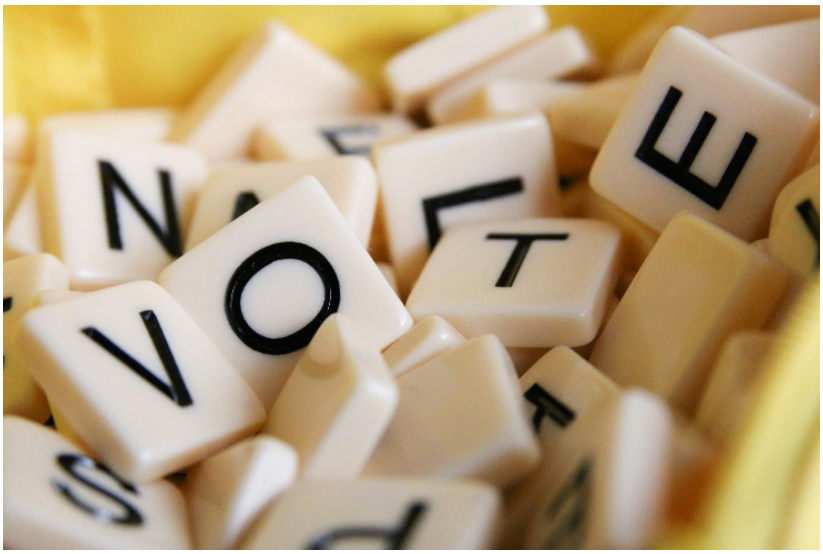

UK DEMOCRACY FUND: RESOURCES FOR GRANTEES

Voter registrations and getting out the vote

The UK Democracy Fund was set up in 2019, and since then has invested considerably in voter participation campaigns in the UK. Through evaluation of these and through our own research we've developed a good understanding of what makes voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns successful.

UK Democracy Fund

Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust

Contents

1. Types of voter participation campaigns

There is a huge gap in democratic and electoral participation in the UK. In 2019, it was estimated that up to 9.4 million eligible people in Great Britain were not registered to vote. This means that millions of people do not have any say over who represents them or the resulting decisions and policies that shape their lives. You can read more about this in our Closing the Gap report.

Those missing from the electoral register are not spread evenly across the population. They are predominantly younger, more likely to have been born overseas, more likely to be from black and minority ethnic communities, are more likely to rent their home, and are more likely to have a lower income and fewer educational qualifications; there are similar patterns in who is least likely to vote in local and national elections.

Voter participation campaigns seek to overcome this gap. They are different from campaigns run by political parties because they want to ensure those who don't usually participate do vote – addressing under-representation rather than seeking to increase the votes for a particular candidate or party.

The Electoral Commission, Local Authorities and Government all run voter participation campaigns – and these are essential for reaching the largest number of people with trusted information.

Campaigns run by community groups, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) and other civic institutions are also vital in supporting and encouraging people to vote. This is because these organisations often have strong relationships with the communities who are less likely to vote – and a better understanding of why they might not vote. If politics feels very far away from you, you are probably going to trust and engage more with someone like you than a state institution. If you are deeply rooted in a community, you are probably going to design a better voter participation campaign because you understand what might work.

Being asked or invited to vote matters

For many people, especially those who do not come from families or communities or demographic groups that regularly vote, the first step to voting is having someone invite you or ask you to vote. Low levels of voting amongst some demographic groups may be explained by how well – or rather how badly – political parties' and statutory bodies' campaigns reach those who feel furthest from politics.

Research suggests that being invited or encouraged to vote can be a motivator, and may enhance confidence in taking part in this way.

Research

- A paper, *The Democratic Participation of Ethnic Minority and Immigrant Voters in the UK*, commissioned by the Fund (Sobolewska & Barclay 2021) synthesised existing research, finding that one of the main predictors of voting is having been asked. The research also found evidence that ethnic minority people and immigrants are less likely to be asked to vote by mainstream actors such as political parties.
- Research on the 2010 General Election found that ethnic minority voters living outside concentrations of populations (for example outside of big cities with large clusters of people with a particular heritage) experienced less campaign contact from political parties.
- In the US, research from the Pew Research Center in 2020 found that particularly Latinx and Asian voters – and Black voters to a lesser extent – said they were contacted less by campaigns than White voters. The Pew Research Center has also found the more campaign material someone sees, the more likely they are to be politically active.
- Research supported by the Fund into the introduction of Votes at 16 in Wales found many young people wanted to be educated on political positions and standpoints to give them confidence to vote. Researchers found that several participants had internalised the expectation that they were deficient citizens who are not yet capable of making an informed and efficacious vote choice. Other focus group participants expressed concern over the perceived legitimacy of young people as voters.
- Similar findings have been made around young people's engagement with complex political issues (such as Brexit). Whilst older people report a similar lack of understanding as young people on some political issues, they do not tend to express similar reservations as young people about whether this means they ought not to or do not deserve to vote.
- Some research has found that young people expect to be invited into the voting process. Initiatives have been suggested to address this, such as a letter on your 16th birthday welcoming you as a voter and inviting you to register.

Funded example

*The Fund supported **ACORN** to run voter participation campaigns with homeless and more vulnerably housed people. They found that their conversations were sometimes the very first time that person had ever been encouraged to vote.*

Voter participation campaigns working with people from nationalities and ethnicities less likely to vote have also found that some people they speak with have never or have rarely been encouraged to vote.

Voter participation campaigns

There are two main types of voter participation campaigns:

Voter registration (VR) campaigns seek to encourage and support people to register to vote. They usually take one of three forms:

1) Information campaigns: making sure people know that elections are coming and how to register
2) Inspiration campaigns: motivating people to register
3) Intervention campaigns: directly supporting people to register – whether by helping people overcome language or technical barriers, providing opportunities for people to register, or taking them step by step through the process

Get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaigns seek to encourage people who have registered to vote to actually turn out to vote. Again, these usually take one of the three forms:

1) Information campaigns: helping people find out how to vote, where to vote, when to vote, and what they need to bring – including Voter ID
2) Inspiration campaigns: motivating people to vote, both ahead of time and on the day itself
3) Intervention campaigns: directly supporting people to vote. There have been a range of creative tactics in this area, including joint trips to polling stations, practice voting sessions to make the experience more familiar, voting buddy systems, and offering lifts to polling stations. Note, the process of voting is regulated, so activities must be in line with the law: see links on Electoral Law resources for more guidance.

Not all of these are equally successful for everyone – so understanding *who* it is you are seeking to reach and *why* they might currently not be registered or likely to vote is very important in designing a strategy that will be effective.

This resource sets out more guidance on what works, for whom and what we know about the 'why'.

There are lots of different guides on how to run a VR or GOTV campaign and resources (posters, graphics, information).

See here for more ideas.

Understanding behaviour change

All voter participation (VR & GOTV) campaigns involve behaviour change – you are trying to get people to do something they do not usually do. The Fund used the COM-B behaviour change model to think about how campaigns might work:

> The COM-B model proposes that there are three components to any behaviour (B): Capability (C), Opportunity (O) and Motivation (M). In order to perform a particular behaviour, [some]one must feel they are both psychologically and physically able to do so (C), have the social and physical opportunity for the behaviour (O), and want or need to carry out the behaviour more than other competing behaviours (M). As each of these components interact, interventions must target one or more of these in order to deliver and maintain effective behaviour change. (Social Change UK)

- **Capability** refers to the skills, knowledge and other personal assets needed for people to participate
- **Motivation** includes the internal beliefs, conscious intentions, emotional responses, desires, impulses and habits that motivate people to participate
- **Opportunity** means the chances to participate that are afforded by the external environment as well as social influences.

Whilst a person needs the capability, motivation and opportunity to register or turnout to vote, not every campaign needs to target all three areas. **Understanding what the barriers might be to people participating will help you work out what your campaign needs to target.** You might have strong connections to a population group to help you do this analysis – and research is always useful to understand what is really behind people's thoughts, feelings and actions.

The three components interact, and so campaigns that target different areas can be complementary: if one group is providing information to help strengthen the opportunity to vote, another campaign might help voters build the capability to vote. **Looking out for other campaigns working with similar people will help you see where the gaps are, and how your campaign might complement others.**

2. The basics

Most people register to vote online, through the government's register to vote site: **www.gov.uk/register-to-vote**

People can also register using a paper form at their local **Electoral Registration Office** (at their local authority).

At the moment, there is no way to check whether you are registered to vote without contacting your Electoral Registration Office directly. People can find their Electoral Registration Officer here: www.gov.uk/contact-electoral-registration-office.

The **Electoral Commission** has information on how to register, and how to vote:

- Eligibility to vote
- How to register to vote
- How to vote in person
- How to vote by post
- How to vote by proxy

You can only vote in the UK if you register ahead of an upcoming election. Your registration is linked to your address – if you have moved house you need to register again. This can be a key barrier to people being correctly registered and may account for the lower levels of voter registration for people who rent privately and university students.

- People who are homeless or have no registered address can use an address where they spend a large amount of their time: How to register if you haven't got a fixed or permanent address.
- It is possible to register anonymously if it would not be safe for your name and address to be publicly available (for example if you are a survivor of domestic violence): How to register anonymously.

If someone is unable to get to their polling station, they can either vote by post, or they can ask someone they trust to vote on their behalf. This is called proxy voting, and the person casting the vote is referred to as a proxy. Proxy voting is useful for some disabled people, people who are temporarily away from their home or living overseas. Applications to register to vote, for a postal vote or a proxy vote can be made at any time; there will be a deadline before election day by which applications need to be made, and local authorities will have the details for different elections.

Postal voting

You can vote by post, as well as in person at a polling station. The number of people who vote by post has been slowly but steadily increasing at recent elections:

- In 2010, 15% of the electorate had postal ballots issued – this grew to 16% in 2015, and to 18% in 2017 and 2019.

Turnout for postal voting is significantly higher than for in-person voting. It is thought this is because postal votes can be cast whenever it is convenient for someone:

- At the 2019 General Election, turnout for postal votes was 84% compared to 65% for in-person voting.

Some campaigners argue that postal voting should be promoted for everyone as a convenient, easy, secure way to vote early. If you are working with populations that are less likely to vote, it may be a good idea to encourage and support people to apply for a postal vote, given the high turnout associated with voting by post. Many people do not know that voters can hand in their postal vote to a polling station on election day if they miss the post.

Important to consider

The Elections Act 2022 changed the regulations around postal voting: people now need to reapply for a postal vote every three years. It has also become an offence for political parties or campaigners to handle a postal vote, for example by taking it in on behalf of a voter. Only the voter, a family member, or a designated carer are allowed to hand in a postal vote. Further rules changes will include: reducing the number of electors an individual can act for (down to four, of which two must be domestic electors ie not overseas electors); identity checking processes for postal and proxy applications; and an online system for making postal and proxy applications.

Voter ID

The Elections Act 2022 introduced the requirement to show photo ID at a range of elections (parliamentary elections, police and crime commissioner elections, and local elections in England). This was first applicable for the local elections in England in May 2023. It will apply for the next UK parliamentary election and elections after that.

The types of ID to be allowed are set out in section 5 of the Act. These include passports, photographic driving licences, biometric immigration documents and some concessionary travel passes. Free voter cards, called a Voter Authority Certificate, can be made available for those without any other form of photographic ID. You need to be registered to vote before you apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. When you

register to vote, you'll be asked whether you have photo ID or if you want to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

The House of Commons Library has a useful background briefing, and the Government set out more information on the policy in January 2022, including a list of identity documents that can be used.

The policy was implemented at the May 2023 local elections, but has not yet been in place at a General Election. A number of charities, civil society groups, and professional bodies have expressed concerns people already less likely to vote are also less likely to have access to the right kind of ID and will be negatively impacted.

Research

- The Electoral Commission's interim analysis showed that 14,000 potential voters were unable to take part in the May 2023 local elections due to the photo ID requirement. They also found that although overall awareness of the requirement was high, it was lower among younger people and minoritised ethnicities, as well as those people without an accepted form of ID. They also suggested that the 14,000 people (or 0.25% of polling station voters) is an underestimate, partly due to the fact some people would "have been reminded of the ID requirement before they could be recorded in the data". Their polling research shows that 4% of people who did not vote said that the photo ID requirement was the reason – either not having access to accepted ID or in disagreement with the requirement. The Electoral Commission's full report is expected in September 2023.
- Observers from Democracy Volunteers saw 1.2% of potential voters attending polling stations turned away because they lacked the accepted ID or were judged not to have it. Of those turned away, 53% were identified as 'non-white passing'. Read the report here.
- A Reuters survey found that of the top 20 councils that turned away voters, 15 were among the most deprived areas in England as measured by the government's deprivation index.
- The Electoral Commission's Public Opinion Tracker in 2022 found that:
    - 4% of the population did not have photo ID (3%) or did not have ID with a recognisable photo (1%). An additional 2% did not know if they had the forms of photo ID the Commission asked about.
    - Those people who did not have recognisable photo ID were more likely to be from disadvantaged groups, eg
        - Those renting from their local authority – 17% without correct ID
        - Those renting from a housing association – 10% without correct ID

        - Those who are unemployed – 14% without correct ID
        - Those who are in semi-skilled or unskilled work or other ‘lower grade’ occupations – 8% without correct ID
        - Those with lower levels of education – 7% without correct ID
    - 20% of the population do have the correct ID but will need to be reminded to take it with them as they go to the polls, as they typically do not take it with them when they leave the house. 74% in Great Britain should not need to do anything different, as they typically carry the necessary ID with them whenever they leave their house.

Additionally, there are concerns that the rules on Voter ID may affect people who do not look like the image on their ID, such as some non-binary or transgender people.

As voter participation campaigners, you will need to build this new requirement to show ID when voting into your plans – and think about how to address it for the people you work with.

3. What works? How to design your campaign

The UK Democracy Fund was set up in 2019, and since then has invested considerably in voter participation campaigns in the UK. Through evaluation of these and through our own research we've developed a good understanding of what makes VR and GOTV successful – though there is of course always more to learn!

3.1 Understand your audience or target population

The first step is defining your audience – who exactly is it you are targeting? Then, to plan a campaign that will have an impact, you need to understand what barriers to participation you are trying to overcome. In other words, why aren't people currently registered or voting? Understanding this will determine:

- What type of campaign to run – information, inspiration or intervention?; VR or GOTV or both?
- What engagement approach to use – do you already know your audience, and can you use personalised, face-to-face interactions? Will you need to reach out to your audience for the first time? Will you need multiple encounters, eg, to spend time breaking down mistrust?
- What tactics to use – how, practically, will you get in contact with people? What sorts of messages will you share with them? What are you asking them to do?

See Closing the Gap report for the importance and potential impact of understanding and learning from under-represented groups.

Who is under-represented in UK elections?

There is a lot of good high-level research into voter participation and turnout rates: see the Electoral Commission, for instance, or the Fund's funding framework. Yet there is relatively little good evidence broken down by different demographic factors, or that can show why different groups are less likely to take part in elections. The Fund has supported research to grow this evidence, and some of what we have learnt is set out below. If you have been working with a particular community or audience you may have some insights into what the barriers might be, or already understand attitudes and behaviours. Draw on your own knowledge and what evidence exists to think carefully about why people might not be registered or turning out to vote – and what you can do about it.

Many of the best voter participation campaigns are already rooted in the population they seek to target. If you are working in a community where you do not have links, you will need to consider power dynamics in your interactions, being sensitive to people's experience and working to build legitimacy and trust. You will also need mechanisms to find out insights into why people may not be registered or not vote.

Research

- We know that the following groups are less likely to participate:
    1. Young people.
    2. People from particular ethnicities and nationalities:
        a. people of African heritage;
        b. people of Caribbean heritage;
        c. people of South Asian heritage;
        d. Commonwealth citizens;
        e. EU citizens.
    3. Those who move house frequently, private renters and the vulnerably housed.
    4. Those with lower incomes, particularly those without educational qualifications.

- We know these factors compound each other (eg Sobolewska and Barclay 2021 on interaction between ethnicity, socio-economic marginalisation, housing tenure and social class, and Chrisp and Pearce 2021 on interaction between age, homeownership and education):
    - Families in precarious housing are more likely to be from particular ethnicities and are even less likely to participate in elections.
    - Young people without educational qualifications are some of the least likely to vote.
    - Young voters from minority ethnic groups are particularly unlikely to vote, compared to younger white voters.
    - EU citizens from racialised minority backgrounds, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritage, are more likely to be disengaged.
    - At the 2019 General Election, nearly 60% of younger people (and 50% of older people) who rent and do not have a degree did not vote.

- We also can measure the interaction between factors to understand what has the most significant effect. In recent years, there has been a shift so that factors such as homeownership and educational attainment are more important than age in determining how likely someone is to vote. For example, in the 2019 General Election, for the first time:
    - Younger graduates were more likely to vote than older non-graduates
    - Younger homeowners were more likely to vote than older renters.

What do we know about what is stopping different demographic groups from voting?

When thinking about your audience and deciding what you want to do, it may be helpful to run through these questions:

- Is the problem with registration, or with turnout – or both?
- Do people face practical barriers to registration, like moving home frequently – or not having access to ID documents?
- Do people have problems using the online registration website?
- Can they easily make it to the polling station on election day?
- Is there a problem with how people see themselves or their relationship to the state and political system – does mistrust and a sense that voting doesn't count stop them from engaging?

All these factors, and more, can stop people from participating in elections.

Registration and eligibility

Being on the electoral register is essential in order to be issued with a ballot paper on election day.

Research

- Research commissioned by the Fund (James and Bernal 2020) prior to the introduction of Voter ID found that when you ask workers who run polling stations about the most common problem they see, they repeatedly say it is citizens asking to vote who were missing from the electoral register. Roughly two thirds of polling stations are thought to turn away at least one voter missing from the register at general elections; at local elections around half of polling stations are thought to turn away at least one voter for this reason.

Voters from those ethnicities or nationalities that are less likely to vote seem to face particular challenges registering to vote – and knowing whether you can vote, or not, plays a part here.

- There is evidence in the UK that once registered, people of Black, Asian or mixed heritage tended to vote at the same levels as White people. This suggests that successful voter registration campaigns would go a large way to reducing the representation gap.
- This same research found that higher proportions of people who were of Black, Asian or mixed heritage thought (incorrectly) that they weren't eligible to vote

or didn't know about the need to register. In fact, surveys find that the lack of knowledge of eligibility, and of the process, is second only to insecure housing as a predictor of the 'participation gap' (Sobolewska and Barclay 2021). For these groups, this suggests that well-targeted, effective information campaigns could be an important part of a campaign to encourage people to vote.

- Commonwealth citizens have very low registration rates. Qualitative research with people from different Commonwealth countries show that knowledge about eligibility to vote is very low – quite likely because very few people would consider themselves to be 'Commonwealth citizens' and so do not necessarily pick up on messaging that explains that Commonwealth citizens have the right to vote in certain elections. Country-by-country targeting should help people understand when they are eligible to vote.

Funded example

In the build up to the 2019 General Election, ***Citizens UK*** *alongside groups such as* ***Migrants Organise*** *set up* ***Can I Vote?****, a website where people could check their eligibility to vote. Information on eligibility for migrants in the UK was held on sites like* ***Promote the Migrant Vote****.*

- Citizenship is positively associated with registration (Sobolewska and Barclay 2021). People who were born overseas but became UK citizens are more likely to be registered to vote. There is an obvious connection: people who want to be citizens are more likely to think of themselves as residents with an interest in who is governing. But there may also be opportunities to work around the citizenship process to encourage democratic engagement.

Example

In 2017, the ***Greater London Authority (GLA)*** *began working with London Boroughs to bring VR campaigns and Electoral Registration Officers to citizenship ceremonies, so people could be supported to register to vote as soon as they became a citizen.*

Moving house frequently

How long you have lived in your home is strongly correlated with whether or not you are registered to vote. This is likely to be practical – it takes time to register, and people may not have gotten around to it after they move house – and related to financial situation, but has demographic impacts. Renters are more likely to be younger and families in precarious housing are more likely to be from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Research

- In Electoral Commission research in 2018, only 36% of people who had moved in the last year were registered to vote.
- As the annual canvass (when local authorities add people to the electoral register) typically takes place once a year in the autumn, those who have moved in the last six months are least likely to be on the register. In London, boroughs with high 'churn' (where people move frequently) are associated with particularly low levels of voter registration.
- There is evidence from research with local authorities that some people assume voter registration is linked to council tax – in other words, if you have registered yourself with a local authority to pay council tax, then the local authority must have also registered you to vote. This is not true.

Example

*Some local and regional authorities have experimented with **prompts to people when registering for council tax**, to encourage them to register to vote at the same time. Others have explored ways to share data between different council teams so that electoral registers are kept as up to date as possible.*

*Trials of **embedding voter registration into other council appointments** (such as a housing adviser helping someone to register to vote at the end of an appointment) have been very successful at reaching voters least likely to be engaged. However, recent tests to embed voter registration into food bank drop-ins or benefits appointments have failed; in part, it has been suggested, because of the stigma of approaching these services for support in the first place.*

- Private renters are least likely to be registered to vote – this may be partially related to moving home more frequently. There have been relatively few experiments in the UK so far that have tried to work with landlords, estate agents or housing associations to increase registration for those who are moving frequently.
- Homeowners are consistently more likely to vote than those in rented accommodation (Chrisp and Pearce 2021)

Turnout

Campaigners who work with young voters suggest that turnout, as much as registration, is a barrier to young people's participation. Student-focused campaigns have noted big drop offs in engagement between young people registering to vote and the election day itself. So, whilst it is important to ensure young people are registered to vote, it is equally important to encourage, inspire or support them to vote.

Research

- At the 2019 General Election, large numbers of younger voters registered to vote, particularly in the final days before the deadline (with a third of registrations made in the last two days coming from young people under 25). A significant proportion of these were duplicates: people registering to vote who were already on the electoral register. Yet turnout was still relatively very low amongst young people: whilst young people were more likely to turnout than in previous general elections, they were much less likely than older people to actually vote.

We do not know if this is an information / capability problem (eg younger voters, for whom voting is less familiar, are more likely to forget or not know when the election is), an inspiration / motivation problem (eg younger voters are more likely to lose interest in the election after registering), or an intervention / opportunity problem (eg younger voters are less likely to make it to polling stations for practical reasons or because it is less of a habit for them). The sorts of solutions you might try to overcome this drop off in turnout would vary accordingly.

Research

- In qualitative research supported by the Fund into the introduction of Votes at 16 in Wales, young people who had registered cited a lack of family support, a lack of time and opportunity, and doubts about whether it would have impact as reasons cited for not voting.

Funded example

At the 2019 General Election, Voting Counts provided simple online content about how and why to vote to young people. On election day, interest in their content on "what happens if you do not vote?" far outstripped other content; they tracked increasing use of search terms related to "if you don't vote…"

How easy it is to register and vote: accessibility and costs of voting

Registering to vote and voting are relatively straightforward activities in the UK. Nonetheless, the huge impact that more automated voter registration can have on levels of participation suggests that the process of registering to vote can be a barrier to participation. This is particularly the case for certain demographic groups: disabled voters face access issues at every stage; homeless voters or those with no fixed address need to fill in an extra declaration; those without National Insurance numbers require additional ID to register, and those who wish to register anonymously need to complete a different form and provide evidence of why their safety is at risk. The requirement to show Voter ID may make it harder for some groups to vote.

Voter participation campaigns equally need to consider how to make it as easy for people to register and vote as possible. What you should do to help make registering and voting easy will vary depending on who you are targeting and the barriers they face: such as reminders to bring National Insurance numbers, translating information into different languages or easy-read formats, or sharing links to polling station finders or other resources.

The fact that voters with a less secure financial situation or lower income are less likely to vote also suggests that campaigns need to think through the cost implications of voting and potential financial barriers.

Funded example

In 2019, Vote For Your Future worked with universities to embed voter registration in university enrolment. Some universities found this effective: by November the University of Sheffield had already registered more than 11,500 students through integrated enrolment since the start of the term.

Research

- The Electoral Commission reported in 2017 that accessibility was an issue at the General Election: not all disabled voters had a positive experience. Information for voters, the register to vote website, poll cards, voting by post, voting in person and help to vote could all be improved. Their survey found that 5% of disabled voters found it hard to get into their polling station.
- Charities such as Mencap have found that people with a learning disability are significantly less likely to vote.

Example

***Mencap** provides easy-read guides for voters with learning disabilities, and provides support to voters to access elections. They have developed flash cards and reminder cards for carers and supporters of people with learning disabilities to support them to vote.*

Habit

The strongest predictor of whether someone will vote is whether they have voted in the past. Voting is seen as 'habit-forming' – the more you do it, the more automatic it becomes, and so the more likely you are to vote when an election is called. Some approaches to voter participation try to build up the habit of voting.

Research

- Multiple studies have found that the younger people are when they vote for the first time, the greater their participation over the long term. This is thought to be in part because starting younger helps build the habit of voting. Research by Jan Eichhorn and others on the impact of Voting at 16 in Scotland has found that this is particularly the case when starting to vote is supported by institutions such as school or the family.
- Studies have also found that children who were taken to the polls by family members (parents, grandparents or other carers) when they were little were more likely to vote when they grew up. This may be because voting felt more familiar, because going to the polls was a habit, or because participating was something they felt they should do within the family.

Funded example

Many schools run mock, shadow or parallel elections – in part as an attempt to help students practise and normalise voting behaviour. ***The Politics Project*** *developed Democracy Classroom which hosts practical resources for educators on democratic and political education and voter participation drives in schools, colleges and other settings.*

Some migrant communities in the UK have strong traditions of voting both within community institutions (for example electing positions) and in elections in their countries of origin – but are not in the habit of voting in the UK. Campaigns in very different migrant communities (for example Polish, Somali and Bangladeshi) over the last several years have sought to use existing voting behaviour to increase participation in UK elections.

Identity

In the UK there has always been a strong correlation between whether someone sees voting as a civic duty, and whether they vote. Older voters are more likely to say that voting is a civic duty, but this is less strongly felt by younger voters. Some campaigns try to appeal to this sense of duty to encourage people to vote – though this may backfire in contexts where people do not have positive interactions with state institutions (whether the Home Office, the police, or local authorities).

Some campaigns work to make people feel like voters, and build voting into an identity for individuals, a neighbourhood, or a community.

Research

- Experiments in the US have found that talking to people about voting as an identity, rather than a behaviour, can increase participation. People who were asked about 'being a voter' showed significantly greater interest in registering to vote than those who were asked about 'voting'. Similarly, people asked about 'being a voter' were more likely to turn out to vote.
- Research in the US has found that people have a strong desire to see themselves as competent, morally appropriate, and worthy of social approval. We know from the over-reporting of voting in surveys in the UK that people in general see voting as socially desirable. Being the kind of person who votes may be a way to build a positive self-image.
- Multiple studies in different countries have found that there is a strong correlation between how central political party affiliation is to a person's character or sense of self and how likely they are to consistently vote for that party. It may be possible to harness this effect for non-partisan campaigns.
- Research commissioned by the Fund (Sobolewska & Barclay 2021) found studies that showed many people from ethnicities less likely to vote actually had stronger senses of duty to vote than White British voters. Using data from 2010 Ethnic Minority British Election Study, the researchers found that South Asian British people had a much higher sense of the duty to vote (well above 90 per cent of respondents agreeing that it is every citizen's duty to vote). Although only 85 per cent of Black Caribbean origin respondents also agreed that this was the case, this still exceeded the sense of duty among the White British respondents, which was below 80 per cent (Heath et al. 2013). Maria Sobolewska concludes: "Evidence of such low levels of political alienation certainly explain why turnout in elections is not markedly lower among ethnic minorities than the general population, after registration levels are taken into account."

Example

Some Somali candidates at local elections in London in 2018 worked to increase turnout by trying to build a feeling that people of Somali heritage were the sorts of people who voted: responsible, with a strong sense of civic and community duty in the UK and overseas.

3.2 Tips, or things to think about when designing a campaign

Build trust

The Fund's work has shown that *who* is running a campaign can be as important as *what* the campaign does. Any successful campaign needs to build trust and engagement – that is the same for voter participation campaigns. How you build that trust will vary: whether you are, for example, a small community group working with people deeply fearful or suspicious of state institutions, or a large digital ad campaign that needs to convince a young audience on social media that they are a brand to follow.

You will need to think about messengers and messages. Messengers are the people who deliver the campaign: who is the face of it, or is having contact with voters? Messages are what is said: does it resonate with the audience, and make sense to them? Behavioural science research has shown that we are heavily influenced by who communicates information, the so-called messenger effect.

Research

- Personalised, face-to-face messages are consistently shown in research to be more effective at mobilising people to register or turnout to vote than more impersonal messages or contact via email or post.
- There is some evidence that respected local leaders or volunteers rooted in communities can build trust most effectively with those who feel furthest from politics.
- Research in the US sought to find out whether telling people they would be asked by someone if they had voted would make them more likely to vote or not. It did: researchers found that being asked by someone you know or that you respect (a neighbour, an established local community leader) had the greatest effect in increasing turnout.
- Civil society organisations, however, aren't necessarily always going to be the most trusted, especially in a UK context: a Fund field experiment involved a local authority sending out SMS (text messages) to un-registered voters and increased registration by 10 percentage points. However, when similar messages were sent out by a tenants' union to their members, it had no impact on registration or turnout. Understanding the audience, their behaviours and their concerns is very important.

Funded examples

*Ahead of Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2021, the **Scottish Refugee Council** worked to register newly enfranchised foreign nationals. They found a big barrier to overcome was political trust: many refugees had lived under authoritarian political systems and therefore had little trust in the voting process. Others had never voted before. It was important to demonstrate that voting was worthwhile, and that the system was safe and secure. Crucially, it was important to convey that voting would have no effect on their immigration status. A range of resources and communications were co-produced with refugees to help overcome these challenges.*

***ACORN**, the community housing union, targeted private renters, homeless people and people living in precarious housing in their voter participation campaigns, reaching out to some of the most disengaged voters. They found that convincing chronic non-voters to participate required **repeated conversations** to build trust and overcome negative attitudes. A regular presence in trusted spaces and relationship building were some of their most effective engagement tools.*

This is time consuming, and therefore expensive, but vital to engage those who distrust the political and electoral system. There are links to explore with so-called 'deep canvassing' in how these attitude-changing conversations were conducted.

Campaigns supported by the Fund have repeatedly shared anecdotal evidence suggesting that some key audiences, particularly the most disengaged, are suspicious of information from non-familiar or non-trusted sources. Projects also shared that people were hesitant to be told about 'politics' from people they did not know or had little experience with.

*At the 2019 General Election, **Vote For Your Future** built a successful brand online to engage young people effectively. By partnering with brands that had good recognition – from Propercorn to Bumble – and influencers that were trusted – including Georgina Toffolo and Gary Lineker – the campaign was able to build a sense for voters of a 'dynamic norm': that 'people like you are registering'.*

Consider using peer networks and spillover effects

There is a lot of research that suggests a person can influence the voting behaviour of family, friends, neighbours, or other members of a household, street or community. People listen to their 'peers' – people like them or equal to them – and are also better able to understand what might make their peers more likely to vote. Peer-to-peer networks (people speaking to others like themselves) can be effective when used in VR or GOTV campaigns.

Research

- Fund research (Sobolewska & Barclay 2021) found that effective voter participation campaigns made use of informal networks. Strengthening informal networks for people who have migrated or are from minoritised backgrounds may increase the likelihood of people registering or voting.

Funded examples

The Fund supported pilot projects in different South Asian communities, working with community organisations to grow voter participation campaigns that were embedded in their everyday work. These projects found that organisations rooted in their communities could, with help, mobilise significant numbers of people to participate in elections – for example by sharing messages through existing networks and making use of existing gatherings. In one project, there seemed to be positive spillover effects into the local area more broadly.

In the 2017 General Election, some Somali and Moroccan community organisations in North West London harnessed peer network effects to try to increase turnout. They set up 'walking buses' (where people could walk together to the polls) and advertised this via their WhatsApp groups, asking people to commit to attend and celebrating people for turning up.

- The potential of peer networks is why political parties in the US invested in peer-to-peer messaging apps and systems (called P2P texting) to mobilise their supporters to reach out to friends and family ahead of elections in 2020. These systems were sometimes used for mass messaging and were open to disinformation and misinformation. Evidence suggests they can have a positive impact on turnout and are particularly effective in reaching people who are the least likely to vote and most disengaged.

In the build up to elections in Wales in 2021, where young people aged 16 to 18 could vote for the first time, many youth organisations made use of peer champions to create and share content, reach out to young people and encourage new voters to register and turnout. Whilst evidence on the impact of this approach is mixed, there is lots of learning out there on how to set up peer advocate or champion programmes.

- 'Spillover effects': there is growing evidence that messages or door-to-door canvassing targeted at a member of a particular household have been shown to increase turnout amongst other members of a household (unless they have differing political allegiance), and even that messages targeted at households can increase turnout in a street, neighbourhood or community.

- Although there is little evidence on this from the UK, it is likely that spillover effects also work for UK-voter participation campaigns, especially in more close-knit communities or neighbourhoods.
- In research into the factors that made young people likely to vote in Scottish elections, Jan Eichhorn has found that whether families discuss politics at home is one of the biggest factors in whether young people were likely to vote – alongside civic education in schools.
- Research supported by the Fund into the introduction of Votes at 16 in Wales also found that young people who voted talked about politics with family members – and those who didn't, didn't. In Wales, the political engagement of parents or family members continues to be the most important determinant of young people's political engagement.
- A sense of local or community accountability can also play a role here; peer effects seem to be particularly strong when people know that they will be asked whether they have voted by their peers or people they respect.
- The appeal of influencers to campaigners may in part be because of the way they can model behaviour to people who think they are 'just like them' – although influencer effects on social media are disputed (see below for more discussion) and may be more about reach and exposure.

Work through institutions and organisations

Many of the Fund's grantees have worked with and through institutions. These include projects that work through:

- schools, colleges, universities, other educational institutions or youth clubs;
- community organisations, community centres or service providers;
- faith institutions;
- trades unions and other workplace-based civic institutions;
- and statutory bodies such as local authorities.

Institutions are places where people gather and which often have strong norms of engagement within them – and this might activate factors such as identity, habit, peer and social pressure, and trust.

Statutory institutions

Close working with local authorities, regional authorities, Electoral Commission or government bodies such as the Scottish Parliament or Cabinet Office has made some voter participation campaigns more effective.

Research

- Research commissioned by the Fund (James and Bernal 2020) reported a common research finding from poll worker surveys that many citizens think that they are on the electoral register because they interact with other government services and they assume that the appropriate information is passed onto EROs.
- A Fund-supported field experiment involved a local authority sending out SMS (text messages) to un-registered voters and increased registration by 10 percentage points. However, when similar messages were sent out by a tenants' union to their members, it had no impact on registration or turnout.

Examples

*The **Greater London Authority** (GLA) has hosted London Voter Registration Week annually since 2019. Working with other statutory bodies such as local boroughs, civil society groups, and educational institutions, they promote a London-specific campaign.*

*In Glasgow, the local **Electoral Registration Officer** (ERO) sought to increase the number of people on the electoral registers who were in temporary accommodation or less secure housing. By working with housing associations to build voter registration into housing support appointments, the local authority was able to increase the numbers of people registering from these groups.*

*A large number of newly enfranchised people were eligible to vote ahead of Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2021, including qualifying foreign nationals and prisoners. **The Electoral Commission** and **Scottish Parliament** led a campaign with civil society partners called 'Welcome to your vote' targeted at newly eligible voters. Working closely with organisations such as Scottish Refugee Council (who had strong relationships with local authorities) this campaign succeeded in registering 3,091 foreign nationals to vote.*

Syrians in Scotland were the second largest group of foreign nationals to register to vote, after those from the US. There is a large community of newly resettled Syrians as a result of government resettlement schemes. The relatively high level of contact with local authorities (alongside the dedicated and resourced support from organisations such as the Scottish Refugee Council) may explain the high level of registration.

Working with Electoral Administrators: The people in local authorities responsible for elections (Electoral Registration Officers and Electoral Administrators) are under increasing pressure – partly because more and more people are only registering to

vote just ahead of elections, partly because of increasingly limited resources, partly because snap elections have exhausted the workforce, and partly because new changes such as the introduction of Voter ID are requiring more work. Engaging early with these officers, understanding the constraints on them and what they need, and asking them for resources or local insights can make both your and their work more impactful.

- At the 2019, General Election approximately one in three registration applications was a duplicate (meaning for someone who was already registered) – this in part is a result of successful voter registration campaigns which saw 3.85 million people apply to register to vote, including 660,000 on the last day to register. Electoral Administrators have said: "the duplicate process is a nightmare throughout the year but during a high-profile election it becomes a huge drain on resources" and the "number of duplicate applications is unacceptable and creates additional enormous workload for no benefit to the register". (The Electoral Commission, 2019, p. 5)
- The Electoral Commission's report into the 2019 General Election found that, "more than a third of Electoral Administrators who responded to our survey said that they or their teams were struggling with the demands of the role and the extra workload from unplanned electoral events". (The Electoral Commission, 2019, p. 4)
- In the past, civil society campaigns have not coordinated with Electoral Administrators, causing additional workload and potentially undermining campaign goals. High-profile campaigns that saved up large numbers of paper registration forms and took them to local authorities as part of a media stunt have been criticised for creating additional last-minute workload and failing to screen applications for duplicates. It may be worth exploring opportunities to coordinate with the Electoral Administrators.

Educational institutions

There has been a lot of work exploring the potential of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions to boost voter participation. Many campaigns make good use of collaborations with educational institutions to reach young people or others less engaged with politics.

Research

- In research funded by the Fund into how Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) reach out to less democratically engaged communities, Runnymede Trust found that almost all EROs surveyed had worked closely with educational institutions in different ways. They viewed such institutions as an effective method for outreach to under-registered groups.

- Young people not in education, employment or training have very low levels of engagement. There are various reasons for this, but being away from educational institutions is one.
- Research around the extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland found that voting earlier, while still being in school and more likely to live at home, is likely to increase voter participation. In fact, the exposure young people had to the election in the two institutions of family and school (eg through political discussion at home or democratic education in schools) were shown to be the most important factors in determining whether or not they voted. Electoral Commission pilots to test the effectiveness of early voting pilots found that the pupils who were able to vote in their local school turned out to vote at much higher rates than other eligible polling station voters (18%, compared to 1.5% of other voters).

Funded examples

*In 2019, **The Politics Project** ran EducateGE, a project that brought together resources for schools. Research by James Weinberg that accompanied this found that democratic education in schools (both through formal lessons and more engaging and interactive classes) increased intention to vote by 40% amongst the oldest students.*

It also reduced political inequality: democratic education closed the gap between students who rarely discussed politics at home and those who did regularly. Regular exposure to participatory teaching methods made young men from black and minority ethnic communities as likely as young white British men to say they would get involved in political activities outside of voting.

There was some indication that the longer you receive democratic education, the more likely you are to vote when you become eligible.

*As part of its work to engage newly enfranchised young people in Wales in the 2021 Senedd elections, **Citizens Cymru** worked with all colleges and a number of schools on a 100% registered campaign. They trained teachers to lead on voter registration in their schools, building core teams of around 25 students to champion voter registration actions. Training included sessions on why and how to register to vote, and worked to empower teachers and students to develop creative and fun actions. In order to track data more effectively, students competed in filing in and collecting paper copies of voter registration forms. In the colleges and schools that they worked with, efforts managed to get 95% of over 14-year-olds registered to vote – 5,040 registrations of young people in total.*

***Vote For Your Future**'s work in 2019 to encourage universities to embed voter registration in university enrolment enabled the institutions to register their students at scale: by November 2019, the University of Sheffield had already registered more than 11,500 students through integrated enrolment since the start of the term.*

Community institutions and service providers

Many campaigns the UK Democracy Fund supports are led by community institutions that are strongly rooted in their communities and have effective mechanisms for reaching out to people who feel that politics is far away from them.

Research

- Researchers from Runnymede Trust found that a lack of knowledge amongst EROs about the institutions where people from ethnicities and nationalities less likely to vote gather was a barrier to more effective outreach with those groups.

Examples

*Organisations such as **Migrants Organise** have run successful campaigns to encourage people to give their information to the census. The **Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)** successfully registered hundreds of their clients to vote ahead of elections in 2015 and 2017 by training advice workers to ask clients if they were registered and to support them to register in appointments if they were not.*

*In 2020 and 2021, the **Scottish Refugee Council** partnered with other civil society organisations to lead efforts to register newly eligible foreign nationals (New Scots) ahead of Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2021. In a report on the election, the Electoral Commission highlighted the need for them to work with community institutions: "the New Scots community in Scotland is very diverse and the Commission's ability to reach relevant communities is highly dependent on working through partner organisations who provide face to face support for these communities at the grass roots level."*

- There is less evidence that community institutions in themselves make their members more likely to vote, without intervention. Research commissioned by the Fund (Sobolewska and Barclay 2021) found studies that suggest that whilst involvement in 'ethnic' organisations is broadly positively associated with civic participation, this is not the case specifically for electoral participation.

Faith institutions

While attending a faith institution in the UK is correlated with higher rates of voter participation, this is not true for all. There are particular faith institutions that have congregations that are less likely to vote: for example, churches with large numbers of EU or Latin American worshippers, or mosques with worshippers from South Asian countries. Some faith groups, such as British Muslims, are less likely to vote. Some campaigns have reached out to members of these faith institutions or worked closely with faith leadership to encourage their members to vote.

Research

- Research commissioned by the Fund (Sobolewska & Barclay 2021) highlighted that multiple studies identify a positive effect of places of worship on turnout. For example, multiple studies on Muslim communities in Britain show that attending a mosque is a positive predictor of turnout, while others show this can be the case for other ethnic minority places of worship. (Sobolewska et al, 2015).

Funded example

*In 2019, **Migrants Organise's** Muslim Voter Registration Day collaboration with the **Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)** enabled outreach to British Muslim voters through an extremely large number of mosques. The MCB has roughly 500 mosques and other organisations in membership. This campaign targeted worshippers at three consecutive Friday prayers. Some news reports estimated that 300,000 British Muslims registered to vote on 'Muslim Voter Registration Day' (22 Nov 2019) – though it has not been possible to verify that estimate.*

Collaborate and coordinate with others

Many successful voter participation campaigns involve joint work with others – and this isn't surprising. Working with confidence on voter participation requires a level of electoral law knowledge, an understanding of how voting and registration works, and experience of running engagement campaigns with the target audience. Anyone can do it – but it is quicker, easier and more effective the more experience you have.

Our collective knowledge of what works and what does not has been hard won, with years of trials and testing, and there is no need for you to learn the hard way! Find people who have run successful VR & GOTV campaigns in the past and who have deep links with your target audiences. Do your own research and make use of guides, resources and information that is out there – so you do not have to spend time and money developing a resource, approach or research that already exists elsewhere. Work with experts who can offer their insights and troubleshoot when you are planning, delivering or monitoring – whether digital ad agencies, representatives from community institutions, or local authorities' elections teams.

At the same time, there may be others who have developed resources you can use, have set up systems you can replicate, or puzzled through the same problems you are grappling with. Do your own research on who is out there. Join up with others so you can get access to resources and bounce ideas around with someone else. Coordinate with campaigns working in similar geographical areas or communities so you can reach more people together.

Funded examples

Ahead of Welsh Senedd elections in 2021, where 16- and 17-year-olds could vote for the first time, the Fund supported a number of groups that were working to make sure young people could vote, including ***Citizens Cymru, Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Wales, Ethnic Youth Support Team, Urdd Gobaith Cymru*** *and* ***The Politics Project****. These groups formed their own working group to share ideas, support each other and coordinate. For example, they mapped the different educational institutions they were working with to ensure they were reaching as many as possible and not duplicating. The* ***Electoral Reform Society*** *(ERS) in Wales also brought together a broader group with over 60 representatives of different organisations to coordinate activities.*

Democracy Classroom *is a platform created by* ***The Politics Project****. A partnership of over 80 different organisations, it pulls together more than 600 resources into a shared hub – meaning that teachers and others only have to go to one place to access resources, training and support for democratic education. The Politics Project initially set up EducateGE in 2019 after noticing that many different organisations were creating very similar resources and people were not aware of what other toolkits and resources were out there – this has evolved into the Democracy Classroom.*

Vote for Your Future *worked with a digital ad agency, which gave their expertise pro bono, to develop their campaign. This helped them not only to develop content but also to set up the testing infrastructure to enable VFYF to run the campaign effectively.*

The Fund has found that many campaigns we support have benefited from collaborating or coordinating with others. Some developed specific tools or resources together; others increased their reach and impact; others have found more intangible positive impact on organisations' campaigns.

Campaigns the Fund supported in the build up to the 2019 General Election told us how important it was that someone started this collaboration, for example by bringing together organisations shortly before the election was announced, making introductions and encouraging partnership working. In reflections after the elections, further coordination was one of the top three issues that grantees wished to work on.

Voters respond to urgency, impact and relevance – but you also need to build for the long term

The Electoral Commission has shown that voter registration is increasingly last minute and 'event based' (tied to a specific election) rather than as part of an annual canvass. Campaigners have also understood that urgency – the need to register or vote right now – is a powerful motivator.

At the Fund, we have found that many successful campaigns work to make elections seem more relevant. Educational sessions in schools and informational workshops with young people unpick how elections work and why they matter. Campaign messages highlight the importance of a specific election, and to particular areas and causes. Conversations on the doorstep and in street stalls try to link the elections to people's lives.

Funded example

***Vote For Your Future**, in their digital campaigns in the build up to the 2019 General Election, found that content that emphasised urgency and an upcoming deadline were particularly effective. As the deadline to register approached, they found that their ad performance increased exponentially, with the adverts emphasising the imminence of the deadline (e.g. "2 days to go", "1 day to go", "today is your last chance") served almost exclusively in the final days.*

Elections only come round every few years. With electoral registration increasingly happening just before elections, many voter participation campaigns are also built around having two peak weeks – the week leading up to the registration deadline and the week of the election. However, this often means there are not enough efforts to engage people over the longer term.

Those who have been involved in voter participation campaigns over the years note that huge amounts of knowledge, infrastructure and relationships are lost between election cycles. In part this is because funding and resources for groups working to increase voter participation often disappears after an election. Recently, some organisations have been coming together to build infrastructure that can last beyond one election campaign. Connecting voter participation campaigns to ongoing engagement or power building work can also help to sustain this work.

If you are running a voter participation campaign: can you work with others to store resources and information? How are you going to capture your learning? How will you make sure that people who you have energised through your campaign will not lose interest when there is not an election just round the corner?

Research

- Many of the millions missing from the electoral registers are likely to be first-time voters. Research from the Making Votes at 16 work in Wales research team led by Nottingham Trent University highlighted that first-time voters have a journey contingent on several connected stages. Efforts to support young people and other first-time voters in their voting journeys need to start earlier.
- Whilst a sense of urgency and relevance are triggered by impending elections, campaigns found that for some people a two-week window in the lead up to an election is insufficient for their voter participation journey.

Funded examples

Political literacy and education projects supported by the Fund have tried to share the many ways that people can engage with democracy beyond elections and demonstrate ways to effect change. Political education delivered in schools throughout the year is one way to do this with students.

***My Life My Say**'s Democracy Cafes, are hosted discussions for young people 18-30, aimed at discussing relevant current issues and embedding democracy as a part of everyday life. In 2019, 76% of young people who attended Democracy Cafe events said they had gained a better understanding of how to take part in local, regional and national decision making.*

***Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC)**, **Citizens UK**, and t**he3Million's Young Europeans Network** also sought to engage people in campaigns for change in their communities, including issues in their area, and residency-based voting rights.*

Developing trust and showing longer-term commitments to communities is also seen as significant. Several campaigns supported by the Fund (including Citizens UK, Citizens Cymru, ACORN and POMOC) all used community organising methods to galvanise and mobilise communities. By training and empowering leaders, the approach works to embed culture, practice, and leadership in institutions.

Social media and digital campaigns

Social media and the use of digital is part of life. However, it has been difficult to evidence the impact of social media on voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns. As most voter registrations (92%) happen through the government's website rather than as paper-based applications, there is undoubtedly a role for digital – but what is that role? There has been mixed evidence of what works (and what doesn't work) when using social media and other digital campaigning techniques. Be

cautious in your use of social media and digital campaigning, and if you do use it, make sure to test what works and what doesn't.

If you are considering adding a digital element to your campaign, it is important to think about your **capacity and expertise**. Your ability to make your campaign a success will depend on what you want to do and how much experience you have. If you are already using Facebook or WhatsApp groups to organise with people you want to target, and you just want to add information about registering and turning up to vote, you might have sufficient experience to do that well. If you are planning a large-scale social media campaign to target people you can only find online and you haven't done that before, you may benefit from working with someone who runs digital campaigns. All effective campaigns track how they are doing and adjust if required – this is even more the case for social media and digital campaigns, where content and ads might need to be tested up to multiple times a day to optimise their impact in the heat of an election campaign. Don't underestimate the time and expertise you need to do this well.

The UK Democracy Fund will produce a separate paper on insights on digital campaigning and the use of social media. For now, here are some initial insights.

Funded examples

Vote for Your Future ran a campaign at the 2019 General Election to get young people to register to vote, sending 380,000 to the government's Register to Vote site. They worked with a digital ad agency, which gave their expertise pro bono. This helped them not only to develop content but also to set up the testing infrastructure to enable VFYF to run the campaign effectively.

In the preparation phase they used A/B testing to identify which ads were mostly likely to lead to click-throughs. Once they launched, they tested their ads every day and adjusted the content, platform and delivery in real time.

As a result, of all the top 25 political advertisers in the build up to the election, VFYF's ads were the most effective in terms of impact for spend – and more than twice as effective as any political party's ads. The team credit the digital campaign expertise they had for this performance.

Research

Social media giants' interventions: When companies such as Facebook (Meta), Snapchat and others decide to promote voter participation, they have consistently been shown to have a big impact on whether people register and turnout to vote, or not. This is largely because of the size of their reach.

- The single largest boost to online voter registration at the 2019 General Election came when Facebook pushed out a message to all of its UK users.
- Similarly, campaigns in the build up to that election found that partnership and direct interventions from Snapchat (eg releasing filters for all UK users) were very effective at increasing engagement.
- There is lots of evidence from the US that initiatives by social media giants can have a big impact. These include 'I voted' buttons, direct push messages to users and opportunities to share ads with friends.

SMS: Evidence from the Fund's own experiments and other research suggests that SMS (text message) campaigns, when put out by a recognised and trusted source such as a local authority, can increase registration for some populations.

- A Fund field experiment involved a local authority sending out SMS (text messages) to unregistered voters and increased registration by 10 percentage points.
- However, when similar messages were sent out by a tenants union to their members, it had no impact on registration or turnout.
- There is some evidence from the US, for example, that SMS campaigns have been successful in targeting African-American voters. Some campaigns working with people in the UK who were born overseas or have Caribbean, African or South Asian heritage have experimented with using SMS or WhatsApp, though we don't know what the impact was.

WhatsApp/direct messages: There has been less evidence of effective WhatsApp or other direct message campaigns in the UK, but it ought to be a successful way of reaching out. Peer-to-peer campaigning (where people send ads or information to friends and families and encourage them to sign up) has been shown to be very successful, and direct message campaigns often make use of peer-to-peer principles.