# THE ENABLING STATE

Research Summary:
Public views on the enabling state
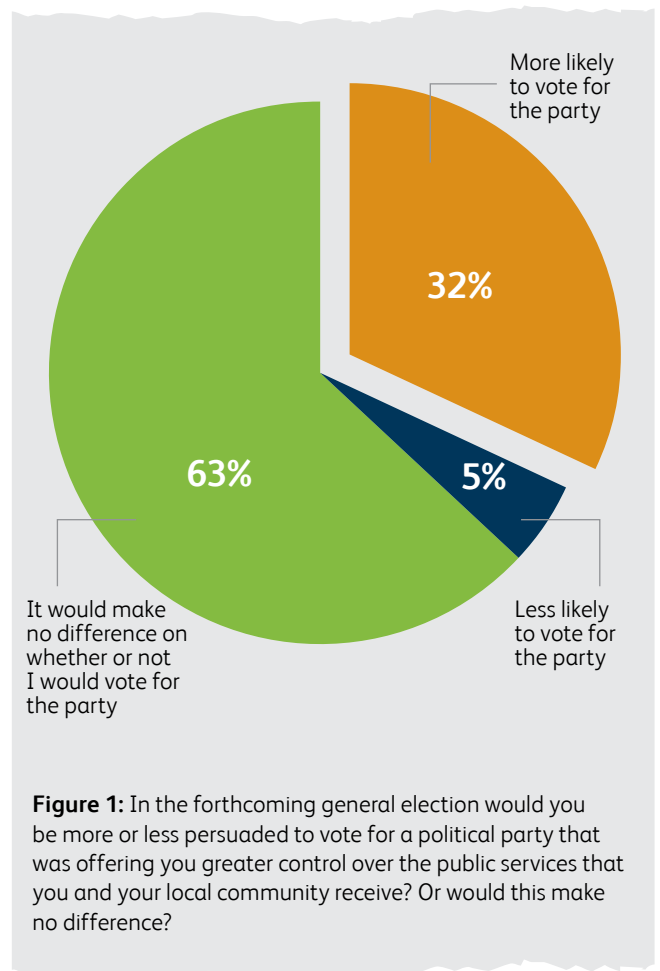
Introduction

There is growing interest amongst policy makers and practitioners in more flexible and responsive approaches that give individuals and communities greater control of service and programmes that seek to improve wellbeing. The Carnegie UK Trust has been exploring this shift in our Enabling State programme (www.enablingstate.co.uk).

To explore what the public think about this change, we commissioned ICM to carry out an online poll in January 2015. The ICM online omnibus poll of a nationally representative sample of 2,000 GB adults aged 18+ was conducted between 7-9th of January 2015. The aim of the poll was to find out more about the public's experience of this public policy shift and to test whether the general public really want more control.
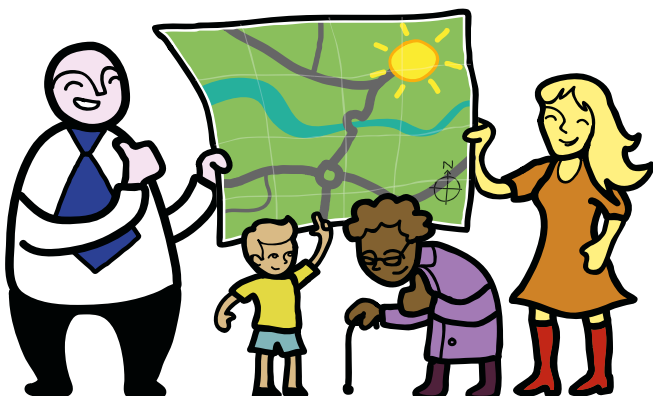
Offering individuals and communities more control is a vote winner

Approximately one third (32%) of people would be persuaded to vote for a political party that offered them more control over the public services that they receive (Figure 1).

More likely to vote for the party

32%

5%

63%

It would make no difference on whether or not I would vote for the party

Less likely to vote for the party

Figure 1: In the forthcoming general election would you be more or less persuaded to vote for a political party that was offering you greater control over the public services that you and your local community receive? Or would this make no difference?

There is some difference in response between lower income and higher income groups – those in social class DE are slightly less likely to vote for a party that offers them more control than those in social class AB (29% and 35% respectively) however the general pattern holds.

The poll revealed that younger voters in particular would be persuaded to vote for a party that offered more control: 37% of 18 -24 year olds and 38% of 25-34 year olds said that they would be persuaded to vote for a political party that offered them greater control over the public services that they and their community received.

Views about current levels of control over public services

The poll also asked people whether they felt like they had too much, too little or the right amount of control over public services that they received. Over half (55%) felt that they had too little (Figure 2). This was true regardless of social class or geography[1]: further suggesting that there is a strong appetite across the population for greater control.

Figure 2: Do you currently feel like you have too much, too little or the right amount of control over the public services that you receive?
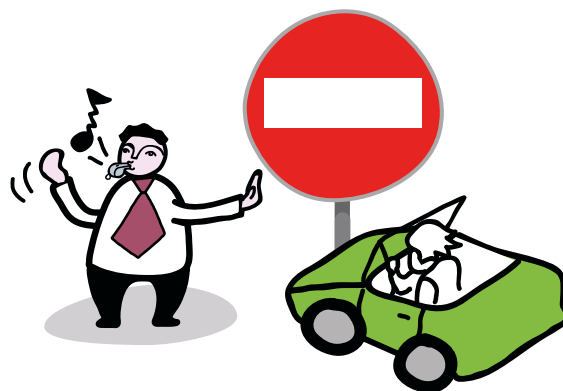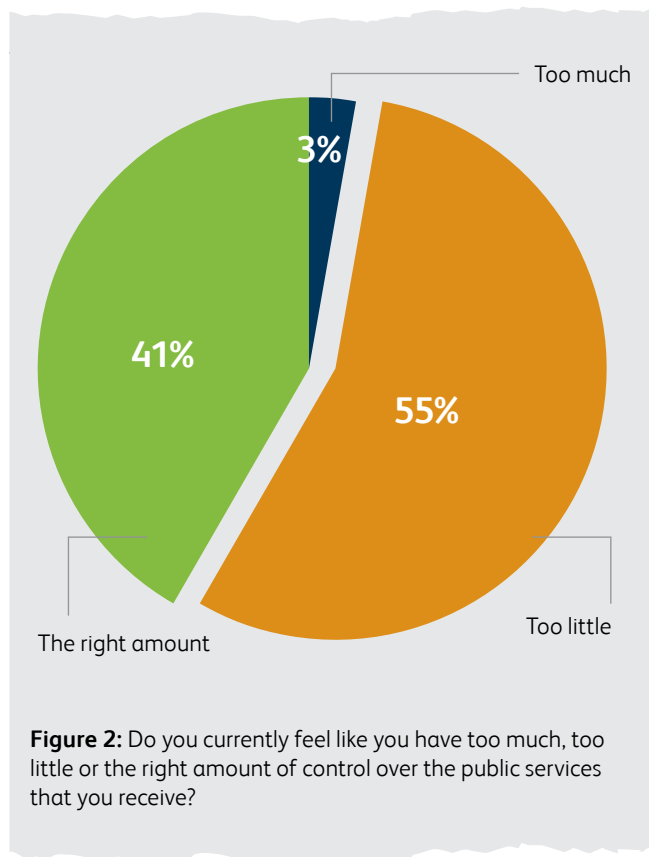
Respondents aged 55 or older in particular, felt that they had too little control over public services (for example 63% of respondents aged 55-64 felt that they had too little control compared with 49% of 18-24 year olds). This may reflect a number of things including differing expectations, the kind of services that older and younger people are engaging with and differences in how digitally connected younger and older respondents are – particularly as more government services move online. We know from other research that older people (65+) are hugely under-represented in access to digital: only 42% of over 65s use the internet compared to 83% of all adults[2] and over 65s are much more likely to lack basic digital skills compared to the rest of the adult population[3]. Only 17% of over 65s who *do* use the internet 'complete government processes' online, compared to 28% of all adult internet users[4].

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1   With the exception of respondents in social class C2 more than 50% of respondents from all social classes said that they would like more control.

2   Ofcom, *Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2014*, Ofcom: online 2014 http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/adults-2014/2014_Adults_report.pdf

3   BBC, *BBC Basic Online Skills May 2014 research*, BBC: online 2014 http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whatwedo/learning/audienceresearch/basic-online-skills-nov-2014.pdf

4   Ofcom, *Adults' Media Use and Attitudes Report 2014*, Ofcom: online 2014 http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/adults-2014/2014_Adults_report.pdf

But people make important distinctions between different services

The fact that individuals and communities are seeking more control does not mean that they wish to be involved in every public service equally. There are some areas of public service delivery where more control genuinely offers greater benefits and others were people are happy to devolve control to professionals. We asked respondents which areas of public service delivery that they thought could be improved by involving local people more in design and delivery (Figure 3).

The most frequently selected options were social care and local planning and development (45% of respondents selected each of these options) in contrast just 9% of respondents felt that defence could be improved by giving local people more control.

Older people (65+) and respondents from social class DE (which includes the unemployed and pensioners) were more likely to say that social care services could be improved by involving local people more in design and delivery (57% of people aged 65 + and 52% of people in social class DE) perhaps because these groups are more likely to have direct personal experience of social care.
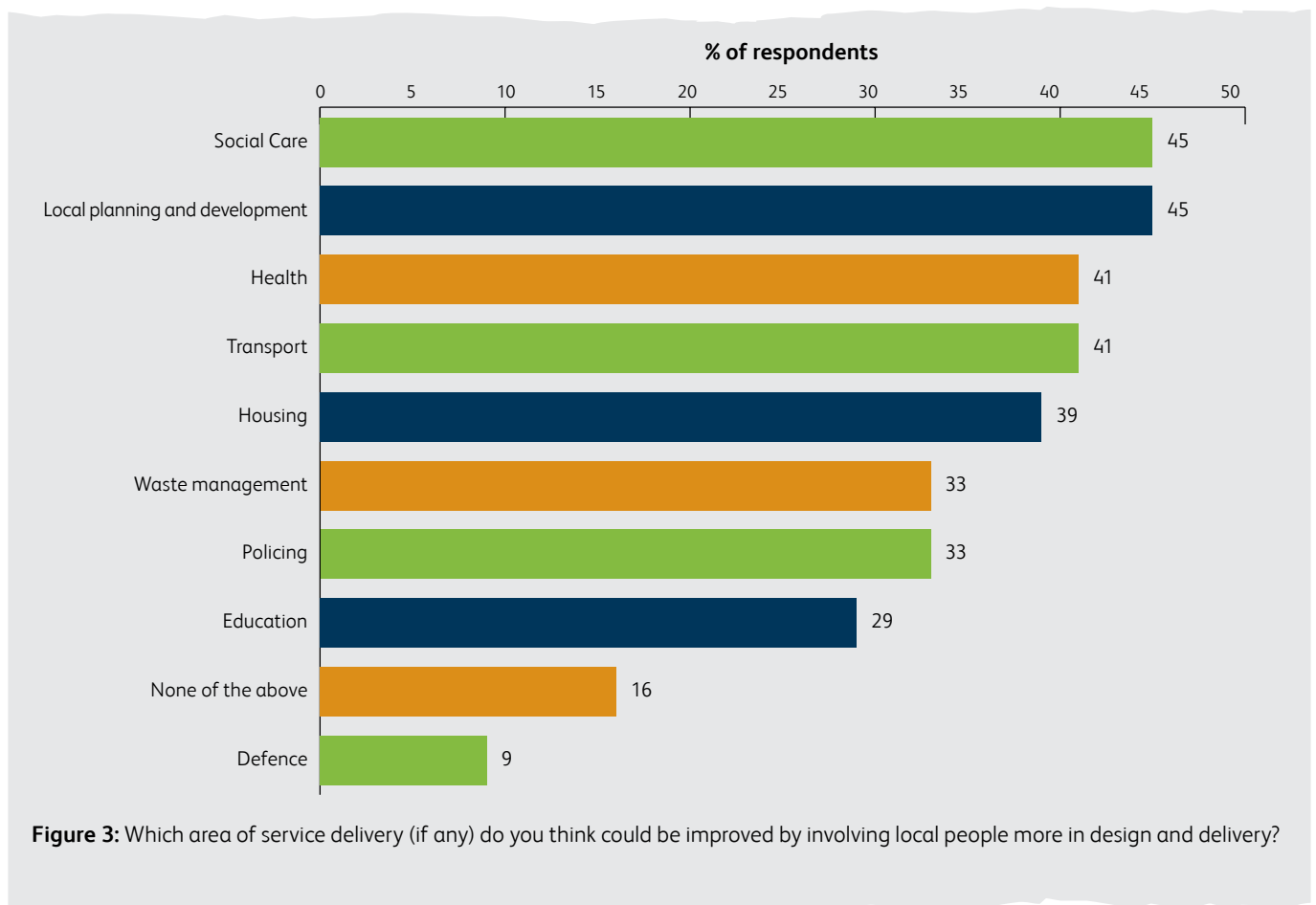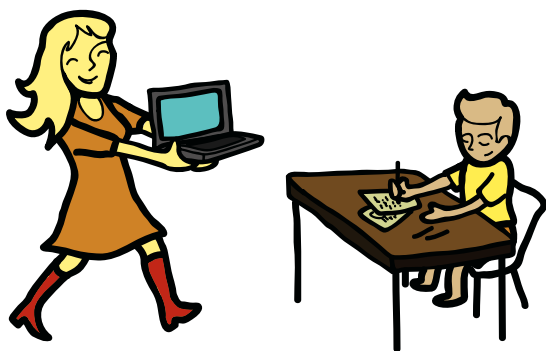

Figure 3: Which area of service delivery (if any) do you think could be improved by involving local people more in design and delivery?

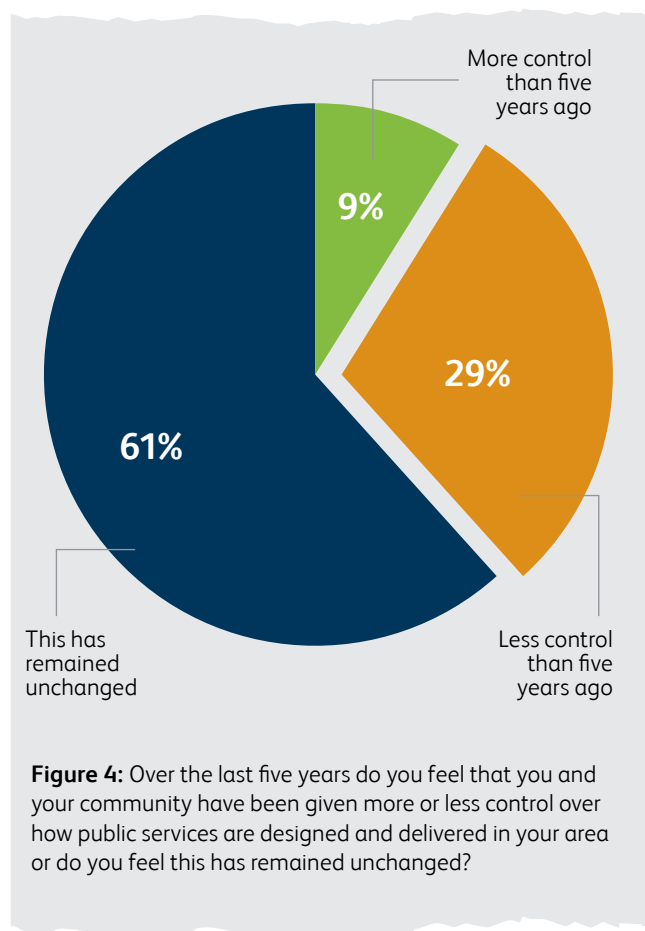## Despite political promises, people don't feel that they have more control

While many national and devolved government policies such as the Localism Act in England and Wales have in theory offered individuals and communities a more active role in public services and decision making when we asked people whether they felt that they had more or less control over how public services are designed and delivered in their area over the last five years (Figure 4) most people (61%) said that this had remained unchanged or even that they had less control (29%).

This varied slightly according to region. For example respondents from the Midlands and the North of England were less likely to report that they had more control over public services in their area than respondents from the South East and West, Wales and Scotland perhaps reflecting the highly centralised nature of public services in England[5] and a feeling of disconnection with Westminster in the English regions.

Respondents from Scotland were the least likely to report that they had less control of public services in their area over the last 5 years (19% of Scottish respondents said they had less control compared to 29-32% elsewhere in the UK) but the pace of change in Scotland is not necessarily fast: 71% of respondents from Scotland felt that the amount of control they had over public services in their area had remained unchanged over the last 5 years.
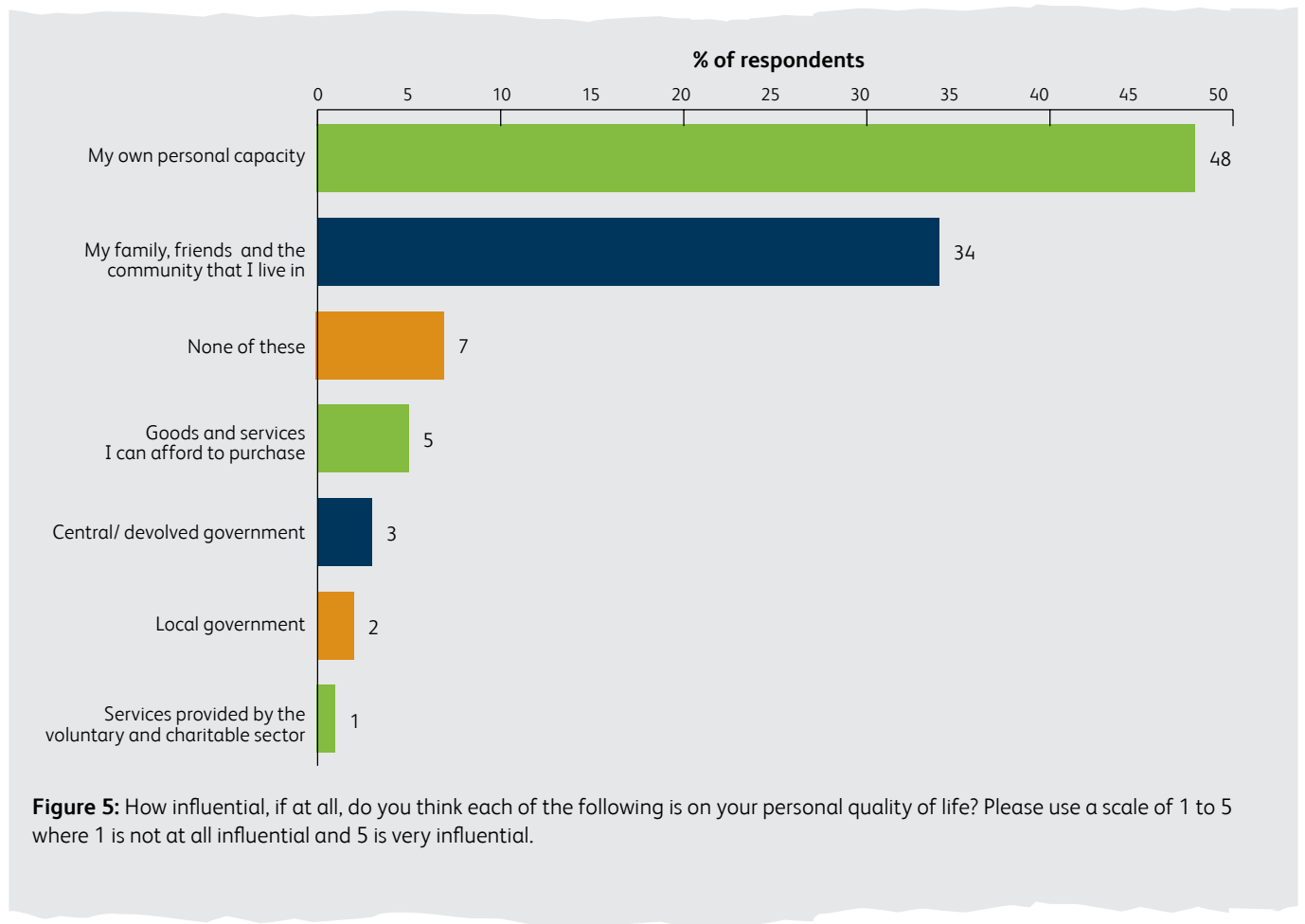
How public services and control influence our wellbeing

Why is control so important to our wellbeing? The Carnegie UK Trust argues that while on the whole post world war two models of public services have served us very well they have also consistently failed to improve outcomes for a significant minority of the population. This is because traditional models of public services fail to take into account the importance of our own individual capacity and autonomy and our network of friends and family in our wellbeing. Our polling data shows that when it comes to their own personal quality of life, people consistently rate their own personal capacity and their family, friends and the community that they live in as having by far the biggest influence on their quality of life and this holds true regardless of social class (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Over the last five years do you feel that you and your community have been given more or less control over how public services are designed and delivered in your area or do you feel this has remained unchanged?

When asked to pick which factor had the biggest influence on their own personal quality of life 48% of respondents choose their own personal capacity and 34% chose their family, friends and the community the community they lived in.

If political parties are serious about improving our quality of life this highlights then they must also be serious about designing policies and services that work to support and facilitate individual capacity and the development of strong networks of support in friends, family and the communities we live in.

% of respondents

Category	Value
My own personal capacity	48
My family, friends and the community that I live in	34
None of these	7
Goods and services I can afford to purchase	5
Central/ devolved government	3
Local government	2
Services provided by the voluntary and charitable sector	1

Figure 5: How influential, if at all, do you think each of the following is on your personal quality of life? Please use a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not at all influential and 5 is very influential.

About the Carnegie UK Trust

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

The Enabling State

The Trust's Enabling State programme is based on two years of research into the shifting relationship between state and citizens and communities in the UK and Ireland. It explores how governments can give communities and individuals more control and make it a success. To find out more about the programme, access our research and download our final recommendations report visit **www.enablingstate.co.uk**

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February 2015