<p align="center">**Written evidence from Voice4Change England[1] (TEB 24)**</p>

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
The Elections Bill inquiry

1. Overview

Voice4Change England is disappointed that the government began the 2021 parliamentary session by including, in the Queen's Speech, plans to require voters to show an approved form of photographic ID at polling stations in UK parliamentary elections in Great Britain and local elections in England. We are deeply concerned about the democratic deficit that this proposed new legislation would cause. The plans call into question the integrity of the electoral process, but there is no evidence to support the government's claims of widespread electoral fraud. The government should instead endeavour to extend enfranchisement, not put up more barriers for people seeking to exercise their suffrage.

2. Is there electoral fraud in the UK?

- The House of Commons Library cites research from the Electoral Commission,[2] and Figure 1 depicts the number of cases of electoral fraud reported to the police each year since 2010. In the majority of these cases, no further action was taken because there was insufficient evidence.
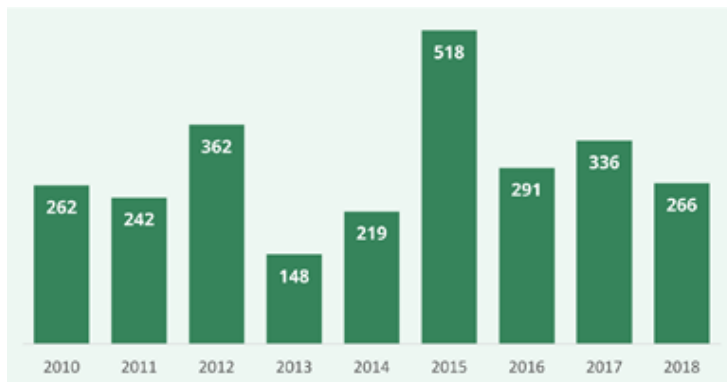
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[1] Voice4Change England (V4CE) is a national advocate for the Black and Minority Ethnic voluntary and community sector (BMS VCS). As the only national membership organisation dedicated to the BME VCS we speak up to policymakers on the issues that matter to the sector, bring the sector together to share good practice and develop the sector to better meet the needs of communities. BME voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) are a crucial part of civil society. By supporting the BME VCS we aim to improve the life outcomes for BME and other disadvantaged communities.

- Increase the involvement of the BME VCS in decision making
- Increase awareness of the BME VCS' impact and value
- Improve the capacity of VCOs to meet the needs of BME and other disadvantaged communities

[2] Uberoi, E. and Johnston, N. (2021), 'Voter ID', House of Commons Library Research Briefing, 12 May, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9187.

Figure 1: Cases of electoral offences reported

Source: Uberoi and Johnson, 'Voter ID'.

- The majority of cases (49% of all reported cases in 2017 and 48% in 2018) concerned campaign offences, for example where a party does not include details about the publisher on its election material. This was followed by voting offences (31% of all cases in 2017 and 21% in 2018).

- In 2017, one person was convicted for the crime of personation at the polling station. Eight police cautions were given in relation to other offences. In 2018, there were no convictions or cautions for personation, and one person was convicted and two accepted a caution for electoral offences other than personation (see Figure 2).[3]

Figure 2: Voter fraud: personation allegations and outcomes

		Outcomes	
	Allegations	Conviction	Caution
2014	21		3 [1]
2015	26		2 [2]
2016	44	1	3 [3]
2017	28	1	0 [4]
2018	19 [5]	0	0 [6]
2019	33 [5]	1	1
2020	0	0	0

Source: Electoral Commission

- There is also considerable currency given to the threat posed to the integrity of the electoral system by postal voting. However, high-profile convictions such as the 2005 Birmingham case[4] are simply not representative. Since 1998, Electoral Commission records show there have been only nine convictions for postal vote fraud – a rate of less than one every two years.[5] More than half of all reported cases were about campaigning offences. Most of these related to:

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[3] Electoral Commission (2021), '2018 electoral fraud data', 31 March (updated from 23 July 2019), www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/electoral-fraud-data/2018-electoral-fraud-data.

[4] Laville, S. (2005), 'Judge slates "banana republic" postal voting system', *The Guardian*, 5 April, www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/apr/05/politics.localgovernment.

- campaigners not including details about the printer, promotor or publisher on election material – an 'imprint'.

- someone making false statements about the personal character or conduct of a candidate.

When academics have studied electoral fraud in other established democracies, where it is also claimed to be common, they tend to conclude that it is in fact very rare. Accusations of electoral fraud, however, are often thought to be very common because they can be made by politicians seeking to undermine the legitimacy of the winner or to make the case for more restrictive electoral laws, from which they might gain partisan advantage.[6]

3. Voter ID pilot studies

The ID trials, which occurred in both May 2018 and May 2019, required voters to present personal identification when visiting the polling station - fifteen English local authorities took part over the two trials. The government said that pilot schemes would help to see what the impact would be for voters and electoral administrators, and would help them to decide how to design a scheme that could be used for UK Parliament elections and local elections in England.

- Compared with allegations and verified cases of personation, the number of people turned away in both pilot years is material. The 2018 voter ID pilots saw more than 1,000 voters being turned away for not having the correct form of ID. Of these, around 350 voters did not return to vote. In 2019, around 2,000 people were initially refused a ballot paper, of whom roughly 750 did not return with ID and therefore did not take part in the election. In total, across both sets of pilots, over 1,000 voters did not return to vote after being refused a ballot because they did not have ID.[7]

- One of the key pieces of evidence used to support the need for the government's voter ID pilots was discredited by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) in the run-up to the 2018 vote. The government claimed that in-person voter fraud more than doubled between 2014 and 2016. While the statistic is technically accurate – there was a rise from 21 cases in 2014 to 44 in 2016 – the Cabinet Office failed to mention that the number of cases then fell by more than a third in 2017, to 28.[8]

- It was discovered that MPs may have been misled to believe that the evidence showed no disproportionate impact on any particular demographic group. The Electoral Commission has since admitted it that in fact, it had no way of measuring the effect of voter ID on minority ethnic communities' votes.[9]

4. Access to photographic ID

[5] Manthorpe, R. (2019), 'General election : Evidence shows electoral fraud not a danger to British democracy', Sky News, 26 November, https://news.sky.com/story/general-election-evidence-shows-electoral-fraud-not-a-danger-to-british-democracy-11867533.

[6] James, T. (2012), *Elite statecraft and election administration*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

[7] Manthorpe, 'General Election'.

[8] Electoral Reform Society (undated), 'Voter ID: An expensive distraction', www.electoral-reform.org.uk/campaigns/upgrading-our-democracy/voter-id.

[9] Elgot, J. (2020), 'MPs may have been misled over BAME voter ID claims', *The Guardian*, 28 July, www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jul/28/mps-may-have-been-misled-over-bame-voter-id-claims.

- Possession of ID is not universal: research by the Electoral Commission shows that around 3.5 million citizens (7.5% of the electorate) do not have access to photo ID.[10] If voter identification requirements were restricted to passports or driving licences, around 11 million citizens (24% of the electorate) could potentially be disenfranchised.

- Members of marginalised groups are less likely to have ID: women, those living in urban areas, and people under 20 and over 65 are less likely to hold a driving licence. Since the 1990s, possession of a driving licence has dropped by 40% among under-20s, making it a poor basis for a voter ID policy. A recent survey by the Department for Transport found that only 52% of the Black population hold a driving licence, compared with 76% of the white population.[11]

- Analysis by Professor Chris Hanretty and *Financial Times* journalist John Burn-Murdoch suggests that there is a strong association between the possession of a driving licence and voting patterns: those without a licence were more likely to report voting Labour (57%) than Conservative (27%) at the 2017 general election.[12]

5. Sector reaction

- The Runnymede Trust has commented: 'People from black and minority ethnic groups are less likely to be registered to vote, vote and be elected. Many voters do not have photo ID, and that ownership of ID can differ by socioeconomic groups, with citizens from BAME [Black and minority ethnic] communities at a particular potential disadvantage. The current proposals suggest a negative disposition towards voters at a time when trust in politicians and the democratic process is quite low.'[13]

- Three major US civil rights groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and Commons Cause, have said that 'while they did not campaign directly in the UK it was a common principle that such [voter ID] laws, without evidence of widespread election fraud, had a harmful impact'.[14]

6. Conclusion

- The Cabinet Office said in April 2021 that these plans form part of the Conservatives' manifesto pledge 'to prevent potential voter fraud in our electoral system. This will further strengthen the integrity of UK elections and will include ID checks at the polling station and rules that prevent abuse of postal and proxy votes.'[15] Claims that

[10] Electoral Commission (2015), *Delivering and costing a proof of identity scheme for polling station voters in Great Britain*, London: Electoral Commission, www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Proof-of-identity-scheme-updated-March-2016.pdf.

[11] Gov.uk (2020), 'Driving licences', Ethnicity Facts and Figures, 16 December, www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/transport/driving-licences/latest.

[12] Georgiadis, P., Provan, S. and Samson, A. (2019), 'Brexit: Boris Johnson renews vow that UK will exit EU on October 31 — as it happened', *Financial Times*, various dates, www.ft.com/content/11523d82-3b85-3645-a824-9c843ba08ce9.

[13] Cowburn, A. (2021) 'Government's mandatory voter ID plans labelled "deeply damaging and exclusionary"', *Independent*, 9 March, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/voter-id-boris-johnson-elections-photo-b1814531.html.

[14] Walker, P. (2021), 'Using photo ID in British elections will harm democracy, say US civil rights groups', *The Guardian*, 28 February, www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/feb/28/using-photo-id-in-british-elections-will-harm-democracy-say-us-civil-rights-groups.

[15] Cabinet Office and Chloe Smith MP (2021), 'Voter fraud measures announced in the Queen's speech', press

the UK electoral system is vulnerable to widespread electoral fraud due to personation are, to put it simply, just not supported by the evidence. Year on year, the Electoral Commission reports a number of cases which is so low as to be immaterial. Though these cases in isolation are concerning, the existing legal framework enables the Commission to resolve them effectively, e.g., by issuing fines (to a maximum of £20,000).

- There are concerns around the expense of introducing mandatory ID, at a cost of up to £20 million per election – and at a time when the government's fiscal priorities should be focused on Covid-19 recovery. Furthermore, in a BMG poll,[16] voter ID ranked second to last (out of 12 factors) in terms of people's priorities for democracy. It would be fair to deduce from the British public's attitudes that they would prefer to see these resources allocated to cash-stricken and over-stretched frontline services.

- In a vibrant civil society, it is incumbent on the government to endeavour to increase political participation by expanding voters' rights. The US case rightly highlights that the introduction of voter ID legislation reduced voter participation, and it is suggested that this was disproportionately high among racial and ethnic minority groups.[17] Attempting to impose more barriers to entry will only cause a groundswell of political apathy, and it will serve to disenfranchise those wanting to exercise their suffrage who will now not have the means to do so. This, in conjunction with the upcoming 2023 boundary review, translates into a partisan dilution of democracy. The government should instead look to address the fact that millions of people are left off the electoral register, to review anachronistic campaign laws and to empower the Electoral Commission with investigatory powers comparable to those of the Information Commissioner's Office to tackle the new battleground of digital campaigning.

- In the recent Queen's Speech, Woking was emphasised as a success story. It piloted photographic ID in both 2018 and 2019, and 99.9% of people who attended a polling station in 2019 were able to show the right photographic ID and were issued with a ballot paper. The population in Woking is 83.6% white; it would be interesting to see if these results would be replicated in a place like Willesden Green, where the population is 52.7% BAME. When there could be an undemocratic and discriminatory impact of mandating voter ID at elections – as there has been in the US – it is disappointing that the choice of location for these pilot studies was a missed opportunity to assuage these concerns.

- The bigger story is that 19 million citizens are still not on the parliamentary electoral register. The government's efforts should be directed towards extending suffrage to those who are not presently able to cast a ballot. We should therefore be considering provisions like election-day registration, automatic voter registration, early in-person voting and weekend elections. Furthermore, there should be a concerted push to diversify the electoral register, as currently a quarter of Black and Asian people are not registered to vote: Electoral Commission data shows that 25% of Black voters, 24% of Asian voters and almost a third (31%) of eligible people with mixed ethnicity

release, 14 May, www.gov.uk/government/news/voter-fraud-measures-announced-in-the-queens-speech.

[16] Electoral Reform Society (2018), 'Poll: "Need" for voter ID should be least of our worries, say voters', 6 June, www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/media-centre/press-releases/poll-need-for-voter-id-should-be-least-of-our-worries-say-voters.

[17] ACLU (2017), 'Fact sheet on voter ID laws', May, www.aclu.org/other/oppose-voter-id-legislation-fact-sheet.

in Great Britain are not yet registered, compared with a 17% average across the population.[18]

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[18] Electoral Commission (2019), '1 in 4 black and Asian voters are not registered to vote, warns the Electoral Commission', 18 November, www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/1-4-black-and-asian-voters-are-not-registered-vote-warns-electoral-commission.