

NEWS RELEASE

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Low turnout caused by 'lack of trust', not apathy, survey shows

Political disaffection was by far the biggest factor behind the low turnout in the May 5th general election, a major national survey of non-voters shows.

The survey of 1,025 people who were registered to vote – but didn't – was commissioned by the Power Inquiry, a year-long inquiry into falling political participation including election turnouts and growing disillusionment with British democracy.

Key survey findings show:

- When asked to choose something that might encourage them to vote, most non-voters (54%) chose politicians keeping their promises and listening to people's views between elections (the figure rose to 72% for 18 to 24-year-olds – a group that are particularly unlikely to vote).
- When asked the 'open' question : 'what was the main reason for you not voting on May 5th'. 36% of non-voters cited political Reasons

included a lack of difference between the parties and claims that politicians 'could not be trusted'.

- Only 19% cited apathy as a reason for not voting when asked the same open question (see above). Only 1% mentioned the fact that the result of the election was a foregone conclusion as a reason for not voting.
- 72% of non-voters said they were likely/very likely to get involved in a referendum when offered other ways of getting involved in political processes. 70% said they were likely/very likely to get involved in a meeting where they could set local council budgets with councillors.
- More than 90% of non-voters identified three or more political issues that "really mattered" to them despite the fact that 66% declared themselves as disinterested in politics – suggesting that many non-voters do not connect the issues that concern them to parliamentary politics.

Power Inquiry chair Helena Kennedy QC said: "It is not good enough to blame low turnouts on voter apathy.

"People very clearly care about important issues – they just don't trust the politicians or the processes by which they claim their mandates. Above all, they don't feel that they have any real influence."

The survey follows publication of last month's Power Inquiry report, *Beyond the Ballot*, which claimed that politicians lacked the will for changes needed to re-engage the growing numbers of people disillusioned with democracy in Britain.

Ms Kennedy said: "Politicians have got to start giving people a genuine influence over political decisions. That means looking to new, more creative mechanisms which can really re-engage the voting public in British democracy."

Ends

Note editors

- The Power Inquiry is a year-long commission funded by the Rowntree Trusts to increase participation in UK political decision-making processes and is due to present its final report in early 2006.
- The survey was carried out by Opinion Leader Research on behalf of the Power Inquiry.
- When asked to choose one or more options from a list of things that would encourage them to vote, the top choices were:
 - politicians listened to my views between elections – 54%
 - politicians' promises could be trusted – 54%
 - my preferred party had a real chance of power – 50%
 - there were more differences between the parties – 49%
 - more information on my constituency candidates – 48%
- Power Inquiry commission members include: Helena Kennedy QC; Ferdinand Mount, former director of the Centre for Policy Studies; former Radio One DJ Emma B; Drum magazine editor Paul Boakye; sports coach Phil Carey; former ICA director Philip Dodd; Ben Freeman of Prudential Property Investment Managers Ltd; Barbara Gill, chair of the National Federation of Women's Institutes; Blackburn-based

consultant Bano Murtja and TUC deputy general secretary Frances O'Grady.

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