

## Elections

- ⚡ The average overall turnout in general elections between 1918 and 2001 was 74%.  
*Source: House of Commons Library Research.*
- ⚡ 59% of those registered voted in the 2001 general election. This was the lowest turnout since the 1918 general election. *Source: House of Commons Library Research.*
- ⚡ Turnout for the Welsh Assembly elections in 2003 was 38% – 8% lower than in 1999.  
*Source: House of Commons Library Research.*
- ⚡ Turnout for the Scottish Parliament elections in 2003 was 49% – 9% lower than in 1999.  
*Source: House of Commons Library Research.*
- ⚡ Turnout for local elections is rarely higher than 45%, but has more commonly been around 30% or lower since the early 1990s. *Source: House of Commons Library Research.*

## Giving people a direct say

- ⚡ The Canadian province of British Columbia recently established a year-long assembly of randomly selected citizens to investigate how their electoral system needed to change. Their recommendations will be put to a province-wide vote in May 2005.
- ⚡ In Porto Alegre in Brazil, large numbers of citizens set the council budget through neighbourhood meetings. The approach is now being used more widely in Brazil and elsewhere.
- ⚡ In America and Europe a number of states and localities are required to hold a referendum if enough people express support in a petition. In some American states, a successful petition can 'recall' a politician leading to elections for the position before the end of their term.
- ⚡ In Anières in Switzerland in January 2003, an e-referendum was held via the internet to decide on the refurbishment of a local building. Turnout was unusually high, at over 65%. The internet and email have been used in other democratic experiments around the world. Some elected representatives use their own websites and email networks to communicate with their constituents, and large internet discussion forums have had an impact on policy-making in some countries.

## People least likely to vote

- ⚡ During the general election of 2001, only 39% of 18-24 year olds voted compared to 70% of those aged 65+. *Source: Electoral Commission, 2004.*
- ⚡ Turnout among lower income groups was 54.5% in the 2001 general election, compared to 64% among those on higher incomes. *Source: Mori, 2001.*
- ⚡ Turnout among members of black and minority ethnic communities was 47% in the 2001 general election compared to the national average of 59%. *Source: Mori, 2001.*
- ⚡ In the UK Parliament, the number of black and minority ethnic MPs was 13 in 2001 – this is less than 2% of the total number of MPs. *Source: Commission on Racial Equality, 2002.*

Find further information at  
**[www.powerinquiry.org](http://www.powerinquiry.org)**



## Fact sheet

The following facts are presented to help illustrate POWER's seven questions. More detailed briefings are available at [www.powerinquiry.org](http://www.powerinquiry.org) or can be requested by calling 0845 345 5307.

## Political parties

- ⚡ Membership of the political parties has declined considerably since the early 1960s. Membership of the three main parties in 2001 was less than 25% of its 1964 level. *Source: Democracy Under Blair, Beetham et al.*
- ⚡ The percentage of the electorate who said they identified 'very strongly' with a political party fell from 45% in 1964 to 13% in 2001. *Source: British Election Study.*
- ⚡ In 1991, 33% of people felt that the government would put the interests of the country before that of their party; by 2000 this had more than halved to just 16%. *Source: British Social Attitudes.*
- ⚡ In 1997, only 4% of members of the Labour party were under 26, 15% were working class and 5% were of black and minority ethnic backgrounds. *Source: New Labour's Grass Roots, Seyd and Whiteley.*
- ⚡ In 1992, among Conservative party members, only 1% were under 26 or of black and minority ethnic backgrounds, while 25% had incomes under £15,000. *Source: True Blues, Whiteley, Seyd, Richardson.*
- ⚡ In a worldwide study of established democracies, political parties came out as the least trusted institutions – 22% expressed confidence in them compared to 44% for the civil service and 77% for the police. *Source: World Values Survey, 1995-1998.*

## The power of government

- ⚡ In 2004, 9 out of 10 people stated that voters should have a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount' of influence but only one third felt that they have this kind of influence. *Source: State of the Nation, JRRT Ltd.*
- ⚡ In 2004, 8 out of 10 people believed that the media and corporations have a 'great deal' or a 'fair amount' of influence over government policies. Only 1 in 3 people believed they should have this influence. *Source: State of the Nation, JRRT Ltd.*
- ⚡ Since the 1980s there has been a significant rise in bodies appointed by the government to run and advise on public services. In 2000 these agencies included, amongst others: 297 executive bodies, 111 regional bodies and 5,338 local bodies. *Source: Mapping the Quango State, fifth report of the Select Committee on Public Administration, 2001.*

## Media

- ⚡ Reporting on parliamentary affairs by the 5 main terrestrial channels has decreased by 28% during the period 1998-2004. *Source: Ofcom.*
- ⚡ Television and radio news is governed by regulations which require broadcasters to distinguish opinions from facts, avoid promotion of their own political views, and maintain an overall sense of balance. Newspapers and magazines are regulated by their own codes of practice which require journalists to distinguish between opinion and fact and to ensure accuracy. Unlike broadcasters, press journalists are free to promote their own political views.