

the 2007 survey of local election candidates – *summary*

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This summary describes the main findings of the 2007 survey of Local Election Candidates undertaken by the LGC Elections Centre, University of Plymouth in partnership with the IDeA.

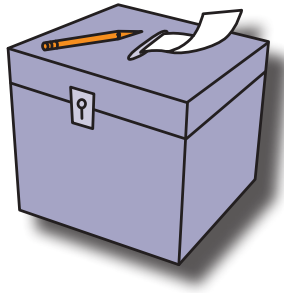
The survey sought to discover more about the type of person that challenges for local council election and their attitudes about the reasons for the under-recruitment amongst certain social groups - women, younger people, Black, Asian and other minority ethnic people

1 who challenges for local council elections?

- two thirds of candidates are men, a majority are aged over 55 years while an even larger majority are white
- councillors that were re-elected are most likely to be retired while many candidates are likely to be self-employed
- around three-quarters of candidates are drawn from the professional and managerial classes and almost half possess a university degree.

2 campaigning and political experience

- for about three in ten respondents the 2007 election was their first as a candidate but for the same proportion it was at least their fifth
- local political parties appeared to be selecting candidates from groups already active in the civic society
- the vast majority produced a campaign leaflet with some personal input into its content
- there was a wide variation in the amount of campaigning done with an average of twelve hours per week spent in this way
- campaigning was of the traditional variety, leafleting and canvassing. The Internet was not widely used.



3 decision to stand for local election and the level of support or opposition encountered from others

- only a third of candidates described the initial decision to stand as entirely their own – two thirds stood after being asked to do so
- women were more likely than men to stand after being asked
- candidates were motivated to stand because they wanted to do something for their local area but also to assist a local party
- being asked to stand was also a strong motivator for standing
- family and friends were most likely to be very supportive of the person's choice to be a candidate for local election
- almost three-quarters believed that many people were prevented from becoming a candidate because council work appeared to be too time-consuming; only a minority believed that financial considerations and the lack of powers for local councillors were factors.

4 the level of competition in the nomination process

- in a large majority of cases the candidate selected was the only person to apply for the nomination; only one in twelve had sought a nomination for a ward other than that for which they were selected
- one in five admitted that they were selected because they were prepared to stand as a paper candidate and one in eight because they were the only volunteer
- while most candidates were resident in the ward they contested a significant minority were not; candidates that stood as Independents were most likely to reside in the ward
- most thought that political parties were the best means for recruiting candidates although a third thought local authorities should advertise for candidates.



5 the candidate's experience of the campaign process

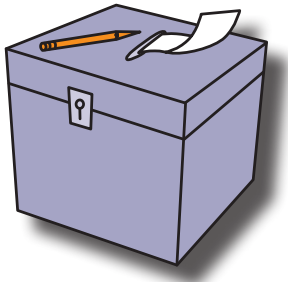
- for a large majority of respondents (even those defeated) election campaigning was an enjoyable experience and one that could be repeated.

6 the diversity of candidates

- candidates believed that personal reputation was most important for their selection – personal characteristics such as skin colour, age and sex were perceived as less relevant to selection than personal qualities such as reputation, experience and community involvement
- among those social groups perceived as under-represented in local government there was most support for more younger people, next more Black, Asian and minority ethnic people and finally more women. A clear majority favoured enhanced recruitment of candidates from among these categories
- almost two-thirds believed that greater social diversity in the council chamber would improve local government's image but only a third thought it would help to increase voter turnout
- in general, the under-representation of candidates who are women, younger people or drawn from the Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities was perceived as resulting from such people not being pro-active in seeking nomination. Positive action measures to redress the situation were overwhelmingly rejected.

7 possible reasons for the under-representation

- two-thirds thought that women put family commitments before a local political career and that too few women come forward to be candidates
- they disagreed with the idea that women were not interested in politics and lacked the confidence to participate in local politics
- opinion about younger people's interest in politics was evenly divided – as many thought they were uninterested in politics as thought they were
- a large majority believed that younger people did not come forward to be selected as candidates for local election
- only a quarter thought that some voters might discriminate against younger people as local election candidates
- while six in ten felt political parties should encourage more Black, Asian and minority ethnic people to become candidates, four in ten believed some voters might discriminate against such candidates.



8 support for positive action measures for these social groups

- women were only slightly more likely than men to favour positive action measures to increase the number of women candidates – a large majority of women was against
- fewer than one in ten respondents believed that a fixed number of council seats for this grouping was the way to redress under-representation in local government
- positive action measures – such as a guaranteed proportion of council seats reserved for women and party quotas for women – were rejected by a large majority of respondents. Among those expressing an opinion the ratio was six to one against such measures being introduced
- positive action measures – such as a guaranteed proportion of council seats reserved for younger people and party quotas for younger people – were rejected by a large majority of respondents
- just 13 per cent thought the use of party quotas for Black Asian and minority ethnic people was a legitimate policy.