



GAINING OUR VOICE

The growing private rented sector and voter registration

November 2023



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Executive Summary

At the time of the 2021 Census, the private rented sector (PRS) provided accommodation for 4.8m households in England, up by 1.1m in the ten years since the previous Census.

As well as more people relying on the PRS, they are living there for longer periods of their lives and one third of households have dependent children.

While the 2011 rental market was concentrated in cities, as renters have settled down but been unable to buy or move into social housing, they have moved out into suburbs and satellite towns. The biggest growth in the PRS in the last decade happened on the outskirts of London and the outer reaches of metropolitan areas like Dudley and Oldham.

This geographical spread has a political impact. Although the private renter population has increased by 29% in ten years, the number of parliamentary constituencies with 20% or more private renters has increased by 70% to reach 194, 36% of the seats in England. Renters can no longer be ignored.

But despite this, private renters are not yet punching at their weight in terms of political voice compared with other tenures. They are more than twice as likely not to be registered to vote as the population as a whole.

Our analysis of Census and electoral register data in this report estimates that of the 2.3m people missing from the electoral register entirely, more than 1 million are private renters. Even at the time of the last General Election we estimate that around 500,000 private renters were missing from the electoral register.

While other factors contribute to someone's likelihood of registering to vote, our analysis of the British Election Study finds that private renters are less likely to be registered to vote, even after taking into account age, another indicator of political engagement.

Our analysis finds that areas with high private renter populations were strongly correlated with large falls in the electoral roll since the General Election.

There are a number of apparent structural barriers that put voters in private rented homes at a higher risk of missing out on their vote. It is well-known that private renters move more frequently than people in other tenures, which can lead to falling off the register. Students in particular are more likely to be registered elsewhere as well as simply not registered in the first place.

But we have identified other subsets of the private renter population that anyone who is concerned with democratic engagement should seek to reach. Houses in multiple occupation, converted flats and large numbers of 25-34 year olds are all characteristics of areas associated with large drops in voter registration.

Alongside this report we have brought together the demographic and voter registration data we have used into an online hub, where users can explore this at a constituency level, and, within constituencies, identify streets with large private renter populations, for local campaigning purposes.

Introduction

A common refrain that any housing campaigner hears when advocating for the interests of private renters is, “well, if they only went out and voted, politicians would start acting on their behalf”.

There have been noticeable shifts in the voting behaviour of renters in recent elections, with some commentators describing a “rentquake” in 2017.¹ There is cross-party support for reforms to private tenancies and regulation of private landlords. But there are still concerns that private renters are not as democratically engaged, and therefore influential, as they could be.

One essential step towards being heard by politicians is to be registered to vote, and past research has indicated that many private renters are less likely to be registered as people in other tenures.

As the national voice of private renters, it is central to Generation Rent’s mission to understand the extent of this problem, what could be driving it and what campaigns to boost voter registration rates should focus on to overcome it.

We have looked at Census data published in 2022 and 2023, recent electoral register statistics, and the 2019 General Election British Election Study to piece together the picture of where private renters’ power lies, and whether they have the tools to exercise that power at the ballot box.

In Chapter 1 we look at how the private renter population in England has changed since the 2011 Census, and where it has grown at a local authority level.

In Chapter 2 we look at what the Census data means for the landscape in Westminster, and where new boundaries put influence in private renters’ hands. In Chapter 3 we consider the British Election Study’s insights into the factors that determine whether someone is registered to vote.

In Chapter 4 we take these individual-level relationships and examine whether they influence actual voter registration behaviour at the constituency level.

In Chapter 5 we estimate how many people in England are eligible to vote at the General Election, how many of these are private renters, and how many are missing from the register.

We conclude with a recap of the main insights our research has produced and information about our data hub where readers can find local level information about voter registration and the private renter population.

1. <https://www.ncpolitics.uk/2018/03/is-the-rentquake-analysis-a-spurious-correlation/>

Chapter 1

Census 2021 and the private rented sector

At the 2011 Census, there were 3.7 million private renter households in England. This represented 17% of the total population and had been an increase from 1.7 million in 2001. Private renters made up as much as 25% of the population in London and 14% in the North East.²

We know from the annual English Housing Survey that the private rented sector (PRS) kept growing in the early half of the decade then plateaued in the second half, after government efforts to encourage home ownership and discourage buy-to-let investment allowed more people to become first time buyers.

The 2021 Census revealed that there were 4.8 million households renting in the private sector in England, 1.1 million more than there were in 2011. This was an increase of 29%, and the sector now comprises 20% of the population.

At this point we should note that the Census took place towards the end of the second major covid lockdown

in March 2021. This meant there was something of a pandemic effect at play, with many young adults moving back in with parents after offices and universities closed.

Labour Force Survey figures suggest that the UK population of people aged 15-34 living with parents increased between June 2019 and June 2021 by around 300,000, then fell by a similar number by June 2022.³ It is therefore likely that the size of the PRS in England was temporarily suppressed at the time of the Census.

The private rented sector has grown in every region of England, with the biggest impact in London where the PRS has grown by 5% as a share of the population, though the West Midlands has witnessed the biggest percentage increase, of 36%.

The smallest increase was in the South West, equivalent to 2.6% of the population – though it has the second highest proportion of the population who are private renters, after London.

Table 1: Size of the PRS population by region

Region	PRS % 2011	PRS % 2021	% change in PRS population	Local Authority with biggest increase	Local Authority with smallest increase
London	25.1%	30.0%	25%	City of London	Waltham Forest
West Midlands	14.0%	17.9%	36%	Telford and Wrekin	Warwick
North West	15.4%	19.2%	31%	Salford	Ribble Valley
East Midlands	14.9%	18.7%	35%	Leicester	Rutland
North East	13.7%	17.2%	31%	County Durham	Darlington
Yorkshire and the Humber	15.9%	19.4%	28%	Bradford	Richmondshire
East of England	14.7%	18.2%	34%	Watford	Uttlesford
South East	16.3%	19.2%	26%	Slough	Hastings
South West	17.1%	19.7%	26%	Exeter	Stroud
England	16.8%	20.5%	29%		

2. Census data downloaded via the ONS. Private renter households include those renting through landlords and letting agents and those categorised Other, but not those living rent-free, except where noted <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/create>

3. <https://www.generationrent.org/2023/06/19/the-real-reason-rents-have-been-rocketing/>

Figure 1: Size of the private rented sector by local authority and region

Private renter population by region



Source: Census 2021

At a local level, the most dramatic increases in the PRS were seen in predominantly urban areas, but whereas large cities have long had relatively large numbers of private renters, the biggest increases in the past decade have happened in smaller cities, suburban areas and commuter belt areas.

Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Leeds have all had smaller increases in the proportion of their populations that are renting than neighbouring boroughs such as Oldham, Sefton, Barnsley and Bradford.

Aside from the tiny City of London, Watford was the local authority that saw the biggest increase in its private renter population. An arc of boroughs on the western and northern outer edges of London also saw significant increases in the course of the decade.

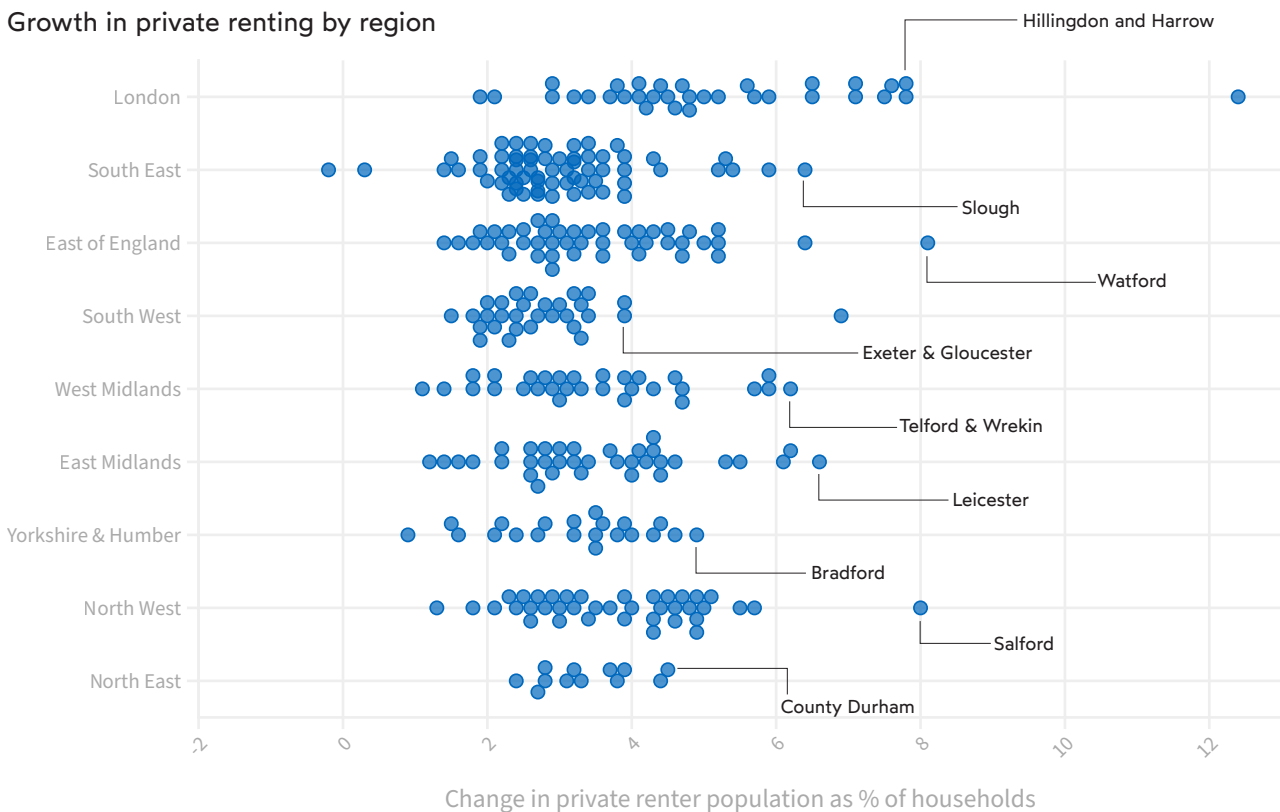
Only Hastings saw a fall in the proportion of the population in the PRS. Areas with small increases tended to be in rural areas.

Table 2: Biggest rises and falls in the size of the private rented sector

Areas with greatest change	Change as share of population	Areas with smallest change	Change as share of population
City of London	12.4%	Hastings	-0.2%
Watford	8.1%	Folkestone and Hythe	0.3%
Salford	8.0%	Richmondshire	0.9%
Harrow	7.8%	Warwick	1.1%
Hillingdon	7.8%	Rutland	1.2%
Redbridge	7.6%	Ribble Valley	1.3%
Hounslow	7.5%	Stratford-on-Avon	1.4%
Enfield	7.1%	East Hampshire	1.4%
Barnet	7.1%	Rushcliffe	1.4%
Leicester	6.6%	Uttlesford	1.4%
Barking and Dagenham	6.5%	Harrogate	1.5%
Ealing	6.5%	Stroud	1.5%
Slough	6.4%	Hart	1.5%
Luton	6.4%	Hambleton	1.6%
Lincoln	6.2%	Eastleigh	1.6%
Telford and Wrekin	6.2%	Central Bedfordshire	1.6%
Oadby and Wigston	6.1%	South Derbys hire	1.6%
Stoke-on-Trent	5.9%	Malvern Hills	1.8%
Brent	5.9%	Bromsgrove	1.8%
Reading	5.9%	South Hams	1.8%

Figure 2: Change in private rented sector as % of population

Growth in private renting by region



Source: Census 2011 and 2021

While the private rented sector is often associated with a younger population, the Census shows a more nuanced picture has emerged since 2011. Nearly half of households headed by someone under 35 are in the private rented sector (46%), but just 36% of private renter households are headed by someone under 35. A fifth of private renters (21%) are aged 55 or over, and 43% are aged 35 to 54.

Inner London has the youngest private rented sector, with 62% of the PRS in Tower Hamlets being under 35, followed by Islington and Lambeth. Newcastle upon Tyne, with a large student population and relatively accessible alternative tenures for older households, has a PRS with 56% under 35.

The areas with the highest proportion aged between 35 and 54 are concentrated in the outer London boroughs that have seen the biggest PRS growth in the 2010s, Barking and Dagenham seeing the largest proportion at 59%.

The oldest private rented sectors are in more rural parts of the country, relatively isolated from cities and other employment centres. North Norfolk has the highest proportion of private renters aged 55 or over, at 41%.

Private renters are also starting families – parents under 35 are more likely to be in a private rented home (35%) than a home they own (33%) or a social home (31%). One in three private rented homes (33%) contain dependent children, up from 31% in 2011, and one in four children lives in a private rented home (24%), up from 20% in 2011.

Table 3: Age groups and families in the private rented sector

Percentage of PRS under 35		Percentage of PRS 35-54		Percentage of PRS 55+		Percentage of PRS with children	
Tower Hamlets	62%	Barking and Dagenham	59%	North Norfolk	41%	Barking and Dagenham	60%
Islington	61%	Slough	58%	East Lindsey	41%	Slough	54%
City of London	59%	Redbridge	58%	Ryedale	40%	Enfield	53%
Lambeth	56%	Enfield	57%	West Devon	40%	Redbridge	52%
Newcastle upon Tyne	56%	Hounslow	56%	Derbyshire Dales	40%	Harrow	50%

Every region saw an increase in children living in the private rented sector in the 2010s, with London seeing the proportion rising from 25% in 2011 to 31% in 2021.

Private renters in the West Midlands are most likely to have dependent children, rising from 34% of the sector to 36% over the decade. In terms of individual boroughs, Outer London and nearby Slough have the highest proportion of private renter households with children, Barking and Dagenham at the top with 60%.

In terms of the proportion of children living in the PRS, inner London boroughs Brent and Newham feature alongside Enfield and Harrow, but Blackpool has the highest, with 44%.

While the increase in the private renter population has not been as dramatic in the past decade as it was in the 2000s, its changing geographical spread reflects the intensifying housing crisis and ageing profile of England's private renters.

The increasing numbers living further from inner cities is a result of increasing rents and house prices, and renters compromising on location in order to keep housing costs low. This is also a result of older private renters, many of whom have families, moving away from areas characterised by flats, into suburban areas where they get more space for their rent.

As a result of these trends, renters are spreading out around the country.

While they had previously been concentrated in urban seats, they now have a strong presence in areas that will be unused to the rental market. That means more local parties will need to understand the renter vote if they want to take and retain power.

Figure 3: Share of households living in the private rented sector, 2021

Private renter population by local authority as % of total, 2021

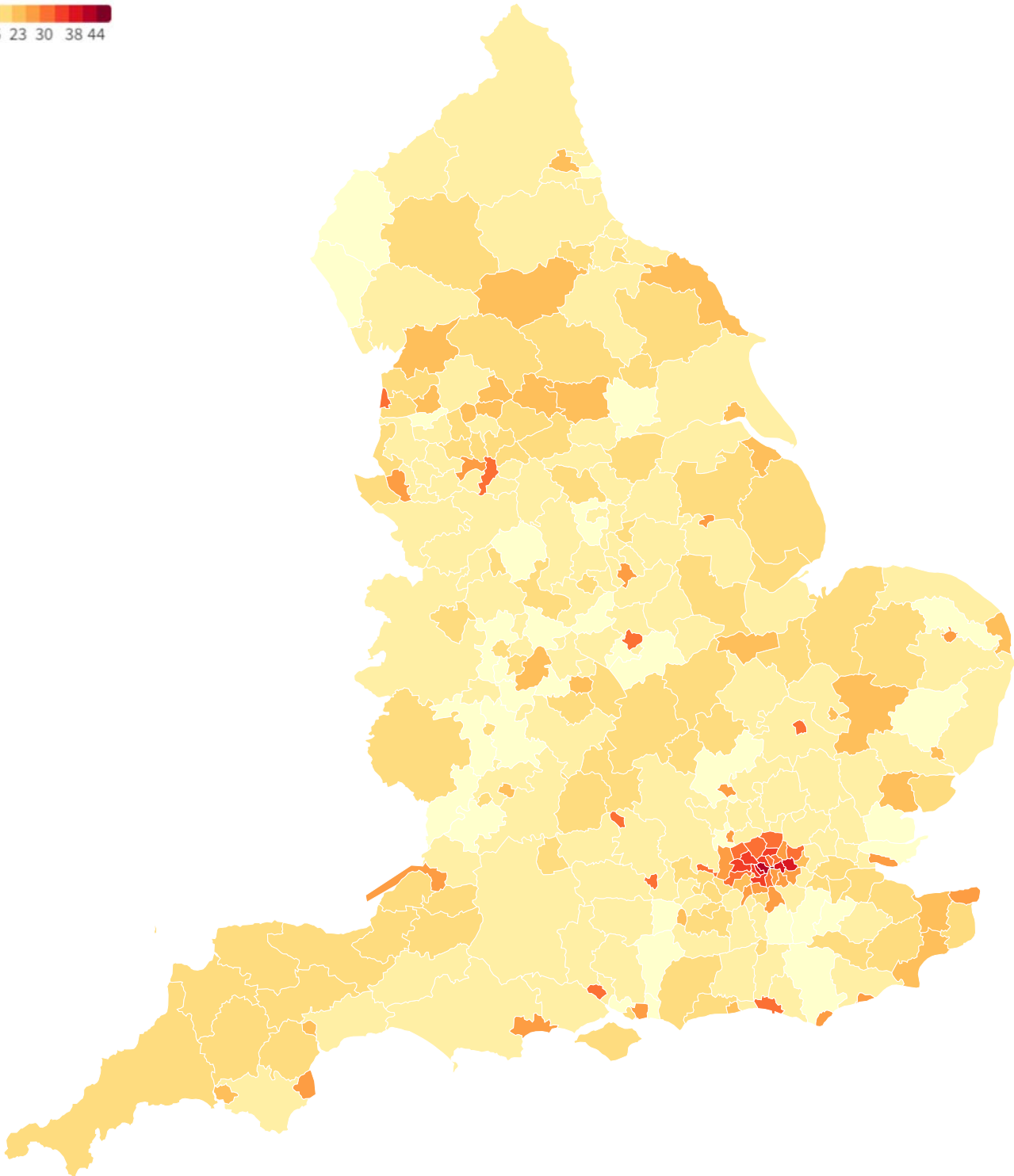
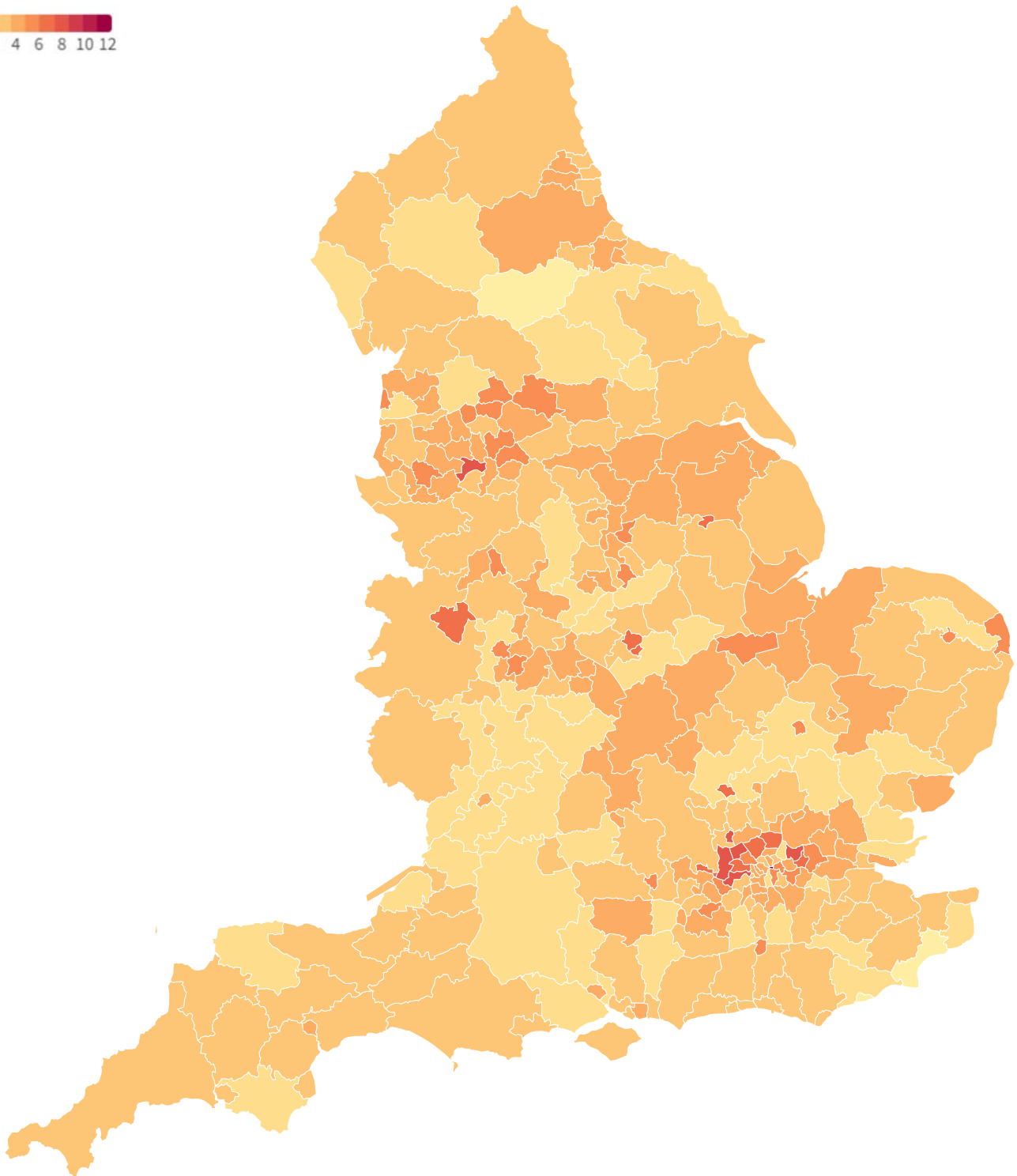
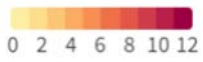


Figure 4: Change in share of households living in the private rented sector

Change in private renter population as % of total, 2011-21



Source: Office for National Statistics (Boundaries), Census 2011 and 2021

Chapter 2

Changing renter power at Westminster

We are particularly interested in what the changing tenure mix means for the seats that will be contested at the next General Election, rather than those that comprise the current Parliament in Westminster. There has been a Boundary Review which has redrawn constituencies substantially.

To find the household population by tenure at 2011 and 2021 for 2024 Westminster seats, we used Census data at the Output Area and ward level and matched these to the new seats.⁴

In 2011, the new seats with the biggest private renter population were Bristol Central, Sheffield Central, Cities of London and Westminster, and Leeds Central and Headingley, all with more than 40% of the population renting from private landlords.

In 2021, the top four is the same, though Cities of London and Westminster is now in second position, and a further four seats have private renter populations of more than 40%: Kensington and Bayswater, Poplar and Limehouse, Manchester Central and Hampstead and Highgate.

Table 4: Constituencies with the largest private renter populations

Constituency (2024)	Region	% PRS 2021	Percentage point change 2011-21
Bristol Central	South West	47%	2.3%
Cities of London and Westminster	London	47%	5.2%
Sheffield Central	Yorkshire & Humber	45%	2.8%
Leeds Central and Headingley	Yorkshire & Humber	45%	4.2%
Kensington and Bayswater	London	43%	3.6%
Poplar and Limehouse	London	42%	5.8%
Manchester Central	North West	41%	7.0%
Hampstead and Highgate ⁵	London	40%	3.8%
Manchester Rusholme	North West	39%	2.7%
East Ham	London	39%	4.2%

The median seat in 2011 was Carlisle with 14.6% of households in the PRS. The median seat in 2021 is Stoke-on-Trent North with 18.2% of households in the PRS. Under 2010 boundaries Carlisle would remain the median seat, with 18.0%.

The private renter population is relatively concentrated geographically, with half of private renter households

living in just 34.3% of seats (as redrawn). This is a marginally higher share of redrawn seats than at the 2011 census (33.7%). This has meant that while private renters are very influential in seats where they are concentrated, they have had less influence in the country as a whole.

4. Boundary data was taken from the revised proposals in November 2022. The final recommendations in summer 2023 made changes to 41 seats. <https://boundarycommissionforengland.independent.gov.uk/2023-review/>

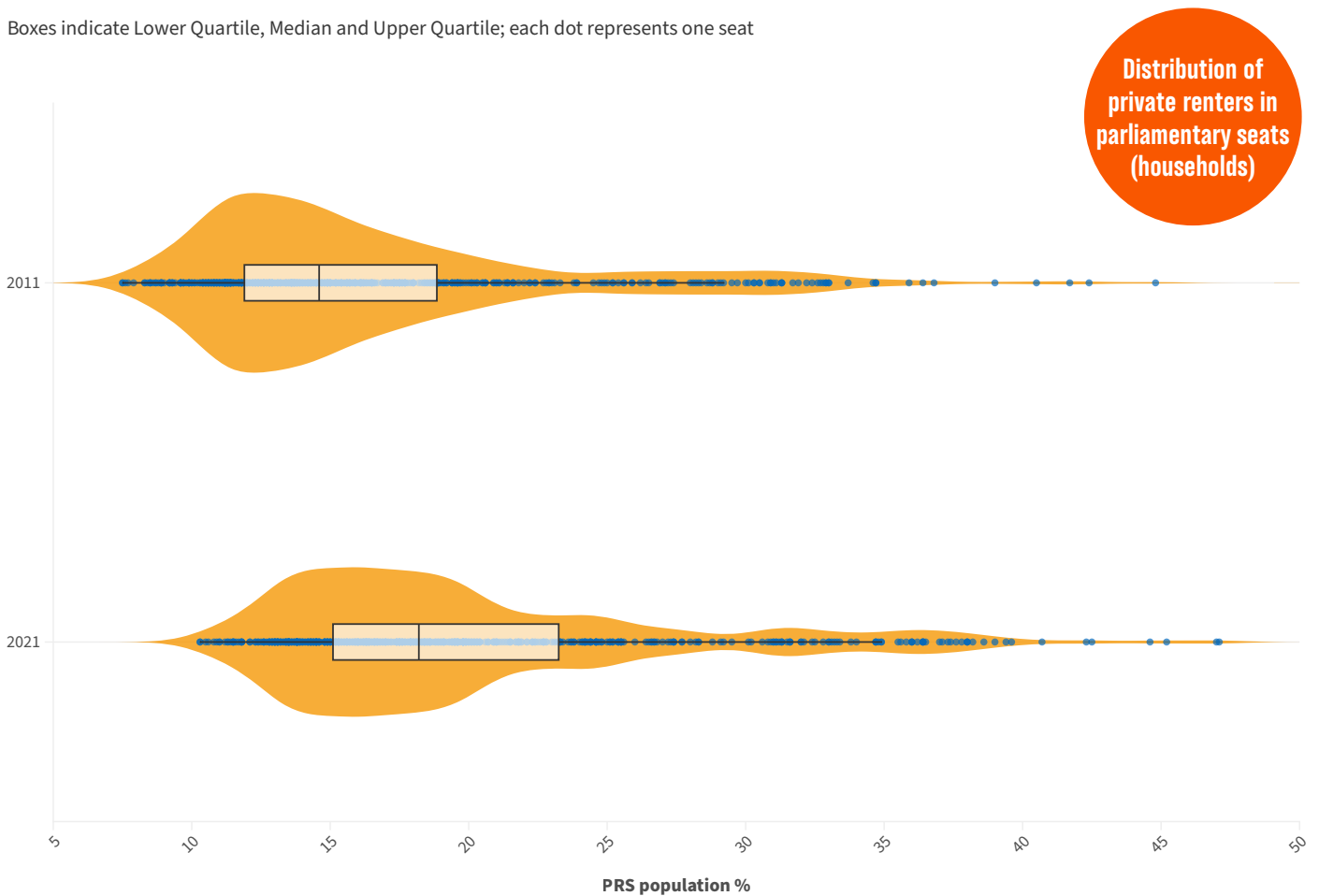
5. We carried out our analysis before the final boundaries were announced, and Hampstead and Highgate saw a small alteration in its border with Holborn and St Pancras which may have affected this figure slightly.

However, the growth of the tenure is changing this. Isolating the electoral influence of any group of voters is difficult, but we could assume that a local private renter population of 20% or more indicates that those voters have some influence as a voting bloc. In 2011, just 114 seats under 2024 boundaries had private renters making up 20% or more of the local population,

but in 2021 this stood at 194, a 70% increase and 36% of English seats in the Commons.⁶ Similarly, there has been an 89% increase in the number of seats with 30% or more of the population in private rented homes, from 37 in 2011 to 70 in 2021 (13% of English parliamentary constituencies).

Figure 5: Distribution of private renter population by parliamentary seat

Boxes indicate Lower Quartile, Median and Upper Quartile; each dot represents one seat



Source: Census, Boundary Commission for England • Estimates by Generation Rent based on revised boundaries 2023

6. A House of Commons Library analysis of the Census data for the new seats finds 195 with a PRS population of 20% or more – though we don't have 2011 data for these boundaries.

The Census data is available for 2010 constituencies so we can assess whether the boundary review has made a difference. The current seat with the largest private renter population is the Cities of London and Westminster with 47% private renters. Some of the boundary changes have concentrated private renters in the same seats, for example under current boundaries Sheffield Central has 39% private renters, but this has increased to 45% under the redrawn boundaries. Ealing Central and Acton has seen its proportion of private renters fall from 40% under the old boundaries to 39% under the new ones.

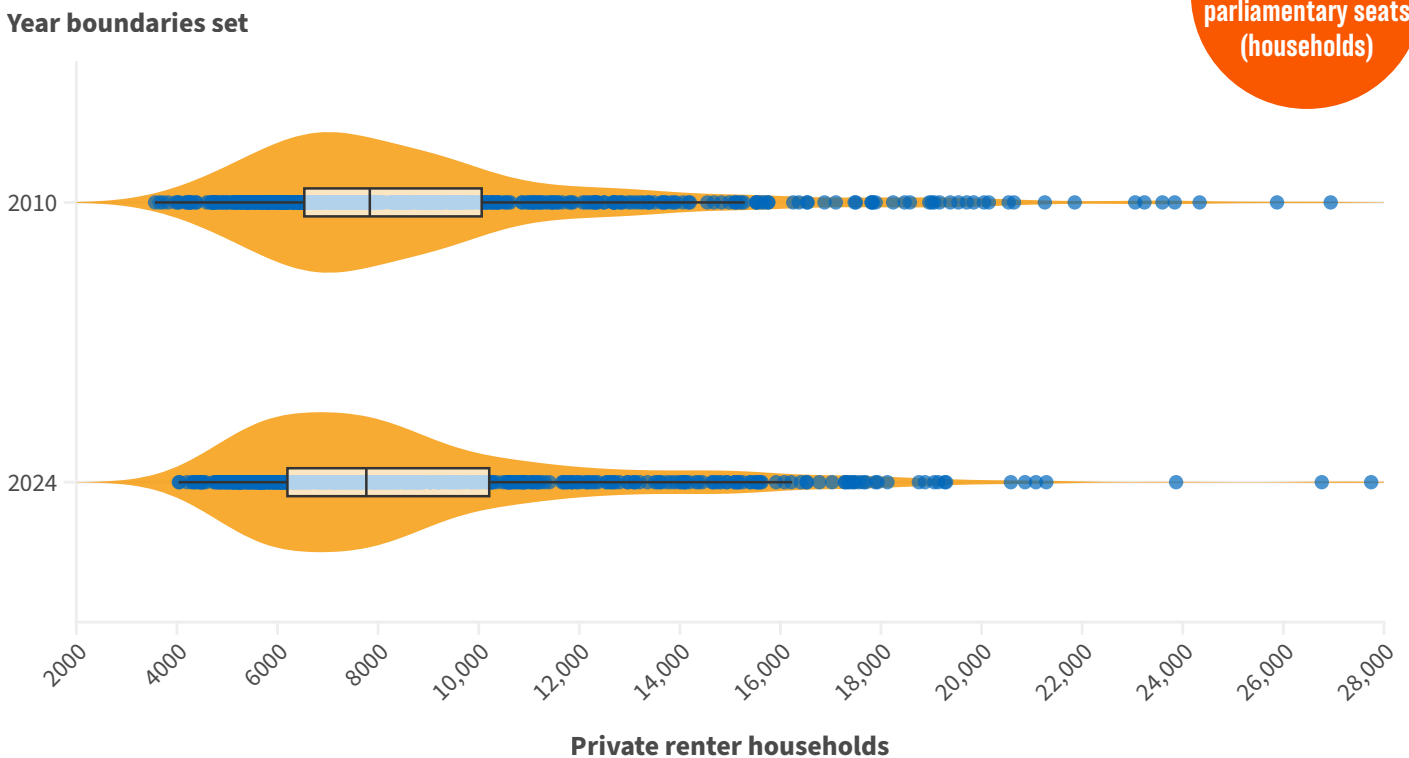
The overall parliamentary distribution of private renters has barely budged as a result of the boundary changes. There were 180 seats under the 2010 borders

with more than 20% private renters, one more than in the new seats. Half of the private renters were concentrated in 186 seats, 34.9% of the (smaller) total. It means private renters are slightly less influential than under the old boundaries, but given their increased number since 2011, more candidates need to be aware of the issues affecting them.

Figure 6 compares the distribution of private renters within seats. The boxes represent the middle 50% of seats and the range of private renter populations are greater within this. There are also fewer outliers (the dots towards the top), meaning more renters are shared out further down the distribution.

Figure 6: How the distribution of private renters in parliamentary seats has changed as a result of boundary review

Boxes indicate Lower Quartile, Median and Upper Quartile; each dot represents one seat



Source: Census, Boundary Commission for England • Estimates by Generation Rent based on revised boundaries 2023

Growth in private renter population at constituency level

When looking at what has happened to the private renter population over the past decade, we can look at the change in the number of private renters, and the change in private renters as a share of the population.

The biggest increase in the size of the PRS came in Dudley, with a 73% increase, followed closely by Salford. These are very different seats though, in that Dudley's PRS as a share of the population increased by 5.3 percentage points, and Salford's increased by 11.3 percentage points – the highest increase of its kind. Hayes and Harlington on the western outskirts of London had a 64% increase in the number of private renters and a 10.3 percentage point increase as a share of population.

Table 5: Constituencies with biggest percentage change in private renter population

Constituency	Region	% PRS 2021	Percentage point change	% increase 2011-21
Dudley	West Midlands	14%	5.3%	+73%
Salford	North West	36%	11.3%	+73%
Wolverhampton South East	West Midlands	19%	6.6%	+67%
Hayes and Harlington	London	31%	10.3%	+64%
Telford	West Midlands	23%	6.5%	+64%
St Helens South and Whiston	North West	17%	5.8%	+63%
Knowsley	North West	16%	5.1%	+61%
Tipton and Wednesbury	West Midlands	15%	5.0%	+61%
Hendon	London	36%	9.1%	+61%
Oldham West and Royton	North West	18%	6.1%	+60%

Generally the areas with the largest increase in proportion to overall population were concentrated in outer London (e.g. Wembley with 9.2% and Hendon with 9.1%), plus Watford (7.9%). Areas with the biggest percentage increases in relation to the initial PRS population were more geographically spread out but still tended to be on the periphery of metropolitan areas, particularly in the North West and West Midlands.

Table 6: Constituencies with biggest change in private renter population as a proportion of the population

Constituency	Region	% PRS 2021	Percentage point change 2011-21
Salford	North West	36%	11.3%
Hayes and Harlington	London	31%	10.3%
Wembley	London	37%	9.2%
Hendon	London	36%	9.1%
Ilford South	London	37%	9.1%
Feltham and Heston	London	27%	8.3%
Harrow East	London	28%	8.3%
Edmonton	London	31%	8.1%
Watford	East of England	27%	7.9%
Harrow West	London	35%	7.7%

Chapter 3

The demographics of voter registration

Although there are now more private renters, their political voice is still stifled by low rates of voter registration.

One reason for this is that private renters move home more frequently than home owners and social tenants. According to the English Housing Survey, 52% of private renters have lived in their home for less than three years, compared with 14% of home owners, and 21% of social tenants.⁷ Amid the other tasks someone must carry out when settling into a new home, registering to vote is not a priority, particularly for people who are less politically engaged.

At any one time, if a private renter has not registered at their current address, they might still be on the electoral register at their old address, or have been taken off it as a result of the annual canvass. If they are no longer registered they will be unable to vote. If they are registered at the old address they may be able to vote if they know which polling station they need, and can travel there on polling day, or if they manage to register for and access a postal vote.

The British Election Study (BES) provides an insight into the relative registration rates of people in different tenures.

We looked at the wave of the research that was carried out at the time of the 2019 General Election as that is

likely to be the most recent high-water mark in terms of registration, i.e. when the last high profile voter registration campaign took place. This wave had a sample of 3393 and we used their weightings by voter behaviour to produce our findings.⁸

The vast majority, 91.5% of respondents of all tenures, said they were registered to vote at their current address, with 3.0% not registered and 2.8% registered at a different address. Another 2.4% said they did not know if they were registered and 0.3% said they were registered at more than one address. Overall, 94.6% of respondents said they were registered to vote somewhere.

As we expected, private renters are least likely to be registered at their current address (78.5%), and more than twice as likely to say they are registered at another address (7.9%), or not registered at all (7.0%). A further 6% said they did not know and 0.7% said they were registered at more than one address (something that is permissible for students).

As tenure is not the only factor determining likelihood to be registered, we looked at several other demographic characteristics recorded by the BES that had a large enough sample to indicate a likely relationship with an individual's propensity to register.

Table 7: Voter registration by tenure (BES)

Tenure	Yes, at this address	Yes, at another address	Yes, at this address and another address	No, I am not registered	Don't know	Total Yes
Own home outright	96.1%	1.1%	0.3%	1.2%	1.4%	97.5%
Own home on mortgage	94.5%	2.7%	0.2%	1.7%	1.0%	97.3%
Rented from private landlord	78.5%	7.9%	0.7%	7.0%	6.0%	87.0%
It belongs to a Housing Association	90.3%	2.6%	0.0%	4.0%	3.1%	92.9%
Rented from local authority	85.7%	2.1%	0.0%	7.2%	5.0%	87.8%

7. Private Rented Sector report, 2020-21, Annex Table 3.1

8. Wave 19 of the 2014-2023 British Election Study Internet Panel, December 2019 (post-election), downloaded January 2023 from <https://www.britishelectionstudy.com/data-object/wave-19-of-the-2014-2023-british-election-study-internet-panel/>

Age

There is a clear relationship between age and voter registration, with the likelihood of registering to vote increasing as one gets older. The youngest age group is more likely to select that they are registered at another address, which reflects the number of higher education students who live away from their parents' home in term time.

Table 8: Voter registration by age (BES)

Age group	Yes, at this address	Yes, at another address	Yes, at this address and another address	No, I am not registered	Don't know	Total Yes
18-24	71.3%	12.2%	2.4%	8.4%	5.8%	85.8%
25-34	87.1%	3.3%	0.2%	5.1%	4.4%	90.5%
35-44	89.8%	2.9%	0.0%	3.5%	3.8%	92.7%
45-54	94.5%	2.3%	0.0%	1.8%	1.5%	96.7%
55-64	96.5%	0.4%	0.2%	1.7%	1.2%	97.1%
65-74	97.2%	0.2%	0.1%	1.0%	1.5%	97.5%
75-84	99.2%	0.3%	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%	99.5%
85+	96.3%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	98.6%

Income

There appears to be a relationship between income and voter registration, though low rates of registration are only apparent among people earning less than £15,600. Above that level there is little variation in registration rates between income bands.

Again we can see the student factor at work, with a relatively large proportion of people earning less than £5,200 saying that they are registered at another address, though to a lesser degree than shown by age.

Table 9: Voter registration by income (BES)

Annual income	Yes, at this address	Yes, at another address	Yes, at this address and another address	No, I am not registered	Don't know	Total Yes
Under £5,200	76.0%	7.8%	0.3%	9.6%	6.3%	84.1%
£5,200 - £15,599	89.3%	1.9%	0.0%	4.9%	4.0%	91.2%
£15,600 - £25,999	94.1%	1.6%	0.1%	2.9%	1.3%	95.8%
£26,000 - £36,399	93.4%	2.4%	0.7%	2.8%	0.7%	96.5%
£36,400 - £46,799	95.0%	1.4%	0.1%	2.1%	1.4%	96.5%
£46,800 - £74,999	92.3%	3.3%	0.0%	2.0%	2.5%	95.5%
£75,000 - £149,999	93.0%	4.3%	0.7%	1.4%	0.5%	98.1%
£150,000 or more	90.6%	3.9%	1.5%	4.0%	0.0%	96.0%

Ethnicity

The BES records specific ethnicity, but in order to compare sizeable samples we have combined categories. White British respondents were more likely to be registered than Asian or Black respondents. People with other white ethnicity were less likely to be registered than any other group.

When considering ethnicity we need to be aware of the possibility that some respondents are not registered because they are not eligible to vote.

The Census indicates that 99% of people with White British or Irish ethnicity have a UK or Irish passport, indicating eligibility to vote – or no passport, indicating that they are unlikely to have citizenship of another country, and are therefore likely to be UK citizens.

For people with Asian ethnicity, 78% have a UK or Irish passport or no passport, while a further 674,000 holders of passports from six Asian Commonwealth

countries (12% of people with Asian ethnicity) indicate that at least 90% of people within this category would be eligible to vote in General Elections. (These countries are listed in Chapter 5.)

For people with Black ethnicity, 79% have a UK or Irish passport or no passport. A further 285,000 holders of passports from six African and Caribbean Commonwealth Countries (12% of people with Black ethnicity) indicate that at least 91% of people in this category would be eligible to vote.

For people with other white ethnicity, just 27% have a UK or Irish passport, or no passport. Around two thirds (65%) have an EU passport, which at the time of the BES wave would allow them to vote in local elections (but not in general elections). Even so, it is less surprising that they are less likely to be registered to vote at the time of the 2019 General Election.⁹

Table 10: Voter registration by ethnicity (BES)

Ethnicity	Yes, at this address	Yes, at another address	Yes, at this address and another address	No, I am not registered	Don't know	Total yes
Black	86.6%	0.9%	1.6%	7.5%	3.4%	89.1%
Asian	86.9%	3.7%	0.0%	3.4%	6.1%	90.5%
White other	68.1%	1.1%	0.0%	10.4%	20.4%	69.2%
White British	92.6%	2.8%	0.3%	2.5%	1.9%	95.6%

9. Analysis of custom Census 2021 dataset: Countries, Passports held (11 categories) and Ethnic group (8 categories), England

Education

The BES asked respondents for their highest level of education completed, and we looked at the most common categories. There is less of a pattern here: while people with no qualifications are least likely to be registered at all, this is only slightly lower than people with A-levels, who are more likely to be higher education students. Even graduates are only slightly more likely to be registered to vote than people who only completed GCSE level qualifications.

Table 11: Voter registration by education level (BES)

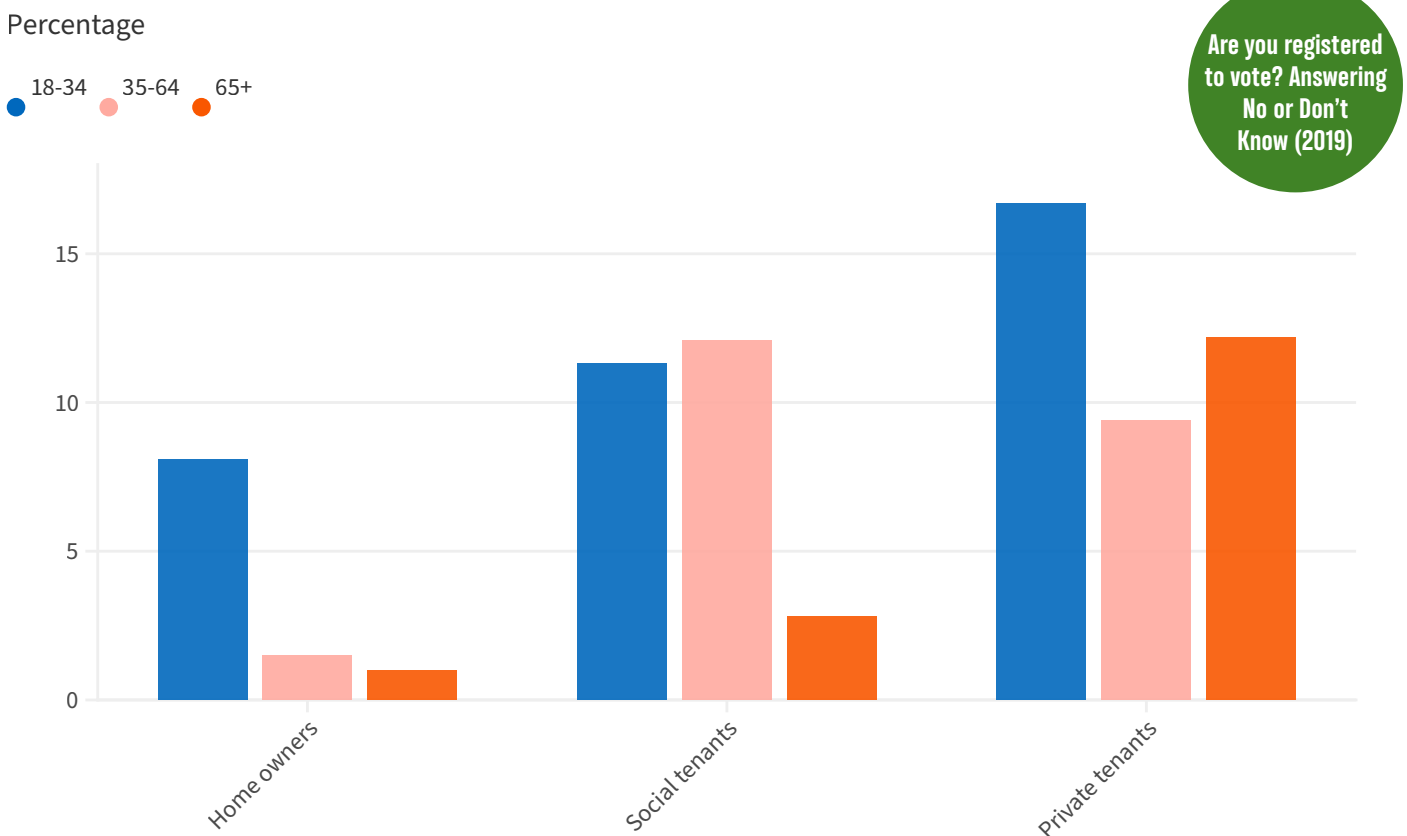
Highest level of education completed	Yes, at this address	Yes, at another address	Yes, at this address and another address	No, I am not registered	Don't know	Total Yes
No qualification	88.1%	1.7%	0.0%	6.2%	4.0%	89.8%
GCSE A*-C, CSE grade 1, O level grade A-C	93.7%	1.3%	0.1%	2.8%	2.2%	95.1%
A level or equivalent	80.9%	8.2%	1.4%	5.5%	4.0%	90.5%
ONC/OND, City&Guilds level 3, NVQ/SVQ 3	92.3%	1.1%	0.2%	4.8%	1.6%	93.6%
First degree	93.1%	2.7%	0.2%	1.8%	2.3%	96.0%
HNC/HND, City&Guilds level 4, NVQ/SVQ 4/5	95.1%	3.4%	0.0%	1.2%	0.3%	98.5%
Postgraduate degree	92.4%	5.1%	0.8%	0.5%	1.2%	98.3%

Understanding the relationship between age and tenure

Given the correlation between age and tenure – younger people are more likely to be private renters – we considered whether the lower registration rates among private renters could be explained by their age alone.

As we can see from the chart, private renters of older working age are much less likely to be registered than home owners in the same cohort, and also less likely to be registered than younger home owners. Similarly, although younger private renters are much less likely to be registered than private renters of older working age, they are half as likely to be registered as younger home owners.

Figure 7: Voter registration by age and tenure



Source: British Election Study, post-election wave 2019

We performed a regression analysis which confirmed that while older people are more likely to be homeowners and this is associated with higher registration rates, there was an additional effect for homeowners to be registered over and above what we would expect by their age alone.

This finding highlights the need to pay attention to registration rates among private renters and not just younger adults.

Having looked at the factors driving voter registration behaviour at individual-level polling data, we decided to apply our new understanding to parliamentary geographies, using population-wide data from the Census.

Doing this will indicate how strong those relationships are in the real world and help us identify cohorts of renters that need particular attention, and in turn which areas to focus on in order to boost voter registration rates among private renters.

Chapter 4

Voter registration at constituency level

In order to assess the strength of relationship between private renting and voter registration we have analysed two data sets from the ONS.

- 1) The number of voters on each parliamentary register in December 2022 compared with the electorate in each seat at the 2019 General Election.¹⁰
- 2) The percentage of households in each constituency that are private renters.¹¹

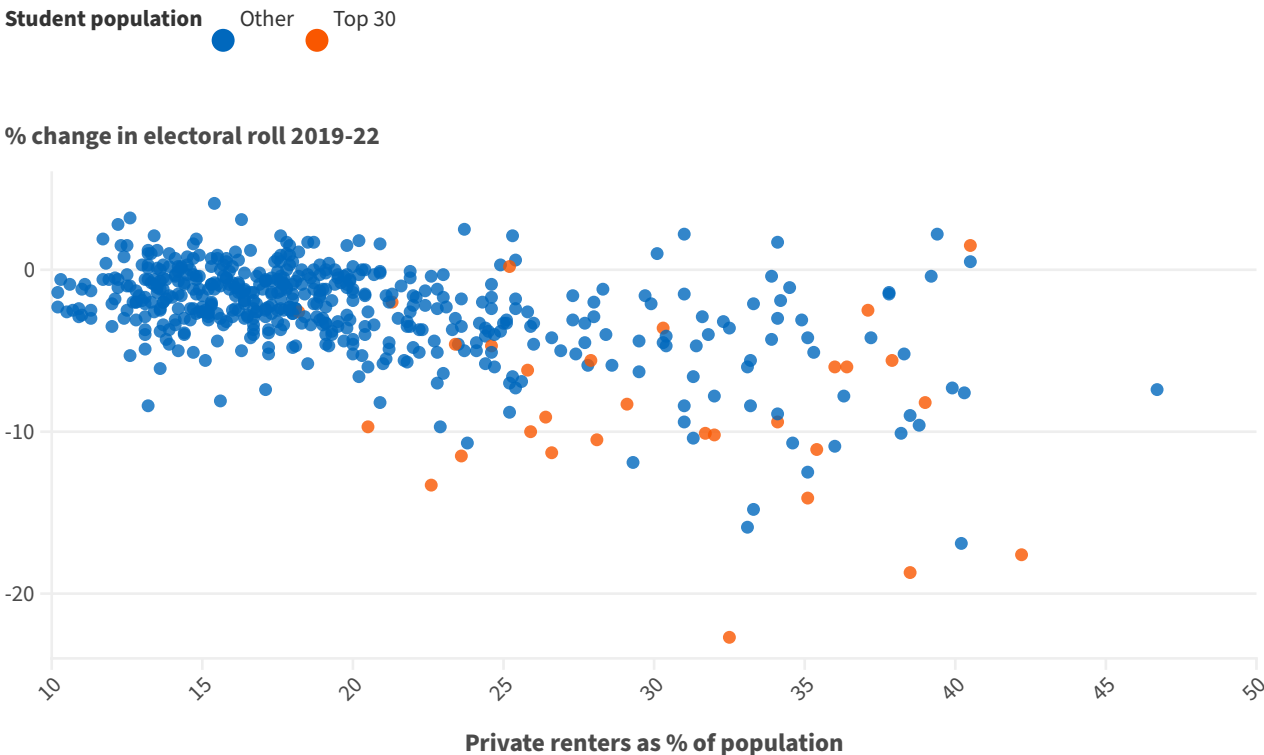
Using the number of electors present on registers at the 2019 general election we can calculate the percentage change in the register between that election and December 2022.

We can now compare the voter registration change percentage to the size of the PRS in Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies (WPC).

Using a regression analysis we find a strong negative correlation between the change in the electoral roll between 2019 and December 2022, and the size of the private rented sector, a correlation coefficient (r) value of -0.53. That is, the larger the local private renter population the bigger the fall we can expect in the number of people registered to vote.

Figure 8: Change in number of registered voters by size of private rented sector

By 2010 constituency; $r = -0.53$



Source: Census 2021, General Election 2019 results, ONS Electoral Roll data

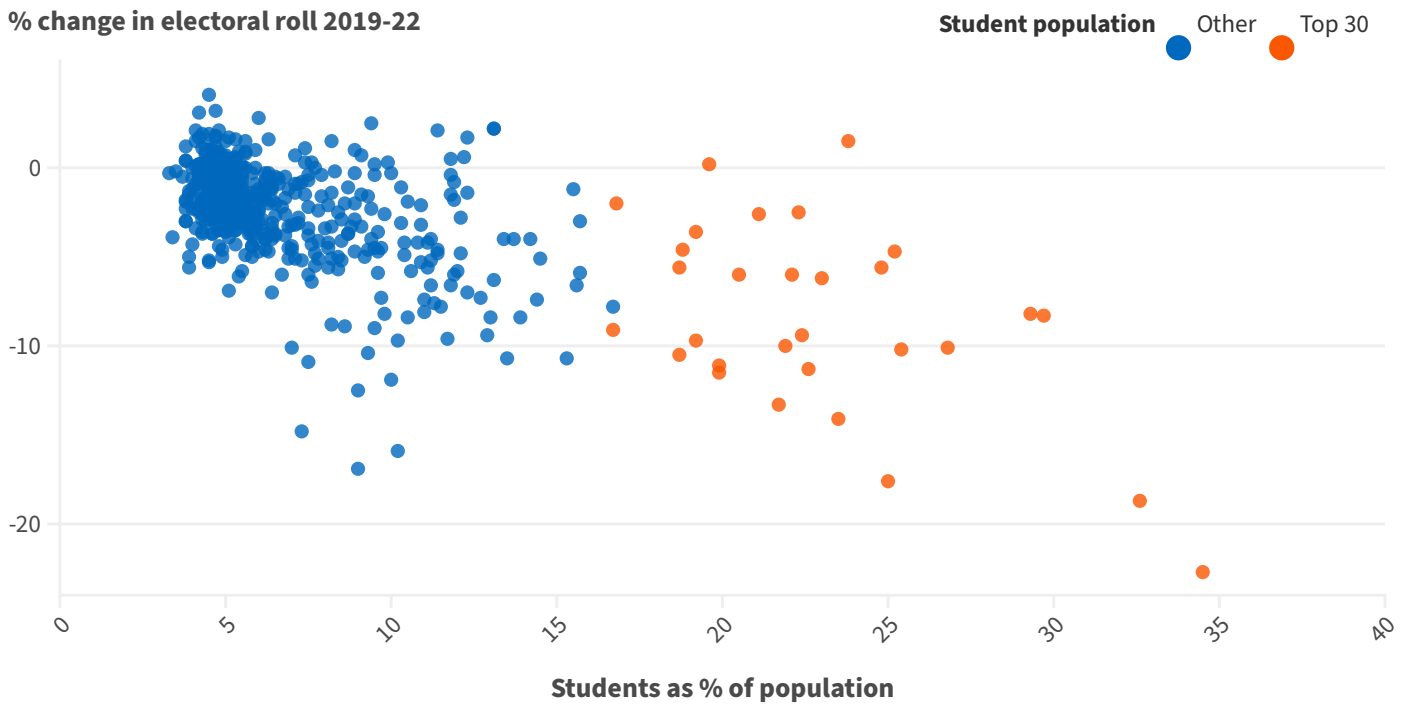
10. Commons Library General Election 2019 results, available at <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8749/>
 ONS, Parliamentary electoral registrations at 1 December 2022, available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/datasets/electoralstatisticsforuk>

11. ONS, Census 2021 Households by tenure, Version 4 released 28 March 2023

Figure 9: Student population and change in voter registration

By 2010 constituencies; $r = 0.60$

% change in electoral roll 2019-22

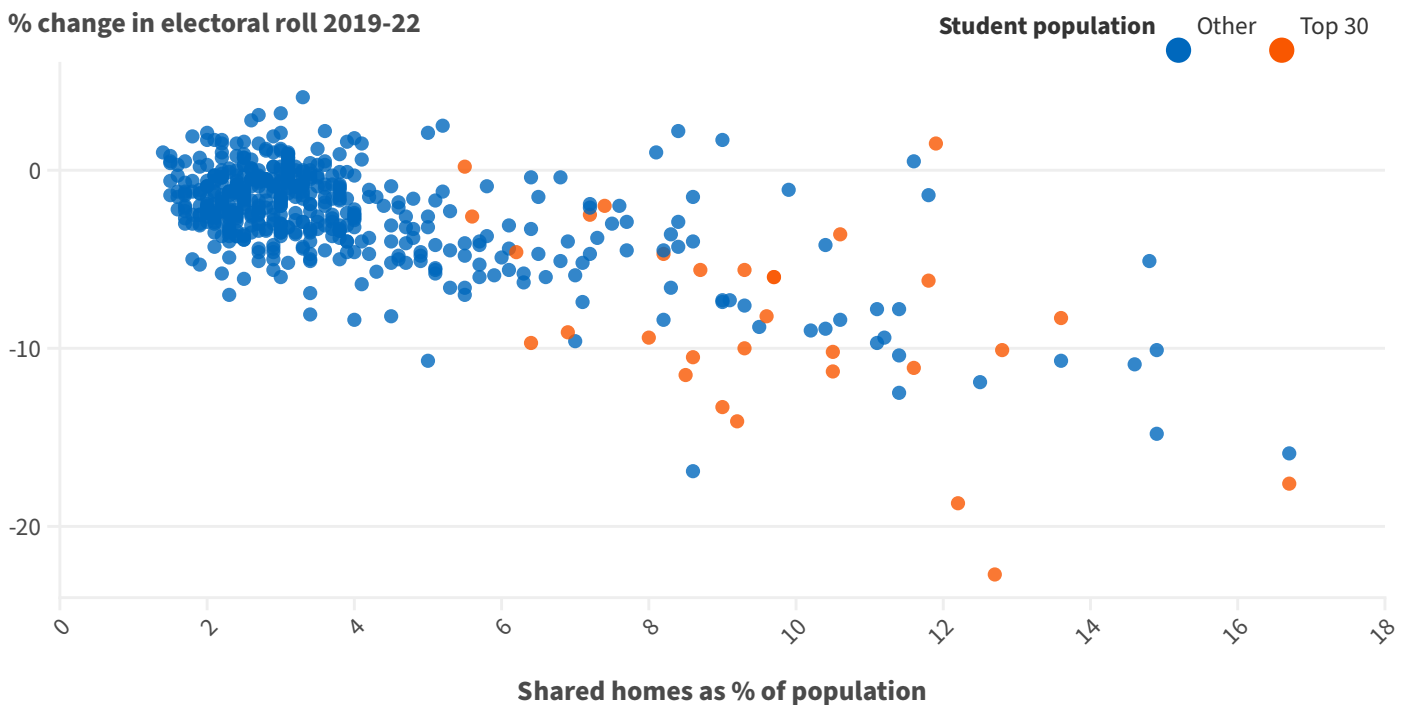


Source: Census 2021, General Election 2019 results, ONS Electoral Roll data

Figure 10: HMO population and change in voter registration

By 2010 constituencies; $r = 0.67$

% change in electoral roll 2019-22



Source: Census 2021, General Election 2019 results, ONS Electoral Roll data

We have also looked at the relationship between voter registration change and other demographic characteristics in the Census, as we know that age and other factors are relevant.

Age appeared to be a stronger factor in likelihood to fall off the electoral register, with r values of -0.60 for the proportion of the local population aged 18 to 24, and -0.49 for 25-34 year olds.

Other strong factors were the proportion of the local population who were classed by the Census as students under the NS-SEC ($r = -0.60$) and the proportion of the population living in house shares ($r = -0.67$).¹²

We also compared voter registration with the prevalence of flats in the constituency, with education level and with the prevalence of people with Black or South Asian ethnicity.

Across parliamentary seats, these factors appear to have some relationship with voter registration. The more purpose-built flats a seat contains, the greater the fall in voter registration in the three years to December 2022 ($r = -0.49$). The same is true of flats in converted buildings ($r = -0.53$).

There is little relationship between South Asian ethnicity and voter registration change ($r = -0.06$) but there does appear to be one for African/Caribbean ethnicity ($r = -0.34$), albeit weaker than other characteristics.

While the BES indicated that graduates were more likely to be registered to vote, this relationship is not borne out at constituency level, where there is a negative relationship with voter registration ($r = -0.36$). This is likely to be because areas with many graduates are cities whose other characteristics are associated negatively with voter registration. Graduate numbers correlate most strongly with prevalence of flats (0.62 for purpose-built) and house shares (0.59).

Many private renters who are aged 18-24 and living in house shares are students, so we were conscious that

many areas with large falls in voter registration could have been having their numbers dragged down by students moving every year. We therefore performed the regression analysis for all constituencies except for the 30 with the largest proportion of students.

The results confirm that it is not just a student issue. Outside of university constituencies, the relationship between PRS and voter registration is still strong with an r value of -0.48 . The relationship with flats actually strengthens outside university areas (r for purpose-built flats of -0.55 ; converted flats, -0.58). While the relationship with the local 18-24 cohort weakens to -0.42 , it strengthens to -0.52 for 25-34 year olds, and for areas with larger African and Caribbean populations, to -0.40 .

Finally, because the BES data on income suggests some relationship with income, and the census records households' deprivation, we tested whether voter registration had a relationship with wider socioeconomic factors. A household may be deprived in terms of education, employment, health and disability, and housing. Shared and overcrowded households, and households without central heating are considered deprived in the housing dimension. The housing dimension had the strongest relationship with voter registration, an r value of -0.40 across all 2010 constituencies, followed by employment¹³, with a value of -0.21 .

Looking at households in terms of the number of dimensions they are deprived in, there are weaker relationships with voter registration. Constituencies with more households deprived in three dimensions has the strongest relationship, an r value of -0.20 . Deprivation is less useful as a way of understanding voter registration than its constituent elements. Even though housing deprivation has a relatively strong relationship, it is shared housing on its own that has a much stronger relationship with voter registration, as highlighted above. In contrast, overcrowding also has a relationship but the r value is -0.26 , so explains the change in voter registration less well than other factors. This analysis indicates that if we are interested in

12. The Census classes these households as "All other multifamily households"

13. Where any adult member of the household is unemployed or out of work due to long term illness or disability

boosting voter registration numbers among private renters then we need to focus as much on young adults into their thirties, people living in house shares and flats, as on students.

These findings are in some way unsurprising: young adults are more likely to move more frequently than older private renters, who are more likely to have started a family and thus prefer to stay put for longer. House shares are more likely to contain younger renters. The relationship between flats and voter registration is twofold: first, private renters are more likely to live in flats than houses, and second, on a more

practical level, it is often difficult for political activists and other actors with an interest in voter registration to reach residents of flats, particularly compared with houses.

Looking at the 2010 seats with the largest drops in registration, we can see that there are different factors at work in each. While Nottingham South and Sheffield Central have large student populations, in Bristol and Vauxhall the high proportions of people living in HMOs may be a driving factor. In Streatham and Hampstead, the large numbers of converted flats could be playing a part.

Table 12: Constituencies with the largest changes in voter registration, 2019-22

Constituency (2010)	Change in voter registration 2019-22	% PRS	% Students	% HMOs	% converted flats	% 18-24	% 25-34
Nottingham South	-23%	33%	35%	13%	3%	29%	18%
Sheffield Central	-19%	39%	33%	12%	5%	30%	23%
Bristol West	-18%	42%	25%	17%	21%	24%	25%
Hampstead and Kilburn	-17%	40%	9%	9%	33%	7%	20%
Vauxhall	-16%	33%	10%	17%	16%	11%	28%
Streatham	-15%	33%	7%	15%	24%	7%	26%
Nottingham East	-14%	35%	24%	9%	6%	21%	18%
Birmingham, Selly Oak	-13%	23%	22%	9%	2%	21%	14%
Hackney North and Stoke Newington	-12%	35%	9%	11%	22%	7%	22%
Hackney South and Shoreditch	-12%	29%	10%	12%	9%	8%	25%

We should also pay attention to people with a minority ethnic background, even though we found that the only significant relationship with change in voter registration to be with Black people. Even non-citizens of the UK are entitled to vote in General Elections if they are citizens of Commonwealth countries, which applies to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and many African and Caribbean countries.

Chapter 5

Estimating the voter pool

Examining falls in voter registration only gives us a sense of the problem in relation to the numbers of people who have previously been registered. We also need to understand why people aren't registering to vote at all.

We have sought to estimate the number of people in each new constituency who are eligible to vote based on their age and their passport status. We assume that people who hold no passport or are UK passport holders are UK citizens and are therefore eligible to vote. We add in holders of Irish and Commonwealth passports, where countries are named in the Census data, as they are also eligible to vote in General Elections.¹⁴

At a national level, we estimate that there were 41.1 million eligible voters in England at the Census, including 35.0 million UK passport holders aged 18 or over, 324,000 Irish passport holders, 920,000 Commonwealth passport holders and 4.88 million people without a passport.

At the December 2019 General Election, there were 39.9 million people registered to vote in England, meaning approximately 1.22 million voters were unable

to cast their votes, based on the Census 15 months later. Since the General Election, the number of people registered to vote has fallen further, to 38.8m million in December 2022, a total of 2.30 million missing voters compared with the voter pool at the Census.

This "missing voter" figure does not include people who are registered but at the wrong address. The Electoral Commission (EC) has published research into the completeness and accuracy of the 2022 electoral roll.¹⁵ Its property-based study estimated that between 5.6m and 6.6m people in England were not correctly registered at their current address, up to three times as many as our estimate of missing voters.

The primary reason for this discrepancy is the scale of inaccuracies in the electoral roll at this point in the electoral cycle. The EC estimated that 10% of register entries in December 2022 did not match up with a resident of the property in question. This is equivalent to 3.88m individuals in England, who are by definition not included in our estimate of 2.30m people not registered anywhere. This figure is roughly equal to the difference between our figure and the EC's, which gives us assurance that our estimate of the number of eligible voters is robust.

Constituency level voter pools

The data used to estimate eligible voters is not widely available at a very low level because privacy considerations limit what the ONS can publish. Just 87 constituencies have Census data granular enough to work out how many eligible voters lived there in March 2021.

We have sought to understand how many missing voters there are in each of these seats and whether the factors explored above can also explain the size of these groups.

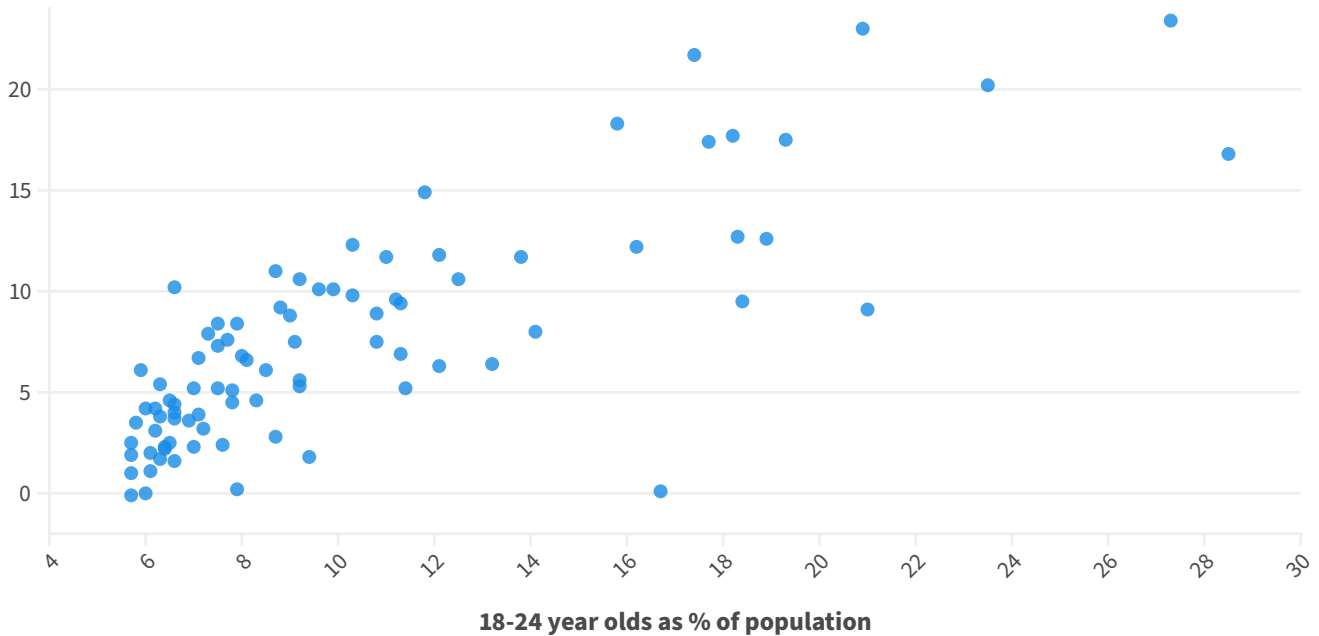
The following table shows the seats with the largest proportion of missing voters in relation to the number we would expect from the census data on age and passport status. The list is dominated by seats with large student populations. Indeed, running a regression analysis finds that students and 18-24 populations are highly correlated with the proportion of missing voters (r values of 0.76 and 0.79 respectively). Private renter and HMO populations are also moderately correlated, with values of 0.44 and 0.41 respectively.

14. 15 named Commonwealth countries are included in our figures: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe

15. <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/accuracy-and-completeness-electoral-registers>

Figure 11: 18-24 population and missing votersSelected 2010 constituencies; $r = 0.79$

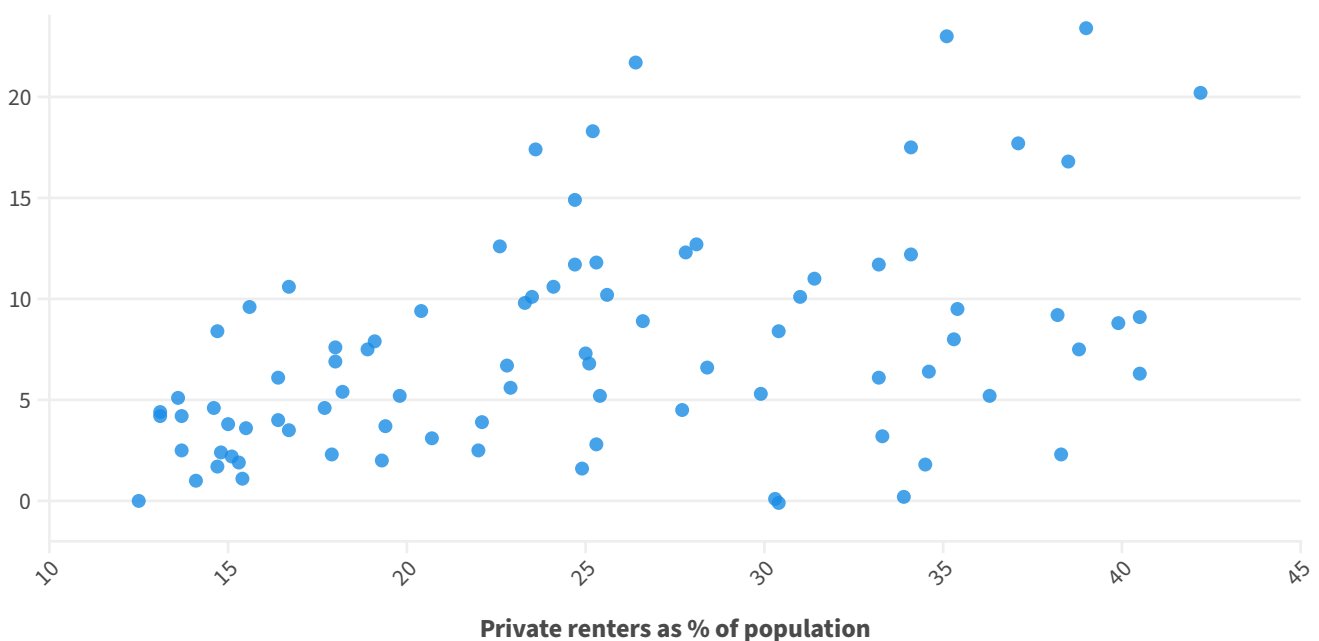
Unregistered voters as % of eligible voters



Source: Census 2021, ONS Electoral Roll data 2022 • Unregistered voters estimated based on 2022 electoral roll and estimated eligible voters from Census

Figure 12: Private renter population and missing votersSelected 2010 constituencies; $r = 0.44$

Unregistered voters as % of eligible voters



Source: Census 2021, ONS Electoral Roll data 2022 • Unregistered voters estimated based on 2022 electoral roll and estimated eligible voters from Census

Table 13: Selected constituencies with the largest estimated number of missing voters

Constituency (2010)	Missing voters as % of voter pool (2022)	% PRS	% Student	% HMOs	% 18-24
Liverpool, Riverside	23%	39%	29%	10%	27%
Nottingham East	23%	35%	24%	9%	21%
Lincoln	22%	26%	17%	7%	17%
Bristol West	20%	42%	25%	17%	23%
Newcastle upon Tyne Central	18%	25%	20%	6%	16%
Birmingham, Ladywood	18%	37%	22%	7%	18%
Leicester South	17%	34%	22%	8%	19%
Canterbury	17%	24%	20%	8%	18%
Sheffield Central	17%	39%	33%	12%	28%

Taking out seats with large student populations gives us a sense of the profile of seats with considerable under-registration but more diverse populations. A relatively large private renter population is the one common factor, though purpose-built flats feature in a number, including Welwyn Hatfield where the PRS population is lower.

Table 14: Selected constituencies with the largest estimated number of missing voters (excluding high student populations)

Constituency	Missing voters 2022 %	PRS %	HMO %	% Converted flats	% Purpose Built flats	% 25-34	% S Asian	% Black
Stoke-on-Trent Central	15%	25%	5%	2%	13%	15%	9%	3%
Northampton South	12%	28%	6%	2%	21%	16%	7%	8%
Southampton, Itchenw	12%	25%	6%	3%	38%	17%	3%	2%
Southampton, Test	12%	33%	8%	7%	34%	17%	9%	3%
Uxbridge and South Ruislip	12%	25%	6%	3%	26%	15%	18%	6%
Hayes and Harlington	11%	31%	7%	3%	28%	16%	33%	10%
Derby South	11%	24%	4%	2%	14%	15%	21%	5%
Welwyn Hatfield	11%	17%	6%	1%	22%	14%	6%	6%
South Thanet	10%	26%	3%	6%	16%	11%	1%	1%
Birmingham, Perry Barr	10%	23%	5%	3%	12%	15%	40%	14%

Among seats with lots of missing voters there are some interesting patterns. For example, in Bristol West, there were 3,162 missing voters in 2019 but this increased dramatically to 20,678 by 2022. This suggests that large numbers of people moving have led to this fall in registration. In comparison, Birmingham Ladywood had one of the biggest missing voter figures in 2019, of 13,777, and this has not shifted substantially, rising to 15,675 in 2022, indicating that there was a lack of registration at election time and less of an issue with churn.

We should note that at the other end of the scale there are a number of seats which appear to have very few missing voters, even where they have large private renter populations. These include Wimbledon, Holborn and St Pancras and Harrow West. Compared with the 2019 electoral register the missing voter figure was even negative – possibly because many households had moved away during the pandemic and so were not counted by the Census in the areas where they had previously been registered to vote. The Census indicates that there had been a significant increase in

the number of unoccupied homes in central parts of London in March 2021 compared with the rest of the country and 2011.

Of most value to today's activists would be the number of unregistered voters in each new constituency. In the absence of granular data for each new seat, we used a regional breakdown of age and passport status to estimate the size of the voter pool in each seat. For example, if 95% of people aged 35-44 in the North West held a British, Irish, Commonwealth passport, or had no passport, then we would assume that 95% of 35-44 year olds in Manchester Central were eligible to vote. We would do the same for each constituency and each age band to produce an estimated voter pool.

This is a fairly rough method, and there appears to be a large variation between our estimates and the actual figures we have for 87 2010 seats. This may be

because of variation of passport status within regions, for example, EU citizens are often concentrated in cities as well as a handful of rural areas. There are also a number of seats where the voter pool was smaller than the number on the register. As well as central London, which experienced a temporary fall in population during the pandemic, the phenomenon also appeared in certain areas with large populations of retirees. This will be one area we will continue to seek better data on.

What this limited analysis does show is that areas with high private renter populations are not only likely to see drops in the number of registered voters, but also tend to have relatively high numbers of eligible voters who are not registered in the first place. This suggests that there may be more to under-registration of private renters than frequent moves, though we should note that the trend is more pronounced in areas with high student and under-25 populations.

How many unregistered voters are private renters?

At a national level, we can estimate how many eligible voters there are in each tenure. The Census tells us the number of Household Reference Persons (HRPs, i.e. heads of households) by tenure and passport status, and also the number of households by tenure and adult/child composition (this is available at constituency level, though without passport status data as well has limited value to our work).

Among outright owners, 98% of HRPs have a passport status making them eligible to vote. This falls to 96% for mortgaged home owners, 95% for social tenants and 80% for private renters. But this only counts households so to estimate voters we need the number of adults in these households.

The publicly available Census data is not precise, but categorising households by 10 different categories of adult/child combinations allows us to find a rough minimum of adults in each tenure at constituency level. The largest adult-only category is 3+ so we do miss

additional adults in these households. As a result the total number of eligible voters by this method is about 1m smaller than the voter pool calculated without the tenure breakdown. Because households with more than three adults tend to be private rented shared houses, it is likely that many of these missing adults will be in private rented homes.

Nationally, this method indicates there are at least 8.48m adults living in private rented households – plus 3.36m children (this also includes households living rent free due to the way the Census made the data available, but this is a small number and, for our purposes, useful to class alongside private renters). We estimate that one fifth are not eligible to vote in General Elections, so 80% of the total makes 6.80m adult private renters who can vote for their MP next year. This means that while private renters' share of the population is more than 20%, their proportion of the General Election voter pool falls to 17.0%.

Using the BES data for voter registration rates by tenure, we can estimate how the missing voters in 2019 broke down by tenure. We note however, that the number of respondents reporting to BES that they were not registered is very low, so these numbers are only indicative.

Multiplying the number of eligible voters per tenure by the unregistered rate (and assuming that Don't Knows are in fact registered) produces 1.07m missing voters, close to the figure of 1.22m we estimated based on the voter pool and electoral register in 2019. Our calculations put the private renter contribution to the former number at 476,000, or 45% of the missing voters.

Table 15: Estimating the number of unregistered voters in each tenure

	Outright owners	Mortgage owners	Social tenants	Private renters	Total
Total HRPs	7,624,691	6,980,326	4,005,662	4,825,408	23,436,087
% with UK, Irish or Commonwealth passport, or none	98%	96%	95%	80%	93%
Total adults, based on household composition data	13,669,536	14,185,717	6,567,188	8,480,430	42,902,871
Eligible to vote	13,463,318	13,591,652	6,236,666	6,796,572	40,088,208
Proportion of voter pool	33.6%	33.9%	15.6%	17.0%	
Not registered (BES 2019)	1.2%	1.7%	5.8%	7.0%	
Unregistered voters 2019	161,560	231,058	361,727	475,760	1,068,545
Proportion of missing voters 2019	15%	22%	34%	45%	

If the proportion of unregistered voters who lived in the PRS stayed at 45% three years after the BES wave, this would put the figure of private renters missing from the register at 1.04m, an unregistered rate of 15% among private renters.

But given how much more frequently private renters move than people in other tenures, and the correlation between the private renter population and the change

in voter registration demonstrated above, it is likely that a larger proportion of the increase in missing voters are in the private rented sector. If so, the true proportion of private renters who are not registered at this stage in the electoral cycle is likely to be higher than 15%. This indicates that a voter registration campaign will be sorely needed ahead of the next election.

Conclusion and next steps

The growth and suburbanisation of the private renter population during the 2010s illustrates the continued failure of politicians to tackle the housing crisis. Renters are reaching middle age unable to buy a home, but in need of the relatively lower rents and greater space the suburbs have to offer.

This trend could have a bigger impact on politics than the absolute growth in the number of private renter households. While their number in England has grown by 29%, the number of parliamentary constituencies where 30% or more of the population are private renters has nearly doubled.

Private renters have more political power than at any time since the 1960s so could play a pivotal role at the next election, but can only exercise this power if they are registered to vote.

Our work has demonstrated that private renters are at a particular risk of not being registered to vote, beyond what we would expect from their age profile and the impact of the student element of the sector.

We have highlighted seats with large 18-34 year old populations, high prevalence of flats, particularly converted flats, and high numbers of shared houses, as being at most risk of under-registration of voters.

While it has been possible to estimate the size of the voter pool at a national level, and, by comparing with the electoral register, the number of voters missing from the register, publicly available data only allows us to estimate with precision this number in one sixth of constituencies (on old boundaries). One high priority next step will be to seek this custom data from the ONS in advance of a campaign to boost voter registration for the next general election.

We know that in addition to Generation Rent, a wide range of organisations are interested in boosting voter registration rates among private renters and we hope that this report will help to shape their work.

Many groups, including political parties, will be keen to apply some of these insights to their local campaigning and we have set up an online data hub to assist with this: www.generationrent.org/voter-registration-hub

The hub brings together data from the electoral register, the Census and postcode-level data on tenure from the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) register, to help paint a picture of local private rental markets. The hub is in four parts, with data to be added as it becomes available. At the time of publication the hub includes:

Postcodes with the most EPCs categorised as private rented at the time of submission. This can be filtered to constituency (2010 and 2024).

Comparison of constituencies by:

- Voter registration over time (2010 constituencies only)
- Ethnic profile
- Tenure profile
- Young voters

We hope to improve the presentation of the data and provide more features after consultation with stakeholders. To share your feedback, please contact Dan Wilson Craw on dan@generationrent.org.

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Generation Rent
Dan Wilson Craw
71, Howard Street
North Shields
NE30 1AF

More Information
✉ dan@generationrent.org
☎ 07753 369 555

🐦 @GenRentUK
📘 Generation Rent UK
📷 @GenerationRentUK
🌐 GenerationRent.org



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