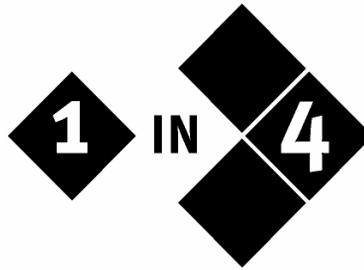


CAPABILITY SCOTLAND

T U R N I N G D I S A B I L I T Y I N T O A B I L I T Y



FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE
The views of disabled people in Scotland
on government and political parties

June 2001

THE SECOND SURVEY REPORT FROM
CAPABILITY SCOTLAND'S 1 IN 4 POLL

THE BACKGROUND

Capability Scotland began establishing the 1 in 4 poll in October 2000. As the country's largest disability organisation, we provide a range of quality services for adults and children with disabilities. We also campaign for and promote equal rights for disabled people. The 1 in 4 poll panel fits well within that ethos. Approximately 1 in 4 households in Scotland have a family member who is disabled. The choice of name was therefore simple - the 1 in 4 poll will not allow society to forget that disabled people form a very large minority in this country.

This unique initiative will create a panel of 1000 disabled people, their family members and carers. Participants of all ages from all parts of Scotland will be surveyed up to 4 times a year on a wide range of issues. The aim is to give disabled people, their families and carers a voice and to ensure their voice is heard by decision makers and key influencers.

Participants in the poll are guaranteed anonymity. Scotinform Ltd, a reputable Scottish research company, have been commissioned by Capability Scotland to conduct all the surveys and to analyse the responses. Capability Scotland will then publish the findings highlighting particular issues or trends. Surveys are available in a range of accessible formats and Capability Scotland will make every effort to accommodate every participant's needs.

The second survey was conducted in March 2001. The response rate was an excellent 57%. This survey asked panel members about their voting preferences, their experience of voting and to rank the importance of different issues. Members were also asked for their views on the UK government. To our knowledge, this is the first time that disabled people and carers have been asked as a group, for their views on political issues. Again, Capability Scotland's 1 in 4 poll is breaking new ground.

If you want to join the 1 in 4 poll, contact Kate Higgins at Capability Scotland

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Summary of Key Findings:

- 88% of respondents voted in 1997, 93% intend to vote in this General Election
- Half of all respondents voted New Labour in 1997, a third intend to do so now
- 24% voted SNP and in 2001, 20% intend to do so again
- While 12% voted Liberal Democrat in 1997, 9% will do so this time
- The Conservatives share of the vote is stable - 8% in 1997 and the same in 2001
- Many are still making their minds up - 26% are “not sure” who to vote for
- Nearly one in five of disabled participants will not vote in person
- Benefits and poverty are the issues which most participants saw as important
- While 10% thought the government had improved benefits, 24% thought they had cut benefits
- 13% thought the government had done a good job in improving awareness and tackling discrimination
- 84% of respondents feel no different or worse off under this government

THE FINDINGS

Who responded to the survey?

Of the 213 respondents, 57% were women and 37% were men, with some participants not stating their gender. 22% of respondents were either under 35 or over 55, but the majority of respondents were aged 35-44 (21%) or aged 45 -54 (24%).

Respondents were asked to describe themselves either as someone with a disability, someone with a medical condition or illness or someone who cares for a person with a disability. The vast majority of respondents - 70% - are someone with a disability or someone with a medical condition or illness, with nearly one third describing themselves as a carer.

Voting - Trends and Patterns

Commentators are anticipating a low turn-out in this General Election, yet, 1 in 4 poll members show no signs of disenchantment. A remarkable 88% of respondents voted in the 1997 General Election, far higher than the actual turnout in Scotland which was 78%. As we shall see repeatedly throughout this survey, participants aged 35-44 and 45-54 are key groups. The turnout among those aged 35 to 44 was an astounding 94%, yet this age group in the population at large does not turn out in such large numbers at elections. There are also differences in participation between disabled people and carers: 97% of carers voted but only 84% of disabled people did. The party preferences of respondents is largely reflective of the general population in Scotland. Half voted for New Labour, nearly a quarter voted SNP, 12% voted Liberal Democrat and 8% voted Conservative.

Respondents were asked if they intended to vote in the forthcoming General Election and which party they intended to vote for. An astonishing 93% intend to vote with the main reasons cited by the small numbers not voting being that “politicians don’t do anything for disabled people” or that they are “not interested in politics”. A recent ICM poll showed that only 73% of Scots are certain or likely to vote at this General Election so disabled people and carers are certainly bucking the national trend.

Table I shows how people intend to vote at the 2001 General Election. It also shows the shift in stated party preference by age group.

	Total		18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		over 65	
	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001
Conservative	8%	8%	20%	7%	13%	0%	13%	10%	4%	9%	7%	11%	6%	11%
		0%		-13%		-13%		-3%		5%		4%		5%
New Labour	50%	30%	40%	14%	64%	43%	50%	29%	49%	28%	41%	33%	47%	28%
		-20%		-26%		-17%		-21%		-21%		-8%		-19%
Liberal Democrat	12%	9%	20%	14%	4%	3%	13%	8%	13%	11%	15%	11%	12%	6%
		-3%		-6%		-1%		-5%		-2%		-4%		-6%
SNP	24%	20%	20%	29%	29%	23%	21%	15%	30%	23%	19%	11%	19%	28%
		-4%		9%		-6%		-6%		-7%		-8%		9%
Unsure		26%		29%		27%		34%		26%		19%		11%

More than a quarter are not sure who they will be voting for and where these votes go in 2001 may be crucial. If this large pool of uncommitted support returns to the same parties as people voted for in 1997, there will be little change in voting trends. However, if most or all of them switch votes to a different party, the voting pattern among disabled people and carers in Scotland will clearly be on the move.

Who would be the winners and losers? New Labour stand to lose the most support - 20% fewer have decided to vote for them in this General Election and only 59% of those who voted New Labour last time have indicated that they are intending to do so this time. It would appear however, that none of the political parties can take heart from the 1 in 4 poll findings. The SNP and the Liberal Democrats have also experienced a loss of stated support. Only half of those who voted SNP in 1997 will definitely do so in 2001 and the largest group of “unsure” voters - one third - are people who previously voted SNP. Only the Conservatives would appear to show signs of stability, albeit with the lowest level of support of all the parties. With some age groups experiences there are signs of growth. Yet, the numbers are small and there is no sign of them making significant inroads into the vote of any other party.

It is more difficult to see a trend by age. The highest level of shift in voting intentions is signalled by the 35 - 44 year old age group. More of them are unsure who to vote for in this election than any other age group. Yet, at both ends of the age spectrum, both the youngest and oldest participants seem more keen to shift directly from one party to another.

Table II shows how disabled people and carers are shifting their votes and this breakdown shows that carers appear much less sure about who to vote for this time round. Among disabled people, party support remains fairly steady except among respondents who voted New Labour last time. At the moment, they appear to be unsure who to vote for.

	Disabled People (%)			Carers (%)		
	1997	2001	change	1997	2001	change
Conservative	6	7	1	8	11	3
New Labour	50	30	-20	48	32	-16
Liberal Democrat	11	11	0	14	7	-7
SNP	24	23	-1	22	13	-9
Not sure		22			32	

What can we discern from this expression of change in party preference? There is evidence that the dynamics demonstrated in the 1 in 4 poll survey are part of a larger process in Scottish politics. Recently published research indicated that in the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections, some Labour voters either stayed at home and a small number moved their votes to another party. The potential shift in party preference by 1 in 4 poll members might well be part of this wider trend. If it is, then while New Labour is still likely to attract more votes from disabled people and carers than any other political party, their lead

will be much less commanding. However, it is not entirely clear that the SNP will be the main beneficiary of this shift. Obviously if they do receive the majority of the “unsure” votes then they will be closing the gap on New Labour and will be challenging to be the main party of choice for 1 in 4 poll members. But there are only signs of a switch amongst the under 25s and over 65s who are the smallest groups statistically in this sample. If this trend is replicated nationally, there may be some comfort in the fact that older people are considered more likely to vote in an election. If that is the case, then the Conservatives too can take comfort as people over 55 also appear to be switching from New Labour to them.

The results on voting intentions are fascinating and Capability Scotland intends to continue mapping the voting intentions of disabled people and carers in future elections. At this election, we will be watching to see if the party preferences expressed by 1 in 4 poll members are representative of the Scottish electorate. Whether they are or not, disabled people and carers form a sizeable group in our society. It is clear that turnout among these groups is higher than average and it is also clear that their party preferences are currently fluid. This would suggest that the votes of disabled people and carers are there to be wooed by all the political parties in Scotland.

Participating in the Process

1 in 4 poll members were asked a series of questions about the practicalities of participating in the electoral process. Previous research conducted by Capability Scotland had shown that access to voting and to polling stations was a concern for many disabled people - would this still be the case in Scotland in the 21st Century? The responses showed clearly that carers anticipated few difficulties in casting their votes. Responses from disabled people and people with a medical condition or illness depict a very different picture. Table III shows how people intend to vote. The figures demonstrate dramatically that for many disabled people voting in person is still an aspiration rather than a reality.

Table III - How disabled people and carers intend to vote			
	Disabled people	Carers	
In person	77%	93%	
By proxy	2%	0%	
By postal vote	16%	5%	

Disabled people also indicated that they will experience a range of problems in voting - almost half will find it difficult to walk to their polling station, more than 1 in 5 will find it difficult to read information or hear what people say to them and the same number will have problems accessing the actual polling booth. Getting inside the polling station will be difficult for 18% and 15% will have difficulty folding their ballot paper and putting it in the ballot box. These responses demonstrate that participating in the electoral process will be a trial for many disabled people, yet huge numbers are determined to try.

Changes introduced in the Representation of the People Act 2000 should make a difference, making every aspect of casting a vote more accessible. Yet, disabled people clearly

anticipate problems. On June 7th, polling day, Capability Scotland and the 1 in 4 poll will be conducting a survey to test these changes. We hope to be able to report significant improvement on previous election day experiences.

The Issues that Matter

1 in 4 poll members were asked to rate a number of issues as important, not important or to state if they did not have a view. Participants were asked about issues which might be of interest to disabled people and carers - benefits, poverty, jobs and equality law - and also about issues of concern to everyone and which are largely reserved to the Westminster Parliament - taxes, nuclear weapons, the armed forces and environmental issues. The survey deliberately avoided issues like health, education and transport, acknowledging that these are devolved matters and therefore, are essentially not matters upon which people in Scotland are being asked to vote in this General Election.

Table IV shows how respondents ranked these issues.

Table IV - Issues ranked by importance			
	Important	Neither/nor	Not important
State benefits	87%	7%	2%
Poverty	78%	6%	2%
Jobs	72%	11%	6%
Equality Law	67%	16%	3%
Environmental Issues	67%	15%	4%
Taxes	64%	15%	7%
Nuclear weapons	44%	30%	12%
Armed forces	24%	36%	18%

Benefits are a crucial issue for both disabled people and carers and there is little differential in attitude according to party preference. For those aged between 25 and 44, benefits are key, with 94% and 82% ranking them as important respectively. Next in order of importance is poverty at 78%. This issue is more important to carers than to disabled people and again it ranked highest with the 25 to 34 year old age group. Here there is a distinction according to party preference with 4/5ths of SNP voters rating it as important compared to only half of Conservative voters. On jobs there was no discernible party political divide. More carers than disabled people valued this issue and unsurprisingly it was more important to respondents in the younger age groups. Equality law saw the biggest differential by age - over 70% of respondents aged up to 44 years old saw this issue as important with only 37% of over 65s doing so. For the first time, more disabled people than carers ranked an issue as important.

We can perhaps conclude that for 1 in 4 poll members there are some issues relating to disability that are of universal concern and others which show a definite age divide and in some cases a slight difference of opinion between disabled people and carers. It may be that the idea that people have the right to be treated as equal members of society protected by law, is a relatively novel political concept, of wider appeal, therefore, to younger poll participants.

On the more general issues, 1 in 4 poll respondents broadly ranked them as less important. Environmental issues ranked highest, particularly among older age groups and among Liberal Democrat voters. Taxes saw a definite party political divide with 64% of respondents rating them as important. The range varied between 93% of Conservative voters to only 58% of New Labour voters, perhaps indicating that taxes are still a key battleground issue although not necessarily because everyone is seeking lower ones! While respondents were relatively indifferent to the issue of the armed forces, 44% rated nuclear weapons as important. There was little difference of opinion across age groups and between disabled people and carers. And in party preference, it ranked highest among Conservative and SNP voters, presumably for entirely different reasons.

On issues of like concern to 1 in 4 poll participants and the wider electorate, there is little evidence of a convergence of opinion. Reassuringly, disabled people and carers view such issues as other voters do, rating them very much according to party preference rather than because of their life circumstances. And while it is clear that 1 in 4 poll members view issues which impinge directly on their lives highly, there is evidence that their concerns are shared by the wider voting population in Scotland.

Recent research indicated that in Scotland 87% of people believed “income inequality in Britain is too high” and that “large numbers of people who are eligible for benefits fail to claim them”. Moreover, 87% of people in Scotland think that “the government is mainly responsible for maintaining disabled people”, 82% support “more government spending on carers for sick or elderly” and 70% support the same for disabled people. Benefits and poverty are issues which appear to unite voters in Scotland. These issues in the context of disabled people appear to elicit strong feelings in the electorate.

For Better or For Worse

Respondents were asked to state one thing the government had done which made life easier for disabled people. In their responses, they showed a remarkable level of knowledge of government activity in the last 4 years. 13% cited improvements on equality issues or in raising awareness, 10% listed improvements in benefits and 8% considered that access in areas like transport, education and public buildings was better. The highest single response was “nothing” with nearly 1 in 5 of all participants responding thus and those aged between 35 and 54 giving the highest level of response.

Poll members were also asked to state one thing the government had done which had made life worse for disabled people. Again the responses showed a detailed grasp of government policy. Benefit cuts were cited by 24%, which was by far the largest response and for 8% it was the government’s lack of interest in disabled people or failure to keep their promises.

The next question asked participants to consider how they and their families felt under this government. While 15% indicated that they feel better off, 84% stated that they felt worse off or no different. There was little difference in the feelings expressed by disabled people and carers nor across party preferences - 81% of New Labour voters felt things were no different or that they were worse off. Those aged 35 to 44 had the lowest number who felt better off and the highest numbers who felt no different or worse off.

Is there a correlation between these feelings and participants shifting their vote? Table V would appear to indicate so.

	Total		18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		over 65	
	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001	1997	2001
New Labour	50%	30%	40%	14%	64%	43%	50%	29%	49%	28%	41%	33%	47%	28%
		-20%		-26%		-17%		-21%		-21%		-8%		-19%
<i>Better Off</i>		15%		0%		16%		11%		15%		21%		32%
<i>No different</i>		58%		79%		63%		56%		52%		59%		53%
<i>Worse Off</i>		26%		21%		19%		32%		33%		17%		16%
Unsure		26%		29%		27%		34%		26%		19%		11%

The best way to examine the possibility of a link is to look at the expressed shift in party preference compared to who considers themselves better off. Where the highest number of people who feel better off are, there is generally a lower level of shift. For example, among those respondents aged between 55 and 64, only 8% are saying that they do not intend to vote New Labour at this election. This age group also records the second highest level of satisfaction with the government. The feelings among respondents aged 45 to 54 appear to show a different picture. They indicate one of the lowest levels of feeling better off, the highest one of feeling worse off and show one of the highest shifts in party preference. In every age group there is a link between the level of shift from New Labour and the level of feeling better off - except one. Respondents over the age of 65 record the highest level of feeling better off at 32%, yet a fairly high percentage of them do not intend to vote New Labour at this election. A more detailed survey would be required to try and work out why.

Our survey findings appear to show a clear link between a feel-good factor and voting intentions in the 2001 General Election campaign. Those who feel better off will be voting New Labour again. Those who do not, are not sure who to vote for. Opposition political parties may find themselves the grateful recipients of votes from disabled people and carers not because of anything positive they are offering but simply because disabled people and carers are venting their feelings. Alternatively, like many other voters in the Scottish Parliament elections in 1999, they may choose simply to stay at home.

Conclusion

This survey of voting intentions and of attitudes on issues and to the UK Government is unique, in that it is the first time that disabled people and carers have been asked for their political views separately from the rest of the Scottish electorate. One intention of this second 1 in 4 poll survey was to ascertain differences in voting behaviour and attitudes among disabled people and carers compared to Scottish voters in general. We also hoped to tease out similarities and to show how disabled people and carers are included as an integral part of wider society. We were not disappointed.

The pattern of party preference in the 1997 General Election largely reflected the choices made by all Scots. Issues which disabled people and carers consider important, perhaps because of their own life circumstances, appear to strike a chord with the electorate

generally in Scotland. Party preference by voters who are disabled or who are carers may be shifting in common with a pattern discerned by wider research on the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections.

Yet the differences are quite startling, not least on the issue of voter apathy. In this survey, disabled people and carers have shown themselves to be passionate about politics. Why they vote in greater numbers is unclear but perhaps the fact that politics and government impact on their lives to a greater extent than other voters plays a role. It obviously does matter to 1 in 4 poll members who is in government and they value their votes as their way of having a say in what happens in their lives. Their knowledge of policies and issues is detailed and this might also be a factor which sets them apart from other Scottish voters.

Finally, the results of this survey should alert the political parties in Scotland. As we go forward in a new century, voting habits appear to be changing and becoming less entrenched. Disabled people and carers form a large part of the electorate in Scotland and may well form a more important part of it in this and future elections. There are nearly 800,000 people of working age in Scotland who have a disability or long-standing illness or medical condition. Most of them will be entitled to vote and if our survey is representative, most of them intend to use their vote. If disabled people and carers continue to vote in such high numbers in future elections while turnout decreases in the general population, their votes may well become crucial. The vote of disabled people and carers is clearly a vote to be wooed and to be won.

All references to recent research refer to:

*New Scotland, New Politics? by Lindsay Patterson, Alice Brown, John Curtice, Kerstin Hinds, David McCrone, Alison Park, Kerry Sproston, Paula Surridge
Chapters 4 and 8*