



LANDSLIDE

How mail swept the board
for political parties in the
2024 General Election

CONTENTS

Foreword 2

01 Was this really the ‘first truly digital’ General Election? 4

02 Method 6

03 Executive summary 8

04 Mail is the dominant medium 10

05 How did voters really feel going into the election? 12

06 What were voters concerned about? 14

07 Considered. Not ignored 16

08 The most engaging medium. And the most read 20

09 Mail became the most recalled channel in the week before the election 22

10 All ages engaged more with mail than with other channels 24

11 What of the future? 26

12 Conclusion 29

FOREWORD



Andrew Marr, Journalist, Broadcaster and Commentator

It’s just... different. A folded, colourful, printed message lying inside the front door is not the same as a targeted act of pleading on my advertising-saturated social media accounts.

The latter, I flick by with a blur of the thumb and don’t remember 30 seconds later. But somehow the physical political message, addressed to me by a candidate or party, stays on the desk and in my mind. Many months after the election, I still have a couple of leaflets, unfolded, re-read amidst my creative clutter, their promises still sharp and remembered.

Is this “counter-intuitive”? Not really. We are living in a digital age but we still seem to be real; three-dimensional, embodied, smelling and touching creatures, interacting with a thoroughly physical world. Cold digital art has nothing like the power to move us that physical paintings on canvas do, or sculptures in marble. Music generated by AI has nothing like the emotional punch of songs generated by Taylor Swift or Johann Sebastian Bach. We can look at pictures of flowers on computer screens. We can’t smell them.

And yet our 2024 general election was sold as the election when politics would go entirely digital. The “X” election, the TikTok or “Insta” election. And I should know. I’m afraid I did quite a lot of the selling. Newspaper articles, TV reports and radio commentaries all said the same: politics is all online. In retrospect, it was a kind of mild collective hysteria.

The political parties bought into it, through hiring young and energetic people to squirt out messages at carefully selected smartphone-enabled demographics. And the mainstream media, clipping itself into ever littler chunks, followed. This was not uncreative: digital messaging was mostly shrewd and attention-grabbing.

And yet, as this research shows, the public didn’t respond quite as the political class expected them to. People weren’t quite grabbed. There was a barrier of trust, higher than many of us realised at the time.

Again, perhaps we should have realised; because we were also reporting the growing manipulation of images and voices online. We found entirely fake recordings of Keir Starmer apparently furiously abusing a staff member; fake images of politicians engaged in fistfights; fake clips from fake speeches.

It is still unclear quite how much malicious manipulation found its way into the election debate. But voters took note and very quickly became dubious about what was pinging into their inboxes. We may sometimes be credulous apes but we are also hardwired for suspicion and caution.

Now, whatever your views on Starmer – or any other political figure – the idea that social media was a pure, uncommitted or reliable source of political information – more so, for instance, than the famously partisan British press – was becoming untenable as the election campaign got going.

The British electorate noticed, and quietly began to return to more familiar sources. Criticise the traditional media all you like, but the scrutiny given to politicians during summer 2024 by salaried newspaper and broadcast journalists was rigorous and thorough. Talking about their experiences afterwards, I found that MPs from all parties thought their personal doorstep interactions with voters, while often irascible, were of huge importance. There is nothing like eye-to-eye.

I think something of the same applies to mailed communication. It is personal and direct because it comes into our actual homes. Far more than digital messages sent out to millions with a forefinger, it feels meant for us, in the real world. The postie, certainly for me, is a friendly and familiar face; part of my street, my community.

Elections are national, sometimes even global, events. But in our Parliamentary system, they are first of all local ones. We want a direct, emotional connection between ourselves, the candidates and ultimately the MP. It’s about intimate space – an actual address not an IP address; a physical postcode, not a digital identifier; something I can hold in my hand, not something only held, briefly, in the mind’s eye. And something that I can trust. This report is a welcome dose of reality, a happy corrective.



01 WAS THIS REALLY THE 'FIRST TRULY DIGITAL' GENERAL ELECTION?

At Marketreach, we wanted to know the answer to this question. Why? Not for academic or intellectual reasons. But because it will help us to understand better how our customers – in particular political parties and government – can reach voters most effectively and cost effectively whenever they need to.

And if there is one thing that this report proves once and for all it is that any successful election communications strategy simply has to include mail. Even – or perhaps especially – in a world of rapidly changing communications.

'The first TikTok election': are Sunak and Starmer's digital campaigns winning over voters?

The Observer, Sat 1 Jun 2024

GE2024 is going to be a *really* digital election

London School of Economics and Political Science, Thu 7 Dec 2023

Before the election, many experts expected this digital transformation to alter the landscape of voter communication fundamentally. We needed to see if these expert opinions were grounded in reality.

In particular, we wanted to investigate the effects of this on election communications and how they were received. We needed to compare how voters in 2024 noticed, trusted and responded to communications across a range of different media, both analogue and digital.

And if you want to understand how election communications affect voters' behaviour, the only time you can do it is actually during the election itself.

So we were committed to carrying out a major piece of research during the 2024 General Election. But like everyone else, we did not expect the then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to call a snap election for July 2024.

Nevertheless, we had our research in field within a week of that announcement. A nationally representative programme of a scale and reach that would allow us to draw definite conclusions.

The result is a comprehensive picture of how mail (both Direct Mail and Door Drop) and other media influenced voters' behaviour in the run-up to the election.

We found the results very exciting.

We think you will too.



02 METHOD

How did we go about finding the answer?

Marketreach commissioned a nationally representative, multi-stage, mixed method market research programme to take place around the election. Carried out by Thinks Insight & Strategy, it consisted of four quantitative surveys. In total 3,920 UK adults aged 16+ completed at least one survey with 1,079 respondents completing all four waves to give us a longitudinal view across the full study. The research fieldwork took place during and after the election campaign.

Quantitative **and** qualitative

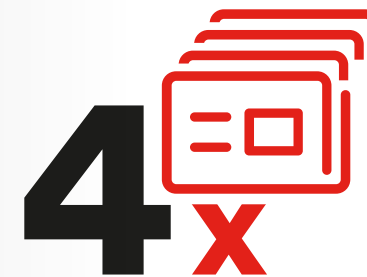
This quantitative approach was complemented with qualitative research using online communities of voters in three 'swing-seat' constituencies during and after the election campaign. These included representatives from a mix of voting segments (undecided/sway voters, decided/firm voters, potential abstainers) across a range of ages, genders and ethnicities.



At the start of, during and after election campaign



Nationally representative



Four quantitative surveys at different stages of the campaign

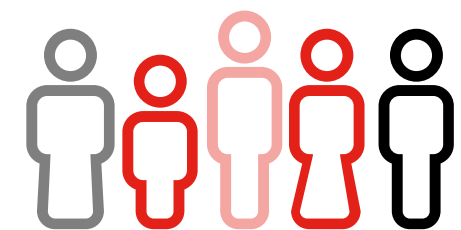
3,920

Voters took part in the research project

**Crewe and Nantwich
Glasgow North
Norwich North**



Online communities from three 'swing' constituencies



Range of ages, genders and ethnicities*



03 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this nationally representative piece of research, voters gave us a clear message:

Political parties who forget the importance of election mail do so at their peril.

The results of this research are very clear indeed. Despite expectations that this would be a ‘digital’ General Election campaign, mail was the single dominant medium.

There are a number of reasons for this, as this report demonstrates:

Mail is the only medium that reaches all voters

Regardless of age, location or political affiliation, mail is the single medium that enables political parties to get their message into the hands of all the voters they want to reach.

Mail is more trusted than other election media

One of the most powerful outcomes of this research is the fact that it confirmed that mail was the most trusted medium during this election campaign. This is extremely important at a time of great concern about ‘fake news’ and AI involvement in election communications, along with a rise in communications designed to discredit other political parties.

Mail is held onto for longer than other media

Many voters kept election mail throughout the campaign and used it right up until polling day.

Mail makes voters think

In an election campaign where many voters wanted change – but were not completely certain what precise kind of change they wanted – mail communications played a huge role in helping them to make up their minds by polling day.

Mail stands out through its physical presence in voters’ homes. It can engage voters about the issues that matter to them personally. And it allows political parties complete control over their message.

Because only mail can be localised down to constituency level, it enabled political parties to introduce individual candidates and policies with a particular local appeal.

Mail is popular with young people

Contrary to pundits’ expectations, election mail was extremely well-liked – and even welcomed – by young voters who received it. These members of Generation Z were one of the reasons why this General Election was expected to be ‘really digital’. In fact, their response to both direct mail and door drops helped make it ‘really analogue’.

Mail is personal

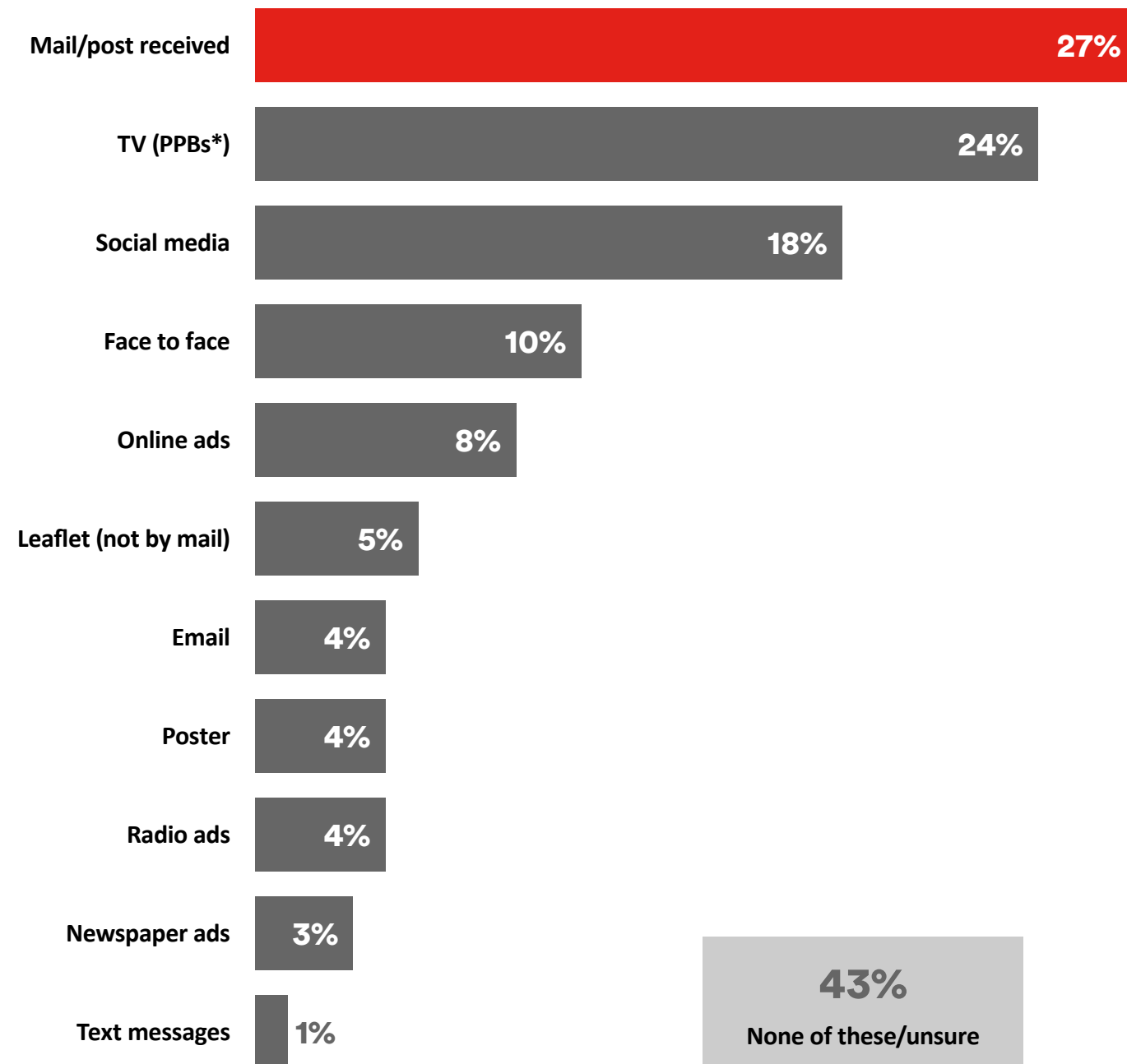
Direct mail and door drops can engage voters about the issues that matter to them personally. And it allows political parties complete control over their message.

Because only mail can be localised down to constituency level, it enabled political parties to introduce individual candidates and policies with a particular local appeal.

04 MAIL IS THE DOMINANT MEDIUM

Most impactful channels in deciding who to vote for

Showing % of voters placing each channel in their top three



*Party political broadcasts



One medium stands out as having the major impact on voters' choices this election

Voters say that mail was the single dominant medium of this General Election. They say that it has the greatest effect of any channel in terms of affecting their decision to vote for a particular party. Election mail:

- **Is the only medium that gets through to audiences of all ages.** Digital media in particular cannot reach a majority of voters in every age group.
- **Is impactful**, stands out and grabs attention. The fact that it arrives in your home, and often carries your name, makes mail difficult to ignore. Voters in our research rated mail election communication as more likely to grab their attention than most other channels.
- **Is engaging.** At 70%, mail has the highest level of engagement of any medium, i.e. it is most likely to be read, shared or talked about.
- **Is seen as trustworthy** in the run-up to this election. In fact, it was regarded as almost twice as trustworthy by voters than other channels in our research.

- **Is relevant.** Election mail talks about issues which are of interest to the voters and have significance to them. This may be personal and local as well as national, down to the level of individual constituencies. Mail was seen as having close to twice the relevance of other comms channels in the run-up to the election.

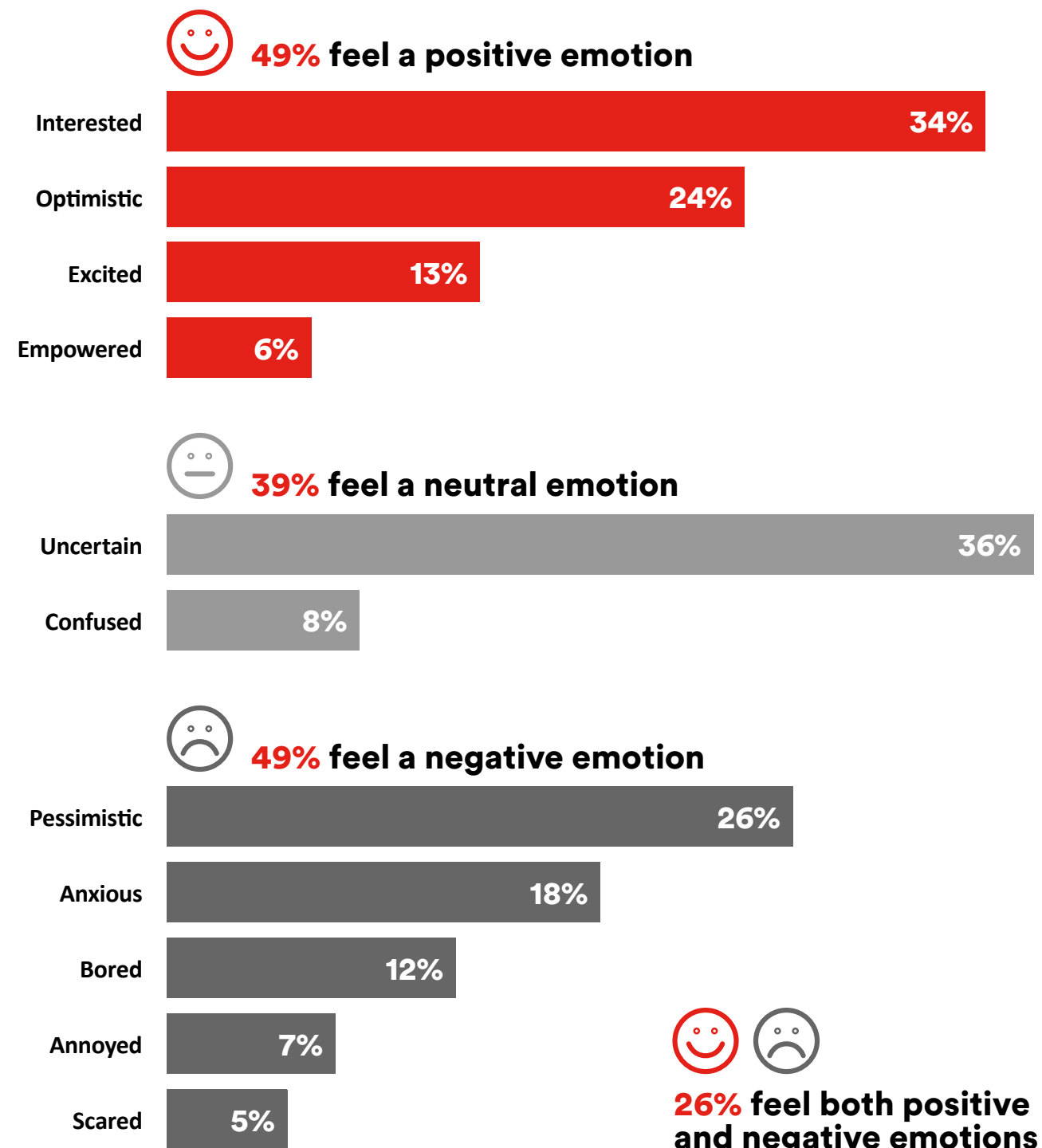
“I actually think my feeling towards receiving information on the election by post has changed. I used to think it was annoying but now consider it to be enlightening/informative.”

Female voter, 16-24, Crewe and Nantwich

05 HOW DID VOTERS REALLY FEEL GOING INTO THE ELECTION?

Feelings towards the election

Showing % of respondents in the first wave of research selecting each option



Communication really mattered because voters were uncertain

In a surprisingly open 'snap' General Election, with little time to make up their minds, voters were more open to persuasion than had been predicted.

Although there was much talk in the media beforehand about the certain prospect of victory for the Labour Party, the evidence we have gathered paints a far more nuanced picture of the electorate on the eve of the General Election. You can see in the chart to the left of this page that many people felt uncertain about who to vote for.

Many voters considered changing their minds during the election campaign. Among younger groups, the number thinking about changing their minds was almost 20% higher than the electorate as a whole, at 61% for those aged 18-34 compared with 46% for those aged 35+. This uncertainty continued right until polling day, with more than a quarter of 18-19 year-olds and more than a fifth of 20-34 year-olds telling us they only made their final decision on the day of the election.

Part of this uncertainty may have been because Rishi Sunak called a 'snap' election for July 4, rather than later in the year as many people had expected. So while many voters were eager for change, many had not yet had enough time or information to decide where to put their cross on the ballot paper.

This meant millions of people were still open to communications helping them to make up – or change – their minds, right up until the day of the election itself.

Of the communication channels parties used to promote their messages, as we have seen on page 10, voters told us that mail had the greatest impact.

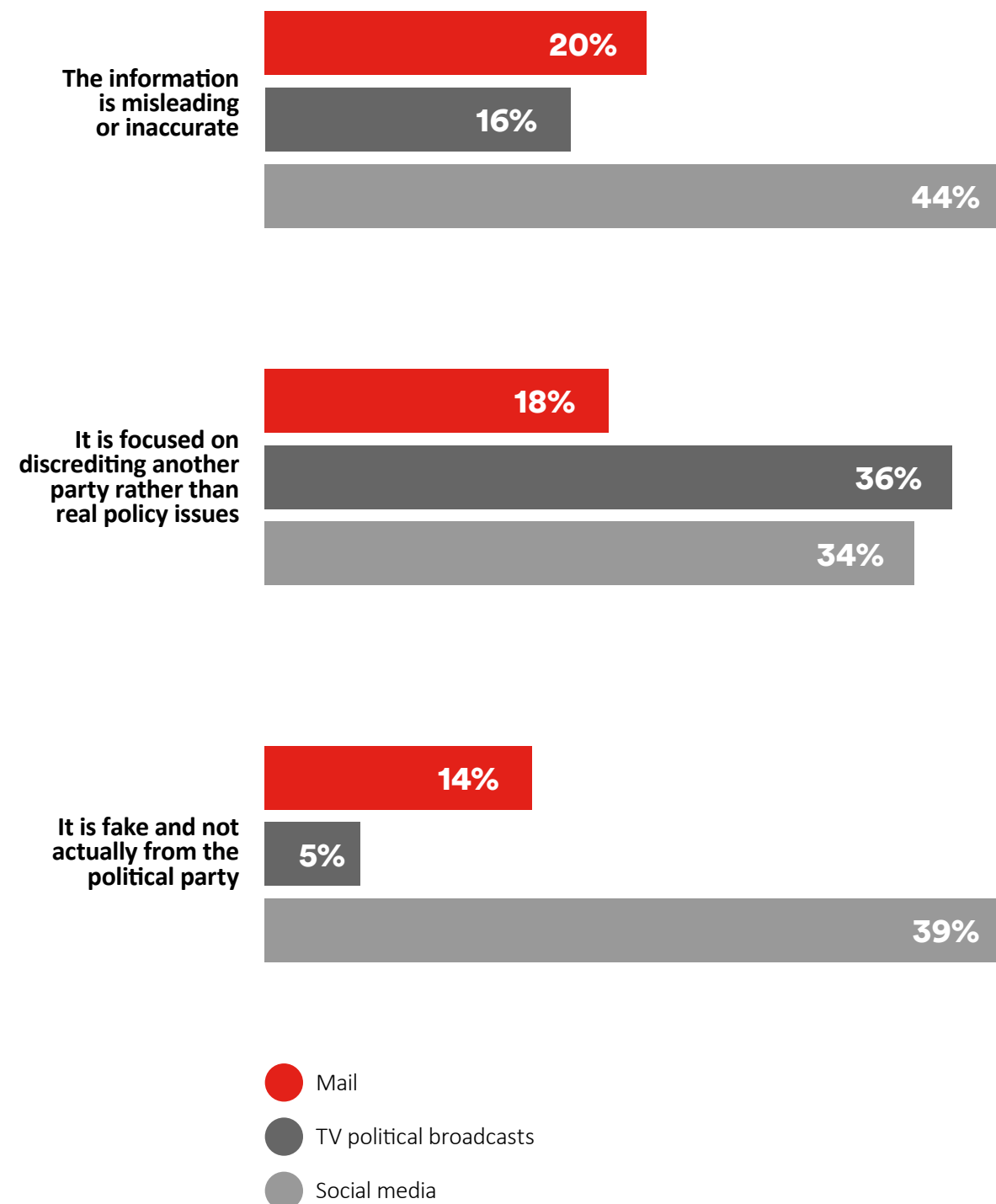
“I voted for the party I received the flyer from. I think it was useful for me as I work long hours, therefore I could read it in my own time.”

Male voter, 35-44, Crewe and Nantwich

06 WHAT WERE VOTERS CONCERNED ABOUT?

Concerns associated with channels

Showing % of all respondents selecting each channel in relation to each concern



TRUSTED. NOT SUSPECTED

Voters did say they had concerns about the possibility of receiving misleading campaign communications in the run-up to the election. They were most worried about social media. In contrast, mail:

- Is much less likely than a political party's social media or an individual's social posts to be suspected of being fake news or the product of AI interference.
- Is least likely to be associated with the idea of discrediting other parties.

This is true even for younger voters, who see mail as the most trustworthy election communications medium.

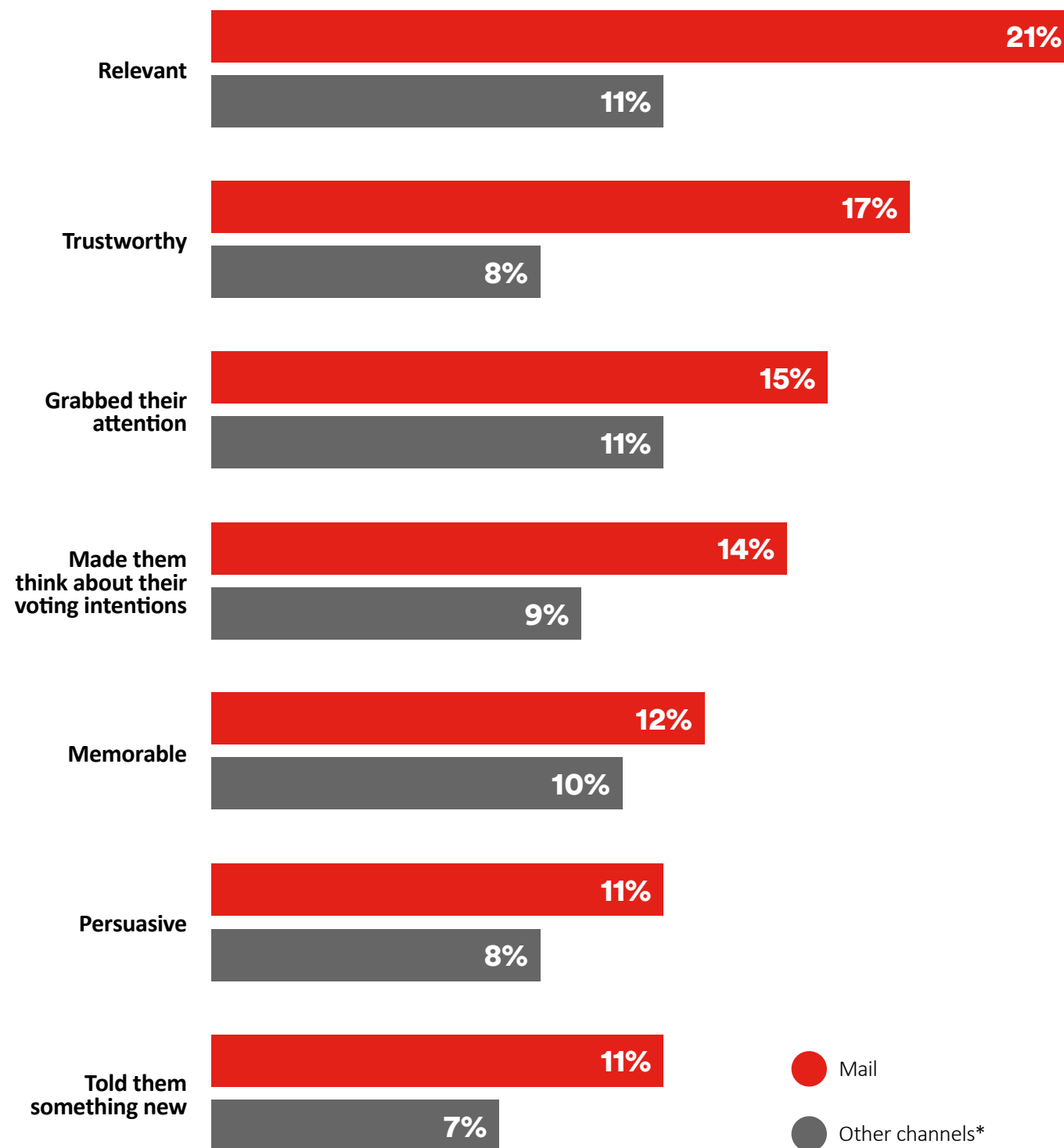
“
In future elections
I'll be looking to
mail and leaflets
– they are more
informative,
trustworthy and
approachable.
”

Female voter, 16-24,
Crewe and Nantwich

07 CONSIDERED. NOT IGNORED

Views on information from channels

Showing % of respondents selecting each statement per channel



*Note these figures are averages across party political TV broadcast, social media, posters and online advertising.



Mail makes voters think

Voters who received election mail found that it was more than 50% more effective at making them think about their voting intentions than other channels.

They also told us that election mail had a number of advantages over other communications channels.

More control. Voters can read it in their own time, at their own pace – and re-read it whenever they want. Mail can be retained, and does not simply disappear in the way that online ads and social media posts can.

More standout. Many voters – especially young voters – simply do not receive very much mail. This makes mail more memorable and noticeable when it does arrive. Especially when it is concise, visual, and colourful.

More local. Mail is the only medium that can be localised down to constituency level, which means the content can be personalised to very small groups of voters and their concerns.

“
A leaflet from Reform... I found this one easier to read as it was big text.
”

Female voter, 16-25, Crewe and Nantwich



“
I received a leaflet from the SNP. It was a simple and concise message. A paragraph explaining what they support and a paragraph which argues what they've done.
”

Male voter, 16-25, Glasgow North

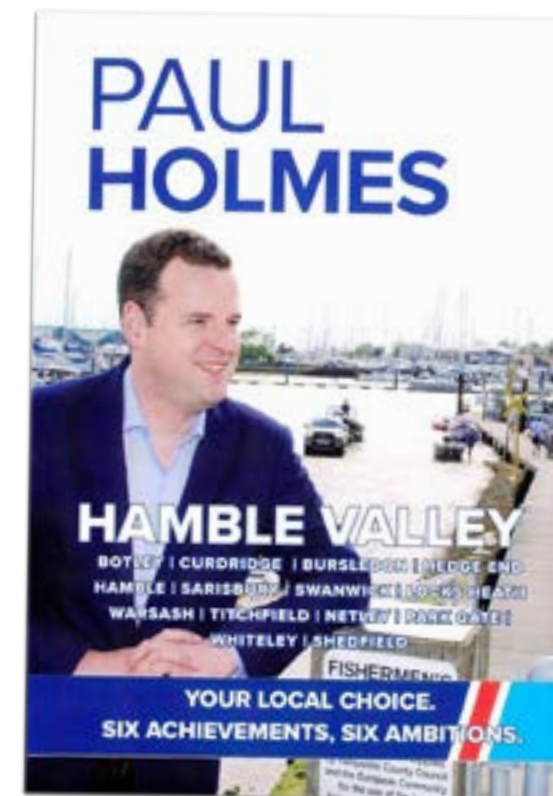
“
I have received one from the Conservative party which was quite useful as it had a lot of information in it and was very detailed.
”

Female voter, 16-24, Norwich North



“
It was about local issues and how the Liberal Democrats have influenced the local area.
”

Female voter, 35-44, South West England



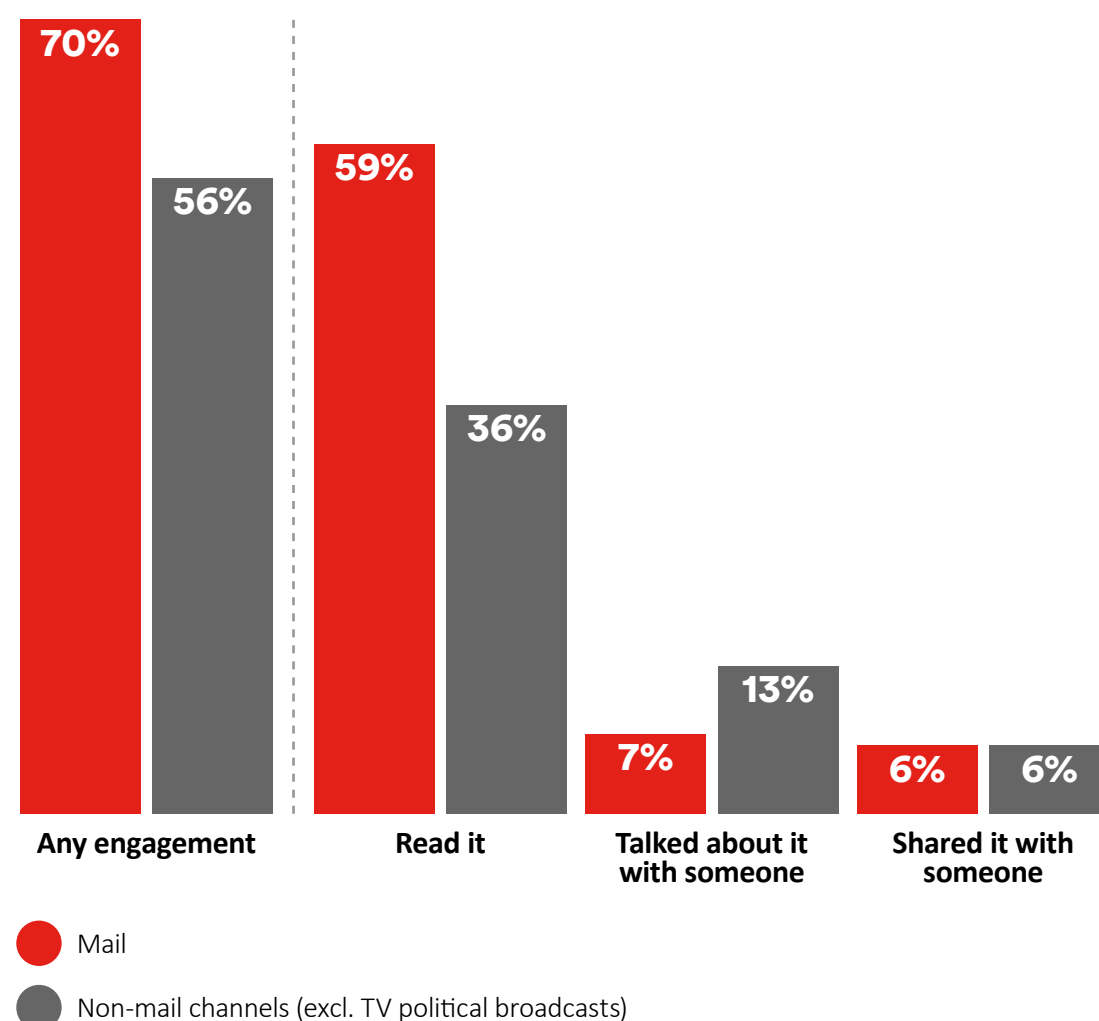
“
Labour colour-coded their policies which was helpful.
”

Female voter, 45-54, Crewe and Nantwich

08 THE MOST ENGAGING MEDIUM. AND THE MOST READ

Actions taken related to political information received via mail and non-mail channels

Showing % of respondents selecting each option



“
I’d look at [the mail communications]
if I wasn’t sure which party had said
something about one of their policies.
”

Female voter, 45-54, Norwich North



Election mail is inclusive – it reaches all voters, while other media don’t

Even the youngest age groups show very high levels of engagement with mail. For instance among 18-24-year-olds, 81% said they had engaged with mail during the run-up to the election, higher than social media (72%), posters (67%), online advertising (64%) and party political broadcasts on TV (51%).

This makes it an ideal way to communicate with all voters, and to deliver detailed policy information that they have time to consider and digest.

“
To put it simply, you’re
more likely to read a flyer
than a random email.
”

Male voter, 16-24, Crewe and Nantwich

More than a quarter of all voters reported that they kept mail packs until just before the election, giving mail a very long shelf life indeed. 60% of 18-19 year olds (new voters) kept any mail until a few days before the election versus an average of 27%. A huge plus in an election where almost half of voters said they were considering changing their minds about their choice of party right up until polling day.

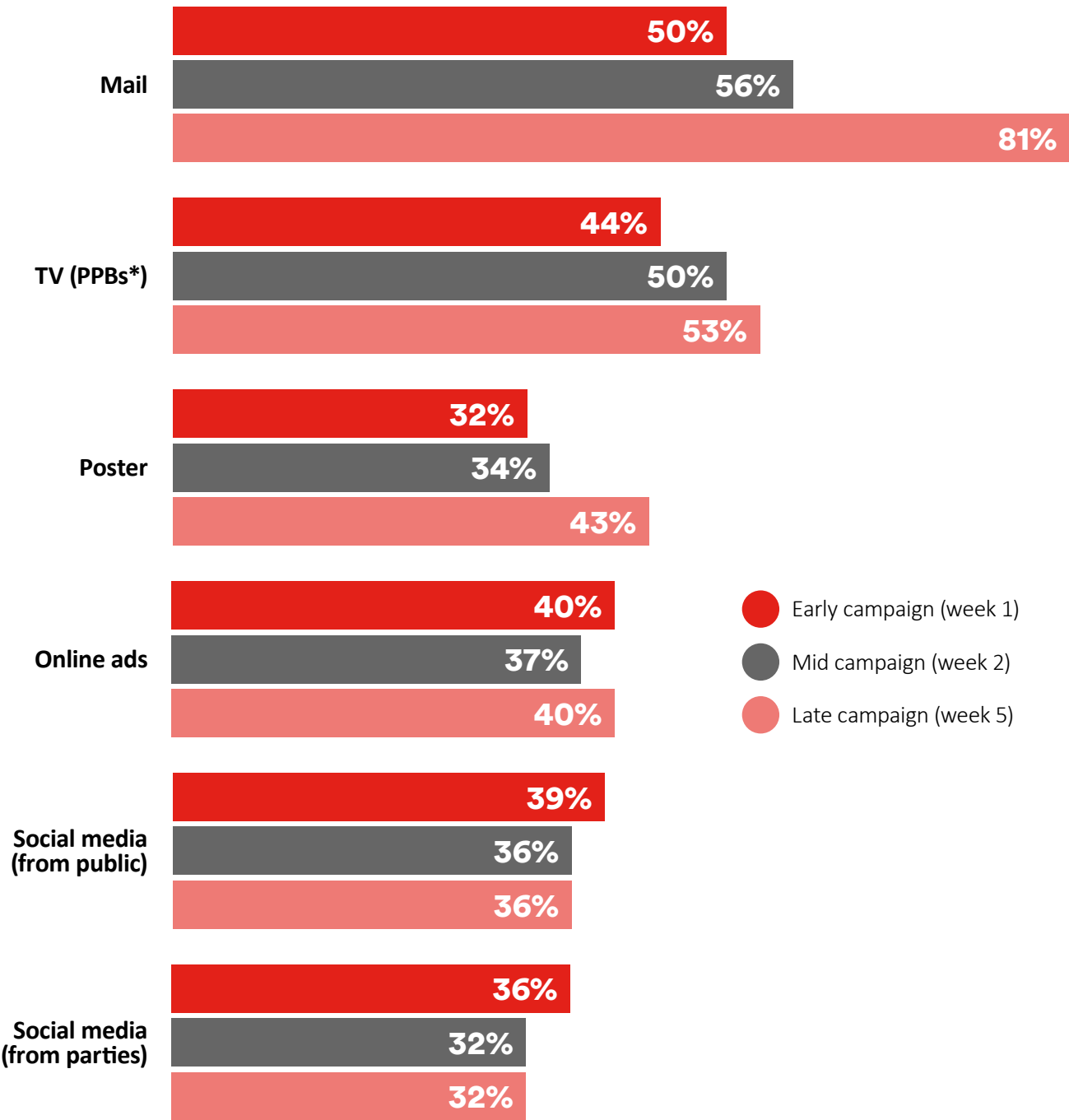
Mail works because it arrives at voters’ homes, meets a real need that they have for information, can be retained, is designed to be easy to read, presents factual information, and can be personalised right down to the level of individual constituencies. This means it can answer important questions that are very local in nature. It is trusted too. And because – especially for younger voters – receiving mail can be a relatively rare occurrence, election mail can have a relatively dramatic impact.

Important decisions such as who to vote for require focused attention. Mail is a medium that allows for longer dwell times that enable people to take their time gathering the information they need to make the decision that is right for them.

09 MAIL BECAME THE MOST RECALLED CHANNEL IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE ELECTION

Reported channels for General Election campaigning

Showing % of all respondents who have received information from each channel once or more in the last week



*Party political broadcasts

Mail became more memorable as the campaign went on

Mail was the single most recalled communications channel during the 2024 campaign.

It was particularly regarded as a useful way of building awareness of local candidates and constituency information – with 65% of respondents reporting that mail was primarily focused on the election in their local constituency. This is almost three times higher than the figures for online advertising and for social media.

While digital media can target audiences by their geographic location, it cannot do so by constituency or by individual voter. This makes it harder to deliver messages about truly local concerns in the way that mail can.

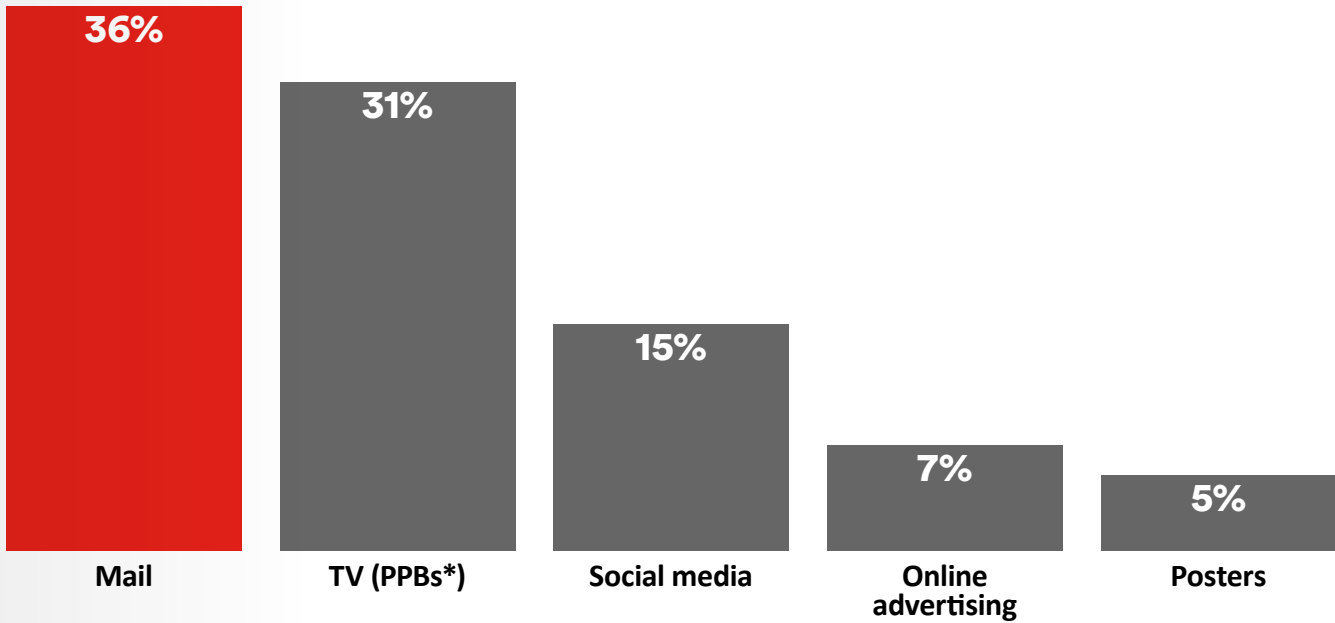
Mail was also considered the most useful channel for future election communications – chosen by 36% of respondents.

However, mail does not operate in a vacuum, and voters do see it as playing a strong part in an integrated election communication campaign. Along with party political broadcasts, online advertising, social media, press and out of home (OOH), mail can enable more voters in future to find the accurate and honest information they need to play their part in this vital democratic process.

Mail was considered the most useful channel for future election communications.

Most useful sources for future elections communications.

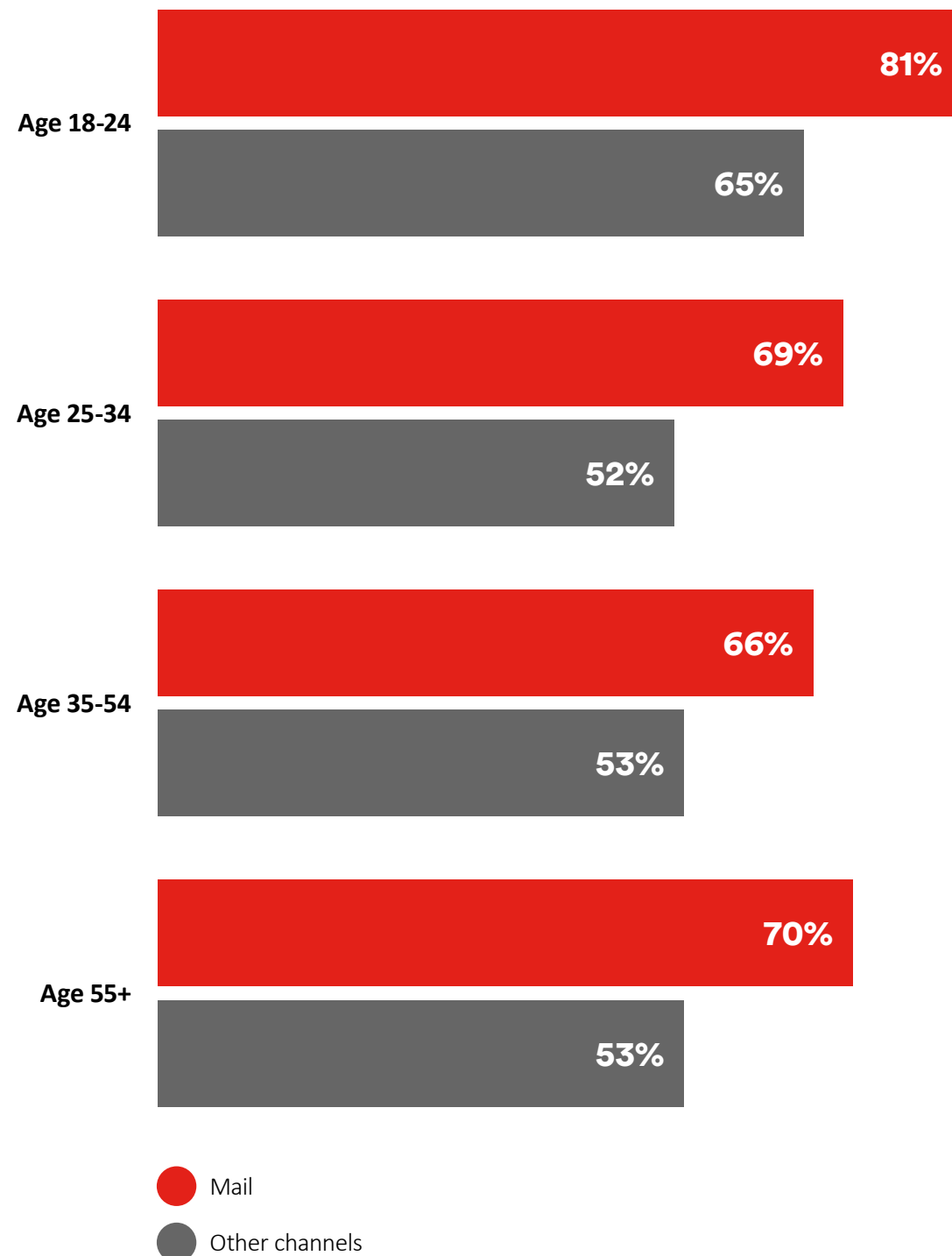
Showing % of respondents selecting each channel in their ‘most useful’ channels



10 ALL AGES ENGAGED MORE WITH MAIL THAN WITH OTHER CHANNELS

Actions taken related to political information received

Showing % of all respondents reporting some engagement



We did not assess engagement with TV party political broadcasts in the same way as mail as PPBs aren't read, so these figures exclude them.

Loved by the young

Overall, mail was the medium most engaged with in the 'digital' General Election campaign.

We have already said that mail enjoyed the highest levels of engagement of any of the communications channels covered in our research apart from TV party political broadcasts, which obviously could not be assessed in the same way as mail. This is true among all age groups.

This is perhaps a surprise, as our younger voters might well have been expected to regard digital channels as more engaging. There was certainly a great deal of media coverage suggesting that this would be the 'most digital' election ever, or that it would be the 'first TikTok election'.

The reality turned out differently for Generation Z. Among 18-24-year-olds, more than four in five (81%) people said they had engaged with mail during the run-up to the election. This is almost 10% higher than the figure for social media (72%), and much higher than those for posters (67%), online advertising (64%) and party political broadcasts on TV (51%).

The pattern continues even among Generation Y and Millennials. Among 25-34-year-olds the respective figures were 69% for mail, followed by social media (63%), posters (52%), online advertising (48%) and party political broadcasts on TV (32%).

And mail has an even more powerful effect on new voters. Sixty per cent of 18-19-year-olds kept any mail until a few days before the election – more than twice the average of 27%.

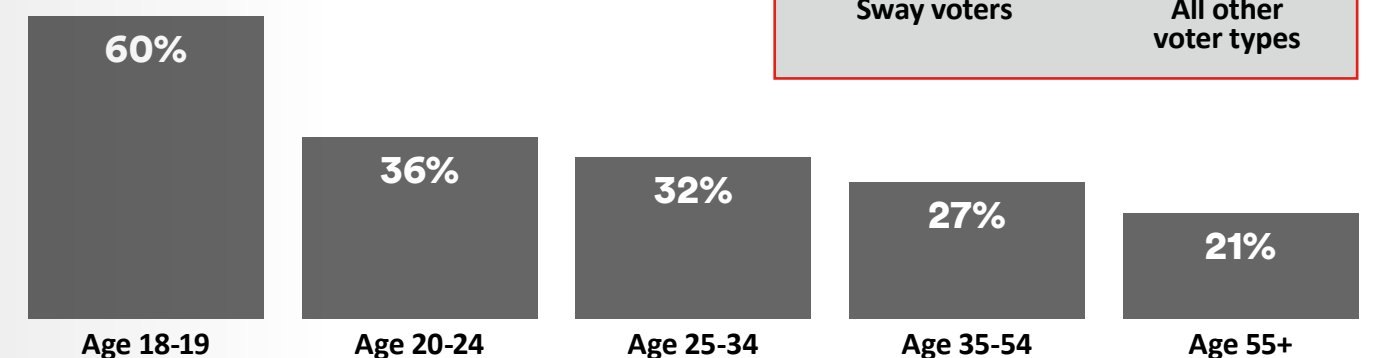
And while younger voters did engage with digital, this was not to the exclusion of mail. In fact, they seem to have engaged with a mixture of both..

“I feel more informed now and ready for change.”

Female voter, 16-24, Glasgow North

Who kept their political mail?

% retaining their election mail until close to the election based on people who received any political mail.





11 WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

Simple ways to make election mail even more effective

Give voters what they want.

Mail is part of every General Election in voters' minds. In fact, 47% of respondents said they expected mail to be a key campaigning channel – a figure only exceeded by TV party political broadcasts, which were expected by 69%.

Timing is crucial...

The timing of mail communications play an important role in their success. Many people reported both keeping mail up until polling day and not making up their minds until the same time.

So is targeting...

Mail can be targeted very closely indeed – house by house or voter by voter. Addressed mail can help ensure that your messages are opened, while partially addressed mail (PAM) enables you to target around 15 households with a single message.

It is the only channel that enables you to personalise your messaging right down to the most local level, enabling you to focus on issues that matter to voters. And on voters in areas where you want to make a difference.

Age is important...

Across all age groups, mail generated the highest levels of engagement of all communications channels. It was also the most impactful, the most read and generated the lowest level of suspicion about 'fake news'. Assuming that young people will only respond to digital media could be a very expensive mistake for a political party to make. Election mail is a medium for everyone.

Design is crucial

Respondents told us they held on to mail for weeks to compare policies across political parties. Those who used design to its full potential – through colour coding and digitally printed photographs of candidates for example – made it simpler for voters to understand and retain the information they were sharing. Equally, bold and clear design on the outside of election mail helped to make it stand out and ensure 'doormat dominance'.

Tone matters

Many voters told us how tired they were of the negative and critical election messaging they had been exposed to on social media. Mail is better suited to explaining policies and talking about facts.



Integration is important

Mail is often seen as a 'local' comms channel, able to pick up on hyperlocal campaign issues. Other channels are seen as playing a 'national' role – most obviously party political broadcasts but also press, OOH and digital advertising. Mail works best as part of an integrated multi-media campaign.

Consider sustainability at every stage

It is important to consider the circularity and sustainability of election mail at every stage of its design and production. Voters should be encouraged to recycle their communications once they are finished with them and the election is over.



12 CONCLUSION

Mail – the dominant channel for election communications

Mail played a central role in the 2024 General Election. Research commissioned by Marketreach proves that voters found it more engaging, more impactful and more trustworthy than any other communications channel.

Despite predictions that this would be the first ‘truly digital’ General Election, mail was loved by young voters too.

Voters of all ages also expect mail to play a key role in future elections.

All of which should make mail a key part of every political campaign.

Marketreach is the marketing authority on commercial mail. We help organisations and agencies to make the most of mail's effectiveness in order to gain a competitive advantage.

We provide research, information and tools to help you stay in touch with all the latest innovations and opportunities mail offers you.

**To find out how you can unleash the magic of mail,
visit marketreach.co.uk**

