HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Corrected oral evidence: Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Tuesday 10 March 2020

4.40 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Shutt of Greetland (The Chair); Lord Campbell-Savours; Lord Dykes; Baroness Eaton; Lord Hayward; Lord Lexden; Baroness Mallalieu; Baroness Pidding; Baroness Suttie.

Evidence Session No. 15 Heard in Public Questions 169 - 179

Witnesses

I: Lord Woolley of Woodford, Founder and Director, Operation Black Vote; Imran Sanaullah MBE, Chief Executive Officer, Patchwork Foundation; Dr Omar Khan, Director, Runnymede Trust.

Examination of witnesses

Lord Woolley of Woodford, Imran Sanaullah and Dr Omar Khan.

Q169 **The Chair:** We welcome you to this evidence session. The meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website, and a transcript will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to the transcript where necessary. Thank you very much indeed for coming along.

First, what do you see as the main barriers and challenges for boosting registration and engagement of BAME groups in British elections? How might the challenges be addressed?

Imran Sanaullah: I begin by thanking the Committee for inviting us. For me, the challenges link to two areas. Number one is politics itself and the lack of trust within politics. In 2019, the Hansard Society found a lack of trust in politics, which is getting worse. The question arises of why people should vote in the first place, which leads to the question of why they should register, if they are not planning to vote. There needs to be engagement with those communities.

Our friends in Canada have community engagement officers who engage with local communities and community groups. The issue we have in the UK is that, when an election is called, there is a sudden and sporadic expectation that everyone will register to sign up, if they have not done so already, while the commissions and political parties have not given them any real reason to do so.

We need to look at long-term engagement with communities, to give them a reason to vote. The barriers are the ones that we have created ourselves, in our democracy. An element of that is the funding available for campaigns. We have seen trusts and foundations provide funding just before elections are called for charities to get people signed up. The issue is that even charities cannot engage with communities on an ongoing basis, if they do not have the funding to do so, so there is an issue within that element as well.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Thank you for inviting me. This is a bit of a déjà vu moment for me, because I sat in a seat like this, speaking to a Committee, I think about 10 years ago, and you are asking me the same questions. I am afraid I am going to give you some of the same answers. That is a shame, because it means that, in that 10-year period, some of the comments that Imran is talking about and some of the fundamentals about the lack of political will to address the issue have not been dealt with.

The critical thing to understand, as Imran pointed out, is the lack of trust. Why should black and minority ethnic communities engage in a political process that, first, they do not trust; secondly, they do not think listens; and, thirdly, and critically important, is where they often see the outcomes of policies in this place not only not working for them but working against them?

Last week, I launched a report in this building about race inequality in the workplace. The data showed that if you are a young black man or woman you are 58% more likely to be unemployed. For every 100 white people, there are 158 black people who are unemployed. The data also showed that you are 47% more likely to be in a zero-hour contract job than you are if you are white. On those very basic levels, people's experience of their daily lives is that there are persistent race penalties, and institutions are doing little to close the gaps.

Why would I engage in a politics that is working against me, not for me? We have been saying for 25 years that that is precisely why you should engage, not to ask for justice but to demand it. We have made some progress in moving the dial—for example, around political representation. When we started 25 years ago, there were four black and minority ethnic MPs, and now there are over 65, many from Operation Black Vote. We have made some change, but in regards to tackling the big issues around employment, education and criminal justice, in some ways we are going backwards; stop and search, educational attainment and employment are going in the wrong direction. When we as activists say to our community, "This is our institution. These are our policies. We need to engage", people look at us and say, "Are you for real?"

Critical to the issue, as I said 10 years ago, is whether the report that you will put together will get traction in this House with political parties to say that we need comprehensive, fundamental action to inspire and have a pathway to close the gaps. I hope that I am not here in another 10 years' time saying the same thing.

The Chair: Well, you have got that off your chest, as it were, and I do not disagree with you. We have a specific job, and what you had to say was incredibly wide, compared with our specific job, but we take your point.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I hear you.

Q170 **Lord Hayward:** You have covered some of this in broad terms, but, given the diversity of the BAME population in the UK, are there some particular communities in that grouping that are harder to reach than others? What do we know about the diversity of experiences within that population with regard to electoral registration? I shall come on to the question of actual voting in a second, but I am talking now specifically about registration.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: As we look at where people are in society, we can see people who feel more left behind, in particular Roma, Gypsy and Traveller, as well as some Pakistani communities and Bangladeshi, African and some Caribbean. As they are often socioeconomically left behind, they could be the communities more difficult to register to vote; they cannot see the benefit of it. There are other communities, such as some within the Hindu and Sikh communities, who are, let us say, doing better, and who are more likely to register to vote and to vote. We need to understand that it is not one size fits all. It is not only that there is no

understanding; more importantly, there is no investment to say, "We will take on this challenge and put everything in place to give people a way for all to want to engage, because they know that they will benefit from it".

Imran Sanaullah: Dr Khan has been unable to join us, but the Runnymede Trust did a report in 2012 looking into the ethnic diversity of Britons engaging in politics. It found that second generation black Caribbean people in the UK were the least likely to register or vote, and that is because of the direct engagement with the state. I know that we are talking about the experience of registration and voting, but very much in the psyche of the public is engagement with public institutions, and that includes institutions such as the police. We need to take that into consideration. When they register to vote, what are they really voting for?

It is not just about the Electoral Commission, which they will probably have little engagement with at any point in the whole voting system; it is taking the state as a whole. We need to consider the marketing of separation between the two, while understanding that this Committee or the Lords do not have power over the police. A differentiation needs to be made between what voting gives you and what not voting does not give you, or gives you in turn.

The other side of that are the barriers for accessibility to enter and register, and one consideration needs to be the language used. As Lord Woolley mentioned, it is about understanding different communities and, quite often, local authorities understand their communities best. Some communities might have a high population of Pakistanis and Indians, and even within those communities there are several different languages, such as Hindi and Punjabi, and different regional languages. It is about making sure that it is as accessible as possible for those wanting to engage with the system.

Who those communities see in politics is important. Quite often, we see campaigns pushed out by the Electoral Commission using stock images of people they cannot really relate with, because it is not who they are or look up to. Patchwork specifically works with young people, and young people are not engaging with the BBC or ITV; they are engaging with online media. It is about recognising that there needs to be something that communicates down to them, rather than expecting the wider public to engage upwards with the commission or registering.

Lord Hayward: I specifically split the two, registration and voting, because I now want to ask a supplementary question and put a different point to each of you. I live in Camberwell and Peckham, and I love it. It has probably the largest West African-derived population in any constituency in the country. I walk through what is, according to the *Times*, the deadliest estate in London to get to work each day, but I love living there. The tragedy is that, whether I look at the figures for Tottenham, Camberwell and Peckham, Brent Central, Streatham or wherever you go, once people have registered, the turnout figures are

lower. People within those communities have overcome the barriers to registration that you identified, but they then do not turn out to vote. It is often 4% or 5% below the national turnout figures. In relation to another set of constituencies, including Ilford South, Harrow West, East Ham, West Ham, Feltham and Heston and Ealing Southall—you will recognise where I am going on these—at the last election, turnout was quite often 4%, 5%, 6% or 7% below what it was in 2017.

I am putting different questions to each of you. Why are the voting figures always lower, even when they have registration in what I have described as generally black constituencies, whereas—I have some figures here—there was a marked turnout decline at the last election across what I will describe simplistically as the Asian-London constituencies?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: In the African communities there is probably some of the highest non-voter registration in the country. In London, there is 50% non-voter registration, which compares with 6% in the White community.

Lord Hayward: But I am talking about people who register—

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I am just recognising the disparity—

Lord Hayward: Sorry, my apologies.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: The disparity in non-voter registration is huge. The second challenge is that, even when people go to register to vote in places such as Camberwell, Walthamstow or Tottenham, how much political representation do they have in local authorities? In many of those cases, it is very small. They say to themselves, "Where are we getting the representation? Where are the black men getting selected and elected?" In Walthamstow, for example, I think there is one.

We did a report on representation in local authorities and a third of first-tier local authorities had either zero or one BAME councillor. Some of the big local authorities, such as Hackney and in south London, had still very few. You need representation and you need leadership. You need BAME mayors and leaders of local authorities; I think there are only a handful. Until you get that, people will ask the same question: "Why bother? We don't get representation and we don't get policies that are going to help us alleviate some of the inequalities".

Imran Sanaullah: To focus on the wider picture, one thing that we forget sometimes with minority communities, especially the constituencies you mention, is that there are socio-economic barriers as well. Some of those communities are among the most deprived in the country, despite being in London. One thing we need to recognise is where voting fits into their priority list. Thursday might be when everyone is out voting and campaigning, but, for them, it is a Thursday when they are going to work, and they do not care because they need to put food on

the table. We need to recognise some of the barriers in line with current voting systems.

Apart from that, there is a belief in politics that, if you knock on someone's door and canvass, you will bring them towards politics. We have to recognise that a lot of minority communities have been put off politics, especially in the last few general elections, and that racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have gone up. When it is represented in these institutions, it makes people question why they are voting for the system at all. Quite often, you see it reported as rebellious voting, but for people that is the only outlet; it is either that or they do not vote. It comes down to the system rather than the administration of the system.

I know there is a question linking to this later on, but sometimes there is lack of engagement with the trusted community institutions that these groups look up to, such as faith institutions, whether temples, synagogues, churches or mosques. That brings up questions about the registration and voting systems. If it is only politicians engaging with these systems, what does it say of the more neutral stance of the Electoral Commission?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: It is a double-edged sword. Often, we see in the headlines that there needs to be an investigation into a particular area because there has been some skulduggery about block-voting for an Asian community, so, when they engage, it is seen as a bit iffy and as back-home politics. Some of the communities that we are referring to have basically understood the dynamics of power and voting, and that it is a numbers game. They have understood: "We've got the numbers. We join the party and we select our own people". They get selected and people vote, and not everybody is happy about it. It is a double-edged sword when certain communities engage more than others.

The real challenge is that, of course, we would like a democratic level playing field on which people are inspired to engage and feel that, if they engage, they do not have to vote en bloc but can vote for the best candidate. As a nation we do not engage in a framework that would better allow that to happen. I am sure that at some point we will come on to solutions and what is going to make the difference. I was looking at some of my notes from 10 years ago. I will be saying the same thing again. I will say it and hope that the penny drops, Chair, because there are solutions.

Baroness Pidding: Can we ask what those solutions are?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: First and foremost, it is about leadership. With leadership you get commitment. There is a disparity, and you need the political will to close the gap. Where would that start? Some of these things are twin-tracked and parallel. I would argue that it starts with citizenship. Often in schools that deliver citizenship, there is no cohesive approach; some schools are more proactive than others, so you need a fundamental demand that all schools engage in citizenship.

This institution is a public institution; it belongs to us and, unless we engage, it will not work for us. It is about having basic understanding of how it works. I have joined your ranks as a Peer and a Lord, and I am still working out how it works.

Baroness Suttie: You are not the only one.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: We need our citizens and our young children to know how this place works and how they can engage with it, because, if they do not, alienated young men and women will say, "That's for them, and I'll get by doing my own business". Imran will tell you, because he works with many more young people than I do right now. We need to try to get them when they are aged between 18 and 24. The task is difficult. It is not impossible but it is very difficult. They are already at minus 10: "We don't deal with those people over there".

Q171 **Baroness Eaton:** You mentioned earlier communities looking up to various institutions, such as mosques, or whatever. How much responsibility do you think leaders in the synagogue, mosque or church could have to educate the people who look up to them about the society in which they live and the responsibility they have to take part in it, for the well-being of all communities in that society?

Imran Sanaullah: It is a balance. A lot of community hubs and places of worship are registered charities, and Charity Commission rules are enforced on them, so they need to ensure that they give opportunities to all parties if they allow particular candidates to stand for an election. That has made them all very conscious of the political engagement that they have had.

Baroness Eaton: Sorry, I missed the beginning.

Imran Sanaullah: The Charity Commission has rules on engagement during an election.

Baroness Eaton: Yes, it does, but I was not suggesting something party political at all. I meant it in general terms about well-being and living together, which is not going to go against any Charity Commission rules, I would have thought.

Imran Sanaullah: Sorry, I do not get how that links in.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Let me explain. There are some bear traps. Let us say, for argument's sake, that the Muslim Council of Britain said that it wanted Muslims to register to vote, and this, that and the other. The *Daily Mail* might write an article, and then the Charity Commission will investigate and the Muslim Council of Britain will say, "Hang on a second, we are going to back away from this, because we don't want headlines splashed in the *Daily Mail*". These are choppy waters, and they are not clear. I agree that faith groups should play a more active civic role.

Baroness Eaton: Yes, I am talking about a civic role, not a political one.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: That civic role should be about political education and participation, but they should be empowered by this building, too.

The Chair: We welcome Dr Omar Khan of the Runnymede Trust.

Dr Omar Khan: I am sorry I am late.

The Chair: I know you had trouble with the railways, but you have obviously beaten them somehow and made it. Welcome.

Dr Omar Khan: Yes, I got a cross-country train from Coventry to Reading and then came that way.

The Chair: Right. We are moving on to our third question, from Baroness Suttie.

Q172 **Baroness Suttie:** Can I turn specifically to the issue of individual electoral registration? What impact do you feel it has had on identifying and registering underrepresented groups?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: It has had a huge impact on lowering the numbers from BAME communities. It is one of the things that I want the Committee to understand. I understand why, but there are unintended consequences. More granular detail is wanted, and the more barriers you put up, the more people will say, "I can't be bothered. I'm not engaging with this". We will come on to the same subject with voter ID: the more barriers you put up, particularly for our communities, which are already suspicious about more scrutiny, the more people turn off. We need to understand the consequences.

Dr Omar Khan: I am sorry that I missed the first questions. We have data that is a few years old, but the two main reasons why black and minority ethnic groups are not registered are that they do not know that they are entitled to vote, and they do not know how to vote. Individual electoral registration has had some effect because, whatever you think about it, in the past heads of household used to register everyone in their household. Obviously, if there are groups, they are less likely to understand how the registration process works, and any changes in it will disproportionately affect groups that are currently more likely to be underregistered because they do not know the process. That is one issue about how well it is communicated. I do not think that it is inevitable. It could be better communicated, so it is not an inevitable consequence.

On entitlement to vote, more could be done to make it clear to Commonwealth citizens in particular that they are entitled to vote. We did a little bit on that, and I know that Lord Woolley has done it over many years. We tweeted a picture of all the flags of the Commonwealth during the last election, and it got a huge amount of take-up, including among people from some of those countries who did not know that they were entitled to vote. There were people who did not realise that they were entitled to vote. We know that registration rates are lowest for Black African groups, followed by South Asian groups and Black Caribbean

groups. You are four times less likely to be registered if you are Black African.

Once you control for registration rates, turnout rates are not that different. There is a bit of a red herring in that people think that some people are less likely to turn out. The evidence on that is very weak; it is slightly less for Black Caribbean groups, but it is statistically weak. The big difference is in registration. If we are concerned about political participation, the issue is not apathy or lack of interest; the issue is more around registration, and that is where the focus should be, if we are interested in increasing civic and political engagement.

I have one point on the Charity Commission thing. One source of confusion is that the guidance issued by both the Electoral Commission and the Charity Commission is insufficiently clear to charities. A difficult fact that Lord Woolley has highlighted is the reality that 85% of Muslims vote Labour and 10% or less vote for the Conservative Party. For black groups, it is similar: 86% of black people vote Labour, and 10% vote for the Conservative Party. Obviously, there is a difference politically in the groups that are underregistered, and if you are doing work to register those groups you will potentially be accused of political leanings, even though that is not your intent. That is one reason why people are concerned and why, as Lord Woolley suggested, sometimes efforts to increase those votes are often said by the media to be a way for Labour to steal the election. There are headlines. It is not something that I would endorse, but it is part of the context in which this work is carried out. No organisation wants to be hit with that kind of media coverage.

Imran Sanaullah: To touch on individual registration from not only a BAME scope but a youth scope, culturally BAME families expect to live in larger families. Traditionally, whoever is the head of the household would register the whole family, so everyone knew that they were registered. With that changing, the expectation is that individuals will register themselves, even though it might come later in life. Not every person at the age of 18 thinks, "Yes, I can vote. Let me go and do that straightaway".

Flip that to young BAME people—a kind of add-on. Many young people are now moving back into their parents' household because they cannot afford new houses, so they still have a hierarchy at home whereby one of their parents might be expected to register them. Some education needs to be put out there. I agree with Lord Woolley's point; scepticism about democracy kicks in very early, especially for those from BAME backgrounds, because of their engagement with the state, and the only way that can be counteracted is through positive promotions in education, which needs to start in schools at a very early age.

The Chair: Am I right in thinking that you would not put the clock back on individual registration?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I am not sure. I like more people voting and engaging. I do not know whether there was a huge amount of fraud,

as is claimed, when there was household voter registration. I think it is a bit of a red herring.

We ought to focus on where we are now and where we want to go in the future. In future, I would like to suggest that we have compulsory registration so that there are ways and means of getting every citizen of voting age to register to vote. That is the first thing. The second thing is that just because they are registered it does not mean that they will vote. You have to educate people from primary school in fundamental citizenship, so that when they come of age they say, "I'm busting a gut to vote because it's my right and I want to engage".

The third element is that organisations such as ours, for decades, have been given either nothing or crumbs to get our communities to register to vote. Imran highlighted what normally happens. About five minutes before an election, a government department will say that there is a funding call for a few thousand pounds for you to register to vote. We go to our communities and say that they should register to vote and they say, "Why are you coming now? Is there an election around the corner?"

Dr Omar Khan: There needs to be more funding for EROs, even if you do not go down the compulsory route. A lot of local authorities do not have enough electoral registration officers; some only have one, so there is not enough support. The other thing that could be done is that they could go door to door more, and do more leafletting. We are doing research at the moment to look at what EROs have done. We have sent out a survey to them, asking what they are doing, and what they have done over the past five to 10 years, to increase BAME registration rates. We will have the findings of that in a few weeks or months, probably in a month.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: That is interesting because, when we started 25 years ago, it was the responsibility of the electoral registration officers to raise voter registration, and they often had campaigns and teams of people.

Dr Omar Khan: They did, yes.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: When there was the Electoral Commission, everything shifted from the local authorities to the commission; local authorities said. "It's not our business any more. Go to the Electoral Commission". That is when it went from up there to down there in terms of local authorities rolling up their sleeves and getting the numbers better.

Dr Omar Khan: Yes, I have some sympathy. If there is one electoral registration officer in a local authority of 100,000 people that cuts across two constituencies, it is tricky for them, but we should expect more from them, and we should expect that it will cost money.

The Chair: I think you will be able to build on that from Baroness Pidding's questions.

Q173 **Baroness Pidding:** I think we probably know what you are going to say, but how would you rate the Government's effort to improve registration among underregistered groups? How effective have tools such as online registration been in making registration easier?

Imran Sanaullah: I am going to link the two questions about dialling the clock back and online registration. As the youngest in the room, I am going to think slightly outside the box and go beyond compulsory and automated registration, potentially linking to national insurance registration. The argument is that, if we expect people to pay tax in our country, surely they have the right to vote in our country. That is a different conversation altogether, but there are processes that can be looked into if we are moving forward from an Act implemented in 2013. We are now seven years down the line, and we cannot base ourselves on what happened seven years ago but should be looking forward to online registration.

From personal experience, the online registration system seems to be working well enough. It is seamless enough. The issue we have had as charities is that quite often we are asked how many people we have registered. We have engaged with the Cabinet Office on the issue, and there is no way to track how organisations are doing, and how the Electoral Commission is doing with registration sign-up; it just goes into a mysterious form, and suddenly you are registered. Sometimes there are issues around how it is funded, and when funders ask how many people we have registered, we often have to presume from social media or website engagement how many people have actually engaged through our systems or gone directly through us.

Dr Omar Khan: I agree that the online system is decent, but the question mark is that a lot of the groups that are more likely to be underregistered may be less likely to be online. Young people are more likely to be online, but I do not think that an online campaign is likely to reach some of the other groups that are more likely to be underregistered, such as those with Commonwealth citizenship who do not realise that they have entitlement to vote.

It is a more difficult question, but there will be groups within that who do not speak English very well, so online registration is not going to work well for those groups either. It is not a huge number. I think the numbers are often inflated; about 200,000 people do not speak English in Britain, or it may be closer to 250,000. It is not a large number of people, but how well you understand English in order to register to vote might be an issue. You are still entitled to vote even if you do not speak English, if you have an entitlement to vote.

If you look at the data, you can see that gaps remain. The underregistered groups were the underregistered groups 10 years ago, and they remain the underregistered groups. There is no reason to say that the system has had a positive effect in that sense, possibly with the exception of young people. I do not know.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I think you are on to something, not least because, looking at the demographics, young people, young BAME people, all have phones. They do not have to fill in a form when they have that device in their hand; the question is how we get the device to work for them. It is not a magic wand or a short cut, but if we are in it for the long term, and we get some fundamentals right, we could use the device for them to get registered.

Q174 **Lord Dykes:** I go back to what I would call the coefficients of exhortation with which you started, which were very enticing—citizenship, the civic role, encouragement and example, how Parliament works and all that. What are the practical things that can be done to encourage registration of severely underregistered groups? You mention the phone, so I presume that it starts with social media. Then there are adverts on TV and radio. How would you do it?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I am pleased to say that yesterday it was announced by this institution that Operation Black Vote won campaigner of the year for the last election. It got tens of thousands of people registered to vote and voting.

To your point, it is about when the community trusts you and you have a narrative that can take them on a journey. The journey that we are taking with many young black and minority ethnic people with regards to civil engagement is from minus 10—"We are really against this"—to plus 10 and voting. We have to take them on a journey from minus to plus. Part of that journey is that when they say that there is no point in voting, we say, "That's what your detractors want you to do because that way nothing changes". But we cannot say that in five minutes; we have to have a conversation and a narrative that takes them from the minus to the plus.

It takes investment and, when our organisations are so threadbare, we are often whistling in the wind. At Operation Black Vote we are lucky, because we have enlisted the media giant, Saatchi & Saatchi, which works for us pro bono, and our campaign uses celebrities and stuff. You can turn things around, but we wish there was more investment by the state in getting grass-roots organisations to engage with the communities they know.

Imran Sanaullah: We need recognition of how much it really costs to get someone registered. Quite often, a lot of funding streams are trapped by the number of people you are able to register, and quite often charities go for the low-hanging fruit, because it is easier. If we are really talking about the hard to engage, it will take time and commitment from community organisations and local authorities to go out and engage with those individuals, which might mean spending months on understanding what the system does, and what this place does. We talk about this place as if everyone knows what we do, sitting in these rooms, but that takes an education in itself, not just for young people but often for the more elderly in communities.

Consistent funding is an important thing to understand, and not just for community groups. It is easy for us to sit down and talk about our own groups, but local authorities have been massively overlooked. They were able to engage with their communities directly but now they depend on community groups, faith institutions and social clubs to engage with the community that they are ultimately answerable to. Some of the issues align there.

We heard from our friends in Canada where they have community support officers. That is something we lack currently. Our registration officers are geared solely towards registration rather than engagement, and engagement is the only way you will attract people into engaging with our democracy.

I mentioned education earlier. It is about education, not just at the basic level but continuing even through university, when people can actually vote, putting something there for universities to entice and encourage them. Most students' unions do that, and they do great work, but it is often seen as a more left-leaning tactic to engage with universities. It is important for those of us in the centre of politics, or in neutral and apolitical groups, to get people encouraged to vote.

Finally, we need the Electoral Commission to target its marketing. Even today, our charity, and probably many other charities, got branding guidelines and statements that we can put out, but often they are very mass market. For us to engage, the marketing needs to be targeted towards our audiences.

Dr Omar Khan: Yes. I have spoken to the Electoral Commission about that, and people seemed to think that it would be a challenge; they can target where they put the message, but they cannot change the message. The commission can choose to try to send more volume of message A to a particular population, but it does not believe—or, at least, the person I was speaking to did not seem to believe—that it can tailor it in such a way that it did not look as if it was targeting an ethnic group. That seemed to be how they interpreted the requirement for impartiality; that was my understanding of the conversation.

I see that as a question, and the data collection issue is another one. I would like to see registration rates published at ward level; it would be an improvement for campaigners to know where to target better. Constituency and local authority-level data is too high and does not tell us in granular enough detail who is underregistered, whereas, if you have ward-level data, you can compare that ward versus another ward that theoretically has the same population, and you can see underregistration.

Especially for the point on age, I would like to see how far the data could include other demographic variables. Could the Electoral Commission publish ward-level data by age or gender? It could probably do that, although ethnicity is a challenge, because it does not collect that data. That is another question mark that has been flagged in the past: should we be collecting data on ethnicity when we gather the annual canvass?

There are issues of data protection and anonymisation, I agree, but there are ways of sharing that data.

My understanding is that the other institution that ends up getting hold of some of the data at the end is the ONS. Given that the ONS has a statutory function, could we put pressure on it? We could not do that from our point of view, but you could write to the ONS requesting it to publish more granular data on who is not registered at local level. If you are targeting, you need to know where you are targeting, otherwise you are doing it a bit randomly. You are kind of guessing. The way we did it last time was to look at the census, which is from 2011; then we looked at place of birth data, passport data and ethnicity data, and we had to combine all of that, looking at it at local authority level. It is also eight years out of date, so obviously everyone is eight years older. The whole thing is not very good, with that data.

The Chair: I understand what you are saying, but I wonder whether it is even available.

Dr Omar Khan: They have ward-level data. One thing to note is that political parties all have the data. They get it from the Electoral Commission. They need to know how many voters in each ward voted for their party.

The Chair: No.

Dr Omar Khan: Yes, I think so.

The Chair: You know who is on the register, but you do not know who is going to vote for you.

Baroness Eaton: You know if they have voted but not how they have voted.

The Chair: You know whether they have voted, but you do not know who they have voted for.

Dr Omar Khan: You know that in ward A there were 900 Conservatives and 800 Labour and that in ward B there were—

The Chair: Oh, yes.

Dr Omar Khan: If you are a canvasser for a party, you are obviously going to try to drum up more support for your party in the ward where there are more of your voters, and you know the registration rates as a result; you know that there are more eligible and registered voters in one ward versus another, so those data exist.

The Chair: I think the problem is that we do not have that, but we will pursue it.

Q175 **Baroness Mallalieu:** The question I was going to ask is one that you have all given some answers to already, but I would like to press you a little further, if I may. Are there any other bodies that could be doing

more to identify people who are unregistered and/or to encourage registration? You have all said that there is a great need for much more to be done in schools, and with students and faith groups, and somebody needs to tell Commonwealth voters that they have a right to vote.

Lord Woolley, you said that, once things were handed over to the Electoral Commission and the EROs had limited funding, things went downhill. Is there any point in trying to look at taking responsibility back to the local areas by giving the EROs a specific responsibility and funding between elections specifically to raise targets in their individual areas?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Of course, the more local you go, the more understanding you will have of the communities you seek to serve, so more local has to be better. You mentioned what faith groups might do. Perhaps there could be some kind of framework for faith groups not just to be faith centres but to be civic centres, which would include voter registration and becoming a magistrate or a school governor.

Chair, you said that we are involved in voter registration but I cannot stress enough that actually we are involved in the well-being of communities and our democracy. If we do not get it right, if people feel alienated and do not have a voice, there are other paths they can go down, and we do not like the look of that. Getting this right is really important. Beyond voter registration and voting, it is about the well-being of our society.

Dr Omar Khan: The ONS is important in addition to the Electoral Commission, electoral registration officers, local authorities and schools. As I suggested, because the Office for National Statistics holds data and is a different kind of body, as the statutory holder of data, with a different role from the Electoral Commission, it might do more. Universities do a lot, but they could continue to do more.

The big issue in voting behaviour, which we hear a lot about politically too, is around those who do not go to university, young people not in education, employment or training, and groups that are less likely to have a graduate degree. How do we reach them? Maybe FE colleges could do more, but that is education, so how do we reach them? Where are they congregating? We could think about our other public services, such as GP surgeries. Imran mentioned national insurance, and data-sharing between the DWP and HMRC is on the government agenda, to try to check tax records. You would have to be a bit careful about how far citizens' data is shared across government without our permission, but there are other bodies that hold data.

Lord Woolley has already noted that there are communities that understand the underregistered groups better, and they need to be funded and supported to do it. You ask why they are not registered. It is partly because the existing mainstream institutions of our society are not reaching them with their messages. The question is how you are going to reach them, and you then have to ask where they are, who they trust and who knows those groups. Maybe GP surgeries and even housing

associations could be thought about, if they leafleted in their lobby areas. There are things like that; social housing could potentially be involved, because there are underregistered groups there as well.

Imran Sanaullah: Faith groups and charities are already on my list and we have already mentioned them. In GP surgeries there are often posters but not in a language that those we define as hard to reach would understand. In recognising that, there needs to be cross-platform engagement. There are BAME media; even on YouTube there are BAME media, and on TV. Quite often, that is where HMRC puts its reminders for tax, so why not put in a reminder for people to register to vote?

Q176 **Baroness Eaton:** In a lot of ways you have already answered my original question, which was whether there were any aspects of voting or electoral administration that you thought had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities or other demographic groups. You have touched on quite a few of them already. Can you highlight for us those that you think are the most damaging and that we can do something about? There is a difference between knowing things and saying, "Well, yes", and focusing on addressing them.

Imran Sanaullah: We have mentioned that citizens from Commonwealth countries are able to vote in elections and many of them do not know that. Beyond that, EU residents are able to vote in certain elections and not in others. Even last week, when I was canvassing with a group of young people, people came to the door and asked, "Can I vote, because I'm not too sure about this election?" The communication about whether people can vote in certain elections needs to be done better so that people recognise it, or there needs to be some sort of standardisation. Especially with Brexit now done, or out of the way, and as EU residents become British citizens, that should potentially make it easier administratively, but the communication around it is important and often missed.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Rolling out national voter ID is a big danger, particularly when you are not putting anything on the other side through engagement and other elements that would move the dial. We could go even further back. That for me is one of the key areas that could be problematic.

Dr Omar Khan: We have evidence that it will be problematic in Britain. In the US, there is no shortage of evidence that voter ID has had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority voters. One of the reasons why the Windrush scandal happened was that people were unable to provide sufficient identification, so we know already that there are groups that are struggling to provide the levels of identification required, and they were put into detention centres because of that. There are reasons for Lord Woolley's concern; we have evidence for that.

Baroness Eaton: That is historical, though. Presumably, there could be ways of addressing it, recognising that that is the issue. The system, if it goes ahead, could be designed to accommodate that particular worry and

deal with it. You are saying that, as it is, without extra communication or an improved system, with a particular required paper, it could be problematic.

Dr Omar Khan: Yes. I do not think it is inevitable, but it is likely without safeguards or proper rollout. I have spoken to some Windrush people who have identity cards, but they have a validity of only five years.

Baroness Eaton: So it is about looking at those kinds of details.

Dr Omar Khan: They are going to have to reapply. A lot of them are very concerned, because in five years they are going to be 80, and they could have lost even more of their documents, potentially.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: Instinctively, it is another layer and another barrier: "Big Brother wants to know everything about us, so let's not engage". What we want to do is to give positive reasons to get greater engagement.

Baroness Eaton: I understand.

Dr Omar Khan: It is worth saying that migrants and ethnic minorities historically, not just in Britain but across Europe, have had greater fear of the state having data about them.

Baroness Eaton: For obvious reasons, in many cases.

Dr Omar Khan: We have to be aware that, whatever we think, that is a view within migrant communities in particular. Historically, there are reasons why migrants feel that way about data-sharing.

Imran Sanaullah: I know there is a question about voter ID, but is it all right if I chip in now?

Lord Campbell-Savours: We can take it now, but I wanted to ask the question.

Imran Sanaullah: I apologise for jumbling the order.

Lord Campbell-Savours: I have another question I can substitute, Chair.

Imran Sanaullah: We did a smaller focus group with some of our young people. It is not just migrants. There is suspicion across the BAME community when dealing with authority and when authority asks for your ID or who you are. We had questions such as, "Will people know who I voted for, if they know who I am?", or, "Will it be on record somewhere that I voted for this, this and this, because they now know exactly who I am, where I live, and all that?" That will have to be dealt with very sensitively, especially with the younger BAME communities and first generation migrants.

We view it as a naturally new system, but we have to recognise that a lot of migrants have dealt with a system where they have had to show ID

before, because in their own countries they have to show ID. There will not be a huge learning pattern, but for the majority who have already voted it will be a learning trend for them, rather more than for first generation migrants.

One thing we wanted to raise, which we raised with the Cabinet Office when it asked for our input to its study, was that social mobility is a key issue. To get a passport costs between £50 and £70, and many people cannot afford that. There has to be some sort of ID implementation process. Our Canadian friends mentioned homeless people. If this is a system that prevents homeless people voting, there needs to be serious concern about that because, regardless of whether they have a registered address or not, they need at least to have the capability to vote. Whether they choose to or not is down to them.

The trials are even more concerning. At the last election, 819 people were turned away, and there were, I think, only eight constituencies in the trial. If that is run across the country, it means many people being turned away. Across 2019, 1,968 were turned away and 740 did not return. If that is followed across the country, that is many people turning away from the system, and we do not know whether the 740 who did not return might choose never to engage in an election again, because of that experience. Those are things that we need to consider, because public trust is already fragile, as was mentioned in the Hansard Society report. We do not want this to be the thing that breaks it.

Dr Omar Khan: There are 9 million people in Britain who do not have a passport; it is not a small number.

The Chair: Are you happy with that, Lord Campbell-Savours?

Lord Campbell-Savours: I shall substitute another question.

The Chair: That is fine.

Q177 **Lord Lexden:** Dr Khan, you have given some views on the annual canvass. Are there any other points you would like to leave with us on that?

Dr Omar Khan: I am not an expert on this, but when I was speaking to EROs they said that they had software that they used to input it, and there are three different systems. When I asked questions about age demographic variables, they told me that they could not do it and that the software company would have to do it. I do not understand that, but there may be an IT issue that it is worth getting to the bottom of. Could the Electoral Commission, or you or someone else, recommend that the software is made universal and simpler, and collects all the data we might need? I do not know very much about it, but it would be worth your talking to an ERO about that.

Lord Lexden: Are there any other points on the annual canvass, how it works now and improvements that you would like to see?

Imran Sanaullah: If we move towards a system of automation where it is connected to national insurance numbers, it would be automatically updated, so the need for the annual canvass would be removed, reducing costs for local authorities.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I reiterate that local authorities need to be better empowered, particularly to focus on challenging areas and challenging communities.

Q178 **Lord Campbell-Savours:** Lord Woolley, you referred to compulsory registration, and your colleague, Mr Sanaullah, referred to linking it all to national insurance contributions. I think I understood him to say that. Dr Khan referred to the history of BAMEs being used to producing identification documentation.

Can I take you to national identity cards and ask whether, in many ways, they would actually solve the problem in the sense that they would lead to greater registration? There are all sorts of consequences with national identity cards. Do you think they might be helpful in the area of electoral registration?

Lord Woolley of Woodford: I would argue that they would be completely and utterly unhelpful. You have to bear in mind that black and minority ethnic young people are 24 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police. They will feel that they will be harassed even more to show their identity card, if it is rolled out in the way you suggest.

Imran Sanaullah: I think there are similar issues. When I talked about linking it to national insurance, it is not that their contribution means that they can then vote; it means that they are on a system that can be shared, essentially saving costs. The national identity system would enable you to have verification through your national ID number rather than showing a passport or an ID card, and the suspicion would increase. Many BAME people do not hold a valid passport in the household, because they see no need, so the question of an ID card becomes even harder to satisfy.

Dr Omar Khan: It is also a political issue. Everyone from Jacob Rees-Mogg to Jeremy Corbyn has objected to identity cards. We know it was attempted.

Lord Campbell-Savours: You know what?

Dr Omar Khan: It was attempted under the Labour Government. There was an attempt to introduce identity cards, and it was one of the few defeats they suffered when they had a very large majority. The tradition of libertarian views about identity cards in Britain is quite a deep one among the public and among Britain's politicians in the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties. It is one thing that unites those three parties, so I think it would be difficult to propose and get through the other House.

Lord Campbell-Savours: I was not asking you for your judgment as to

the politics of it but whether you thought it would be helpful in this case.

Dr Omar Khan: We do not have a position right now, because they were proposed in 2004. I have reservations based on what Lord Woolley said. I would want to look at the evidence on them, but I would be suspicious. I think it was 2004 when it was attempted; I cannot remember.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Can I take you into a far more sensitive area? It is very difficult to raise this in a public session, but I am going to do so. Many years ago, I was canvassing in a by-election in east London with quite a well-known figure in the Labour Party, and we were knocking on doors in Asian community areas. What was disturbing us was what was happening to women and their right to vote. I do not know a lot about this, but I have tried to find out. I understand that there is a culture whereby men dominate and women take instruction. That obviously worries us, because it has implications for the electoral system. I am sorry to raise it, but we have to be open about these things, because otherwise reforms never take place.

The reason why I asked you about identity cards, from within the minority community, was that the one way of giving women real rights is by giving them a national identity document. It transforms their rights within families when otherwise they may well have their rights suppressed. I know that you have reservations and you talk about being stopped in the street and asked for the card, but I understand for women this is a huge issue. Has it passed across your minds that there may be a solution to the problem of the treatment of women through the introduction of these cards?

Dr Omar Khan: I think we would all accept that gender inequality is an issue in Asian and all communities in Britain, but I am a bit sceptical as to how identity cards are the solution. Empowering women and ensuring that they have equal access to education and employment opportunities is of vital importance. If you look at the data, nowadays Asian women, including Muslim women, are more likely to go to university than Asian men, and they are more likely to get firsts, 2.1s and higher-level degree qualifications. Among the younger generation, the evidence is quite strong that women are stepping through, but that does not mean that men are not trying to obstruct them in achieving everything they can. That exists in all communities. The issue is much bigger than identity cards, which may or may not be a solution to some things, but I do not think they are the cure-all for gender inequality.

Lord Woolley of Woodford: A holistic approach will deal with gender and race inequality. If you get that right and get citizenship education right at a very early level so that people feel that these are their institutions and they want to engage, young women will want to vote and engage, as will older women. Then you get greater representation and policies that better reflect the community's concerns. It is a win-win, and fundamental to it is leadership, and getting the buy-in that we need to invest in that area.

Imran Sanaullah: We need to call it what it is. It is domestic abuse. For anyone to have the right over someone else's vote and their freedom is domestic abuse, and the law needs to reflect that. I do not see an ID card fixing that problem. I do not see anyone saying, "Oh, I've got this card. This will protect me". There are services that need to protect those women. There is other domestic abuse. It might be civil couples or it might be between parent and child; we see a lot of that happening in various communities. It is about the trust in the systems, whether the local systems or the police, and about them not being willing to engage with the support system that should be there to save them. Considering that an ID card might fix that for them is risky.

Lord Campbell-Savours: Yes, but we knocked on doors in those areas and we found that many women are on no documentation at all, and that everything is in the husband's name. I cannot see how, in that kind of local society, women have rights; I cannot understand how it is possible, if they are on nothing. If they are not on any documentation apart from, maybe, a pension book or something, how can we possibly just rely on education to deal with that?

Imran Sanaullah: I do not think it is about education. It is making them aware of what they have exposure to in the UK. Quite often these are cases where women have come from different countries and, therefore, feel that they have to rely on or answer to their husbands, or whoever has brought them to the UK. It is about showing them that they are residents here, in the UK, and making the system easier. There are even issues with divorce systems, and the capacity of a woman to be able to divorce, or whether the marriage is even legally registered in the UK. It is very far from their minds to ask whether they can vote; it is more about whether they even have the right to stay in the country.

Q179 **The Chair:** I have one final question. You have seen that there is the prospect of the Government who have just been returned bringing in legislation for identity cards, or not identity cards as such but some form of identity for voting. You have expressed your views on that. The interesting thing is that they are doing it perhaps on the basis that they have tested it by having a pilot scheme. We had three people with us who had different pilot schemes and said, "This is how it worked for us", and so forth. I am putting a question to you that you might want to give some thought to and then write to us later. Is there a pilot scheme that would help with BAME registration that would be worth pursuing and, if that works, then going nationwide? Is there some pilot that would be worth pursuing? Is that worth considering?

Dr Omar Khan: Yes, I think it would be very good. It would be good to evaluate it and maybe try it in different areas.

The Chair: If you would like to come up with a scheme, we could consider it.

Dr Omar Khan: UCL is looking at that. A research project has just started that I have been made aware of.

The Chair: Right. Thank you very much indeed for coming along.