

Gender and political participation



Contents

Preface	3	4 Explaining the activism gap	33
Terms of reference	5	Potential explanations	33
Research steering committee	5	Analysis of the evidence	34
Acknowledgements	6	Structural resources	36
Executive summary	7	Cultural attitudes	41
1 The activism gap	11	Mobilising agencies	44
Literature review	11	Institutional context	47
Social trends and women and men's political participation	12	5 Case studies	53
Contemporary patterns of political participation among men and women	12	Political parties	53
Does the activism gap matter?	13	Trade union and other organisations	56
2 Defining and measuring political participation	15	6 Implications	61
Defining types of participation	15	Summary	61
Voting turnout	17	Implications	62
Campaign-oriented participation	17	Research priorities	65
Cause-oriented participation	18	Notes	67
Civic-oriented participation	18	Appendix 1: Data sources, measures and scales	75
Measuring the activism gap	19	European Social Survey 2002	75
3 The extent of the activism gap in the UK	21	The Electoral Commission surveys	75
Main findings	21	British Election Study 1964-2001	75
Comparative benchmark evidence	23	Notes	77
An audit of political engagement	25	Appendix 2: Tables	79
The British Election Study 2001	27		
Trends in general election turnout 1964-2001	27		
Turnout in regional and local elections	30		
Young people's participation	31		



Preface

This report presents the findings of a research study, funded by The Electoral Commission, looking at the extent and nature of men and women's political participation in the UK and examining the existence of any political activism 'gap' by gender.

This research was conducted by Pippa Norris of Harvard University, and by Joni Lovenduski and Rosie Campbell of Birkbeck College, University of London. It should be noted that the conclusions and suggestions contained within are those of the authors and not of The Electoral Commission.

This is the third Electoral Commission research report of its kind. In 2002 the Commission published *Voter Engagement Among Young People* and *Voter Engagement Among Black and Minority Ethnic Communities*. Like these previous reports this research has been designed to inform campaigns and initiatives, by the Commission and other stakeholders, aimed at increasing political participation.

Whereas most UK studies have focused primarily on comparing men and women's political interest and awareness, this research considers the extent and nature of their participation in politics. As well as providing a review of literature on this subject, it also presents the findings of recent survey data relating to gender and political participation.

Topics covered in this report include men and women's propensity to vote in local and national elections, to contact a politician and join a political party; as well as their propensity to participate in cause-orientated activities such as demonstrating or signing a petition, and civic-orientated activities such as joining a voluntary association.

4

The Electoral Commission would like to thank the authors of this report and also the Fawcett Society and the Equal Opportunities Commission for their advice and support throughout this project.

I hope this research, and the suggestions and research priorities outlined in this report, will stimulate discussion and facilitate initiatives to encourage greater political participation among both women and men in the UK.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joan Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light beige rectangular background.

Joan Jones

Deputy Commissioner,
The Electoral Commission
April 2004

Terms of reference

The Electoral Commission retained academics from Harvard University and Birkbeck College, University of London, to undertake a review of existing research and an analysis of survey data on gender and political participation in the UK.

The research team comprised of Pippa Norris (the McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University), Joni Lovenduski (Professor of Politics at Birkbeck College, University of London) and Rosie Campbell (Lecturer in Research Methods at Birkbeck College, University of London).

The project had three key aims:

1. To provide a literature review of research on gender and political participation.
2. To analyse and interpret evidence relating to gender and political participation, including recent surveys conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission.
3. To identify key priorities and make recommendations to inform the ongoing research and public awareness programmes of The Electoral Commission and the policies of other organisations.

Research steering committee

The project was supervised by a steering committee convened by The Electoral Commission. This included:

- Joan Jones, Deputy Commissioner, The Electoral Commission;
- Ben Marshall, Research Manager, The Electoral Commission;
- Laura Richards, Research Officer, The Electoral Commission;
- Beccy Earnshaw, Outreach Manager, The Electoral Commission;
- Laura Turquet, Policy Officer, Fawcett Society;
- Sam Smethers, Parliamentary and Public Affairs Manager, Equal Opportunities Commission.

6

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Executive summary

This study, conducted on behalf of the Commission by academics at Harvard University and Birkbeck College, University of London, looks at the extent and nature of men and women's political participation. In addition, it examines the existence of any political activism gap by gender in the UK today.

The activism gap

The level of men and women's activism in the UK differs according to the type of political activity. There is no gender gap in voter turnout at national, regional or local elections and women are more likely to be involved in cause-orientated activities such as signing a petition or boycotting products for ethical reasons. Nevertheless, women are significantly less likely than men to participate in campaign-orientated activities, such as contacting a politician and donating money to, working for, or being a member of, a political party. Women are also less likely than men to join voluntary organisations.

Overall, a statistically significant activism gap by gender exists in the UK. Comparison with the activism gap in other countries also shows that if European countries are ranked, the UK is located within the top third. This suggests that although some progress has been made in the UK, there remains further scope for eliminating disparities.

Turnout

Before 1979 fewer women than men voted in most UK elections. Since then the voting gap at general, regional and local elections has lessened and may have reversed. For example, in 1997 an estimated 80.1% of women voted compared with around 76.9% of men. However, the gap between men and women's turnout at the 2001 general election was not statistically significant.

In regional and local elections the traditional voting gap may also have lessened and possibly reversed. For example in the May

2003 contests for the Scottish Parliament, 57% of women reported voting compared to 56% of men.

Despite this reduction in the overall voting gap between men and women, reported turnout at the 2001 general election suggests that women from ethnic minorities were significantly less likely to vote than their male counterparts. Also, while at the 1997 general election there was no significant voting gap between men and women among Asian populations, turnout among black women was a significant 8% less than among black men.

Pilot schemes so far also suggest that men and women's propensity to turn out is affected in different ways by the introduction of new methods of voting. In areas piloting all-postal voting in May 2003, reported turnout among women was 13% higher than among men (compared to 8% overall), whereas in those areas piloting electronic voting it was 5% less than men. In areas where both methods were piloted, women's reported turnout was 24% higher than men's.

Other forms of political participation

Women are equally or more likely to participate in cause-oriented activities such as signing petitions and boycotting or buying products for political or ethical reasons. Yet in relation to other activities, such as participating in a demonstration or protesting illegally, no gender differences are evident.

In campaign politics, however, men are significantly more active than women.

This gender gap is not large in size but it is both statistically significant and consistent across all activities such as party membership, party donations, party work, and contacting politicians. Men are also generally more likely to be involved in forms of civic-orientated activity, such as belonging to a voluntary association and being a member of a hobby, consumer or professional group, as well as a sports or social club. The only exception among voluntary associations concerns church groups, which have more women members due to long-standing patterns of greater female religiosity.

Explaining the activism gap

Access to social and economic resources impacts upon levels and types of political participation. In general, those in paid employment are more likely to be politically active, although the direct effect of the total hours worked per week (including overtime) is unrelated to levels of political participation.

The activism gap is smaller among better off households and those who have attended university, and larger among those with the lowest levels of educational qualifications. Marital status is also a predictor of activism, with married men significantly more likely to participate than married women. Also, the gap is significant among those with children, but closes among those without children living at home.

Age and ethnicity also have different effects on men and women's levels of activism. Propensity to be politically active varies across the life cycle, however men are consistently more active than women across all age groups. Also, while there

is no significant difference in the participation rates of those men belonging to ethnic minorities and those not, women from ethnic minorities proved less active than other women.

The attitudes that draw people into public affairs have a significant impact on men and women's political participation. For example, women have a weaker sense of political efficacy than men; they have lower confidence that they can influence the political process through their own actions. Women also express less interest in politics than men, are less likely to regard politics as important and less likely to trust a range of political institutions.

Mobilising organisations also play a key role in encouraging people to participate in public affairs. Women in the UK are less likely than men to be a member of many kinds of associations. This may also influence patterns of men and women's participation more generally, for example, in the case of associations that engage in campaign activities such as trade unions that provide volunteers and activists to help in election canvassing.

Lastly institutional factors, such as the presence of women in representative institutions, and by extension the candidate recruitment processes, also have an important effect on women's political activism. For example, in 2001 in seats where a woman MP was elected to Parliament, women's turnout was 4% higher than men's, a modest but statistically significant difference. Similarly, women were far less interested in the election campaign, and less likely to say they would volunteer to work for a candidate or party, in seats where a male MP was elected.

Also, when people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Government benefits people like me', in constituencies represented by a female MP, women were far more likely than men to concur with this statement (49% compared to 38%). Alternatively, where a man represented the seat, this gap reversed and men were far more likely than women to agree (45% compared to 38%).

Implications

The persistence of a significant gender gap in political participation poses a problem for government, parties and other mobilising agencies in the UK today. This report considers a number of case studies providing details of strategies and initiatives which could contribute to closing the gender activism gap, as well as raising levels of political participation more generally.

It is suggested that more women representatives may encourage participation among women more generally. Therefore, strategies to increase the number of women being selected and standing for election may be necessary to address this issue. Successful measures adopted by some political parties have included equal opportunity strategies and positive action.

In the UK and elsewhere, initiatives have also been taken to encourage women as activists and as members of political parties and other organisations. Successful examples of such strategies include: training, internships, mentoring, monitoring, women-targeted membership drives and the use of financial incentives to encourage organisational innovation.

Measures taken by political parties to modernise the culture and practices of their organisations may also assist the inclusion of women as members and activists. Women may be discouraged from becoming involved with political organisations because of the perceived 'male-dominated' nature of politics. Women's support networks, groups and offices may help overcome this barrier. Attention could also be paid to the timing and location of meetings and the provision of childcare.

As the evidence suggests that women are more interested in local rather than national politics, government, parties and other mobilising agencies could use local campaigns to motivate women to become more politically involved generally. Also, the use of innovative communication formats could also be effective.

Making voting more accessible – for example through the expansion of all-postal voting, the provision of more conveniently located polling stations, such as those in shopping malls and homes for the elderly, and the simplification of the registration process – could also facilitate greater levels of participation, particularly among women.

Further research

This report highlights various priorities for future research including:

- Further explanation of the link between women in office and women's mobilisation as citizens, for example through surveys and focus groups monitoring public perceptions of elected representatives.

- Survey research with sample sizes large enough to permit analysis of racial, ethnic and youth sub-groups.
- Further research into political participation at intermediate levels, for example within voluntary associations, parties and non-government organisations.

1 The activism gap

The received wisdom suggests that women are generally less politically active than men. However, changing social trends, including the breaking down of traditional sex roles and the expansion of equal opportunities in education and the work place, have meant that men and women's lives have been transforming during recent decades. In light of these changes, it is important to re-examine the evidence for patterns of men and women's participation in the UK today.

Literature review

1.1 A series of seminal studies of political participation have reported that women have been less politically engaged than men in many established democracies. The earliest studies of electoral behaviour in Western Europe and North America, conducted during the 1920s and 1930s shortly after the female franchise was granted in many countries, commonly observed that men were more likely to vote than women.¹

1.2 Two decades later, a UNESCO report published in 1955 by the French political scientist Maurice Duverger, demonstrated that gender was one of the standard factors predicting levels of electoral turnout and party membership in Western Europe.²

1.3 During the 1960s and early 1970s, the classic survey by Verba, Nie and Kim compared voting turnout, party membership, contact activity and community organising, all 'conventional' forms of political participation, in seven nations including Britain. The study concluded: 'In all societies for which we have data, sex is related to political activity; men are more active than women'.³ The activism gap persisted, even after controlling for differences between women and men in their education, trade union membership and psychological involvement in politics.

1.4 During the early 1970s, Barnes and Kaase expanded the scope of activity in their study of 'protest politics', comparing eight post-industrial nations (including Britain). They established that women were usually less engaged in demonstrations, occupations and illegal strikes than men.⁴

1.5 In the mid-1980s, trends were updated by an extensive survey of political participation in Britain, conducted by Parry, Moyser and Day. They confirmed that gender differences in voting participation had become insignificant by this decade, yet men continued to prove more engaged in contacting public officials, collective action and direct action.⁵

Social trends and women and men's political participation

1.6 Despite the accumulated weight of evidence from previous studies, it is important to re-examine the evidence for patterns of political participation in the UK today.

1.7 We might expect the public sphere to reflect important social trends that have been transforming women and men's lives during recent decades. This includes changes in traditional sex roles in the home and family, the expansion of equal opportunities for women in higher education and the paid workforce, and rising numbers of women entering the professions and management. Expanding opportunities for self-expression and financial autonomy mean that women are less restricted to attaining status and fulfilment solely through the traditional route of family, marriage and children.

1.8 Cultural attitudes towards women have also shifted radically since the mid-twentieth century, with a rising tide of support for gender equality found in most post-industrial societies.⁶ Changing attitudes have brought wider acceptance of sex role equality in the home, workforce and public sphere.

1.9 A series of landmark legal reforms have been designed to achieve equal opportunities and women's rights. During the last decade, women have also made dramatic gains in elected and appointed office in the UK, notably in the House of Commons and in ministerial office, as well as in the National Assembly for Wales, the Scottish Parliament and the European Parliament.⁷

Contemporary patterns of political participation among women and men

1.10 In the light of these developments, the key question for this research is how far social and cultural developments have altered traditional patterns of men and women's participation in the UK.

1.11 Comparative evidence has shown that the traditional voting gap has often diminished, or even reversed, in other established democracies, with women now regularly casting ballots in significantly higher proportions than men.⁸ In the United States, for example, in every presidential election since 1980, turnout among women has been higher than among men, and the same phenomenon is found in non-presidential mid-term elections since 1986.⁹

1.12 What is less clearly established from the contemporary literature is whether the traditional activism gap persists today in the UK, whether it has now disappeared, or whether it may even have reversed. Although there are many studies published in the United States and elsewhere,¹⁰ the evidence derived from recent studies of the UK remains scattered and inconclusive.

Most of these studies have focused primarily on comparing women and men's attitudes, such as in their political interest, their political awareness or their attention to media campaigns, rather than their behaviour or activism *per se*.¹¹

1.13 The most detailed study of British political activism in recent years, the Citizen Audit, was conducted by Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley.¹² The study compared three main types of activism, using a typology distinguishing among 'individual' acts, 'contact' acts and 'collective' acts, as well as summarising all forms of political participation.¹³

1.14 This study reports that gender is not significantly related to the overall summary of the total number of political actions taken by citizens. Women, however, were found to be slightly more engaged in individual acts (such as boycotting a product). At the same time, women were found to be marginally less involved in collective acts (such as party membership). These sex differences are statistically significant (due to the large sample size) but also extremely modest in size (men and women only differ in these measures by 1–2%).¹⁴ The audit also reported that more substantial gender differences can be found in cultural attitudes, with women proving less politically knowledgeable, interested and engaged in political discussions. These patterns are explored in more detail, and largely confirmed, later in this report.

Does the activism gap matter?

1.15 If there continues to exist inequalities in political participation by men and women in the UK this may matter for both instrumental and symbolic reasons. If one sex is less politically involved than the other, it is possible that their concerns, needs and interests will fail to be reflected in the public policy-making process. Citizens who do not articulate their preferences risk being ignored. If women and men were identical in their political views, then this consideration might not matter for the public policy process, however, opinion polls frequently suggest that the attitudes of women and men commonly differ on many issues, such as in their policy priorities on the appropriate levels of public spending on health care, the importance of educational services, or the appropriate deployment of military force.¹⁵ The legitimacy of democratic political systems assumes that the views of all citizens should be taken into account equally in political decision-making, especially in the formation of government.

1.16 Similarly, if one sex is not equally active within political parties, as the primary channel of political recruitment, they may fail to acquire the civic skills, social networks and political experiences that are invaluable for gaining higher levels of elected and appointed office in the UK.

1.17 Membership of voluntary associations, a central aspect of social capital, is also thought to generate both collective benefits (facilitating co-operation in solving community problems) and individual benefits (such as generating social and employment opportunities).

Any disparities in membership may therefore be to the disadvantage of those participating less, both as a group and as individuals.

1.18 Moreover, at a broader level, the classical liberal idea of representative democracy rests on the notion of the participation of all its citizens, alongside guarantees of political competition through contested elections and the existence of widespread political rights and civil liberties. The quality of UK democracy is therefore undermined if any major social sector fails to participate fully in civic affairs. In sheer numbers, women constitute more than one half of the UK electorate (see Table 1). Therefore, facilitating opportunities for greater participation among women can be expected to strengthen representative democracy for society in general, as well as benefiting those individual women who become more active.

1.19 Understanding the reasons for the activism gap may also provide important insights into the general causes of civic disengagement. Anxiety about the state of democracy in the UK has been heightened by the dramatic fall in voting turnout evident in the last two general elections, with turnout in 2001 reaching its lowest level for almost 80 years. This steep decline generated widespread concern that many citizens in the UK were becoming apathetic about public affairs, mistrustful of politicians and alienated from the political system.

1.20 Insights into the underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon, and what practical actions can be taken to mitigate this problem, are therefore important both for achieving gender equality in public life, as well as for strengthening the quality of representative democracy in the UK.

Table 1: Age structure of the population in the UK

Age range	Total	Men	Women
18-24	4,960,991	2,482,351	2,478,640
25-34	8,360,700	4,095,417	4,265,283
35-44	8,777,390	4,334,429	4,442,961
45-54	7,776,401	3,854,688	3,921,713
55-64	6,218,809	3,061,093	3,157,716
65+	9,340,606	3,910,976	5,429,630
All 18+	45,434,897	21,738,954	23,695,943

Source: 2001 Census, Office of National Statistics

2 Defining and measuring political participation

Before we can consider contemporary patterns of participation among men and women we first need to clarify our key concepts and measures and define what we mean when referring to political participation.

Defining types of participation

2.1 Political participation used to be commonly understood as citizen activity aiming to influence government and the public policy process. 'Participation' refers to the mass level, rather than recruitment into elected or appointed office among elites. It was usually measured by indicators such as voting turnout and party membership. For example, Verba, Nie and Kim focused on this approach when they defined political participation as '...those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take'.¹⁶

2.2 Yet this conventional approach often failed to capture important areas of contemporary political activity. Recognising this limitation, modern definitions have sought to incorporate informal political activity, including protests, social movements and, increasingly, voluntary activities in pressure groups, civic associations, charities and other associations.¹⁷

2.3 To explore contemporary patterns of political activism, this report recognises that mass involvement in public affairs can take many different forms, each associated with differing costs and benefits.¹⁸ We distinguish four main dimensions of political participation: voting, campaign-oriented, cause-oriented and civic-oriented activism. These are summarised into a 21-point Political Activism Index combining all dimensions.¹⁹ The basic items used to develop this index are listed in Table 2 and reported fully in Appendix 1.

Table 2: Political activism in the UK

% reporting having participated in the following activities in the previous 12 months	Women (%)	Men (%)	Activism gap (%)	Sig.
Voting				
Voted in the last national election	68	66	+2	N/s
Campaign-oriented				
Contacted a politician	17	20	-3	*
Donated money to a party	6	9	-3	**
Worked for a party	2	4	-2	**
Been a party member	2	4	-2	**
Worn a campaign badge	10	11	-1	N/s
Cause-oriented				
Signed a petition	42	36	+6	**
Bought a product for political reason	36	29	+7	***
Boycotted a product	27	25	+1	N/s
Demonstrated legally	5	4	0	N/s
Protested illegally	1	1	0	N/s
Civic-oriented				
Member of a church group	18	10	+7	**
Member of an environmental group	6	6	+1	N/s
Member of a humanitarian group	3	4	-1	N/s
Member of an educational group	6	7	-1	N/s
Member of a trade union	15	16	-1	N/s
Member of a hobby group	14	19	-5	**
Member of a social club	13	19	-6	**
Member of a consumer group	28	35	-7	**
Member of a professional group	9	17	-7	**
Member of a sports club	20	33	-13	**
Total 21-Point Activism Index				
Mean index score	3.58	3.87	-0.29	**

Note: Significance *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant. Please note that where activism gap is greater or lesser than the percentage point difference between men and women's activism, this may be due to computer weighting or rounding.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

2.4 The 'activism gap' is measured as the percentage of women minus the percentage of men who have engaged in each activity. A positive gap indicates that women are more active than men, whereas a negative gap indicates that women are less active than men. The Political Activism Index counts participation in each form of activity as one and sums the activism gap for each of the 21 individual acts.

2.5 Certain important exclusions from the scope of this study should be noted. This report focuses upon understanding mass political activity. We are therefore concerned with doing politics, hence we do not explore the causes of any gender differences in psychological attitudes, such as trust in Parliament, political interest, civic duty, partisanship or political efficacy, which are thought conducive to civic participation.²⁰ Along similar lines, the report does not regard exposure or attention to mass communications, including following campaign events in newspapers or watching party political broadcasts during the election, as indicators of political activism per se. Nor do we look directly at gender differences in political awareness, knowledge or information.

2.6 These factors may indeed all plausibly contribute towards mass participation, and may thereby help explain this phenomenon. They are also intrinsically interesting in their own right and deserve further detailed analysis. However they are not, in themselves, channels which citizens can use for expressing political concerns or mobilising group interests. Activism concerns mass political behaviour, not prior attitudes or predispositions. Moreover the explanation of the

origin of any gender differences in political knowledge or awareness is a very complex issue which requires comparison of how citizens learn many dimensions of political information, beyond simple 'civics', which would take us far beyond the scope of this report.²¹

Voting turnout

2.7 Voting in regular elections is one of the most common forms of citizen-oriented participation. Voting requires some initiative and awareness for an informed choice but makes fairly minimal demands of time, knowledge and effort. Through the ballot box, voting influences parties and elected officials, and the outcome affects all citizens.

2.8 Voting is central to citizenship in representative democracy but, due to its relatively low costs in terms of the effort, time and resources it requires, it is usually regarded as atypical of other more demanding forms of participation. In this report we examine participation in general elections, as well as in local and regional elections in the UK.

Campaign-oriented participation

2.9 Campaign-oriented forms of participation concern acts designed to influence Parliament and government, primarily through political parties and elections. This category is typified in this study by work for parties or candidates, party membership, election leafleting, financial donations to parties or candidates, attending local party meetings and get-the-vote-out drives.

2.10 Participation through parties is important as these organisations serve multiple functions in UK politics: simplifying and structuring electoral

choices, organising and mobilising campaigns, articulating and aggregating disparate interests, channelling communication, consultation and debate, training, recruiting and selecting candidates, structuring parliamentary divisions, acting as policy think-tanks, and organising government. Not only are parties one of the main conduits of political participation, they also serve to boost and strengthen electoral turnout. If mass party membership is under threat, as many indicators suggest, this could have serious implications for democracy in the UK.²²

2.11 Campaigning typically generates collective benefits and requires greater initiative, time, and effort (and sometimes expenditure) than merely voting. Experience of campaign-oriented activism is gauged in this study by a five-item scale including whether people are members of a party and whether they have donated money to a party, worked for a party, contacted a politician, or worn a campaign badge during the previous 12 months.

Cause-oriented participation

2.12 Cause-oriented activities are focused upon influencing specific issues and policies outside of the electoral arena. These acts are exemplified by consumer politics (buying or boycotting certain products for political or ethical reasons), taking part in demonstrations and protests, and organising or signing petitions.

2.13 Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of these activities is that these are most commonly used to pursue specific issues and policy concerns among diverse targets, including organisations in the non-profit or private

sectors. These actions can have diverse aims, whether to shape public opinion and 'life-styles', to publicise certain issues through the news media, to mobilise a networked coalition with other groups or non-profit agencies, or to influence the practices and policies of international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation, the EU or the United Nations.

2.14 Experience of cause-oriented activism is measured in this report by a five-item scale, including whether people have signed a petition, bought or boycotted products for a political reason, demonstrated legally or protested illegally during the previous 12 months.

Civic-oriented participation

2.15 Civic-oriented activities involve membership and working with others in a voluntary association, as well as collaborating with community groups to solve a local problem.

2.16 Theories of social capital claim that typical face-to-face deliberative activities and participation within voluntary organisations removed from the political sphere – exemplified by trade unions, social clubs, and philanthropic groups – promote interpersonal trust, social tolerance and cooperative behaviour.²³

2.17 In turn, these norms are regarded as cementing the bonds of social life, creating the foundation for building local communities, civil society and democratic governance. In a 'win-win' situation, participation in associational life is thought to generate individual rewards, such as career opportunities and personal support

networks, as well as facilitating community goods, by fostering the capacity of people to work together on local problems.

2.18 Putnam²⁴ suggests that civic organisations such as unions, churches and community groups, play a vital role in the production of 'bridging' social capital. He claims they succeed in overcoming divisive social cleavages; integrating people from diverse backgrounds and values; promoting 'habits of the heart' such as tolerance, cooperation and reciprocity; and thereby contribute towards a dense, rich and vibrant social infrastructure.

2.19 Civic activism involves direct action within local communities, such as raising funds for a local hospital or school, where the precise dividing line between the 'social' and 'political' breaks down.²⁵ Trade unions and churches, in particular, have long been regarded as central pillars of civic society that have traditionally served the function of drawing citizens into public life. For a variety of reasons – including the way that voluntary associations can strengthen social networks, foster leadership skills, heighten political awareness, create party linkages and facilitate campaign work – people affiliated with church-based or union organisations can be expected to participate more fully in public life.²⁶ It follows that any gender disparities in the mass membership of voluntary associations are important in themselves and may plausibly be expected to influence propensity to participate in other forms of political participation.

2.20 Experience of civic activism is measured here by a 10-point scale summarising

membership in a series of different types of voluntary organisations, including both traditional sectors such as trade unions, church groups and social clubs, as well as 'new' social movements exemplified by groups concerned about the environment and about humanitarian issues.

Measuring the activism gap

2.21 To sum up the overall patterns of political participation, we have constructed the 21-point Political Activism Index. This is composed very simply by adding together the activism gap for each of the 21 separate acts.

2.22 To establish the extent and significance of the activism gap in the UK, the report uses several sources of survey data. This includes the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002, several surveys conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission and the British Election Study 1964-2001. Full details of these sources are provided in Appendix 1.

2.23 The empirical analysis focuses upon sex differences in mass political activism. In the social sciences, the terms sex and gender have distinct meanings. Sex refers to simple biological difference. It separates the categories of male and female.²⁷ In social surveys, sex is normally included as a background variable. The concept of gender takes account of differences among women and men, as well as those between groups of women and men. Instead of dividing the population into two halves, gender incorporates the social differences that arise from cultural expectations of the division of labour between boys and girls, and between

men and women. In this regard, biological sex is only one source of individual identity. Another way of conceptualising gender is to think of it as a scale of attributes ranging from masculinity to femininity. Women are more likely than men to possess feminine attributes, but such attributes do not belong exclusively to women. The same point may be made about men and masculinity. Although we focus upon sex differences in this report, one way of capturing gender effects is to look at differences between women and men in various social categories or sub-groups. Where significant differences exist between the behaviour of women and men, we identify the existence of an 'activism gap'.

3 The extent of the activism gap in the UK

Using the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002, we can measure men and women's propensity to participate in different types of political activity. Our 21-point Political Activism Index summarises the gap between men and women's participation in each act. This provides an overall measure of the activism gap by gender in the UK today.

Main findings

3.1 To summarise the contemporary picture in the UK, the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002 indicates the following five key findings:

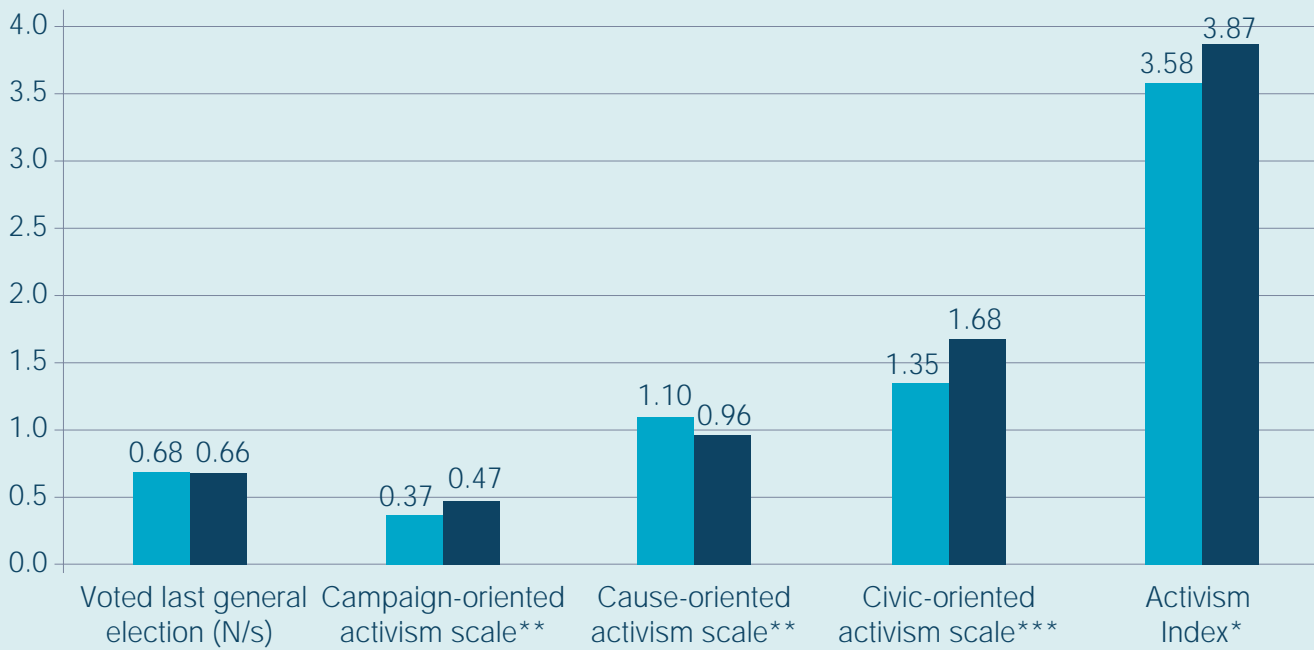
- **There is no gender gap in voting participation.** This pattern is evident in UK general elections, in local elections and in regional contests, confirming this pattern across successive contexts.
- **Women are equally or more engaged in cause-oriented activism.** In particular, more women sign petitions and engage in consumer politics, although no gender differences were evident in relation to participation in demonstrations and protest politics. This evidence broadly confirms other recent studies, including the results of the Citizen Audit.²⁸
- **Men remain significantly more active in campaign politics.** This gender gap is not large in size but it is statistically significant and is consistent across all the indicators of party membership, party donations and party work, as well as experience of contacting politicians. This pattern is also reported in many other studies, notably detailed surveys of party membership and the Citizen Audit.²⁹
- **Men are generally more likely to belong to voluntary associations.** This pattern is partly dependent upon the type of groups monitored by different studies,³⁰ however, in the ESS survey, more men than women were found to join hobby groups, social clubs, consumer groups, professional groups and sports clubs. The World Values Study shows similar patterns in other post-industrial countries.³¹ The only exception among

voluntary associations is church groups, which have more women members, due to long-standing patterns of greater female religiosity.³²

- Overall, a modest but significant activism gap persists today among women and men in the UK. This was found by summarising the basic overall indicators using the 21-point Political Activism Index combining all acts.

Overall, across the 21 indicators of political activism, women are less active than men. This pattern is summarised in Figure 1 showing the gap between men and women's participation in each type of act. The activism gap across the 21 separate indicators in the ESS is also illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 1: The activism gap in the UK by each major dimension

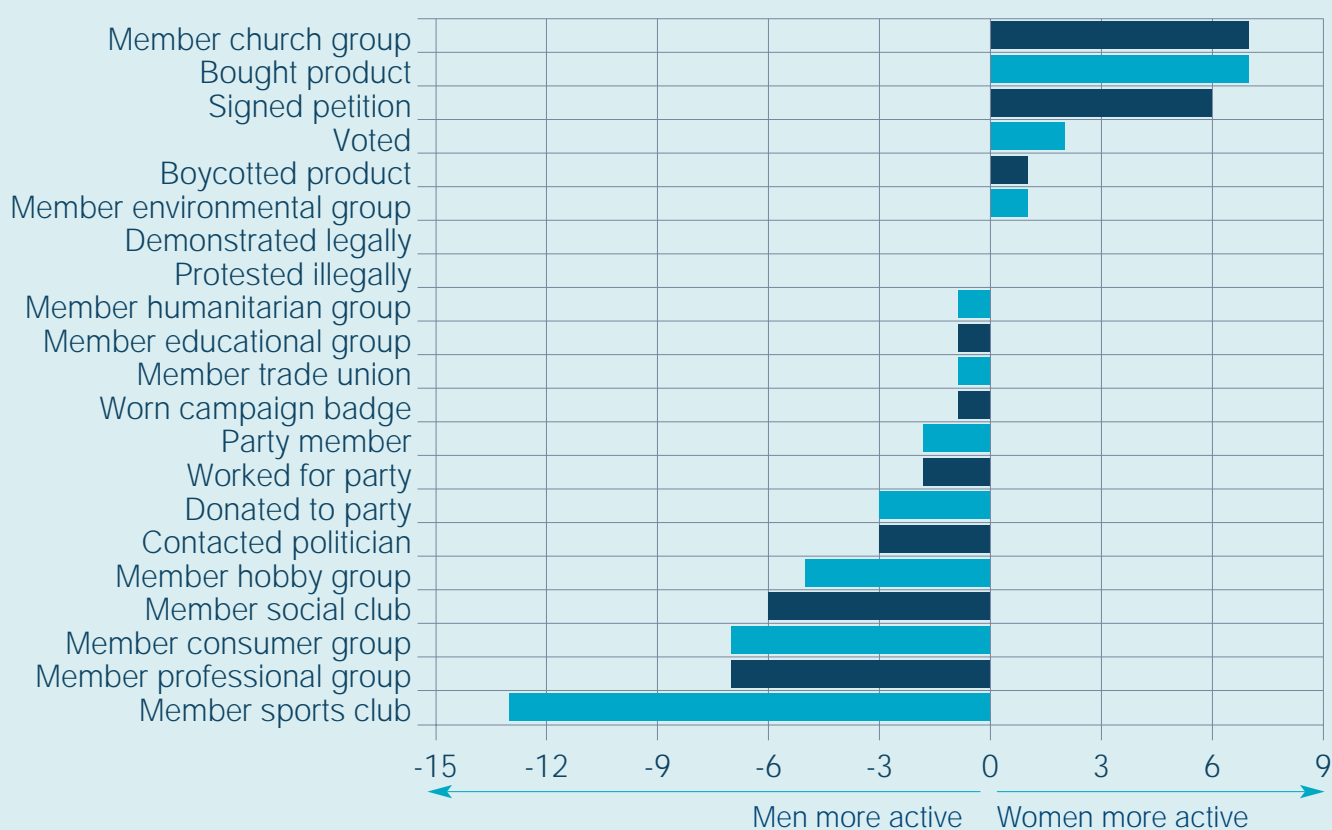


Note: See Table 2 and Appendix 1 for the components of each scale. The significance of the difference in mean scores for women and men was measured by ANOVA: *** = .001, ** = .01, * = .05, N/s = Not significant. Please note that where scores for each type of act do not equal the overall activism index for each gender, this may be due to computer weighting or rounding.

■ Women
■ Men

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

Figure 2: The activism gap in the UK by individual act



Note: For the specific items used in the construction of the Index, see Appendix 1. The 'activism gap' is measured as the percentage of men minus the percentage of women who have done each of these activities during the previous 12 months. A positive gap indicates that women are more active than men. A negative gap indicates that women are less active than men.

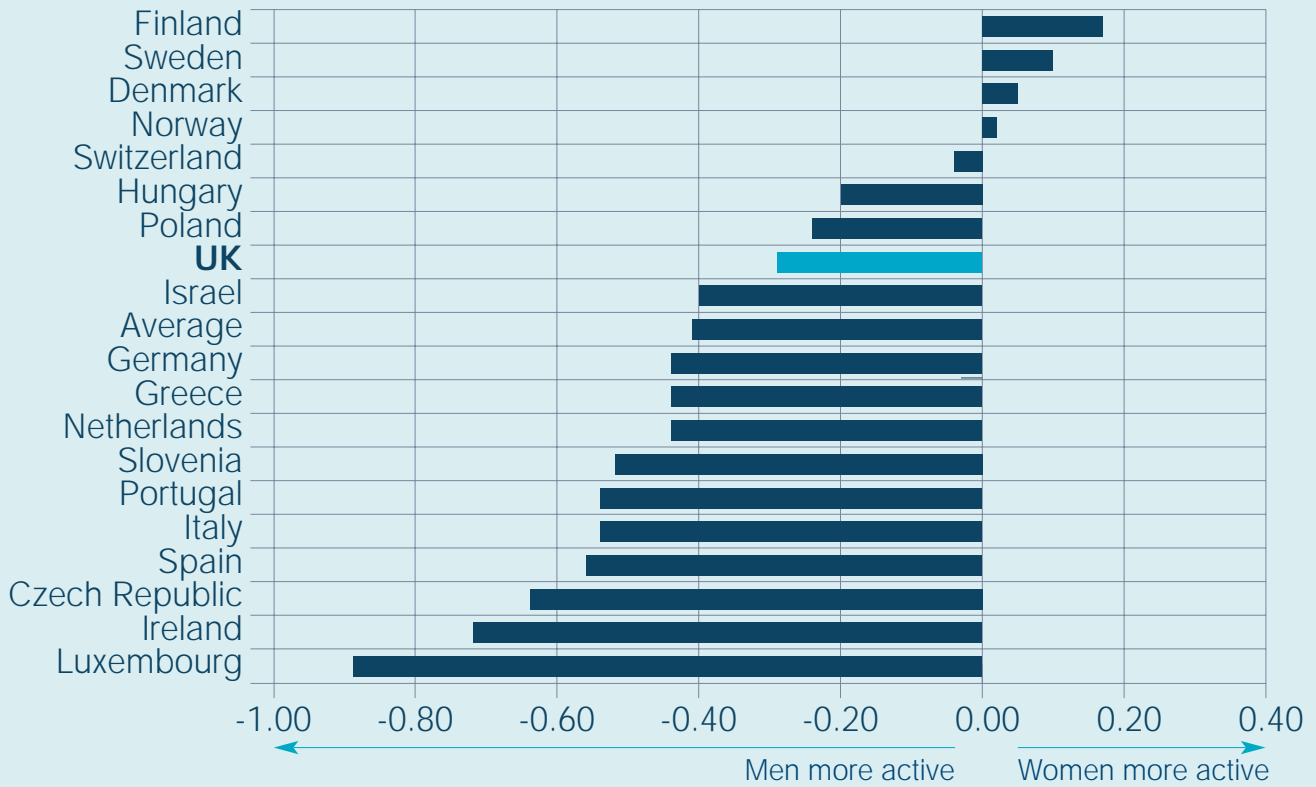
Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

Comparative benchmark evidence

3.2 To get some sense of whether this activism gap is distinctive to contemporary UK politics, or whether it remains common elsewhere, we need to consider some cross-national benchmarks.

3.3 Comparison with other countries in the ESS in Figure 3 shows that the activism gap is not universal. In the four Scandinavian nations, women participate more than men, a pattern consistent with women's role in politics in these countries, with Scandinavian nations leading Europe in terms of the proportion of women in parliament and in cabinet.³³

Figure 3: The activism gap in other countries



Note: See Table 2 and Appendix 1 for the components of the Political Activism Index. A positive gap indicates that women are more active than men. A negative gap indicates that women are less active than men.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. Pooled sample N. 36,701.

3.4 Similarly, across all the 19 nations, included in the survey, the size of the activism gap is strongly correlated ($R=60^{***}$) with the proportion of women in the lower house of parliament.

3.5 In the other European societies, according to this index, women are less active than men at mass level. The gender gap is largest in nations such as Luxembourg, Ireland, the Czech Republic and Spain. This is possibly due to the predominantly Catholic religious culture in each society which is closely associated with public attitudes towards gender equality. There is considerable evidence that the culture in Catholic societies remains more sympathetic to traditional division of sex roles for women and men, whereas more egalitarian attitudes are now common in many Protestant nations.³⁴

3.6 Overall, if European countries are ranked in terms of their activism gap, the UK is located within the top third of nations. This suggests that although there has been considerable progress towards gender equality in political participation in the UK, there remains further scope for eliminating disparities.

An audit of political engagement

3.7 To cross check the reliability of these findings, and to see whether this is a consistent pattern from alternative sources of survey evidence, the findings from the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002 can be compared against those from the audit of political engagement. This was a project conducted by The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in 2003, using a Political Engagement Poll by MORI.³⁵

3.8 The questions in this study are not identical to those in the ESS, in particular the ESS asks about activities undertaken 'during the last 12 months' whereas the audit asks about activities undertaken 'during the last two or three years'. Also, the audit does not monitor membership of voluntary associations, although it does ask in more detail about contact activity, a distinct dimension of political participation. Technical differences in sampling and fieldwork procedures, the year of the study, survey design, sample size and other methodological matters may also produce different estimates from those monitored by the ESS. Nevertheless, there are enough similarities to make some comparisons and to crosscheck whether the findings established so far are robust and consistent.

3.9 Table 3 shows the results of the audit's survey. No significant gender differences were found in the indicators of voting turnout in the last general election and local elections, as already noted by the ESS.

3.10 In contrast to the ESS, however, the audit found no significant gender differences in the five items used to monitor activism through campaign work. The differences between the ESS and the audit findings on campaign activism can well be explained by the alternative questions and indicators used in each survey, as well as the fact that so few people (less than 5%) reported taking an active part in party campaigns.

Table 3: An audit of political engagement

% reporting having participated in the following activities in the previous 2-3 years...	Men	Women	Gap	Sig.
Voting				
Voted in the last general election	61	64	+3	N/s
Voted in the last local elections	48	50	+1	N/s
Campaign-oriented				
Taken an active part in a party campaign in a general election	1	1	0	N/s
Taken an active part in a party campaign in a local election	2	1	0	N/s
Taken an active part in a political campaign	3	3	0	N/s
Been to any political meeting	5	4	-1	N/s
Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party	6	4	-2	N/s
Cause-oriented				
Signed a petition	35	41	+6	**
Boycotted certain products for ethical or political reasons	17	17	0	N/s
Taken part in a demonstration, picket or march	6	4	-2	*
Civic-oriented				
Helped on fundraising drives	17	25	+8	***
Helped organise a charity event	14	18	+4	**
Done voluntary work	21	24	+3	*
Donated money or paid membership fee to a charity or campaigning organisation	37	41	+4	N/s
Taken part in a sponsored event	15	15	-1	N/s
Been an officer or a club or organisation	9	6	-3	**
Made a speech before an organised group	13	9	-4	**
Contact-oriented				
Presented views to MP or councillor	12	14	+2	N/s
Contacted my local council	27	26	-1	N/s
Written a letter to an editor	6	4	-2	*
Urged someone to get in touch with MP or councillor	11	15	+4	**
Discussed politics or political news	38	33	-5	**

Note: Significance (in bold) *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant. Please note that where activism gap is greater or lesser than the percentage point difference between men and women's activism, this may be due to computer weighting or rounding.

Source: *An Audit of Political Engagement*. Survey of 1,976 UK adults aged 18+ conducted by MORI for The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in December 2003.

3.11 In the cause-oriented category, more women signed a petition (as found in the ESS), but more men reported taking part in a 'demonstration, picket, or march'. On the civic acts, more women participated in a support role, such as helping to fundraise or to organise a charitable event, while men proved slightly more active in leadership roles, for example being an officer or making speeches. Lastly, on contact activity men proved slightly more likely to write a letter to newspapers as well as to discuss politics.

The British Election Study 2001

3.12 The results of the European Social Survey (ESS) 2002 can also be compared with a similar range of indicators provided in the 2001 British Election Study (BES) (see Table 4 overleaf).

3.13 The main distinction is that the ESS and the Audit monitored retrospective activism by asking about actual experience of engaging in various acts ('have you done...'), whereas the 2001 BES monitored prospective activism ('would you do...').³⁶

3.14 Despite these methodological differences, Table 4 confirms a broadly similar picture to that established in the ESS, increasing confidence in the reliability of the main findings.

3.15 The results in the 2001 BES confirm no significant gender differences in likelihood to vote at the 2001 general election and in local elections. Women reported, however, that they would be less likely to vote in the next European Parliamentary elections, which can probably be attributed to their lower interest in European affairs, as found in repeated Eurobarometer surveys.

3.16 Women were also persistently less likely than men to engage in campaigns, especially to convince others how to vote and to discuss politics, as well as to join and donate funds to political parties. These gender differences were small in size but statistically significant.

3.17 The BES found no gender gap in the two cause-oriented acts included in its survey (as in the ESS). The study also confirmed men were more likely to join voluntary associations, such as a community association, charity group or sports club (as found in the ESS).

Trends in general election turnout 1964–2001

3.18 To explore electoral turnout in more detail and over time, we can use the series of British Election Studies (BES), conducted in every general election since 1964, allow us to monitor trends over time. Table 5 and Figure 4 show the percentage of women and men who reported voting at each general election between 1964 and 2001.

Table 4: Propensity to participate in Britain

% reporting that they were...	Women	Men	Gap	Sig.
Voting-oriented				
'Very likely' to vote in the May 2001 UK general election	73	72	+1	N/s
'Very likely' to vote in the next local election	57	56	+1	N/s
'Very likely' to vote in the next European elections	33	41	-8	**
Campaign-oriented				
'Likely' to work for a party or a candidate in an election campaign	10	11	-1	N/s
'Likely' to give money to a political party	10	12	-2	*
'Likely' to become a party member	4	6	-2	*
'Likely' to try to convince someone else how to vote	13	19	-6	***
'Likely' to discuss politics with family or friends	50	59	-9	***
Cause-oriented				
'Likely' to participate in a protest, like a rally or a demonstration	28	28	0	N/s
'Likely' to join a consumer boycott	51	53	-2	N/s
Civic-oriented				
'Likely' to work actively with a group of people to solve a problem	38	39	-1	N/s
'Likely' to be active in a voluntary organisation	49	53	-4	*

Note: Respondents were asked to rate their likelihood to participate in each act on a scale of 0-10, 0 meaning 'very unlikely' and 10 meaning 'very likely'. The 10-point scales for each item were categorised into the percentage 'unlikely' (0-4) and 'likely' (5-10). The significance of the mean difference between groups was measured by ANOVA and Chi-Square tests. *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = not significant. Source: British Election Study 2001. Weighted for gender. N.3219

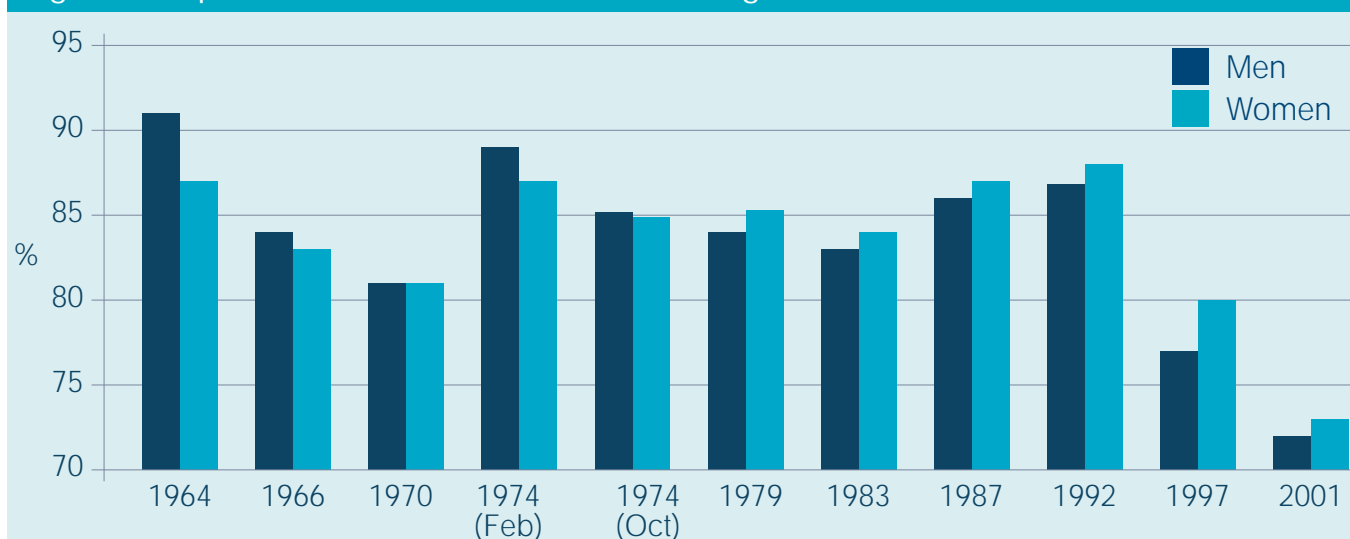
Table 5: Reported turnout for men and women at general elections 1964-2001

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Activism gap (%)
1964	90.9	86.6	-4.3
1966	84.3	82.6	-1.7
1970	81.0	81.0	0.0
1974 (Feb)	88.8	86.9	-1.9
1974 (Oct)	85.2	84.8	-0.4
1979	84.4	85.2	+0.8
1983	82.5	84.1	+1.6
1987	85.5	86.7	+1.2
1992	86.4	87.5	+1.1
1997	76.9	80.1	+3.2
2001 Reported vote	72.4	72.9	+0.5
2001 Validated vote	66.8	67.7	+0.9

Note: The activism gap is calculated as the difference in the reported turnout for women and men. In 2001 the figures also show the validated vote (checked against votes actually cast).

Source: British Election Study, 1964-2001.

Figure 4: Reported turnout for men and women at general elections 1964-2001



Source: British Election Study 1964-2001.

3.19 The gradual closure of the gender gap in voting, found in other countries, is also evident in these surveys. The traditional pattern was apparent in most general elections during the mid-1960s and early 1970s, when women were less likely to vote. In 1979, however, this pattern reversed and in every general election since then women have proved slightly more likely to vote than men. This process peaked in 1997, where an estimated 80.1% of women voted compared with around 76.9% of men, as a result of the activism gap combined with age-related patterns of turnout and greater female longevity.³⁷ The gender difference then diminished again in the 2001 general election, with 72% of men and 73% of women reporting voting at that election according to the BES.

3.20 In most surveys the proportion of respondents who report that they voted is consistently inflated compared with the actual votes cast.³⁸ To provide a more accurate estimate, reported turnout in the BES 2001 survey were matched and validated against the official votes cast at each respondent's address, according to the electoral register.

3.21 The validated vote estimate in the 2001 general election suggests that women and men cast ballots in roughly equal proportions (68% of women voted compared with 67% of men, a statistically insignificant difference). However, this study did report some modest differences in the reasons given by women and men for not voting. As shown in Table 6, women were slightly more likely not to vote because of lack of interest, whereas men were slightly more likely not to vote because they believed there

was 'no real democracy', or their preferred party had changed since the previous election.

3.22 According to the 2001 BES, there were also no significant differences in the reported voter registration rates of women and men.

Table 6: Reasons given for not voting at the 2001 general election

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Sig.
Prevented by circumstances	41	38	N/s
Not interested	16	24	**
No real democracy	8	3	***
Obvious Labour would win	16	13	N/s
Party had changed	7	3	*
Other reason	18	21	

Note: *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant.
Source: British Election Study 2001.

Turnout in regional and local elections

3.23 This pattern is not confined to general elections, which usually attract the highest turnout. Instead, in UK regional and local elections, the traditional voting gap has also either diminished or reversed slightly according to a series of surveys conducted by different polling agencies on behalf of The Electoral Commission.

3.24 For example, following May 2003 an ICM survey for the Commission in Scotland found that in contests for the Scottish Parliament, 57% of women reported voting compared with 56% of men.³⁹ Similarly, in the simultaneous contests

for the National Assembly for Wales, a NOP post-election survey for the Commission in Wales found that 40% of women reported voting compared with 35% of men.⁴⁰

3.25 A MORI survey for the Commission following the English local council elections in May 2003, found that 38% of women and 31% of men reported voting, producing a seven percentage point gender gap.⁴¹ Also in those areas conducting electoral pilots schemes, 47% of women reported voting compared with 39% of men, signifying a substantial gender gap, for reasons explored fully later.⁴²

Young people's participation

3.26 Considerable concern has been expressed about activism among the young, and whether

this group is particularly disenchanted with Westminster politics and apathetic about elections. Comparisons can be made using the standard surveys such as the BES but the limited sample size means that it is often difficult to analyse the attitudes and behaviour of the youngest cohort (typically taken to be 18–24 year olds) with any degree of reliability.

3.27 To examine this in more detail, however, we can turn to an opinion poll conducted by Populus for *The Times* in September 2003 based on a random sample of 18–24 year olds.⁴³ Young people were asked whether they had voted and also whether they had undertaken various activities in support of an issue or cause (see Table 7).

Table 7: Young people and activism in Britain

	Young men (%)	Young women (%)	Gap (%)
If there were a general election tomorrow, would you vote?	65	55	-10
Which of these have you done to support issues and causes?			
Broken the law	24	9	-15
Engaged in non-violent direct action	17	10	-7
Gone on a march/demonstration	21	16	-5
Joined an organisation/pressure group	11	10	-1
Signed a petition	64	64	0
Written a letter (e.g. to a newspaper, MP or PM)	14	17	+3
Made a financial donation	54	59	+5

Source: Populus survey of 505 people aged 18-24 for *The Times* with fieldwork conducted 15-18 September 2003.

3.28 The results in Table 7 show that the gender gap in activism was particularly clear in protest politics: young men were more likely to report having broken the law, as well as having engaged in non-violent direct action and demonstrations. Yet the evidence suggests that young women were not less active across all indicators, since women concerned about a cause or issue had more commonly made a financial donation or written a letter to a newspaper or a politician.

3.29 However, young men were more likely than young women to say that they would vote 'if there were a general election tomorrow' (65% compared to 55 %).⁴⁴ How far the gender gap in voting turnout among the young represents an enduring generational pattern, or instead can be regarded as a life-cycle effect, will be considered in depth in subsequent sections of this report.

4 Explaining the activism gap

Many decades after achieving full citizenship, women today participate equally at the ballot box, or even more than men. Women do however continue to lag behind men in terms of membership of parties and voluntary associations, both vital channels of participation in civic society.

Potential explanations

4.1 Most explanations of why there continues to be an activism gap by gender in the UK emphasise that women often have fewer resources of time, money and civic skills than men as well as lower psychological engagement in politics. Through juggling their dual roles in the home and workplace, many working women with children and family responsibilities face competing demands on their time. Some, particularly the older generation of women, often lack the educational background, financial assets and occupational experiences closely associated with political participation. Yet, if true, these sorts of factors should depress women's participation uniformly across the most demanding forms of political activism, not just certain types of activity.

4.2 More satisfactory explanations need to relate specifically to what distinguishes membership of political parties and voluntary associations from cause-oriented activities. For example, due to the socialisation process, women and men may differ in their attitudes towards the relevance and importance of party politics in their lives. Also the process of partisan de-alignment may potentially have gone further and faster in eroding loyalties among women than among men. Gender differences common in informal social networks and lifestyles may also lead women and men to differ in their interests and thus in their membership of different types of community groups and associations.

4.3 Moreover, women may experience greater practical barriers to activism, especially those with home responsibilities for care of dependents.

Such barriers may include having sufficient time to attend party meetings in the evenings, or their unwillingness to canvass voters in unsafe areas during elections.

4.4 Although all sorts of explanations come to mind, solid and systematic evidence is often lacking to evaluate these alternative accounts. Still less is known about the potential impact of practical policy reforms designed to boost citizen participation in party politics and within voluntary associations. Many arguments are possible but the main explanations can be categorised into the four groups illustrated in Figure 5, namely:

- **Structural explanations** emphasising the resources that facilitate civic participation – notably time, education and income – which are closely associated with political knowledge, skills and interest.
- **Cultural accounts** focusing upon the motivational attitudes that draw people into public affairs – such as a sense of political efficacy, institutional confidence and citizenship duty.
- **Agency explanations** prioritising the role of mobilising organisations such as churches and unions, as well as the role of the news media and informal social networks, which bring people into public affairs.
- **Institutional explanations** suggesting that the structure matters by setting the practical ‘rules of the game’ – notably the context of electoral choices set by the parties, candidates and electoral procedures.

4.5 In short, these explanations suggest that women participate less in parties and associational life either because they can’t (they lack resources); because they won’t (they’re not interested); because nobody asks them (lack of networks); or because the context or rules deters them. Of course, we are not assuming that any single mono-causal explanation lies at the heart of this phenomenon; instead, we are trying to disentangle the relative importance of each of these factors on political activism.

Analysis of the evidence

4.6 A two-step process was used to explore the evidence in the European Social Survey 2002, the richest source of survey analysis currently available on this topic. We theorise that two conditions are necessary in order to account satisfactorily for gender differences in political activism:

- **Firstly, we need to identify what causes political activism.** For example, is activism most strongly related to a sense of civic duty, strong links with social networks or higher levels of education? This study uses a multi-variate regression model to assess the relative importance of the main causes of political activism in the UK.⁴⁵
- **Secondly, we need to identify whether women and men differ on these factors** – i.e. whether men have stronger social networks or a greater sense of civic duty than women.

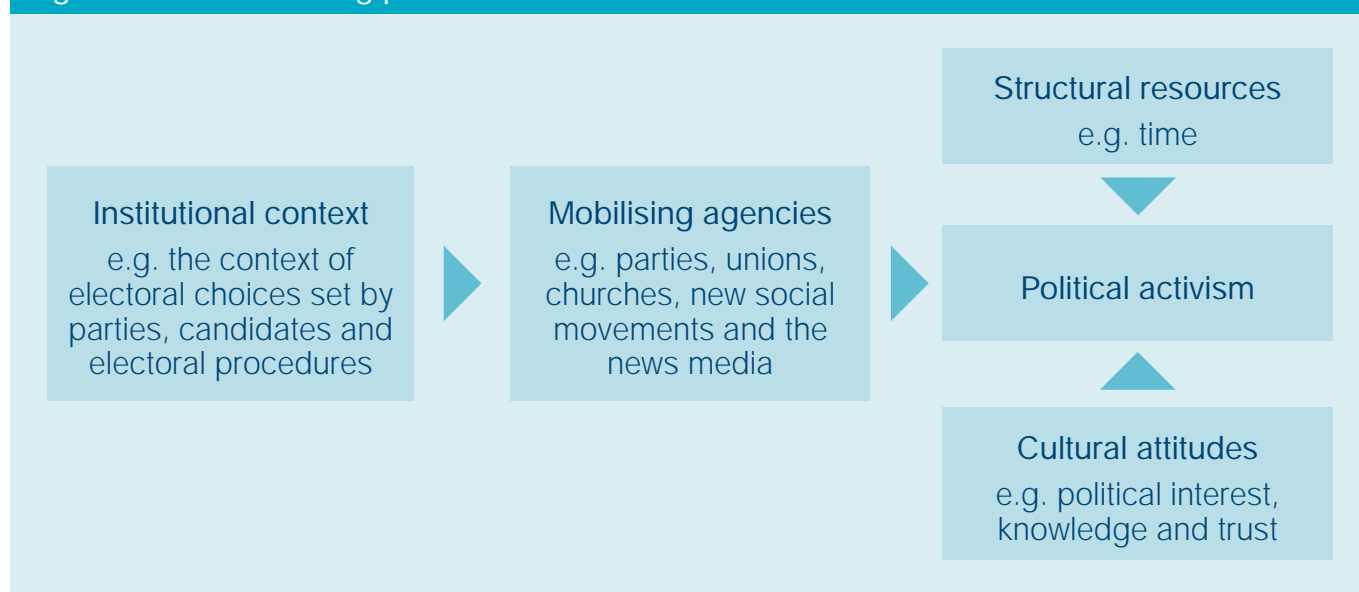
4.7 Table 14 in Appendix 2 shows an analysis of the main causes of political activism in the UK. As many previous studies have found, social background is an important predictor of activism

– notably education, age, income and work status. However, gender remained significantly related to activism even after controlling for these factors.

4.8 Moreover, among the cultural factors, internal political efficacy (a feeling of being able to influence public affairs), a sense of civic duty and political interest all played an important role in explaining activism – again confirming many previous studies. By contrast, the indicators of political and social trust were unrelated to activism. Although many blame disengagement upon dissatisfaction with the political system or loss of trust in parties and politicians, in fact this evidence supported neither of these explanations.

4.9 Among the agency explanations, personal communications emerged as far more significant than mass communications. Both informal social networks and political discussion proved extremely important in mobilising citizens (although not the indicators of attention to politics in TV news and newspapers). So why do these factors matter? And how far do women and men differ in these regards? Also, as well as the indicators included in this model, how does the institutional context of electoral choices shape the gender gap in political activism? Let us consider and unpack each factor in turn.

Figure 5: Understanding political activism



Structural resources

4.10 Explanations based on structural resources emphasise how the social background of a citizen accounts for their civic participation. These accounts emphasise that educational qualifications, social-economic status and income lead to inequalities in other civic assets – such as skills, knowledge, experience, time and money. Possession of these assets makes some better placed than others to take advantage of the opportunities for participation. Resources are perhaps most obviously useful in fostering more demanding forms of activism – such as social networks in philanthropic fundraising for local schools and hospitals; the need for leisure time to volunteer in a community association or serve on a parish council; the assets of flexible careers for the pursuit of elected office; the advantages of writing and communication skills to produce the local party newsletter; and the organisational abilities that help mobilise grassroots social movements.

4.11 In this regard, the activism gap among women and men may vary due to many other contrasts in their lifestyles and circumstances. For example, Burns, Schlozman and Verba found that in the United States women are, on average, disadvantaged with respect to education, income and occupational status, attributes long known to be associated with political activism.⁴⁶ As many others have found, the results in Table 14 (Appendix 2) confirm the strong impact of age, education and income on civic participation.

Education and socio-economic status

4.12 Education has commonly been found to provide one of the best predictors of participation: formal schooling fosters the civic and cognitive skills useful to make sense of complex issues and political controversies, to gather relevant information about party policies and leaders from the mass media, and to engage in political debates. Becoming a member, activist, or office-holder in parties, community or voluntary groups typically makes multiple demands in the ability to gather and process information, to communicate, to organise events and meetings, and to manage people, all of which are facilitated by the skills and confidence provided by education.

4.13 Figure 6 illustrates the activism gap by gender and educational qualifications, showing that differences in political participation among women and men are greatest among those with the lowest levels of educational achievements and smallest among those who have attended university. Given this pattern, steadily growing levels of equal educational opportunities in the UK during the post-war era, especially in higher education, is one factor that has probably contributed most to the gradual closure of the gender gap in voting turnout.⁴⁷

4.14 Closely related factors, based on the standard social-economic status (SES) model, suggest that income differentials and social class will also shape patterns of participation.⁴⁸ Both of these attributes are strongly associated with educational qualifications and achievements, with greater affluence and more flexible white-collar professional and managerial jobs providing the leisure, time-flexibility and financial

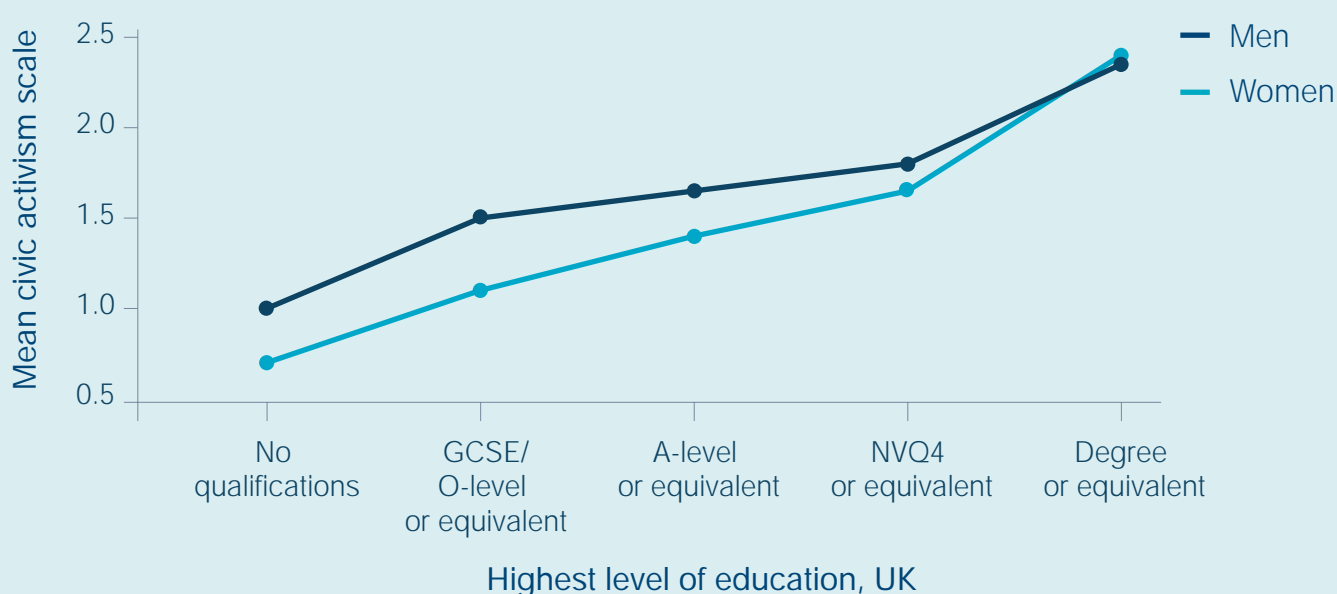
resources that facilitate political participation. Indeed, the impact of household income was strongly confirmed in the results of the analysis.

4.15 After entering household income, however, the respondent's occupational class did not prove significant. Figure 7 illustrates how income predicts activism, showing that this distinguishes women and men, with the activism gap closing most among the better-off households. Again, as women in the UK have made greater progress towards achieving equal pay and equal opportunities in management and the professions during the post-war era, this may have led to their participation in the political process.

Employment and work status

4.16 Participation in the paid labour force can strengthen civic engagement both directly – through facilitating membership and activism in work-based organisations (notably trade unions), co-operatives and professional associations, as well as indirectly through strengthening social networks among colleagues and workmates. The movement of women (especially married women) from the domestic sphere into the paid labour force is one factor commonly thought to help explain changing patterns of civic participation. Yet at the same time, the movement of women out of the home is a double-edged sword: it both increases opportunities for them to make new social

Figure 6: The activism gap in the UK by education



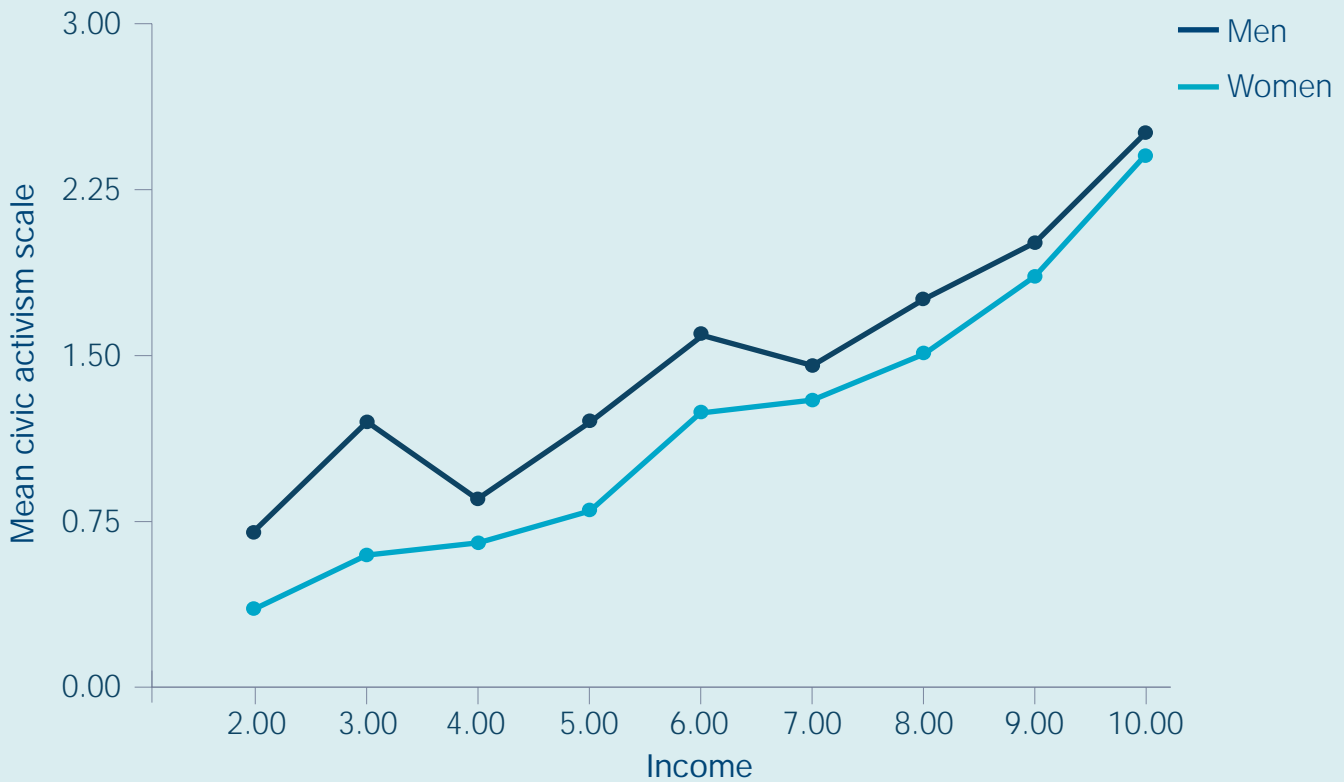
Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

connections and networks via the workplace, and yet also simultaneously reduces the time available for community involvement.

4.17 The results in Table 14 (Appendix 2) show that work status does play a role: those who are in paid employment were more likely to be politically engaged, although the direct effect of the total hours worked per week (including overtime) proved to be insignificantly related to political involvement.⁴⁹

4.18 The most plausible interpretation of these results is that participation in the paid labour force outside the home probably does lead to wider social and political contacts beyond the local neighbourhood and community, all of which may encourage social and political networks. However, the amount of time occupied by work does not necessarily displace the hours available for political activities. The activism gap in the UK was insignificant among women and men in paid employment (see Table 15 in Appendix 2).

Figure 7: The activism gap in the UK by income



Note: Income has been standardised into deciles from low to high.
 Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

Religiosity, marital status, family and children

4.19 By contrast to the role of education, income and work status, many other structural factors, which observers often believe may be important, proved less strongly related to overall levels of political activism (see Table 14 in Appendix 2).

4.20 Marital status, having children living at home and religiosity were found not to be good predictors of political activism in the general population. Nevertheless the role of marital status and children was important in distinguishing women and men's activism: married men participated significantly more than married women and, as shown in Figure 8 overleaf, among those with children there was a significant and large activism gap among women and men which closed most among those without children living at home.

4.21 This evidence suggests that family responsibilities do not deter activism in general but given the traditional division of sex roles within the home, women continue to be less visible in the public sphere, in part because of care of family dependents.

Age and generation

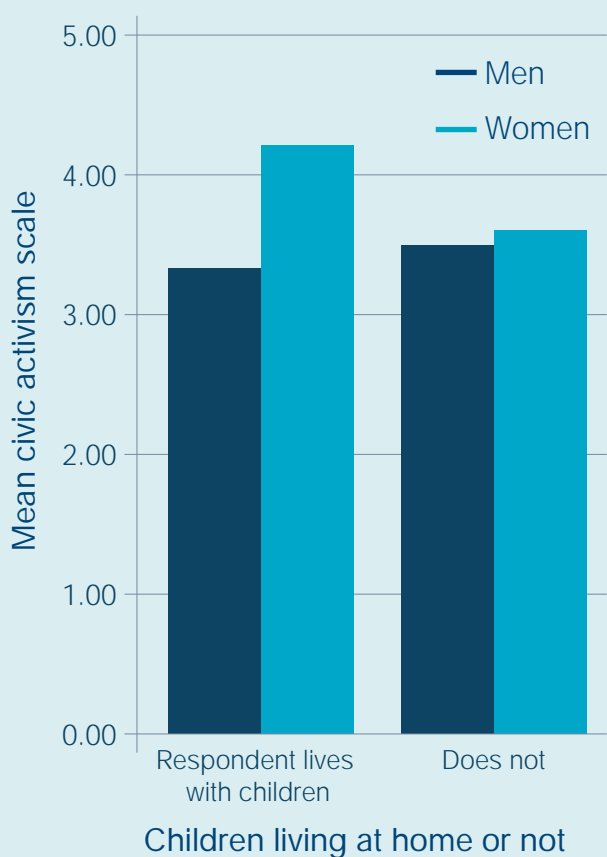
4.22 Patterns of participation are also commonly age-related, as we have already observed. In understanding these patterns we need to try to disentangle cohort, life-cycle and period effects, although this is always problematic in the absence of detailed panel surveys among the same people over many years. If we establish linear trends in political activism among successive birth cohorts of women, these can be interpreted as indicators of broader

social developments. Traditional theories of socialisation suggest that habitual patterns of political behaviour are generally acquired during an individual's formative years (in the family, school, workplace and local community), and these habits gradually rigidify over time, creating persistent differences among successive birth cohorts. If each cohort acquired political attitudes and social norms of behaviour which proved fairly stable and enduring during their lifetimes, then we should see distinctive patterns of activism which persist as each cohort ages.

4.23 Yet any age differences in activism can also be attributed to life-cycle effects produced by the experience of changing individual circumstances. Patterns of civic activism, social networks and associational membership often alter as people leave home for educational and workforce opportunities, start their own family and settle down within a local community, and when they eventually enter retirement and lose some physical mobility. Life-cycle effects in political participation are apparent if there is a curvilinear pattern suggesting that political participation rises from youth to a peak in early middle age before there is a slight decline again in old age.

4.24 Period effects, producing a 'stepped-shift', occur due to a particular major historical event which had a decisive impact upon all citizens in a society at one point in time. This process is exemplified by experience of the Great Depression during the 1920s and 1930s, the end of World War II, the student protests during the 1960s, or the transition to democracy in post-Communist Europe in the early 1990s.

Figure 8: The activism gap in the UK by children living at home



Source: European Social Survey, 2002.
UK sample N. 2051.

4.25 Perhaps the most important period effects for women can be expected to occur due to the expansion of the franchise. Generational theories of political socialisation suggest that political experience during the formative years, particularly the first few elections once citizens first reach the age to vote, generate enduring habits of voting participation that may last a lifetime.⁵⁰ The Representation of the People Act

1918 and the Representation of the People Act 1928 provided the most dramatic legal change in women's status as citizens, and these could have left a strong stamp upon patterns of participation among those cohorts who entered adulthood before and after passage. The cohort who grew up before they had the right to vote never had the opportunity to acquire the habits of participation during their formative years. By contrast, women who came of age after passage of the 1928 Act will have been able to cast a ballot on the same basis as men from their first few elections.

4.26 The methodological challenge of interpreting any age effects therefore lies in disentangling the separate components of social change and distinguishing linear, curvilinear and one-off 'stepped-shifts'.⁵¹ Ideally, we need longitudinal time-series data from panel surveys monitoring patterns of political activism among the same individuals as they gradually age. Unfortunately there are serious limits in monitoring consistent trends over time even with a succession of cross-sectional surveys, as the first systematic studies monitoring voting participation in Britain only started in 1964, and these contained few measures of activism that have consistently been asked over each general election. In their absence, the best approach is to examine whether there are linear, curvilinear or 'stepped shifts' in patterns of activism divided by cohort of birth.

4.27 As Figure 9 on p42 illustrates, a strong curvilinear pattern is indeed evident in activism in the UK, suggesting a life-cycle effect that is best explained by changes as individuals go through different stages in their lives. The youngest cohort

in their early twenties are often little rooted in local communities, as students and younger workers often need to be geographically mobile, usually renting flats in the private sector rather than being owner occupiers or council house tenants, and often without children to link them to local schools. As people age they commonly start to settle down within particular areas, buying property, taking out a mortgage or renting council houses, building families and developing social networks in the local community. In their sixties and early seventies, 'empty-nesters' entering retirement may lose some of their local ties if they re-settle into smaller properties or retirement communities, as well as losing some of the physical mobility necessary for getting out to local meetings or political events. Moreover, the figure shows how women remain less active than men in every cohort, suggesting that the gap persists throughout the life cycle.

Race and ethnicity

4.28 It is difficult to determine the influence of race and ethnicity on activism in the UK, due to the limited sample size and number of ethnic minority respondents contained in the ESS 2002. However, it is well known that ethnic minorities are usually marginalised in many forms of political participation, especially those groups lacking full citizenship rights or with particular language barriers. The ESS asked a number of questions to monitor ethnicity, race and citizenship, but the measure selected for this report concerned subjective ethnic identities, measured by whether the respondent said that they belonged to an ethnic minority group.

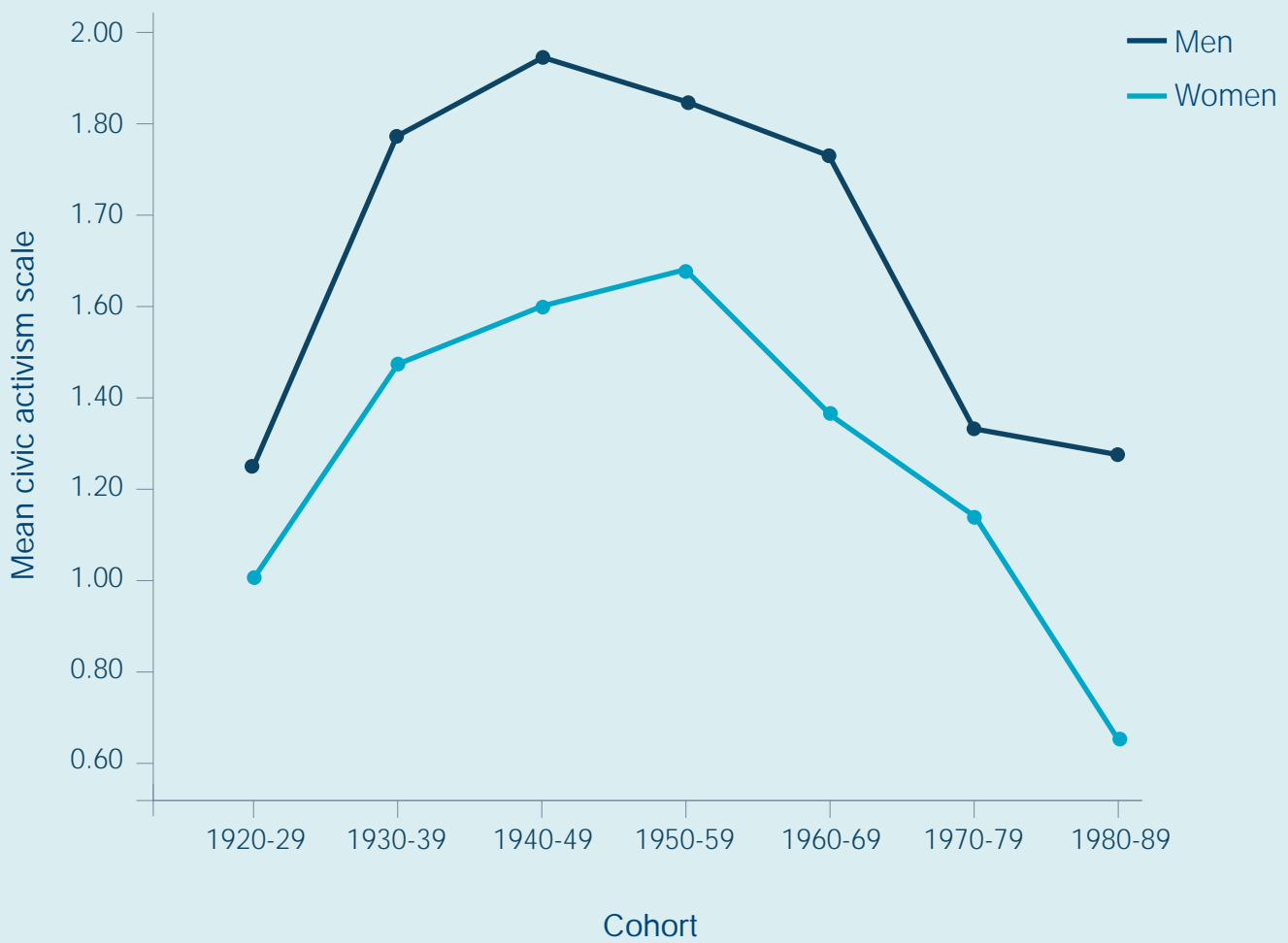
4.29 The results showed that belonging to an ethnic minority in the UK did not predict overall levels of political activism. Nevertheless, when levels of activism were compared by ethnicity and gender, among men there was no significant difference in participation but ethnic minority women proved far less active than other women.

Cultural attitudes

4.30 Certain cultural attitudes may play an important role in explaining activism, including a sense of psychological involvement and civic orientations which allow citizens to play a full part in representative democracy. These factors influence whether people care about politics and whether they feel capable of influencing political processes. Previous studies, including those conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission, have commonly found that women express less interest in politics than men.⁵²

4.31 As many other studies have found, the most important cultural attitudes influencing activism in the model in Table 14 (Appendix 2), after introducing the structural controls, proved to be patterns of political interest, a sense of civic duty and feelings of internal political efficacy. What seems to have the biggest influence on participation is the sense that citizens could affect the political process, that they had a duty to become engaged and had an interest in following current affairs and keeping up with events at Westminster (we will return to these issues later in this report when we consider how far the electoral choices, particularly the recruitment of women and men in elected office, can impact upon political attitudes in the mass

Figure 9: The activism gap in the UK by birth cohort



Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

electorate). By contrast, after entering the structural controls, other cultural attitudes did not prove significant in predicting activism, including institutional confidence and social trust.⁵³

4.32 Many believe that non-participation indicates the public's mistrust of parties and politicians, their lack of confidence in core institutions such as Parliament and the legal system, or their lack of interpersonal or social trust. Yet the evidence in this analysis provides no support for these common assumptions; as others have found, levels of social trust and institutional confidence were unrelated to participation.⁵⁴ A reason for this may be that mistrust is a sword that cuts both ways. If people feel that politicians are corrupt, Parliament is unaccountable and that democracy in the UK is ineffective, they may decide to opt out of the political system or, alternatively, they may seek to bring about political reforms or vote politicians out of office. The phenomenon of 'critical citizens' or 'disenchanted democrats' has been widely observed in many advanced industrialised societies, representing those people with high ideals for democracy who at the same time express minimal confidence in parties, Parliament and politicians.⁵⁵

4.33 But do women and men differ in their levels of political interest, civic duty and feelings of internal political efficacy? Table 8 overleaf compares gender differences in civic attitudes using a range of cultural indicators. The patterns show that women do indeed have a weaker sense of internal efficacy, meaning that they have lower confidence that they can

influence the political process through their own actions. Also, as many studies have found, compared with men, women also expressed less interest in politics. Men were also more likely to regard politics as important and to trust a range of political institutions, although we have already observed that these attitudes are poor predictors of activism. On the remaining indicators, there were no significant differences between the sexes.

4.34 Whether there is also a gap between women and men's level of political knowledge is widely debated, largely because there is little agreement in the literature about what forms suitable benchmarks for measuring this. Three different perspectives on this problem can be identified from the literature. The 'civics' approach assumes a single narrow type of 'ideal' information about government and public policy that all citizens need to know. Alternatively, the 'relativist' stance acknowledges that people have a limited reservoir of political information but suggests that this is sufficient for people to cast a meaningful ballot.

4.35 A third way of approaching the problem of measuring political knowledge is to define the 'practical' knowledge citizens need to make informed judgments about the consequences of their actions in multiple roles, for example as claimants of welfare benefits, as consumers of genetically modified food or as activists concerned about global warming, as well as in their role as electors.⁵⁶

4.36 Evidence from a series of Eurobarometer surveys suggests that, after applying a series of prior social controls, women usually know less than men about certain dimensions of political information – particularly about EU institutions, EU rights as citizens and about the issue of the euro. By contrast women often knew more than men about social issues.⁵⁷

Mobilising agencies

4.37 Mobilising agencies include organisations such as parties, churches and unions that are both a direct form of political activism and also an important indirect influence upon other forms of participation.⁵⁸

4.38 The process of political communication, through the news media and through informal personal discussions with friends, neighbours and colleagues are also thought capable of

activating and mobilising citizens. As Rosenstone and Hanson argue: 'Citizens participate in elections and government both because they go to politics and because politics goes to them'.⁵⁹

4.39 We have already established that men and women in the UK differ in their formal membership of political parties and voluntary associations. These provide connections that can recruit people into other forms of political participation – for example Verba found that churches and voluntary organisations provide networks of recruitment, with those drawn into the political process through these associations developing the organisational and communication skills that facilitate further activity.⁶⁰ Inglehart and Norris have also documented marked gender differences in membership of parties and in various types of voluntary associations in many post-industrial

Table 8: Gender gaps in civic attitudes in the UK

	Women	Men	Gap	Sig.
Internal political efficacy (10-point scale)	5.01	5.82	-0.81	***
Interest in politics (4-point scale)	1.32	1.62	-0.30	***
Importance of politics (10-point scale)	3.48	4.04	-0.56	***
Trust in national political institutions (20-point)	9.41	9.99	-0.58	***
Civic duty scale (60-point scale)	39.58	38.67	+0.91	N/s
External political efficacy (10-point scale)	4.78	4.72	-0.06	N/s
Social trust (30-point scale)	15.99	16.16	-0.17	N/s
Trust in international political institutions (20-point)	8.95	8.80	-0.15	N/s

Note: The figures represent the mean score for women and men on civic attitude scales. A positive gap indicates that women have stronger civic attitudes than men. A negative gap indicates that women have weaker civic attitudes than men.

Significance measured by ANOVA *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

societies, finding similar patterns to those evident in the UK. Evidence from the World Values Surveys show that women today remain less likely than men to belong to sports or recreational clubs, the peace movement, professional associations, trade unions and local community action groups, as well as political parties; although at the same time they were also more likely to belong to religious organisations and welfare groups.⁶¹ These differences are likely to influence patterns of electoral turnout where these groups engage in campaign activities, for example where trade unions provide volunteers and activists to help in election canvassing.

4.40 The news media may also be capable of influencing political activism. On the positive side, it may act as a mobilising agency by strengthening civic participation, providing information about current affairs, expanding awareness of political issues and increasing knowledge about electoral choices, thereby reducing the hurdles to activism. Yet theories of ‘media malaise’ commonly suggest that it is often to blame for problems of civic engagement by nurturing apathy and distrust.⁶²

4.41 The results of the model in Table 14 (Appendix 2) suggests that in the context of the UK, after controlling for social and cultural factors, neither the amount of attention paid to politics on the TV or in newspapers had either a positive or negative direct effect on patterns of activism. However, there was modest but statistically significant impact produced by attention to politics in radio news. Thus, while it is often fashionable to claim the media

is responsible for civic woes, the evidence examined here does not support this assertion.

4.42 On the other hand, even after controlling for interest, personal communications through social networks and informal political discussions do seem critical for mobilisation, although there could be a reciprocal effect at work here. Both of these factors proved significantly related to activism.

4.43 Do women and men differ in their connections to mobilising agencies? Table 9 overleaf looks at the evidence for this. There are many reasons to believe that women and men may differ in their social networks. Women working in the home, particularly those with heavy family responsibilities arising from care of children or the elderly, may become socially isolated beyond their immediate family and community, while women in employment outside the home often have more social opportunities to mix with co-workers, advisors and friends.⁶³ Entry into the paid workforce should expand social networks outside the household and local community, as well as encouraging membership in unions and professional associations.⁶⁴ Yet the comparison of the strength of male and female informal social networks in the UK shows that no significant difference is apparent.

4.44 The gender gap in media use is clearer and more consistent: women are less exposed to politics through television news, radio news and newspapers. The ‘uses and gratifications’ approach emphasises that patterns of prior interest drive media use and attention, and it

seems likely that women’s lower interest in politics means that they are less attentive in following current affairs and events in the news media. Nevertheless, as observed earlier, exposure to news appears unrelated to patterns of activism.

Patterns of electoral turnout

4.45 Are similar factors to those influencing overall levels of political activism also affecting voting turnout? We might expect considerable differences, given the nature of voting as a low cost, less demanding act than other forms of participation. To investigate this question, similar procedures were followed as before (summarised in Tables 16 and 17 in Appendix 2).

4.46 The results in Table 16 (Appendix 2) show that the factors best predicting electoral turnout overall were a range of social structural factors that many others have emphasised, notably age, income, class status, work status and

marital status. In addition, certain cultural attitudes also proved important, including civic duty and political interest. By contrast, the role of mobilising agencies proved insignificant, as did many of the other cultural factors often thought important, such as efficacy and political trust.

4.47 We have already established that there is no overall gender gap in voting turnout. Table 17 (see Appendix 2) confirms further that there were few significant and consistent gender differences in voting among sub-groups of women and men beyond income and education. Ethnicity, however, does seem to be important with ethnic minority women far less likely to vote than ethnic minority men.

4.48 To check the reliability of these findings on ethnicity given the limited sample size in the ESS, we can compare the validated voting turnout

Table 9: Gender gaps in relation to mobilising agencies in the UK

	Women	Men	Gap	Sig.
Social networks, meet with friends etc (7-pt scale)	5.16	5.09	+0.07	N/s
Discuss politics, how often (7-point scale)	2.56	3.05	-0.49	***
Exposure to politics in TV news (7-point scale)	2.09	2.33	-0.24	***
Exposure to politics in radio news (7-point scale)	1.53	1.87	-0.34	***
Exposure to politics in newspapers (7-point scale)	1.03	1.26	-0.23	***
Church membership	0.17	0.10	+0.07	***
Trade union membership	0.15	0.15	0.00	N/s

Note: The figures represent the mean score for women and men in exposure to mobilising agencies. A positive gap indicates that women have stronger exposure to mobilising agencies than men. A negative gap indicates that women have weaker exposure to mobilising agencies than men.

Significance measured by ANOVA *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

monitored by the 1997 BES that contained a booster sample among ethnic minorities. Table 10 shows that, while there was a significant 8% voting gap among black women and black men, there were no significant differences by gender among white and Asian populations.

Institutional context

4.49 There are many reasons why institutional context could create opportunities and barriers in relation to women and men's political activism. Here we will focus on two distinct aspects: the number of women in visible leadership positions and the registration and electoral process.

Women in office

4.50 The candidate recruitment process, in particular whether candidates and Members of Parliament reflect the society from which they are drawn, could play an important role in dampening or encouraging turnout. Burns, Schlozman and Verba found that women seeking or holding elected office in American politics have an impact upon the political participation of women at the mass level – boosting women's political interest, knowledge of candidates and sense of political efficacy.⁶⁵ They reason that more

visible women in politics may act as role models sending signals to women citizens that politics is an arena open to them. Alternatively, the presence of women in public office might suggest to women that their interests will be reflected in the policy-making process.

4.51 One way to explore whether similar processes are at work in the UK is to examine common indicators of civic engagement – such as levels of voter turnout, campaign interest and voluntary campaign work – among women and men in the electorate. We have done this using 2001 BES survey data, subdividing those constituencies where a male or female MP was elected to Parliament.

4.52 The results in Table 11 confirm that in seats where a woman MP was elected to Parliament, female turnout was 4% higher than male turnout – a modest but statistically significant difference. By contrast, in seats where a male MP was elected to Parliament there was no gender gap in turnout.

Table 10: The turnout gap in Britain by race and ethnicity

% Validated voting turnout in the 1997 general election...	Women	Men	Gap	Sig.
White	75	74	+1	N/s
Asian	83	85	-2	N/s
Black	72	80	-8	**

Note: Significance ** = 0.1, N/s = Not significant.
Source: The British Election Study, 1997.

4.53 Of course, the pattern could always be spurious if something else, such as the marginality of the seats held by women MPs, was generating these results. But in fact this pattern was confirmed in regression models (not shown here) – even after introducing various controls, for example for the marginality of the seat.

4.54 In addition, it was not just turnout where the sex of the MP mattered as more general patterns of civic participation were also affected. Women proved far less interested in the election campaign in seats where a male MP was elected, whereas this gender gap disappeared where a woman MP was elected (see Table 11). Also, when asked whether they would be likely to work for a candidate or party, women were less likely to volunteer in seats with a male MP. In seats with a woman MP, however, the gender gap disappeared. Even more striking patterns were revealed when people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement ‘Government benefits people like me’. In constituencies represented by a female MP, women were far more likely than men to concur with this statement (49% compared to 38%). Where a man represented the seat, the gap reversed, and men were far more likely than women to agree (45% compared to 38%).

4.55 This consistent pattern across the different indicators suggests that the election of women to office is important – not just symbolically for the legitimacy of governing bodies nor even substantively for their impact on public policy – but also for encouraging participation by

women as citizens in democratic processes. Confirming patterns found in the United States, in those instances where women were elected to the Westminster Parliament this helped to mobilise and activate women in the electorate.

4.56 To see if this relationship held more generally, the activism gap, as measured by the ESS 2002, was compared against the proportion of women in the lower house of parliament in each country in the 19 nations included in the survey. Given the number of other factors that could explain both variations in political activism among the general public as well as the election of women to office, we would expect not to find a very strong relationship between these factors. However, in fact, the results in Figure 10 on p50 confirm a fairly strong relationship⁶⁶ between the activism gap and the proportion of women in office.

4.57 The Scandinavian countries were remarkably high on both scales, as observed earlier, and countries such as Ireland and the Czech Republic were characterised by a large participation gap between women and men as well as having few women parliamentarians.

4.58 The fit is far from perfect, given many other potential causes of these phenomena. The pattern could also be spurious, if something else such as an egalitarian political culture is driving both the success of women in office as well as their participation at mass level. Nevertheless, the fact that the cross-national pattern points in a similar direction to the constituency-level analysis in the UK lends further confidence to this relationship.

Electoral administration

4.59 Detailed aspects of electoral administration may also have a differential effect upon men and women's participation,⁶⁷ for example the location of special polling stations in shopping malls, homes for the elderly or community centres; the use of proxy, transfer and advance voting; opportunities for remote electronic or all-postal voting; whether polling is held on a work-day or rest day; registration procedures such as a rolling register; or the hours that polling stations are open. The impact of these arrangements on men and women's participation has often been neglected in previous studies. Nevertheless, surveys conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission allow us to investigate their impact.

4.60 Electoral pilot schemes trialling new methods of voting and other administrative

innovations provide evidence to evaluate whether current electoral arrangements pose barriers to men and women's participation. Local elections are characteristically low-salience events where only a third of the electorate usually cast a ballot. Pilot schemes provide an exceptionally good test of the effects of modernising electoral administration and voting facilities on levels of participation.

4.61 During the English local elections in May 2003, 59 local government areas conducted pilots. These experimented with alternative ways of facilitating remote electronic voting, including the use of the internet from home and public access sites, interactive digital television, SMS text messaging and touch-tone telephones. Other innovations were also piloted including all-postal ballot voting and extended voting periods.

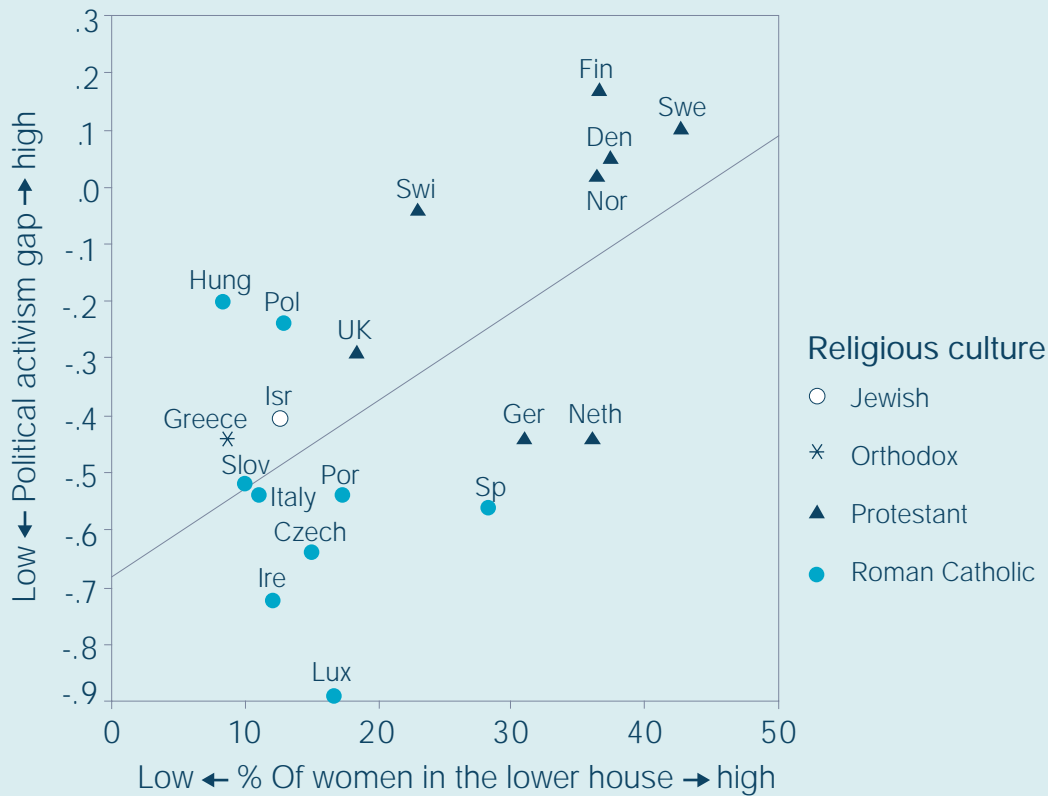
Table 11: Men and women's political engagement by gender of the MP

% Who		Men	Women	Gap	Sig.
Reported having voted	Male MP	74	74	0	N/s
	Female MP	79	83	+4	*
Very interested in 2001 general election	Male MP	27	20	-7	***
	Female MP	19	22	+3	*
Very unlikely to work for candidate/party	Male MP	65	70	-5	*
	Female MP	66	66	0	N/s
Very likely to discuss politics	Male MP	17	13	-4	*
	Female MP	12	13	+1	N/s
Strongly agree/agree with statement 'Government benefits people like me'	Male MP	45	38	-7	***
	Female MP	38	49	+11	***

Note: Significance measured by ANOVA *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant.

Source: British Election Study 2001. Weighted for gender.

Figure 10: The activism gap and women's representation – the comparative perspective



Note: See Table 1 and Appendix 1 for the components of the Political Activism Index. A positive gap indicates that women are more active than men. A negative gap indicates that women are less active than men. The proportion of women elected to the lower house of parliament is derived from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2002. $Rsq=0.3632$
 Source: European Social Survey, 2002. Pooled sample N.36,701. $Rsq=0.3632$

All-postal schemes remove the need for citizens to apply for a mail ballot – instead, local authorities provided all citizens on the electoral register in an area with the automatic ability to cast a postal ballot during an extended period of about two weeks prior to close of poll.

4.62 Outside the pilot areas the public voted in the traditional way by marking a cross on standard paper ballots in local polling stations. Among other things, it was hoped that the use of new voting facilities in the pilot areas would strengthen turnout by making voting more convenient for citizens. By using a telephone, computer, or digital television to cast a ballot from home or the workplace, citizens could reduce the time and effort traditionally required to participate in person at the polling station. This may help overcome problems of social exclusion, especially for those with limited mobility such as the elderly, caregivers confined to the home by dependent relatives, or employees and shift-workers with little flexibility in their work hours, as well as for those who are traveling away from home or are resident overseas.

4.63 The effect of these pilot schemes is evident from levels of turnout in the May 2003 local elections and from a MORI post-election survey conducted on behalf of The Electoral Commission.⁶⁸ Figures confirm that the use of all-postal voting facilities had a significant and strong impact on turnout, increasing it by approximately 15% on average from the previous comparable election in each area.

4.64 Further analysis of the MORI survey data suggests that the introduction of electronic and all-postal voting in selected areas had a differential effect upon young and old.⁶⁹ Due to patterns of greater female longevity, the use of different ways of casting a ballot also had a significant indirect impact upon men and women's voting participation. As mentioned earlier, in the May 2003 local elections, overall voting turnout was about 8% higher for women than for men.

4.65 Table 12 overleaf shows that the results varied a great deal by the type of pilot scheme that was used in each area. In all postal-voting areas, where citizens automatically received a postal ballot, women's turnout was 13% higher than men's, while women's turnout was a remarkable 24% higher in areas using both remote electronic voting and postal ballots. By contrast, in areas using only remote electronic voting facilities, such as text messaging and internet voting, women's turnout was 5% less than men.

4.66 This pattern illustrates how apparently simple changes in electoral administration may possibly generate differential effects upon women and men's voting turnout.

Table 12: Reported voting participation by gender at the May 2003 pilots

Type of pilot area	Gender	Reported turnout	Voted at a polling station	Voted electronically	Voted by post
Combined	Women	58	N/a	9	49
	Men	34	N/a	8	26
All-postal	Women	52	N/a	N/a	52
	Men	39	N/a	N/a	39
Electronic	Women	31	20	6	5
	Men	36	26	8	3

Notes: N/a = not applicable in pilot area. The substantial gender-related effects (highlighted in bold) can be best explained by the interaction of gender and age, and the greater propensity of the older population (who are disproportionately female) to use postal-voting facilities.

Source: MORI post-election survey of 6,185 adults 2-12 May 2003 in 29 local authorities piloting the new voting arrangement. The survey results were weighted to the know population profile.

5 Case studies

The findings of this report have highlighted that women remain less active in formal politics than men, as well as being less interested in national politics. The following case studies are presented as examples of attempts in the UK to mobilise women's political participation.

5.1 This chapter does not aim to provide an exhaustive critique of current activity but only to highlight examples of initiatives undertaken by political parties, trade unions, women's groups and other organisations to promote women's political activity at both grassroots and at leadership level. These practices are interrelated, since we have demonstrated that the number of women visible in political leadership roles helps mobilise women more generally.

Political parties

5.2 The main UK political parties make targeted appeals to women as electors, members and candidates. Party organisations usually have offices and committees with briefs to service women members, to promote women's representation and to identify and respond to the interests of women voters. Party initiatives are mainly aimed at women who are already members, however some initiatives are specifically designed to encourage interest among those currently less engaged in politics and to recruit new women members.

5.3 Table 13 summarises the number of women nominated and elected by the three major parties in recent UK general elections.

The Conservative Party

5.4 After the 2001 general election there were a total of 166 Conservative Party MPs at Westminster. Of these, 14 were women (8.4%), representing a numerical decline since 1987. Equal opportunity policies are emphasised in the Conservative Party's selection process, such as equal access for candidate training.

Table 13: Number of women nominated and elected by the three major parties in recent general elections

	Conservative		Labour		Liberal Democrat	
	Candidates	MPs	Candidates	MPs	Candidates	MPs
1987	46	17	92	21	105	2
1992	63	20	138	37	143	2
1997	67	13	159	102	142	3
2001	92	14	146	95	135	5

However, to date, the party has not adopted positive action strategies for women.⁷⁰ Women fare better at local level, where they make up about 26% of Conservative councillors.⁷¹ However, a considerable disparity still exists when we consider that the most thorough survey of the Conservative Party found that in the early 1990s women constituted half of the party's membership (49%) and the majority of its voters (55%).⁷²

5.5 The Conservative Party provides training specifically for women. Prominent women MPs also visit schools to encourage girls to consider becoming involved in the Youth Parliament and the candidate selection team are involved in trying to reach out to women who are not politically active by meeting with women's associations, such as the women's financial network. Mentoring is also provided for women who are interested in becoming MPs and the first stage of the candidate selection process has been overhauled in order to overcome the problem of 'favourite sons'.

5.6 While the Party's official website⁷³ does have sections appealing to groups, such as overseas

voters and the young, it does not include any links to any affiliated women's organisations, nor provide any distinct pages appealing to women. The only references to 'women' found via the online search engine for the official party website referred to fringe conference meetings of the Conservative Women's National Council (CWNC), to news stories and to party speeches.

5.7 The CWNC is the main women's organisation within the Conservative Party. Its website⁷⁴ contains policy questionnaires designed to be of particular interest to women. These questionnaires are used to motivate women to become active and to survey their views. The CWNC also publishes a pamphlet entitled *Women Make a Difference: Become a Conservative Councillor*, which highlights the under-representation of women in councils in England and Wales and contains real life stories of women who have become actively involved in public affairs. The role of a councillor is also clearly explained and contact information is provided. A similar leaflet is also available entitled *Conservative Women: Passion into Politics*, designed to encourage women to become active in public life and to act as a mechanism for establishing the issues that women are interested in.

The Labour Party

5.8 At present, women make up roughly 40% of Labour party members, 25% of its councillors, and 23% the Party's MPs.⁷⁵

Although the use of positive action strategies has proved controversial in the party, the adoption of all-women shortlists in the selection process for parliamentary candidates in the run up to the 1997 general election (subsequently discontinued) did help to generate a record number of Labour women MPs (102). However, the 2001 general election saw a slight retreat from this number rather than further gains.⁷⁶

5.9 The current Labour Party policy, applying to the run up to the next general election, is to introduce all-women candidate shortlists in a minimum of 50% of the seats in England and Wales where Labour MPs retire.⁷⁷ Labour is also extending positive action to the selection of local councillors, especially in strong Labour wards.

5.10 The Labour Women's Organisation works across the Party, encouraging the establishment of women's forums within local communities.⁷⁸ In addition, the Labour Women's Network provides training, seminars and publications targeted at women. Publications, including *Women's Place is in the House* and *Women's Place is on the Council*, explain the roles of MPs and councillors and give advice about how to gain elected office.

5.11 As well as developing policies to increase and maintain women's representation throughout its internal organisation and in elected office, the Labour Party has also undertaken initiatives targeted at women voters. In the mid-1990s, the Shadow Women's Minister toured the country to

speak at meetings organised by local non-partisan women's organisations such as the Women's Institute. The results were published by the Party in the document *Listening to Women*. In 2001 a special manifesto was also produced for women, as part of an effort by the Party to attract their votes.

The Liberal Democrats

5.12 After the 2001 general election, there were five women MPs in the Liberal Democrat Party (constituting 9.6% of the total). Despite growing support inside the Party, the Liberal Democrats stopped short of positive action in the selection of women candidates in all contests except the 1999 European elections. For the elections to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and to Westminster in 1997 and 2001, action to equalise representation was limited to voluntary measures. However, the number of women selected by the party to stand for seats at the next general election currently stands at 12% higher than that at the last general election. Also, the Liberal Democrats record is stronger at local government level, where women are one-third (34%) of all their local councillors, the highest level currently among the major parties.⁷⁹

5.13 For the 2001 general election, the Liberal Democrats produced a separate manifesto targeted specifically at women. This document focused on issues such as health, employment, education, poverty, crime, civil liberties, pensions, long-term care costs, the strengthening anti-discrimination legislation and the reforming of the tax system for people on low incomes. This manifesto was targeted at the interests of

women of all ages, with analysis of the British Election Study demonstrating that in 2001 pensions were a priority for older women, whereas equal opportunities were most important in influencing the vote choice of younger women.

5.14 Following the September 2001 party conference, the Liberal Democrats also initiated a Gender Balance Task Force (GBTF) to achieve the party's targets for women's representation. The GBTf provides training and mentoring for women who are interested in seeking elected office, providing them with the skills and knowledge of the rules of the system so that they can fight effective selection campaigns. Also, to encourage more women members to consider standing for elected office the GBTf has stalls at regional and national conferences, and also runs fringe meetings.

5.15 Working within the Party is Women Liberal Democrats (WLD), an organisation aimed at promoting women's issues onto the policy agenda and encouraging women members to become more active within the Party.⁸⁰ WLD provide training events, networking opportunities and literature for their women members, as well running a support campaign, 'Women in Target Seats'.

5.16 Recent initiatives to encourage women to get involved at all levels include a mailing to all women members from Party Leader Charles Kennedy and the development of extensive support networks for women candidates. Training is also available for potential women candidates covering all aspects of campaigning, as well as interpersonal, presentation and 'technical' skills, including understanding how the party works.

Trade unions and other organisations

5.17 Various initiatives and strategies have been introduced by trade unions and other organisations to address gender balance issues and to encourage participation more widely. Examples of such are outlined below.

The Fawcett Society

5.18 The Fawcett Society is one of the main lobbying groups in Britain that has long campaigned for equality between the sexes.⁸¹ At the time of writing it was undertaking a number of initiatives to encourage women, particularly young women, to become more interested in politics. One of these is the Equal Citizen website,⁸² which is designed to assist citizenship education in secondary schools. This website is informative, accessible and has a magazine format. Students are led through the different ways they can become politically active, from signing a petition to making a speech, and it attempts to promote a sense of political efficacy by aiding students to identify issues that are important to them and the steps they can take to have their say.

5.19 The Fawcett Society has also secured finance through The Electoral Commission's New Initiatives Fund for a project working with the Women's Library, a cultural resource centre on women's history. This project will include the development of a website and the staging of events designed to encourage women in London to 'Value their vote'.

The Equal Opportunities Commission

5.20 The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is a statutory body working to eliminate sex discrimination in Britain. It takes landmark legal cases under the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, as well as commissioning research across a range of policy areas. As an organisation the EOC works with all of the main political parties towards achieving balanced representation of women and men in political life.

5.21 In 2001 the EOC produced a literature review of women's representation in national legislative bodies.⁸³ This report called for political parties to give public support to, and to adopt, both affirmative action and positive action measures to achieve balanced representation.

5.22 Subsequently, in 2002 the EOC published *Man Enough for the Job?* providing a detailed analysis of results from qualitative and quantitative research conducted among parliamentary candidates and newly elected MPs. This research examined potential discrimination in party selection procedures and measured levels of support for positive action.

5.23 In 2003 EOC Wales also produced *Choose a Winner: Selecting Political Candidates* and EOC Scotland published *An Equal Chance: Your Guide to Promotion, Selection and Election of Women Candidates*. Both guides make the case for gender balance in public and political representation and suggest practical steps that both political parties and individuals can take to achieve this.

The Women's National Commission

5.24 The WNC publishes *Women in Public Life Today: A Guide*.⁸⁴ This provides a reference point designed to encourage more women to become involved in public life. A comprehensive list of public bodies is supplied and practical advice about filling out application forms is given. A section is devoted to real life stories of women who have become involved in public life and the particular contribution women can make to public life is emphasised.

The Women and Equality Unit

5.25 The Women and Equality Unit, an official government body working under the Ministers for Women, has produced a pack of lesson-plans for teachers to use in class to celebrate International Women's Day. One of the lesson plans outlines the unequal representation of the sexes in public life and in elected office. It also provides information on how young people can become active in politics through the UK Youth Parliament.⁸⁵

The Local Government Association

5.26 The Local Government Association (LGA) has published a report entitled *Representing the People: Democracy and Diversity* examining the lack of diversity in council chambers and identifying a series of recommendations, which are currently being implemented by the LGA.

5.27 The report highlights that although the percentage of women councillors in England and Wales has been gradually rising over time (now standing at 27%), there exists considerable variation across different councils

in terms of the proportions of men and women representatives, with councils continuing to suffer from a high turnover of women councillors. A possible explanation for this can be found in the results of qualitative research undertaken by the LGA, suggesting that many women councillors were unhappy with the attitudes of male colleagues towards them, as well as the work-life balance the role offers, the timing of meetings, and the aggressive culture of many councils.

5.28 The LGA report recommends that councils and local parties should introduce a series of measures to increase participation among women and minorities, including: developing more transparent recruitment and selection procedures, providing opportunities for interested members of the public to shadow councillors, developing mentoring schemes, monitoring any positive action or positive discrimination strategies, introducing specific training budgets for councillors, improving childcare allowances, and reviewing meeting times.

The Transport and General Worker's Union

5.29 The TGWU has introduced a number of initiatives designed to encourage women members to become politically active.⁸⁶ Men currently dominate the organisation, representing over three-quarters of the membership. However, structures have been put in place to facilitate women gaining access to decision-making and leadership positions. The new constitutional rules, agreed in 1998, specify that women must make up at least the same proportion of committees and conference delegates as there are in relevant industries.

The Union has also expressed the desire to work towards a membership that is made up of equal numbers of men and women, not least because the areas of work that they represent are becoming less male dominated. Current initiatives on the part of the Union include drives to recruit more members from low-paid jobs in cleaning and catering, the food industry, pharmaceuticals, child-care organisations and residential care homes, as well as campaigns defending the rights of part-time workers.

5.30 Current TGWU policies also include those aimed at changing its organisational culture and image. The Union wants to be identifiable as a 'union for women like me.' They have undertaken qualitative research to establish why so many part-time workers (mainly women) are not Union members and how women react to their publications and general image. They found that women want positive reasons for joining unions, such as information about the support that is available. In reaction to this and other findings from this research, a women's leaflet and magazine have been designed. Whereas previous Union publications took a tabloid paper style, the new magazine is specifically designed to appeal to women (although men also read it) and contains real-life stories about women playing an active role in the Union.

5.31 Although their research showed that women do not necessarily see union membership as a political act, joining does make them more likely to participate in politics. Being a member of the Union also gives women an organised voice through the Women and Politics Committee. Also, within the industries represented by the Union,

the TGWU has helped women raise political concerns with politicians, such as the Minister for Transport. Women officers are also available to facilitate communication between the Union and its women members.

5.32 In addition, the Union also provides training courses for women both at local and national level. This training is advertised in several different ways, including via the women's TGWU magazine and direct mailings to new members. Other resources are also provided for women through Equalities Officers, based at both national and regional level. In the past these have arranged talks for women members by women MPs and councillors, explaining how they got involved in politics and how they manage the balance between their work and domestic lives. The Union also conducts 'listening to women' exercises with the participation of women's organisations, women's aid and childcare campaigning groups.

The National Assembly for Wales

5.33 The Government of Wales Act 1998 places the National Assembly under a unique statutory duty to ensure that its functions are exercised with regard to equality of opportunity for all people. The Assembly could be subject to judicial review if it failed to comply.

5.34 The Equality of Opportunity Committee of the Assembly has sought to ensure that the Assembly sets an example of best practice in the way it 'mainstreams' equal opportunity in the conduct of its business and procedures. The Committee also oversaw the Assembly's equal pay audits. Mandatory equality

awareness training has also been introduced for all civil servants, along with an opening up of the appointment process to attract candidates from a wider range of backgrounds. The Assembly has also launched a voluntary code of equality practice for outsourced work.

5.35 In addition, a commitment to family-friendly working hours means that plenary business is not scheduled beyond 5.30pm and recesses generally coincide with school holidays, including half terms.

5.36 It is also notable that the National Assembly for Wales leads the world in terms of representation of women in national legislatures – exactly half of Assembly Members are women, as are five out of nine Welsh Assembly Government Ministers.

The Scottish Parliament

5.37 Many parliaments have established childcare facilities for members and officers, but the Scottish Parliament crèche facility has gone one step further by providing childcare facilities that are also available to members of the public who are visiting Holyrood.

5.38 As noted by Duncan McNeil MSP the crèche is 'an important part of Parliament being open and accessible to people in Scotland. For parents with young children, this service could be the crucial difference between making your views known to Parliament in person and being excluded from the democratic process'. This initiative will benefit parents who wish to visit their MSPs and may be of particular value to women who generally bear the bulk of childcare responsibilities.

The news media

5.39 As has already been observed, women receive less civic information than men about politics and elections from the traditional news media, as well as from the internet.⁸⁷ Evidence from the 2001 British Election Study also confirms that women are less likely to read a daily newspaper than men and report paying slightly less attention to political news in the press and on television during election campaigns.⁸⁸

5.40 Women's magazines do not usually focus on overtly political news, but there are examples of stories that seek to make politics relevant to women. One such feature was published in *Good Housekeeping Magazine* in 2001, framed as 'Why women hold the key to the election'. The article was based on a survey of women's voting intentions and attitudes to politics. The tone of the feature was positive and upbeat. Women were informed that 'they have the power' to decide the election because more women turnout to vote than men. The feature contained criticism of mainstream news media, claiming 'Politicians and newspapers appear to think we're obsessed with taxation, petrol prices and the Euro, but they need to reconsider. Almost two-thirds of women (60%) put health as their number one priority, and even the youngest voters agree'.⁸⁹ This is an example of a story that focused on how politics and elections are relevant to women and the important role they can play.

6 Implications

The persistent activism gap in the UK has significant consequences. This chapter explores some of the implications and raises issues for the future.

Summary

6.1 In the UK, as in other countries, it used to be thought that women were less politically active than men. A series of studies from the 1920s until at least the mid-1980s confirmed this perception.

6.2 This report demonstrates that today, contrary to the received wisdom, women commonly cast ballots at equal, or even slightly higher levels than men in UK general, regional and local elections. Women are also equally or more active in many forms of cause-oriented activity, such as signing petitions and consumer politics.

6.3 Nevertheless, 75 years after the granting of equal franchise, an overall and persistent activism gap remains between levels of men and women's political participation in the UK. For example, it has been shown that women continue to lag behind men in their levels of involvement with political parties and in their membership of voluntary associations.

6.4 To place this in context, if the 19 European countries included in the ESS 2002 are ranked according to their activism gender gap, the UK is located within the top third of these nations. This suggests that although progress has been made there remains further scope for eliminating disparities between men and women's levels of political participation in the UK.

6.5 The persistent activism gap in the UK has significant consequences, since parties and voluntary associations are important dimensions of civil society. Membership of voluntary associations represents a central aspect of

‘social capital’. Those who are less engaged in voluntary organisations and professional associations have weaker social networks and fewer opportunities.

6.6 This report has considered a number of case studies detailing initiatives undertaken by political parties, trade unions and other organisations in the UK designed to promote political participation. We have focused specifically on initiatives designed to boost political participation as defined in this report (see chapter 2), and in particular upon activities that encourage women’s participation.

Implications

6.7 The persistence of a significant gender gap on political participation poses a problem for government, parties and other mobilising agencies in the UK today. The following paragraphs outline some policy implications of the research findings and make suggestions as to how organisations may go about tackling this problem. These are based on a consideration of the case studies outlined in this report and other initiatives and strategies by women’s policy agencies and other organisations in the UK, Western Europe and the USA aimed at increasing women’s participation.

Increasing the number of women representatives

6.8 The evidence suggests that the inclusion of more women at Westminster may be important, not just for symbolic legitimacy and substantive policy representation, but also for encouraging participation among women more generally. Therefore, strategies to increase the number

of women being selected and standing for election may be necessary to address this issue.

6.9 Research has shown that the use of positive action policies in other countries has had a significant effect on the proportion of women elected to office and, in turn encourages wider participation among women as citizens.⁹⁰ Positive action strategies include a range of initiatives that are designed to benefit women, usually as a temporary measure until such time as gender parity is reached in legislative and appointed bodies. There are three main strategies: the use of reserved seats for women established in electoral law (used, for example, in Pakistan); the use of statutory gender quotas controlling the composition of candidate lists for all parties in a country (used, for example, in Belgium); and voluntary gender quotas used in the regulations and rules governing the candidate selection process within specific parties (used by many European parties).

6.10 In the UK, only the latter has been tried, with some success. Detailed analysis of the effects of these strategies were discussed in chapter 5 and are considered elsewhere.⁹¹ Here we note that, where implemented effectively, these strategies may lead to more women entering elected office.

6.11 Party initiatives to operate more transparent candidate selection procedures, such as raising awareness of selection processes and publicising application deadlines, to encourage the participation and selection of under-represented groups, could also be effective in this regard. Additionally, the formalisation of job descriptions and the skills that the

successful candidates need to meet, may help to make the selection criteria more transparent.

Encouraging women as members and activists

6.12 In the UK and elsewhere initiatives have been taken to encourage women as activists and as members of political parties and other organisations. In particular, strategies designed to raise awareness of women's stake in politics and to identify and highlight the political dimensions of women's activism could be successful in this respect.

Successful strategies adopted by some parties and voluntary associations to date include:

- **Training programmes** designed to provide relevant skills and experience to women who wish to enter elected and appointed office and to become more politically active. For example, useful skills for elected office include public speaking, media management, financial budgeting, awareness of political institutions and public policy processes, and substantive knowledge of major policy issues. Such training activities are found in all of the major political parties, with some training programmes being gender-neutral and some designed specifically for women. For example, the Conservative Party's officials in charge of candidate selection have contacted women's financial networks and given speeches encouraging women to become involved. The TGWU also provides political training for female members and Engender in Scotland provides training for women who are active in women's groups but not in politics.
- **Examples of training initiatives by political parties, women's policy agencies and women's advocacy organisations abroad** include Emily in Italia and programmes elsewhere in Italy and the Netherlands to train women in politics and policy. Also, in the United States a range of training programmes are offered for women and men entering local, state and Congressional elected office – for example the New Members of Congress programme offered every two years by the Institute of Politics and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The provision of women-only training programmes is beneficial in allowing women to find their own political voice and can be useful in the development of women's networks.
- **Internships** allow young people to gain direct experience of working for Members of Parliament for a short period, as well as in party research offices, the news media, public bodies, election campaign headquarters, government departments and policy research think-tanks. Such experience can provide direct awareness of the work of these organisations, as well as furnishing contact networks and providing relevant research and communication skills. Compared with the situation in the United States, the UK has further scope for expanding opportunities for such internships and targeting these more specifically at young women, including school-leavers and university undergraduates.
- **Mentoring schemes** are offered by all of the UK political parties for women who are interested in becoming MPs. These link women who are interested in becoming

involved with elected officials who can provide advice and guidance. In the Netherlands, some parties provide opportunities for women who are considering running for office to 'sit next to' a local or regional councillor for a week, so that they become familiar with all aspects of the work.

- **Monitoring and information campaigns** run by organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, the International Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) and Inter-Parliamentary Union highlight women's stake in politics and the progress that has been made. Their research is made available on the internet and is a resource for organisations working for women's political mobilisation. In France, the *Observatoire de la parité* monitors the presence of women in assemblies and commissions research on women's political representation.
- **Financial incentives** build the inclusion of women into any financial public subsidies given to parties. For example, in the Netherlands during the 1980s the central Women's Policy Agency, the *Emancipatieraad*, offered subsidies to political parties to employ staff to devise strategies to enhance women's political participation. The subsidy was offered to all parliamentary parties thus avoiding difficulties of partisan bias. Parties used the subsidy to establish programmes to increase women's membership and to encourage women to register to vote independently of their husbands. The initiative made parties aware of their relevance to women voters.

Modernising the culture and practices of political organisations

6.13 Alternative strategies have focused upon changing the culture and practices of political organisations, in order to encourage the inclusion of more women as members and activists. Women's support networks and groups may help overcome the perceived 'male dominated' nature of politics, as well as the maintenance of well-resourced women's sections and offices.

6.14 Studies also suggest that women have more limited time for political activity due to their dual roles of caring for children and elderly dependents, and their involvement in the paid workforce. In order to overcome this problem, some party branches, trade unions and other community organisations have introduced crèches and childcare, or have varied the timing and location of meetings.

6.15 Dutch political parties, for example, have formulated positive action plans designed to facilitate the participation of women members at branch level. Party meetings are set at suitable times and locations, and childcare facilities are provided. Some Dutch parties have also offered special membership fees for women without independent incomes.⁹²

6.16 A commitment by UK political parties and other mobilising agencies to review their membership and participation strategies may therefore be necessary to ensure that there are no barriers to women's participation.

Targeting and communication strategies

6.17 It can be difficult to identify women who may be interested in participating in politics. To ensure that publicity materials and notification of meetings reach these target groups some organisations have targeted sectors where women predominate, such as in part-time work, in the caring professions and lower down the political hierarchy, as well as through women's networks and websites. The purpose of this has been to target women who are already active in public life but may not consider politics to be relevant to them.

6.18 Because women are more interested in local rather than national politics, using local campaigns may motivate women to become more involved generally. Also, the sponsoring of get-the-vote-out campaigns prior to each election, targeted specifically at women and younger voters, could be effective in making elections more relevant to these groups and in turn may encourage their participation. Any campaigns of this sort however should be sensitive to differences in the political interest and efficacy of young men and women.

6.19 Strategies adopted by some organisations to raise awareness of elections and encourage participation more generally have included the use of magazine-style format publications and the highlighting of issues that may be of particular interest to women.

Electoral modernisation

6.20 Making voting more accessible – for example through the expansion of all-postal voting, the provision of more conveniently

located polling stations, such as those in shopping malls and homes for the elderly – could encourage greater levels of participation, particularly among women.

6.21 In addition, efforts to simplify the registration process could also be useful in raising participation levels generally and in particular among women. In 1995 the Chirac government in France altered voter registration law for young people. Since then young people have no longer been required to register to vote on reaching the age of 18 and people are able to vote upon presentation of their identity cards. While there is no systematic evidence on the effect of this change, it is thought to have enfranchised more young women than young men.

6.22 Similarly, in the USA the 1993 National Voter Registration Act made voter registration easier. This legislation was predominantly aimed at encouraging participation among the 'poor and less educated', women being a disproportionate section of both. Research on the effects of changes to voter registration requirements in the USA shows that women, especially younger and older women, are among the groups most advantaged by this legislation.

Research priorities

6.23 Further research expanding the approaches contained in this study, would be a valuable contribution to the current evidence-base on the relationship between gender and political participation. Existing research focuses on the relationship between sex and participation, however we know far less about the relationship between gender and political participation.

Such analysis entails close attention to sub-groups where differences among women and men may be as important as any found between women and men. Moreover, similarities in aggregate data on women and men may conceal sex differences in sub-groups that cancel each other out and therefore create a false impression of similarity.

6.24 This research has also begun to explore the reasons for the link between women in office and women's mobilisation as citizens. This topic promises to be a very fruitful avenue for future research, for example through surveys and focus groups monitoring public perceptions of elected representatives.

6.25 Future research in this area would ideally involve survey sample sizes large enough to permit gender analysis and to enable racial, ethnic and youth sub-group analysis. One of the most effective techniques involves surveys employing very large scale (10,000+) random samples of the population. An initial research wave designed to identify activists, followed by in-depth survey interviews with the random sub-sample of activists could be employed. Other valuable techniques include extended multi-wave panel surveys and also targeted research among demonstrators engaged in protest events.

6.26 More multi-method observational, time-budget 'diary' and quasi-experimental research in this area could also be beneficial. This would allow the examination of what people do, rather than what they say they do. Existing research relies heavily upon reported activity, which is

often systematically exaggerated due to social biases, or on claims about 'potential' activity. Experimental research techniques and the use of concrete examples embedded within surveys are some of the most powerful methods available to develop more reliable indicators of political behaviour.

6.27 Also, existing research on political participation is concentrated on voting behaviour and the presence, and increasingly the activities, of representatives. Future research into activists at intermediate levels of participation, including within parties, voluntary organisations and non-government organisations, would be a valuable contribution to the evidence base in this area.

6.28 In addition, The Electoral Commission's research has indicated that registration levels may differ by age, class, race and sex. Further research is needed that provides reliable information about patterns of voter registration. Further research is also needed to provide information on women's patterns of community activity and its connection to mainstream political activity. Lastly, further experimental and focus group studies are needed to evaluate the effect of publicity campaigns by various mobilising agencies, such as those designed to raise turnout.

Notes

- 1 Charles Edward Merriam. 1924. *Non-Voting: Causes and Methods of Control*. Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press; Harold Foote Gosnell. 1930. *Why Europe Votes*. Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press; Herbert Tingsten. 1937. *Political Behavior: Studies in Election Statistics*. Reprinted Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press (1963); Kristi Andersen. 1996. *After Suffrage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 2 Maurice Duverger. 1955. *The Political Role of Women*. Paris: UNESCO.
- 3 Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Jae-on Kim. 1978. *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 4 Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase. 1979. *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage. See also Alan Marsh. 1990. *Political Action in Europe and the USA*. London: Macmillan.
- 5 Geraint Parry, George Moyser and Neil Day. 1992. *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.145-151.
- 6 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- 7 For details see Joni Lovenduski. 2004. *Feminising Politics*. Oxford: Polity Press.
- 8 Carol Christy. 1987. *Sex Differences in Political Participation: Processes of Change in Fourteen Nations*. New York: Praeger; Margaret Conway, Gertrude A. Steuernagel and David Ahern. 1997. *Women and Political Participation*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- 9 Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) 2000. 'Sex differences in voting turnout'. M. Margaret Conway, Gertrude A. Steuernagel and David W. Ahern. 1997. *Women and Political Participation*. CQ Press. P.79.
- 10 For a summary of this literature and the comparative evidence, see Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press. For a discussion of the activism gap in the US see Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Cambridge, NA: Harvard University Press.
- 11 See, for example, The Electoral Commission. 2003. *Attitudes to Voting and the Political Process in 2003*. London: The Electoral Commission.
- 12 Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2004. *Citizens and Politics: Democracy and Participation in Twenty-First Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2003. 'Citizenship and civic engagement.' *Political Studies* 51 (3): 443-468.
- 13 It should be noted that the typology used by the Citizen Audit has some overlap to the one employed in this study, although using different theoretical concepts. The Audit approach focuses upon the type of act rather than its broader political objective. Hence, 'individual' acts in the Audit are classified here as 'cause-oriented' and 'collective acts' in the Audit are classified here as 'campaign-oriented' acts.
- 14 For example, the Citizen Audit reports that in Britain, 29% of women and 27% of men had taken part in an individual act (such as boycotting

a product), while 4% of women and 6% of men had taken part in a collective act (such as joining a party). These gender differences were modest in size but statistically significant at the .05 level, without any prior controls. For more information see Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2004. *Citizens and Politics: Democracy and Participation in Twenty-First Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Tables 3.5 and 3.18. See also Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2003. 'Citizenship and civic engagement.' *Political Studies* 51 (3): 443-468.

15 Keith T. Poole and L. Harmon Zeigler. 1985. *Women, Public Opinion, and Politics: The Changing Political Attitudes of American Women*. New York: Longman; Robert Shapiro and Harpreet Mahajan. 1986. 'Gender Differences in Policy Preferences.' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 50:42-61; L. Jarvis et al. 2000. *Women's Social Attitudes: 1983 to 1998*. London: Cabinet Office.

16 Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Jae-on Kim. 1978. *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* New York: Cambridge University Press.

17 See, for example, the conceptualisations offered in Pippa Norris. 2003. *Democratic Phoenix*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2004. *Citizens and Politics: Democracy and Participation in Twenty-First Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

18 'Costs' in this report refers to the investment of money, time or other resources on the part of the individual, necessary to participate in a certain political activity.

19 Since the dimensions are theoretically defined and constructed, based on our understanding of the role of different forms of participation in representative democracy, the study did not use factor analysis to generate the classification or measurement.

20 For a discussion of patterns of political interest, see Jan Willem van Deth. 2000. 'Political interest and apathy: the decline of a gender gap?' *Acta Politica* 35(2): 247-274.

21 See, for example, Michael X. Delli-Carpini and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; Pippa Norris. 2000. *A Virtuous Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 10.

22 See in particular Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen. 2001. 'Party membership in twenty European democracies 1980-2000.' *Party Politics*. 7(1): 7-22; Susan Scarrow. 2001. 'Parties without Members?' In *Parties without Partisans*. Eds. Russell J. Dalton and Martin Wattenberg. New York: Oxford University Press.

23 Seminal works on this subject are: Robert D. Putnam. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Robert D. Putnam. 1996. 'The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.' *The American Prospect*, 24; Robert D. Putnam. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. NY: Simon and Schuster. More recent comparative research is presented in: Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam. Eds. 2000. *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Robert D. Putnam.

Ed. 2002. *Democracies in Flux*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

24 Robert D. Putnam is a Professor of Public Policy at Harvard University and has written extensively on the topic of civic engagement.

25 See Pippa Norris. 2002. 'Women's power at the ballot box.' In *Voter Turnout Since 1945*. International IDEA: Stockholm; Pippa Norris. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. NY: Cambridge University Press; Peter Hall. 2000. 'Social Capital in Britain'. In *The Dynamics of Social Capital*. Ed. Robert D. Putnam. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

26 C.A. Cassel. 1999. 'Voluntary associations, churches, and social participation theories of turnout.' *Social Science Quarterly*. 80(3): 504-517; B. Radcliff and P. Davis. 2000. 'Labor organisation and electoral participation in industrial democracies.' *American Journal of Political Science*. 44(1): 132-141.

27 Such separation may be rather arbitrary. An important debate turns on the argument that biological sex differences are not also socially constructed. For a discussion of the implications of this debate for political science, see Joni Lovenduski. 1998. 'Gendering research in political science.' *Annual Review of Political Science*. 1:333-56.

28 These results are confirmed in a larger survey of demonstrators. See Pippa Norris, Stefaan Walgrave and Peter Van Aelst. 2004. 'Who Demonstrates? Anti-state Rebels, Conventional Participants, or Everyone?' *Comparative Politics* (forthcoming). Similar findings are established in

Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2004. *Citizens and Politics: Democracy and Participation in Twenty-First Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

29 Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 1992. *Labour's Grass Roots*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris. 1993. *Gender and Party Politics*. Thousand Oaks, Sage; R. Ward. 2002. 'Invisible women: The political roles of unionist and loyalist women in contemporary Northern Ireland.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 55 (1): 167+; Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 2004. *Citizens and Politics: Democracy and Participation in Twenty-First Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

30 Measures about sex differences in voluntary associations are heavily dependent upon the type of organisations under comparison in each survey. See Vivien Lowndes. 2004. 'Getting on or getting by.' *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. Forthcoming.

31 For broader confirmation of these patterns see Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

32 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

33 Elina Haavio-Mannila et al. 1985. Eds. *Unfinished Democracy: Women in Nordic Politics*. Oxford: Pergamon Press; Lauri Karvonen and Per Selle. 1995. *Women in Nordic Politics*. Aldershot: Dartmouth; Christina Bergqvist. et al. 1999. *Equal Democracies?*

Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

34 Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2004. *Sacred and Secular.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

35 The Electoral Commission and Hansard Society. 2004. *An Audit of Political Engagement.* London. Available at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk. MORI interviewed 1976 adults aged 18+ across the UK between 11 and 17 December 2003. Questions related to respondent's knowledge, interest and participation in politics, as well as their sense of satisfaction and efficacy in relation aspects of the political process.

36 Unfortunately the type of hypothetical questions used in the BES ('might you ever demonstrate, discuss politics, or join a consumer boycott?') often prove to be poor predictors of real behaviour. These items often prompt answers that are regarded as socially acceptable, or just tap a more general orientation towards the political system, such as feelings of civic duty or tolerance of protest politics. For a fuller discussion of this point see Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase. 1979. *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies.* Beverley Hills, CA: Sage; Christopher A. Rootes. 1981. 'On the future of protest politics in Western democracies: A critique of Barnes, Kaase et al., Political Action.' *European Journal of Political Research* 9: 421-432.

37 Pippa Norris. 1999. 'A gender-generation gap?' In *Critical Elections: British Parties and Voters in Long-term Perspective.* Eds. Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris. London: Sage.

38 Kevin Swaddle and Anthony Heath. 1989. 'Official and reported turnout in the British general election of 1987.' *British Journal of Political Science* 19(4): 537-551.

39 ICM post-election survey. See The Electoral Commission. 2002. *Scotland Votes? Public Attitudes Towards Scottish Parliament Elections.*

40 NOP post-election survey in Wales in May 2003. See also The Electoral Commission. 2002. *Wales Votes? Public Attitudes Towards Assembly Elections.*

41 MORI Social Research Institute for The Electoral Commission. 2003. *Attitudes to Voting and the Political Process in 2003.* London: The Electoral Commission. P.18.

42 MORI interviewed a representative sample of approximately 200 adults aged 18+ in 29 of the 59 authorities which were piloting new voting arrangements at the May 2003 elections. See The Electoral Commission. 2003. *Public Opinion and the 2003 Electoral Pilot Schemes.* London: The Electoral Commission.

43 Telephone interviews were conducted between 15 and 18 September 2003 with 505 respondents aged 18-24 across Britain (for more information see www.populuslimited.com).

44 Alternatively, a survey of 914 11-18 year olds conducted by MORI on behalf of the The Nestlé Family Monitor in 2003 found that boys were less inclined to vote than girls. Of the boys surveyed, 10% said that there were certain that they would not vote if there were a general election tomorrow, compared with 4% of girls. *Young People's Attitudes Towards Politics: The Nestle Family Monitor.* Volume 16, July 2003.

45 Firstly an ordinary least squares regression model was developed with the Political Activism Index as the dependent variable. The model in Table 14 (Appendix 2) entered the most common structural, cultural and agency variables often thought to predict activism. Demographic factors are entered first (gender, age and ethnicity). Then social-economic variables (education, income, class, work status, marital and family status and religiosity) are entered as the standard variables shaping the socialisation process during the formative years of childhood and adolescence. Cultural attitudes are then entered into the model before agency factors. Due to the nature of the evidence, the impact of the institutional context is evaluated separately later in this report, requiring different analytical procedures. The most important factors explaining political activism are judged by the strength of the standardised beta coefficients and their statistical significance.

46 Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. P.359.

47 Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

48 Kay L. Schlozman, Nancy Burns and Sidney Verba. 1994. 'Gender and Pathways to Participation: The Role of Resources.' *Journal of Politics*. 56: 963-990; Gill Steel. 2003. 'Class and Gender in British General Elections.' Paper prepared for the presentation at the Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting. Chicago.

49 At the conventional .05 significance level.

50 See Mark N. Franklin. 2004. *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

51 See discussions in W. M. Mason and S. E. Fienberg. 1985. *Cohort Analysis in Social Research*. New York: Springer-Verlag; D. F. Alwin and J. A. Krosnick. 1991. 'Aging, cohorts, and the stability of social-political orientations over the life-span.' *American Journal of Sociology*. 97: 169-195.

52 See, for example, The Electoral Commission. 2003. *Attitudes to Voting and the Political Process in 2003*. London: The Electoral Commission. See also The Electoral Commission. 2003. *Scotland Votes 2003*. London: The Electoral Commission.

53 R. L. Miller, R. Wilford and F. Donoghue. 1999. 'Personal dynamics as political participation.' *Political Research Quarterly* 52 (2): 269-292.

54 Pippa Norris. Ed. *Critical Citizens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

55 Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam. Eds. 2000. *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

56 For a more detailed discussion of political knowledge by gender see Pippa Norris. 1999. *A Virtuous Circle*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 10. Pippa Norris, John Curtice David Sanders, Margaret Scanmell and Holli Semetko. 1999. *On Message*. London: Sage: Table 7.3. For a recent study based on the 'civic' approach see Elizabeth Frazer and Kenneth MacDonald. 2003. 'Sex differences in political

knowledge.' *Political Studies*. 51:67-83. For a discussion about concepts and measures of knowledge see Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter. 1996. *What Americans Know about Politics and Why it Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

57 Similarly, patterns of a knowledge gap among women and men on civic items are reported by Frazer and MacDonald, by Norris et al. (1999) and in the Political Engagement Poll conducted by MORI for The Electoral Commission and the Hansard Society in December 2003. See *An Audit of Political Engagement*. London: The Electoral Commission.

58 Steven J. Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilisation, Participation and Democracy in America*. NY: Macmillan; Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris. 1993. *Gender and Party Politics*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

59 Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen. 1993. *Mobilisation, Participation and Democracy in America*. NY: Macmillan.

60 Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Cambridge, NA: Harvard University Press.

61 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp.101-126.

62 Pippa Norris. 2000. *A Virtuous Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

63 Gwen Moore. 1990. 'Structural determinants of men's and women's personal networks.' *American Sociological Review* 55: 726-35.

64 Kay L. Schlozman, Nancy Burns and Sidney Verba. 1999. "What happened at work today?" A multistage model of gender, employment, and political participation.' *Journal of Politics* 61 (1): 29-53.

65 Nancy Burns, Kay Schlozman and Sidney Verba. 2001. *The Private Roots of Public Action*. Cambridge, NA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 13.

66 ($R^2 = .36$)

67 Pippa Norris. 2004. *Electoral Engineering*. NY: Cambridge University Press; Mark N. Franklin. 2004. *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

68 MORI interviewed a representative sample of approximately 200 adults aged 18+ in 29 of the 59 authorities which were piloting new voting arrangements at the May 2003 elections. A total of 6,185 interviews were conducted. Quotas were set by age, gender and work status with c.100 voters and 100 non-voters interviewed in each authority. Data are weighted by age, sex, working status to the known population profile and by turnout on 1 May 2003. Aggregate data are also weighted by the population size of each pilot authority. Fieldwork took place between 2 -12 May, 2003.

69 Pippa Norris. 2003. 'Will new technology boost turnout? Evaluating experiments in e-voting v. all-postal voting facilities in UK local

elections.' Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 2003, Philadelphia. An edited version of this paper is forthcoming in International IDEA. *Voter Turnout Since 1945*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

70 Joni Lovenduski. 2001. 'Women and Politics: Minority Representation or Critical Mass?' *Parliamentary Affairs*. 54(1): 179-194; T. Keswick, R. Pockley and A. Guillaume. 1999. *Conservative Women*. London: Centre for Policy Studies.

71 Estimate provided by the Fawcett Society, www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

72 Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd and Jeremy Richardson. 1994. *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Table 3.5 p.50.

73 www.conservatives.com

74 www.conservativewomen.co.uk

75 These estimates are derived from the Labour Party official website: www.labour.org.uk/labourwomen. The figures of the proportion of women members confirm earlier estimates where women were found to be 39% of Labour party members: Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley. 1992. *Labour's Grassroots*. Oxford: Clarendon. Table 3.5 p39.

76 Pippa Norris. 2001. 'Breaking the Barriers: British Labour Party Quotas for Women'. In *Has Liberalism Failed Women? Assuring Equal Representation in Europe and the United States*. Eds. Jyette Klausen and Charles S. Maier. NY: Palgrave. Pp.89-110.

77 The Labour party will use a different set of selection procedures in Scotland because of a constituency boundary review and the subsequent decrease in parliamentary seats.

78 Labour Women's Organisation, www.labour.org.uk/labourwomen/

79 Estimate provided by the Fawcett Society, www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

80 Women Liberal Democrats, www.womenlibdems.org.uk

81 The Fawcett Society, www.fawcettsociety.org.uk

82 Equal Citizen website, www.equalcitizen.org.uk

83 Equal Opportunities Commission, www.eoc.org.uk

84 The Women's National Commission, www.thewnc.org.uk

85 The UK Youth Parliament, www.ukyp.org.uk

86 The Transport and General Worker's Union, www.tgwu.org.uk

87 For a further discussion see Pippa Norris. Ed. 1998. *Women, Media and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

88 For further discussion in relation to the 1997 general election, see M. Stephenson. 1998. *The Glass Trapdoor: Women, Politics and the Media During the 1997 General Election*. London: Fawcett.

89 This claim is supported by analysis of the 2001 British Election Study, which indicates that, when asked about the most important problem facing the country, women were more likely to prioritise the issue of the NHS and educational standards. By contrast, men were more likely to prioritise the issue of relations with the European Union, the euro and the economy.

90 For details see Pippa Norris. 2003. *Electoral Engineering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 8; International IDEA. *Global Database of Quotas for Women*. See www.idea.int/quota

91 International IDEA Global Database of Quotas for Women. See www.idea.int/quota

92 Hella van de Velde. 1994. *Vrouwen van de Partij, De integratie van vrouwen in politieke partijen in Nederland, 1919-1990*. Leiden: DSWO-Press.

Appendix 1

Data sources, measures and scales

European Social Survey 2002

The report draws primarily from the 19 nation European Social Survey 2002 (ESS-19). This is a new academically driven study designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations.¹ This survey includes a wide range of items designed to monitor citizen involvement, including a battery of a dozen items that can be used to create a summary political activism scale, as well as multiple indicators of political interest, efficacy, trust, party allegiances, subjective well-being, family and friendship bonds, and a rich array of detailed social-demographic data including household composition, ethnicity, type of area and occupational details.

This survey provides recent evidence and facilitates comparison between the UK and similar advanced industrialised European societies and democratic states, allowing us to see whether patterns of political activism in the UK are typical or relatively exceptional. The size of the total pooled sample (with over 36,000 cases) also allows us to monitor gender differences among smaller European populations, such as immigrants. The survey currently includes four nations in Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark), six nations in Northern Europe (the UK, Germany, Luxembourg, Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland), five from Mediterranean Europe (Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Israel), and four post-Communist societies in Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia). All these countries were classified by Freedom House in 2001-2 as fully

'free' in their political rights and civil liberties, using the Gastil Index. Most can also be categorised as affluent post-industrial economies (with an average per capita GDP in 2002 ranging from \$16,000 in Greece to \$30,000 in Norway), although all of the post-Communist states except Slovenia fall below this level.

The Electoral Commission surveys

This report also draws upon available data from MORI, ICM and NOP polls conducted for The Electoral Commission. This includes in particular the Political Engagement Poll, conducted by MORI on behalf of the Commission and the Hansard Society, that informed the research report published in March 2004 entitled *An Audit of Political Engagement*. This used face-to-face interviews among 1,976 adults aged 18+ across the UK in December 2003.

British Election Study 1964–2001

For comparison, and for the analysis of long-term trends in voting turnout, the sources above were supplemented by the series of British Election Study (BES) surveys, conducted in every British general election from 1964–2001.² Unfortunately the BES includes few questions consistently monitoring activism across the whole series, except for items measuring reported voting turnout, political interest and whether people cared about the outcome of elections, thus limiting the value of this resource for the study of activism.³

Electoral participation is measured in the European Social Survey 2002 by reported voting in the last national election. The gender patterns found in the ESS closely matched levels of

reported voting in the 2001 BES, increasing confidence in the reliability of these independent estimates. The BES also monitored validated vote, with reported participation at the ballot box checked against the official records.

The main measures used in the European election study 2002 are given below and a summary of the research findings from each of the studies described above, and from the 2001 Citizen Audit, is shown in Figure 11 on p78.

Variable	Item	Coding
Political activism	<p>'There are different ways of trying to improve things in [country] or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Contacted a politician, government or local government official b) Worked in a political party or action group c) Worked in another organisation or association d) Worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker e) Signed a petition f) Taken part in a lawful public demonstration g) Boycotted certain products h) Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons i) Donated money to a political organisation or group j) Participated in illegal protest activities.' 	Yes (1), No (0).
Civic-oriented membership		
Participation in voluntary organisations	<p>'For each of the voluntary organisations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and if so, which?'</p> <p>'A sports club; an organisation for cultural or hobby activities; a trade union; a business, professional or farmers' organisation; a consumer or automobile organisation; an organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities or immigrants, an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights; a religious or church organisation; a political party; an organisation for science, education, or teachers and parents; a social club for the young, the retired/elderly, women or friendly societies; any other voluntary organisations?'</p>	[Code all that apply within this organisation.] None (0), member (1), participated (2), donated money (2), did voluntary work (3).

Variable	Item	Coding
	Social trust	
Careful	'Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? Please tell me on a score of 0 to 10, where 0 means you can't be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted.'	10-pt scale
Fair	'Using this card, do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?'	10-pt scale
Helpful	'Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves? Please use this card.'	10-pt scale
Social trust scale	Summary scale of careful + fair + helpful	30-pt scale
	Informal social networks	
Informal social ties	'Using this card, how often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?'	Never (1) to Every day (7)

Notes

1 For more details of the *European Social Survey*, including the questionnaire and methodology, see <http://naticent02.uuhost.uk.uu.net/index.htm>. Data for an initial 19 countries, along with comprehensive documentation, is accessible at ess.nsd.uib.no. It is anticipated that subsequent releases will include data from four other countries which participated in round I, namely Austria, France, Belgium and Turkey. The survey is funded via the European Commission's 5th Framework Program, with supplementary funds from the European Science Foundation which also sponsored the development of the study over a number of years. We are most grateful to the European Commission and the ESF for their support for this project and to the work of the ESS Central Coordinating Team, led by Roger Jowell, for making this survey data available.

2 Further details of the fieldwork and research design are available at www.essex.ac.uk/bes. The specific items, measuring prospective activism (the propensity to do these things) rather than retrospective activism (actual experience of these acts), are all listed in Table 4.

3 For the problems of consistency and continuity in the BES series see Appendix D and E in Ivor Crewe, Anthony Fox and Neil Day. 1995. *The British Electorate, 1963-1992*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The only continuous time-series throughout the whole series (1964-2001) concerns reported voting participation and interest in politics (although the latter item has been revised on a number of occasions); the series concerning caring about the election result was dropped in 2001.

Figure 11: Summary of major findings by survey

Type of activism	The European Social Survey 2002	An Audit of Political Engagement 2003	The British Election Study 2001	The Citizen Audit 2001
	UK sample 2,051	British sample 1,976	British sample 3,219	British sample 3,135
Voting-oriented	None	None	Mixed	None
Campaign-oriented	Men +	None (i)	Men +	Men +
Cause-oriented	Women +	Mixed	None	Women +
Civic-oriented	Men +	Mixed	Men +	Men +

Note: This summarises the presence of significant differences, where found, among women and men's levels of political activism for the four major dimensions covered in this report. 'Women +' denotes that women were found to be significantly more engaged. 'Men +' denotes that men were found to be significantly more engaged. 'None' means that across most indicators no significant gender differences were evident. 'Mixed' indicates different patterns within particular indicators in each category. (i) Indicates the direction of the gap was similar but the results were not statistically significant in this survey.

Source: ESS 2002, An audit of Political Engagement, BES 2001. For details of the Citizen Audit see Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley. 2004. *Citizens and Politics: Democracy and Participation in Twenty-First Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix 2 Tables

Table 14: Model of political activism in the UK

	B	s.e.	Beta	Sig.
Gender (men=1, women=0)	-.353	.174	-.06	*
Social structure				
Age (years)	.028	.006	.17	***
Ethnic minority (belong 1, else 0)	-.002	.307	.01	N/s
Education (6-point scale, low to high)	.403	.070	.19	***
Household income (12-point scale, low to high)	.134	.038	.12	***
Occupational class (6-point scale)	-.063	.062	-.03	N/s
Work status (1=in paid employment, else=0)	.443	.198	.07	*
Work time: Total hours per week in main job + o/t	.008	.005	.04	N/s
Married (1=married, else=0)	.258	.172	.05	N/s
Children living at home (1=yes, 0=no)	.269	.181	.04	N/s
Religiosity (7-point scale of importance)	.266	.165	.04	N/s
Cultural attitudes				
Internal political efficacy (10-point scale)	.316	.045	.22	***
Civic duty scale (60-point scale)	.044	.011	.12	***
Interest in politics (4-point scale)	.334	.115	.10	**
External political efficacy (10-point scale)	.094	.052	.06	N/s
Importance of politics	.047	.043	.04	N/s
Trust in national political institutions (20-point)	.003	.026	-.01	N/s
Social trust (30-point scale)	.003	.017	.01	N/s
Trust in international political institutions (20-point)	.004	.025	.01	N/s
Mobilising agencies				
Social networks , meet with friends etc. (7-point scale)	.222	.056	.11	***
Discuss politics , how often (7-point scale)	.230	.046	.16	***
Exposure to politics in TV news (7-point scale)	-.008	.057	-.01	N/s
Exposure to politics in radio news (7-point scale)	.082	.085	.06	*
Exposure to politics in newspapers (7-point scale)	.133	.086	.03	N/s
Adjusted R ²	.360			
Constant	-4.15			

Note: The models represent the result of ordinary least squares regression analysis where the total Political Activism Index is the dependent variable. The Index counts participation in each form of activity as one and sums the 21-point scale. The figures represent the unstandardised beta coefficient (B), the standard error (s.e.), the standardised beta coefficient (Beta), and the significance (sig.). All variables were checked to be free of problems of multicollinearity tolerance statistics. See Appendix 1 for the items in each scale. Significance: *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s=Not significant. Where found to be significant figures are in bold.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

Table 15: The activism gap in the UK by major social sectors

	Women	Men	Activism gap	Sig.
All	3.57	3.87	-.30	*
Older (+60)	3.49	3.89	-.40	**
Middle-aged (30-59)	3.96	4.18	-.22	N/s
Younger (under 30)	2.49	2.76	-.27	N/s
In paid employment	4.03	4.13	-.10	N/s
Married	4.00	4.33	-.33	*
With children living at home	3.44	4.19	-.75	**
Education: Degree or equivalent	5.49	5.48	+.01	N/s
Education: NVQ4 or equivalent	4.45	4.11	+.34	N/s
Education: A level or equivalent	3.85	4.19	-.34	N/s
Education: GCSE/O/or equivalent	3.11	3.29	-.18	*
Education: no qualifications	2.36	2.50	-.14	N/s
Household income: low	2.45	2.60	-.15	N/s
Household income: medium	3.23	3.47	-.24	*
Household income: high	4.65	4.69	-.04	N/s
Religiosity high (very important)	4.13	4.65	-.52	*
Religiosity low (not very important)	3.16	3.56	-.40	**
Managerial and professional	5.13	5.19	-.06	N/s
Lower managerial	4.33	4.55	-.22	N/s
Other white collar/clerical	2.80	3.41	-.61	N/s
Skilled manual	3.12	2.87	+.25	N/s
Unskilled manual	2.32	2.86	-.54	**
Belong to ethnic minority	3.83	4.61	-.78	N/s
Do not belong to ethnic minority	3.56	3.81	-.25	*
England	3.60	3.90	-.30	**
Wales	3.70	4.37	-.67	N/s
Scotland	3.64	3.69	-.05	N/s
Northern Ireland	2.07	2.48	-.30	N/s

Note: The figures represent the mean score for women and men on the Political Activism Index, the activism gap, and the significance of the gender difference. A positive gap indicates that women are more active than men. A negative gap indicates that women are less active than men. Significance measured by Chi-square *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant. Where found to be significant figures are in bold.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

Table 16: Model of voting turnout in the UK

	B	s.e.	Beta	Sig.
Gender (men=1, women=0)	-.049	.030	-.055	N/s
Social structure				
Age (years)	.006	.001	.03	***
Ethnic minority (belong 1, else 0)	-.045	.053	-.03	N/s
Education (6-point scale, low to high)	.007	.012	.02	N/s
Household income (12-point scale, low to high)	-.015	.007	-.08	*
Occupational class (6-point scale)	-.025	.011	-.08	**
Work status (1=in paid employment, else=0)	.074	.034	.08	*
Work time: Total hours per week in main job + o/t	.002	.001	.06	N/s
Married (1=married, else=0)	.079	.030	.09	**
Children living at home (1=yes, 0=no)	.042	.031	.04	N/s
Religiosity (7-point scale of importance)	-.041	.028	-.05	N/s
Cultural attitudes				
Internal political efficacy (10-point scale)	.008	.008	.04	N/s
Civic duty scale (60-point scale)	.012	.002	.22	***
Interest in politics (4-point scale)	-.049	.023	-.09	*
External political efficacy (10-point scale)	.002	.009	.01	N/s
Importance of politics	.000	.007	-.01	N/s
Trust in national political institutions (20-point)	.004	.005	.04	N/s
Social trust (30-point scale)	-.001	.003	-.01	N/s
Trust in international political institutions (20-point)	-.003	.004	-.02	N/s
Mobilising agencies				
Social networks, meet with friends etc. (7-point scale)	.010	.010	.03	N/s
Discuss politics, how often (7-point scale)	-.005	.008	-.02	N/s
Exposure to politics in TV news (7-point scale)	.012	.010	.04	N/s
Exposure to politics in radio news (7-point scale)	.003	.008	.01	N/s
Exposure to politics in newspapers (7-point scale)	.018	.015	.04	N/s
Adjusted R ²	.204			
Constant	-.062			

Note: The models represent the result of ordinary least squares regression analysis where the total Political Activism Index is the dependent variable. The Index counts participation in each form of activity as one and sums the 21-point scale. The figures represent the unstandardised beta coefficient (B), the standard error (s.e.), the standardised beta coefficient (Beta), and the significance (sig). All variables were checked to be free of problems of multicollinearity by tolerance statistics. See Appendix 1 for the items in each scale. Significance: *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant. Where found to be significant figures are in bold.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

Table 17: The turnout gap in the UK by major social sectors

% Reported voting in the last national elections...	Women	Men	Activism gap	Sig.
All	70	69	+1	N/s
Older (+60)	83	82	+1	N/s
Middle-aged (30-59)	70	70	0	N/s
Younger (under 30)	43	34	+9	N/s
In paid employment	69	67	+2	N/s
Married	78	78	0	N/s
With children living at home	66	70	-4	N/s
Education: Degree or equivalent	76	74	+2	N/s
Education: NVQ4 or equivalent	80	71	+9	N/s
Education: A level or equivalent	75	63	+12	*
Education: GCSE/O/or equivalent	58	62	-4	N/s
Education: no qualifications	70	70	0	N/s
Household income: low	69	69	0	N/s
Household income: medium	64	71	-7	*
Household income: high	74	69	+5	N/s
Religiosity high (very important)	78	77	+1	N/s
Religiosity low (not very important)	63	64	-1	N/s
Managerial and professional	77	78	-1	N/s
Lower managerial	76	75	+1	N/s
Other white collar/clerical	66	55	+11	N/s
Skilled manual	65	59	+6	N/s
Unskilled manual	62	66	-4	N/s
Belong to ethnic minority	57	75	-18	*
Do not belong to ethnic minority	70	68	+2	N/s
England	68	68	0	N/s
Wales	76	77	-1	N/s
Scotland	80	67	+13	*
Northern Ireland	67	65	+2	N/s

Note: The figures represent the mean score for women and men on the Political Activism Index, the activism gap and the significance of the gender difference. A positive gap indicates that women are more active than men. A negative gap indicates that women are less active than men. Significance measured by Chi-square. *** = .001 ** = .01 * = .05, N/s = Not significant. Where found to be significant figures are in bold.

Source: European Social Survey, 2002. UK sample N. 2051.

The Electoral Commission

We are an independent body that was set up by the UK Parliament. We aim to gain public confidence and encourage people to take part in the democratic process within the UK by modernising the electoral process, promoting public awareness of electoral matters, and regulating political parties.

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