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## Democracy and voting: Key organisations and individuals

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# Democracy and voting: Key organisations and individuals

## Summary

This briefing is intended as a brief overview of organisations and individuals who are influencing thinking on democracy and voting in the UK. The briefing outlines some key themes in elections research, highlighting organisations which are involved in these areas. It then goes on to provide details of the main campaign groups, think tanks, research institutes, government departments and individuals involved in UK elections research. The briefing also includes a selection of recent publications on democracy and voting from some of the organisations listed, which are available on our database.

## Themes in elections research

### Accountability and transparency

Research in this area is concerned with the accountability and transparency of public policy, parliamentary activities, democratic processes and public spend.

Organisations include:

- > those aimed at exploring the veracity of political statements, party manifestos and media stories, such as Full Fact;
- > those involved in accountability research, such as the Centre for Public Scrutiny, Transparency International and the Taxpayer's Alliance; and
- > the freeing and opening of public information, such as the Campaign for Freedom of Information and the Open Knowledge Foundation.

### Representative groups

This strand of research explores issues around under-representation in British politics and democracy for particular groups, including scope, underlying factors and solutions.

Organisations include:

- > those representing racial or ethnic groups, such as Operation Black Vote and the Online Centre for Ethnicity in Politics;
- > those representing women, including the Fawcett Society and the Centre for Women & Democracy; and
- > those representing young people, such as the British Youth Council, Votes at 16 and the UK Youth Parliament.

### Voter participation and engagement

This area of research explores the reasons for low levels of voter participation and apathy towards politics within society and particular demographic groups (overlaps with Representative Groups).

Organisations include:

- > those studying general patterns in voting behaviour, such as the British Election Study;
- > those such as the Hansard Society who aim to educate and inform citizens about democracy and politics, particularly under-represented groups; and
- > those representing particular groups with lower levels of participation and engagement as identified above.

### Cross-cutting themes

The themes above obviously overlap in many instances. For example, voter engagement and participation is often researched in relation to specific, typically under-represented, demographic groups. There are also organisations whose research and mandate covers all aspects of elections research in relation to one another, and many organisations cover multiple themes. These are shown in the centre of the Venn diagram below. These organisations should be a first point of reference in exploring over-arching trends in elections research.

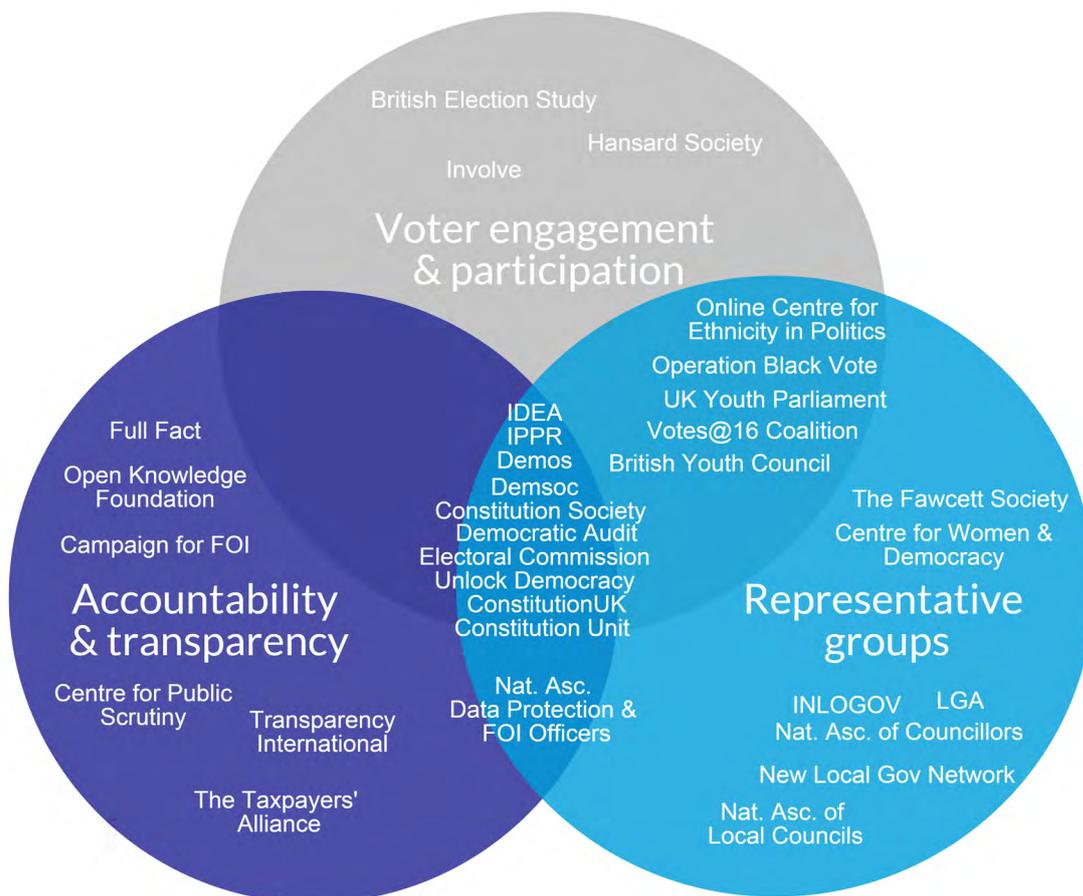


Figure: UK elections research organisations by theme

## Full list of organisations by type

The following is a list of some of the most influential organisations involved in electoral research.

### Campaign groups

Links to some of the key campaign groups influencing democracy and voting are presented below. These groups are often created in reaction to particular events or policies, or to represent groups who are under represented in politics. This means some caution should be applied in terms of the neutrality of their research.

- > [The Campaign for Freedom of Information](#)
- > [Citizenship Foundation](#)
- > [Electoral Reform Society](#)
- > [Operation Black Vote](#)
- > [The TaxPayers' Alliance](#)
- > [Transparency International](#)
- > [Unlock Democracy](#)
- > [Votes at 16](#)

### Government departments and committees

#### All-Party Parliamentary Group on the British Constitution

The Constitution Society provides organisational and secretarial support for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the British Constitution, chaired by Lord Norton of Louth. The Group works to broaden legislators' knowledge base and improve the quality of debate on proposals for constitutional change and the way in which they are introduced.

#### All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights

The Parliamentary Group on Human Rights is a long-standing group chaired by Ann Clwyd MP. The group works with UK parliamentarians on a cross-party basis to raise awareness of serious international human rights violations, especially in relation to civil and political rights, and to lobby decision-makers for redress and reform in countries where such violations occur.

#### All-Party Parliamentary Group on Local Democracy

This group promotes the virtues of existing forms of first tier local authorities, informs policy making and initiatives affecting first tier local authorities and stimulates debate on models of community governance.

#### Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. It regulates party and election finance and sets standards for well-run elections. It works to support a healthy democracy, in which elections and referendums are based on principles of trust, participation, and no undue influence.

#### Joint Committee on Human Rights

The Joint Committee on Human Rights' formal remit is to consider: matters relating to human rights in the United Kingdom (but excluding consideration of individual cases); proposals for remedial orders, draft remedial orders and remedial orders made under the Human Rights Act 1998; in respect of draft remedial orders and remedial orders, whether the special attention of the House should be drawn to them on any of the grounds specified in HC Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)).

### **Political and Constitutional Reform Committee**

The House of Commons agreed in June 2010 that this committee should be established to consider political and constitutional reform, scrutinising the work of the Deputy Prime Minister in this area. The committee currently consists of ten Members of Parliament, drawn from across the political parties, both those in government and the official opposition.

### **UK Youth Parliament**

Run by young people, the UK Youth Parliament provides opportunities for 11-18 year-olds to use their voice in creative ways to bring about social change.



### **Research institutes and think tanks**

Research institutes are usually extensions of academic departments in universities utilising the expertise, objectivity and quality of academic peer-reviewed research. Think tanks offer similarly robust levels of academic rigour and quality in their research but some are more value-based than others, particularly when associated with a particular political party.

### **British Election Study**

The British Election Study (BES) has been conducted at every General Election since 1964. Its main goal is to describe and to explain why people vote, why they vote as they do, what affects the election outcome, and what are the consequences of elections for democracy in Britain. The next British Election Study will be hosted by a consortium led by The University of Manchester in collaboration with the Universities of Oxford and Nottingham.

### **Centre for Public Scrutiny**

The Centre for Public Scrutiny promotes public scrutiny, accountability, transparency and involvement for the public benefit, through: advancing education in the principles and practice of public scrutiny and accountability, maintaining a national centre of expertise and promoting national debate and networks; and promoting the development of and improving the practice of public scrutiny and accountability within government and public services, including promoting standards of professional practice.

### **Centre for Women & Democracy**

The Centre for Women & Democracy believes that women are under-represented at all levels of public life and public decision-making and works to address this issue.

### **Constitution Unit (University College London)**

The Constitution Unit conducts independent research into constitutional change and its consequences. It aims to inform policy-makers engaged in constitutional reform both in the United Kingdom and around the world.

### **Constitution Society**

Founded in 2009, The Constitution Society (ConSoc) is an independent, non-party educational foundation. It promotes public understanding of the British Constitution and works to encourage informed debate between legislators, academics and the public about proposals for constitutional change.

## **ConstitutionUK (LSE)**

Constitution UK is a project that invites members of the public to participate in, offer advice on and eventually to draft a new UK constitution through crowdsourcing. It is led by LSE's Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) and Department of Law, together with the LSE Public Policy Group (PPG) and Democratic Audit. It builds on the IPA's successful and ongoing Imagining One Nation Britain programme, on the Department of Law's academic knowledge and the specialist excellence of PPG and Democratic Audit.

## **The Democratic Audit**

Democratic Audit is an independent research organisation, established as a not-for-profit company, and based at the London School of Economics. Its main objective is to advance education, and to undertake and promote research into, the quality and effectiveness of UK democracy.

## **Democratic Society**

Demsoc (The Democratic Society) is a membership organisation promoting participation, networked democracy, and active citizenship.

## **Demos**

Demos is a leading cross-party think-tank in the UK. It explores tensions within modern politics, especially in areas in which there is a significant gap between the perceptions of voters and political leaders.

## **Full Fact**

Full Fact is an independent factchecking organisation. It provides free tools, information and advice to allow people to check claims made by politicians and the media.

## **Hansard Society**

The Hansard Society believes that the health of representative democracy rests on the foundation of a strong Parliament and an informed and engaged citizenry.

## **INLOGOV (University of Birmingham)**

The Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) is the leading UK centre for the study of local public service management, policy and governance. With over 40 years of experience working within local government and the public sector, the Institute of Local Government Studies creates the latest thinking for public servants.

## **Involve**

Involve is a think tank and charity specialising in public participation. Its mission is to inspire, innovate and embed effective citizen engagement, so that members of the public are able to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

## **Institute for Public Policy Research**

IPPR is a key progressive thinktank. Its purpose is to conduct and publish research into, and promote public education in, the economic, social and political sciences, and in science and technology, including the effect of moral, social, political and scientific factors on public policy and on the living standards of all sections of the community.

## **New Local Government Network**

The NLGN Network is an group of around 50 organisations from the public and private sector with a common interest in innovation and creativity. The Network aims to create a safe space to meet as peers and have forward-thinking conversations

### Online Centre for Ethnicity in Politics

Ethnic Politics (EP) is a one-stop data shop for all aspects of ethnic minorities' inclusion and engagement in British politics. It is funded by the ESRC.

### Open Knowledge Foundation

Open Knowledge is a worldwide non-profit network of people who are passionate about openness, using advocacy, technology and training to unlock information and enable people to work with it to create and share knowledge.

### Oxford Human Rights Hub (University of Oxford)

The Oxford Human Rights Hub (OxHRH) aims to bring together academics, practitioners, and policy-makers from across the globe to advance the understanding and protection of human rights and equality. It strives to facilitate a better understanding of human rights principles, to develop new approaches to policy, and to influence the development of human rights law and practice through the vigorous exchange of ideas and resources.

### Social Action and Research Foundation

The Social Action & Research Foundation is an action-research think tank. It aims to transform the social, cultural, economic and political landscape through supporting communities that are living in poverty to share their experiences, knowledge and expertise to develop evidence in order to influence and shape a more equitable society.

### Key publications

Here is a selection of recent key publications on democracy and voting from research institutes and think tanks which are available on our database, with indicative abstracts which summarise the content of the reports.

[Should the UK lower the voting age to 16?](#) (2014) Democratic Audit.

Presents a selection of posts from the Democratic Audit blog about the ongoing debate on the UK's voting age, featuring views both in favour and against lowering the age to 16.

[Engaging young voters with enhanced election information](#) (2014) Democratic Audit.

Looks at trends in voter turnout and registration, particularly among young people. Highlights the importance of giving voters information and feedback, and the consequences of poor information.

[Audit of political engagement 11: the 2014 report](#) (2014) Hansard Society.

Presents the 2014 report of the Audit of Political Engagement, a review of the UK democratic system which measures public opinion across the UK with regard to politics and political processes.

[The political inclusion of young citizens](#) (2014) IPPR.

Looks at trends in turnout at elections and considers the extent to which rising political inequality affects the policy outcomes generated by government and the political system more widely.

[Introducing generation citizen](#) (2014) Demos.

Recommends giving more young people a platform and voice on media and social issues, as well as ensuring that young people are registering to vote and understand the importance of doing so.



## Representative organisations

### Association of Electoral Administrators

The Association was founded in 1987 and has since made rapid progress in establishing itself as a professional body to represent the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. The Association now has over 1600 members.

### British Youth Council

The British Youth Council helps young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. It supports young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.

### Local Government Association

The LGA provides a national voice for local government. It works with councils to support, promote and improve local government. It is a politically-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. It aims to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils in order to deliver local solutions to national problems.

### National Association of Councillors

NALC is the a national body specialising in the work of local councils. It protects and advances the rights and interests of member councils in the government, main political opposition parties, Parliament, in media, private, charity and other parts of the public sector.

### National Association of Data Protection Officers

NADPO was formed in 1993 to act as a network for the sharing of best practice and ideas between professionals working in the public and private sectors who are responsible for data protection and information handling.

### National Association of Local Councils

The National Association of Local Councils is the national membership body for local (parish and town) councils. It works with County Associations of Local Councils to support, promote and improve these councils.

## Influential experts

Here are some brief biographies of a selection of academics and senior figures from think tanks and other organisations working on elections research. Links to Twitter accounts have been provided where available.

### [Professor Tim Bale](#), Queen Mary University of London

Tim works on all aspects of party politics in Britain, Europe and sometimes further afield. As well as his ongoing interest in the Conservatives and centre-right parties more generally, current projects include the following: the relationship between parties and interest groups (particularly left-wing parties and trade unions); the party politics of immigration; and the British Labour Party after Blair. He is Chair in Politics at Queen Mary, University of London. © Queen Mary University of London 2014.

### [Jonathan Birdwell](#), Demos

Jonathan is the Head of the Citizenship and Political Participation programme at Demos. His research expertise lies in civic engagement, populism and extremism, and alcohol and drugs policy. © Demos 2014.

### **Simon Burrall, Involve and Democratic Audit**

Simon has long and extensive experience in the fields of democratic reform, governance, public participation, stakeholder engagement, and accountability and transparency. He has worked at the national level in Africa, Asia and Europe, as well as on related issues of global governance and democracy. Simon is the Director of Involve and Chair of the Democratic Audit Board of Trustees. Previous roles include being Executive Director of the One World Trust where he initiated the influential Global Accountability Index. © Involve 2014.

### **Carolyn Downs, LGA**

Carolyn Downs is Chief Executive of the LGA. Before this she was chief executive of the Legal Services Commission where her role was to drive performance and secure a stronger financial future. She was also previously deputy permanent secretary and director general of corporate performance at the Ministry of Justice. She was responsible for all corporate services, including finance, estates, personnel, risk management, business planning and communications. From 2003 to 2009, Carolyn was Chief Executive of Shropshire County Council, where she was responsible for a budget of £500 million a year and a staff of 12,000. Carolyn had worked for the same council as director of environment and community services since 1999 and before this, worked for a range of other councils including Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, Stevenage Borough Council, and the London Borough of Haringey. © LGA 2014.



### **Professor Patrick Dunleavy, Democratic Audit and LSE**

Professor Patrick Dunleavy is an expert in the UK budget, electoral reform, the British constitution, public policy, public choice and party competition. He is the Co-Director of the Democratic Audit and a Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at the London School of Economics. His research lies in six principle areas: the development of public sector IT systems; rational choice theories of bureaucracy and related aspects of public administration and management; the design of large-scale electoral systems (including designing systems used by the London Assembly and London Mayoral elections); electoral analysis and party politics; public choice theory and modern political science; and modern political theory relating to liberal democratic governance. © LSE 2014.

### **Ruth Fox, Hansard Society**

Ruth Fox is responsible for the strategic direction and performance of the Hansard Society and leads its research programme. She has appeared before more than a dozen parliamentary select committees and inquiries, and regularly contributes to a wide range of current affairs programmes on radio and television, commentating on parliamentary process and political reform. In 2012 she served as adviser to the independent Commission on Political and Democratic Reform in Gibraltar, and in 2013 as an independent member of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee Review Group. Prior to joining the Society in 2008 she was head of research and communications for a Labour MP and Minister and ran his general election campaigns in 2001 and 2005 in a key marginal constituency. In 2004 she worked for Senator John Kerry's presidential campaign in the battleground state of Florida. © Hansard Society 2014.

### **Professor Robert Hazell, UCL and The Constitution Unit**

Professor Robert Hazell is Professor of British Politics and Government & Director of the Constitution Unit. His research interests cover the whole of the constitutional reform agenda. He has written widely on devolution in Scotland, Wales and the English regions; freedom of information; parliamentary reform and Lords reform; a British bill of rights; referendums; electoral reform; the Crown and royal prerogative; constitutional watchdogs; and the process of constitutional reform. He is a great believer in collaborative research and likes to build research teams around projects, and to write edited books rather than monographs. © 1999-2009 UCL.

### Professor Anthony Heath, Online Centre for Ethnicity in Politics and University of Manchester

Anthony Heath holds Professorships at the Institute for Social Change, Manchester University and the Department of Sociology, Oxford University and is a Fellow of the British Academy. His research interests cover social stratification, ethnicity, electoral behaviour and national identity. He has published many books and over 100 scientific papers. His most recent book, *Unequal Chances: Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets* (edited, with Sin Yi Cheung) was published by OUP in 2007. He has recently completed work with a team of European colleagues on a comparative study of ethnic minority education and started a new project on a module on attitudes to migration in the European Social Survey. He is currently working on a book for OUP on ethnic minority political integration (with David Sanders, Steve Fisher, Maria Sobolewska and Gemma Rosenblatt), based on EMBES. He frequently authors reports for the government and offers evidence to parliamentary committees. © The Online Centre for Ethnicity in Politics 2014.

### Dr Jonathan Hopkin, Democratic Audit and LSE

Dr Jonathan Hopkin's research brings together electoral and party politics with the political economy of redistribution and inequality. He has a particular interest in how political institutions affect the income distribution, which has informed research on political parties, clientelism and corruption in Southern Europe, and broader comparative work on the institutional determinants of inequality. He is an Associate Professor of Comparative Politics at LSE and Co-Director of the Democratic Audit. © LSE 2014.

### Will Moy, Full Fact

Will Moy is the Director of Full Fact. He has been a guest on TV and radio, from rolling news and the Today Programme through to discussion shows on Radio 5 Live and LBC. He and the team are often asked to assist the media with factual and statistical issues both on and off the record. He is regularly asked to speak at events ranging from the Government Statistical Service annual conference to the Perugia International Festival of Journalism as well as at internal events for organisations interested in Full Fact's work. He also contributes to the National Statistician's Review Panel, assisting official statisticians to improve the communication of their work. Before Full Fact, Will worked for the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety and then as a researcher in the House of Lords for the non-party affiliated peer Lord Low of Dalston. He previously worked as an IT consultant. © Copyright 2010 - 2014 Full Fact.

### Nick Pearce, IPPR

Nick Pearce is Director of IPPR and a leading voice in progressive policy research and writing, in Britain and further afield. Nick rejoined IPPR in September 2010 after two years as head of the Policy Unit at No 10. An author and regular commentator on public policy in broadcast and print media, Nick writes on a wide range of issues, from social justice, public service reform and identity politics to the changing nature of political leaderships. He is a co-editor of *Juncture*, IPPR's journal of political ideas. © IPPR 2014.



### Professor Meg Russell, Constitution Unit and UCL

Professor of British and Comparative Politics and Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit. She is responsible for most of the Constitution Unit's research on parliament. She has a particular interest in the British parliament, and she is known as one of the primary academic experts on the House of Lords. But she has also researched the House of Commons, and Commons reform, as well as the devolved legislatures in the UK and other legislatures overseas. In comparative politics terms she has a particularly strong interest in bicameralism (i.e. two chamber parliaments). She has also written on political party organisation and women's representation in politics. © 1999-2009 UCL.

### **Dr Maria Sobolewska, Online Centre for Ethnicity in Politics and University of Manchester**

Dr. Maria Sobolewska is a Lecturer in Politics at the University of Manchester. She works on the political integration and representation of ethnic minorities in Britain, public perceptions of integration, and the production and framing of public opinion of British Muslims. She has been part of the team conducting the Ethnic Minority British Election Survey in 2010 and is currently co-authoring a book based on this study. © The Online Centre for Ethnicity in Politics 2014.

### **Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, University of Liverpool**

Dr. Stuart Wilks-Heeg is a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Liverpool and served as Executive Director of the Democratic Audit between 2009 and 2012. He is recognised as one of the leading experts on the UK democratic process, particular with regard to the issues associated with the mechanics of the electoral process. His research is mainly concerned with the democratic process in the UK. He has particular expertise in issues concerned with the mechanics of elections, including electoral administration, electoral registration, electoral fraud and integrity, boundary changes, and election finance. Stuart also has wider research interests in other aspects of UK democracy, including the funding of political parties, electoral systems, voting behaviour and election outcomes, and the functioning of local government. ©University of Liverpool 2014.

## **Influential policymakers and politicians**

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPG) are informal cross-party groups devoted to particular themes and interests. They have no official standing within Parliament but are a useful way into finding MPs with particular passions and interests as they join and setup groups based on their interests. Membership changes frequently and so the details below are only accurate at the time of publication. For an up-to-date list please consult the Register of All-Party Groups at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/memi01.htm>.

### **Graham Allen MP, Political and Constitutional Reform Committee**

Graham Allen is a Labour MP and Chair of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee.

### **Christopher Chope MP, All-Party Parliamentary Group on the British Constitution**

Christopher Chope is a Conservative MP and the key contact for the APPG on the British Constitution.

### **Ann Clwyd MP, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights**

Ann Clwyd is a Labour MP and is Chair of the APPG on Human Rights.

### **Rory Stewart MP, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Local Democracy**

Rory Stewart is a Conservative MP and Chair of the APPG on Local Democracy

### **Peter Wardle, UK Electoral Commission**

Peter Wardle has been the Chief Executive of the UK Electoral Commission since December 2004. He spent the earlier part of his career as a civil servant, including spells as a Minister's private secretary. He worked on the first major outsourcing of government IT services, negotiated international tax treaties as a "tax diplomat" and was a management board member of the Inland Revenue (Director, Strategy and Planning) and the Cabinet Office (Director, Corporate Services). Peter sits on the group audit committee of a major housing association and previously served as a non-executive director of his local hospital board. © Electoral Commission 2014.

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