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# Survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life 2010

September 2011

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Prepared for the Committee on Standards in Public Life by Dr Maria Grasso and the Committee's Research Advisory Board with the assistance of Jonathan Rose, using data collected by TNS-BMRB through the TNS CAPI OmniBus survey.

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CONFIDENTIAL



# FOREWORD

**Sir Christopher Kelly**  
**Chairman of the Committee**

I am delighted to publish this report on the Committee's fourth biennial national survey into public attitudes towards conduct in public life. The data was collected by TNS-BMRB Social Research between 29 December 2010 and 4 January 2011.

This fourth survey offers the opportunity to assess public attitudes, expectations and perceptions about the behaviour of those in public life against baseline data established in previous surveys in 2004, 2006 and 2008. The 2010 survey also included a set of questions on the funding of political parties to assist the Committee in its current inquiry into party finance.

The results of the survey make stark reading. Previous surveys have shown that public confidence in those holding public office has been on a long term decline since 2004. The 2010 results suggest that the rate of decline may have increased. Worryingly, between 2008 and 2010, the proportion thinking that most MPs are dedicated to doing a good job for the public fell by twenty percentage points (from 46 to 26 per cent); the proportion thinking that most MPs are competent at their jobs fell by ten percentage points (from 36 to 26 per cent).

On a more positive note, there has been some increase in the public's perception that professionals (other than MPs) 'tell the truth' and there is evidence to suggest that there is still a significant degree of public confidence in many British practices and institutions.

The answers to the new questions about the funding of political parties show the extent to which the public are concerned about large donations, whether from activist groups, large companies, trade unions, or individual donors. It would be a mistake for anyone to think this issue had gone away. People generally assume that substantial donations are made for self-interested reasons and a third of respondents believe that politicians 'very often' do special favours for people and organisations who give large donations.

A great deal of change has taken place across the UK's ethical landscape over the last 16 years, placing greater emphasis on transparency and accountability. There are further pointers in this report about changes in behaviour that might start to address negative public perceptions and increase confidence in the political system. Ultimately, it is the duty of every public servant to ensure that their behaviour is of the highest standard and that they consider how their own and their organisations' behaviour matches up to the expectations placed upon them by the public. What is clear is that the public has sophisticated and comprehensive views about the standards those in positions of public trust should be meeting, that it matters to them that those standards are met, and that they believe that on many fronts those standards are not consistently met.

I would like to thank the members of the Committee's Research Advisory Board (Professor Cees van der Eijk, Dr Jean Martin, and the chairman, Dr Mark Philp), Dr Maria Grasso from the University of Sheffield, and Jonathan Rose from the University of Nottingham for their hard work in producing this report. I should also like to thank all those members of the public who gave their time, face-to-face in their own homes to discuss and complete the comprehensive questionnaire.

**Christopher Kelly**

# INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a national survey of public attitudes towards the standards of conduct of public office holders in the United Kingdom (UK). The survey was commissioned by the Committee on Standards in Public Life as the fourth part of a long-term study to track public opinion about standards in public life. The survey was carried out in 2010/11 by TNS-BMRB Social Research.

## i. Background and objectives

The Committee on Standards in Public Life was set up in October 1994 by the then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Sir John Major. Its original terms of reference were:

*'To examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities, and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements which might be required to ensure the highest standards in public life.'*

The terms of reference cover a range of categories of public office holder, encompassing elected and appointed public office holders at national and local level.

On 12 November 1997 the terms of reference were extended by the then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Tony Blair:

*'To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements'.*

In its First Report in 1995, the Committee drew up the Seven Principles of Public Life, as a statement of the values 'inherent in the ethic of public service'. These Principles have been central to the Committee's work and each of its subsequent reports, which have covered most of the major groups of public office holders. The Seven Principles, which are intended to apply to all public offices, are: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty

and Leadership. The scope of each Principle, as it relates to the conduct of public office holders, is defined by a short explanatory statement. The Seven Principles have been widely adopted by public institutions, and are broadly in line with the most common ethical principles adopted in the 29 OECD countries.

In 2001, it was decided that the Committee should undertake research in order to explore whether the Principles reflected the general public's priorities in relation to the conduct of public office holders, and to gauge public opinion on how well public office holders measured up to the Principles. A benchmark survey was carried out in 2003/04 across Great Britain by BMRB, and a second survey in 2005/06 across the UK was conducted by Ipsos MORI, and BMRB ran a third survey in 2007/08. This is the fourth survey in this series and is designed as a follow-up to the three previous surveys.

The aims and objectives of the fourth survey remain unchanged from the previous three surveys, these being to track:

- ① What the public sees as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour on the part of elected and appointed holders of public office.
- ② How far the public believes that the behaviour of holders of public office is, for the most part, acceptable or unacceptable.
- ③ How far the public believes that holders of public office are effectively held responsible and accountable for their conduct.

In addition, a series of questions on issues surrounding political party funding were introduced in the 2010 survey in order to assist the Committee in its inquiry into the subject.

## ii. Methodology

The questionnaire used for the survey was largely based on the previous questionnaires to ensure that relevant comparisons could be

made. The detailed analysis of the findings of previous reports demonstrated that there were a number of elements of the stand-alone questionnaire that produced little or no variation in the two year cycles of the surveys. As a result, it was agreed that it would be possible to run a smaller set of questions as a 'tracking' survey to follow up on the key items, with the prospect of returning to a fuller range of questions (or a sub-set of that fuller range of questions) at a later stage. The significantly shorter set of questions made a stand-alone survey inappropriately costly and it was agreed to use the TNS CAPI OmniBus survey run by TNS-BMRB as a vehicle for the questions.

One consequence of choosing the omnibus survey was that the opportunity for over-sampling in the areas of the devolved administrations (as undertaken in 2006 for Northern Ireland and Scotland, and in 2008 for all three devolved administrations) was removed. This means that there is no systematic comparative discussion of data from these areas, although where the data is adequate and demonstrates significant variations this is noted in the report. The use of a set of core 'tracking' questions, and the use of an omnibus survey to carry the questions, substantially reduces the cost of the survey. However, both the previous surveys and the Omnibus Survey are designed to produce nationally representative samples which should ensure valid comparisons over time.

The survey was conducted face-to-face in respondents' own homes using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) between 29 December 2010 and 4 January 2011. Interviews were carried out by fully trained interviewers from TNS-BMRB's national face-to-face field force. 1,637 respondents were interviewed in England; 170 in Scotland and 93 in Wales.

Full technical details are provided in the Technical Appendix.

### iii. Structure of the report

Following this introduction and an executive summary, the report is divided into the following chapters:

- 1 Overall Perceptions of Standards in Public Life
- 2 Trust in Public Office Holders to Tell the Truth
- 3 Expectations and Perceptions of Westminster MPs

- 4 MPs and Voting in Parliament
- 5 Public Office Holders and Accountability
- 6 Political Party Funding
- 7 An Overview

### iv. Reporting conventions

The commentary in the following chapters is supported by summary tables and figures. Chapters 1-5 cover questions that have been asked in all three of the previous surveys. Chapter 6 covers questions that were included only in the 2010 survey. The findings reported in these chapters are based on the sample of adults in Great Britain (GB) except where noted otherwise. The GB base is used so that the findings of the 2010 survey can be compared with those from both the 2006 and 2008 surveys (which included booster samples for the devolved administrations) and the 2004 survey which was conducted in GB only. Readers should note that some questions in these chapters ask respondents for their views about issues concerning standards in public life with respect to the UK as a whole. This gives rise to a number of tables or figures in which judgements about the UK are being reported on the basis of the GB sample.

Differences reported in the commentary between subgroups within the sample are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level. This means that we can be 95% certain that the difference between the results for the subgroups being compared is a true difference, rather than one that has occurred by chance.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary provides an overview of the key insights from the 2010 survey on public attitudes to standards in public life. The survey was conducted about eighteen months after the height of the MPs' expenses scandal and nearly eight months after the General Election of 2010 and the creation of the current coalition Government. The survey took place before the height of the phone-hacking scandal in the early summer of 2011.

The analysis conducted on the data, in relation to previous surveys, allows us to chart changes over time and to see which demographic factors and political orientation (such as age, social grade and party-affiliation) are related to particular attitudes. Although the analysis cannot definitively identify causes for changes in attitudes, it is reasonable to consider the changing patterns of response against the background of the political events prior to the survey and to hypothesise about possible connections. The bullet points below identify core findings, drawing attention to especially significant patterns of relationships between attitudes and demographic factors. The subsequent passages of commentary suggest possible explanations for changes between the surveys. A fuller discussion can be found in the report's Overview.

## 1 Key Changes in Overall Perceptions of Standards in Public Life

- Previous surveys showed that most people in GB have a neutral or guardedly positive view of the overall standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK. In the 2010 survey people rated standards of conduct less positively. In the previous three surveys at least four in ten people rated standards as high but by 2010 only about three in ten people rate them as such. In comparison to the last (2008) survey, the number of people rating standards as high dropped by almost 10 per cent and the proportion rating standards as low rose by about 4 per cent. Similarly, the proportion thinking that

standards had deteriorated increased, and the proportion of individuals who thought that standards had improved fell.

- When respondents were asked how they thought standards today compared to those of a few years ago almost half said they thought that standards of conduct amongst public office holders had deteriorated; only about two in ten respondents thought they had improved.
- Overall, supporters of the three main parties, people in higher occupational categories, and ethnic minority respondents have more positive views. Men and young people are also more positive about changes in standards relative to, respectively, women and older people.

The evidence collected shows a long-term decline in public confidence in those holding public office between 2004 and 2010. On many issues, the 2010 results show a steeper decline than in the previous period. It might have been anticipated that there would be a growth in positive attitudes following the General Election and the change in government. In fact, the results suggests that there was no 'bounce' in public confidence following the election, or that any such bounce had collapsed by the time of the survey, or that there was a bounce, but that does not appear as a positive change but serves to mask an even steeper decline in confidence than is reported here.

It is not possible to identify with certainty the cause of people's declining confidence, but it is possible that the expenses scandal has had an impact on people's views and appear to have fed into and exacerbated the long-run trend of increasingly negative evaluations of politicians.

## 2 Trust in Public Office Holders to Tell the Truth

- As in previous surveys it is clear that some professional groups continue to command

public confidence. Front line professionals are rated highly in terms of telling the truth; those working in the media are less trusted, although there is considerable variation between types of media and types of newspaper. Politicians, especially those with whom the public has less direct contact, are rated poorly. In this survey, against the background of the expenses scandal, levels of trust in local MPs fell, and confidence in the media increased across the board. Over the four surveys confidence in tabloid journalists and TV news journalists has increased by 9 per cent.

- As with the assessment of standards, statistical analysis shows that levels of trust in MPs in general and Government ministers tends to be higher among younger voters, those in higher occupational categories, and those from ethnic minorities. Supporters of the parties in government (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) were more trusting of politicians than supporters of Labour and Other parties.

In relation to questions about 'trusting people to tell the truth', the evidence is that confidence has declined in local MPs, but not in other professional groups, and there has been some increase in confidence in the media. This suggests both that people do have confidence in areas of public service manned by professionals, but that these views do not affect, and are not (as yet) affected by, their attitudes to politicians. At the same time, it may be that the rise in confidence in journalists is linked to their perceived role in exposing the expenses scandal. How robust that confidence will prove in the face of the details of the phone-hacking scandal remains to be seen.

### 3 Expectations and Perceptions of Westminster MPs

- People's views as to how national politicians should behave and the priority that people attach to specific criteria of propriety have remained similar since the survey was first conducted in 2004, suggesting a broad and consistent consensus among members of the public on what general standards of conduct are appropriate in politics. The public places particular emphasis on basic honesty, financial prudence and selfless dedication to public service. However, there are also some fluctuations in people's ranking of the importance of these standards compared to previous years:

- the proportion of individuals ranking not taking bribes in the top three behaviours fell sharply in 2010 (from 42 to 25 per cent);
- being in touch with what the public thinks is more likely to be rated as important;
- not using power for personal gain, and being competent at their jobs on the other hand remained relatively consistently evaluated in comparison to previous surveys, with about 25-35 per cent of respondents ranking these amongst the three most important criteria of appropriate conduct.

Overall, the proportion who state a preference for the criteria of propriety that rated most highly in 2004 has declined, whereas the proportion selecting those rated least highly has increased (in each case between 2008-2010).

- As in previous surveys, the 2010 survey suggests a mismatch between how people think national politicians should behave and what they think actually happens in practice. MPs fall short of what people expect of them on all of the dimensions covered in the survey – with the exception of not taking bribes. The 2008 results suggested the public attached major importance to four key areas of conduct in which MPs are thought to be doing particularly badly.

'telling the truth'  
 'making sure public money is used wisely'  
 'being in touch with what the public thinks is important'  
 'owning up to mistakes'

In 2010, three further areas enter this list:

'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public'  
 'not using power for their own gain'  
 'being competent at job'

- Public satisfaction with the conduct of MPs has declined on every measure except taking bribes since the last survey was conducted. Most worryingly, between 2008 and 2010, the proportion thinking that most MPs are dedicated to doing a good job for the public fell by twenty percentage points (from 46 to only 26 per cent); the proportion thinking that most MPs are competent at their jobs fell by ten percentage points (from 36 to 26 per cent); there was a 14 percentage point drop in the proportion thinking that most MPs are in touch with what the public thinks is important (from 29 to only 15 per

cent); and there were also large drops in the proportion thinking that most MPs set a good example in their private lives (from 36 to 22 per cent), make sure public money is used wisely (from 28 to 18 per cent), that they explain the reasons for their actions and decisions (from 25 to 17 per cent), and that they tell the truth (from 26 to 20 per cent).

In 2010 there was no change in levels of trust in ministers and MPs in general, although some decline in trust in local MPs. However, these more detailed and probing questions about standards of propriety that the public expect MPs to demonstrate do show considerable changes in people's confidence that MPs will conform to these standards.

One possible explanation is that the impact of the MPs' expenses scandal has been considerable, and has exacerbated a trend that earlier surveys identified. Confidence in relation to MPs' conduct has fallen on practically every measure. The results also suggest that concerns with bribery or associated risks of outside influence on political decisions have been overshadowed by concerns with self-serving behaviour on the part of MPs. The increase in the number of areas of concern is most likely a further reflection of decreased public confidence in MPs generally.

#### 4 MPs and Voting in Parliament

- When respondents were asked in 2010 about the kinds of reasons that ought to influence MPs when voting in Parliament, they were slightly less likely to select selfless motives and slightly more likely to accept self-interested motivations relative to previous surveys. In general, however, acting in the public interest remains important. Voting in accordance with what the MP's party election manifesto promised, and therefore honouring a pledge to the electorate, is also widely seen as acceptable. Most people do not want MPs to prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues.
- As in previous surveys, many people seem to reject party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on the decisions that individual MPs take, although these motivations have become more acceptable. The wishes of local party members are seen as a more legitimate influence than the interest of the party at national level. There is little consensus on which single

factor MPs would be most likely to take into account when voting. The most common view, given by a quarter of respondents, is that most MPs would base their decision on what would benefit the country as a whole, which is also the factor most likely to be viewed as a reasonable basis for the decision.

People's views on which factors most influence MPs' decisions appear to have changed to some extent over time. More people believe that MPs base their decisions on what the party's election manifesto promises, and on what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency. On the other hand, fewer people believe that MPs base their decision on what will make their party more popular or what might affect their political career.

These results suggest an increased complexity in terms of expectations of politicians – with a greater acceptance shown towards the influence of parties at both the national and local level than in previous surveys. It is possible that the experience of coalition government may have had an impact on people's views of the legitimacy of manifesto promises and party influence.

#### 5 Public Office Holders and Accountability

- Respondents are evenly split over whether the authorities are committed to upholding standards in public life. Most respondents are confident that the media will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office; fewer have confidence that the authorities would do this, and still fewer had confidence that public office holders will be punished for misconduct. Nonetheless, the levels of confidence in the authorities to uncover and punish wrongdoing are slightly higher than in the 2008 survey.
- In broad terms, confidence in the authorities' and the media's ability to improve standards and uncover wrongdoing is higher among young people, supporters of mainstream parties, and people from the higher occupational grades. People from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely than White-British respondents to feel confident in the authorities' ability and commitment to improving standards and uncover wrongdoing but had less confidence than White-British respondents in the media's ability to uncover wrongdoing.

Given declining levels of trust and confidence in MPs' conduct, the relatively stable, and in some respects improved, evaluation of the role of the authorities in uncovering offences and punishing offences suggests that while people's evaluation of MPs is affected by the expenses scandal, they retain their confidence in the more general institutions which police public standards was not affected. This, together with a good deal of evidence collected in the surveys over time (such as levels of trust in professionals; the consistency with which certain values are supported; and the reasonably high levels of confidence in wrong-doing being uncovered) suggests that the increasingly negative evaluations of politicians remains framed by a less fluctuating confidence in many British institutions and practices.

## 6 Party Funding

- The 2010 survey included a number of questions on the funding of political parties to assist the Committee in its inquiry into party finance. Most respondents believe that this is an important issue and that it is 'never acceptable' for politicians to do special favours in return for contributions. Respondents are most concerned about large donations, whether from activist groups, large companies, trade unions, or individual donors. Moreover, people largely assume that substantial donations are made for self-interested reasons. About a third of respondents believe that politicians 'very often' do special favours for people and organisations who give large donations; about two in ten respondents think that MPs 'very often' decide what to do based on what their political contributors want. About half of respondents believe that MPs' decisions are conditioned by donations, with very few thinking this was never the case.

The picture in relation to party funding is reasonably clear. A clear majority of people see large donations (over £100,000) as a source of major concern, with at most a fifth of the population thinking that they are not a concern. Moreover, most people believe that donations come with expectations of influence or benefit to the donor, and the vast majority of people believe that, in one way or another, donors do get special favours or do influence MPs' decisions.

# 1 OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE

## 1.1 Summary

The previous three surveys in this series have shown that most people in Great Britain have a neutral or guardedly positive view of the overall standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK. People rated standards of conduct less positively in 2010 than in previous years. In 2004-2008 at least four in ten people rated standards as high but by 2010 only about three in ten people rated them as such. Correspondingly, the proportion rating standards as low more than doubled between 2004 and 2010. In addition, 5 per cent of respondents rated standards as 'very low' in 2010 compared to only 1 per cent in 2004.

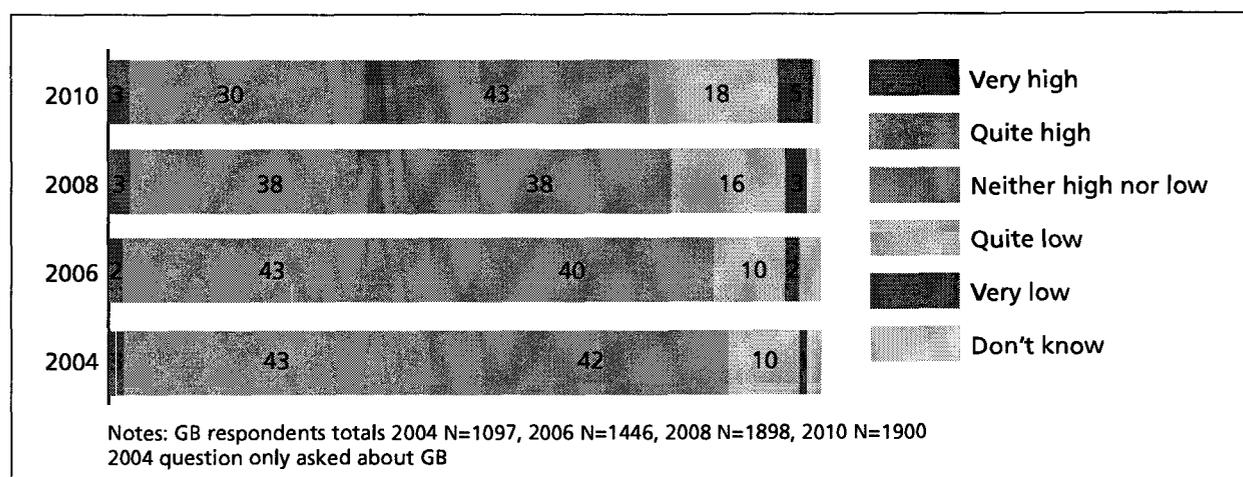
When respondents were asked how they thought standards today compared to those of a few years ago almost half said they thought that standards of conduct amongst public office holders had deteriorated; only about two in ten respondents thought they had improved. Overall, supporters of the three main parties, people in higher occupational categories, and ethnic minority respondents had more positive views. Men and young people were also more positive about changes in standards relative to, respectively, women and older people.

## 1.2 Overall standards of conduct of public office holders

This first chapter analyses citizens' perceptions of the standards of conduct of public office holders in the UK. It also explores how these compare with perceptions in previous years (2004, 2006 and 2008) and how citizens themselves think that standards have changed over time. The results from the 2010 survey showed that 33 per cent of respondents rated standards of conduct as 'quite high' or 'very high'. More people (43%) rated them as 'neither high nor low'. About two in ten people (23%) rated standards as quite low or very low.

Figure 1.2.1 shows that people rated standards of conduct less positively in 2010 than in previous years. In 2004-2008 at least four in ten (44%) people rated standards as 'very high' or 'quite high' but by 2010 only about three in ten (33%) people rated them as such. Correspondingly, the proportion rating standards as 'very' or 'quite low' more than doubled between 2004 and 2010. In addition, 5 per cent of respondents rated standards as 'very low' in 2010 compared to only 1 per cent in 2004. In comparison to the 2008 survey,

Figure 1.2.1 Overall rating of standards of conduct 2004-2010



the number of individuals rating standards as high dropped by almost 10 per cent and the proportion rating standards as low rose by about 4 per cent. Similarly, the proportion of individuals thinking that standards had deteriorated increased, and the proportion of individuals who thought that standards had improved fell.

### 1.3 How perceptions of overall standards vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a significant influence on whether people in Great Britain rate standards of conduct in public life as 'very' or 'quite high'. Party affiliation, occupational grade, and ethnic minority status have a significant effect on whether people think standards are high whereas gender, age, and country of residence do not. **Table 1.3.1** reports the proportion of individuals from various groups rating standards as 'very' or 'quite high'. The proportions of respondents in each group rating standards as 'very' or 'quite high', and the significant difference results from logistic regression analysis are summarised in **Table 1.3.1**. Proportions are reported for

variables only where significant differences were found.

Overall, supporters of all three main parties, people in higher occupational categories, and ethnic minority respondents are more likely to rate standards as high.<sup>2</sup>

- **Party affiliation:** Supporters of all three main parties (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats) are more likely than supporters of Other parties and people with no party affiliation to rate standards as high. Liberal Democrat supporters are also more likely than Labour supporters to rate standards as high.
- **Occupational Grade:** Individuals in managerial and professional occupational groups (A/B) and supervisory and clerical occupations (C1) are more likely than individuals in skilled manual (C2) and unskilled manual occupations or the unemployed (D/E) to rate standards as high.
- **Ethnicity:** Individuals from an ethnic minority background are more likely than people from a White British background to rate standards as high.

**Table 1.3.1** How perceptions of overall standards vary within the Great Britain population: proportions reporting standards as 'very' or 'quite high'

| Party affiliation  | Conservative                  | Labour                      | Liberal Democrat  | Other Parties                       | No party        |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
|                    | 41% *                         | 35% *                       | 46% *             | 25%                                 | 25% (ref. cat.) |
| Occupational grade | A/B managerial & professional | C1 supervisory and clerical | C2 skilled manual | D/E unskilled manual and unemployed |                 |
|                    | 42% *                         | 37% *                       | 27%               | 26% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Ethnicity          | Minority                      | White-British               |                   |                                     |                 |
|                    | 38% *                         | 32% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |

Notes: Each cell reports the proportion of respondents in each group rating standards as 'very high' or 'quite high'. Significance stars (\*) are based on results of logistic regression. For each variable, \* means the difference between this group and reference category group (ref. cat.) is significant at the 95% confidence interval.

1 See Technical Appendix for full details of the variables included in the models.  
 2 Logistic regression only allows to test for differences between the reference category and each of the other variable categories, so, for example, between individuals with No party affiliation and supporters of, in turn, Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Other parties. Where the text refers to (significant) differences between two categories included in the models (e.g. Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters), significance tests were conducted post-regression, by means of the Wald test, which tests for significant differences between the two regression coefficients (β). In practice, this is equivalent to substituting the reference category.

#### 1.4 How standards compare with a few years ago

When respondents are asked how they think standards today compare to those of a few years ago 40 per cent of adults say they think that standards of conduct amongst public office holders have deteriorated; only 18 per cent think they have improved. A sizeable proportion think they have 'stayed the same' (39%).

Figure 1.4.1 shows that the proportion of individuals thinking that standards have deteriorated increased between 2004/2006 and 2008/2010 from about 30 per cent to about 40 per cent. Between 2008 and 2010, the proportion of individuals who think that standards have improved fell by 7 percentage points from 25 per cent to 18 per cent.

#### 1.5 How perceptions of changes in standards vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a significant influence on whether people in GB think that standards have improved. All the variables included in the model (gender, age, party affiliation, occupational grade, minority status and country, the relevance of each being suggested by previous research) have a significant effect on whether people think that standards have improved. The proportions of respondents in each group saying standards improved 'a lot' or 'a little' and the significant difference results from logistic regression analysis are summarised in Table 1.5.1.

Again, supporters of the three main parties, people in higher occupational categories, and ethnic minority respondents have more positive views. Men and young people are also more positive about changes in standards relative to, respectively, women and older people.

- *Gender:* Men are more likely than women to think that standards have improved.
- *Age:* In general, young people are more optimistic than older people in thinking that standards have improved. More specifically, people in the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups are more likely than those over 45 to think standards have improved; people in the 18-24 age group are also more likely than people in both the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups to think standards have improved.

- *Party affiliation:* In general, supporters of parties in government are more optimistic than supporters of Other parties. More specifically, supporters of all three main parties (Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats) are more likely than those with no party affiliation to say that standards have improved. Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters are also more likely than Labour supporters and supporters of Other parties to say standards have improved (but differences between Liberal Democrat and Conservative supporters are not significant).

- *Occupational Grade:* Individuals in managerial and professional occupations (A/B) are more likely than individuals in supervisory and clerical (C1) and unskilled manual occupation or the unemployed occupations (D/E) to think standards have improved.

- *Ethnicity:* Individuals from an ethnic minority background are more likely than those from a White British background to think standards have improved.

Figure 1.4.1 How standards in the UK compare with a few years ago 2004-2010

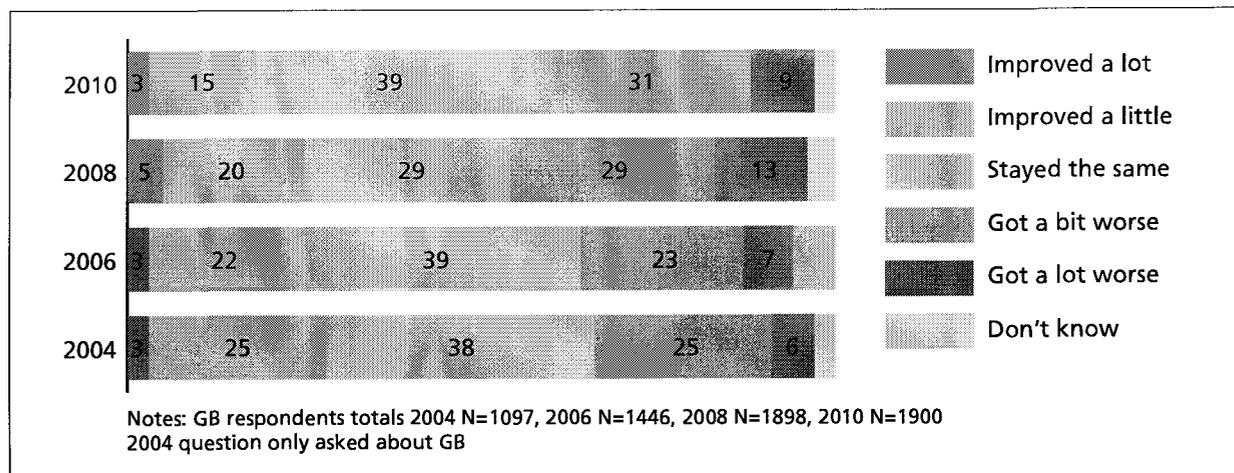


Table 1.5.1 How perceptions of standards vary within the Great Britain population: proportions reporting standards as improving 'a lot' or 'a little'

| Gender             | Male                            | Female                      |                   |                                     |                 |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
|                    | 20% *                           | 15% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |
| Age                | 18-24                           | 25-34                       | 35-44             | 45+                                 |                 |
|                    | 28% *                           | 20% *                       | 16%               | 15% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Party affiliation  | Conservative                    | Labour                      | Liberal Democrat  | Other Parties                       | No party        |
|                    | 22% *                           | 19% *                       | 30% *             | 12%                                 | 12% (ref. cat.) |
| Occupational grade | A/B managerial and professional | C1 supervisory and clerical | C2 skilled manual | D/E unskilled manual and unemployed |                 |
|                    | 21% *                           | 17%                         | 19%               | 14% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Ethnicity          | Minority                        | White-British               |                   |                                     |                 |
|                    | 26% *                           | 16% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |
| Country            | Scotland                        | Wales                       | England           |                                     |                 |
|                    | 21% *                           | 15%                         | 17% (ref. cat.)   |                                     |                 |

Notes: Each cell reports the proportion of respondents in each group saying standards 'improved a lot' or 'improved a little'. Significance stars (\*) are based on results of logistic regression. For each variable, \* means the difference between this group and reference category group (ref. cat.) is significant at the 95% confidence interval. We only report proportions for groups where differences are statistically significant.

## 2 TRUST IN PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS TO TELL THE TRUTH

### 2.1 Summary

As in previous surveys, it is clear that some professional groups continue to command public confidence. Front line professionals are rated highly in terms of telling the truth; those working in the media are less trusted, although there is considerable variation between types of media and types of newspaper. Politicians, especially those with whom the public has less direct contact, are rated poorly. In this survey, against the background of the expenses scandal, levels of trust in local MPs fell, and confidence in media professionals increased across the board. Over the four surveys confidence has increased by 9 per cent in tabloid journalists and TV news journalists. Statistical analysis shows that levels of trust in MPs in general and in government ministers tends to be higher among younger voters, those in higher occupational categories, and those from ethnic minorities. Supporters of the parties in government (in this survey, Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters) were more trusting of politicians than supporters of the opposition (Labour and other parties).

### 2.2 The trust survey items

In the first three surveys respondents were asked to say which of 17 professions they would trust to tell the truth and which they would not. This allowed the analysis to see the broader public's levels of trust in public office holders against the background of their trust in other types of professionals. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they trusted or did not trust various types of professionals to tell the truth. Detailed analysis of the results from 2004, 2006 and 2008, assessed the extent to which expressed trust for different professional groups was correlated. It established that for clusters of professions the responses reflected the same underlying orientation, and that the findings should not be affected by a reduction in the number of professions about whom the trust question was asked. Accordingly, the 2010 survey included the dichotomous trust

items 'trust to tell the truth'/'do not trust to tell the truth' for only nine key professions: (1) Journalists on newspapers like *The Times*, *Telegraph* or *Guardian*; (2) Television news journalists; (3) Journalists on newspapers like the *Sun*, the *Mirror*<sup>3</sup> or the *Daily Star*; (4) Judges; (5) Senior police officers; (6) Westminster MPs in general; (7) Your local Westminster MP; (8) Top civil servants; (9) Government ministers in Westminster.

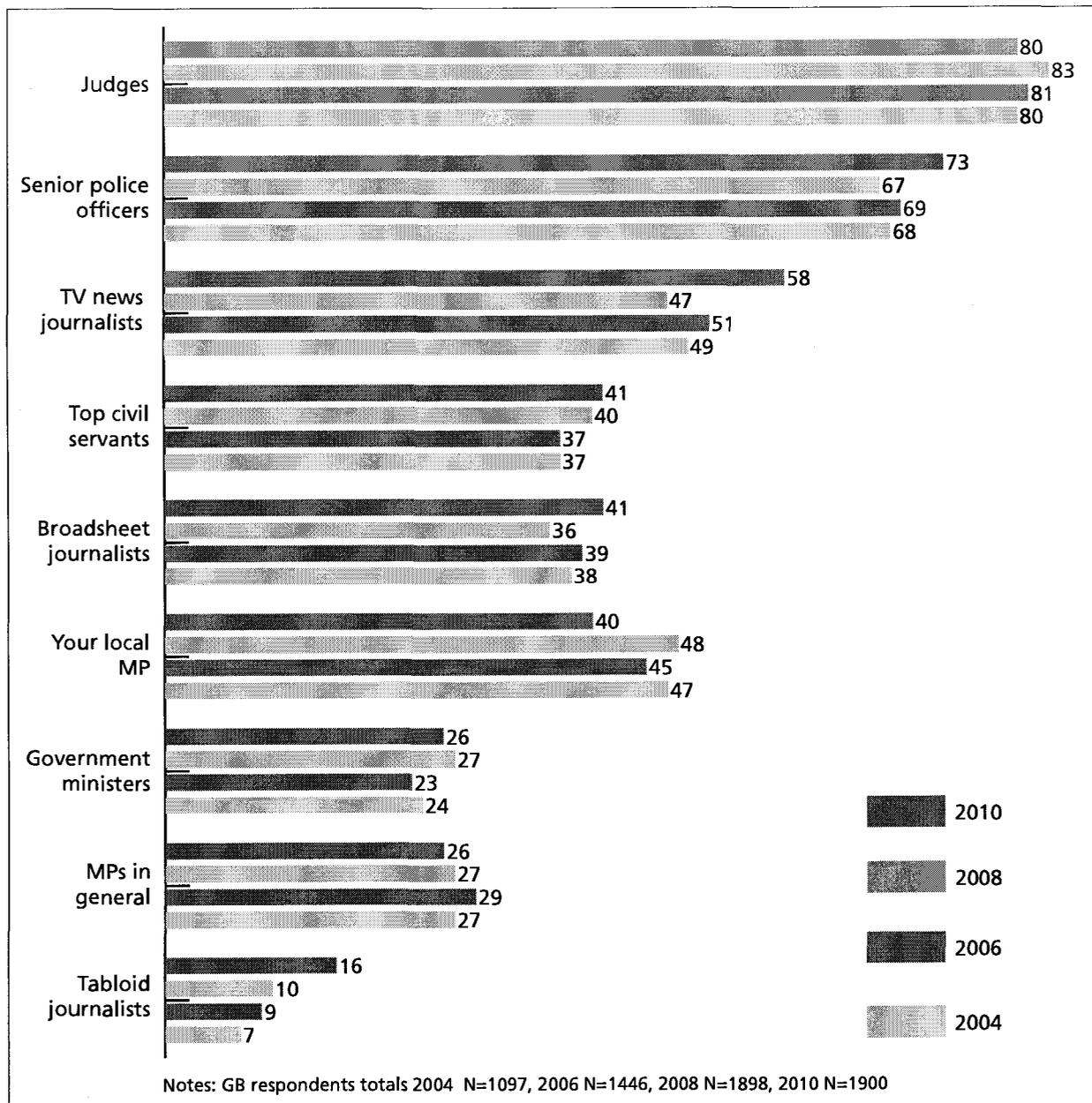
### 2.3 Over time change in trust

Figure 2.3.1 shows the proportion of respondents who say that they would generally trust individuals in nine key professions to tell the truth. The results show that judges and senior police officers are the most trusted professions of the nine analysed. Comparing responses over time shows that trust in journalists and police officers has gone up and trust in MPs has gone down. Trust in judges remains relatively stable; trust in top civil servants has improved slightly. Local MPs (who in 2004 were more trusted – by nearly 10 percentage points – than top civil servants and broadsheet journalists) were, in 2010, marginally less trusted than both groups: only 40 per cent of respondents still said that they trusted their local MP. With the exception of tabloid journalists, Government ministers and MPs in general are the least trusted professionals. Low trust in Government ministers and MPs in general remained stable throughout the period under investigation. At the same time, trust in all three types of journalists rose between 2004 and 2010 (and between 2008 and 2010): respectively, (from 2004) by 9, 3 and 9 per cent for TV news, broadsheet and tabloid journalists.

These are perhaps unsurprising results in the aftermath of the expenses scandal. Journalists seem to have been praised for breaking the news and policemen for enforcing the law whereas local MPs paid a price. However, respondents were no more likely to distrust Government ministers and MPs in general. This

3 In Scotland, the *Mirror* was replaced with the *Record*

Figure 2.3.1 Trust in professions to tell the truth 2004-2010



is perhaps owing to the fact that these groups were already not particularly well respected so that the expenses scandal did not overturn but rather confirmed people's expectations.

**2.4 How distrust in local MPs, MPs in general, and government ministers and perceptions of deteriorating standards vary within the Great Britain population**

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a

significant influence on whether people in Great Britain trusted their local MP, MPs in general, and Government ministers and whether standards had gotten worse, to check if trust in MPs is related to perceptions of changing standards. Age, party affiliation, occupational grade, and minority status had a significant effect on at least one of either the standards variables or the three trust variables. The proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer (see first column of Table 2.4.1 for details) and the significant difference results from logistic regression analysis are summarised in Table 2.4.1 (overleaf). Proportions are reported for variables only where significant differences were found.

Table 2.4.1 How levels of distrust in local MPs, MPs in general, and government ministers, and perceptions of deteriorating standards vary within the Great Britain population: proportions selecting 'do not trust to tell the truth' and selecting options indicating that standards have 'got a bit worse' or 'got a lot worse'

| Age                         | 18-24                           | 25-34                       | 35-44             | 45+                                 |                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Do not trust local MP       | 54%                             | 56%                         | 60%               | 59% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Do not trust MPs in general | 67% *                           | 67% *                       | 73%               | 78% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Do not trust govt ministers | 64% *                           | 65% *                       | 72%               | 78% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Standards are worse         | 32% *                           | 30% *                       | 42%               | 45% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Party affiliation           | Conservative                    | Labour                      | Liberal Democrat  | Other Parties                       | No party        |
| Do not trust local MP       | 47% *                           | 57% *                       | 44% *             | 66%                                 | 66% (ref. cat.) |
| Do not trust MPs in general | 66% *                           | 73%                         | 68% *             | 84% *                               | 77% (ref. cat.) |
| Do not trust govt ministers | 66% *                           | 70% *                       | 70% *             | 86% *                               | 77% (ref. cat.) |
| Standards are worse         | 38% *                           | 41%                         | 31% *             | 47% *                               | 42% (ref. cat.) |
| Occupational grade          | A/B managerial and professional | C1 supervisory and clerical | C2 skilled manual | D/E unskilled manual and unemployed |                 |
| Do not trust local MP       | 51% *                           | 55%                         | 64%               | 62% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Do not trust MPs in general | 68% *                           | 74%                         | 78% *             | 74% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Do not trust govt ministers | 70%                             | 71%                         | 78% *             | 73% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Standards are worse         | 37% *                           | 40% *                       | 40% *             | 45% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Ethnicity                   | Minority                        | White-British               |                   |                                     |                 |
| Do not trust local MP       | 48% *                           | 60% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |
| Do not trust MPs in general | 58% *                           | 76% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |
| Do not trust govt ministers | 54% *                           | 76% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |
| Standards are worse         | 30% *                           | 42% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |

Notes: Each cell reports the proportion of respondents in each group selecting the response 'do not trust to tell the truth' for (1) 'local Westminster MP', (2) 'Westminster MPs in general', and (3) 'government ministers in Westminster' and the proportion of respondents in each group selecting 'got a bit worse' or 'got a lot worse' when asked about changes in standards. Significance stars (\*) are based on results of logistic regression. For each variable, \* means the difference between this group and reference category group (ref. cat.) is significant at the 95% confidence interval.

Younger people, supporters of the three main parties (and more so of those in government), people in higher occupational categories and minority respondents are all more positive.

- **Age:** There is a clear age gradient to distrusting MPs and Government ministers and thinking that standards have worsened (except in the case of local MPs) with younger people generally having more positive views of politicians/ standards than older people, and particularly those over 45.<sup>4</sup> In more detail, there are no significant differences between age groups in terms of distrust for local MPs; however, 18-24 and 25-34 year olds are significantly less likely than over-45s to distrust MPs in general or to distrust Government ministers; 18-24 year olds are also less likely than 35-44 year olds to distrust government ministers; all three younger age groups are less likely to think standards have worsened than over 45s; 18-24 and 25-34 year olds are also less likely than over 45s to think standards have worsened. Only in the case of local MPs are these differences not significant although, here too, they run in the same direction.
- **Party affiliation:** Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour supporters are all significantly less likely than people who do not support a party to distrust their local MP. For Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters this holds also for the extent to which they distrust MPs in general and Government ministers. Supporters of Other parties are more likely than supporters of all three colours to distrust MPs in general and Government ministers; they are more likely than Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters to distrust their local MPs, but about as likely to distrust them as Labour supporters. This is very similar to the pattern for people thinking standards have become worse in recent years, by party. Liberal Democrat supporters are less likely than people with no party affiliation to think standards are worse; individuals supporting Other parties are more likely than Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters to think that standards have worsened; they are no more likely than Labour supporters to think so. Therefore, trust in MPs and ministers is lowest amongst people supporting parties

other than the main three, followed by people with no party affiliation, and thirdly by Labour supporters. Liberal Democrat and Conservative supporters are on the whole most trusting of MPs and ministers. The same pattern holds for those thinking that standards have worsened – Liberal Democrat and Conservative supporters are the least likely to think so whereas people supporting Other parties are the most likely to think that this was the case. Labour supporters and people with no party affiliations are somewhere in the middle. Therefore, distrust in MPs and government ministers and thinking that standards have worsened are most common amongst those without party affiliation, followed by supporters of other parties and Labour – i.e. those out of government.

- **Occupational Grade:** Individuals in A/B occupations are less likely than C2 and D/E to distrust their local MPs; they are also less likely than C1 and C2 to distrust MPs in general; individuals in skilled manual occupations are more likely than individuals in unskilled manual occupations or the unemployed to distrust MPs in general. Managers and professionals are less likely than individuals in skilled manual occupations to distrust government ministers; people in skilled manual jobs are more likely to distrust government ministers than the unemployed and those in unskilled manual occupations. Professionals and managers are less likely than the unskilled manual and unemployed to think standards have become worse. Overall, individuals in skilled manual occupations tend to distrust MPs and government ministers the most, closely followed by those in unskilled manual occupations and the unemployed. The latter group are the most likely to think standards have deteriorated. Taken together, this means that distrust in MPs and ministers and the feeling that standards have worsened are most common amongst the least skilled occupational groups in society.
- **Ethnicity:** Individuals from an ethnic minority background are less likely than respondents from a White-British background to distrust MPs and ministers and to think that standards have become worse.

<sup>4</sup> This recurrent finding raises the interesting question as to whether we are observing a *life-cycle* or a *cohort effect*. In the first (life-cycle) case, this would mean that young people tend to be more positive but that aging leads to more negative appraisals of MPs and government as individuals move through the life course. In the second (cohort effect) case, this would mean that a new generation of voters which views government in a better light than previous ones is coming of age and that their outlook will persist through the life-cycle, resulting in generational differences in attitudes to government between younger and older cohorts. This question can only be disentangled through the collection and analysis of quality longitudinal data following current young cohorts through the life-cycle.

## 3 EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF WESTMINSTER MPS

### 3.1 Summary

People's views as to how national politicians should behave and the priority that people attach to specific criteria of propriety have remained similar since the survey was first conducted in 2004. The public places particular emphasis on basic honesty, financial prudence and selfless dedication to public service. However, the 2010 survey also saw some changes relative to previous years: the proportion of individuals who ranked 'not taking bribes' among the three most important criteria of propriety fell sharply in 2010 to only 25 per cent. 'Being in touch with what the public thinks is important', 'not using power for personal gain', and 'being competent at their jobs' on the other hand have remained relatively stable in the middle group with about 25-35 per cent of respondents ranking these amongst the three most important behaviours. Overall, the proportion who state a preference for the criteria of propriety that rated most highly in 2004 has declined, whereas the proportion selecting those rated least highly has increased (in each case between 2008 and 2010).

As in the previous surveys, the 2010 survey suggests a mismatch between how people think national politicians should behave and how they think they actually behave in practice. MPs fall short of what people expect of them on all of the dimensions covered in the survey – with the exception of 'not taking bribes'. In 2008, the results from Gap Analysis suggested four key areas for improvement in the behaviours which the public think are important but also where they think that MPs are doing particularly badly.

- 'telling the truth'
- 'making sure public money is used wisely'
- 'being in touch with what the public thinks is important'
- 'owning up to mistakes'

In 2010, three further areas enter this list:

- 'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public'
- 'not using power for their own gain'

- 'being competent at job'

Moreover, confidence about the actual conduct of MPs has declined on all measures except 'taking bribes' in the period since the last survey was conducted. Most worryingly, the proportion thinking that most MPs are 'dedicated to doing a good job for the public' fell by twenty percentage points from 46 per cent in 2008 to only 26 per cent in 2010. The proportion thinking that most MPs are competent at their jobs fell by ten percentage points from 36 per cent in 2008 to 26 per cent in 2010. Between 2008 and 2010 there were large drops in the proportion thinking that most MPs are in touch with what the public thinks is important (14 per cent, from 29 to 15 per cent); and in the proportions thinking that most MPs 'set a good example in their private lives' (14 per cent, from 36 to 22 per cent), 'make sure public money is used wisely' (10 per cent, from 28 to 18 per cent), that 'they explain the reasons for their actions and decisions' (8 per cent, from 25 to 17 per cent), and that they tell the truth (6 per cent, from 26 to 20 per cent).

### 3.2 Standards of Conduct

As with previous studies, this research sets out to establish what people perceive to be acceptable or unacceptable conduct on the part of elected and appointed public office holders and how far people believe that their actual behaviour is acceptable or not. The research follows its previous practice of tracking how far the Seven Principles of Public Life actually reflect the public's own priorities. To accomplish this, respondents were first asked to say, in relation to ten criteria of propriety, which three they felt were the most important. They were then asked to say what proportion of public office holders they believe actually exhibit these behaviours. The available response options were 'All', 'Most', 'About half', 'A few', 'None'. The behaviours were drawn up with reference to the Seven Principles and the qualitative research findings from Stage 1 of the programme of research.<sup>5</sup> The aim is to provide a basis for analysing the importance ascribed by people to certain behaviours against their perceptions of

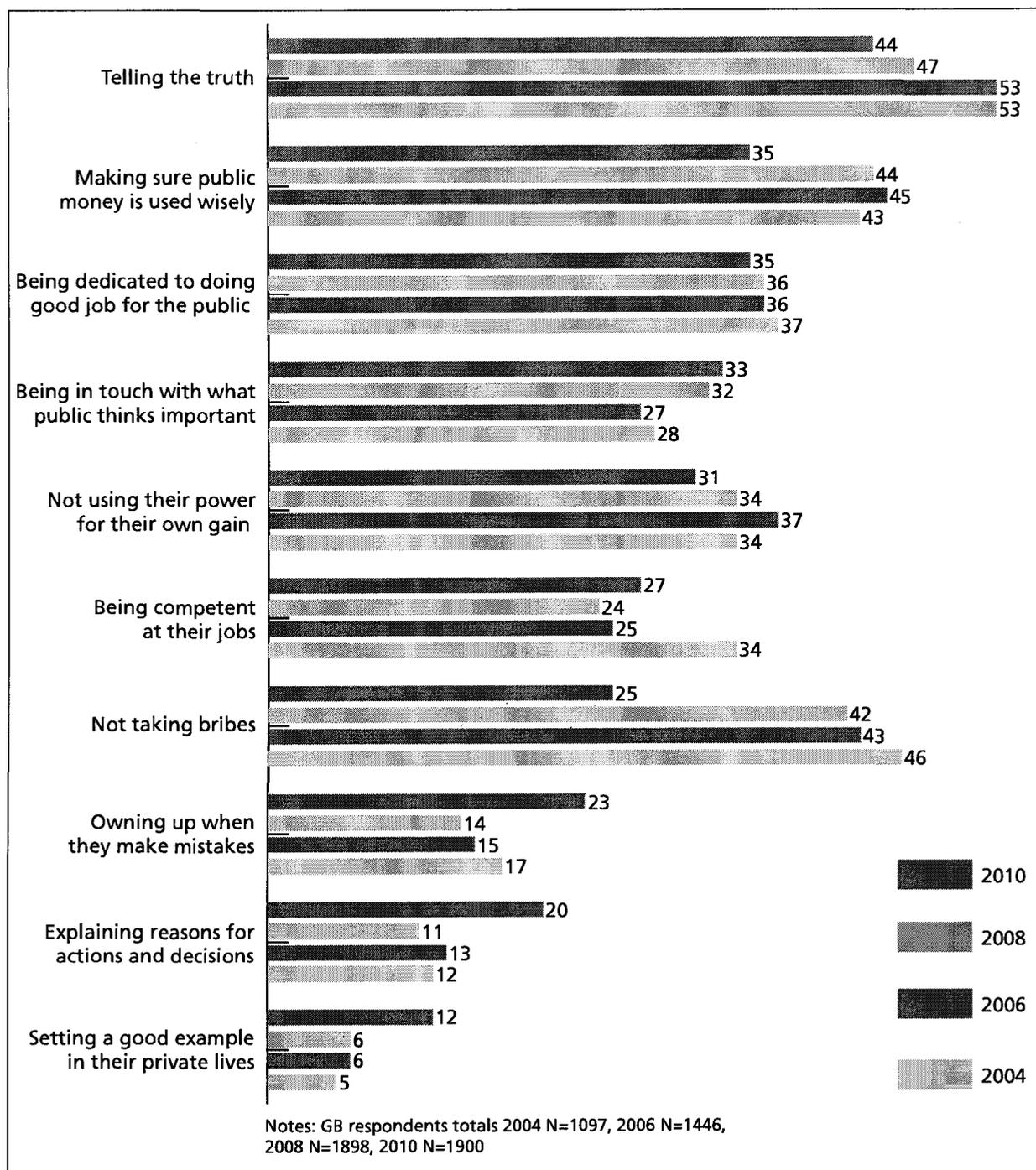
Illustration by: [illegible]

the extent to which public office holders meet these standards. In 2010 these questions were asked solely in relation to MPs. It is important to emphasise that the judgments recorded are relative, not absolute. In so far as 'not taking bribes' is less often ranked in the top three items this does not mean that people do not consider it to be an issue, only that there are other issues they consider more important at this time.

### 3.3 Over time change in the three most important criteria for conduct for public office holders

Figure 3.3.1<sup>6</sup> shows which criteria for conduct respondents feel it is most important for public office holders to exhibit. Telling the truth and making sure that public money is spent wisely, as well as being dedicated to doing a

Figure 3.3.1 Three most important criteria of conduct for MPs 2004-2010



5 GRAHAM, J., O'CONNOR, W., CURTICE, J. and PARK, A. (2002) 'Guiding Principles: Public Attitudes towards Conduct in Public Life', London: National Centre for Social Research

6 The yearly totals in Figure 3.3.1 do not add up to 100 per cent due to leaving out the 'don't knows'.

good job for the public are consistently ranked as the most important criteria of conduct. In terms of change over time, the proportion of individuals ranking 'not taking bribes' in the top three criteria falls sharply in 2010 to only 25 per cent: from 46 per cent in 2004, to 43 per cent in 2006, to 42 in 2008. 'Being in touch with what the public thinks is important', 'not using power for personal gain', and 'being competent at their jobs' remain relatively stable in the middle group with about 25-35 per cent of respondents ranking these amongst the three most important behaviours. While respondents identify 'owning up to mistakes', 'explaining reasons for actions and decisions', and 'setting a good example through private life' least often as part of the three most important criteria, each is ranked more often amongst the three most important criteria by respondents in 2010 relative to all previous surveys. Overall, the proportion selecting those criteria which rated most highly in 2004 declines, whereas the proportion selecting those and those rated least highly increases (in each case between 2008 and 2010).

### 3.4 How preferences for most important criteria for conduct for MPs vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a significant influence on whether people include each of the ten qualities in their top three types of conduct that, according to their opinion, MPs should exhibit. The proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer (see first column of Table 3.4.1 for details) and the significant difference results from logistic regression analysis are summarised in Table 3.4.1. Proportions are reported for variables only where significant differences were found.

Overall, the factors most associated with which of the criteria of conduct are identified as among the top three most important are occupational grade, followed by party affiliation, and age. Older people are more likely than younger people to select criteria relating to honesty, selflessness, and integrity ('telling the truth', 'not taking bribes') and private behaviour ('setting a good example in their private lives') in their top three. On the other hand, younger people are more likely to rate accountability and openness ('explaining reasons for actions and decisions') as key standards than older people. In terms of differences by party affiliation, Conservative

supporters are more likely to prioritise integrity and selflessness ('not taking bribes') relative to Labour supporters and supporters of Other parties; Labour supporters are generally more likely to prioritise selflessness, accountability and openness ('being dedicated to doing a good job for the public' and 'explaining reasons for actions and decisions'); Liberal Democrat supporters are in general more likely than supporters of Other parties to give priority to 'being in touch with what the public thinks is important'. In terms of differences by occupational grade, people in group D/E are more likely than people in higher occupational categories to prioritise honesty ('telling the truth') and integrity ('not taking bribes'), and accountability and openness ('owning up when they make mistakes'); they are less likely than people in higher occupational categories to prioritise fiscal prudence ('making sure money is used wisely'), selflessness ('being dedicated to doing a good job for the public', 'not using power for their own gain'), competence, and 'being in touch with what the public thinks important'.

- **Age:** People in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups are (significantly) less likely than over 45s to include 'Tell the truth' in their top three most important criteria for conduct for MPs; those over 45 are more likely than people in all three other younger age groups (respectively, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44) to include 'Not taking bribes' in their top three; those over 45 are less likely than people in all three other younger age groups (respectively, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44) to include 'explain reasons for actions and decisions' in their top three behaviours for MPs; People in the 25-34 age group are less likely than those over 45 to include 'set good example in their private lives' in their top three criteria for MPs.
- **Party affiliation:** supporters of Labour and Other parties are more likely than people with no party affiliation to include 'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public' in their top criteria for conduct for MPs; Liberal Democrat supporters are more likely than Conservative, Labour and people with no party affiliation to include 'being in touch with what public thinks important' in their top three behaviours; Conservative supporters are less likely than supporters of Other parties to include 'not using their power for their own gain' in their top three criteria for MPs; Conservative supporters are more likely than Labour supporters and supporters of Other parties to include 'not taking bribes' in their top three; Labour and

| Table 3.4.1 How preferences for most important criteria for MPs' conduct vary within the Great Britain population: proportions selecting a given conduct as one of the three most important for MPs  |                                 |                             |                   |                                     |                 |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Age  | 18-24                           | 25-34                       | 35-44             | 45+                                 |                 |
| Tell the truth   | 40% *                           | 40% *                       | 40% *             | 47% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Not take bribes  | 18% *                           | 22% *                       | 21% *             | 28% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Explain reason for actions   | 32% *                           | 24% *                       | 23% *             | 16% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Set good e.g. in private lives   | 11%                             | 9% *                        | 11%               | 14% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Party affiliation  | Conservative                    | Labour                      | Liberal Democrat  | Other Parties                       | No party        |
| Dedicated to do a good job   | 37% *                           | 37% *                       | 35%               | 38% *                               | 29% (ref. cat.) |
| In touch with public thinking  | 33%                             | 32%                         | 46% *             | 38% *                               | 30% (ref. cat.) |
| Not use power for own gain   | 28%                             | 30%                         | 28%               | 37% *                               | 31% (ref. cat.) |
| Not take bribes  | 29%                             | 23%                         | 21%               | 20% *                               | 26% (ref. cat.) |
| Explain reasons for action   | 19%                             | 24% *                       | 24% *             | 18%                                 | 17% (ref. cat.) |
| Occupational grade   | A/B managerial and professional | C1 supervisory and clerical | C2 skilled manual | D/E unskilled manual and unemployed |                 |
| Tell the truth   | 41% *                           | 40% *                       | 42% *             | 51% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Public money used wisely   | 36%                             | 35%                         | 39% *             | 31% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Dedicated to do good job   | 46% *                           | 35% *                       | 31%               | 29% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| In touch with public thinking  | 35% *                           | 34% *                       | 39% *             | 28% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Not use power for own gain   | 33% *                           | 36% *                       | 27%               | 27% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Competent at their job   | 31% *                           | 28% *                       | 28% *             | 23% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Not take bribes  | 23% *                           | 22% *                       | 24%               | 29% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Own up when mistakes   | 18% *                           | 22%                         | 24%               | 25% (ref. cat.)                     |                 |
| Ethnicity  | Minority                        | White-British               |                   |                                     |                 |
| Not take bribes  | 29% *                           | 24% (ref. cat.)             |                   |                                     |                 |
| Country  | Scotland                        | Wales                       | England           |                                     |                 |
| Tell the truth   | 51% *                           | 51% *                       | 43% (ref. cat.)   |                                     |                 |
| Notes: Proportions and logistic regression summary of results. Each cell reports the proportion of respondents in each group selecting a given type of conduct for MPs (see above) as among the top three most important. Significance stars (*) are based on results of logistic regression. For each variable, * means the difference between this group and reference category group (ref. cat.) is significant at the 95% confidence interval. |                                 |                             |                   |                                     |                 |

Liberal Democrat supporters are more likely than people with no party affiliation to include 'explaining reasons for actions and decisions' in their top three behaviours for MPs.

- **Occupational Grade:** People in group D/E are more likely than people in A/B, C1, C2 respectively to select 'telling the truth' in their top three criteria for MPs; People in C2 are more likely than people in D/E to include 'making sure public money is used wisely' in their top three criteria; people in A/B are more likely than people in all three other occupational groups to include 'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public' in their top three behaviours for MPs; People in C1 and C2 are more likely than people in D/E to include 'being in touch with what public thinks important' in their top three; People in A/B and C1 are more likely than people in C2 and D/E to include 'not using their power for their own gain' in their top three criteria for MPs; People in A/B, C1 and C2 are more likely than people in D/E to include 'being competent at their jobs'

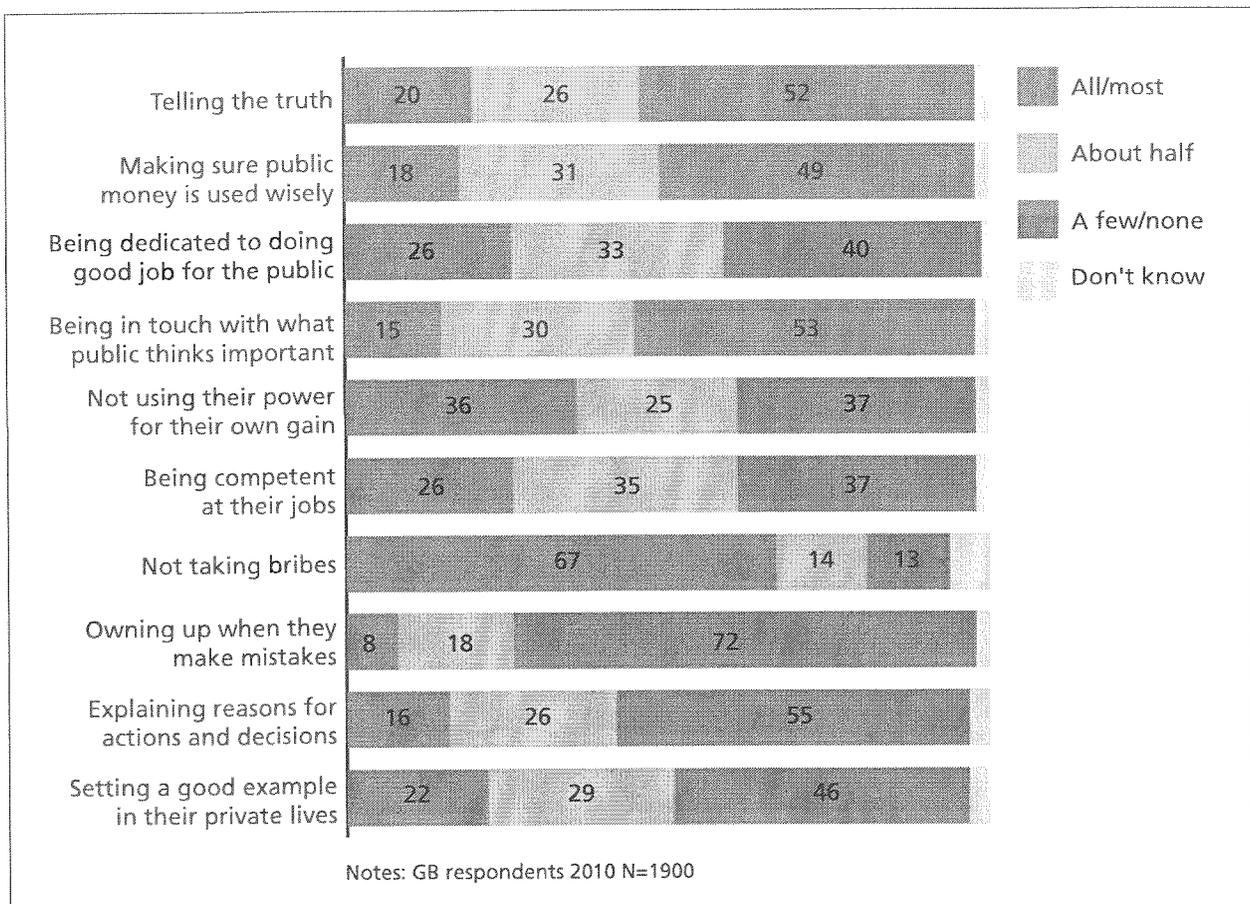
in their top three criteria for MPs; People in C1 are less likely than people in D/E to include 'not taking bribes' in their top three; People in A/B are less likely than people in D/E to include 'owning up when they make mistakes' in their top three concerns.

- **Ethnicity:** People from an ethnic minority background are more likely than people from a White-British background to include 'not taking bribes' in their top three.
- **Country:** People in Scotland and Wales are more likely than people in England to select 'telling the truth' in their three most important criteria for MPs.

### 3.5 Perceptions of conduct of MPs

After ranking criteria of conduct in terms of importance, respondents were asked to say what proportion of MPs they believe actually acted in accordance with these characteristics. Figure 3.5.1 shows, for each of the ten criteria, the proportion of MPs that respondents think meet it. Overall, citizens view MPs in a relatively

Figure 3.5.1 Perceptions of conduct of MPs 2010



unflattering light. While only a minority of people think that MPs take bribes, as many as 27 per cent of respondents think that half or more MPs take bribes. 52 per cent of respondents feel that only a few or less MPs tell the truth; 72 per cent of respondents feel that at best only a few MPs own up to their mistakes; 53 per cent of respondents feel that no more than a few MPs are in touch with what the public think is important. No less than 61 per cent of individuals feel that more than half of MPs use their power for their own gain. In short, fewer than half of the respondents feel that most MPs tell the truth, are in touch with what the public thinks is important, own up to mistakes, or explain the reasons for their actions.

### 3.6 Over time in change in the perceptions of the conduct of MPs in England

In this section we examine how the perceptions of the conduct of MPs changes over time amongst respondents in England. We focus on England alone for comparability purposes since the question on MPs was asked only in England in 2008. The two key patterns observed here are with respect to the various criteria for conduct, with the minor exception of 'not taking bribes', are that: (1) that there is a dramatic decline in perceived good conduct in 2010 compared to previous years; (2) this decline does not seem to originate between 2008 and 2010 but had already been set in motion earlier.

Figure 3.6.1 (overleaf) plots the proportion of individuals thinking that 'All' or 'most' MPs exhibit a given characteristic across the four surveys (2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010). A majority of respondents think that 'all' or 'most' MPs do not take bribes. However, for all other positive behaviours less than 40 per cent of respondents believe that 'all' or 'most' MPs exhibit these favourable characteristics. Only about four in ten respondents think that most MPs do not use their power for their own gain; this means that about six in ten respondents believe that at least half of MPs do so. About three in ten respondents believe that most MPs are dedicated to doing a good job for the public and that they are competent at their jobs; this means that about seven in ten respondents believe that less than half of MPs act in this way in practice.

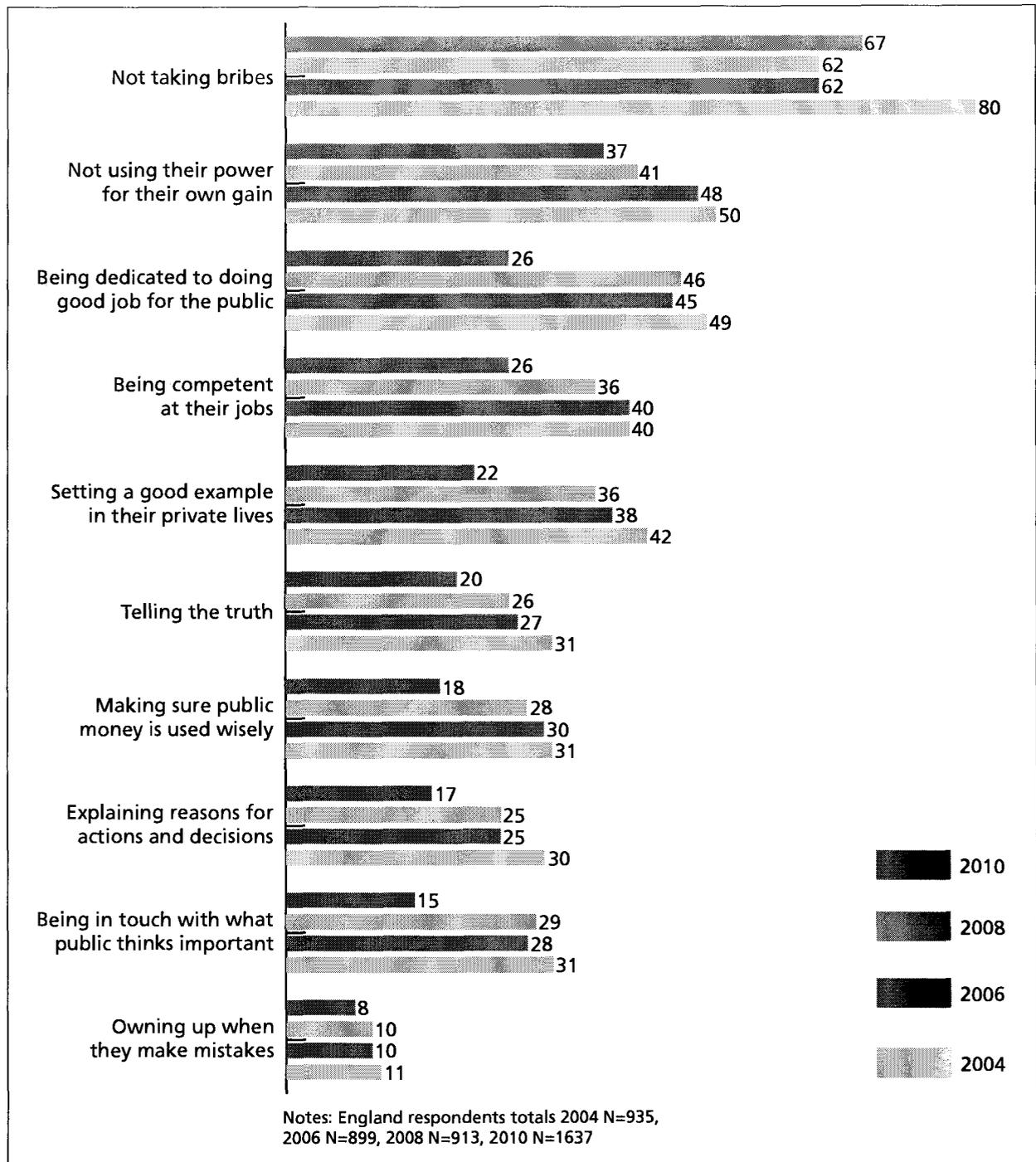
Only about two in ten respondents believe that most MPs 'set a good example in their private lives', 'tell the truth', 'make sure public money is used wisely', or 'explain the reasons for their

actions' and 'are in touch with what the public thinks is important'. This means that about eight in ten respondents believe that fewer than half of England's MPs actually display these characteristics. Finally, only about one in ten respondents believe that most MPs owned up to their mistakes.

In terms of change over time, fewer people in England feel that MPs exhibit each of the positive behaviours (with the exception of not taking bribes) in 2010 than in previous years. Most worryingly, the proportion thinking that most MPs are dedicated to doing a good job for the public has fallen by twenty percentage points from 46 per cent in 2008 to only 26 per cent in 2010.

The proportion thinking that most MPs are competent at their jobs fell by ten percentage points from 36 per cent in 2008 to 26 per cent in 2010. There is also a large drop (14 per cent) in the proportion thinking that most MPs are in touch with what the public believes is important: from 29 per cent in 2008 to only 15 per cent in 2010. Between 2008 and 2010, there are also large drops in the proportions thinking that most MPs set a good example in their private lives (14 per cent), make sure public money is used wisely (10 per cent), that they explain the reasons for their actions and decisions (8 per cent), and that they tell the truth (6 per cent). Overall, the results in this section show the perceptions of MPs behaviours clearly deteriorated in England between previous surveys and the one conducted in 2010.

Figure 3.6.1 Perceptions of conduct of MPs (All/most) 2004-2010 (England only)



### 3.7 Gap Analysis

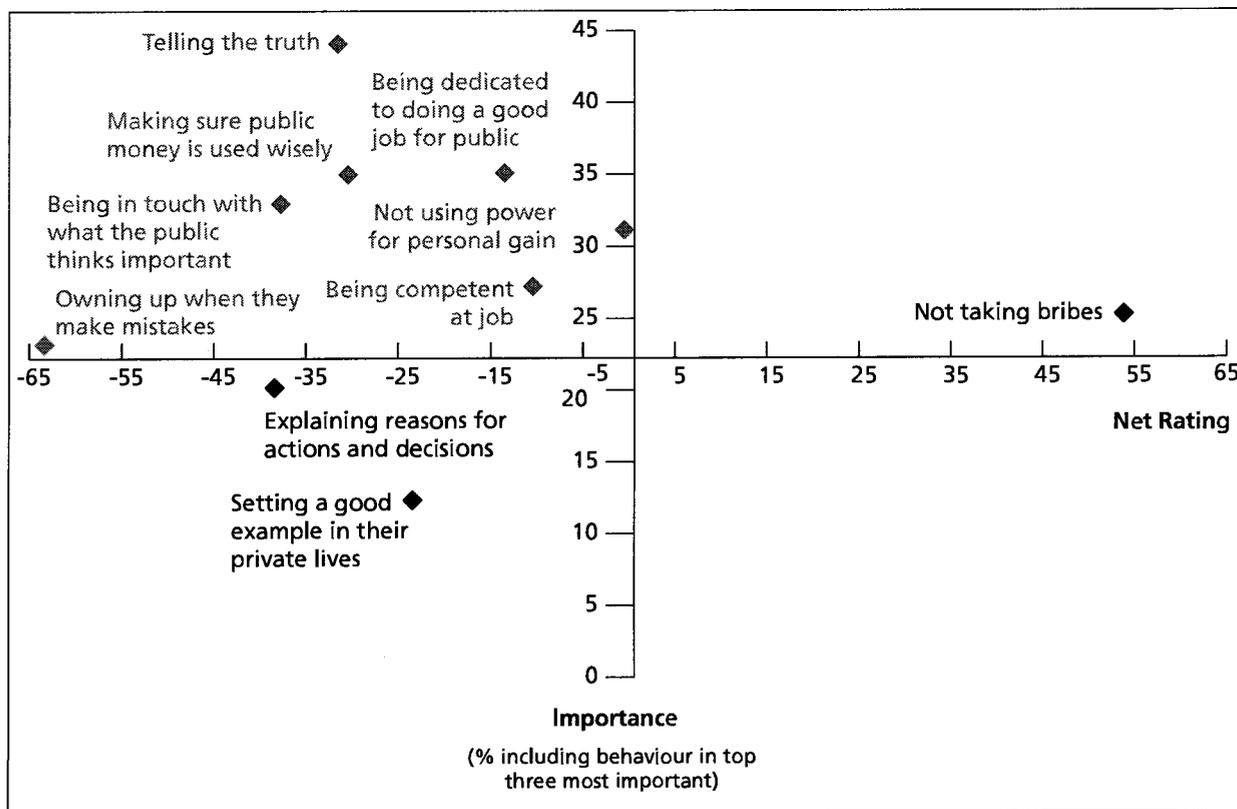
The previous sections have examined which types of conduct people think are the most important for MPs to exhibit and what proportion of MPs they believe actually conform to these standards of conduct. By looking at the relationship between these two measures, it is possible to identify where the largest gaps exist between how people would like MPs to act and how they think MPs act in practice. Figure 3.7.1 reports the results of such a 'Gap Analysis'. In each case, the perceived importance of each type of conduct (the vertical axis<sup>7</sup>) is plotted against the perceived performance (the horizontal axis<sup>8</sup>). The figure is then divided into four quadrants:

- types of conduct plotted in the top left quadrant are those which people perceive as particularly important, but on which they rate performance as relatively poor;
- types of conduct plotted in the top right quadrant are those which people perceive as particularly important and on which they rate performance as relatively good;
- types of conduct plotted in the bottom right quadrant are those which people perceive as relatively unimportant and on which they rate performance as relatively good;
- and types of conduct plotted in the bottom left quadrant are those which people perceive as relatively unimportant and on which they rate performance as relatively poor

The types of conduct plotted in the top left quadrant (where these are seen as important, but where MPs are rated poorly) represent the greatest cause for concern, and are key priorities for improvement, since they are areas of where the gap between expectations and delivery is at its largest. Thus, in Figure 3.7.1:

- 'Telling the truth' appears in the top left quadrant, because this type of conduct is included in the top three by the highest proportion of respondents (44 per cent), but only a small proportion feel that all or most government ministers do tell the truth (resulting in a net rating of -32 per cent). It is therefore a high priority for improvement.

Figure 3.7.1 Gap analysis



7 The relative position on this axis is plotted from '% Including the type of conduct in top three': i.e., the proportion of respondents including each type of conduct in their top three.

8 The relative position on this axis is plotted from '% Net rating': the proportion saying that few or no politicians exhibited the conduct subtracted from the percentage saying that all or most politicians did so. Please note that axes cross at (0, 22).

- 'Not taking bribes' appears in the top right quadrant: like 'telling the truth' it is widely seen as important. However, it has a very good net rating so is less of a priority for improvement than 'telling the truth'.
- 'Setting a good example for others in their private lives' appears in the bottom left quadrant: the public sees it as relatively unimportant – only 12 per cent included this behaviour in their top three for MPs. It is therefore a low priority for improvement.

In 2008, the results from Gap Analysis suggested four key areas for improvement that the public think are important but where they also think that MPs are doing particularly badly.

- 'telling the truth'
- 'making sure public money is used wisely'
- 'being in touch with what the public thinks is important'
- 'owning up to mistakes'.

In 2010, three further areas enter this list:

- 'being dedicated to doing a good job for the public'
- 'not using power for their own gain'
- 'being competent at job'.

## 4 MPS AND VOTING IN PARLIAMENT

### 4.1 Summary

When asked about the kinds of reasons that ought to influence MPs when voting, respondents in 2010 are slightly less likely to require selfless motives and are slightly more likely to accept more self-interested motives, relative to previous surveys. In general, however, making decisions on the basis of the public interest remains important. Voting in accordance with what the MP's party election manifesto promised, and therefore honouring a pledge to the electorate, is also widely seen as acceptable. In contrast, most people do not want MPs to prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues. As in previous surveys, many people seem to reject party loyalties and the demands of the political leadership as legitimate influences on MPs' decisions, although these have become more acceptable. The wishes of local party members are seen as a more legitimate influence than the interest of the party at national level.

There is little consensus on which one of the factors MPs are most likely to take into account when voting. The most common view, given by a quarter of respondents, is that most MPs base their decision on what would benefit the country as a whole, which is also the factor most likely to be viewed as a reasonable basis for the decision. People's views on which of the factors have most influence on MPs' decisions appear to have changed to some extent over time. More people believe that MPs base their decisions on what the party's election manifesto promised, and on what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency. Fewer people believe that MPs base their decision on what will make their party more popular, on what might affect their political career, and on what they personally think is right.

### 4.2 Views on what should influence MPs voting behaviour

This section examines people's views about what factors MPs should or should not take into account when voting in Parliament, and what factors people believe that MPs actually do take

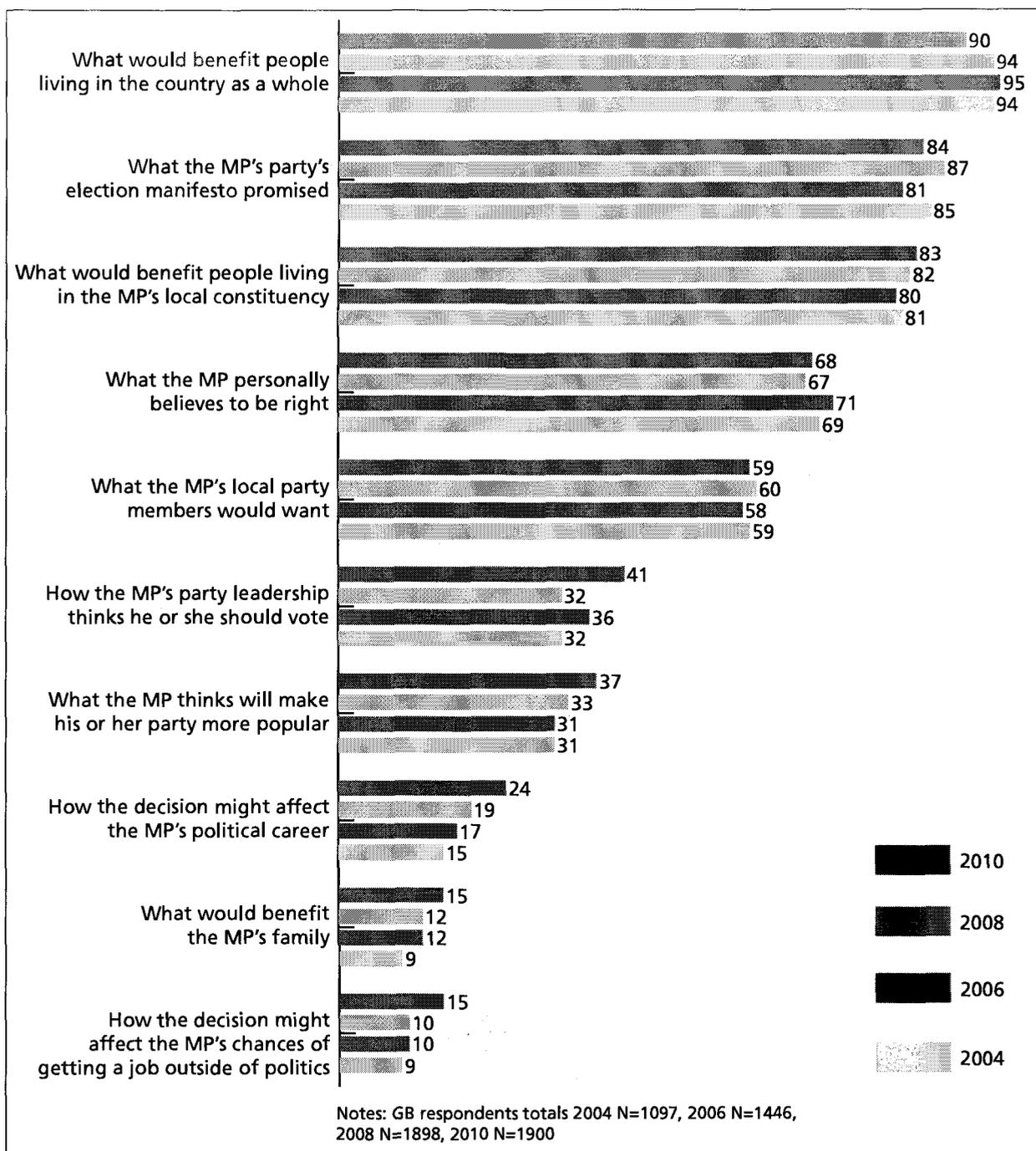
into account in practice. One of the aims of these questions, which were also asked in the 2004, 2006 and 2008 surveys, is to explore the extent to which people recognise that MPs are part of a partisan political system, and therefore accept party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on the decisions that individual MPs take. On the whole, in the past, respondents have shown little sympathy for the partisan character of decision making in the House of Commons.

Respondents are asked to think of the scenario of an MP voting on 'an important national issue' in Parliament, and are given a set of cards to sort so as to indicate which factors they think it is reasonable for MPs to take into account when deciding how to vote and which they should definitely not take into account. They are then asked to say which single factor they think most MPs in practice would base their decision on.

Figure 4.2.1 (overleaf) shows the proportion of respondents who feel that each factor was reasonable for an MP to take into account when voting and compares responses with previous surveys. As was the case in 2004, 2006 and 2008, the results indicate widespread endorsement of the Selflessness Principle though slightly less so than in previous surveys. Respondents are particularly likely to cite factors that relate directly to acting in the public interest as being reasonable for MPs to take into account, such as 'what would benefit people living in the country as a whole' (90 per cent – 4 points down from 2008) and 'what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency' (83 per cent). Voting in accordance with what the MP's party election manifesto promised, and therefore honouring a pledge to the electorate, are also widely seen as acceptable (84 per cent – 3 points down from 2008).

In contrast, most people do not want MPs to prioritise their own interests when voting on national issues though these motivations are more acceptable in 2010 relative to 2008. The majority think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account their own personal beliefs

Figure 4.2.1 What factors are reasonable for MPs to take into account 2004-2010



when deciding how to vote (68 per cent), but are firmly opposed to any sort of personal gain being taken into account. Perhaps unsurprisingly, only 24 per cent of respondents say it is acceptable for MPs to base their decision on how it might affect their political career (though this is 5 points up from 2008) and only 15 per cent think it reasonable for MPs to take into account how their decision might benefit their family (though this was 3 points up from 2008). 15 per cent also think it reasonable for MPs to take into account how it might affect their chances of getting a job outside of politics (5 points up from 2008).

Six in ten respondents (59 per cent) think that it is reasonable for MPs to vote in accordance with the wishes of local party members. Four in ten (41 per cent) feel that it is acceptable for an MP to vote in accordance with how the party leadership thinks that they should vote (nine points up from 2008). Only 37 per cent think that voting according to what would make the MP's party more popular is acceptable (four points up from 2008). The first five items all seem to display trendless fluctuation over time; the last five appear to increase slightly in acceptance over time.

### 4.3 How views on what should influence MPs' voting vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a significant influence on which factors people think it is reasonable for MPs to take into account when voting. Below, we report and discuss the proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer (see text below for details) only where significant differences were found.

Older people tend to be more likely than younger people to think that conscience is a reasonable motivation for MPs when voting. Men are more likely than women to think that conscience, local constituency issues, potential benefits to the MP's career and family are reasonable considerations to take into account. Conservative party supporters tend to think that local constituency needs, national needs, local party member wishes, party leadership, and conscience are reasonable influences relative to individuals with other party affiliations. People in D/E are less likely relative to individuals in higher occupational categories to consider what the party's manifesto promised and local constituency needs as reasonable influences on MPs when voting in Parliament; they are also more likely to consider as reasonable considerations what the party leadership thinks, what will make the party more popular, how decisions might affect the MP's political career, what would benefit the MPs family.

The detailed results are:

- Age:** People in the 35-44 age group (35%) are less likely than people in all three other age groups (respectively, for 18-24, 25-34, 45+, 47 per cent, 44 per cent, 42 per cent) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote'; People in the 45+ age group (73%) are more likely than people in all the other three age groups (respectively, for 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 60 per cent, 62 per cent, 63 per cent) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account what 'What the MP personally believes to be right'.
- Gender:** Men (86 per cent) are more likely than women (82 per cent) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What would benefit people in local constituency' when voting; to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP personally believes to be right' (respectively, 70 and 65 per cent); to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career' (respectively, 26 and 22 per cent); to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What would benefit the MP's family' (respectively, 16 and 13 per cent).
- Party affiliation:** Liberal Democrat supporters (92 per cent) are (significantly) more likely than Labour supporters and people with no party affiliation to think that it is reasonable to take 'What the MP's party's manifesto promised into account' when voting in Parliament; Conservative supporters (88 per cent) and supporters of Other parties (89 per cent) are more likely relative to people with no party affiliation (79 per cent) to think that it is reasonable take into account 'What would benefit people in local constituency' when voting; Conservative (95%) and Liberal Democrat (97%) supporters are more likely than Labour supporters (90%) and people with no party affiliation (87%) to think it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What would benefit people in the entire country when voting'; Conservative (64%) and Liberal Democrat supporters (65%) are more likely than people with no party affiliation (56%) to think it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP's local party members would want'; Conservative supporters (44%) are more likely than people with no party affiliations (39%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote'; Conservative supporters (74%) are more likely than people with no affiliation (64%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP personally believes to be right'.
- Occupational Grade:** People in group C1 (87%) are more likely than people in D/E (81%) to cite 'What the MP's party's manifesto promised' into account when voting; people in group D/E (77%) are less likely than people in all three other grades (respectively, A/B, C1, C2, 89%, 86%, 83%) to think that it is reasonable take into account 'What would benefit people in local constituency' when voting; people in group A/B (39%) and C1 (40%) are less likely than people in group D/E (45%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote'; People in group D/E (45%) are

more likely than people in all three other groups (respectively, A/B, C1, C2, 25%, 38%, 37%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular'. People in group A/B are less likely than people in all three other grades to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular'; People in group D/E (30%) are more likely than people in all three other groups (respectively, AB, C1, C2, 17%, 24%, 22%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career'; people in group A/B are less likely than those in C1 to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career'; people in group D/E (19%) are more likely than people in all three other groups (respectively, A/B, C1, C2, 9%, 16%, 13%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What would benefit the MP's family'; people in group A/B are less likely than people in C1 to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What would benefit the MP's family'; People in group A/B (6%) are less likely than people in all three other groups (respectively, C1, C2, D/E, 16%, 16%, 19%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics'.

- **Ethnicity:** People from an ethnic minority background (48%) are more likely to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP thinks will make his or her party more popular' than people from a White-British background (36%); People from an ethnic minority background (38%) are more likely to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career' than people from a White-British background (22%); People from an ethnic minority background (24%) are more likely to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What would benefit the MP's family' than people from a White-British background (13%); People from an ethnic minority background (27%) are more likely than people from a White-British background (13%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's chances of getting a job outside politics'.
- **Country:** People in Wales (75%) are (significantly) less likely than people in

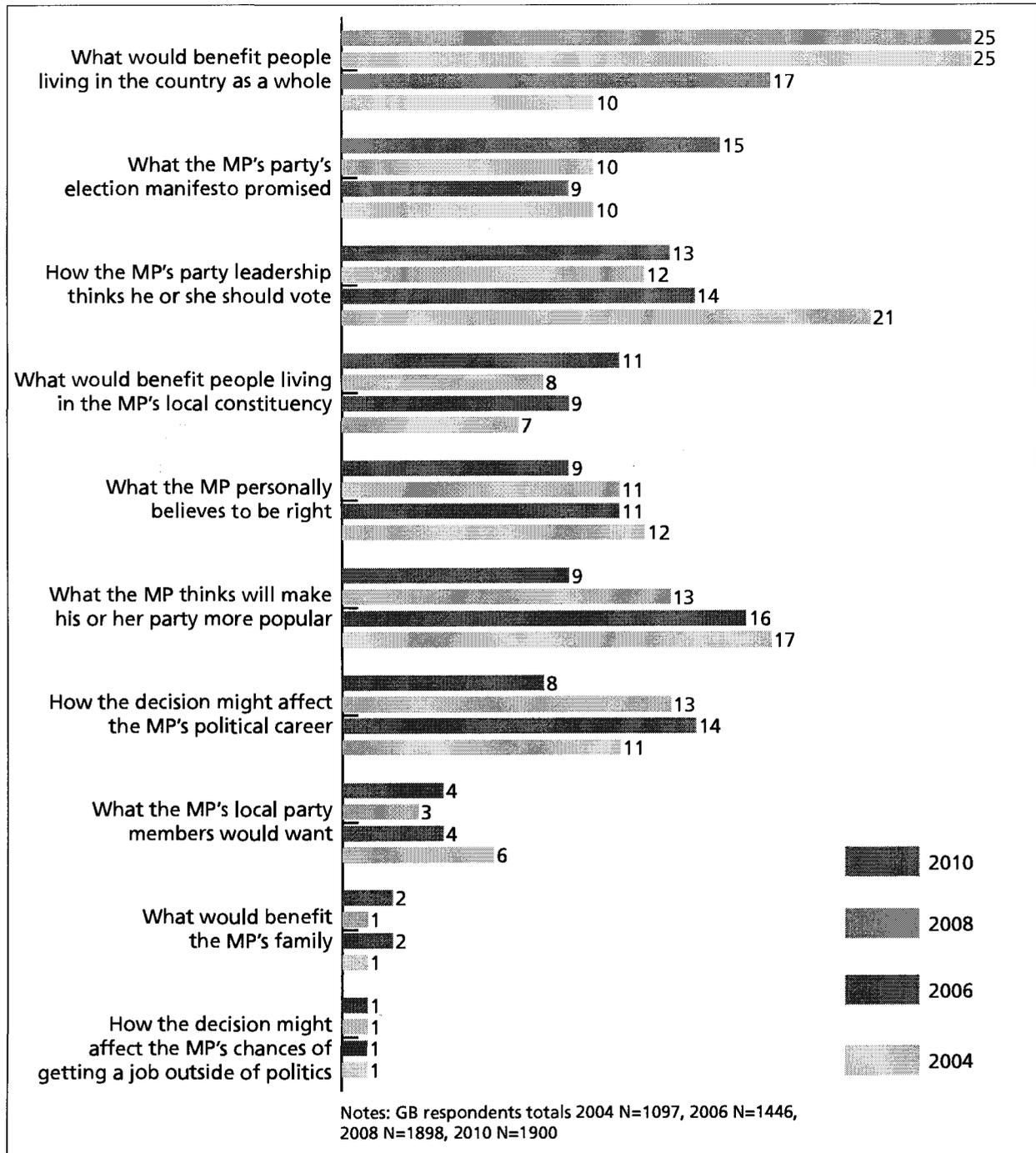
England (84%) and Scotland (86%) to think that it is reasonable to take into account 'What would benefit people in local constituency' when voting; People in Wales (29%) are less likely than those in England (42%) and Scotland (43%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote'; People in Scotland (77%) are more likely than people in England (67%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'What the MP personally believes to be right'; People in Wales (13%) are less likely than people in England (25%) to think that it is reasonable for MPs to take into account 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career'.

#### 4.4 Perceptions of influences on MPs' voting behaviour

Moving on to look at what people think actually affects MPs' voting behaviour, **Figure 4.3.1** (overleaf) (which also compares responses with past surveys) shows that the most common view, given by a quarter of respondents (25%), is that most MPs would base their decision on what would benefit the country as a whole, which is also the factor most likely to be viewed as a reasonable basis for the decision. Just over a quarter of respondents think that MPs would take a decision along national party lines, either according to what the party promised in the election manifesto (15%) or in line with the wishes of the party leadership (13%). Hence, while only around a third of people accept national party loyalties and political leadership as legitimate influences on the decisions that individual MPs take, fewer still believe that these are the primary drivers of MPs' voting behaviour. As the previous surveys found, there is little evidence to suggest that people believe that MPs vote in Parliament on the basis of self-interest. Although 8 per cent of respondents think that most MPs would vote on the basis of how the decision might affect their political career, this was 5 points down from 2008 (13%). Only 1-2 per cent feel that most would vote on the basis either of how their career prospects outside politics, or their family, would be affected.

People's views on which of the factors have most influence on MPs' decisions appear to have changed to some extent over time. More people believe that MPs based their decisions on what the party's election manifesto promised (15 per cent – 5 points up from 2008), and on what would benefit people living in the MP's local constituency (11 per cent – 3 points up

Figure 4.3.1 Perception of main influence on MPs voting behaviour 2004-2010



from 2008). On the other hand, fewer people believe that MPs base their decision on what will make their party more popular (9% – 4 points down from 2008), on what might affect their political career (8 per cent – 5 points down from 2008).

#### 4.5 How views on what actually influences MPs' voting vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables had a significant influence on the factors people think are the main influences on MPs when voting. Below, we report and discuss the proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer (see text below for details) only where significant differences were found.

Younger people are in general less likely than older people to think that MPs voted according to how the party leadership thought they should vote; they are more likely than older people to think that the politician's career was the main influence on voting. Men are more likely than women to think the party's manifesto and leadership are the main influences on voting whereas women are more likely to think that MPs vote based on the national interest. Liberal Democrat supporters tend to think the party's manifesto is the main influence; supporters of Other parties are more likely than people with different affiliations to think that politicians tend to be mainly influenced by their career prospects. People in group D/E are more likely than people in higher occupational categories to think that the main influences on voting by MPs are the national interest and what would make the party more popular; they are less likely to think that what the party manifesto promised, party leadership demands, and politician political career prospects are the main influences.

- **Age:** People in the 35-44 age group (19%) are less likely than people in the 45+ age group (28%) to think that 'What would benefit people in the entire country' is the main influence on MPs' voting behaviour; People in age groups 18-24 (6%) and 25-34 (9%) are less likely than people in the 45+ age group (15%) to think that 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote' is the most important influence on MPs' voting; People in the 35-44 age group (11%) are more likely than over 45s (7%) to think that 'What the MP thinks will make his or her

party more popular' is the main influence on MPs' voting; People in the 18-24 (11%) and 35-44 (11%) age groups are more likely than over 45s (7%) to think that 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career' is the main influence on MPs' voting.

**Gender:** Men (17%) are more likely than women (13%) to think that 'What the MP's party's manifesto promised' is the most important influence on MPs' voting; men (22%) are less likely than women (28%) to think that 'What would benefit people in the entire country' is the main influence on MPs' voting behaviour; men (15%) are more likely than women (11%) to think that 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote' is the most important influence on MPs' voting.

**Party affiliation:** Liberal Democrat supporters (19%) are more likely than supporters of the Conservatives (14%), Other parties (12%), and people with no party affiliation (14%) to think that 'What the MP's party's manifesto promised' is the most important influence on MPs' Parliamentary voting; Conservative supporters (18%) are more likely than people with no party affiliation (10%) to think that 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote' is the most important influence on MPs' voting; Supporters of Other parties (16%) are more likely than supporters of all three main parties (respectively, Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats, 9%, 7%, 4%) and also people with no party affiliation (8%) to think that 'How the decision might affect the MP's political career' is the main influence on MPs' voting.

- **Occupational Grade:** People in C2 (13%) are less likely than people in D/E (18%) to think that 'What the MP's party's manifesto promised' is the most important influence on MPs' voting; People in AB (21%) are less likely than people in C2 (28%) and D/E (29%) to think that 'What would benefit people in the entire country' is the main influence on MPs' voting behaviour. Occupational grade is a particularly important influence on whether people believe that 'How the MP's party leadership think he/she should vote' is the most important influence on MPs' voting; people in group A/B (25%) are more likely than people in all three other groups (C1, C2 and D/E, respectively, 12%, 11%, 6%) to think that this is the most important influence on MPs' voting; people in group D/E are less likely than people in all three other groups to think this is the most important influence on voting; People in group A/B (5%) are less likely than those in



## 5 PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### 5.1 Summary

Respondents are evenly split over whether they are confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards in public life. Overall, there is a decline in confidence in the authorities in this respect: while most respondents are confident that the media will uncover wrongdoing by people in public office, fewer have confidence that the authorities will do this. Not only do only a minority of respondents have confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing but even fewer people are confident that public office holders will be punished for any wrongdoing. However, people have more confidence that the authorities will uncover and punish wrongdoing than in previous surveys.

As in previous years, one aim of the study is to assess how far the public believes that public office holders are held accountable for their conduct; that is, to what extent people feel that public office holders will be exposed and punished for unacceptable behaviour. To address this respondents were asked:

- how confident they felt that:
  - (a) the authorities, and
  - (b) the media will generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office;
- how confident they felt that the authorities will punish people in public office when they are caught doing wrong.

Figure 5.2.1 summarises the responses to the first question over the four surveys. Around half of respondents are confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards in public life, although only 4 per cent are very confident. Fractionally more respondents (50%) were not confident that the authorities are committed to upholding standards, with 8 per cent saying that they are not at all confident. Overall, there has been a decline in confidence on this measure since 2006, with the proportion who were very or fairly confident dropping from around six in ten (58%) to less than half (49%) by 2010, although there was no significant difference between 2008 and 2010.

Figure 5.2.1 Confidence in authorities' commitment to standards 2004-2010

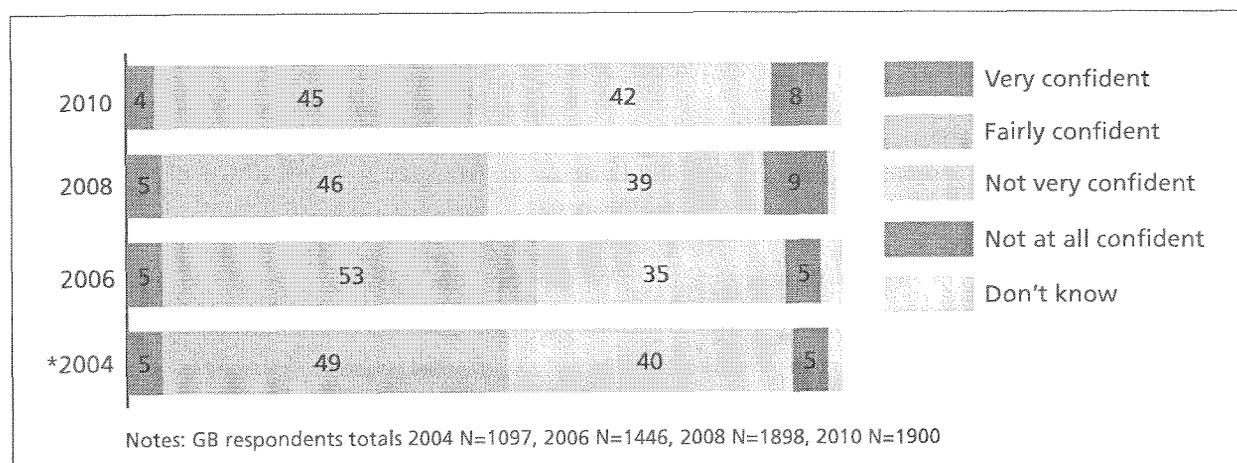


Figure 5.2.2 Confidence that wrongdoing will be uncovered and punished 2004-2010

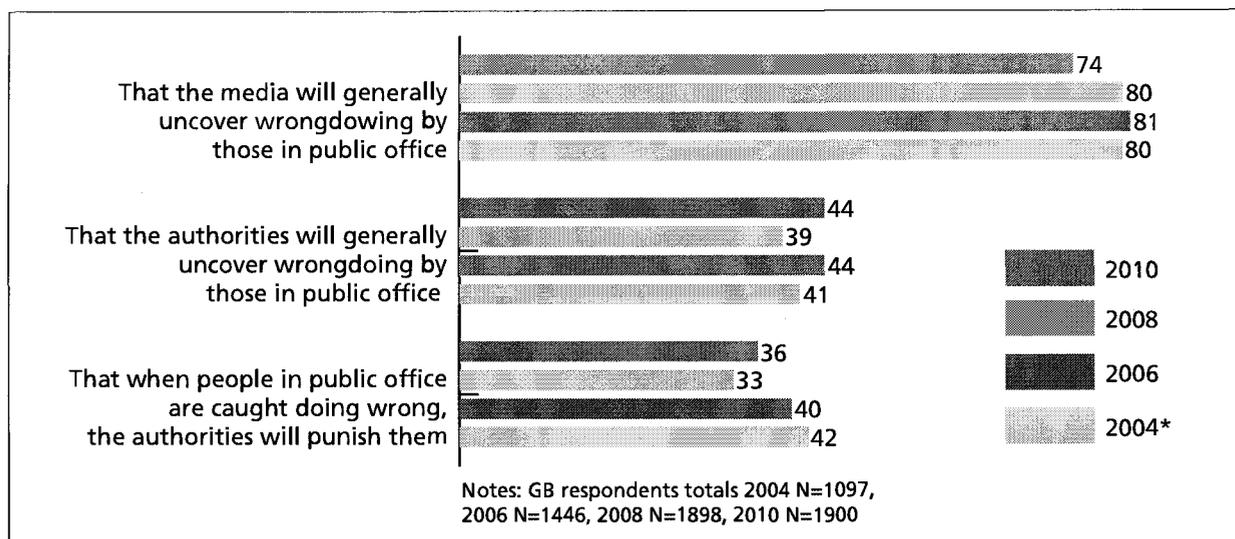


Figure 5.2.2 shows that, by 2010, 74 per cent of respondents are confident that the media would generally uncover wrongdoing by people in public office, compared with just 44 per cent having confidence in the authorities to do this. The confidence in the media to uncover wrongdoing, which was also found in the previous surveys, is unsurprising, since media activity in exposing the alleged misdemeanours of public figures is much more visible to the general public than official activity in the same area. Not only do a minority of respondents have confidence in the authorities to uncover wrongdoing but even fewer people (36%) are confident that public office holders will be punished for unacceptable behaviour. However, people are less confident that that media will uncover wrongdoing than previously so.

### 5.3 How views on accountability vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a significant influence on whether people are confident about:

- the authorities' commitment to improving standards in public life;
- the authorities' ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office;
- the media's ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office;
- the authorities' commitment to punishing people in public office when they were caught doing wrong

Below, we report and discuss the proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer (see text below for details) only where significant differences were found.

The results showed that people in the youngest age group are more likely than older people to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving standards in public life. Supporters of mainstream parties are more confident in the authorities' and the media's ability to improve standards and to uncover wrongdoing than supporters of Other parties and people with no party affiliation. Individuals in occupational grades D/E are less likely than people in higher categories to feel confident in the authorities' and the media's ability to improve standards and uncover wrongdoing. People from ethnic minority backgrounds are more likely than White-British respondents to feel confident in the authorities' ability and commitment to improving standards and uncover wrongdoing; they are less likely than White-British respondents to feel confident in the media's ability to improve standards and uncover wrongdoing.

- **Age:** People in the 18-24 age group (58%) are (significantly) more likely than over 45s (47%) to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving standards in public life.
- **Party affiliation:** Conservative (59%), Labour (51%) and Liberal Democrat (65%) supporters are all more likely than people with no party affiliation (42%) to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving

standards in public life. People supporting Other parties (35%) are significantly less likely than people with no party affiliation and the supporters of all three main parties to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving standards in public life; Conservative (50%) and Liberal Democrat (55%) supporters are more likely than people with no party affiliation (39%) to feel confident about the authorities' ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office; Liberal Democrat supporters are also more likely to be confident about this than Labour supporters (46%). Supporters of all three main parties and even people with no party affiliation are more likely to have confidence in the authorities than supporters of Other parties (32%). Conservative (83%) and Labour (74%) supporters are more likely than people with no party affiliation (68%) to feel confident about the media's ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office. Conservative supporters are also more likely than Labour and Other party (75%) supporters to feel confident about the media's ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office. Supporters of Other parties (25%) are less likely than supporters of all three main parties (respectively, Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats, 40%, 38%, 38%) and also people with no party affiliation (35%) to feel confident about the authorities' commitment to punishing people in public office when they were caught doing wrong.

- *Occupational Grade:* People in group A/B (55%) and C1 (54%) are more likely than people in group D/E (42%) to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving standards in public life ; people in occupational category A/B (55%) are also more likely than people in C2 (46%) to feel confident about this; people in group D/E (67%) are less likely than people in all three other categories (respectively, A/B, C1, C2, 79%, 75%, 78%) to feel confident about the media's ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office; people in A/B (41%) are more likely than people in C2 (34%) and D/E (34%) to feel confident about the authorities' commitment to punishing people in public office when they were caught doing wrong.
- *Ethnicity:* People from an ethnic minority background (57%) are more likely than people from a White-British (48%) background to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving

standards in public life; people from an ethnic minority background (58%) are more likely to feel confident about the authorities' ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office than White-British respondents (41%); people from an ethnic minority background (64%) are less likely than people from a White-British background (76%) to feel confident about the media's ability to uncover wrongdoing by people in public office; people from an ethnic minority background (54%) are more likely than White-British respondents (34%) to feel confident about the authorities' commitment to punishing people in public office when they were caught doing wrong.

- *Country:* People in Scotland (51%) are more likely than people in England (49%) to feel confident in the authorities' commitment to improving standards in public life; people in Scotland (31%) are less likely than people in England (45%) to feel confident about the authorities' ability to uncover wrongdoing by those in public office.

# 6 POLITICAL PARTY FUNDING

## 6.1 Summary

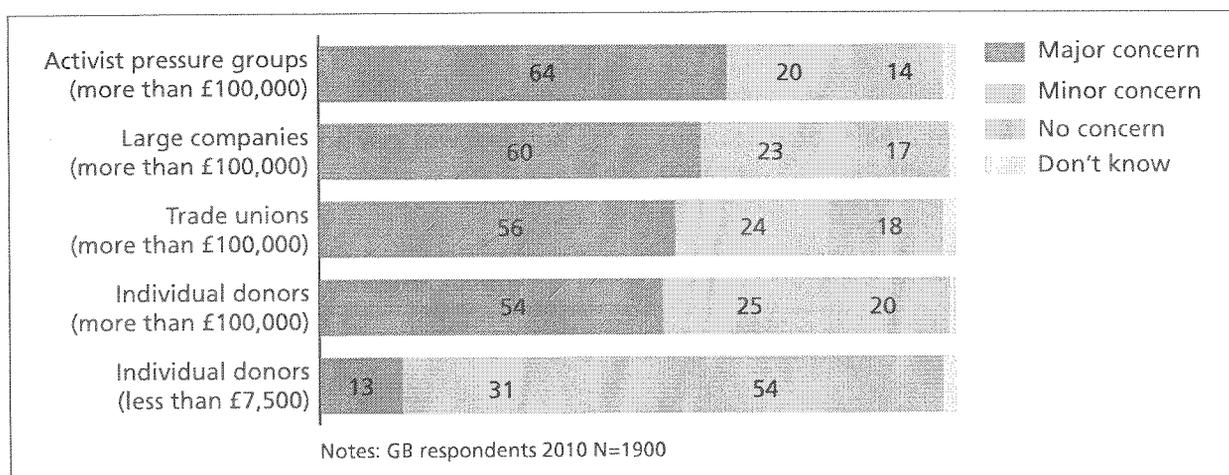
The 2010 survey also included questions on party funding. Most people think this is an important issue and that it is 'never acceptable' for politicians to do special favours for contributors. Respondents are most concerned about large donations by activist pressure groups; but most respondents think that all large donations, whether by large companies, trade unions, or individual donors are of major concern. Moreover, people tend to think that large donations are made for self-interested reasons. About a third of respondents think that politicians 'very often' do special favours for people and organisations who give large donations; about two in ten respondents think that MPs 'very often' decide what to do based on what their political contributors want. About half of respondents believe that MPs are influenced by donations, and very few feel that this is rarely the case.

## 6.2 Party funding

The 2010 survey also included questions on party funding. When asked how important an issue they thought party funding was for the UK, 52 per cent think it is 'of some importance' and 30 per cent think it is 'of great importance'; only 16 per cent think it is 'of no importance'.

When asked about whether it is acceptable for politicians to do special favours for contributors, 53 per cent think it is 'never acceptable' and 30 per cent think that it is 'rarely acceptable'. Only 2 per cent think this is 'completely acceptable' and 14 per cent think it is 'usually acceptable'. Respondents were also asked to say how concerned they were about donations (large and small) by different types of donors. Figure 6.2.1 shows that respondents are most concerned about large donations by activist pressure groups (64% think this is a major concern). But most respondents think that all

Figure 6.2.1 Party funding concerns 2010



large donations, whether by large companies (60%), trade unions (56%) or by individual donors (54%) are of major concern. In contrast only low levels of concern were expressed about small donations (less than £7,500) from individuals. For most people (54%), this type of donation elicited 'no concern'. This underlies the fact that the most important distinction drawn by respondents when asked about party funding is in the relation to the amount of money given, rather than who is giving it.

Moreover, when respondents were asked what they think is the most common reason for people or organisations to make very large donations (say in excess of £100,000) to a political party they tend to reply that large donations are made for self-interested reasons (Figure 6.2.2).

Finally, respondents were asked how often they thought that politicians did special favours for people and organisations who give very large contributions to their party and how often they thought that Members of Parliament decided what to do based on what their political contributors want, rather than on what they really believed. Again, Figure 6.2.3 shows that people have a relatively negative view of MPs: 36 per cent think that MPs 'very often' do special favours for people and organisations who give large donations and 49 per cent believe that they are 'sometimes' influenced by donations. Only 2 per cent think that this never happens and 9 per cent think it happens rarely. In a similar vein, 20 per cent think that MPs 'very often' decide what to do based on what their political contributors want and 57 per cent believe that this happens at least 'sometimes'. Only 5 per cent think that this never happens; and 16 per cent think it happens 'rarely'.

Figure 6.2.2 Most and least common reasons for large donations 2010

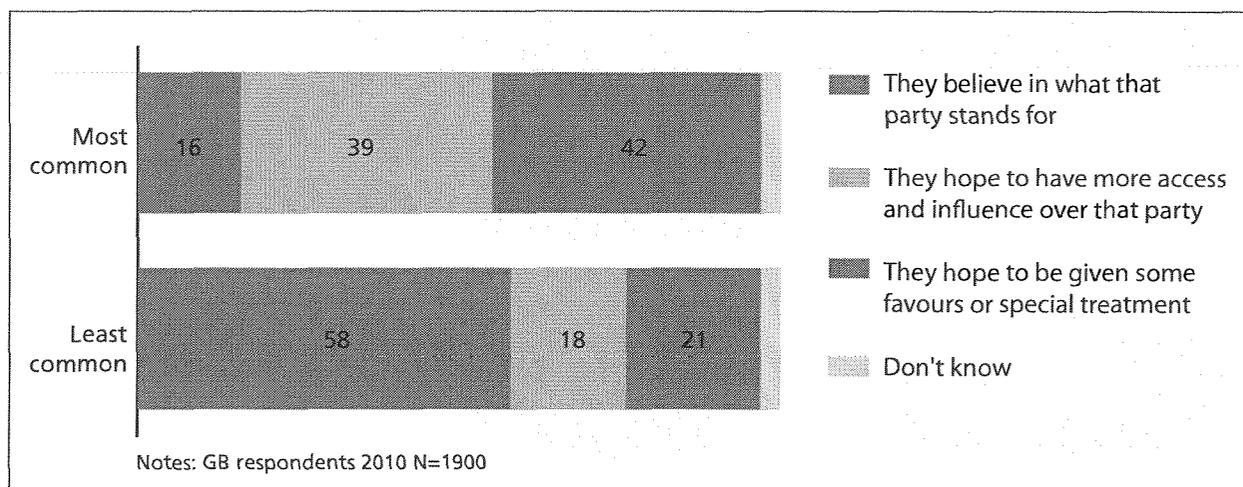
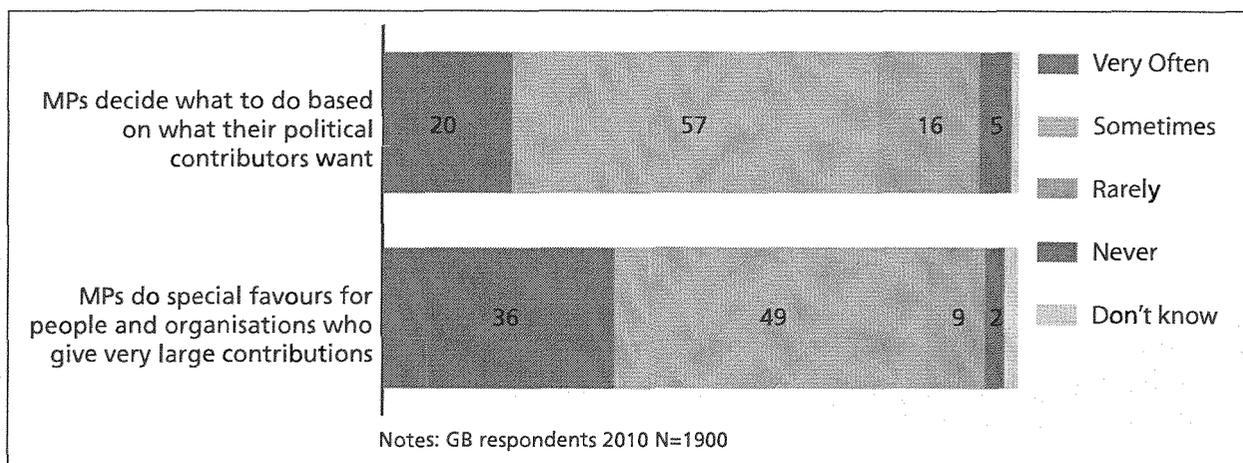


Figure 6.2.3 How often do MPs decide based on contributions or do special favours 2010



### 6.3 How views on party funding vary within the Great Britain population

Logistic regression analysis has been used to explore which of a range of variables has a significant influence on people's views on party funding. Below, we report and discuss the proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer (see text below for details) only where significant differences were found.

In terms of concern over donations to parties, people in unskilled manual occupations and the unemployed are more likely to see individual donations to parties (whether large or small) as highly problematic than individuals in other occupational categories; on the other hand, they are less likely than individuals in the higher two occupation categories to see large donations from activist pressure groups and companies as of major concern. Individuals in different occupational categories however do not diverge over their concern for large donations from trade unions. People in the youngest age group (18-24 years of age) are less likely than people in the older three age groups to see large donations, whether from activist pressure groups, companies or trade unions, as highly problematic. There are no age differences over concern for individual donations (whether large or small). Party affiliation differentiates individuals only in terms of concerns over large donations from trade unions and individuals and in the expected direction: Conservative party supporters are more likely to see trade union donations as a major concern than supporters of the Labour party; Labour party supporters and the supporters of Other parties are more likely to see large individual donations as problematic than both Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters. There are also small differences by ethnic minority status and country of residence.

- *Major concerns over individuals donations of less than £7,500:* People in occupational group D/E (18%) are more likely than people in the other three occupational categories (respectively, for A/B, C1, and C2, 7, 10 and 13 per cent) to see this as highly problematic. Ethnic minority respondents (16%) are more likely to see this as a major concern than White British respondents (12%). People in Wales (24%) are more likely to see this as a matter of concern than people in England (11%).
- *Major concern for individual donations of more than £100,000:* Individuals in

occupational group D/E (57%) are more likely than individuals in group A/B (47%) to see this as highly problematic. Labour party (59%) and Other party (58%) supporters are more likely than Conservative (46%) and Liberal Democrat (47%) supporters to see this as a major concern.

- *Major concern for activist pressure group donations of more than £100,000:* Older people (for all three of the 25-34, 35-44, 45+ age groups, respectively, 65, 65, and 67 per cent) are more likely than people in the youngest age group (54 per cent for 18-24 year olds) to see this as highly problematic. People in group A/B (70%) and C1 (68%) are more likely than people in group D/E (59%) to see this as a major concern.
- *Major concern for company donations of more than £100,000:* Older people (for all three of the 25-34, 35-44, 45+ age groups, respectively 59, 61 and 63 per cent) are more likely than people in the youngest age group (40 per cent for 18-24 year olds) to see such donations as a major concern, and people in group A/B (65%) and C1 (60%) are more likely than people in group D/E (56%) to see this as a major concern. White British respondents (61%) are more likely than ethnic minority respondents (50%) to express concern, and people in Scotland (68%) are more likely than people in England (58%) to see this as a major concern.
- *Major concern for trade union donations of more than £100,000:* Older people (for all three of the 25-34, 35-44, 45+ age groups, respectively 55, 55 and 59 per cent) are more likely than people in the youngest age group (42 per cent for 18-24 year olds) to see this as a major concern. It is more a concern for Conservative supporters (63%) than for supporters of the Labour party (52%).

There are also interesting differences in the GB population in terms of other attitudes to party funding. In general, supporters of all three main parties tend to be more optimistic that parties refrain from doing favours for individuals or groups making large donations and to believe that individuals and organisations make donations because of their beliefs rather than to gain special treatment. However, supporters of the three main parties are split over whether doing favours for donors is ever acceptable, with Labour supporters (along with supporters of Other parties and people with no party affiliation) being more likely than supporters of the

other two main parties to say that this is 'never' acceptable. Young people are both less prone to think that parties do special favours for donors and also more likely to think that individuals make donations based on belief than older people. Young people are also less likely than older people to think that doing special favours for donors was 'never acceptable'. Additionally, individuals in occupational group D/E have a more positive view in relation to both the occurrence of special favours and motives for donations than individuals in the middle two occupational categories (C1 and C2). In more detail:

- Conservative (18%) and Labour supporters (21%) are more likely than individuals with no party affiliation to believe that most donors give money "because they believe in what that party stands for" rather than "because they hope to have more access and influence over that party" or "because they hope to be given some favours or special treatment". Individuals in occupational group D/E (18%) are more likely than individuals in groups C1 (15%) and C2 (13%) to think that people make donations because they believe in what the party stands for.
- Men (40%) are more likely than women (32%) to think that parties 'very often' do special favours for individuals who make large donations; younger people (18-24 and 25-34, respectively, 31 and 32 per cent) are less likely than older people (38 per cent for 45+ year olds) to think that this happens 'very often'. Supporters of all three main parties (respectively, for Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters, 34, 33, and 30 per cent) are less likely than supporters of Other parties (46%) to think that this happens 'very often'; individuals in occupational group D/E (32%) are less likely than individuals in groups C1 (38%) and C2 (39%) to think that this happened 'very often'.
- Supporters of Other parties (30%) are more likely than supporters of the three main parties (respectively, for Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters, 15, 19, and 11 per cent) to think that parties base decisions on donations 'very often'.
- Older people (56 per cent for 45+ year olds) are more likely than young people (for 18-24 and 25-34, respectively, 43 and 45 per cent) to say that it is 'never' acceptable for MPs to do favours for donors; Labour (53%) and Other party (61%) supporters and individuals

with no party affiliation (54%) are more likely than supporters of the Conservative (44%) and Liberal Democratic (45%) party to say this is 'never' acceptable.

## 7 AN OVERVIEW

### 7.1 Summary

The previous chapters of this report have each looked at a separate set of questions asked in the survey. They reported how often various answers were given, how that compared with results from earlier surveys, and whether, if at all, specific groups in the British population displayed different views. This resulted in a great number of detailed findings. Yet, although this detail is important, it can make it difficult to see 'the bigger picture' that derives from the data. This final chapter reverses the perspective and tries to assess the common features of the more detailed findings reported earlier.

This conclusion focuses on questions that contain a clear aspect of evaluation of standards, and that were asked not only in the 2010 survey but also in the previous three. These questions do not all have the same 'format'. Some specify only two options for answers, others more. Yet, they can be compared in a simple way by expressing the responses as a point lying somewhere between a 'worst' and a 'best' conceivable situation. In each case, the 'worst' would be where all respondents see standards are very poor, or believe that politicians cannot be trusted, or think that MPs are not competent. The 'best' would be if everyone believes that standards are excellent, that politicians can be trusted, that MPs are competent, and so on. The actual responses of the sample will lie somewhere in between these two extremes, sometimes more to the positive side, sometimes more to the negative side. By scoring the responses in this way, comparisons can be made between different questions, and between different years, and different groups in the British population.

The questions included in the following analyses are:

- Trust (see Chapter 2 of this report), and in particular: trust in MPs in general, in one's local MP, in Government ministers, and in top civil servants. Trust in judges and in tabloid journalists (the most and the least

trusted groups respectively – see Chapter 2), are also included to provide some perspective on the ratings of politicians.

- Rating of standards of conduct of public office holders (see Chapter 1).
- How standards of conduct compare with a few years ago (see Chapter 1).
- Confidence in authorities to uphold standards (see Chapter 5).
- Confidence in authorities uncovering wrongdoing by people in public office (see Chapter 5).
- Confidence in the media uncovering wrongdoing by people in public office (see Chapter 5).
- Confidence that wrongdoing by people in public office will be punished (see also Chapter 5).
- The extent to which MPs are seen as engaged in desirable behaviour (such as being committed to doing a good job for the public, or being competent at their job) or undesirable behaviour (such as using their power for their personal gain, or taking bribes). These questions were analysed in detail in the report (see Chapter 3). For the current analysis we combine the responses to these separate questions into a single index that expresses the proportion of listed behaviours that are perceived in a positive way by the respondents.

For each of these variables, responses can be expressed as a specific point somewhere on a continuum between the most positive and the most negative perceptions possible. They can be then be represented (with all thirteen variables in a single graph), by arranging them as spokes of a wheel. In such a chart (sometimes referred to as a 'spider web' or 'radar' chart) it is easy to see the extent to which positive or negative perceptions are the same across all variables, or whether particular variables elicit much more

positive (or negative) responses than others. A chart of this type can also be used to compare the responses of different samples or different groups of respondents to these groups of questions.

Figure 7.1 uses this analysis on the results of the 2010 survey and compares it to each of the previous surveys. The points on each of the axes of the web (one for each variable), that represent respondents' evaluations of negativity or positivity have been connected. This makes it easier to see both which of the variables is perceived most positively, and what differences exist between the various surveys. The outer rim of the web is where everybody is positive on the scale; the centre is where everybody is negative. In between, points on each axis combine levels of positivity or negativity and proportions expressing them.

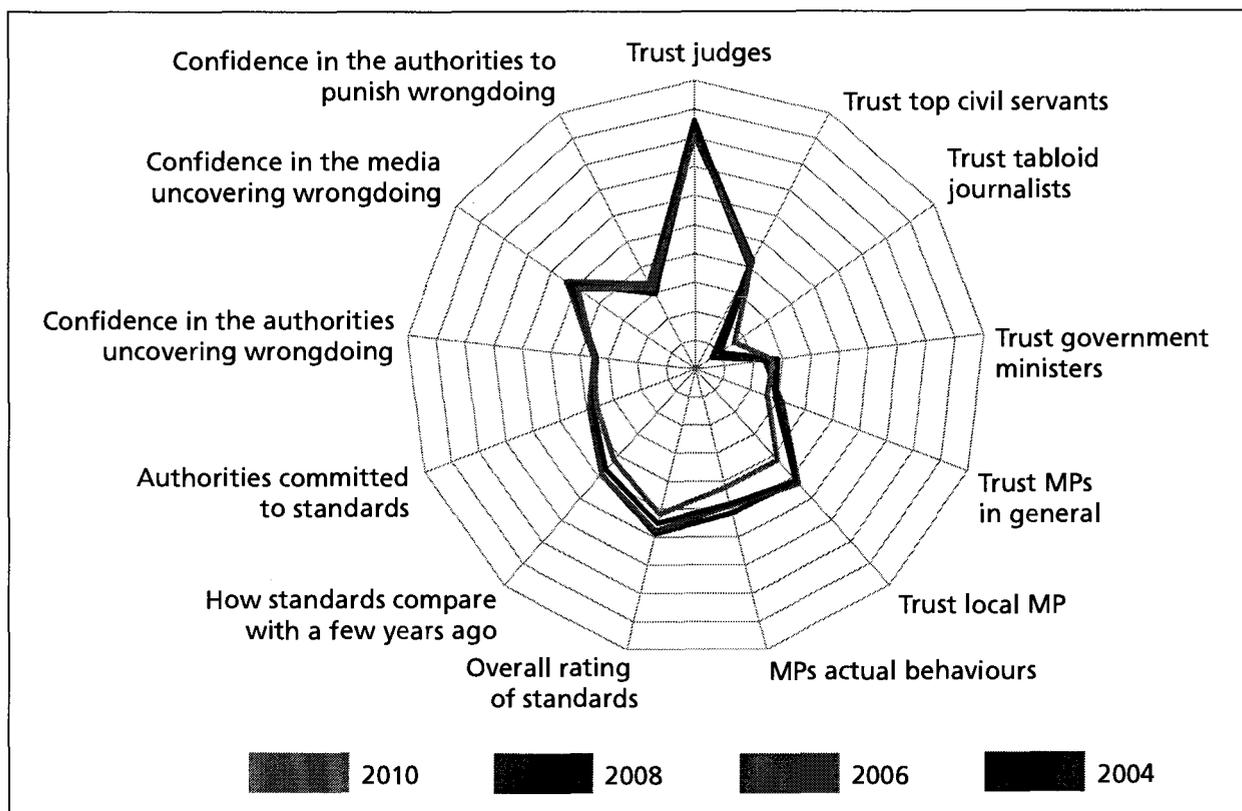
Figure 7.1 shows that, with the exception of judges, perceptions of standards of politicians and public officials are quite negative. For the variables displayed, and for 2010, only trust in judges is more positive than negative (i.e., the point of the trust in judges axis is much closer to the outer rim of the chart than towards the centre). The other variables rarely cross the

mid-point between maximum negativity and maximum positivity.

A second striking feature of Figure 7.1 is that for some variables there has not been much change over time in perceptions. The lines representing the four surveys are virtually on top of each other for all the variables displayed in the upper half of the chart. But for the variables in the bottom half of the chart the 2010 survey shows more pronounced negativity than the previous surveys. These variables relate to trust in MPs generally, trust in one's local MP, perceptions of MPs' actual behaviour, overall ratings of standards, perceptions of how this has changed over time, and the perception of the authorities' commitment to improving standards. For all these variables, the green line (representing the 2010 survey) is significantly closer to the centre of the chart (thus, more negative) than the lines of the earlier surveys.

For a few variables this increasingly negative evaluation reflects changes that were already visible in earlier surveys (most marked in the cases of the overall rating of standards and the perception of how standards have changed). But for the variables relating to politicians, the 2010 perceptions display a step-change towards

Figure 7.1 Comparing perceptions of standards across surveys



greater negativity. This is not a reflection of the British public being gloomier in general, since there is no increased negativity for the items in the top half of the chart. Increased negativity in 2010 is found only for judgments about politicians and for the general evaluation of standards.

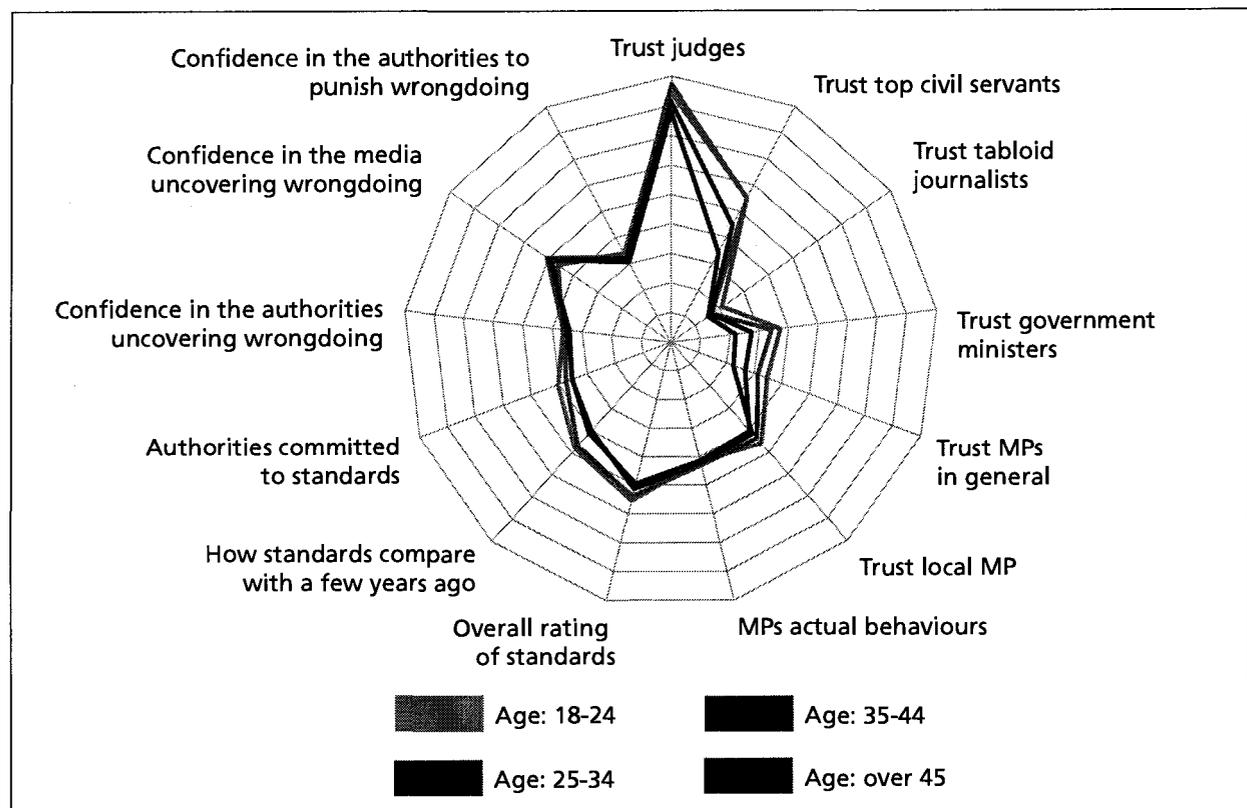
This increase in negative evaluations must be seen against the background of already very unflattering perceptions of politicians in previous years (being already much closer to the centre of the chart than to the outer rim). As mentioned earlier in this report, it cannot be stated with absolute certainty that these changes can be attributed to the expenses scandal, but that interpretation seems at least plausible in the absence of compelling rival interpretations.

Previous chapters of this report have provided detailed analyses of the extent to which perceptions and beliefs vary within the GB population. In this chapter we address how far these differences have a general pattern, as against varying for different items. This can be addressed in the same way as the comparison between the different surveys, above. For these variables, however, we focus on the 2010 data

only, and make comparisons between different groups within the GB population.

Figure 7.2 illustrates the impact that differences between age groups have on people's views. The differences in perceptions are not very large between age groups, although the magnitude of these differences varies somewhat across questions (e.g., the differences are much larger when looking at trust in Government ministers, than perceptions of MPs' actual behaviours). However, this figure also shows that there is a systematic character in the impact of age differences. On every item the perceptions and beliefs of the two oldest age groups are more negative than those of the two youngest age groups. This is the case even where the differences do not reach statistical significance for separate items (as is the case, for example, for trust in judges). This finding underlines the relevance of the question raised in Chapter 2 of this report, as to whether such systematic and persistent differences reflect life-cycle or cohort effects. If life-cycle effects exist, young people who tend to be more positive now will become less so when they grow older. With cohort effects, the more positive views of the currently youngest generations of citizens will persist through their life-cycles. The relevance of this

Figure 7.2 Comparing the impact of age on perceptions of standards

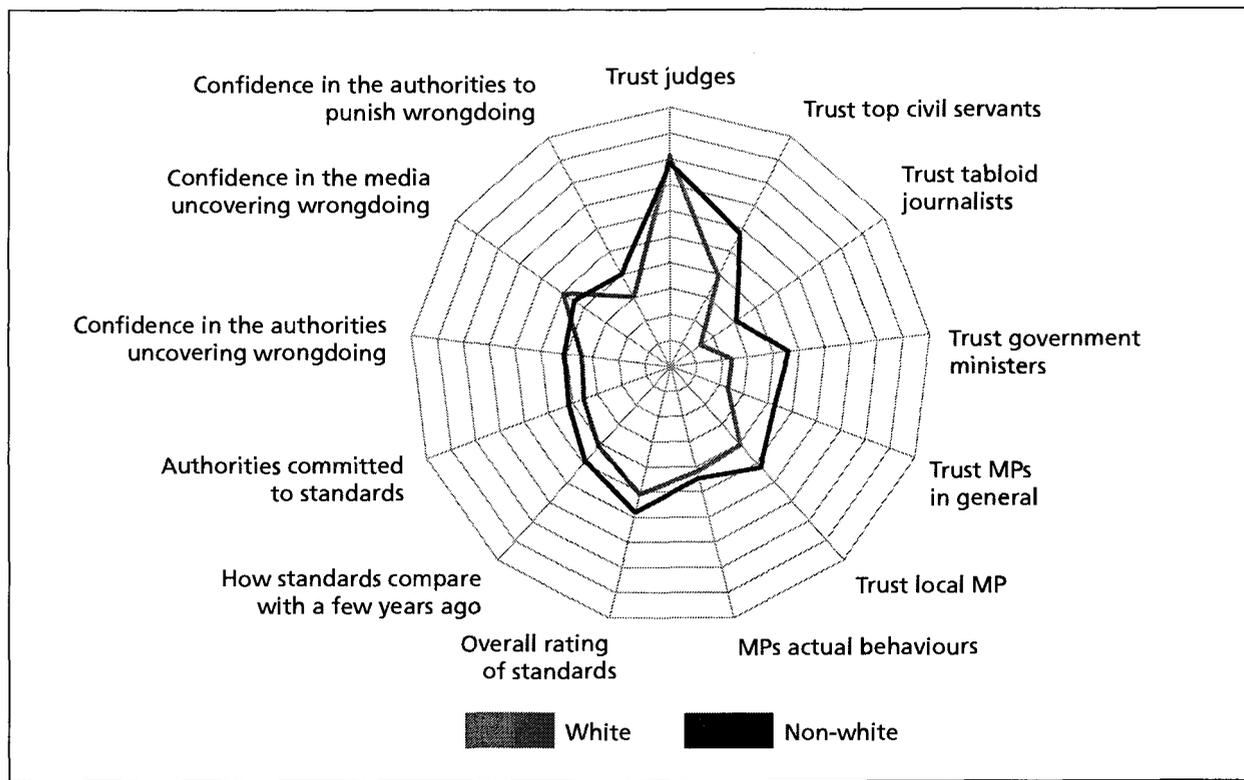


question lies in what we can expect to happen in the coming decades: a greying population giving rise to increasingly strong feelings of negativity about politics (life-cycle effect), or the gradual replacement of generations with negative perceptions by other ones who have a somewhat more positive perception. Which of these two different processes is at play can be assessed only through the collection and analysis of quality longitudinal data, which follow cohorts through their life-cycles.

Some caution is needed when comparing groups on the basis of ethnic background since the small numbers interviewed in this

survey preclude comparisons of different ethnic minority groups, whose attitudes may vary considerably from one another. However, comparing all those in an ethnic minority group with the majority White British group reveals very strong and systematic differences across virtually all items. Figure 7.3 shows that negativity in perceptions is much more pronounced amongst the White British population than amongst ethnic minority groups. Overall, the difference is one between slightly negative perceptions and beliefs amongst members of ethnic minorities, and much more extremely negative views amongst White British. This report is not the appropriate

Figure 7.3 Comparing the impact of ethnicity on perceptions of standards

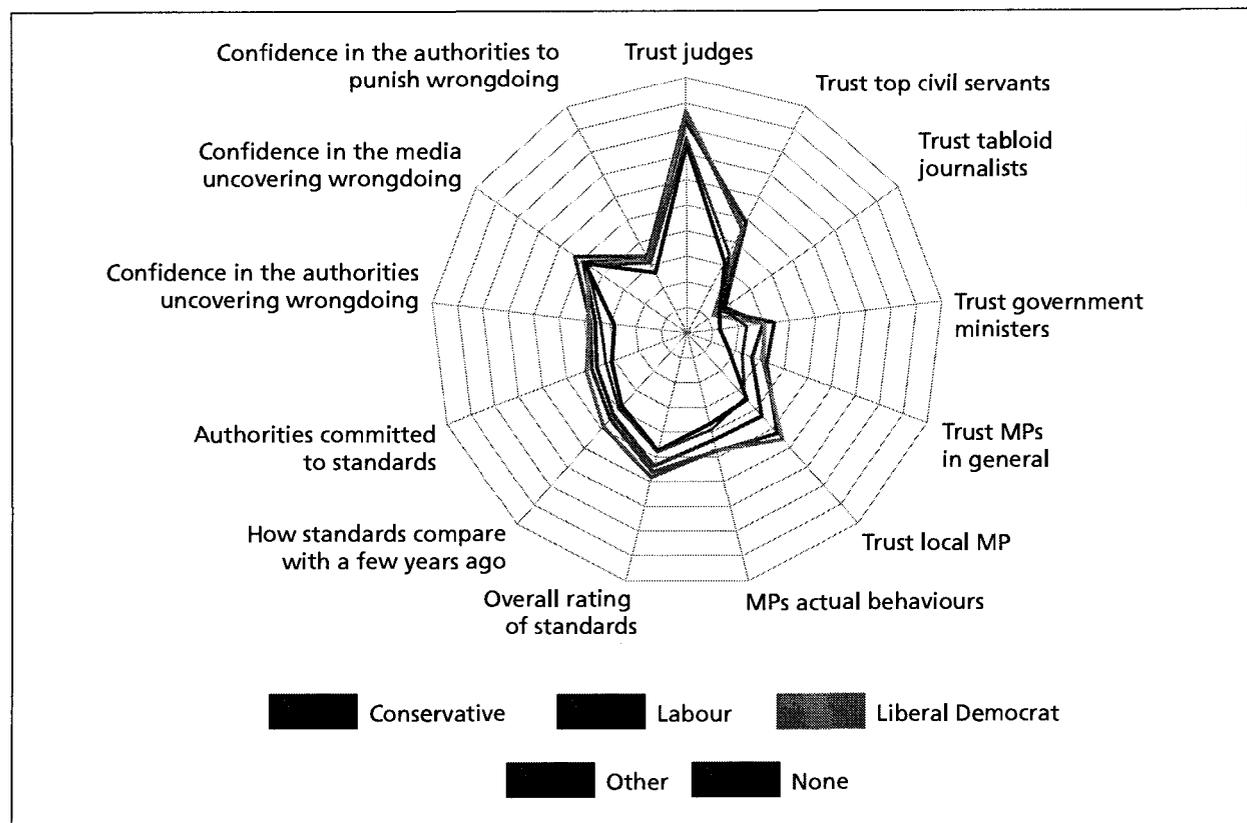


place to speculate about the origins and consequences of these differences, but they are large enough to warrant further investigation.

As the preceding chapters have shown, perceptions and views differ considerably between people of different political affiliations. Figure 7.4 helps to assess these differences. Two things stand out. First, on virtually all variables analysed here, the perceptions and beliefs of people affiliated to parties other than the major three and people without any party affiliation whatsoever, are much more negative than are those of supporters of the three major parties. Second, although much more muted, there

seems to be somewhat of an incumbency effect, with supporters of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats generally being most positive in their perceptions. The first of these two findings is linked to the most striking differences: people supporting Other parties are extremely negative in most of their perceptions, and they display especially low trust in Government ministers.

Figure 7.4 Comparing the impact of party affiliation on perceptions of standards

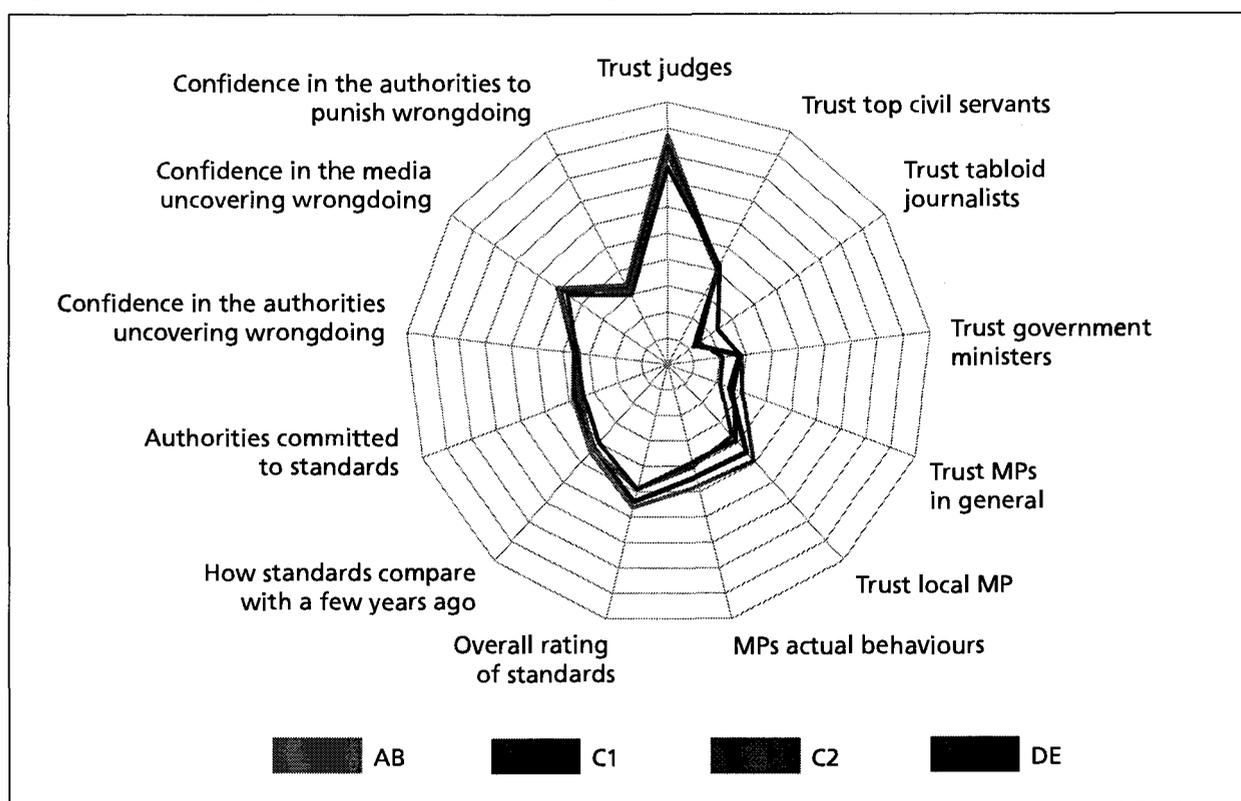


In earlier chapters we have commented on the impact of differences between occupational grades. Figure 7.5 shows that for most of the variables the differences between the perceptions of people from different occupational grades are not very large. Moreover, the ranking in terms of negativity across the four groups distinguished (A/B, C1, C2, and D/E) is not always the same for each measure. For example, the D/E group is most negative in its perceptions for many of the variables, but not for trust in Government ministers and trust in tabloid journalists.

Finally, when comparing the differences between the different surveys from 2004 to

2010 on the one hand, and the differences between different segments of the GB population in 2010, it must be emphasised that the differences with earlier surveys are, on the whole, not particularly large. There is more variation in perceptions within the population, for example in terms of ethnicity or party affiliation, than there is variation over the four surveys. This does not make the over time differences unimportant, but it does demonstrate that the slow secular decline in overall levels of confidence on standards issues slightly obscures some very varied reactions to standards questions from different sections of the community.

Figure 7.5 Comparing the impact of occupational grade on perceptions of standards



# TECHNICAL APPENDIX

Unless otherwise noted, the analyses in this report are based on the sample of respondents from Great Britain to make results comparable with previous surveys. The total numbers of respondents in each survey were: 2004 N=1097, 2006 N=1446, 2008 N=1898, 2010 N=1900. The Survey was conducted between 29 December 2010 and 4 January 2011.

All the logistic regression models control for all the following independent variables:

*Gender:* male, female (ref cat)

*Age:* 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45+ (ref cat)

*Party affiliation:* Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Other parties, No affiliation (ref cat)

*Occupational grade:* A/B managerial and professional, C1 supervisory and clerical, C2 skilled manual, D/E unskilled manual and unemployed (ref cat)

*Ethnic minority status:* ethnic minority, White British (ref cat)

*Country:* Scotland, Wales, England (ref cat)

We report and discuss the proportions of respondents in each group selecting a given answer only where significant differences were found. Logistic regression indicates significant differences between the reference category and each of the other variable categories, so, for example, between individuals with No party affiliation and supporters of, in turn, Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Other parties. Where the text refers to (significant) differences between two other categories included in the models (e.g. Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters), significance tests were conducted post-regression, by means of the Wald test, which tests for significant differences between these two regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ). In practice, this is equivalent to changing the reference category.

Unlike previous studies, the 2010 survey does not include measures of highest educational qualification, sector of employment, newspaper readership, exposure to media, whether the respondent was influenced by issues under the

remit of the CSPL, and whether the respondent was influenced by wider events. As such, these are not included in the models.

The 2010 omnibus sample showed larger differences relative to the 2008 stand-alone survey than could be accounted for by sampling errors in terms of party affiliation patterns. If we compare the 2008 sample for England alone (N=913) with that for England for 2010 (N=1637), (since the 2008 survey over-sampled in Wales, Scotland and NI), the proportions in the various party affiliation categories for England alone are as follows:

| Party Affiliation | England 2008 | England 2010 |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
|                   | %            | %            |
| Conservative      | 30           | 21           |
| Labour            | 28           | 30           |
| Liberal Democrat  | 13           | 8            |
| Other parties     | 11           | 8            |
| No affiliation    | 18           | 33           |
| Total             | 100          | 100          |

It is clear that overall a larger proportion of individuals reported having no party affiliation in 2010 compared with 2008. There was a corresponding decline the proportions identifying with the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. We cannot determine the reason for these differences, although they could reflect disenchantment with the Coalition government on the part of supporters of its constituent parties.

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