

**Public Administration and Constitutional
Affairs Committee**

Review of the 2024 general election

Second Report of Session 2024–25

HC 487

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

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Summary

Assessment of the 2024 general election

We agree with the Electoral Commission's assessment that the 2024 general election was well run. But we note once again that considerable concerns have been raised about the potential for things to go wrong in any one of the elements necessary to deliver a successful election. We are concerned that the fabric may not hold, potentially placing an election result in doubt. We also note that while the Electoral Commission have consistently reported that elections are well run, they have also consistently raised concerns. To better judge how elections are run the Electoral Commission should develop criteria and, where appropriate, metrics, for assessing and judging how effectively an election has been run.

Turnout

A significant concern coming out of the general election was the low turnout, which if considered as a percentage of the adult population was the lowest since the introduction of universal suffrage. We also note the decline in voter registration levels over the same period. This decline in voting risks undermining the authority and legitimacy of government in the UK. Reversing the decline is a task for the whole of government, Parliament and the wider political system. We agree with the Electoral Commission that a key place to start addressing the decline is with Political education. This will be all the more necessary if the Government lower the UK voting age to 16 years old.

State of electoral law and systems for electoral administration

There is a clear consensus in our evidence around the necessity and benefits of simplification and consolidation of electoral law. We are concerned that the Government do not share this view and so have called on them to make their position clear. We do appreciate the Government's point that the consolidation and simplification of electoral laws may take some time, but

this only strengthens the case for putting the process in motion, and for a clear commitment for consolidating legislation to be introduced once the process is complete.

We are aware of a range of concerns regarding the pressures placed on electoral administrators. These concerns include anxieties raised around recruiting and retaining staff; securing suitable locations for polling stations and counts; implementation of new requirements and technologies; the dependence on an increasingly small number of external suppliers; and the funding and resourcing of elections. To better understand, prepare and address these pressures, we recommend that the Government produce an annual report assessing the readiness for elections.

Changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022 further added to the workload of electoral administrators. For example, the greater use of online portals while providing new and necessary ways for people to engage with the electoral system, has considerably increased the workload for electoral administrators and others. It appears to us that these advancements have only gone part of the way, and that greater use needs to be made of advancement in technology and in use of data.

While we are pleased that administrative errors at elections in 2024 did not bring into doubt the election results, such mistakes do threaten to diminish trust in our electoral system. We are concerned that there is no uniform process prescribed for actually counting the votes at an election. Candidates standing in a UK general election should be confident that, as far as is reasonably practicable, votes are counted and checked in the same way in every constituency.

While there are historic reasons why different systems have developed and been maintained, the case for streamlining, standardising, and making these electoral systems consistent is now compelling. We call on the government to create:

- A single system for how counts should be conducted.
- A single electoral register, with functions for local authorities to access local data to access local rates of registration.
- A single or integrated digital platform and system for electoral administration.

The completeness and accuracy of the electoral register has declined over the last thirty years. A consequence of this has been that an event-led registration process has developed, placing considerable additional burden on electoral administrators during their peak period of activity. We encourage the Government to develop an automated electoral

registration system that actively prompts people to register to vote or update their details. As part of this change, we also call on the Government to consider whether the requirement for the annual canvas can be removed.

Postal voting

Postal voting makes up an increasingly large proportion of votes cast at elections, meaning people increasingly vote earlier than election day. Given this, the Government should consider whether other means of ‘early’ and ‘flexible’ voting would aid participation in elections. We also call for changes to make postal voting more effective for voters. These include better information given to people about the timescales involved and dispatching postal ballots on a rolling basis rather than in two batches. The reissuing of postal ballots earlier than the currently proscribed 4 days before an election, and the ability to change your method of voting from postal voting to in person or proxy, are also recommended. Royal Mail plays a vital role in our postal vote system, in recognition of this and to ensure a high standard of service is maintained, we call for the delivery of ballot packs, postal votes and poll cards to be explicitly mentioned in the universal service obligation.

The current system for overseas voting cannot guarantee that eligible voters will be given the opportunity to have their vote counted. A system capable of reliably allowing eligible voters to cast their ballot must be in place in time for the next general election. To achieve this we call on the Government to conduct feasibility studies to report within six months for the following alternatives for overseas voting:

- Embassy and consulate voting
- Online voting
- Digitally receiving and returning ballot papers
- Telephone voting

While these are being considered we also call for all overseas voters that are registered to automatically receive a postal vote. We also note the poor level of data on overseas voting, as a part of reforms to the electoral register an overseas electoral register should be created and data collected on whether people were successfully able to vote.

Accessible voting

While the changes to accessible voting brought in by the Elections Act have been a step in the right direction, more can be done. In particular, we believe that better use of data can be made to make people aware of assistance available and target whether particular equipment is likely to be needed.

Voter ID and voter fraud

We are concerned that the evidence base for the necessity and effectiveness of voter ID is simply not there. At the 2024 general election, 16,000 people were prevented from voting and the Electoral Commission data indicates that between 770,000 and 1.9 million people were either prevented or discouraged from voting. However, the Government told us they had ruled out even considering removing the requirement.

While the previous government commissioned research into voter ID, this did not consider the impact of voter ID on turn out, nor the impact on different democratic groups. We call on the Government to clearly set out its criteria for assessing the acceptability of impact of the policy on turnout, and a detailed assessment of the general impact of voter ID on turnout. This should include the impact on different demographic groups as part of post-election reviews. To aid this we also call for the Government to consider what data should be routinely collected at elections to properly evaluate the effectiveness of the voter ID requirements.

To mitigate the impact of voter ID, we also support calls for the current list of accepted IDs to be kept under review; improve the awareness of the Voter Authenticity Certificate (VAC) system, including the issuing of an emergency VAC on election day and the creation of a digital VAC or government ID that could be used.

Mis- and Dis- Information Abuse and Intimidation

The dissemination of information and differing perspectives remains central to a healthy democracy and is essential to effective elections, but this is threatened by the rise of mis- and dis- information. There is no easy solution to this, and electoral law and policy has struggled to keep pace. The development of AI adds complexity to this picture, bringing many concerns but offering much potential. Any legislative framework to regulate AI must be agile but allow effective scrutiny of new regulations that proceed from that framework.

The level and extent to which abuse, harassment and intimidation was seen at the general election was totally unacceptable and antithetical to our democracy. The police have a vital role in defending democracy, and this needs to be carried out proactively, not just reactively. There should be a coordinated and consistent police engagement response with all candidates throughout the country. We also agreed with the Electoral Commission that Ofcom has a vital role to play ahead of the next election considering their new power and duties. We are pleased that a Speaker's Conference has been established to examine these issues in detail and to recommend steps that can be taken to counteract this.

We believe the Electoral Commission carries out a vital role as an independent regulator in the elections sphere, but it is a regulator without sufficient teeth. We call for the Government to establish an independent review of the Electoral Commission's powers, to be carried out with a view to giving it the powers necessary to rigorously and proactively ensure that elections are carried out in a fair, impartial, and truthful environment.

1 Introduction

1. The process of carrying out elections that are free, fair and well run, is at the very core of UK democracy. These infrequent but essential events, like all aspects of our constitution, need careful monitoring and analysis in order: to consider whether they are functioning effectively; to address issues for reform identified; and to assess the need for them to adapt to the changes in the way people are living their lives and engaging with politics. We launched this inquiry to review the administration, process and conduct of the 2024 general election, following the publication of the Electoral Commission's [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#) and their earlier publication of [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#). This inquiry and report is intended to review the administration of the current electoral system with a view to ensuring that the next general election is able to be carried out effectively, securely and freely. This was not a review into the type of electoral system used at UK Parliamentary elections.
2. During the course of the inquiry, we took oral evidence from the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), the Royal Mail and the Government. We also published 29 pieces of written evidence. In addition to this we were able to draw on a considerable body of published work by others in the areas of electoral administration and electoral law. In particular we have reviewed and considered the evidence and recommendations of the Electoral Commission's reports. We see no need to reproduce a full and detailed review of all these areas or reproduce the Electoral Commission's evidence and so have focused on what needs to be done in preparation for the next election.

2 Assessment of the 2024 general election

3. The overall assessment made of the 2024 general election by the Electoral Commission was that the “elections were well-run, and voters continue to have high levels of confidence and satisfaction in the polls”.¹ The election, however, was not without its challenges, and the Electoral Commission report highlights a number of issues specific to this election, as well as the recurrence of some that are longer running.
4. The overall assessment of the general election being “well run” was also the conclusion reached by others in evidence to us. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) describe the general election as being “well-run within the system and legislation [elections] are bound by”.² An independent Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation carried out by IFF Research also reached the conclusion that overall the election was well run and that the Electoral Integrity Programme measures were implemented effectively.³ This was also the assessment of the Government. Minister Rushanara Ali MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Homelessness and Democracy), told us that she shared the Electoral Commission’s assessment, describing the election as being “broadly well run”.⁴
5. We expect UK elections to be well run. Indeed, the “well run” assessment was also made by the Electoral Commission regarding the general elections in 2019, 2017, 2015 and 2010.⁵ When asked how this assessment was reached, John Pullinger, Chair of the Electoral Commission, told us there

1 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

2 AEA [2024 Post polls ministerial letter](#), 18 July 2024; [Q135](#)

3 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, [IFF Research: Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), 15 May 2025

4 [Q176](#)

5 Electoral Commission, [UK Parliamentary General Election 2019](#); Electoral Commission, [Electoral administration at the 2017 UKPGE report](#); Electoral Commission, [The May 2015 UK elections: Report on the administration of the 7 May 2015 elections, including the UK Parliamentary general election](#); Electoral Commission, Report on the administration of the 2010 UK general election.

are two methods used to inform the assessment. The first is a large-scale survey and the second is an assessment of whether performance standards are met.⁶

6. Against the first, the Electoral Commission's survey indicated that 83% of the electorate had a positive view of the election. This was an improvement on the 2019 general election. Both the Electoral Commission and the Government cite this as a high and positive number. However, there was a considerable difference in the outcome between voters (88%) and non-voters (58%). John Pullinger told us that it was a consistent pattern that people who had experienced the election came away with a positive impression of it. He told us that "people's concerns about whether the system is going to be well run and their propensity to vote are tied up with the same set of issues in their minds".⁷
7. The second criterion is based on whether returning officers achieve the performance standards set by the Electoral Commission. These were last updated in 2022 and set out four overall outcomes for returning officers in delivering elections.⁸ While they provide clear standards that must be met, they do not provide an effective method for assessing how well an election has been run overall. In the 2024 general election, as John Pullinger outlined to us, there were two instances where these standards were not met. Errors were made in the count in both Wandsworth and Richmond.⁹ In both cases the counting errors did not affect the outcome of the election. The Electoral Commission highlighted in its report, and in evidence to us, that they had engaged with the returning officers to identify the cause and prevent similar issues arising in future.¹⁰ However, the Electoral Commission did highlight that these errors could have impacted confidence in the effectiveness and integrity of the electoral process.
8. When asked what would constitute electoral failure, the Electoral Commission told us that, ultimately, failure in individual constituencies could result in legal challenges, and through the petitions process, to a constituency's result being voided and the need to rerun in individual constituencies. John Pullinger thought that the potential for widespread failure of this nature is limited by the fact that the UK has a dispersed democratic process, where there are essentially 650 separately

6 [Q2](#)

7 [Q9](#)

8 Electoral Commission, Performance standards for Returning Officers, December 2022

9 In Wandsworth, an error was made when tallying the totals, with 6,558 votes not included in the declaration made on election night. In Richmond, a spreadsheet error led to the total number of votes for one candidate being under reported by 688 votes.

10 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024; [Qq5-8](#)

administered elections. But a failure at the single constituency level does pose a wider risk to public confidence in the integrity of the process and the overall legitimacy of the result.

9. Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive of AEA, also told us that “the thing about a Parliamentary election is that for it to go critically wrong, it would need to go critically wrong in 650 constituencies, unlike a local government election, where the issue could have more of an effect on the outcome.” Ultimately, he said it is about whether the outcome is trusted by the electorate.¹¹ Despite some issues at this election, he stressed that there was not a sense that the whole system would fall down.
10. When asked about the experience of the electoral administrators at this election and how this compared to previous elections, Peter Stanyon told us that election administrators had to go “above and beyond” and that there was a “punch-drunk” feeling for most of the rest of the year because of the “personal cost that was put on reasonably junior staff in small teams”.¹² Anecdotally, he went on to tell us:

Without trying to dramatise, in my experience, you used to come out of an election saying, “We could have done that better” or “That was really good” or whatever. Now, the general feeling is, “We survived,” and that is not a comfortable place to be.¹³

11. The Government response to the Electoral Commission report highlighted the positives from the findings, that the elections (May and July) were well run with high levels of satisfaction in the process of registering and voting. They drew particular attention to: high levels of confidence in the election (83%); that it was free from fraud and abuse (87%); and that people who voted felt they were able to vote by their preferred method. But the response also opened by highlighting concern with the current state of affairs, saying:

The UK’s democratic systems and institutions are strong and are rightly held the world over as an example of democracy. However, undermining of public trust in politics has led to a crisis of confidence in our political system.¹⁴

12. The Minister said that the general election was broadly well run, but acknowledged there were challenges including the timing of the election, issues affecting electoral administrators, postal vote issues, and high levels of abuse and harassment.

11 [Q136](#)

12 [Q135](#)

13 [Q137](#)

14 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025

13.

CONCLUSION

We agree that the 2024 general election was well run. This was due to the hard work, dedication, and often the personal sacrifice of the people running it. The electoral administrators, the civil servants and the Electoral Commission worked hard to deliver the election and, as shown later in the report, to ensure that changes to electoral law, new systems and new guidance were implemented in full. We extend our thanks to those involved in running the election.

14.

CONCLUSION

In line with previous elections, the fabric of our electoral administration system held together sufficiently at the 2024 general election to allow a well-run election to be delivered. However, as the Electoral Commission report sets out increasing demands and tight deadlines are placing ever greater pressure on the system. Our concern is that at a close election, issues could arise in any one of the elements necessary to deliver a successful election, and the fabric may not hold, potentially placing an election result in doubt.

15.

CONCLUSION

While the Electoral Commission have rightly reported that each general election on which they have reported was well run, there have also been repeated concerns raised. While we do not doubt the Electoral Commission's overall assessment of this or previous elections, we do note that there could be improvements to make the assessment criteria more rigorous and measurable, allowing for better comparability between elections. This includes where stresses are being felt and increasing, and where the existing system needs to be adapted to the way people are living their lives. It is good that the public opinion survey shows a high level of trust in the election but, by itself, this should not be taken as a measure of how well run an election is. It is vital that there are more objective measures that can be pointed to.

16.

RECOMMENDATION

There need to be clear criteria and, where appropriate, metrics, for assessing and judging how effectively an election has been run. The Electoral Commission should establish such criteria in consultation with Government and other stakeholders. This should be in place in advance of the next general election, and reports should be made to this Committee regularly on progress towards establishing the criteria, and afterwards on monitoring the criteria. As part of this, there needs to be a clear understanding of what election failure looks like.

3 Turnout

The short-term drop and long-term decline

17. There was a significant 7.5% fall in turnout at the 2024 general election, with a turnout of 60% in 2024 down from 67.5% in 2019. This was the second lowest turnout for a general election since the introduction of universal suffrage (turnout was 59.4% in 2001). Turnout is traditionally measured as the number of people who voted as a percentage of those registered to vote and historically this was fairly close to the percentage of the adult population. However, decline in voter registration levels means that this gap has grown over the last 25 years. For example, in 2024 turnout as a percentage of the adult population was 7.2% lower than the percentage of the electoral register, whereas in 2001 it was only 1.7% lower.¹⁵ Therefore, the IPPR has argued that because turnout at the 2024 general election was 52.8% of the adult population, this election should be considered as having the lowest turnout since the introduction of universal suffrage.¹⁶
18. While the Electoral Commission described the drop in turnout from 2019–2024 as significant, Vijay Rangarajan, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission, acknowledged that turnout does fluctuate from election to election. The Electoral Commission argues that the larger concern is the drop over the last 30 years. Since the election in 1992 there has been a 17.7% drop in turnout. If the drop is considered on the basis of turnout of the adult population, then it is even greater at 22.7%.¹⁷

15 IPPR analysis takes the number of ballots cast and compares it to the UK adult population rather than the number of people on the electoral register. Using this measure, they estimate that the turnout in 2001 was 57.7% of the adult population. Population figures taken from ONS estimates.

16 Parth Patel and Viktor Valgarðsson, [Half of us: Turnout patterns at the 2024 general election](#), IPPR, 12 July 2024

17 If calculated based on the estimate of percentage of adult population who voted, then the drop is 22.7%. The turnout at the 1992 election based on percentage of adult population was approximately 75.5% – $(33,614,074 / 44,500,000 \times 100)$. Population figures taken from the ONS estimates.

Potential causes of the decline in turnout

19. The Electoral Commission identified a number of factors that appear to have contributed to the low turnout. The report broadly divides these into two categories, circumstantial and political.

- Circumstantial reasons include: illness, holiday, work commitments, and being too busy.
- Political reasons include: negative perceptions of political parties and politicians, a general lack of interest, the view that all parties are ‘the same’, a feeling that no party or candidate represented ‘their views’, and an absence of trust in politicians. Vijay Rangarajan added that at this election there was the sense, especially in some constituencies, that the outcome was a forgone conclusion and that also reduced turnout.

20. Addressing the correlation between turnout and trust in the system, Vijay Rangarajan highlighted that “the long-term secular decline in the turnout” is:

coupled with a degree of alienation from the process of voting, from the political system and a feeling of “Why vote?” and seems to come through quite strongly in the public polling ... [and] that is a real concern for us.¹⁸

21. In both the Electoral Commission report and in evidence to us, concern was raised about the disengagement of young people from the electoral process and politics more generally. Vijay Rangarajan told us that there is a sharp difference between different groups in engaging with the system. For example, “About half of young people are not on the register and do not think it is important to be on the register. They do not think that engaging in politics is important.”¹⁹ There was a further decline of 9.5% in the number of attainers (people becoming old enough to vote) in 2024.²⁰ The Electoral Commission polling research showed 18–24 year olds were less likely to think the election was well run, feel the system for registering to vote was satisfactory or feel voting was safe from fraud or abuse.²¹

18 [Q18](#)

19 [Q10](#)

20 Electoral Commission, [Electoral registration in Great Britain in 2024](#), 18 June 2025

21 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

22. This concern was reflected in other submissions to us. For example, the UK Democracy Fund raised wider concern that turnout was lower in constituencies with a “higher proportion of younger people, renters, people from racialised and minoritised ethnicities, or Muslim voters.”²² This corresponds with lower registration rates in these groups.

Voter registration

23. The completeness of the electoral register has slipped significantly over the same period as the decline in turnout. The Electoral Commission research shows that in 2022 the completeness of the electoral register was 86%. This is an improvement since the low in 2011 (82%) but is still lower than it was between 1950 and 2001 where it was consistently over 90%.²³ There are an estimated 7–8 million people missing from the electoral register.²⁴ The Electoral Reform Society said that the number of people who did not vote (non-voters and non-registered adults) was almost as many people as those who voted.²⁵
24. Professor Toby James and Dr Holly Garrett highlight that poll worker studies since 2015 have shown that a significant number of people attend polls but are unable to vote because they are not on the electoral register. At the 2024 general election, the research indicates that 80% of poll workers turned away at least one person.²⁶ The Electoral Commission noted a spike in the number of people wanting to register to vote on election day itself.
25. However, not being registered is not the only, or even main, reason why people said they did not vote at the 2024 general election. The Electoral Commission’s opinion polling found that non-registration accounts for only 3% of the people who said they did not vote.²⁷

22 The UK Democracy Fund, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust ([RGE0013](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#))

23 Electoral Commission, [2023 report: Electoral registers in the UK](#), 2003

24 Professor Toby S. James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Professor Paul Bernal (Professor of Information Technology Law at University of East Anglia); Ellen Berry (Head at UK Democracy Fund) ([RGE0012](#));

25 Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#))

26 Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#))

27 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024; Electoral Commission Polling data for general election <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/our-reports-and-data-past-elections-and-referendums/report-2024-uk-parliamentary-general-election-and-may-2024-elections>

Impact of voter ID

26. The 2024 general election was the first general election in which photographic voter ID was required to vote at polling stations in England, Scotland and Wales. The official figures from polling stations show that around 16,000 people turned up to vote without ID and then did not return. However, research indicates that the likely impact of the introduction of voter ID was considerably larger. The Electoral Commission's survey following the election asked non-voters in two different ways why they did not vote. When asked in an open format, 4% gave the requirement to show voter ID as a reason, but when directly asked if voter ID was the reason for not voting, 10% of people gave it as a reason. This works out to between 770,000 and 1.9m people. This impact on turnout was also reflected in independent research set out in evidence to us. Voter ID will be considered in more detail later in the report.²⁸

27. **CONCLUSION**

Low turnout continues to be an issue of concern but was not due to the administration of the election.

28. **CONCLUSION**

The decline in turnout is not an indictment of any one government or party. While it may be uncomfortable for those directly involved in politics and government, the decline in voting risks undermining the authority and legitimacy of government in the UK. Reversing the decline in turnout is a task for the whole of government, Parliament and the wider political system.

28 Dr Ben Stanford (Senior Lecturer in Law at Liverpool John Moores University) ([RGE0001](#)) Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#)); Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#)); Professor Edward Fieldhouse (Professor of Social and Political Science at The University of Manchester); Dr Ralph Scott (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in Politics at The University of Bristol); Dr Chris Prosser (Senior Lecturer at Royal Holloway, University of London); Dr Jack Bailey (Lecturer in Politics at The University of Manchester) ([RGE0026](#)); Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

Political Education

29. To address the issue of falling participation, the Electoral Commission emphasised the importance of newly enfranchised voters voting as soon as possible after they become eligible. The Electoral Commission report sets out that: “research has found that voting is a habit. When people do not begin to vote early in life, they are less likely to do so later.”²⁹ To address this challenge, the Electoral Commission highlight the importance of education about democracy and elections.³⁰
30. Vijay Rangarajan explained that they have differential data that shows better engagement in Wales and Scotland where they have votes at 16 and have a different approach to political education from England. He highlighted that the Electoral Commission recently convened 40 civil society groups to consider political education in England and make a submission to the Department for Education’s curriculum review. He explained that they found a “reticence by some teachers to teach about politics because they think they are getting into party political territory and parents may be unhappy about that”.³¹ He also made clear that there was an opportunity to engage, through “showing, explaining and working with young people to show why their vote really matters, and that it is not a theoretical process”.

He went on to say he felt that two linked issues are important to focus on in political education:

- Digital literacy mis- and dis- information - building the understanding that not everything on social media can be trusted, and the ability to make judgements.
- making politicians human to young people - polling has shown a higher disregard for politicians, particularly among the youngest voters, so he emphasised the importance of politicians, MPs, councillors and candidates coming into schools.

Making these changes and prioritising political education more “could have real democratic and long-term benefits.”³²

31. The key recommendations made by the Electoral Commission and others were:
- Provide opportunities for democratic education for all in Key Stage 1 to post 16 groupings.

29 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

30 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

31 [Q25](#)

32 [Q25](#)

- Provide opportunities for educators to participate in teacher training in democratic education and provide access to age appropriate, impartial, accurate and up to date information and resources.
- Modernise the citizenship curriculum to ensure it is fit for modern democracy. Strengthen content on media literacy and mis- and dis-information, oracy and debating, candidates and how to engage with them, and local government.³³

32. Several other submissions we received emphasised the importance of better political education in relation to tackling the negative perceptions of politicians and the growing levels of abuse, harassment and intimidation.³⁴ The LGA told us there needs to be an improvement in the general public’s understanding of local democratic processes, the roles of elected members and respectful debate expectations. This, they argue, should start by improving and broadening the “political education requirements under the national curriculum for school-age children, as well as developing options to improve the political literacy of adults”.³⁵

33. The Jo Cox Foundation also stressed the importance of political literacy, so that “everyone can understand the responsibilities of different elected representatives and how they can use their voice to bring about change”. They recommended:

- The Government implement significant awareness campaigns aimed at increasing understanding of the role of elected representatives and promoting civility.
- Impartial political and media literacy should be made a mandatory part of the school curriculum, including addressing how to deal with information sources and misinformation. Teachers should be adequately trained to deliver this.³⁶

34. The Government told us they recognised both the necessity and opportunity of engaging with young people and changing political education. The Minister told us:

We have already engaged with the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The wider network of youth organisations is key, as is citizenship education, and obviously the Department for Education’s curriculum review is an important part of that, and DSIT ...

33 Electoral Commission, [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#), 12 December 2024

34 The UK Democracy Fund, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust ([RGE0013](#)); The Jo Cox Foundation ([RGE0010](#)); Democracy Volunteers ([RGE0009](#))

35 Local Government Association ([RGE0028](#))

36 The Jo Cox Foundation ([RGE0010](#))

...We see this as an important opportunity for the whole of Parliament to engage the next generation, because the evidence suggests that that participation is key. Young people at 16 can get a job, can join the Army and much else. It is important that the younger generation have a greater say in our democracy and can participate.³⁷

35.

RECOMMENDATION

We welcome consideration of political education as part of the Department for Education curriculum review. But what is needed is a complete overhaul of political education in the UK, particularly within England. The Government has committed in its manifesto to introduce votes at 16. That would provide an opportunity for a new approach to be considered. However, regardless of whether this change is delivered, a new approach should be undertaken as a matter of urgency so that it is in place ahead of the next general election.

36.

RECOMMENDATION

The development of a new school curriculum for political education is an opportunity to engage the public in order to create the wider environment and culture for political education in schools to be successful.

37.

RECOMMENDATION

We note the message about the importance of politicians engaging with young people in schools, and we support continued efforts to enable MPs and Parliament more widely in this work.

4 State of electoral law and systems for electoral administration

Electoral law

38. While we are confident it was well run, the election was not without errors and difficulties, and the potential for major issues occurring was apparent. The UK has a functioning election system that delivers trusted results. However, it has over the years become an increasingly complex and stressed system. John Pullinger told us:

the whole canon of law and guidance, and everything that sits underneath it, has become so unwieldy that it is almost impossible to administer or follow, whether you are an administrator, a candidate, a campaigner or a party. It inevitably leads to confusion for voters too. That feels, to us, unsustainable ... At the moment we have been stretching and stretching the system and adding more and more complexity to it, and there will come a point when it fails if that is not addressed. We see those risks growing. We look at risks to the system and see the acute risks that are upon us on election day, but there are chronic risks that build up. The risk of the canon of law itself being problematic is a chronic risk that has been growing very substantially.³⁸

39. This problem has been known for some time. In 2011, the Law Commissions of England and Wales and of Scotland were tasked with reviewing the body of election law and how it could be consolidated. The conclusion reached by the Law Commission was that “Electoral law in the UK has become complex, voluminous and fragmented”.³⁹ The review identified that electoral law is:
- out of date (with much of the system still dating from the mid nineteenth century).

38 [Q42](#)

39 Law Commission & Scottish Law Commission, Electoral Law A joint final report, HC145, SG/2020/35, Law Com No 389, Scot Law Com No 256

- complicated (very prescriptive, requiring detailed guidance to enable administrators to interpret the law).
- subject to legislative gaps (the prescriptive nature means there are often gaps where there have been new developments); and
- fragmented (17 statutes and 27 pieces of secondary legislation directly affecting the electoral process).⁴⁰

The review recommended that:

The current laws governing elections should be rationalised into a single, consistent legislative framework governing all elections (enacted in accordance with the UK legislative competences).⁴¹

- 40.** The Law Commission’s review was intended to lead to a draft Bill. However, in 2016 the Government decided that no consolidation bill would be introduced in that Parliament due to the process of withdrawing from the EU.⁴²
- 41.** The Electoral Commission, the AEA, the Electoral Management Board for Scotland, the Local Government Association, and the Electoral Reform Society have all been clear about their concerns with the current state of electoral law, and the need for simplification and consolidation of legislation.⁴³ In the last two parliaments, our predecessor committees have also made the case for this.⁴⁴ In response, the then Government, though recognising the importance of ensuring electoral law is fit for purpose now and into the future, has failed to prioritise the issue.⁴⁵

40 This was the figure in the 2020 report. It is likely to have increased with the passing of the Elections Act 2022 and connected secondary legislation.

41 Law Commission & Scottish Law Commission, Electoral Law A joint final report, HC145, SG/2020/35, Law Com No 389, Scot Law Com No 256, Paragraph 2.47

42 Law Commission & Scottish Law Commission, Electoral Law A joint final report, HC145, SG/2020/35, Law Com No 389, Scot Law Com No 256, Paragraph 1.8

43 The Electoral Management Board for Scotland ([RGE0019](#)); Local Government Association ([RGE0028](#)); Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#)); The Electoral Commission ([RGE0030](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#))

44 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019, [Electoral law: The Urgent Need for Review](#), HC244; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2021–22, [The Elections Bill](#), HC 597; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2022–23, [The Work of the Electoral Commission](#), HC 462

45 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, First Special Report of Session 2019–21, [The Urgent Need for Review: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2019](#), HC327; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Forth Special Report of Session 2021–22, [The Elections Bill: Government Response to the Committee’s Fifth Report](#), HC1133; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2022–23, [The Work of the Electoral Commission: Government response to the Committee’s Second Report of Session 2022–23](#), HC 1065

42. The new Government has shown an understanding of the challenges that the electoral sector faces and has said that “while elections continue to be delivered effectively, that delivery is not without risk and comes at a personal and professional cost to elections teams.”⁴⁶ The Government has recognised that in order to deliver its electoral manifesto commitments, “first we must make sure the foundations upon which our elections are based are solid”. The Government launched a strategic review of electoral registration and conduct, with the intent of identifying and addressing the “the biggest challenges and pain-points in the current system for electoral registration and conduct”.⁴⁷
43. Minister Ali reiterated to us that the strategic review, alongside the Government’s manifesto commitments relating to electoral reform, were the Government’s priority. When questioned, both the Minister and Stuart Ison, Director for Elections, were clear that the Government recognise that the current system of election law is complex.⁴⁸ But when questioned about addressing the complexity, they stressed that the Government sees addressing the immediate and medium-term issues through the strategic review as the priority. Stuart Ison said that “consolidating electoral law is a complex piece of work that would take a great deal of time to deliver. It is probably the work of more than one Parliament.”⁴⁹ Mr Ison also raised doubts about whether consolidation was the right path forward saying while the Government is sympathetic to stakeholders who make those arguments, “I do not think that there is a single view across the whole system... that would suggest that that is definitively the way forward”.⁵⁰

44. **CONCLUSION**

There is a clear consensus in our evidence around the necessity and benefits of simplification and consolidation of electoral law. This is not a new position and has been reiterated by the practitioners and experts of electoral law for some time, and this appeared to have been accepted by this and the previous Government. We are concerned however by some of the evidence the Government gave to us that suggest it does not view simplification and consolidation as a necessary route forward.

46 Department of Communities Housing Local government, [Democratic participation: Open letter to the electoral sector](#), 15 October 2024

47 Department of Communities Housing Local government, [Democratic participation: Open letter to the electoral sector](#), 15 October 2024

48 [Q196](#)

49 [Q197](#)

50 [Q200](#)

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should make clear whether it accepts in principle that UK elections law needs simplification and consolidation, and if it does not should set out its evidence for this position in full in its response to this report.

45.

CONCLUSION

We recognise that the Government has manifesto commitments in the area of electoral law that it is prioritising. We commend the Government for recognising these challenges and including this work alongside the implementation of their other manifesto commitments.

46.

CONCLUSION

We are however concerned that the Government has not put in motion the work necessary to simplify and consolidate electoral law. It is clear to us that the conclusion of the Law Commissions' report was correct, and that the UK would be better off with a single elections act. We note the Government's concern that the exercise of simplification and consolidation may take some time, which would likely span over Parliaments. However, it seems imperative to us that this work is started. If it is not started in this Parliament, it will only perpetuate the problem of kicking the issue of electoral law into the long grass. We fear that the longer this is put off, the more likely something will go seriously or catastrophically wrong.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should start the process of simplification and consolidation of electoral law alongside the work being carried out to produce a Bill to implement its manifesto commitments and the outcome of the strategic review. In doing this it should commit to introducing the consolidation legislation when this process is complete.

State of electoral administration: The pressing concerns and pain-points

47. Beyond the overall body of electoral law, there were a number of issues that arose, or continued to be an issue at this election, that we feel should be considered by the Government as part of the process of addressing the immediate and medium-term issues. Broadly, these issues address two

overall concerns: the workload and capacity of electoral administrators, and whether elections are suitably adapted to the context of the changing circumstances and ways people are living their lives.

48. The clear message that came through in our evidence is that of administrators having ‘got through’ or having ‘survived’ the election.⁵¹ In its survey of electoral administrators carried out after the election, the Electoral Commission found that there continued to be concerns around the increasing complexity of electoral administration. Of those who had worked on the previous election, 43% said the experience had been more difficult than last time. While the election was delivered successfully, the Electoral Commission has been clear that the capacity and resilience of the electoral system continues to be an area of concern, and that the changes brought in recently have only added new layers to an “already stretched system”.⁵² The Electoral Commission warned us that:

Without significant change, including in the funding of elections, there continues to be the risk of administrative errors or failure of electoral administration processes in both the short and long terms. Improvements must happen before the next scheduled general election.⁵³

49. This was also the message from the Association of Electoral Administrators, who stressed to us that elections were delivered due to the electoral administrators going “above and beyond”. They point out that delivering elections and electoral registration often to a personal detriment, is “not a sustainable way to run a critical ‘no-fail’ service.”⁵⁴ The AEA’s recent blueprint report makes over 57 recommendations. Here we will focus on a few broad areas where reform is needed.

Staffing and recruitment

50. The Electoral Commission report highlights strong and growing concerns with electoral administration. 90% of respondents to the Electoral Commission survey of electoral administrators said they experienced problems with recruitment and 13% said they had significant issues. While retaining staff was less problematic, only 33% of electoral administrators

51 The Electoral Commission ([RGE0030](#)); [Q137](#)

52 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

53 The Electoral Commission ([RGE0030](#))

54 AEA, [New Blueprint for a Modern Electoral Landscape: How to bring resilience and capacity to UK democracy](#), February 2025

polled said they had no issues in that area. The Electoral Commission highlighted that the combination of increased complexity of the work and the rate of pay offered impacted the ability to recruit staff.⁵⁵

51. Peter Stanyon told us there is:

... a misconception that there are huge machineries in place to run elections. There are not. You will know from your contact with your own local authorities how small it is, and pressure is being put on elections delivery because local authorities are getting smaller. If we talk about things like staff to assist—polling station staff, count staff—there are not the numbers of bodies readily available to understand the excitement of an election, quite frankly, which is adding further challenge into these sorts of processes.⁵⁶

52. Laura Lock, Deputy Chief Executive of the AEA, told us that recruitment has always been a problem, but covid made this worse. Staff used to be drawn from local authorities, but with local authority staffing reducing, other places are having to be looked at to fill the gaps left by this.

Capacity of Electoral Administrators

53. Changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022 meant that in addition to people being able to use online portals to register to vote, there was the ability to apply online for postal votes, proxy votes and Voter Authenticity Certificates. This greatly increased the number of applications that had to be dealt with during the election, placing pressure on electoral administrators, the digital systems and suppliers. There were also additional requirements to provide accessibility equipment and to process postal votes handed in at polling stations.

54. Laura Lock explained to us that one of the biggest challenges faced by electoral administrators in the run up to the general election was the volume of work and supply of people to deal with it. She explained that if you consider the number of applications received during the elections period, “registering to vote, postal voting and voter authority certificates—we had almost 4.5 million separate applications from the time the election was called up until the deadlines.”⁵⁷ The large number of postal vote

55 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

56 [Q135](#)

57 [Q137](#)

applications (1.9 million) combined with what the AEA called an ‘avalanche’ of registration requests (2.8 million) that came in after the announcement of the election “overwhelmed” many electoral registration officers.⁵⁸

55. Absentee voting, and in particular postal voting, are considered in more detail later in the report. However, the volume of applications for postal voting was raised as a challenge throughout the evidence to this inquiry.

Digital systems

56. Over the last decade an increasing number of digital systems and services have developed and are now relied upon by administrators. These include: Individual Electoral Registration Digital Service (IERDS); Electoral Registration Officer Portal (EROP); Electoral Managements Systems (EMS), which differ across local authorities; and now websites for applying for absentee ballots and Voter Authority Certificates. Concerns have been raised around the operation and functionality of some of these systems, and the compatibility of central and locally provided systems.
57. Laura Lock explained that there are four suppliers of EMS for local authorities to choose from, and the Government have their own Portal. She told us these systems do talk to each other, but “in the same way as a divorced couple might talk to each other about custody of their children”.⁵⁹ The Electoral Commission have also reported that the EROP is viewed by electoral administrators as ‘not fit for purpose’.⁶⁰
58. However, when we raised the idea of a single integrated system with the AEA, they said that, given the number of snags within digital systems, they would be hesitant, as it would be like putting all one’s “eggs in one basket”.⁶¹ When we raised the issues of digital systems with the Electoral Commission, they told us that:

There is a need for a comprehensive risk assessment of capacity and resilience, including the supplier market. Administrators need to be able to rely on functional, joined-up digital systems to deliver their duties.⁶²

58 AEA, [New Blueprint for a Modern Electoral Landscape: How to bring resilience and capacity to UK democracy](#), February 2025

59 [Q154](#)

60 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

61 [Q154](#)

62 The Electoral Commission ([RGE0030](#))

59. The Government told us that they were proud of the digital services they run, of which there are now seven, and highlighted that they get “superb reviews from those who use them”.⁶³ However, they did accept that there had been issues with the EROP, due to it being introduced a relatively short period before the May elections. But the Government stressed that EROP continued to be “evolved at pace” and ultimately was “successfully used during the general election”.⁶⁴

Suppliers

60. While much of the work at elections is carried out by electoral administrators, there is a network of commercial suppliers that are vital to the delivery of elections. The availability and resilience of these suppliers has been highlighted as an area of concern. Laura Lock explained that “suppliers are under as much pressure as election administrators” and the UK’s election system is now “reliant on suppliers, be they suppliers of software systems, printers or Royal Mail”.⁶⁵ This she explained is a change from how elections used to take place even as little as 25 years ago, and is a consequence of the changes in the way people interact with the election system - for example, the number of people choosing to vote by post. She explained that the challenge is that there is only a small number of suppliers, and that number is dwindling. Most of the local printers have now left the market due to the time pressures involved, meaning that there is now only a small number of large printers remaining. The result of this, Laura Lock told us, is that resilience has been reduced.⁶⁶ The extent of this was issue was laid bare by the Management Board of Scotland who told us that, due to the reduction in the number of suppliers who have the necessary expertise and capacity, there is now “one supplier covering around 80% of poll cards/postal votes/ballot papers for Scotland”.⁶⁷
61. Similarly, John Pullinger told us that the Electoral Commission has been concerned for some time that the electoral process is dependent on “very small numbers of contractors, where there are challenges in them delivering against very short deadlines in a no-fail situation. Any one element of it that falls over is problematic”.⁶⁸
62. The problems faced by suppliers are similar to those faced by administrators, namely, very tight deadlines and high and increasing volumes of work to be carried out. This was highlighted by Civica Election

63 [Q203](#)

64 [Q203](#)

65 [Q129](#), [Q137](#)

66 [Q129](#)

67 The Electoral Management Board for Scotland ([RGE0019](#))

68 [Q3](#)

Services, one of the UK's largest suppliers of print services and EMS, who offered a supplier's perspective of the challenges of the 2024 election. A particular concern for them were several issues around timing. The proximity to the May election and peak holiday season caused staffing pressures. They also explained that the unexpected timing of the election meant their clients (local authorities) had been reluctant to preorder stock which, given the tight deadlines, could lead to delays. On this occasion they were able to meet the deadlines as they had taken the decision to pay for the preorder themselves. They also explained that the changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022 for online applications introduced both higher volumes of work and considerable uncertainty.⁶⁹

Boundary changes

- 63.** The 2024 general election saw substantial boundary changes with 584 new constituencies, and this included several constituencies with a different combination of local authorities. The Electoral Commission were clear that this added to the challenge of delivering the general election.⁷⁰ Three-quarters of electoral administrators responding to the Electoral Commission's survey reported some issues with these changes.⁷¹ In constituencies spanning more than one local authority, issues were raised about the use and interaction of different EMS systems, and there was confusion for some voters when having to deal with a different local authority for election issues. As a supplier working with many of these local authorities, Civica highlighted that they discovered there is "no single approach to managing cross-boundary arrangements. Instead, we have encountered at least five different methods being employed, each with its own set of challenges and benefits."⁷² Civica also reported that there was a significant difference in the preparedness of local authorities to work in these cross-boundary arrangements, an issue also reported in the Electoral Commission survey.⁷³
- 64.** There were also problems reported with the delivery of election materials where streets had changed constituencies. This was particularly an issue where material was to be delivered to every household rather than being addressed to each. David Gold, Director of Public Affairs and Policy at the Royal Mail, told us some of the changes to boundaries were not intuitive. For example, some stopped in the middle of the road on one side but not

69 Civica Election Services ([RGE0027](#))

70 [Q2](#)

71 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

72 Civica Election Services ([RGE0027](#))

73 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

the other, and this had led to human error on the part of the postal workers. He also said that the boundary changes had led to candidates or their agents giving information that was not entirely accurate.⁷⁴

Funding

65. A key issue for electoral administration that was again raised following the election was the state of funding for the electoral sector. The Electoral Commission highlighted that a key aspect of the concerns of administrators is the funding of elections. It also raised concerns over local authority resilience which is reliant on “a complex and fragmented funding framework”.⁷⁵ The AEA have raised similar concerns and called for a review of electoral funding and funding mechanisms. In particular, they have raised concerns about the lack of transparency about the amounts of funding given to local authorities and returning officers to administer electoral services, and the impact of event-led costs.⁷⁶ For example, as already set out earlier in this Report, the 2024 general election led to a huge spike in the number of applications (to register to vote, and for postal votes and proxy votes).
66. When the Government was asked how it will ensure that sufficient funding is made available so that the system does not fail, Rushanara Ali told us that the Government are aware of the funding challenges faced by local government. She went on to say that the Government have already increased available funding and will “look closely at what else is needed”.⁷⁷ On the related issue of providing adequate funding to ensure a robust, free, liberal, pluralistic democracy and provide protection for candidates at elections, Rushanara Ali highlighted the £31 million allocated under the previous government for the current financial year and told us that the current government is committed to making sure that support is provided.⁷⁸

Timing

67. The timing of the 2024 general election was an issue raised throughout our evidence. John Pullinger told us that it was problematic that the election was held in July, and it would be problematic if a general election was held in July again. He highlighted that holding an election in July means greater account needs to be taken of the people who are likely to be away on holiday and that it needed to be recognised that the “the situation

74 [Qq106–112](#)

75 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

76 AEA, [New Blueprint for a Modern Electoral Landscape: How to bring resilience and capacity to UK democracy](#), February 2025

77 [Q205](#)

78 [Q227](#)

is different in different parts of the UK”.⁷⁹ For the 2024 general election, schools in both Scotland and Northern Ireland were already on summer holidays by 4 July. He also highlighted that the timing of the election was given as one of the top three issues for people who were not satisfied with the election.

68. The AEA and the LGA highlighted that the proximity to the local elections added to the difficulty for a number of administrators, and it placed extra stress on a small number of suppliers who had just delivered for the May elections.⁸⁰ We also heard that there was considerable planning in place for an Autumn election, and the calling of the election in May caught many in the electoral community by surprise. The Electoral Management Board for Scotland also told us the timing added pressure to an already short electoral timetable and disrupted some of the plans for delivering the election in Scotland due to the clash with school holidays.⁸¹
69. External suppliers also reported issues with the timing of the election to us. Civica told us that the timing caused issues due to staff holidays, lack of stock, funding issues and wider supply chain issues.⁸² Similarly Royal Mail told us that the timing of the election put considerable pressure on their operations and other parts of the supply chain.⁸³

70. **CONCLUSION**

We are aware of a range of concerns regarding the pressures placed on electoral administrators. In particular, we note the anxieties raised around recruiting and retaining staff, and securing suitable locations for polling stations and counts. We are also aware of concerns around implementation of new measures and technologies, as well as more routine but vital issues such as the stocks of appropriate paper and the readiness and availability of suppliers. Finally, concerns have been raised about the timeline of elections, and in particular general elections.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government produce an annual report assessing the readiness for elections, and that it provide this report to this committee, and lay it before Parliament.

79 [Q48](#)

80 [Q135](#); Local Government Association ([RGE0028](#))

81 The Electoral Management Board for Scotland ([RGE0019](#))

82 Civica Election Services ([RGE0027](#))

83 Royal Mail ([RGE0006](#))

71.

CONCLUSION

Elections have become dependent on external suppliers over which the Government have little control. This creates points of weakness and even potential failure in our elections system.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that as part of the annual report on readiness for elections, the Government include a resilience plan in case of supplier failure.

72.

CONCLUSION

Funding and resourcing of elections is a significant issue. Funding structures have become increasingly complex and vulnerable to wider cuts in local government spending.

RECOMMENDATION

A review of the funding of elections should be carried out by the Government and published to coincide with the first report of readiness for elections. This review should look at how funding structures can be simplified and consider whether money is being spent in the most efficient way. As part of this review, it should be considered how the roles of electoral administrators have changed, and what might be the appropriate rates of pay for the functions they now perform.

73.

CONCLUSION

The timing of the election placed extra pressure on the administration of the election, and placed stress on the thin supplier market. It also meant certain areas of the UK, such as Scotland and Northern Ireland, were placed at an administrative disadvantage. While we accept that the timing of the election added to the pressure on the administration of the election and created greater difficulty for some parts of the UK, we believe it is unrealistic to expect a Prime Minister to call an election at any time other than that which gives them maximum political advantage.

RECOMMENDATION

Given this we hope that the Electoral Commission and others may be able to learn lessons from the July General Election and produce guidance and plans so that some of the difficulties experienced at this election might be mitigated against or at least better prepared for going forward, should another awkwardly timed General Election be called.

Systems for elections

Systems for electoral counts

- 74.** As highlighted earlier there were two instances of errors being made by electoral administrators at the general election and two also at the local elections in 2024. While these errors fortunately did not change the result of the elections involved, they do highlight serious strains and inconsistencies within the system.
- 75.** Peter Stanyon told us that the electoral law on how counts are conducted simply says “you verify, you mix, you sort, and you count”.⁸⁴ This he explained is why there are differences in the way counts are conducted in different constituencies.
- 76.** The Electoral Commission explained to us that they produce guidance on the conduct of counts as well as on setting and communicating the relevant performance standards. Jackie Killeen, Director of Electoral Administration and Regulation at the Electoral Commission, told us that they review the guidance after every election and are working on improving the guidance for counts. John Pullinger told us:

guaranteed parity of quality is certainly something we need to have. The performance standards framework is designed to give that. It creates an objective test that we set, monitor, assess and report on.⁸⁵

He added that it is widely accepted that the Electoral Commission are the suitable author for this guidance.⁸⁶

- 77.** Vijay Rangarajan suggested that the needs of different constituencies may require some variation in the way counts are conducted. For example, the needs of a large rural constituency differ from those of a smaller dense urban constituency in terms of “how they give their count or how they assemble their ballot papers”.⁸⁷ However, he did accept that beyond this kind of reasoned difference there was considerable variation in the way counts are done, telling us: “Some are done on paper. Some people use Excel spreadsheets, and some use electoral management software”.⁸⁸ While admitting concern due to the possibility of error and cyber threats, he said that there was testing and resilience ‘baked into’ the current system, so there are many eyes on every element.

84 [Q139](#)

85 [Q14](#)

86 [Q15](#)

87 [Q17](#)

88 [Q17](#)

78. Vijay Rangarajan thought there could be improvement in these systems, but this would require action by Government and Parliament. For example, he highlighted that it is difficult for returning officers to use electronic systems because of the way electoral law is written.⁸⁹ The AEA also highlighted what they described as an anomaly in that electoral law does not clearly set out that technology, such as electoral registers and absent voting lists, can be used in polling stations.⁹⁰
79. Peter Stanyon told us he would be reluctant to see the rules for conducting a count prescribed in legislation. He emphasised that it is important the principles of the count are very clear and there is transparency, so that participants can be reassured that the papers are sorted correctly but believed that these principles should allow for sensible variations in practice. As an example of his concern with too much prescription, he speculated that you could set out the number of counters for each constituency, say 50 counters, but some venues may not allow for that number and there may be no other venues available.⁹¹

Voter registration

80. As highlighted above, a large number of people applied to register to vote in response to the calling of the general election. This placed considerable, and potentially unnecessary, pressure on electoral administrators. The rush to register to vote was, at least in part, due to the fact that the electoral register is less complete than it was 30 years ago.⁹² This has resulted in the UK developing an event-led registration process where there are significant peaks in registration in the lead-up to major elections. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no easy way to simply check if you are on the register or if your details are correct. As a result, the Electoral Commission estimate 39% of applications made are duplicates for people already on the register.⁹³
81. The current electoral registration system, Individual Electoral Registration (IER), was introduced in 2014. This system places the onus on people to put themselves onto the electoral register and established an online portal enabling people to register to vote. While IER improved the security of the register and introduced a digital access route to registering to vote, it added

89 [Q17](#)

90 Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

91 [Q140](#)

92 Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#))

93 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024; see also: Scottish Assessors' Association Electoral Registration Committee ([RGE0022](#))

administrative hurdles to registering. Laura Lock told us one of the biggest challenges for electoral administrators is access to the data about who is eligible to be on the register. Providing an example of this she explained:

we can see that the number of attainers—16 and 17-year-olds who are being enfranchised as soon as they turn 18—registered since the introduction of individual registration in [2014] has dropped off significantly. Previously, the head of the household wrote down all their children and they were registered without having to do anything themselves. Since the onus has been on the individual, attainer numbers have massively dropped.⁹⁴

- 82.** There was a clear agreement in our evidence that data needs to be better utilised in the voter registration process. The Electoral Commission carried out work in this area and concluded that better use of public data would make registration for voters easier. Essentially two options have been suggested for better utilising public data in the registration process, automated and automatic:⁹⁵
- automated registration is where public data is used to identify eligible people and changes of details and would form the basis on an individual's electoral registration application. However, people would have to be contacted and carry out some steps to complete the process.
 - Automatic voter registration (AVR) is where public data is used to add people or update their information (address) on the electoral register without them being required to take active steps. Notification would be provided, but people would likely only need to actively correct or refuse a change.
- 83.** Of these options, AVR received considerable support in the evidence to the inquiry and was highlighted as the most likely option to positively affect the administration of elections. For example, a recent study of 158 countries found that countries with AVR systems have both more accurate and complete electoral registers than those that do not.⁹⁶
- 84.** Currently, electoral registers are compiled and held by local authorities and there is no single electoral register for the UK. While automated or automatic voter registration could be utilised with the current system of 332 separate electoral registers, a connected reform would be to create a single electoral

94 [Q163](#)

95 Electoral Commission, [Modernising electoral registration: feasibility studies](#),

96 James, T. S., & Garnett, H. A. (2023). The Determinants of Electoral Registration Quality: A Cross-National Analysis. *Representation*, 60(2), 279–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2023.2207194>

register, from which local registers could be produced. We heard that creating a single centralised electoral register would “maximise the benefits of data for political equality, government efficiency and public service”.⁹⁷

85. Consolidated registers already exist; for example, political parties combine the register data sets into single electoral registers. Concern has been raised that the existence of an open register means that anyone could purchase and create a consolidated register. Toby James and Holly Garrett raised the concern that this leaves the UK more vulnerable to foreign interference in UK elections. They explained that overseas actors could create a consolidated register that could “identify marginal constituencies and then micro-target voters with postal misinformation about the voting process to discourage them to vote”.⁹⁸ They argued that an open register serves no electoral purpose and should therefore be abolished to safeguard against this threat.⁹⁹
86. A further point in considering better utilising data to maintain the electoral register is that currently the registers provided to parties and candidates are paused at the point of request, and so, where there are changes in the lead-up to an election, these are unlikely to be communicated to those campaigning. While this affects only a small number of people, this could include individuals being missed if added late, or situations where people move or pass away and have been removed but campaigners are left unaware.

87. **CONCLUSION**

Recent changes to electoral systems, in particular the greater use of online portals, have provided new and necessary ways for people to engage with the electoral system. However, a consequence of this has been an increase in workload for electoral administrators and others in the electoral system. It appears to us that these advancements have only gone part of the way, and that greater use needs to be made of advancement in technology and in use of data.

97 Professor Toby S. James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Professor Paul Bernal (Professor of Information Technology Law at University of East Anglia); Ellen Berry (Head at UK Democracy Fund) ([RGE0012](#))

98 Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#))

99 Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#))

88. CONCLUSION

While we are pleased that the administrative errors made at elections in 2024 did not bring into doubt the election results, such mistakes do threaten to diminish trust in our electoral system. We are concerned that there is no uniform process prescribed for actually counting the votes at an election. Candidates standing in a UK general election should be confident that, as far as is reasonably practicable, votes are counted and checked in the same way in every constituency.

89. RECOMMENDATION

At a UK general election, all candidates should be subject to the same requirements and the same system should be used throughout the electoral process. While there are historic reasons why different systems have developed and been maintained, the case for streamlining, standardising, and making the electoral system consistent is now compelling. We recommend that the Government move to create:

- A single system for how counts should be conducted.
- A single electoral register, with functions for local authorities to access local data to access local rates of registration.
- A single or integrated digital platform and system for electoral administration.

90. CONCLUSION

The completeness and accuracy of the electoral register has declined over the last thirty years. A consequence of this has been that an event-led registration process has developed, placing considerable additional burden on electoral administrators during their peak period of activity. This burden is unnecessary. The electoral register can and should be updated on a regular basis, and data already held by government should be used to ensure this is carried out effectively and swiftly.

RECOMMENDATION

Data should be shared across government and with appropriate public bodies with the purpose of identifying people who are not on the register or whose details are not up to date. We encourage the Government to develop an automated electoral registration system that actively prompts people to register to vote or update their details, but retains the key democratic function of people actively placing themselves on the register. This would harness the power of the data already held to help make the electoral register both more complete and more accurate. As part of these reforms, a mechanism should also be developed by which people can easily check to see whether they are on the electoral register and confirm that their details are up to date.

91.**RECOMMENDATION**

Establishing an electoral registration system that effectively utilises public data should mean that the register is updated all year round. As part of reform to the electoral register, the Government should consider whether the requirements for the annual canvas can be removed. This could potentially save considerable administrative effort and public money.

5 Postal voting

92. Postal votes now make up a significant portion of all votes cast at the general election. 20% of the electorate are now registered to vote by post and 26% of those who voted at the general election did so by post. By contrast a very small number of people chose to use proxy voting, with only 0.43% of the electorate appointing a proxy.

Issues with postal voting

93. While the Electoral Commission concluded that “there were no widespread, systemic issues with postal voting” at the general election, there were instances where concerns were raised and areas where improvements could be made.¹⁰⁰
94. During the election, concerns were raised about people not receiving their ballot packs throughout the UK but particularly in Scotland. At the time, the postal affairs minister, Kevin Hollinrake MP, said there was “a resourcing issue” with Royal Mail, while the SNP Westminster leader, the Rt Hon Stephen Flynn MP, said the system was “not fit for purpose”.¹⁰¹ There were delays for some people in Scotland receiving their ballot packs due to the specialist print supplier in Nottingham suffering a printer breakdown. Royal Mail helpfully provided us with a detailed account and timeline of the events, and explained to us the efforts they took to ensure that, once the ballot packs were produced, they entered the postal system and were delivered promptly.¹⁰² Jackie Killeen, Director of Electoral Administration and Regulation at the Electoral Commission, also highlighted to us that they saw “administrators and others pull out all the stops to try to make sure that ballots were printed, fulfilled, returned and delivered in time”.¹⁰³ This is again a testament to the personal dedication and efforts of those working on the election. However, this incident does also highlight that there are potential points of failure within the current system, especially in relation to the resilience and capacity of suppliers.

100 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

101 BBC News, [Royal Mail denies postal vote backlog as concerns raised](#), 2 July 2023

102 Royal Mail ([RGE0006](#))

103 [Q38](#)

95. While the postal system appears to have worked well for the delivery and return of postal votes at the election, Jackie Killeen told us that “a number of people did not receive their postal votes in time to complete and return them before polling day.”¹⁰⁴ Evidence suggests that the reason for this was that for a lot of people their expectations of when postal ballots would be received did not match with the reality of the timeline to which postal votes are delivered.¹⁰⁵ An issue raised with us was that a lot of people, especially those going on holiday, thought that once they requested a postal ballot it would arrive quickly. However postal ballots are dispatched in two waves. The first includes those who are already registered or who apply in the first few days following the calling of the election. The second wave is not dispatched until after the deadline for applying for a postal vote, 11 working days before the Poll. Laura Lock also raised the issue that while the new centrally run online application portal enabled a large number of people to apply for postal ballots, the localised messaging has been lost. Previously, people had to contact the local authority directly enabling messaging to inform them when they could expect their postal ballot to arrive. The Electoral Commission also highlighted “a lack of public awareness of the timing of postal vote delivery and the availability of proxy voting” as an issue at the election in their report. Both in their report and in evidence to us the Electoral Commission raised steps that could improve the postal voting system:

- Better information about both the timelines for postal ballots and the availability of proxy voting.
- Reviewing the current deadline for postal vote applications.
- Changes to the rules about reissuing of postal votes (providing a new postal vote if the first one is reported as not received or needs to be replaced), which can currently only be reissued 4 days before the election.
- The ability to change the way you vote, i.e. from postal to in-person; and
- The ability to return a postal ballot to council offices or a returning officer directly.

96. Peter Stanyon was generally supportive of the proposals from the Electoral Commission. He told us it would:

104 [Q36](#)

105 [Q38](#); [Q87](#); [Qq126–127](#); [Q138](#)

add a degree of complexity into the process, but it needs to be considered in the light of the upsetting issues experienced by individuals who legitimately applied for their postal vote, it did not arrive, and they were not able to get that back.¹⁰⁶

97. Royal Mail suggested to us that rather than grouping postal votes into two batches, that they be dispatched daily. This would remove a delay for many people receiving their postal ballot pack and reduce the risk from the breakdown of a printer, as was seen in relation to Scotland at the general election.¹⁰⁷

Postal system beyond postal votes

98. The postal system not only plays a central role in elections through the delivery of the postal votes, but it also remains central to the delivery of electoral communications. The Electoral Commission reported that 21% of responders in their candidate survey who said they had used the Royal Mail for delivery of election material (freepost and paid for) reported difficulties.
99. When we questioned Royal Mail, they told us that the candidate mail (by which they mean the free electoral address) was delivered with a 0.02 margin of error. When pressed on the delivery of paid for election mail, David Gold told us that:

Having dealt with a number of those cases at the time that there were some issues, but on investigation some issues were not entirely down to Royal Mail. On a number of occasions, there was a disconnect between the understanding of a candidate as to when a mailing would be landing and when perhaps the printer or the central party organisation had actually placed the order.¹⁰⁸

100. The number of letters delivered annually by Royal Mail has declined significantly in the past 20 years, from around 20 billion to 6.7 billion. Ricky McCaulay, Royal Mail UK Operations Director, told us that letters remain massively important to Royal Mail, not just at elections.¹⁰⁹ The decline in the number of letters does however mean that there needs to be reform to the universal service agreement. He sought to reassure us that their proposals for reform “maintain a six-days a-week standard tariff across the whole of the UK and next-day service, which is clearly essential for postal votes and ballot packs.”¹¹⁰ We are also aware the Royal Mail is currently undergoing a change of ownership. When asked about this, David Gold told us that it

106 [Q130](#)

107 [Q99](#); Royal Mail ([RGE0006](#))

108 [Q97](#)

109 [Q103](#)

110 [Q123](#)

would be “a change of ownership but not a change of direction”. He went on to tell us that “elections are in our DNA as an organisation. It is something that we have done for very many years, and I hope... that we will continue to deliver elections for many years to come”.¹¹¹

- 101.** Nonetheless, concerns about the future of postal voting remain. For example, Vijay Rangarajan told us that:

There is a broader issue which, I think, is shared internationally about the way that postal systems are evolving. They are not getting stronger. The challenges are growing. In the end—this is something we have been discussing with our colleague Electoral Commissions—how do we manage to improve postal voting and maintain it? Early voting may be part of the answer.

102. CONCLUSION

Postal voting now makes up a significant proportion of votes cast at elections and there is every possibility that the proportion of people voting in this way will continue to increase. There needs to be consideration given to what the purpose and timelines for postal voting should be since it allows people to vote at a different point in the campaign than polling day.

RECOMMENDATION

Given this, the Government should, as part of its review, consider whether other means of ‘early’ and ‘flexible’ voting would aid participation in elections.

103. RECOMMENDATION

The Government should improve the information on postal voting given to voters before and after any application they make. The establishment of a single electoral register and good use of public data should allow for more localised and targeted messaging to be provided.

104. RECOMMENDATION

Currently postal ballot packs are dispatched in two batches. This should be replaced with a system where, following the first dispatch, ballot packs are printed and dispatched on a rolling basis. The first and last dispatch dates should be widely published and voters should be notified when applying.

105.

RECOMMENDATION

The law should be changed to allow the re-issuing of postal ballot packs earlier than four days before the election. People should also be able to apply to change their method of voting, from postal to in-person or proxy, within the election window. People should be able to hand in their postal vote at designated council premises up to the day of the election.

106.

CONCLUSION

There has been a decline in the UK and around the world in the number of letters being delivered, and thus in delivery capacity, and it appears this trend may continue. While the UK postal system is currently still able to cope with the large sudden demands of an election, this should not be taken for granted.

RECOMMENDATION

As part of the annual election readiness report, recommended above, the readiness and preparedness of Royal Mail to deliver postal votes and campaign materials should be reviewed.

107.

CONCLUSION

We are concerned that the number of print suppliers is decreasing, which increases the possibility that the printing of ballot packs could be a point of failure. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that the printing of ballot packs is prioritised, for example by requiring priority clauses in the contracts and that a backup is in place so that delays of more than one day cannot occur. Where delays do occur, a system should be put in place to notify the public. For example, a local authority could be required to notify the Electoral Commission, so they can provide a central point for people to find out about delays, and what options there are to ensure they can vote.

108.

CONCLUSION

We appreciate the Royal Mail's assurances that over 99% of all election mail was delivered on time. However, we are concerned that despite this a number of candidates felt their messaging was not delivered when they expected. To ease concerns for candidates, timelines for delivery of different materials should be clear and tight.

RECOMMENDATION

Postal ballot packs must continue to be a next day delivery, and poll cards should also be delivered the next day. The freepost election mail should be delivered second class, so within 3 days of posting. We do not feel we can designate a delivery period for paid for election mail as it is up to candidates to choose how to spend their election funds. However, we do think that a record of the delivery times for all paid for election mail should be kept, so that an analysis of its delivery can be made following the election.

109.**RECOMMENDATION**

As part of the Government's current review, we ask it to consider the continued utility of poll cards.

110.**CONCLUSION**

We found the level of service provided by Royal Mail, especially in regard to the delivery of ballot packs and postal votes, encouraging. For as long as postal votes continue to be a substantial and essential part of the voting system, it is imperative that this level of service be maintained.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the delivery of ballot packs, postal votes and poll cards (subject to the consideration above) should be explicitly mentioned in the universal service obligation.

Overseas voting

- 111.** Overseas voters faced significant difficulties at the 2024 general election. However, as the Electoral Commission make clear this is not a new issue, as they had highlighted these difficulties in numerous reports on previous elections. As with domestic voters, overseas voters can vote in person, by post or by proxy. The Elections Act 2022 extended the franchise for British citizens living overseas, removing the 15 year limit. However, despite that, the number of overseas voters at the 2024 election (191,338) was less than at the 2019 general election (234,000).¹¹² The Electoral Commission stated that 49% of all overseas voters are registered to vote by post, and of these 52% returned that ballot in time to be counted. There are no figures for the

¹¹² Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

number of proxy votes. It also worth noting that the Electoral Commission data on the return rates of overseas postal voting from different countries is sparse, with its report only including data from five local authorities.

- 112.** The simple fact is that, for overseas voters, postal voting is more difficult. The timescales mean that ballot packs take longer to reach people, and they take longer to be returned. The last day to register for an overseas postal vote is the same as for postal votes in the UK, 11 working days before the election. Ricky McAulay highlighted that “our advertised transit time for a standard letter product to Europe is three to five working days, but to the rest of the world it is six to seven working days”.¹¹³ And then the ballot needs to be filled in and returned. David Gold added to this that:

not every other country has six-day-a-week delivery, and the methodology for delivering in other parts of the world differs from the UK. We come back to this point that for a postal vote pack to get from Dorset to Brisbane, it is just a simple fact that it is not being flown out for overnight delivery; it takes quite a long time. For the voter to have confidence that, once returned, their vote is going to get back in time, we really do feel that the timetable needs to be looked at.¹¹⁴

- 113.** We received a considerable amount of evidence setting out the impracticality of the current overseas postal vote system and relaying the direct experience of overseas voters, many of whom were very frustrated that they were denied their opportunity to have their vote counted. The clear message was that the current system is not working.¹¹⁵
- 114.** We viewed a range of recommendations proposing reform to voting for those living overseas. The Electoral Commission recommended the Government consider making postal voting the default for all overseas voters and moving the deadline for applying for an overseas postal vote earlier in the election timeline. These recommendations found considerable support. Royal Mail were supportive, as were the AEA who recommended that the deadline be moved to 16 working days before the Poll. This change would help create a little more time for ballots to be sent and returned

113 [Q116](#)

114 [Q118](#)

115 Unlock Democracy, New Europeans UK ([RGE0007](#)); Professor Justin Fisher (Professor of Political Science & Director, Brunel Public Policy at Brunel University of London); Dr Manu Savani (Senior Lecturer in Behavioural Public Policy at Brunel University of London); Dr Fotios Spyridonis (Senior Lecturer in Computer Sciences at Brunel University of London) ([RGE0008](#)); Bremain in Spain ([RGE0017](#)); The Electoral Management Board for Scotland ([RGE0019](#)); Ken Westmoreland ([RGE0020](#)); Liberal Democrats Abroad ([RGE0021](#)); Scottish Assessors' Association Electoral Registration Committee ([RGE0022](#))

in time for the election. However, a number of people raised with us that despite already being registered before the election they still received their ballots very late in the election window.¹¹⁶

115. The Electoral Commission also recommend that embassy voting be explored. This is something that a number of other countries use; indeed, both Canada and Australia used their high commissions in London for this purpose during the course of this inquiry.
116. The Electoral Commission also recommended that telephone voting be explored, citing its use in Queensland, Australia. Those who meet the eligibility criteria can register for a phone vote, and then also vote via phone, where the ballot is read out to the elector and a physical ballot is then filled out and placed in the ballot box by the electoral official. Another suggestion from the Electoral Commission, that was also set out in other evidence to us, was that a ballot could be printed out, filled in and returned by voters by post, removing one whole leg from the overseas ballot journey.¹¹⁷
117. Electronic or online voting for overseas voters was suggested in a significant number of submissions made to us. A number of countries have arrangements for some form of online voting available for people living overseas. The US, New Zealand, France, Switzerland, Estonia, and Canada were given as examples of countries which have some form of online voting. Some systems effectively duplicate the postal system, allowing for a ballot to be downloaded, filled in and signed and then returned as a scan or photographed electronically. Academics at Brunel told us that they had developed a prototype app that can be used across device platforms and could be integrated with other government digital platforms.¹¹⁸ Their research suggests that an online or I-vote system would prove popular. There was a clear argument put to us that online voting would address the current concerns about distribution and return of ballots, likely increase participation from overseas citizens, and reduce the burden on electoral administrators.
118. The Government, in both its response to the Electoral Commission's report and in evidence to us, recognised the difficulties UK citizens overseas face in participating in elections. It made clear that "Overseas electors are legitimate voters who should be able to exercise their vote without

116 Bremain in Spain ([RGE0017](#))

117 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024; Royal Mail ([RGE0006](#)); Unlock Democracy, New Europeans UK ([RGE0007](#)); Liberal Democrats Abroad ([RGE0021](#))

118 Professor Justin Fisher (Professor of Political Science & Director, Brunel Public Policy at Brunel University of London); Dr Manu Savani (Senior Lecturer in Behavioural Public Policy at Brunel University of London); Dr Fotios Spyridonis (Senior Lecturer in Computer Sciences at Brunel University of London) ([RGE0008](#))

unnecessary barriers”.¹¹⁹ However, Rushanara Ali added that the challenge of overseas voters “is not straightforward”.¹²⁰ The Government was broadly open to recommendations to address this challenge. However, it ruled out exploring embassy voting and telephone voting in its current review. In relation to embassy voting, the Government raised the concern that it would result in significant logistical and administrative burdens. In particular, it raised the difficulties of distributing ballots for 650 constituencies and would remove direct control of the system from returning officers. They also raised concerns with the fact that many people living abroad do not live near to a consular or embassy building. With regard to telephone voting, the Government also raised concerns as to whether it would be safe and secure and said it would be a significant change to voting at UK elections, raising a number of technical and logistical issues.¹²¹

119. CONCLUSION

The current system for overseas voting cannot guarantee that eligible voters will be given the opportunity to have their vote counted. We take the Government at its word that it is unacceptable that an eligible voter is prevented from having their vote counted.

RECOMMENDATION

A system capable of reliably allowing eligible voters to cast their ballot must be in place in time for the next general election.

120. CONCLUSION

Other countries make greater use of other means of voting for overseas voters in addition to a postal vote option. We are disappointed that the Government has ruled out considering the Electoral Commission’s recommendations for embassy and telephone voting for those living overseas as part of its current review. We appreciate some of the technical issues the Government raised. However, we believe that other recommendations we have made to modernise the systems for elections, such as the creation of a single electoral register, would start to produce a system better able to overcome these problems.

119 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025

120 [Q216](#)

121 [Q216](#); Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government conduct feasibility studies to report within six months for the following alternatives for overseas voting:

- Embassy and consulate voting
- Online voting
- Digitally receiving and returning ballot papers
- Telephone voting

121.**RECOMMENDATION**

While these and other options are being considered, we agree with the Electoral Commission that, as an interim measure, all overseas voters that are registered should automatically receive a postal vote, meaning they would have to actively apply to vote by another means, i.e. in person or by proxy.

122.**CONCLUSION**

We are concerned at the paucity of data available on overseas voters, and how many of them were successfully able to vote.

RECOMMENDATION

As part of the reform to the electoral register, an overseas electoral register should be created and information about what country people are living in and data on whether they were successfully able to vote should be generated. In particular, the number of postal votes sent out and returned, including the number that arrived in the two weeks following the election, should in future be recorded.

6 Accessible voting

- 123.** The Elections Act 2022 made changes to the requirements for the support and equipment that returning officers provide at polling stations to enable or assist disabled people to vote independently and in secret. To aid returning officers with this change in legislation the Electoral Commission created a guide and set out a list of the minimum equipment that should be available to support voters with accessibility needs.
- 124.** The assessment reached by the Electoral Commission is that the changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022 made significant improvements but there remains more to do.¹²² This was the view shared throughout the evidence we received, and was the assessment made by the IFF Research electoral integrity evaluation report.¹²³
- 125.** The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) reported to us the results of a survey of their members following the general election. Only 26% felt the current system allows them to vote independently and in secret, notwithstanding the changes mandated by the 2022 Act. Only half were satisfied with their experience at the election. When asked about the support they received at the polling station, 28% said it was poor or very poor, whereas 47% said it was good or very good. They also told us that 73% did not know they could request reasonable adjustments.¹²⁴
- 126.** The lack of knowledge and awareness about the ability to request reasonable adjustments, particularly equipment or additional help, was also highlighted by the Electoral Commission and a number of others in evidence.¹²⁵ Mrs Florence Banks, a poll clerk at the election, relayed to us that a father of a disabled man came into the polling station to ask what help could be provided. However, as he had turned up after 5pm on the

122 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

123 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, [IFF Research: Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), 15 May 2025

124 RNIB ([RGE0014](#))

125 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024; RNIB ([RGE0014](#)); Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

day of the election, there was no assistance they were able to offer him.¹²⁶ The IFF report also found that communications did not effectively raise awareness of the new measures and the options available.¹²⁷

- 127.** Peter Stanyon said that the changes had allowed local knowledge to be used, where previously things had been prescribed. He added that the electoral administrators might however benefit from advice on what the best solutions may be and what constitutes a reasonable adjustment. He told us that the key outcome of the new provision was that learning was taking place and organisations were working together in this area. The result, he suggested, was that solutions would be developed over time.
- 128.** In its response to the Electoral Commission and in evidence to us, the Government made clear its commitment to supporting disabled people to vote via whatever method they choose. The Minister told us that “disability should never be something that prevents people from taking part in their democratic right and duty.”¹²⁸ The Minister and Stuart Ison both stressed that the Government were talking to local authorities and stakeholders to see how the arrangements can be improved for people with accessibility needs at future elections.¹²⁹

129. CONCLUSION

The changes to accessible voting in the Election Act 2022 have had a positive response, but the fact that a significant number still feel unable to vote independently and in secret is a concern. We agree that more can be done.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that more is done to make voters aware that additional support and equipment may be requested. This should be done through clearer advice in communications to voters.

130. RECOMMENDATION

The Government should explore whether existing data held by the Government could be used to allow those most likely to be in need of assistance to be contacted. This information should be used to better inform returning officers of the equipment that may be needed in particular polling stations.

126 Miss Florence Banks ([RGE0023](#))

127 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, [IFF Research: Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), 15 May 2025

128 [Q225](#)

129 [Qq225–226](#); Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025

7 Voter ID and voter fraud

- 131.** The 2024 general election was the first UK-wide poll in which there was a requirement to show photographic ID to vote in polling stations in England, Scotland and Wales.¹³⁰
- 132.** The Electoral Commission’s survey found that 87% of people across the UK were aware of the voter ID requirement (England 87%, Northern Ireland 89%, Scotland 90%, Wales 88%). However, some groups had significantly lower awareness. For example, only 71% of 18–24 and 76% of ethnic minorities were aware of the requirement. The level of awareness of the Voter Authenticity Certificate (VAC), intended to provide a form of ID for those who do not already hold one, was 58% among those surveyed.¹³¹
- 133.** Administratively, the implementation of the voter ID requirement was successful. The AEA told us that its introduction was managed well by electoral administrators, with no major issues reported at any elections held since its introduction.¹³² IFF Research also found that both local authorities and polling station staff were able to deliver the voter ID requirements set out in law successfully.¹³³

Effect on electoral fraud

- 134.** The purpose of the requirement to show photographic ID at polling stations is “to confirm that someone is who they say they are when voting” in order to prevent the electoral offence of personation (when someone votes as someone else).¹³⁴ The level of personation at elections prior to the Elections Act was incredibly small. In 2019, 34 allegations of personation accounted for 0.000057% of all votes cast in elections that year and 2 people were cautioned or convicted. The previous Government suggested, in defence

130 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024; Photographic ID had been required at the previous two local elections in England, Police and Crime Commissioner elections in Wales, and in Northern Ireland at all elections from 2003 onwards (1985-2003 there was a requirement for non-photographic ID to be shown)

131 This excluded Northern Ireland where an Electoral Identity card has been in place for some time. There is no polling on the awareness of this card.

132 Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

133 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, [IFF Research: Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), 15 May 2025

134 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Protecting the integrity of our elections: Voter identification at polling stations and the new Voter Card](#), Policy paper, 6 January 2022

of the policy, that the level of personation and electoral fraud more widely was underreported.¹³⁵ The data for all 2024 elections show, 7 allegations of personation at the polling station, with six leading to no further action and one being locally resolved, this accounts for 0.000017% of all votes cast.¹³⁶

- 135.** The IFF study found that there is not enough evidence to determine whether voter ID makes it easier to identify either personation itself or its effect on reducing personation long term. The study notes that in the future, long term trends in prevalence and perception of personation can be examined. However, it says it “will not be possible to attribute any changes solely to the introduction of the new requirements”.¹³⁷ Qualitative research carried out for the study indicated that electors, electoral services teams and polling station staff all thought the voter ID requirements reduced the opportunity for personation. However, this was caveated by the fact that it was not a big problem in the first place, and some commented that if people are determined to vote fraudulently, they will find a way.¹³⁸

Effect on turnout

- 136.** As highlighted above, the introduction of the voter ID requirements has had an effect on turnout. 0.08% of people who turned up to vote at the polling station without ID did not return - this is about 16,000 people. However, research suggests that there was a larger group of people who did not reach the desk at the polling station due to the requirement to show ID. As the Electoral Commission set out in its report, some people who wanted to vote in a polling station may have decided not to try, either because they did not have an accepted form of ID or were otherwise deterred. These people are not picked up by the polling station data. The Electoral Commission’s survey asked non-voters the reasons for not voting in two different ways. When people were asked for their reason for not voting unprompted, 4% said they did not vote due to the voter ID requirements, which is approximately 770,000 people (1.5% of the electorate). When non-voters were asked directly if voter ID was a reason for not voting, 10% said it was – approximately 1.9 million people (3.9% of the electorate).¹³⁹

135 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of session 2021–22, [The Elections Bill](#), HC597, paras 75–7

136 Electoral Commission, [2024 Electoral Fraud data](#); Locally resolved mean the police gave words of advice to the suspect about complying with the law.

137 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, [IFF Research: Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), 15 May 2025

138 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, [IFF Research: Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), 15 May 2025

139 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024

- 137.** The findings of an effect between 1.5% and 3.9% on turnout from the Electoral Commission survey is supported by other groups that observed the election and by results that are starting to emerge from studies on the impact of introducing voter ID. Research led by Professor Petra Schleiter, Oxford University, studied the impact of voter ID on the May 2023 local elections (it was too early for their research to provide figures for the 2024 general election). This research combines three empirical studies, drawing on different data sources and methodologies, allowing them to distinguish the effect of voter ID from other confounding factors. They have found that the impact of introducing voter ID in the May 2023 elections was to reduce turn out by between 2.1 - 3.3%. This they argue is a significant enough effect to influence an election result, for example, at the 2024 general election, 46 seats were won by under 2%.¹⁴⁰
- 138.** This research, similar to that of the Electoral Commission, found that people without an existing form of accepted ID were the most affected (6.4% reduction) and that some subgroups were more significantly impacted. For example, one of their studies focused on voters around the age of 70 (the point at which people are required to renew their driving licence, and for those with paper licences they are replaced with a photo licence). The research found that individuals who were not (yet) subject to the renewal requirement and lacked a photo license were 18.8 to 39.0% less likely to vote than those with photo licenses.¹⁴¹ While this is a very small section of the population, it does show that lacking an ID has a significant impact on whether a person will vote following the introduction of the requirement.
- 139.** The Electoral Commission concluded that people in the C2DE social grade, were more likely to not vote because they did not have an accepted ID than people in ABC1.¹⁴² Dr Ben Stanford also highlighted that the areas with the

140 Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#)); Georgina Sturge, [2024 general election: Marginality](#), House of Commons Library insight, 05 September, 2024

141 Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#))

142 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024; Social Grade has six possible classifications (A, B, C1, C2, D and E). Census data uses a combined, four-way classification: AB: Higher and intermediate managerial, administrative and professional occupations. C1: Supervisory, clerical, and junior

highest proportion of turned away voters, tended to be in the most deprived areas in the UK.¹⁴³ Concern was also raised with us by the RNIB that voter ID is a deterrent for people who are blind or partially sighted.¹⁴⁴

Next steps and reforms for voter ID

- 140.** To fully mitigate the effect of voter ID, Professor Schleiter and her colleagues suggest that either universal ID would need to be introduced, or the voter ID requirement would need to be repealed. We received no evidence arguing for the introduction of a universal national ID. There was however considerable evidence supporting the repeal of the requirement.¹⁴⁵ The arguments made in favour of abolishing the requirement were that it was unnecessary and had a detrimental effect on turnout.
- 141.** Partial mitigation of the effect that voter ID has had on turnout was also strongly argued for. The main recommendations in this area centred around those made by the Electoral Commission:
- Given the low awareness and take up of the VAC, the Electoral Commission have called for a review of its design, implementation and use. This should include moving the deadline for application closer to polling day and assessing whether the VAC could be offered digitally.¹⁴⁶ This recommendation was echoed in other evidence we received.¹⁴⁷
 - The Electoral Commission also recommended a review of the current list of accepted IDs with a view to identifying a wider range to include on the list.¹⁴⁸ In particular, they stress increasing forms of ID that would support people who are least likely to have a document, those in the

managerial, administrative and professional occupations. C2: Skilled manual occupations. DE: Semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations; unemployed and lowest grade occupations

143 Dr Ben Stanford (Senior Lecturer in Law at Liverpool John Moores University) ([RGE0001](#))

144 RNIB ([RGE0014](#))

145 Unlock Democracy, New Europeans UK ([RGE0007](#)); RNIB ([RGE0014](#)); Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#)); Miss Florence Banks ([RGE0023](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#))

146 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024

147 Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#)); Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

148 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024

C2DE social grade, disabled people and those who are unemployed. The expansion of the range of IDs which are accepted was widely supported in the evidence to this inquiry.¹⁴⁹

- The final measure the Electoral Commission recommended was the introduction of an attestation or ‘vouching’ system.¹⁵⁰ This would allow a registered voter, who has the required ID, to make an attestation as to the identity of someone who does not have the required form of ID. This measure would likely only apply in a very small number of cases where a person cannot access another form of ID on polling day. This system again garnered considerable support in the evidence we received.¹⁵¹ However the AEA told us they did not support a vouching system, telling us there is already too much complexity for staff to cope with and this would add “further burden bringing real risk to the safe conduct of the poll”. They also added that they questioned whether vouching “correlates with the original intentions of the introduction of voter ID, where voters must satisfy a ‘high-bar’ level of proof of identity”.¹⁵²

142. There was also a clear message in much of our evidence on voter ID that there needs to continue to be monitoring and evaluation of the policy.¹⁵³ For example Schleiter et al all suggested that the evaluation should consider the impact on:

- electoral participation,

149 Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#)); Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#)); Dr Ben Stanford (Senior Lecturer in Law at Liverpool John Moores University) ([RGE0001](#)); Democracy Volunteers ([RGE0009](#)); RNIB ([RGE0014](#)); Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

150 Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), September 2024

151 Professor Toby James (Professor of Politics and Public Policy at University of East Anglia); Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor at Royal Military College Canada) ([RGE0015](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#)); Dr Ben Stanford (Senior Lecturer in Law at Liverpool John Moores University) ([RGE0001](#)); Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#))

152 Association of Electoral Administrators ([RGE0029](#))

153 Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University

- turnout across protected and particularly affected demographic groups,
- the effectiveness of mitigation measures such as VACs, and
- the effectiveness of the voter ID requirement in reducing personation fraud at polling stations.¹⁵⁴

The review of the policy carried out by IFF has provided useful insight and evaluation on the areas it covers, and we have drawn upon these above. However, it has not considered the effect on turnout in general, or on the turnout of particular demographic groups. This is unfortunate as these were two of the main areas of concern raised with the policy by our predecessor committee and others.¹⁵⁵

- 143.** The Government response to the Electoral Commission states that “[i]t is unacceptable when legitimate voters are prevented or discouraged from voting.”¹⁵⁶ It went on to say that the barrier created by voter ID “must be addressed” and so it is “committed to reviewing and, where necessary, making changes to the voter identification policy to address any aspects that prevent or discourage legitimate electors from voting”.¹⁵⁷ The Government’s response said it was open to all of the Electoral Commission recommendations and the conclusion of the Government’s review of the policy would form part of the strategy for elections published later in the year.¹⁵⁸
- 144.** When we questioned the Minister, she reiterated that it was unacceptable that people were prevented from voting due to the introduction of voter ID.¹⁵⁹ When asked what evidence there is that voter ID has reduced electoral fraud, she said:

of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#)); RNIB ([RGE0014](#)); Electoral Reform Society ([RGE0025](#))

- 154 Prof Petra Schleiter (Professor of Comparative Politics at University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor at University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science at University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student at University of Essex); Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St Louis) ([RGE0002](#))
- 155 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of session 2021–22, [The Elections Bill](#), HC597
- 156 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025
- 157 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025
- 158 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025
- 159 [Q219](#), [Q221](#)

I do not believe that there is specific evidence around cases. It is slightly a counterfactual because you could argue that having the ID process has meant that if there were electoral fraud issues, that would have helped to prevent it.¹⁶⁰

When further pressed on what criteria the Government is using to judge the impact of voter ID, given the low levels of personation and the lack of a clear measure of whether fraud has been reduced, the Minister told us:

We are not going to rip up the system. Our focus is on improving the voter ID system so that legitimate voters are not excluded from elections and that they are conducted safely and securely.¹⁶¹

When asked if the removal of voter ID was ‘on the table’, the Minister told us “no, it is not”.¹⁶²

- 145.** On the question of criteria for evaluation, Stuart Ison added to the Minister’s answer saying the Government are continuing with the evaluation of the system carried out by IFF Research, describing them as conducting a “very thorough, mainly qualitative research with electors to provide us with a full picture of what the impacts have been”.¹⁶³

146. CONCLUSION

We are concerned that the evidence base for the necessity and effectiveness of voter ID is simply not there. There were extremely low levels of personation prior to the introduction of voter ID, and no evidence that it was being under reported. After the introduction of voter ID, the situation has not changed: there continues to be extremely low levels of personation and no evidence that it is being under reported. What has changed however is that there is clear evidence that the introduction of voter ID has been an additional barrier to voting for a considerable number of people. At the 2024 general election, 16,000 were prevented from voting and the Electoral Commission data indicates that between 770,000 and 1.9 million people were either prevented or discouraged from voting. The Government clearly state that “it is unacceptable when legitimate voters are prevented or discouraged from voting”. As such, under the Government’s own measure, this policy has an ‘unacceptable’ effect. Yet the Government have been clear that removal of the policy is off the table.

160 [Q220](#)

161 [Q221](#)

162 [Q224](#)

163 [Q221](#)

147.

CONCLUSION

When asked what criteria the Government would use to assess the effect of the voter ID policy on turnout, the Government told us that it had commissioned research from IFF Research. However, this research does not consider the impact of the policy on turnout, which was the question put to the Government. Neither does the IFF Research study consider the effect the policy has had on different demographic groups. Evidence from the Electoral Commission, and other independent studies of the policy's impact, suggests that certain groups have been more affected than others. The exclusion of this from the Government sponsored research is all the more concerning given that it was explicitly raised as a concern by our predecessor committee.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should set out clear criteria for judging the effectiveness of the voter ID policy. This statement should include criteria for assessing the acceptability of any impact of the policy on turnout. A detailed assessment of the general impact of voter ID on turnout and on different demographic groups should be part of post-election reviews, whether carried out by the Electoral Commission or independent research such as that previously carried out by IFF Research. In response to this research the Government should consider all options to mitigate any negative impact of voter ID on turnout.

148.

CONCLUSION

Our assessment is that the longer voter ID prevails the more it will become accepted, reducing, though not removing, the prevention and discouragement effect. It is unfortunate that data was not regularly collected at polls in Northern Ireland, in particular following the introduction of photo ID there in 2003. The Government should consider what data it is necessary to routinely collect at elections to properly evaluate the effectiveness of the voter ID requirements. This could include what forms of ID are used (preferably broken down by age group), the reasons for refusing an ID, how many people are turned away for not having ID, and how many do not return.

149.

RECOMMENDATION

The effect of voter ID on turnout is not simply due to people not possessing an accepted form of ID, but every effort should be made to ensure everyone has easy access to an accepted form of ID. We agree with the Electoral Commission that the current list of accepted IDs needs to be kept under review. Where an additional form of ID may have a significant impact in increasing access for people and can maintain an acceptable level of security, it should be included. The Government should encourage those who supply ID, (universities, transport companies etc) to bring their IDs in line with the Pass plus requirements so they can be used. Alternatively, the Government could create a new template for IDs that would meet sufficient levels of security to be accepted.

150.

RECOMMENDATION

We are particularly concerned that introducing votes for 16 and 17 year olds poses an issue for a group that may not have the necessary ID. If a Bill is introduced containing provisions to change the voting age to 16, an analysis needs to be undertaken of what forms of ID people aged 16–17 are most likely to possess, and a plan set out for how the impact of the voter ID requirement on this age group will be mitigated. Consideration should be given to proactively, or even automatically, providing Voter Authenticity Certificates to people coming onto the electoral register for the first time.

151.

RECOMMENDATION

The Voter Authenticity Certificate (VAC) system was clearly underused. The Government should look at ways of improving the VAC system. This should include improving awareness of the VAC and may include changing the format of the ID, for example to a card rather than a piece of paper. The provision for an emergency VAC should be extended to the day of the election and additional resources allocated to deliver this. We would support the creation of a digital VAC or a digital government ID that could be used.

152.

RECOMMENDATION

Alternatively, the Government should consider the Electoral Commission's recommendation to introduce a vouching system, which would provide an emergency system for people who do not have, or find they have lost, an acceptable form of ID on the day of the election. However, we are cognisant of the concerns raised by the Association of Electoral Administrators that it would add additional administrative burden.

8 Mis- and Dis- information Abuse and Intimidation

- 153.** This final chapter considers two issues that have unfortunately become increasingly a feature of recent elections, mis- and dis-information and the alarming rise of abuse and intimidation. These issues are, at least in part, the subject of inquiries by other Committees of the House. The Science and Technology Committee is currently carrying out an inquiry into ‘Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms’ and a Speaker’s Conference was established in October 2024 to consider the security of candidates, MPs and elections. Due to this ongoing work, we seek only to highlight the issues and make focused recommendations in relation to the administration and conduct of future elections.

Mis- and dis- information

- 154.** The Electoral Commission found in their post-election survey that 61% of people said they saw misleading information about party policies and 52% about candidates. The most common reaction to seeing or hearing misleading content was to ignore it (64%) although 49% said they took some form of action, such as fact checking or reporting. However, only 12% said that they reported misleading information to the platform on which they had seen it.¹⁶⁴ John Pullinger told us that, given the number of people who encountered misleading information, he found it quite encouraging that the response to this was that generally people identified it and ignored it.¹⁶⁵ He went on to explain that one of the statistics coming out of the Electoral Commission’s research was the significant association between people distrusting politics and people whose primary source of news was social media.¹⁶⁶ The Electoral Commission has expressed concern in relation to social media that:

164 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

165 [Q27](#)

166 [Q27](#)

Algorithmic promotion of misleading content, whether about candidates, policies, or electoral processes like when/where to vote, or the voter ID requirement, risks undermining democratic participation.¹⁶⁷

- 155.** John Pullinger told us that there needs to be a focus on what should be addressed prior to the next general election. A particular area of concern was that “the landscape of AI mis and disinformation feeds into concerns about trust, particularly in relation to social media”.¹⁶⁸
- 156.** The Alan Turing Centre for Emerging Technology and Security (CETaS) has carried out research into the use of AI at the general election. They told us that in the 2024 general election they found no conclusive evidence of AI-generated mis- or dis- information that meaningfully impacted the election. However, they say this was primarily due to the low volumes of information disseminated through AI compared to other formats. They highlighted false statements made by social media influencers and politicians as a key source of mis- and dis- information. Confusion over whether online election material was authentic or synthetic, was an issue that rose in prominence during the general election and CETaS says this poses future concerns for the broader democratic system and information ecosystem. They also highlighted that the future risks from AI could be in the area of voter suppression, and in undermining the legitimacy of the elections results. However, while AI has been used in the generation of misleading content, CETaS also highlighted the same technology could be used to enhance the voting process, for example by assisting fact checks and assessing truthfulness of claims.¹⁶⁹
- 157.** Both John Pullinger and Vijay Ranganarajan stressed the importance of people being equipped to challenge information when it comes their way. Digital literacy in identifying mis- and dis- information is key to empowering people, particularly young people.¹⁷⁰

158. CONCLUSION

The dissemination of information and differing perspectives remains central to a healthy democracy and is essential to effective elections. This has been threatened by the rise in mis- and dis- information, something that has contributed to the decline in trust in the UK’s political system in general and politicians in particular. There is no easy solution to this, and electoral law and policy has struggled to keep pace.

167 Electoral Commission, [Response to the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee call for evidence on social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms](#)

168 [Q27](#)

169 The Alan Turing Institute (CETaS) ([RGE0011](#))

170 [Qq25-27](#)

159. CONCLUSION

The recent development and growth of AI brings with it both potential benefits and concerns. It is an area where regulation may also find it difficult to keep pace. Any legislative framework to regulate AI must be agile but allow effective scrutiny of new regulations that proceed from that framework.

Abuse and Intimidation

- 160.** One of the areas where mis- and dis- information was prevalent was in the abuse, harassment and intimidation of candidates and campaign workers during the election.
- 161.** The Electoral Commission report sets out that many candidates were reporting abuse and intimidation at the elections in 2022 and 2023.¹⁷¹ In response to this, a range of actors took action in advance of the 2024 general election. Operation Bridger, put in place by the previous government, offered all candidates basic security during the campaign and access to a dedicated, named, police contact in every force to raise concerns or report threats against them. Guidance was updated and issued to all candidates. A number of groups also called on parties and candidates to uphold standards of conduct and engage in respectful discourse.¹⁷² However, despite these measures and efforts, candidates were “subject to increased and unacceptable levels of abuse and intimidation”.¹⁷³
- 162.** Addressing the scale of the issue, the Electoral Commission found that 55% of respondents to its survey suffered some kind of harassment, intimidation, or abuse and 13% reported serious problems. 44% of all candidates said they avoided campaigning on their own, rising to 66% of female respondents. 32% said they avoided talking about or giving an opinion on controversial topics for fear of harassment.¹⁷⁴ We also heard that the scale of the problem may have been even greater than the Electoral Commission research suggests. Dr Sofia Collignon and Dr Wolfgang Rüdig found that

171 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

172 Committee on Standards in Public Life, [Letters to political party leaders and parliamentary candidates about upholding standards of conduct ahead of the forthcoming general election](#), 22 May 2024; Equality and Human Rights Commission, [Freedom of expression and respectful discourse: Guidance for political candidates and parties](#), 30 May 2024; Electoral Commission, [Abuse and intimidation](#), 25 June 2024

173 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

174 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

the preliminary results from the 2024 Representative Audit of Britain Survey indicated that 85% of candidates faced at least one form of violence during their campaign.¹⁷⁵

- 163.** The types of abuse and groups most affected are also extremely concerning. The Electoral Commission and others highlighted that antisemitic and Islamophobic abuse was prevalent. Ethnic minorities and women were more likely to have been subject to serious harassment, abuse, or intimidation. For example, CETaS highlighted the problem of AI being used to create deepfake pornographic content targeting female UK politicians. These left the women involved “distressed and ‘sick’ by the incidents, highlighting the psychological damage these cases have caused”. CETaS warn that if this were to continue it may have a “‘chilling’ effect on the willingness of female candidates to stand in upcoming elections”.¹⁷⁶

- 164.** The Electoral Commission told us:

Abuse doesn’t only negatively impact the individuals themselves but acts as a wider deterrent on those considering standing, limiting the diversity of candidates and choices for voters, and ultimately harming our democracy.¹⁷⁷

- 165.** The Local Government Association told us that:

there is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised and that candidates and councillors are expected to handle high levels of abuse with little support to manage safety concerns.¹⁷⁸

- 166.** The Electoral Commission made a range of recommendations aimed at trying to address the issue of abuse, harassment and intimidation at elections.¹⁷⁹ We will leave the Speaker’s Conference to consider the details of these recommendations as part of its inquiry. However, there are two recommendations that should be highlighted within the broader context of this report, and with a view to preparing effectively ahead of the next general election.

- 167.** The Electoral Commission highlight the volume and scale of online abuse experienced by candidates and campaigners, and visible on social media and online platforms. To combat this, they say:

175 Dr Sofia Collignon (Director of the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary University of London); Dr Wolfgang Rüdiger (Reader in Politics at University of Strathclyde) ([RGE0018](#))

176 The Alan Turing Institute (CETaS) ([RGE0011](#))

177 The Electoral Commission ([RGE0030](#))

178 Local Government Association ([RGE0028](#))

179 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

Ofcom, the communications services regulator, should also consider how the new duties and responsibilities introduced by the Online Safety Act could be developed in the future to improve online protections for candidates and campaigners.¹⁸⁰

168. The Electoral Commission also emphasised the need to:

ensure there is a clear shared understanding of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour towards candidates and campaigners, as opposed to robust political debate. This is needed to support a consistent approach that protects candidates and gives them the confidence to participate. This should particularly take into account the differential experiences of those most affected by abuse and intimidation (including women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and disabled people).¹⁸¹

169. The Government, in response to the Electoral Commission's report, stated that:

The polls in 2024 saw unacceptable harassment and intimidation directed towards candidates, campaigners and electoral staff, both online and in the real world. This Government is clear that intimidation and abuse of those participating in public life has no place in our society and cannot be tolerated. The safety of candidates and elected office holders is paramount to the integrity of elections.¹⁸²

170. Appearing before us, the Minister, Rushanara Ali, provided an impassioned opening statement that clearly demonstrated the Government's commitment to tackling the issues of abuse, harassment and intimidation at elections. She began by telling us:

... thoughtful and respectful debate must underpin our politics. We must ensure the safety of those participating in our democracy. We come from diverse backgrounds. Viewpoints are sincerely held and passionately argued, but where healthy argument spills over into harassment, intimidation and abuse, it is simply unacceptable.¹⁸³

and closed by saying:

While I am proud of our democracy, we must recognise it is a work in progress. Democracy is hard won and fragile.¹⁸⁴

180 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

181 Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), November 2024

182 Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, [Electoral Commission's reports on the 2024 elections: government response](#), Policy paper, 12 February 2025

183 [Q171](#)

184 [Q171](#)

171.

CONCLUSION

The abuse, harassment and intimidation seen at the general election was totally unacceptable and antithetical to our democracy. The level and extent to which this occurred is a serious cause for concern. Candidates for election must be able to go door to door and speak in public without fear.

172.

CONCLUSION

It is vital that instances of abuse, harassment and intimidation are identified and addressed quickly. The police have a vital role in defending democracy, and this needs to be carried out proactively, not just reactively.

RECOMMENDATION

There should be a coordinated and consistent police engagement response with all candidates throughout the country.

173.

CONCLUSION

Given the rise of online abuse, we agree with the Electoral Commission that Ofcom has a vital role to play ahead of the next election considering their new power and duties. It is vital that work is done early to set up new measures, so that they can be tested and scrutinised.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that Ofcom in coordination with the Electoral Commission set out the timescale for setting up arrangements to address online abuse and intimidation at elections.

174.

CONCLUSION

We are pleased that a Speaker's Conference has been established to examine these issues in detail and to recommend steps that can be taken to counteract this. We will not be making specific recommendations on measures that could be taken but we offer our evidence and support to the Speaker's Conference and await its recommendations.

Regulation with teeth

175. **CONCLUSION**

We believe the Electoral Commission carries out a vital role as an independent regulator in the elections sphere, providing vital guidance and support to electoral administrators, political parties, individual candidates and the wider public. However, it is a regulator without sufficient teeth. Approbatory assessments and warnings are not sufficient. We call for the Government to establish an independent review of the Electoral Commission's powers, to be carried out with a view to giving it the powers necessary to rigorously and proactively ensure that elections are carried out in a fair, impartial, and truthful environment. As a start, while we do not believe the prosecutorial power removed by the Elections Act 2022 should be restored, we do think the Electoral Commission should have the power to refer cases directly to the Crown Prosecution Service. As part of this review, it should be considered whether the Electoral Commission should have the power to bar a candidate from standing. This review should also consider whether other bodies are better placed to act or work in conjunction with the Commission, and if the powers of these bodies should also be strengthened.

176. **CONCLUSION**

A further significant issue that arose during the course of our inquiry was that of political donations, and in particular of overseas donations to political parties. We will keep this issue under review and may return to it later in the Parliament.

Conclusions and recommendations

Assessment of the 2024 general election

1. We agree that the 2024 general election was well run. This was due to the hard work, dedication, and often the personal sacrifice of the people running it. The electoral administrators, the civil servants and the Electoral Commission worked hard to deliver the election and, as shown later in the report, to ensure that changes to electoral law, new systems and new guidance were implemented in full. We extend our thanks to those involved in running the election. (Conclusion, Paragraph 13)
2. In line with previous elections, the fabric of our electoral administration system held together sufficiently at the 2024 general election to allow a well-run election to be delivered. However, as the Electoral Commission report sets out increasing demands and tight deadlines are placing ever greater pressure on the system. Our concern is that at a close election, issues could arise in any one of the elements necessary to deliver a successful election, and the fabric may not hold, potentially placing an election result in doubt. (Conclusion, Paragraph 14)
3. While the Electoral Commission have rightly reported that each general election on which they have reported was well run, there have also been repeated concerns raised. While we do not doubt the Electoral Commission's overall assessment of this or previous elections, we do note that there could be improvements to make the assessment criteria more rigorous and measurable, allowing for better comparability between elections. This includes where stresses are being felt and increasing, and where the existing system needs to be adapted to the way people are living their lives. It is good that the public opinion survey shows a high level of trust in the election but, by itself, this should not be taken as a measure of how well run an election is. It is vital that there are more objective measures that can be pointed to. (Conclusion, Paragraph 15)
4. There need to be clear criteria and, where appropriate, metrics, for assessing and judging how effectively an election has been run. The Electoral Commission should establish such criteria in consultation with Government and other stakeholders. This should be in place in

advance of the next general election, and reports should be made to this Committee regularly on progress towards establishing the criteria, and afterwards on monitoring the criteria. As part of this, there needs to be a clear understanding of what election failure looks like. (Recommendation, Paragraph 16)

Turnout

5. Low turnout continues to be an issue of concern but was not due to the administration of the election. (Conclusion, Paragraph 27)
6. The decline in turnout is not an indictment of any one government or party. While it may be uncomfortable for those directly involved in politics and government, the decline in voting risks undermining the authority and legitimacy of government in the UK. Reversing the decline in turnout is a task for the whole of government, Parliament and the wider political system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 28)
7. We welcome consideration of political education as part of the Department for Education curriculum review. But what is needed is a complete overhaul of political education in the UK, particularly within England. The Government has committed in its manifesto to introduce votes at 16. That would provide an opportunity for a new approach to be considered. However, regardless of whether this change is delivered, a new approach should be undertaken as a matter of urgency so that it is in place ahead of the next general election. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)
8. The development of a new school curriculum for political education is an opportunity to engage the public in order to create the wider environment and culture for political education in schools to be successful. (Recommendation, Paragraph 36)
9. We note the message about the importance of politicians engaging with young people in schools, and we support continued efforts to enable MPs and Parliament more widely in this work. (Recommendation, Paragraph 37)

State of electoral law and systems for electoral administration

10. There is a clear consensus in our evidence around the necessity and benefits of simplification and consolidation of electoral law. This is not a new position and has been reiterated by the practitioners and experts of electoral law for some time, and this appeared to have been accepted by this and the previous Government. We are concerned however by

some of the evidence the Government gave to us that suggest it does not view simplification and consolidation as a necessary route forward. (Conclusion, Paragraph 44)

11. The Government should make clear whether it accepts in principle that UK elections law needs simplification and consolidation, and if it does not should set out its evidence for this position in full in its response to this report. (Recommendation, Paragraph 44)
12. We recognise that the Government has manifesto commitments in the area of electoral law that it is prioritising. We commend the Government for recognising these challenges and including this work alongside the implementation of their other manifesto commitments. (Conclusion, Paragraph 45)
13. We are however concerned that the Government has not put in motion the work necessary to simplify and consolidate electoral law. It is clear to us that the conclusion of the Law Commissions' report was correct, and that the UK would be better off with a single elections act. We note the Government's concern that the exercise of simplification and consolidation may take some time, which would likely span over Parliaments. However, it seems imperative to us that this work is started. If it is not started in this Parliament, it will only perpetuate the problem of kicking the issue of electoral law into the long grass. We fear that the longer this is put off, the more likely something will go seriously or catastrophically wrong. (Conclusion, Paragraph 46)
14. The Government should start the process of simplification and consolidation of electoral law alongside the work being carried out to produce a Bill to implement its manifesto commitments and the outcome of the strategic review. In doing this it should commit to introducing the consolidation legislation when this process is complete. (Recommendation, Paragraph 46)
15. We are aware of a range of concerns regarding the pressures placed on electoral administrators. In particular, we note the anxieties raised around recruiting and retaining staff, and securing suitable locations for polling stations and counts. We are also aware of concerns around implementation of new measures and technologies, as well as more routine but vital issues such as the stocks of appropriate paper and the readiness and availability of suppliers. Finally, concerns have been raised about the timeline of elections, and in particular general elections. (Conclusion, Paragraph 70)
16. We recommend that the Government produce an annual report assessing the readiness for elections, and that it provide this report to this committee, and lay it before Parliament. (Recommendation, Paragraph 70)

17. Elections have become dependent on external suppliers over which the Government have little control. This creates points of weakness and even potential failure in our elections system. (Conclusion, Paragraph 71)
18. We recommend that as part of the annual report on readiness for elections, the Government include a resilience plan in case of supplier failure. (Recommendation, Paragraph 71)
19. Funding and resourcing of elections is a significant issue. Funding structures have become increasingly complex and vulnerable to wider cuts in local government spending. (Conclusion, Paragraph 72)
20. A review of the funding of elections should be carried out by the Government and published to coincide with the first report of readiness for elections. This review should look at how funding structures can be simplified and consider whether money is being spent in the most efficient way. As part of this review, it should be considered how the roles of electoral administrators have changed, and what might be the appropriate rates of pay for the functions they now perform. (Recommendation, Paragraph 72)
21. The timing of the election placed extra pressure on the administration of the election, and placed stress on the thin supplier market. It also meant certain areas of the UK, such as Scotland and Northern Ireland, were placed at an administrative disadvantage. While we accept that the timing of the election added to the pressure on the administration of the election and created greater difficulty for some parts of the UK, we believe it is unrealistic to expect a Prime Minister to call an election at any time other than that which gives them maximum political advantage. Conclusion, Paragraph 73)
22. Given this we hope that the Electoral Commission and others may be able to learn lessons from the July General Election and produce guidance and plans so that some of the difficulties experienced at this election might be mitigated against or at least better prepared for going forward, should another awkwardly timed General Election be called. (Recommendation, Paragraph 73)
23. Recent changes to electoral systems, in particular the greater use of online portals, have provided new and necessary ways for people to engage with the electoral system. However, a consequence of this has been an increase in workload for electoral administrators and others in the electoral system. It appears to us that these advancements have only gone part of the way, and that greater use needs to be made of advancement in technology and in use of data. (Conclusion, Paragraph 87)
24. While we are pleased that the administrative errors made at elections in 2024 did not bring into doubt the election results, such mistakes do threaten to diminish trust in our electoral system. We are concerned that there is no

uniform process prescribed for actually counting the votes at an election. Candidates standing in a UK general election should be confident that, as far as is reasonably practicable, votes are counted and checked in the same way in every constituency. (Conclusion, Paragraph 88)

- 25.** At a UK general election, all candidates should be subject to the same requirements and the same system should be used throughout the electoral process. While there are historic reasons why different systems have developed and been maintained, the case for streamlining, standardising, and making the electoral system consistent is now compelling. We recommend that the Government move to create:
- A single system for how counts should be conducted.
 - A single electoral register, with functions for local authorities to access local data to access local rates of registration.
 - A single or integrated digital platform and system for electoral administration. (Recommendation, Paragraph 89)
- 26.** The completeness and accuracy of the electoral register has declined over the last thirty years. A consequence of this has been that an event-led registration process has developed, placing considerable additional burden on electoral administrators during their peak period of activity. This burden is unnecessary. The electoral register can and should be updated on a regular basis, and data already held by government should be used to ensure this is carried out effectively and swiftly. (Conclusion, Paragraph 90)
- 27.** Data should be shared across government and with appropriate public bodies with the purpose of identifying people who are not on the register or whose details are not up to date. We encourage the Government to develop an automated electoral registration system that actively prompts people to register to vote or update their details, but retains the key democratic function of people actively placing themselves on the register. This would harness the power of the data already held to help make the electoral register both more complete and more accurate. As part of these reforms, a mechanism should also be developed by which people can easily check to see whether they are on the electoral register and confirm that their details are up to date. (Recommendation, Paragraph 90)
- 28.** Establishing an electoral registration system that effectively utilises public data should mean that the register is updated all year round. As part of reform to the electoral register, the Government should consider whether the requirements for the annual canvas can be removed. This could potentially save considerable administrative effort and public money. (Recommendation, Paragraph 91)

Postal voting

29. Postal voting now makes up a significant proportion of votes cast at elections and there is every possibility that the proportion of people voting in this way will continue to increase. There needs to be consideration given to what the purpose and timelines for postal voting should be since it allows people to vote at a different point in the campaign than polling day. (Conclusion, Paragraph 102)
30. Given this, the Government should, as part of its review, consider whether other means of ‘early’ and ‘flexible’ voting would aid participation in elections. (Recommendation, Paragraph 102)
31. The Government should improve the information on postal voting given to voters before and after any application they make. The establishment of a single electoral register and good use of public data should allow for more localised and targeted messaging to be provided. (Recommendation, Paragraph 103)
32. Currently postal ballot packs are dispatched in two batches. This should be replaced with a system where, following the first dispatch, ballot packs are printed and dispatched on a rolling basis. The first and last dispatch dates should be widely published and voters should be notified when applying. (Recommendation, Paragraph 104)
33. The law should be changed to allow the re-issuing of postal ballot packs earlier than four days before the election. People should also be able to apply to change their method of voting, from postal to in-person or proxy, within the election window. People should be able to hand in their postal vote at designated council premises up to the day of the election. (Recommendation, Paragraph 105)
34. There has been a decline in the UK and around the world in the number of letters being delivered, and thus in delivery capacity, and it appears this trend may continue. While the UK postal system is currently still able to cope with the large sudden demands of an election, this should not be taken for granted. (Conclusion, Paragraph 106)
35. As part of the annual election readiness report, recommended above, the readiness and preparedness of Royal Mail to deliver postal votes and campaign materials should be reviewed. (Recommendation, Paragraph 106)
36. We are concerned that the number of print suppliers is decreasing, which increases the possibility that the printing of ballot packs could be a point of failure. Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that the printing of ballot packs is prioritised, for example by requiring priority clauses in the contracts and that a backup is in place so that delays of more than one day

cannot occur. Where delays do occur, a system should be put in place to notify the public. For example, a local authority could be required to notify the Electoral Commission, so they can provide a central point for people to find out about delays, and what options there are to ensure they can vote. (Conclusion, Paragraph 107)

37. We appreciate the Royal Mail's assurances that over 99% of all election mail was delivered on time. However, we are concerned that despite this a number of candidates felt their messaging was not delivered when they expected. To ease concerns for candidates, timelines for delivery of different materials should be clear and tight. (Conclusion, Paragraph 108)
38. Postal ballot packs must continue to be a next day delivery, and poll cards should also be delivered the next day. The freepost election mail should be delivered second class, so within 3 days of posting. We do not feel we can designate a delivery period for paid for election mail as it is up to candidates to choose how to spend their election funds. However, we do think that a record of the delivery times for all paid for election mail should be kept, so that an analysis of its delivery can be made following the election. (Recommendation, Paragraph 108)
39. As part of the Government's current review, we ask it to consider the continued utility of poll cards. (Recommendation, Paragraph 109)
40. We found the level of service provided by Royal Mail, especially in regard to the delivery of ballot packs and postal votes, encouraging. For as long as postal votes continue to be a substantial and essential part of the voting system, it is imperative that this level of service be maintained. (Conclusion, Paragraph 110)
41. We recommend that the delivery of ballot packs, postal votes and poll cards (subject to the consideration above) should be explicitly mentioned in the universal service obligation. (Recommendation, Paragraph 110)
42. The current system for overseas voting cannot guarantee that eligible voters will be given the opportunity to have their vote counted. We take the Government at its word that it is unacceptable that an eligible voter is prevented from having their vote counted. (Conclusion, Paragraph 119)
43. A system capable of reliably allowing eligible voters to cast their ballot must be in place in time for the next general election. (Recommendation, Paragraph 119)
44. Other countries make greater use of other means of voting for overseas voters in addition to a postal vote option. We are disappointed that the Government has ruled out considering the Electoral Commission's recommendations for embassy and telephone voting for those living overseas as part of its current review. We appreciate some of the

technical issues the Government raised. However, we believe that other recommendations we have made to modernise the systems for elections, such as the creation of a single electoral register, would start to produce a system better able to overcome these problems. (Conclusion, Paragraph 120)

- 45.** We recommend that the Government conduct feasibility studies to report within six months for the following alternatives for overseas voting:
- Embassy and consulate voting
 - Online voting
 - Digitally receiving and returning ballot papers
 - Telephone voting (Recommendation, Paragraph 120)
- 46.** While these and other options are being considered, we agree with the Electoral Commission that, as an interim measure, all overseas voters that are registered should automatically receive a postal vote, meaning they would have to actively apply to vote by another means, i.e. in person or by proxy. (Recommendation, Paragraph 121)
- 47.** We are concerned at the paucity of data available on overseas voters, and how many of them were successfully able to vote. (Conclusion, Paragraph 122)
- 48.** As part of the reform to the electoral register, an overseas electoral register should be created and information about what country people are living in and data on whether they were successfully able to vote should be generated. In particular, the number of postal votes sent out and returned, including the number that arrived in the two weeks following the election, should in future be recorded. (Recommendation, Paragraph 122)

Accessible voting

- 49.** The changes to accessible voting in the Election Act 2022 have had a positive response, but the fact that a significant number still feel unable to vote independently and in secret is a concern. We agree that more can be done. (Conclusion, Paragraph 129)
- 50.** We recommend that more is done to make voters aware that additional support and equipment may be requested. This should be done through clearer advice in communications to voters. (Recommendation, Paragraph 129)

51. The Government should explore whether existing data held by the Government could be used to allow those most likely to be in need of assistance to be contacted. This information should be used to better inform returning officers of the equipment that may be needed in particular polling stations. (Recommendation, Paragraph 130)

Voter ID and voter fraud

52. We are concerned that the evidence base for the necessity and effectiveness of voter ID is simply not there. There were extremely low levels of personation prior to the introduction of voter ID, and no evidence that it was being under reported. After the introduction of voter ID, the situation has not changed: there continues to be extremely low levels of personation and no evidence that it is being under reported. What has changed however is that there is clear evidence that the introduction of voter ID has been an additional barrier to voting for a considerable number of people. At the 2024 general election, 16,000 were prevented from voting and the Electoral Commission data indicates that between 770,000 and 1.9 million people were either prevented or discouraged from voting. The Government clearly state that “it is unacceptable when legitimate voters are prevented or discouraged from voting”. As such, under the Government’s own measure, this policy has an ‘unacceptable’ effect. Yet the Government have been clear that removal of the policy is off the table. (Conclusion, Paragraph 146)
53. When asked what criteria the Government would use to assess the effect of the voter ID policy on turnout, the Government told us that it had commissioned research from IFF Research. However, this research does not consider the impact of the policy on turnout, which was the question put to the Government. Neither does the IFF Research study consider the effect the policy has had on different demographic groups. Evidence from the Electoral Commission, and other independent studies of the policy’s impact, suggests that certain groups have been more affected than others. The exclusion of this from the Government sponsored research is all the more concerning given that it was explicitly raised as a concern by our predecessor committee. (Conclusion, Paragraph 147)
54. The Government should set out clear criteria for judging the effectiveness of the voter ID policy. This statement should include criteria for assessing the acceptability of any impact of the policy on turnout. A detailed assessment of the general impact of voter ID on turnout and on different demographic groups should be part of post-election reviews, whether carried out by the Electoral Commission or independent research such as that previously carried out by IFF Research. In response to this research the Government should consider all options to mitigate any negative impact of voter ID on turnout. (Recommendation, Paragraph 147)

55. Our assessment is that the longer voter ID prevails the more it will become accepted, reducing, though not removing, the prevention and discouragement effect. It is unfortunate that data was not regularly collected at polls in Northern Ireland, in particular following the introduction of photo ID there in 2003. The Government should consider what data it is necessary to routinely collect at elections to properly evaluate the effectiveness of the voter ID requirements. This could include what forms of ID are used (preferably broken down by age group), the reasons for refusing an ID, how many people are turned away for not having ID, and how many do not return. (Conclusion, Paragraph 148)
56. The effect of voter ID on turnout is not simply due to people not possessing an accepted form of ID, but every effort should be made to ensure everyone has easy access to an accepted form of ID. We agree with the Electoral Commission that the current list of accepted IDs needs to be kept under review. Where an additional form of ID may have a significant impact in increasing access for people and can maintain an acceptable level of security, it should be included. The Government should encourage those who supply ID, (universities, transport companies etc) to bring their IDs in line with the Pass plus requirements so they can be used. Alternatively, the Government could create a new template for IDs that would meet sufficient levels of security to be accepted. (Recommendation, Paragraph 149)
57. We are particularly concerned that introducing votes for 16 and 17 year olds poses an issue for a group that may not have the necessary ID. If a Bill is introduced containing provisions to change the voting age to 16, an analysis needs to be undertaken of what forms of ID people aged 16–17 are most likely to possess, and a plan set out for how the impact of the voter ID requirement on this age group will be mitigated. Consideration should be given to proactively, or even automatically, providing Voter Authenticity Certificates to people coming onto the electoral register for the first time. (Recommendation, Paragraph 150)
58. The Voter Authenticity Certificate (VAC) system was clearly underused. The Government should look at ways of improving the VAC system. This should include improving awareness of the VAC and may include changing the format of the ID, for example to a card rather than a piece of paper. The provision for an emergency VAC should be extended to the day of the election and additional resources allocated to deliver this. We would support the creation of a digital VAC or a digital government ID that could be used. (Recommendation, Paragraph 151)
59. Alternatively, the Government should consider the Electoral Commission's recommendation to introduce a vouching system, which would provide an emergency system for people who do not have, or find they have lost, an acceptable form of ID on the day of the election. However, we

are cognisant of the concerns raised by the Association of Electoral Administrators that it would add additional administrative burden. (Recommendation, Paragraph 152)

Mis- and Dis- information Abuse and Intimidation

60. The dissemination of information and differing perspectives remains central to a healthy democracy and is essential to effective elections. This has been threatened by the rise in mis- and dis- information, something that has contributed to the decline in trust in the UK's political system in general and politicians in particular. There is no easy solution to this, and electoral law and policy has struggled to keep pace. (Conclusion, Paragraph 158)
61. The recent development and growth of AI brings with it both potential benefits and concerns. It is an area where regulation may also find it difficult to keep pace. Any legislative framework to regulate AI must be agile but allow effective scrutiny of new regulations that proceed from that framework. (Conclusion, Paragraph 159)
62. The abuse, harassment and intimidation seen at the general election was totally unacceptable and antithetical to our democracy. The level and extent to which this occurred is a serious cause for concern. Candidates for election must be able to go door to door and speak in public without fear. (Conclusion, Paragraph 171)
63. It is vital that instances of abuse, harassment and intimidation are identified and addressed quickly. The police have a vital role in defending democracy, and this needs to be carried out proactively, not just reactively. (Conclusion, Paragraph 172)
64. There should be a coordinated and consistent police engagement response with all candidates throughout the country. (Recommendation, Paragraph 172)
65. Given the rise of online abuse, we agree with the Electoral Commission that Ofcom has a vital role to play ahead of the next election considering their new power and duties. It is vital that work is done early to set up new measures, so that they can be tested and scrutinised. (Conclusion, Paragraph 173)
66. We recommend that Ofcom in coordination with the Electoral Commission set out the timescale for setting up arrangements to address online abuse and intimidation at elections. (Recommendation, Paragraph 173)

- 67.** We are pleased that a Speaker's Conference has been established to examine these issues in detail and to recommend steps that can be taken to counteract this. We will not be making specific recommendations on measures that could be taken but we offer our evidence and support to the Speaker's Conference and await its recommendations. (Conclusion, Paragraph 174)
- 68.** We believe the Electoral Commission carries out a vital role as an independent regulator in the elections sphere, providing vital guidance and support to electoral administrators, political parties, individual candidates and the wider public. However, it is a regulator without sufficient teeth. Approbatory assessments and warnings are not sufficient. We call for the Government to establish an independent review of the Electoral Commission's powers, to be carried out with a view to giving it the powers necessary to rigorously and proactively ensure that elections are carried out in a fair, impartial, and truthful environment. As a start, while we do not believe the prosecutorial power removed by the Elections Act 2022 should be restored, we do think the Electoral Commission should have the power to refer cases directly to the Crown Prosecution Service. As part of this review, it should be considered whether the Electoral Commission should have the power to bar a candidate from standing. This review should also consider whether other bodies are better placed to act or work in conjunction with the Commission, and if the powers of these bodies should also be strengthened. (Conclusion, Paragraph 175)
- 69.** A further significant issue that arose during the course of our inquiry was that of political donations, and in particular of overseas donations to political parties. We will keep this issue under review and may return to it later in the Parliament. (Conclusion, Paragraph 176)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 15 July 2025

Members present:

Simon Hoare (in the Chair)

Richard Baker

Peter Lamb

John Lamont

Richard Quigley

Review of the 2024 general election

Draft Report (*Review of the 2024 general election*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, The the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 176 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134)

Adjournment

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 July at 9.30 am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 7 January 2025

John Pullinger CB, Chair, Electoral Commission; **Vijay Rangarajan**, Chief Executive, Electoral Commission; **Jackie Killeen**, Director of Electoral Administration and Regulation, Electoral Commission

[Q1–80](#)

Tuesday 21 January 2025

David Gold, Director of Public Affairs & Policy, Royal Mail; **Ricky McAulay**, UK Operations Director, Royal Mail

[Q81–123](#)

Peter Stanyon, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators; **Laura Lock**, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators

[Q124–170](#)

Tuesday 18 March 2025

Rushanara Ali MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Homelessness and Democracy), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; **Stuart Ison**, Director for Elections, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

[Q171–228](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

RGE numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Antisemitism Policy Trust	RGE0004
2	Association of Electoral Administrators	RGE0029
3	Banks, Miss Florence	RGE0023
4	Bremain in Spain	RGE0017
5	Civica Election Services	RGE0027
6	Collignon, Dr Sofia (Director of the Mile End Institute, Queen Mary University of London); and Dr Wolfgang Rüdig (Reader in Politics, University of Strathclyde)	RGE0018
7	Democracy Volunteers	RGE0009
8	Electoral Reform Society	RGE0025
9	Fieldhouse, Professor Edward (Professor of Social and Political Science, The University of Manchester); Dr Ralph Scott (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in Politics, The University of Bristol); Dr Chris Prosser (Senior Lecturer, Royal Holloway, University of London); and Dr Jack Bailey (Lecturer in Politics, The University of Manchester)	RGE0026
10	Fisher, Professor Justin (Professor of Political Science & Director, Brunel Public Policy, Brunel University of London); Dr Manu Savani (Senior Lecturer in Behavioural Public Policy, Brunel University of London); and Dr Fotios Spyridonis (Senior Lecturer in Computer Sciences, Brunel University of London)	RGE0008
11	James, Professor Toby S. (Professor of Politics and Public Policy, University of East Anglia); and Dr. Holly Ann Garnett (Associate Professor, Royal Military College Canada)	RGE0015
12	James, Professor Toby S. (Professor of Politics and Public Policy, University of East Anglia); Professor Paul Bernal (Professor of Information Technology Law, University of East Anglia); and Ellen Berry (Head, UK Democracy Fund)	RGE0012

13	Liberal Democrats Abroad	<u>RGE0021</u>
14	Local Government Association	<u>RGE0028</u>
15	Migrant Democracy Project	<u>RGE0016</u>
16	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government	<u>RGE0032</u>
17	RNIB	<u>RGE0014</u>
18	Royal Mail	<u>RGE0031</u>
19	Royal Mail	<u>RGE0006</u>
20	Scottish Assessors' Association Electoral Registration Committee	<u>RGE0022</u>
21	Schleiter, Prof Petra (Professor of Comparative Politics, University of Oxford); Prof Jonathan Homola (Assistant Professor, University of California, Los Angeles); Dr Jeremy Siow (Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Quantitative Political Science, University of Oxford); Ms Joelle Tasker (PhD Student, University of Essex); and Prof Margit Tavits (Dr William Taussig Professor in Arts and Sciences, Washington University in St Louis)	<u>RGE0002</u>
22	Stanford, Dr Ben (Senior Lecturer in Law, Liverpool John Moores University)	<u>RGE0001</u>
23	The Alan Turing Institute (CETaS)	<u>RGE0011</u>
24	The Electoral Commission	<u>RGE0030</u>
25	The Electoral Management Board for Scotland	<u>RGE0019</u>
26	The Jo Cox Foundation	<u>RGE0010</u>
27	The UK Democracy Fund, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust	<u>RGE0013</u>
28	Unlock Democracy; and New Europeans UK	<u>RGE0007</u>
29	Westmoreland, Ken	<u>RGE0020</u>

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Appointment of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	HC 781
1st Special	Transforming the UK's Evidence Base: Government, UKSA, ONS and OSR responses	HC 757