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Lessons from e-voting in England 2000-07

Tom Hawthorn

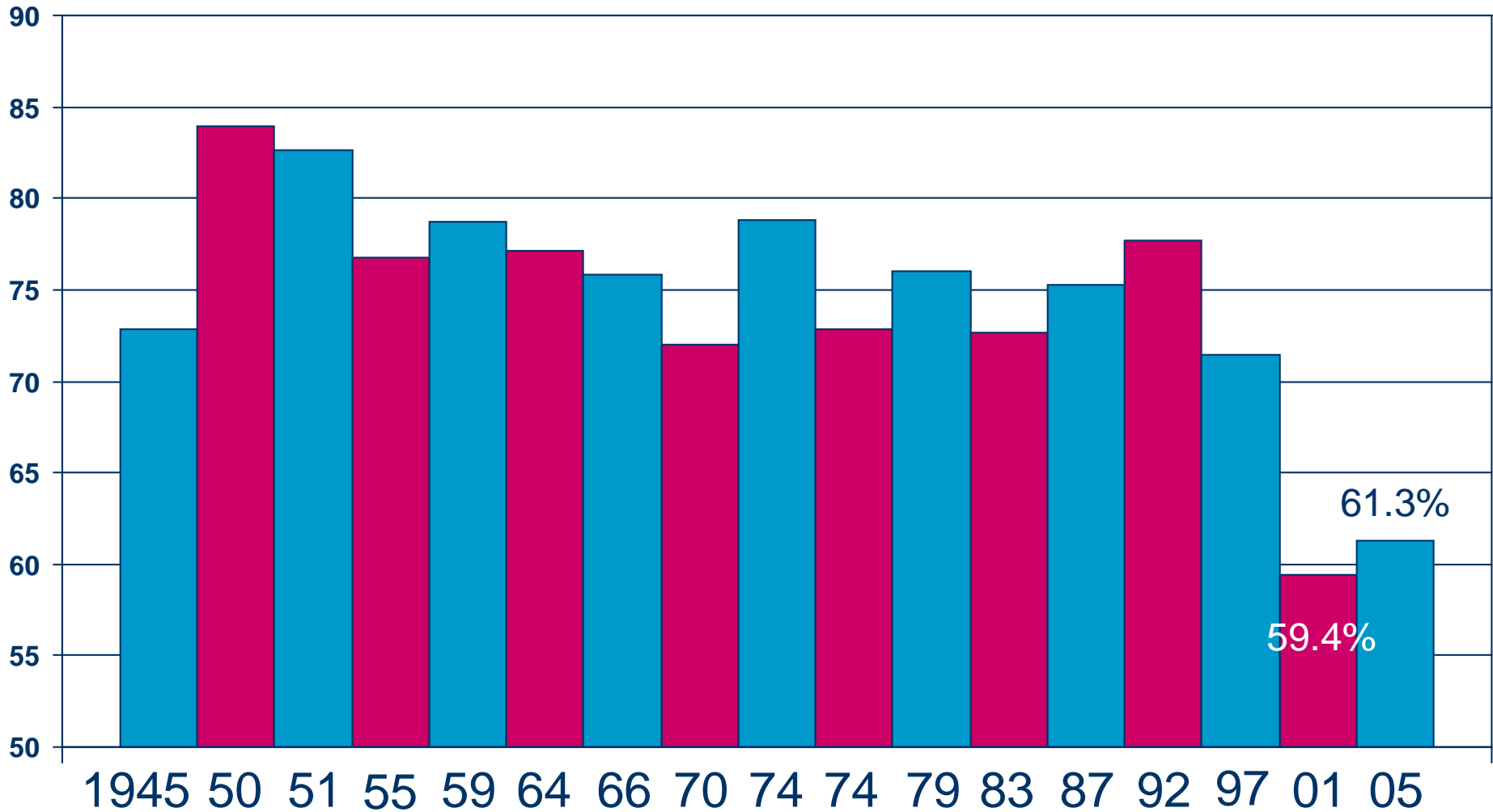Head of Electoral Policy, UK Electoral Commission

Ottawa, January 2010

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Declining turnout and desire to increase convenience are key drivers for e-voting in UK

- Long-term decline in turnout at all elections in UK

- Declining levels of trust and engagement with traditional or formal politics

- Perceptions of changes to patterns of society – busier lifestyles, less time available to participate

- Increased opportunities for online activity in other areas of life – shopping, banking, other government transactions
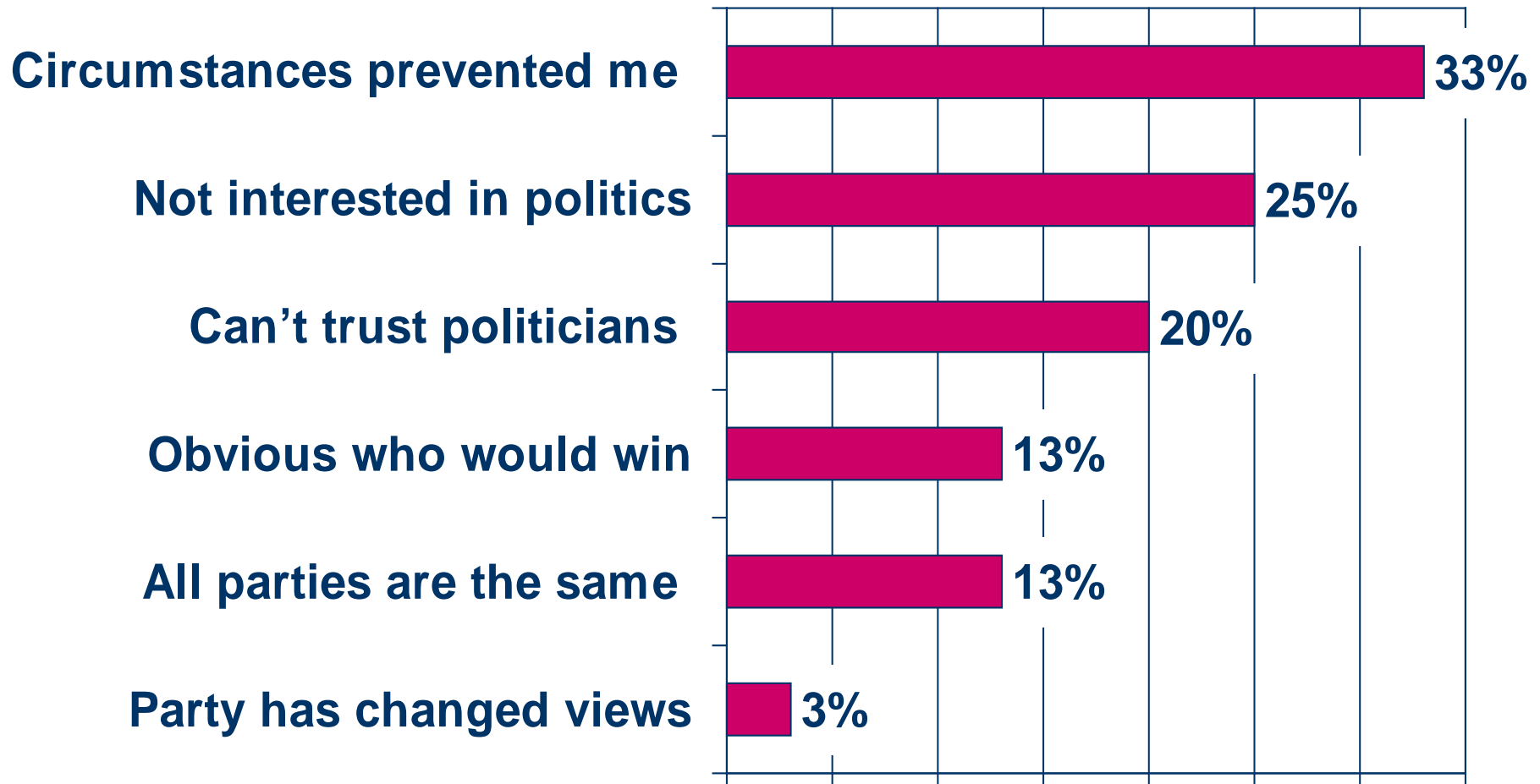
Turnout at UK Parliament General Elections, 1945 – 2005
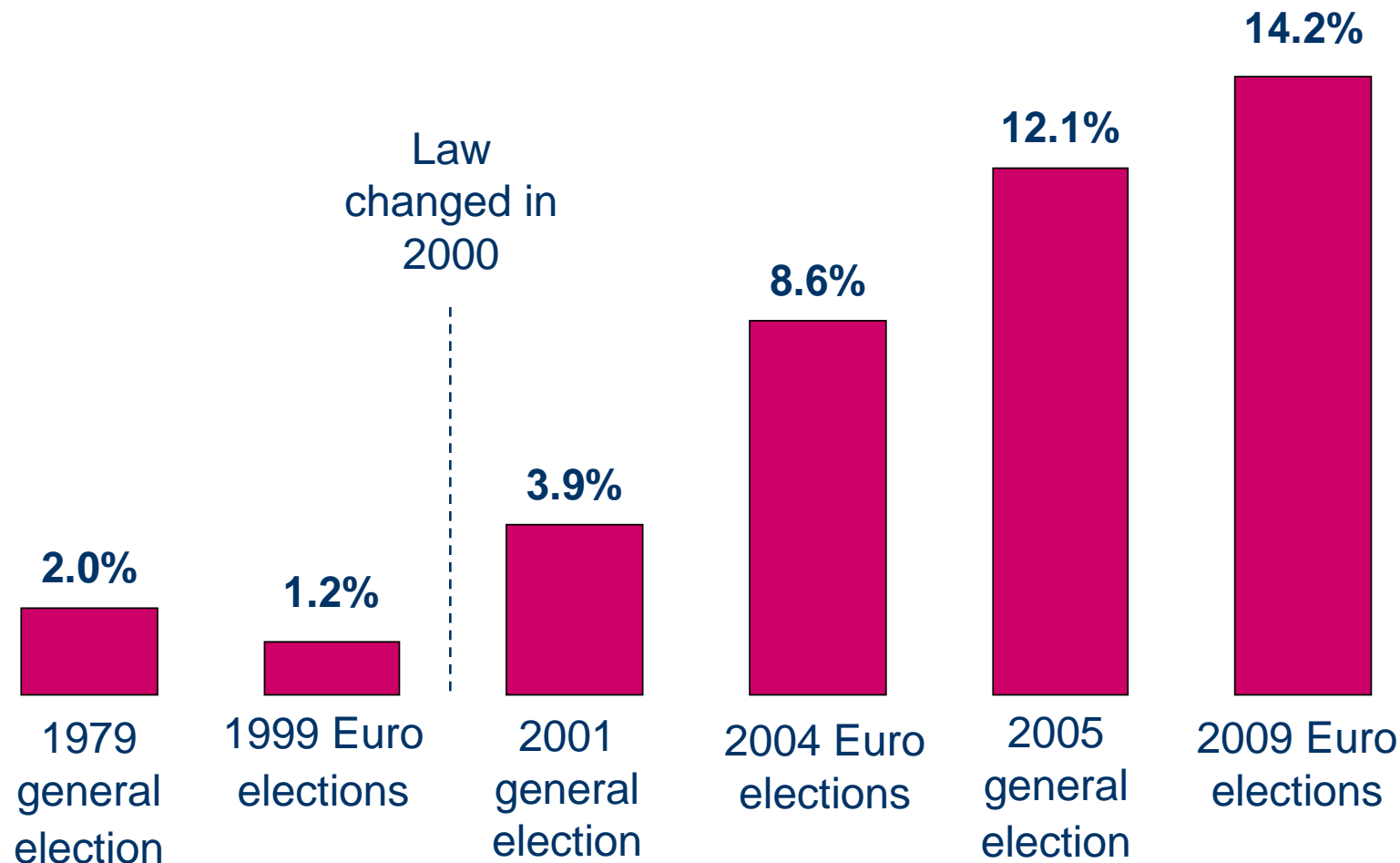
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Postal voting is increasingly popular in Great Britain

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14.2%

12.1%

Law
changed in
2000

8.6%

3.9%

2.0%

1.2%

| 1979 general election | 1999 Euro elections | 2001 general election | 2004 Euro elections | 2005 general election | 2009 Euro elections |

Percentage of electors receiving postal votes

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Deadline for registration and postal vote applications

Deadline for new proxy applications

Polling day
Last date for emergency proxy applications

| -17 | -16 | -15 | -14 | | | -13 | -12 | -11 | -10 | -9 | | | -8 | -7 | -6 | -5 | -4 | | | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 |

Proclamation and issue of writs

Publication of notice of election

Deadline for nominations
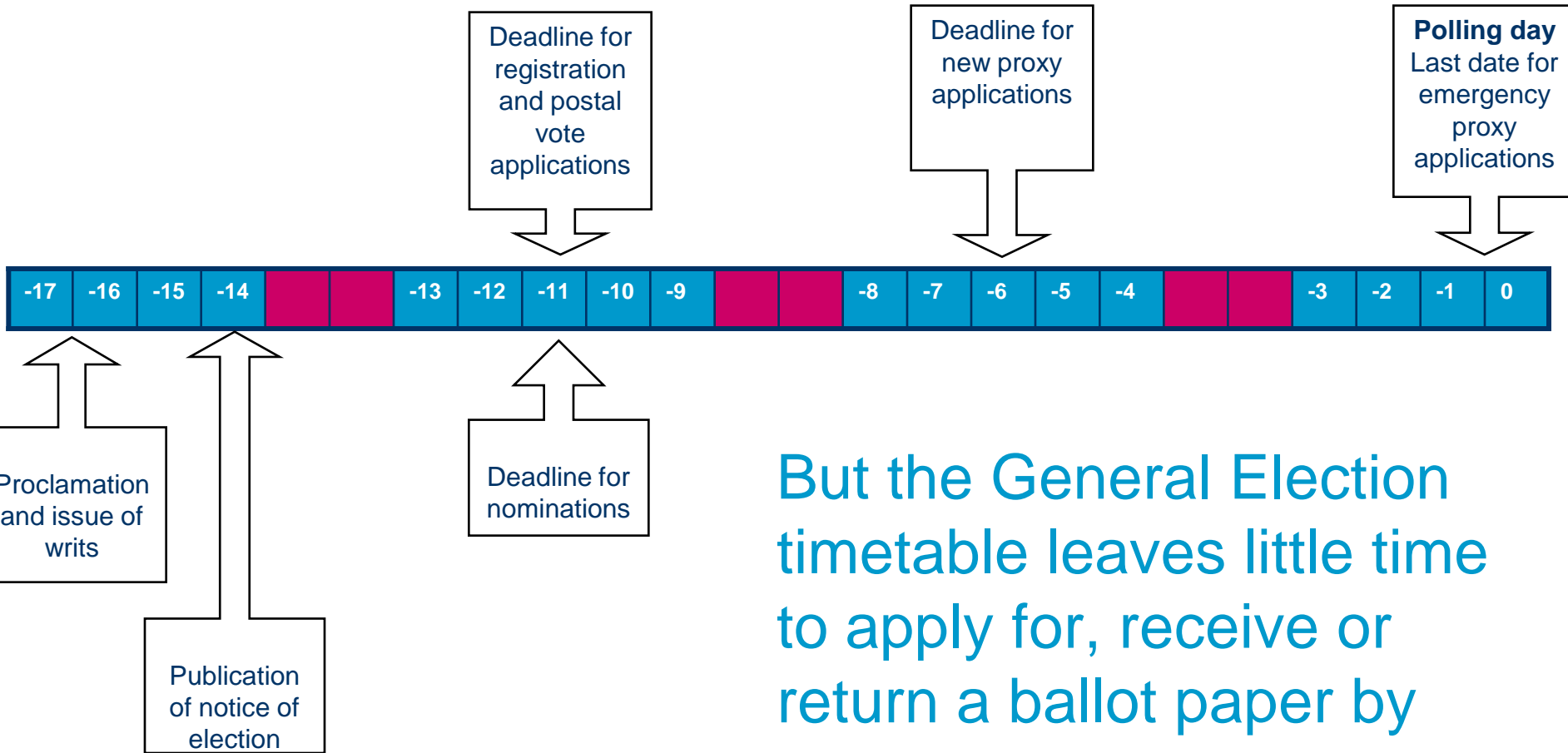
But the General Election timetable leaves little time to apply for, receive or return a ballot paper by post

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## The UK has carried out e-voting tests since 2000

- Legal framework for pilot schemes at local government elections

- 31 e-voting pilot schemes 2000-07:
  - e-voting machines in polling place (2000-03)
  - remote e-voting using Internet, telephone

- Electoral Commission has provided independent evaluation of pilot schemes
  - turnout and convenience
  - security and confidence
  - administrative impact and value for money

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E-voting has not persuaded significant numbers of 'non-voters' to vote …
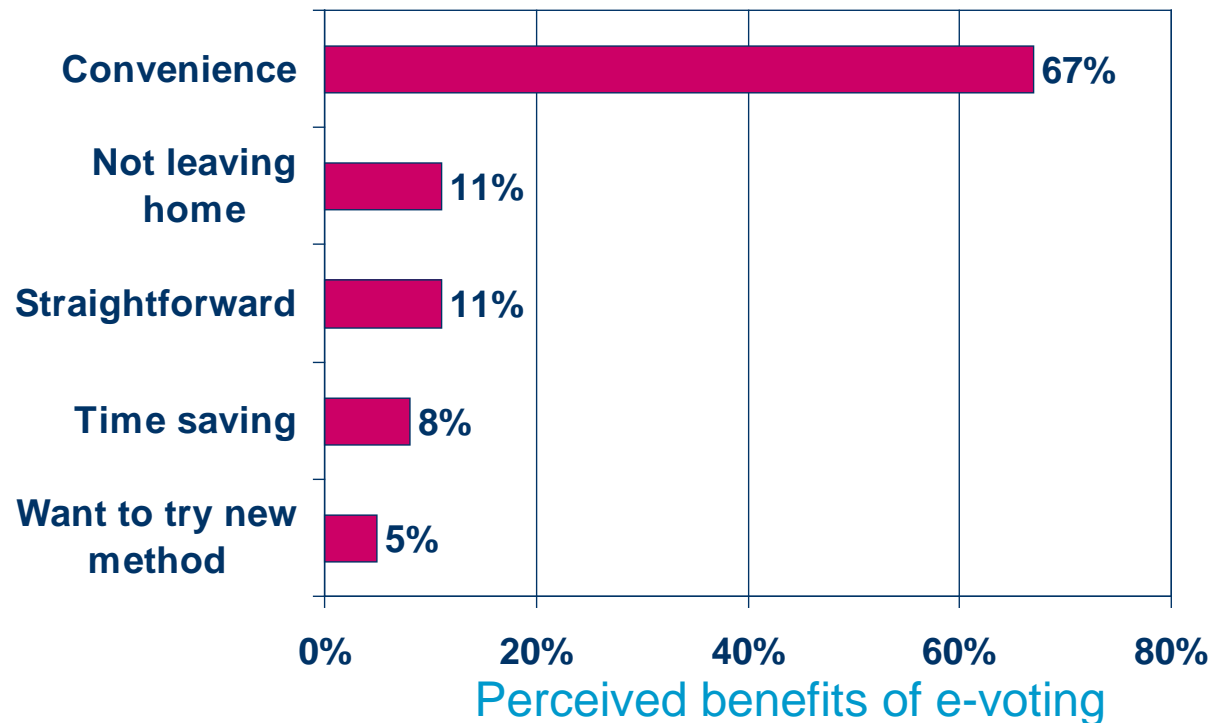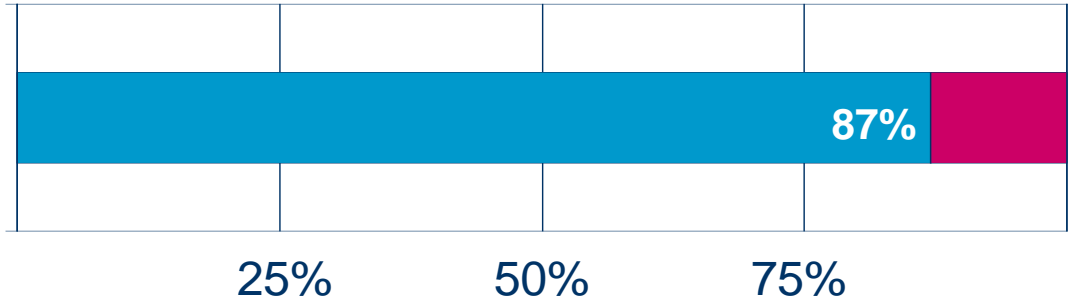
Percentage of electors using e-voting

Min 3.4%   Max 17.7%

5%   10%   15%
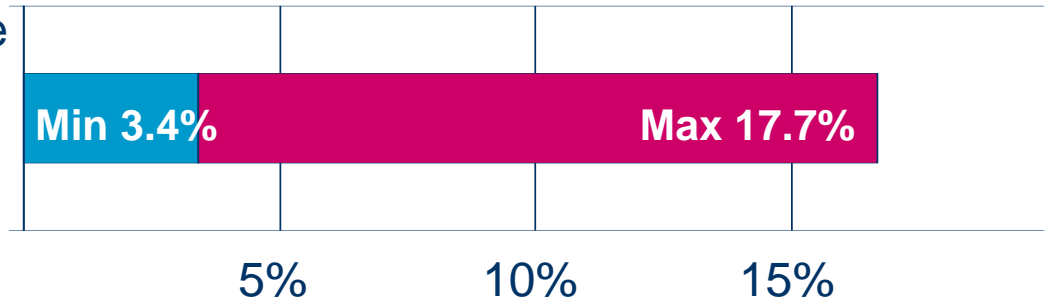
Percentage of e-voting users who would have been likely to vote anyway

77%

25%   50%   75%

Findings from 2007
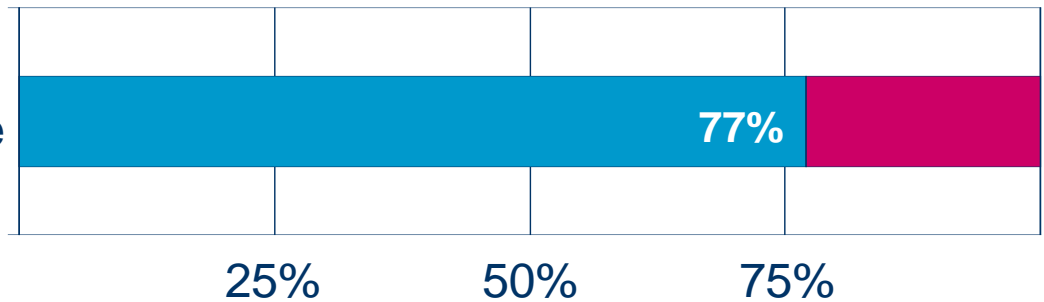
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... but it has successfully widened choice and convenience for people who are interested in voting

Percentage of e-voting users who say more convenient

87%

25%   50%   75%

Convenience — 67%
Not leaving home — 11%
Straightforward — 11%
Time saving — 8%
Want to try new method — 5%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Perceived benefits of e-voting

Findings from 2007
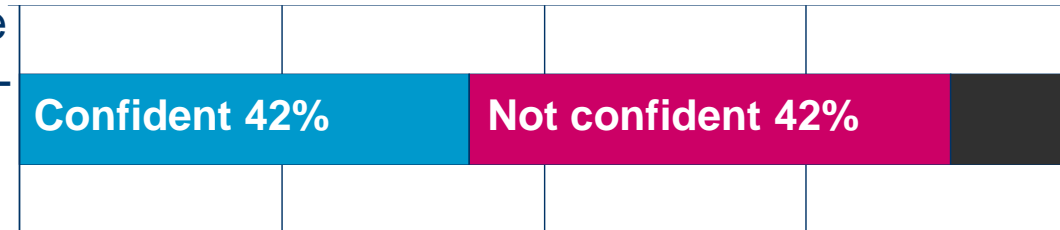
No serious security breaches have been detected …

- Timescales for implementation of pilot schemes has been biggest contributor to project risk – insufficient opportunity for design, development, quality management and testing

- Although no serious security problems reported, level of risk of incident consequently much higher than it should have been
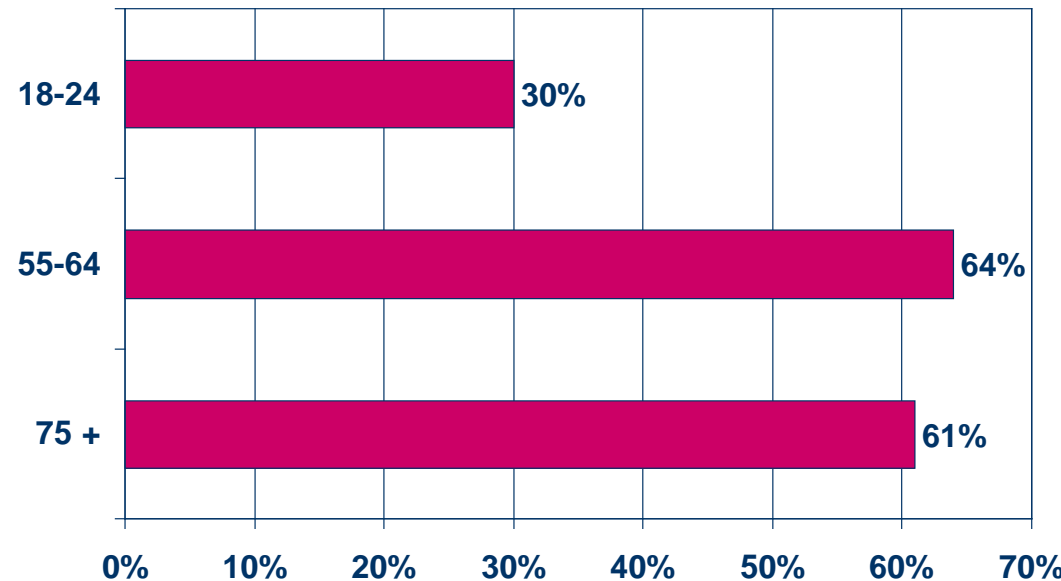
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… But confidence in e-voting may be fragile and concerns about risks remain

Percentage confident e-voting is secure

| Confident 42% | Not confident 42% | |

Percentage not confident e-voting is secure, by age group

18-24: 30%
55-64: 64%
75 +: 61%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

Findings from 2007

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UK e-voting pilot schemes have been very expensive…

E-voting additional cost

Min £600,000	Max £1.1m

£500k   £1m

E-voting cost per elector

Min £1.80	Max £27

£10   £20

E-voting cost per vote cast

Min £100	Max £600

£200   £400   £600

Findings from 2007

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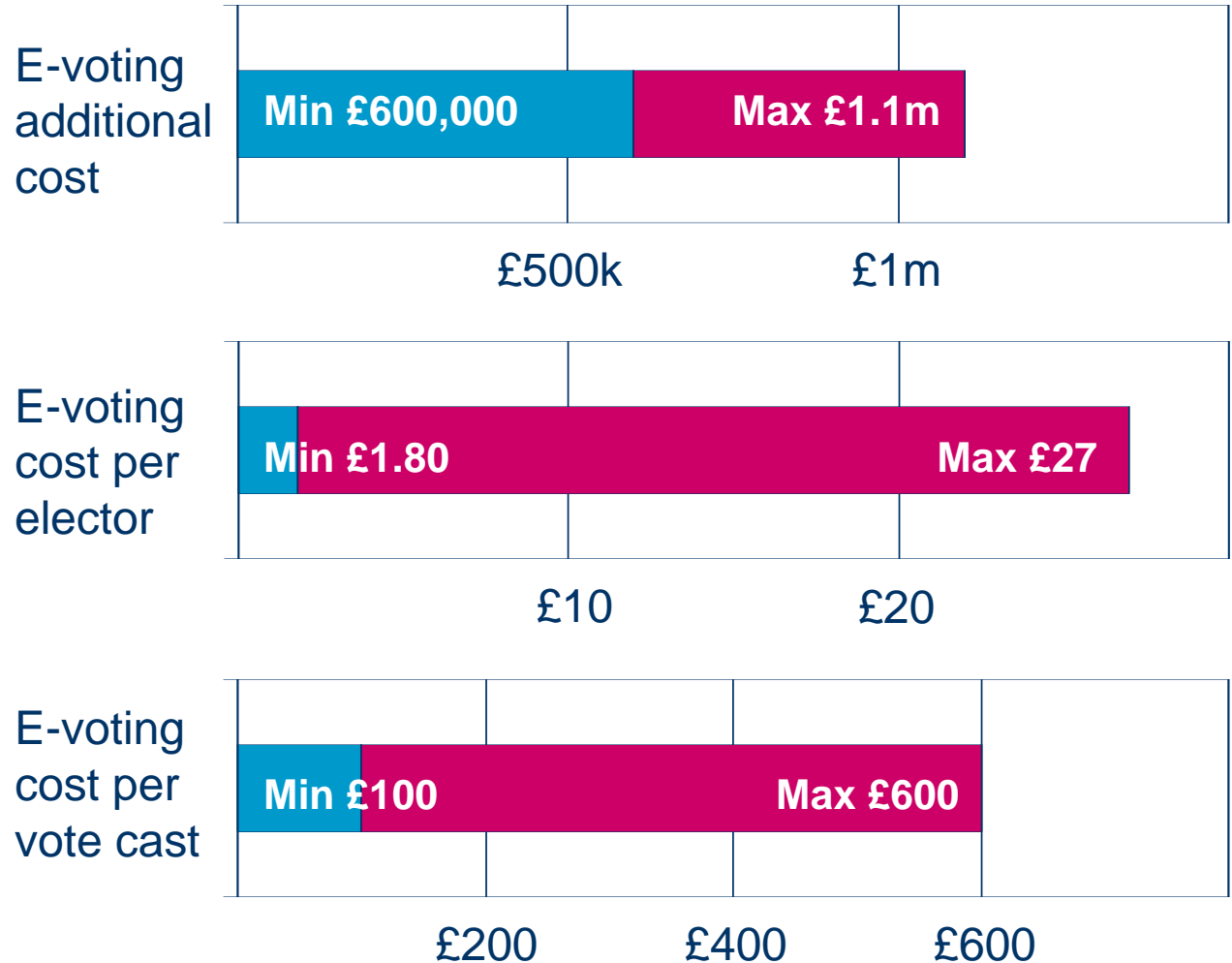
.. But the current level of usage does not allow economies of scale to be achieved

- One-off pilot schemes always likely to be more expensive activity
  - Short timescales
  - Complex IT systems

- Systems were significantly oversized for the voting capacity required, to meet availability and resilience requirements

- Future costs may be lower
  - Competitive, certified market
  - Economies of scale

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Successful development of e-voting policy needs to be set within a wider strategic context for elections

- Piecemeal trials on tight timescales have provided limited learning value
- UK Government still considering ways to improve voting processes
- Awaiting UK Government's vision for electoral modernisation
- Need a robust, publicly available document to provide basis for extensive consultation
  - Allow voters and others to feed back to the Government on its proposals
  - Facilitate broad discussion on principles of public trust, security and transparency

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Key strategic issues for e-voting and electoral modernisation

- **Timescales** – minimum of 6 months before poll for implementation, if not more
- **Procurement** – need for greater assurance of the suitability and competence of suppliers and their solutions before implementation
- Timing and extent of **quality assurance and testing** required
- **Increasing capacity of Returning Officers and staff** to effectively manage modernisation projects and assimilate best practice
- **Public trust** and the need for public debate

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Key lessons learned from e-voting pilot schemes in England

- E-voting alone is unlikely to increase turnout

- It may improve convenience for voters

- Cost likely to be prohibitive in the short-term

- Confidence is fragile, and trust must be built and sustained

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