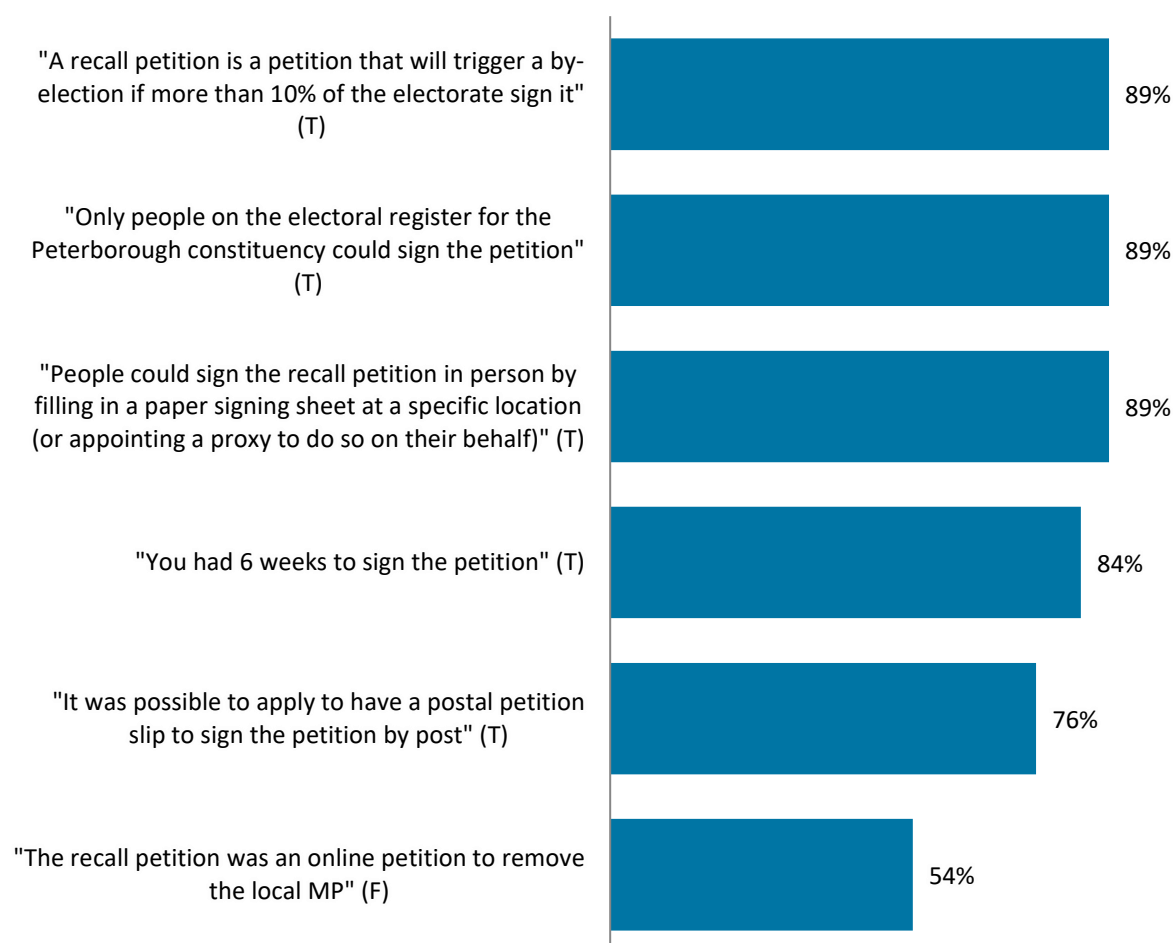
A large majority (91%) of the sample were aware that a recall petition took place in Peterborough. Those who say they always vote in general elections are more likely to have been aware (94%) than those who only sometimes vote (76%).

3.3.1 How the petition worked

Respondents were presented with a series of statements about the recall petition and were asked whether they think they are true or false.

Around nine in ten respondents correctly stated that the following statements were true: a recall petition is a petition that will trigger a by-election if more than 10% of the electorate sign it (89%); only people on the electoral register for the Peterborough constituency could sign the petition (89%); and people could sign the recall petition in person by filling in a paper signing sheet at a specific location (or appointing a proxy to do so on their behalf) (89%). A slightly smaller proportion (84%) knew you had 6 weeks to sign the petition, while three quarters (76%) were aware it was possible to apply to have a postal petition slip to sign the petition by post. Just over half (54%) correctly indicated that “the recall petition was an online petition to remove the local MP” is false, with the remainder (46%) believing this to be the case.

Figure 3: Proportion correctly indicating whether these statements are 'true' or 'false'



Q2. Thinking about the recall petition in Peterborough, I am now going to read out some statements, after each one can you tell me whether you think it is 'true' or 'false'. There is no right or wrong answer here, we are just trying to find out how successful the information produced to publicise the recall petition has been. (T) indicates that the statement is true and (F) indicates that the statement is false. Proportions shown are those that answered correctly. Base: all respondents (159)

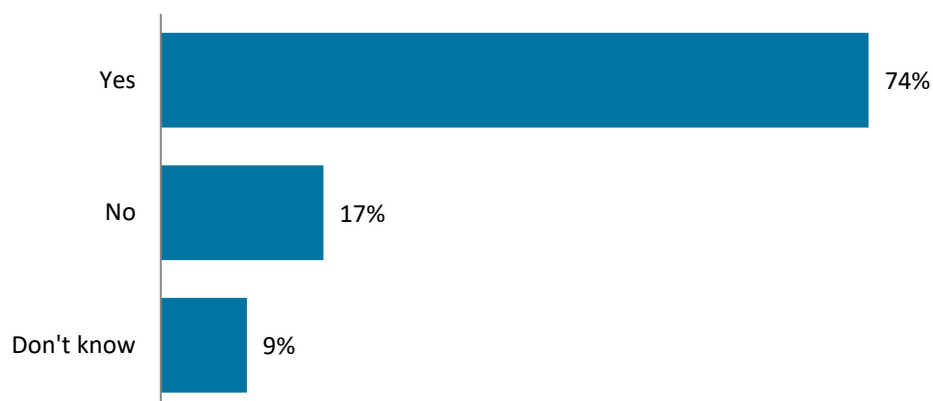
3.3.2 Receiving a letter

Almost three quarters (74%) of respondents recall receiving a letter telling them that a recall petition was going to take place, while a sixth (17%) did not recall receiving it and the remaining 9% did not know or could not remember.

A large majority (86%) of those who signed the petition recalled receiving a letter and over half (53%) of those who did not sign could recall receiving it.

Those aged over 55 were more likely to recall receiving a letter, with nearly nine in ten (88%) indicating this was the case.

Figure 4: In March or April did you remember receiving a letter telling you a recall petition was taking place?



Q3. In March or April, did you remember receiving a letter telling you a recall petition was going to take place?
Base: all respondents (159)

3.3.3 Knowledge of the petition

Over two-thirds of respondents (67%) indicated that they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the petition, including a quarter (27%) that stated they knew a great deal and two-fifths (40%) who said they knew a fair amount. Around an eighth (13%) felt they did not know very much, while a similar proportion knew it was happening but did not know anything about it (12%) and fewer than one in ten did not know it was happening (7%).

Figure 5: How much, if anything, did you know about the petition?



Q4. And how much, if anything, did you know about the petition? Base: all respondents (159)

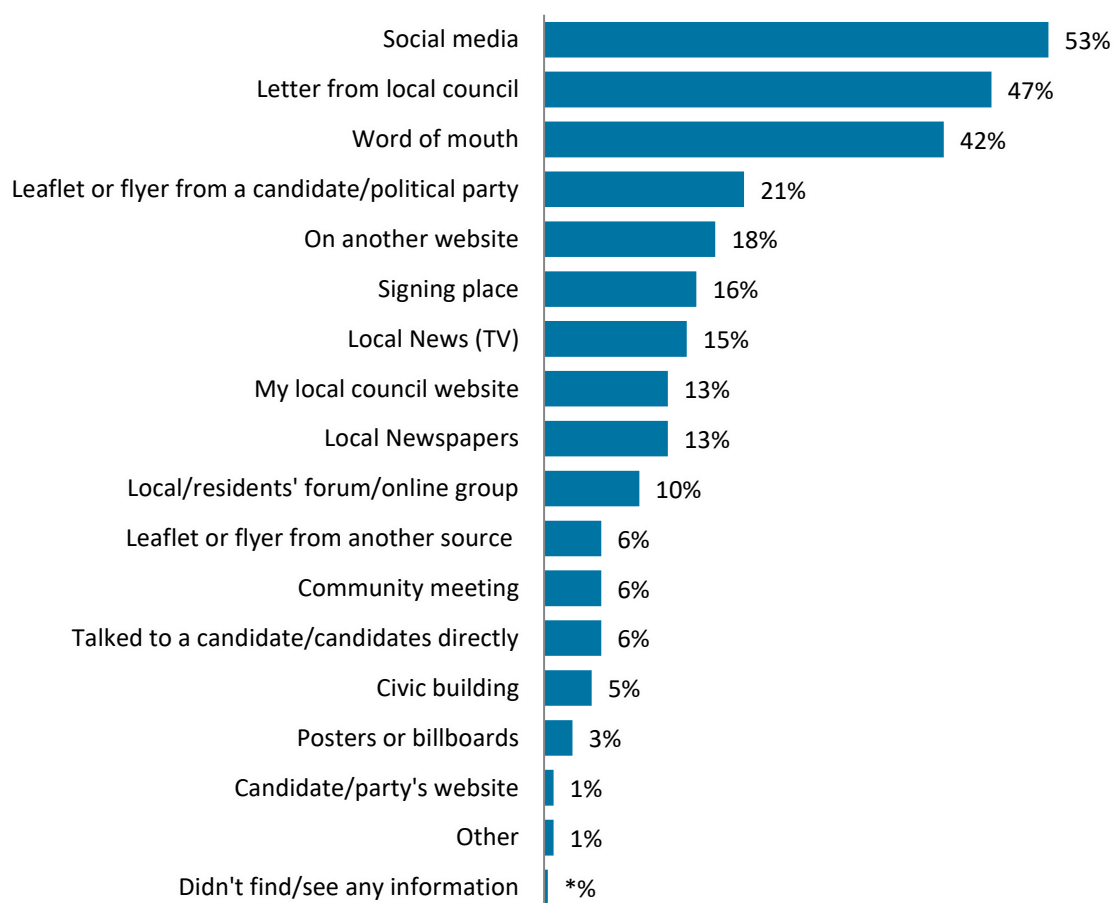
As one might expect, those who had signed the petition were significantly more likely to report knowing a great deal or a fair amount about the petition than those who did not sign (81% compared to 46%).

Older people aged 55 or over were also significantly more likely to state that they knew a great deal or a fair amount about the petition (86%), and, as discussed earlier, were more likely to recall receiving a letter. While around two-thirds (69%) of those aged 35-54 and under half of 18-34 year olds (46%) stated they knew a great deal or a fair amount.

3.3.4 Sources of information

Over half (53%) of those who knew about the petition had obtained information on the petition from social media, while a letter from the local council (47%) and word of mouth (42%) were also commonly cited. Around a fifth (21%) gained information through a leaflet or flyer from a candidate/political party while a smaller proportion received information via a website (other than social media, the Council's website or a candidate/party's website). Around one in six (16%) had seen information in a signing place and/or on local TV news (15%). Other sources cited included the local council's website (13%), the local newspaper (13%), a local residents' forum or online group (10%), a leaflet or flyer from a source other than a candidate/political party (6%), a community meeting (6%), talking to candidates directly (6%), a civic building such as a library or GP surgery (5%), posters or billboards (3%), and a candidates/party's website (1%).

Figure 6: Where did you get information on the petition?



Q5. And where did you get information on the petition? Base: where knew about petition (154)

3.4 Signing the petition

Overall, three-fifths (59%) of respondents indicated that they signed the recall petition, while two-fifths (40%) did not do so. The remainder did not know/could not remember or preferred not to say. Official results show that a much smaller proportion (27.64%) of all electors in Peterborough signed the petition.³

Around four-fifths of people aged 55 and over were significantly more likely to sign the petition (79%), and those identifying as Conservative Party supporters were also more likely to do so (82% compared to 42% of Labour supporters).

Females (69%) were significantly more likely than Males (49%) to state they signed the petition. Three-quarters of those from a non-BAME background (73%) were also significantly more likely to indicate that they signed the petition, compared to under a fifth from a BAME background (19%).

Figure 7: Whether signed the recall petition



Q6. Did you sign the recall petition? Base: all respondents (159)

Of those who had signed the petition, almost three quarters (73%) did so in person at a petition place, while a quarter (26%) did so by post. The remainder either voted by proxy (1%) or could not recall (1%).

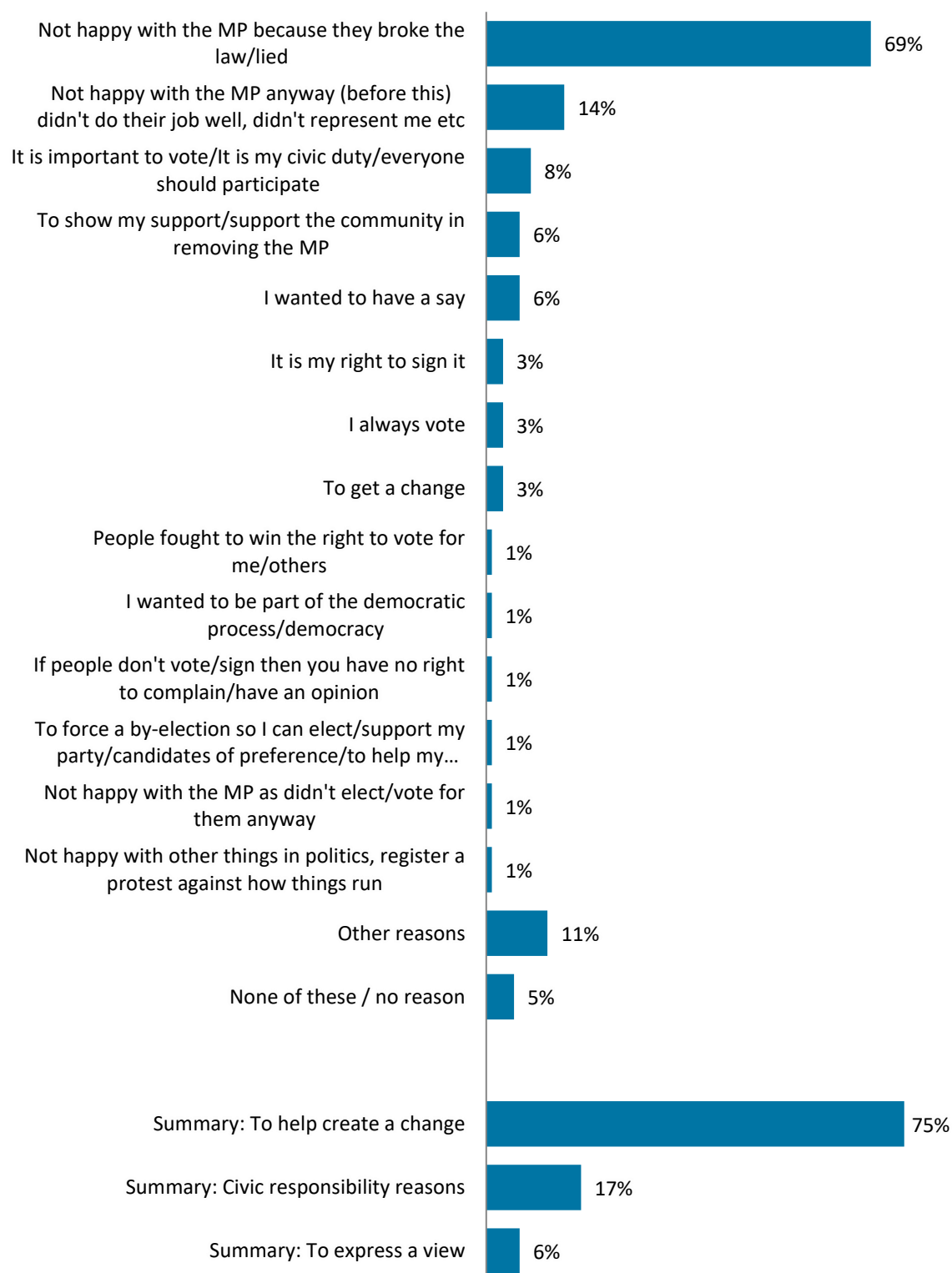
3.4.1 Reasons for signing the petition

Of those who signed the petition, the largest proportion (69%) stated that this was because they were not happy with the MP because she broke the law and/or lied. The next most commonly cited reason was that they were not happy with the MP anyway even before the incident leading to the conviction, with 14% citing this as a reason for signing. Other reasons given included: the importance of voting, a sense of civic duty or a feeling that everybody should participate (8%); to show support or support the community in removing the MP (6%); and wanting to have a say (6%).

³ Respondents are often influenced by social desirability bias when completing surveys about their past voting behaviour. See: Holbrook, Allyson L. and Krosnick, Jon A., 'Social Desirability Bias in Voter Turnout Reports: Tests Using the Item Count Technique' (2010). Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1569295

Overall, three-quarters (75%) did so to help create a change, a sixth (17%) for civic responsibility reasons, and a smaller proportion (6%) signed the petition to express a view.

Figure 8: Reasons for signing the petition



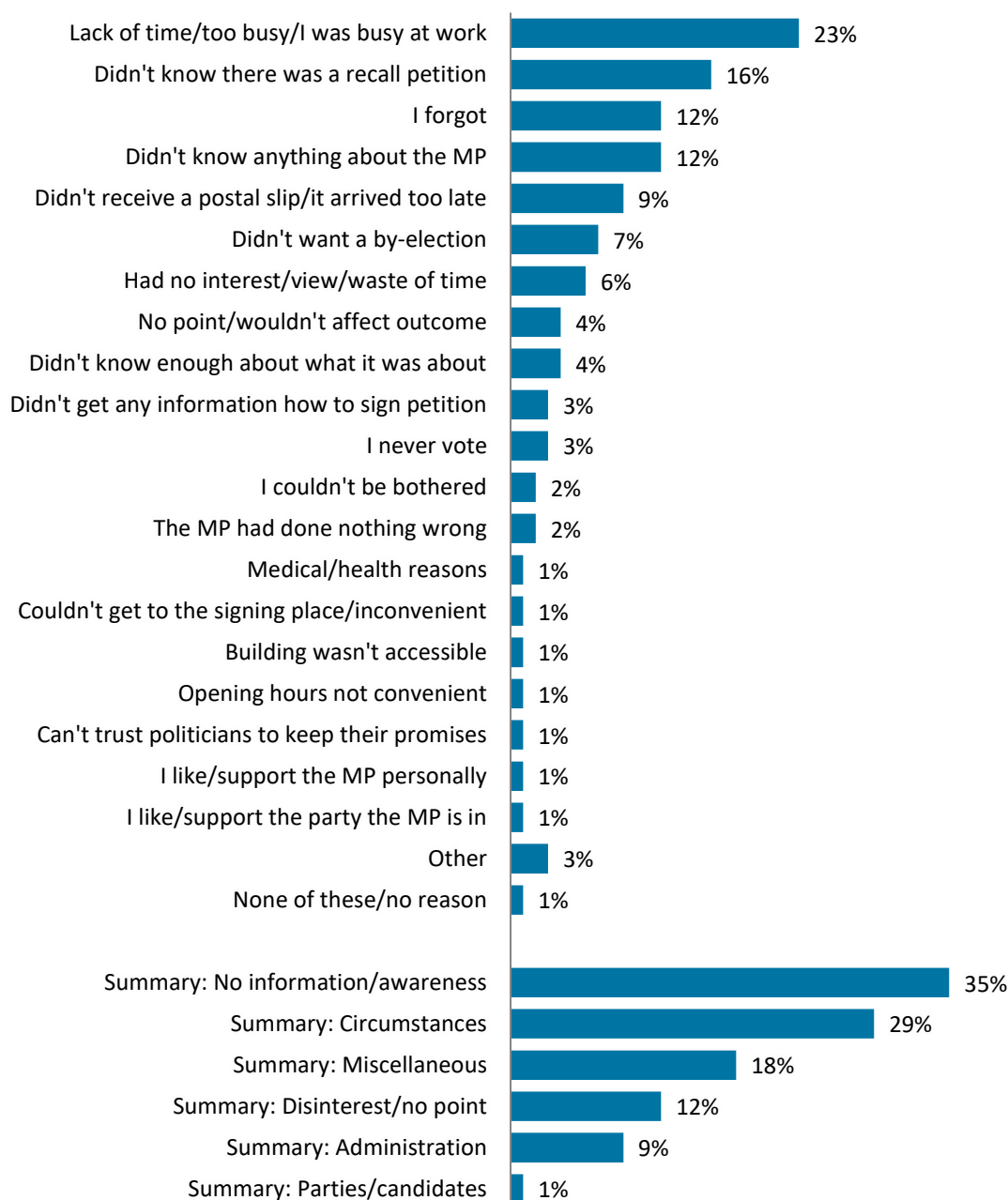
Q8. You said that you signed the petition, can you tell me more about why you chose to do so? Base: where signed (106). Some respondents may have mentioned more than one reason.

3.4.2 Reasons for not signing the petition

A wide range of reasons were given for not signing the petition, but these were most commonly to do with a lack of time and/or being too busy at work (23%), not knowing there was a recall petition (16%), forgetting (12%), not knowing anything about the MP (12%), not receiving a postal slip in time (9%), not wanting a by-election (7%), and having no interest or deeming it a waste of time (6%).

In summary, one-third (35%) cited lack of information or awareness as their decision not to sign, while three in ten (29%) attributed circumstances as their reason, and 18% for a wide variety of miscellaneous reasons.

Figure 9: Reasons for not signing the petition



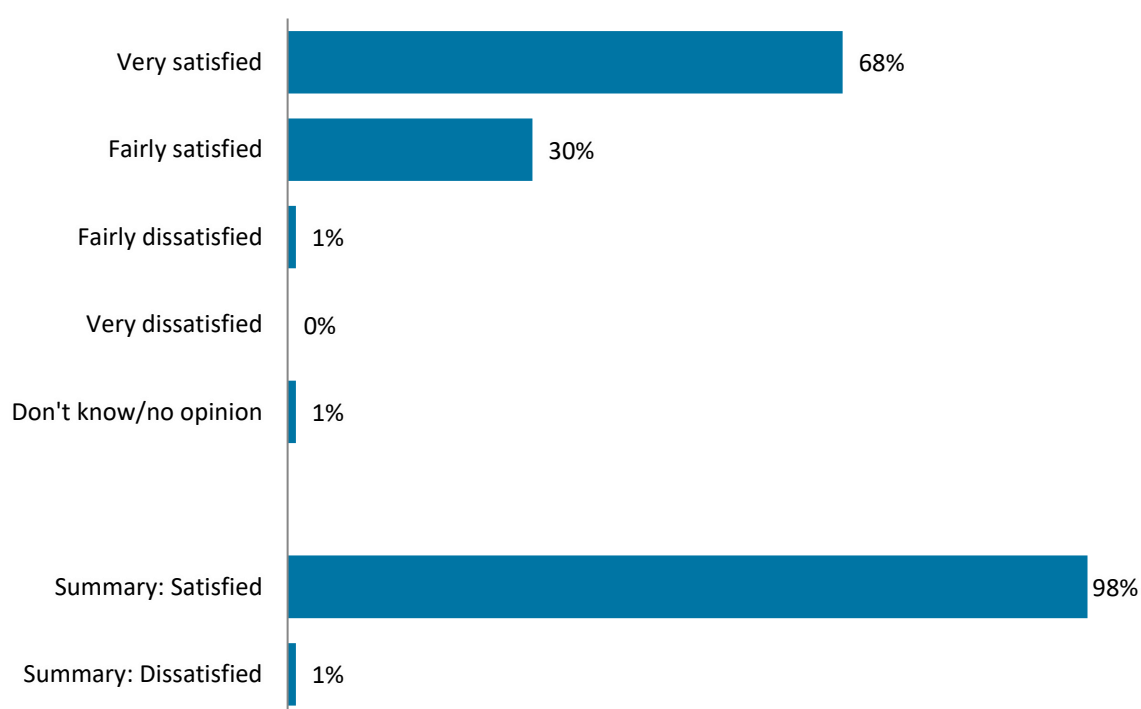
Q9. You said that you did not sign the recall petition, can you tell me more about why you chose not to do so?
Base: where did not sign (50). Some respondents may have mentioned more than one reason.

3.5 Perceptions of the petition process

3.5.1 Satisfaction with the process

The vast majority (98%) of those who signed the petition were satisfied with the process of doing so, including over two-thirds (68%) who were very satisfied and three-tenths (30%) who were fairly satisfied. The remainder either did not know or had no opinion (1%), or were dissatisfied (1%).

Figure 6: How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the process of signing the petition?



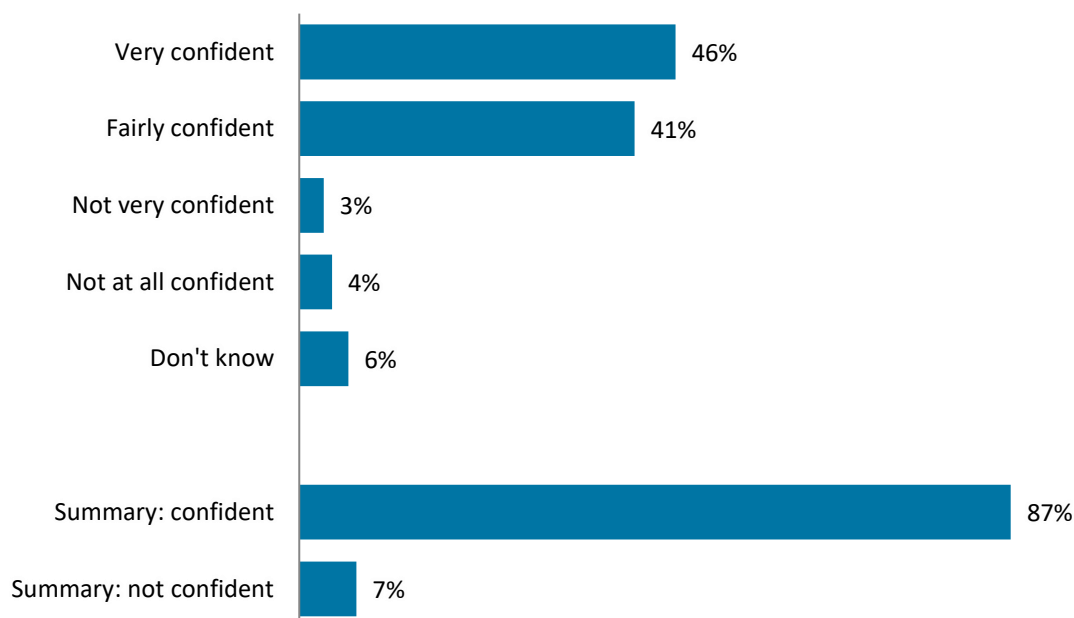
Q10. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the process of signing the petition? Base: where signed (106)

Where respondents were dissatisfied, this was because they felt that allowing six weeks for electors to sign the petition was longer than necessary. It should however be noted that this is based on only two responses. One of the respondents also mentioned that there was not enough information or media coverage.

3.5.2 Confidence that the petition was well-run

Nearly nine in ten (87%) were confident that the petition was well-run, while under a tenth (7%) were not confident and 6% did not know.

Figure 7: How confident, if at all, are you that the recall petition was well-run?



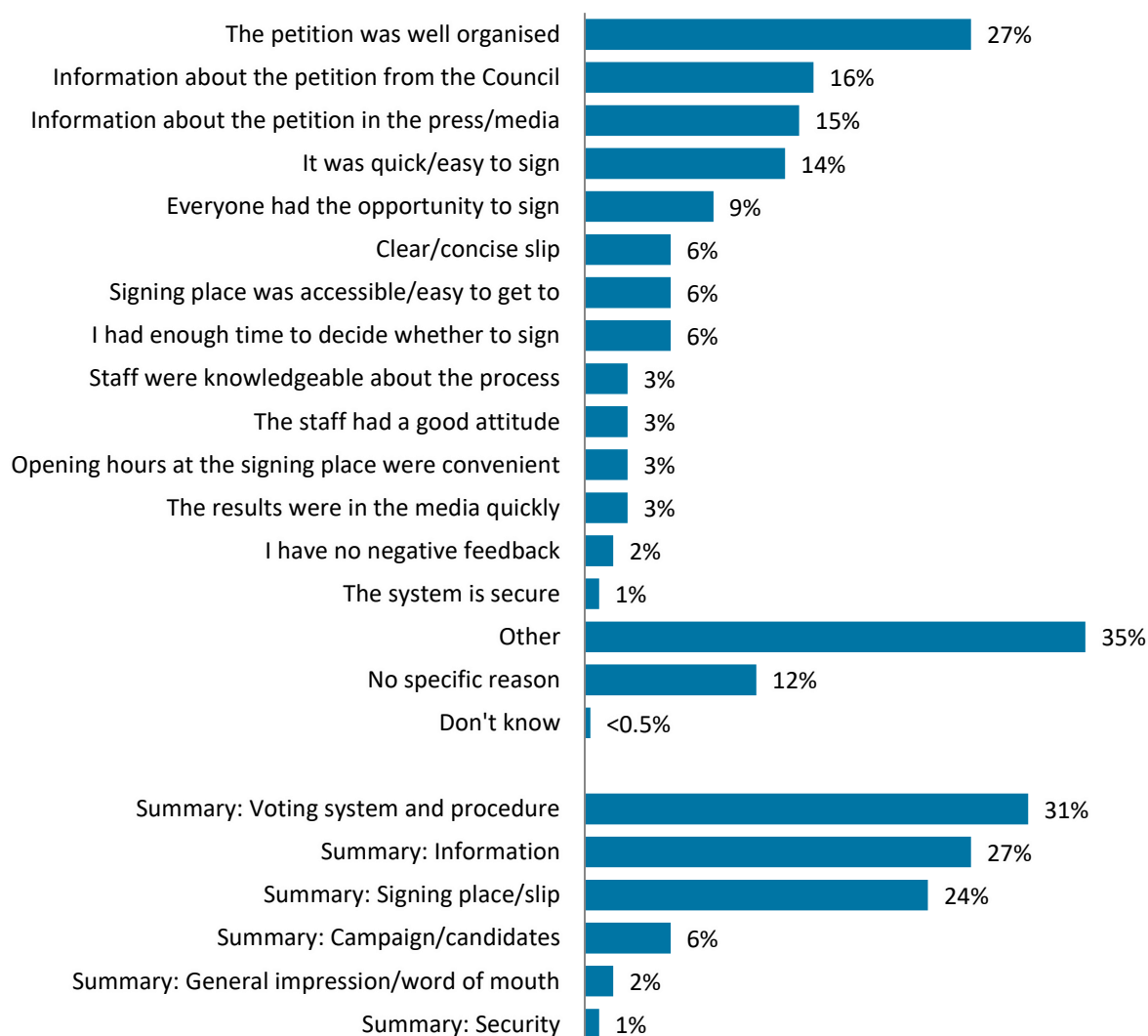
Q12. How confident, if at all, are you that the recall petition was well run? Base: all respondents (159)

Those who remember receiving the letter about the recall petition are more likely than those who do not remember to be confident that it was well-run (95% compared to 54%), as are those who had signed the petition (96% compared to 73% of those who did not sign).

When respondents were asked why they felt the petition was well-run, a multitude of reasons were mentioned. The largest proportion (27%) generally stated that it was well organised, while around one in seven stated that there was a lot of information about the petition from the Council (16%), there was a lot of information about the petition in the press/media (15%), and/or that it was quick/easy to sign (14%).

In summary, three-tenths (31%) mentioned positives around the voting system and procedure. Around a quarter in both cases noted something around the information available (27%) and cited reasons to do with the signing place/slip (24%). Smaller numbers mentioned something to do with the campaign/candidates (6%), that this was their general impression (2%), or the security of the ballot (1%).

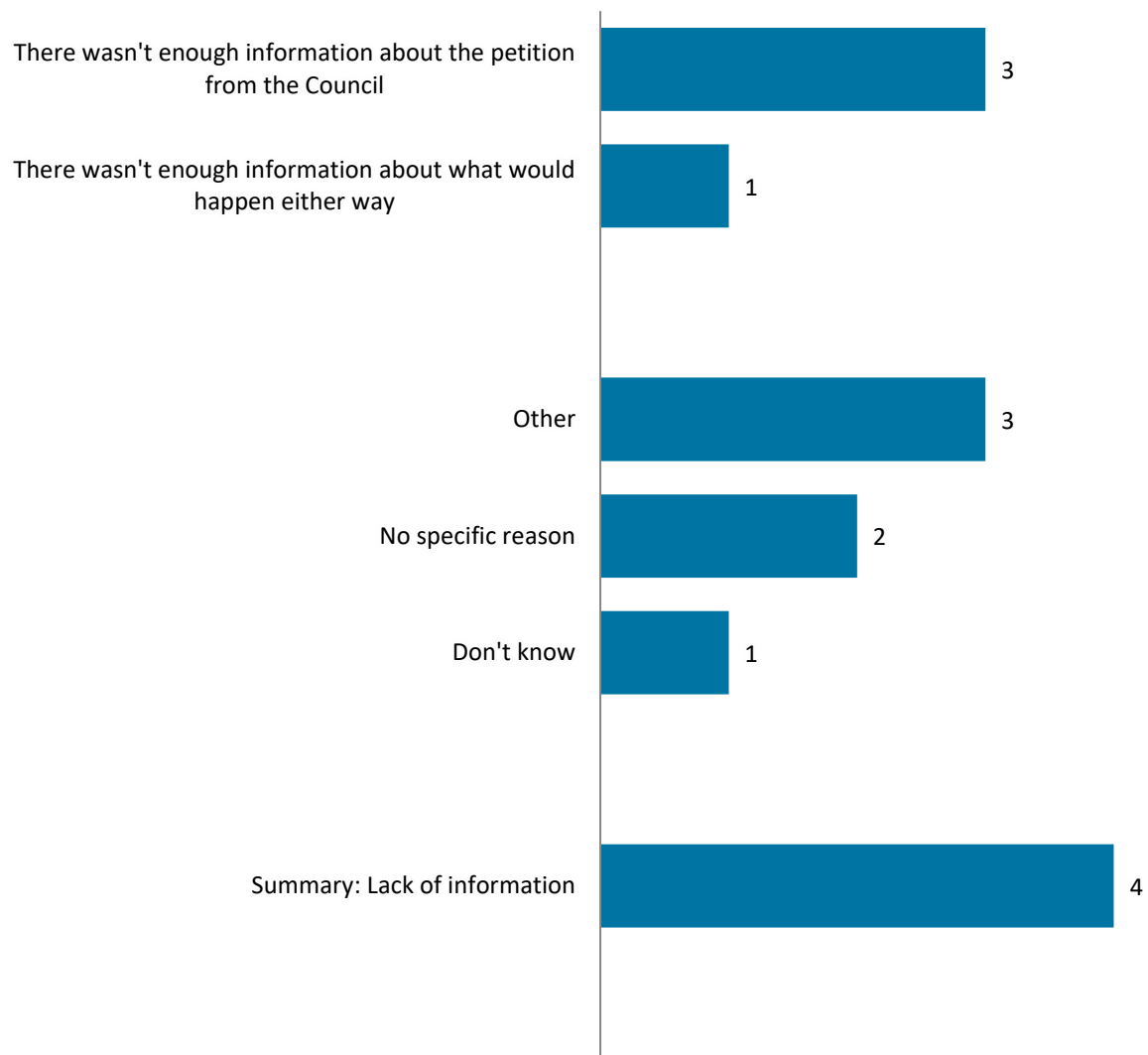
Figure 8: Why do you say you are confident that the petition was well-run?



Q13. Why do you say you are confident that the petition was well run? Base: where confident (142)

The base size of those who say they were not confident that the petition was well run is low and results will be discussed at an individual respondent level. The most common reason for saying this is that not enough information was given about the petition from the Council, which three respondents stated. The second most common reason, cited by one respondent, was that there was not enough information given about what would happen either way.

Figure 9: Why do you say you are not confident that the petition was well-run?



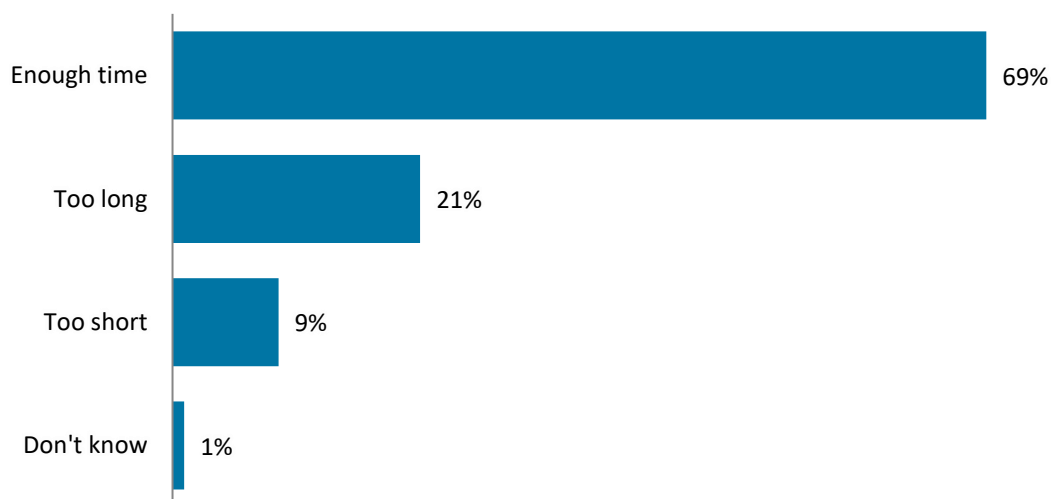
Q14. Why do you say that you are not confident that the petition was well run? Base: where not confident (10 respondents)

3.6 Perceptions of the petition administration

3.6.1 Opening times

Seven in ten (69%) believed that the recall petition being open to sign for 6 weeks between Monday and Friday was enough time, while a fifth (21%) believed this was too long and a tenth (9%) felt this was too short, and 1% did not know.

Figure 10: The recall petition was open to sign for 6 weeks, Monday or Friday. Do you think this was enough time, too long, or too short?



Q15. The recall petition was open to sign for 6 weeks, Monday to Friday. Can you tell me if you think this was enough time, too long, or too short? Base: all respondents (159)

Those who signed the petition were significantly more likely to believe this was too long, with three-tenths (30%) expressing that opinion compared to just a tenth (9%) of those who did not sign.

3.6.2 Practicalities of the petition

Over four-fifths (84%) of respondents agreed that they had enough information about the recall petition, including a third (35%) who strongly agreed. Around a tenth (11%) disagreed that this was the case, while 6% felt that this was not applicable. As one might expect, a large majority of those who signed the petition agreed with this statement, with 94% expressing that view compared to just over two-thirds (68%) of those who did not sign it.

Around two-thirds (65%) agreed that it is sufficiently anonymous that you complete the petition with your signature, while around one in eight (13%) disagreed. The remainder felt that this was not applicable (16%) or did not know (6%). Of those who signed the petition, four-fifths (81%) agreed while less than a tenth disagreed (8%). Amongst those who did not sign the petition, four-tenths (42%) agreed with this statement while around one-fifth (19%) disagreed.

Over half (54%) agreed that the process meant people were able to sign the petition in secret with a sixth (17%) disagreeing. The remainder either felt that this was not applicable (24%) or did not know (6%). Of those who signed the petition, around three quarters (73%) agreed while a fifth (19%) disagreed.

A quarter (27%) agreed that the hours available to sign the petition in person were not convenient for them, with three-fifths (58%) disagreeing with this statement. A tenth (11%) felt this was not applicable while 4% did not know. Amongst those who did not sign the petition, two-fifths (40%) agreed with this while a third disagreed (34%).

Around an eighth agreed that the building was not appropriate for use as a petition signing place, with nearly half disagreeing (48%). Of those that signed, seven in ten (69%) disagreed with this while one in eight agreed (12%).

Overall, a tenth (11%) agreed that there was not enough privacy around the signing place as signing the petition in person meant people nearby could see you go in to sign, with around two-fifths (43%) disagreeing. Under a tenth (8%) said they did not know and nearly two-fifths (38%) felt it was not applicable. Of those that signed, three-fifths (60%) disagreed with this while around a sixth agreed.

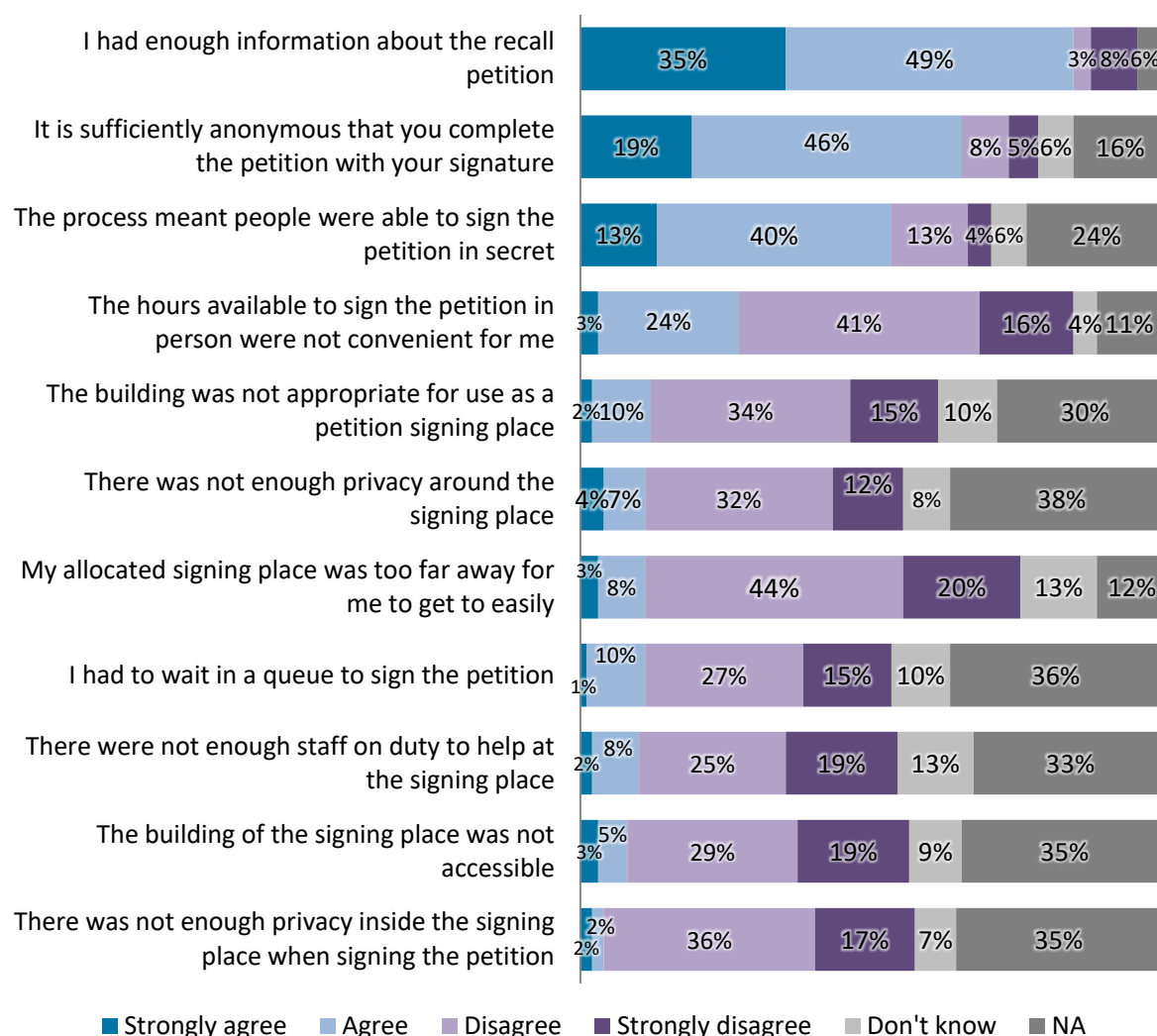
Around one in ten (11%) agreed that their allocated signing place was too far away for them to get to easily, with around two-thirds (64%) disagreeing with this. The remainder either did not know (13%) or felt this was not applicable (12%).

Of those that signed the petition, two-thirds (68%) did not have to wait in a queue to sign the petition, but 12% did. The remainder either felt this was not applicable (perhaps because they did not sign in person) or did not know (36% and 10%, respectively).

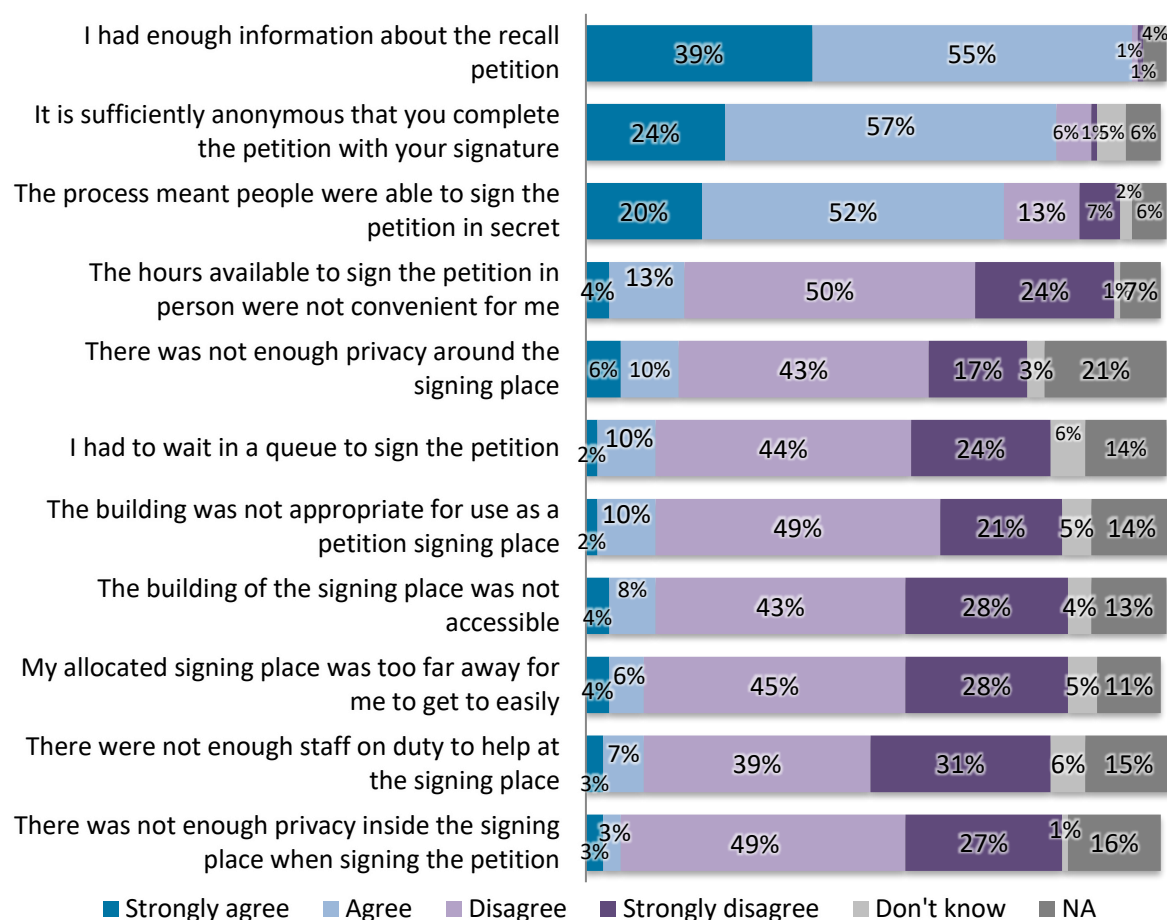
Just a tenth (10%) agreed that there were not enough staff on duty to help at the signing place, whereas over two-fifths (44%) disagreed. A third felt this was not applicable to them (33%) or did not know (13%). Of those who signed the petition, the majority (70%) disagreed with this, while just a tenth (10%) agreed.

Around half (48%) disagreed that the building of the signing place was not accessible, while a small proportion (8%) agreed. At an individual respondent level of those who agreed, 5 out of the 15 respondents (33%) also said they had a long-term illness, health problem or disability.

A very small proportion (4%) agreed that there was not enough privacy inside the signing place when signing the petition, with over half (53%) disagreeing. Around a third (35%) felt this was not applicable and under a tenth did not know (7%).

Figure 11: Agreement with the following statements (all respondents)


Q17. Still thinking about the recall petition, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: Base: all respondents (159)

Figure 12: Agreement with the following statements (Those that signed the petition)

Q17. Still thinking about the recall petition, can you tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements (those that signed the petition). Base: where signed (106)

3.6.3 Signing the petition

Those who signed the petition by post were asked why they chose to sign in this way. A variety of different reasons were given, including: always voting by post (22%); receiving the form to sign by post (17%); opening hours not being convenient (17%); more convenient (11%); too busy to go in person or away at the time (10%); or health reasons (8%), with 33% expressing other reasons. Nobody in the sample cited reasons to do with the integrity of the ballot or issues with their allocated petition place.

Almost all (95%) of those who signed the petition by post said that it was easy to do so, including over two-thirds (70%) that said it was very easy. Just 1 individual felt it was fairly difficult, and they said this was because the text on the sheet was too small and that the instructions were unclear.

Appendix: Statement of Terms

Compliance with International Standards

BMG complies with the International Standard for Quality Management Systems requirements (ISO 9001:2015) and the International Standard for Market, opinion and social research service requirements (ISO 20252:2012) and The International Standard for Information Security Management (ISO 27001:2013).

Interpretation and publication of results

The interpretation of the results as reported in this document pertain to the research problem and are supported by the empirical findings of this research project and, where applicable, by other data. These interpretations and recommendations are based on empirical findings and are distinguishable from personal views and opinions.

BMG will not publish any part of these results without the written and informed consent of the client.

Ethical practice

BMG promotes ethical practice in research: We conduct our work responsibly and in light of the legal and moral codes of society.

We have a responsibility to maintain high scientific standards in the methods employed in the collection and dissemination of data, in the impartial assessment and dissemination of findings and in the maintenance of standards commensurate with professional integrity.

We recognise we have a duty of care to all those undertaking and participating in research and strive to protect subjects from undue harm arising as a consequence of their participation in research. This requires that subjects' participation should be as fully informed as possible and no group should be disadvantaged by routinely being excluded from consideration. All adequate steps shall be taken by both agency and client to ensure that the identity of each respondent participating in the research is protected.

With more than 25 years' experience, BMG Research has established a strong reputation for delivering high quality research and consultancy.

BMG serves both the public and the private sector, providing market and customer insight which is vital in the development of plans, the support of campaigns and the evaluation of performance.

Innovation and development is very much at the heart of our business, and considerable attention is paid to the utilisation of the most up to date technologies and information systems to ensure that market and customer intelligence is widely shared.

