

UK Democracy Fund submission to the PACAC inquiry into the 2024 general election

The voter registration processes – evidence from civil society interventions January 2025

The UK Democracy Fund

The [UK Democracy Fund](#) is an independent, non-partisan pooled Fund hosted by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRRT) since 2019 and supported by a group of committed funders, including a number of charitable trusts. The high number of citizens missing from the registers in the 2015 and 2017 general elections led to the JRRT decision to set up the UK Democracy Fund, which aims to strengthen democracy by increasing voter participation.

Between the 2019 and the 2024 general elections, the UK Democracy Fund supported civil society organisations (CSOs) to deliver campaigns to register people from low-voting demographics. We estimate that our interventions led to 746,442 voter registrations in time for the 2024 general election.

We have built up learning on what works to support low-voting demographics to register and vote. We have tested new approaches, innovations and pilot campaigns, [funded research reports](#), and attempted to scale what has worked. More detail on some of this is below.

Summary of submission:

In this submission, we will share findings from our research and CSO partners at the 2024 general election regarding the administration and process for voter registration, with recommendations for improvements. This will cover:

1. Specific process barriers including the steps needed to register and the timing of the election. We will also show how this affects certain demographics more than others.
2. UK Democracy Fund supported case studies of voter registration campaigns focused on young people and racialised and minoritised ethnicities. We will share what they learned and the challenges they faced.
3. How the registration system can be significantly improved through Automatic Voter Registration (AVR).
4. The limitations of publicly available electoral data and how it impacts the effectiveness of voter engagement.
5. Conclude with a summary of all recommendations.

Voter disengagement at the 2024 general election

At the 2024 general election, long-term trends in voter disengagement culminated in record low turnout, with the [second lowest UK general election turnout since universal suffrage was introduced](#). Official turnout figures show the number of people on the register who voted, but these figures do not account for those who are not registered to vote. The real picture is much worse, demonstrated through [IPPR research](#) commissioned by the UK Democracy Fund. It found that only “One-half of adults in this country voted at the 2024 general election, the lowest share of the population to vote since universal suffrage.”

The 2024 IPPR research once again confirmed the demographic trends associated with low [registration rates](#). It found that there is higher turnout where a large share of the population are older people, homeowners and white. Constituencies with a higher proportion of younger people, renters, people from racialised and minoritised ethnicities, or Muslim voters, had lower turnout, echoing those who are less likely to be registered.

What are the implications for our democracy?

The UK’s democratic principle of ‘one person, one vote’ relies on an accurate and complete electoral register. As the Government noted in their 2017 [Every Voice Matters](#) report, “the right to an equal say is fundamental to our society. Should it diminish, particularly if the erosion is experienced unevenly, some groups will be less included – and therefore heard – in our democracy”.

However, the UK’s Victorian voter registration process is a significant cause of democratic inequality. Unlike most global democracies, the UK requires people to add themselves to the electoral register and update it every time they move home. This is a significant administrative barrier.

As non-voters are predominantly young, from racialised and minoritised ethnicities, born overseas, rent their homes or live on low incomes, this registration and voting gap contributes to democratic inequality – an unequal ability to contribute and influence. This results in these demographics having less influence in the decisions made by Government. The [IPPR argue](#) that this inequality is one of the reasons for the “widely felt but unequally spread sense that democracy-as-usual is not working”.

If we are to address issues of trust and disengagement and avoid declining registration and turnout rates at the next election, the electoral system must change to make it easier for citizens to exercise their right to vote.

Recommendations

- The Government should introduce full Automatic Voter Registration before the next general election. More details below.

- PACAC should encourage institutions including the BBC to use their reach to encourage voters to ensure they are on the electoral register, have appropriate voter ID, and to turnout to vote on polling day. These are non-partisan public interest activities.

Problems with the process – UK Democracy Fund evidence from the 2024 general election

The steps in the registration process

The [vast majority of registrations occur online](#). For those who are mobilised to register by digital advertising, there are a number of inconvenient steps which need to be taken. A soon-to-be published evaluation of two digital voter registration campaigns in 2024 by Joshua Carrington, for the UK Democracy Fund, broke down the process for voter registration for someone engaging with an online ad or post on Facebook:

1. “First, they need to notice it and choose to engage with it – *after spending, on average, just 1.7 seconds with it*
2. Then, they need to feel motivated to click-through to the gov.uk site – *likely on their phone, as 81.5% of Facebook users exclusively access the site by mobile app*
3. Next, they need to complete the registration form – *though they need their National Insurance number and takes about 3-5 minutes*
4. Finally, if they're not already registered, they become a new registrant – *numbers vary over time but just this is [35-55% of people](#), with the remaining already registered, ineligible, or with errors in their application.*”

As shown above, not every click-through to the register to vote site leads to a full application. Applications are checked by local Electoral Registration Offices (EROs) to ensure they are eligible, that information has been submitted accurately, and that it is not a duplicate application. As voters are unable to easily check if they are already on the register, a huge proportion of applications to the register are duplicates, which the ERO must sift through. This is an extraordinary waste of time for both electoral staff and citizens.

Therefore, for every person who takes step one and two as described above, a much smaller number of people actually make it onto the register. For example, from two digital campaigns funded by the UK Democracy Fund (more detail below), we estimate that 974,608 click-throughs led to 298,230 registrations.

Those who apply on a paper form, will also have to post or hand in their application to their Local Authority.

Voters must make an active choice on election day (or sooner if voting by post) to take part in our democracy by voting. The additional step of manually registering to vote

(by a deadline usually 12 working days before the election) is an additional and unnecessary barrier to taking part.

Recommendation

- Government should introduce an “Am I registered?” online tool to enable potential voters to check if they are already on the register, to enable efficiency.

National Insurance numbers

The UK Democracy Fund supported a pilot campaign by The Agency (Battersea Arts Centre). The campaign was delivered by young people, largely from Black and Asian backgrounds, who attempted to register their peers through street engagement. They found that when people were approached to register on the street and supported to submit an online application on a tablet, many people were uncomfortable about entering their National Insurance number, despite it being clear the information was being entered into a government website.

CSOs frequently report to the UK Democracy Fund that when attempting to help people register, not having their National Insurance number to hand is a significant barrier to registering.

Timing

The Electoral Commission commented in their oral evidence to the committee that the summer election was a challenge for some voters. CSOs registering voters in educational institutions also found it a significant issue. Although CSOs often aim to deliver voter registration work year-round, it tends to become more effective once an election has been called. Both potential voters and education institutions respond to the urgency.

In 2024, the UK Democracy Fund supported work to deliver voter registration campaigns in and with schools. Campaigns found that students who were taking exams had finished their class time by the time the election was called, leaving the only routes to engagement through remote communications such as emails and posters around schools. These methods have proven to be less effective ways of engaging students. Many schools and colleges had planned democratic education and voter registration activities for the general election, but the timing of the election made these impossible to deliver.

The timing of parliamentary elections in the UK can be difficult to predict, and the last two general elections have been “snap elections”. In 2024, many CSOs and other institutions were taken by surprise by a July election. While CSOs were aware that an election could come earlier or later, and had built in some degree of flexibility, most made a judgement to work towards an autumn election which at the time seemed the

most likely. The organisations worked hard to respond at pace and shift plans, but it no doubt affected the impact of their work. For example, some had to shift planned face-to-face engagement (which is much more effective) to online engagement (less effective for particularly marginalised demographics).

While our registration system relies on individual registration, “event-based” registrations (a surge in applications once elections has been called), are likely to continue to be an issue. Automatic Voter Registration would enable people to be added year-round as they interact with Government services.

The process is particularly problematic for specific demographics

[Electoral Commission data](#) shows that “80% of people were satisfied with the system of registering to vote”. This figure is close to the percentage of people who are on the register. The Electoral Commission have also shown that in recent years [the register has been between 83-86% complete](#). Some of those less likely to be on the register (such as young people), are also less likely to feel satisfied with the system. This data is consistent with findings that the current registration system works better for some than others.

Racialised and minoritised ethnicities

[Research by Professor Maria Sobolewska and Dr Andrew Barclay](#) for the UK Democracy Fund suggests that for racialised and minoritised ethnicity voters, registration is the main barrier for democratic participation, as “once non-White ethnic minority voters are registered, the turnout gaps are smaller”.

For the 2024 general election, the UK Democracy Fund made grants to three organisations to run small-scale pilot projects to test registration techniques focused on Black potential voters. These pilots were designed and delivered by The Agency (Battersea Arts Centre), Carib Eats, and Skate Cabal, and have provided rich insight into registering different parts of the Black community. The three grantees found that the most significant barriers were a lack of understanding of the registration process, distrust due to perceived lack of political representation, and logistical challenges such as mobility or difficulty accessing postal voting.

People who rent their homes from a private landlord

For those who rent their homes privately, the challenge of manual registration each time they move is clear. [Electoral Commission data](#) shows that those who have lived in their home for less than a year are registered at only 39%, compared to 95% for those who have lived in their home 16 years or more. This means that those who own their home and are settled, are on the register for the long term, as they have no need to re-register unless the ERO is notified of a change.

The large and growing number of private renters, who often move home more frequently, are much less likely to be registered and able to vote. [Generation Rent report](#) that, “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.”

The challenges outlined above would be significantly improved by Automatic Voter Registration.

How the process affected particular voter registration initiatives in 2024

These are brief summaries of some of the initiatives funded by the UK Democracy Fund for the 2024 general election. More information can be made available upon request.

Auto-enrolment for university students

Young people of university age are a highly under-registered demographic. The UK Democracy Fund funded Purpose Union to support universities, further education colleges and EROs to work together to put eligible students onto the electoral roll through automation. Student auto-enrolment, first piloted by Sheffield University in 2016, proved [to be an effective and efficient way](#) to register large numbers of students. Since the 2017 [Higher Education and Research Act](#), universities have been required to work with EROs to enable student registration.

Purpose Union’s [research shows](#) relatively shallow engagement from universities, with the most common activity being the university simply providing a link to the government registration website. This is much less effective than auto-enrolment. [Data from the University of Nottingham](#), who implemented auto-enrolment in September 2023, saw registrations increase from under 1,000 previously to 23,000, representing 64% of all students. This tallies with previous [data from Sheffield University](#), which saw 76% enrolment after piloting AVR (compared to 13% at similar-sized universities).

Purpose Union developed comprehensive [guidance](#), including a template data-sharing agreement, to enable universities to work with Local Authorities. They received high levels of engagement from universities, election officials and relevant professional bodies. Educational institutions were largely very interested in bringing in auto-enrolment, but Purpose Union identified a number of barriers to its implementation. These included cost, staff resource and knowledge, the challenge of working with multiple EROs, and issues around data and software.

Embedding auto-enrolment as a form of Assisted Registration, through a technical solution which directly connects educational institutions to the government’s voter registration website/database, would enable many more institutions to use it. Through an Application Programming Interface, secure software providers used by universities

and colleges could share data directly with the Government's registration database. EROs would then be able to access this data in the usual way. This streamlined process removes the additional resource and administrative requirements for both institutions and EROs, requiring no data-sharing agreements between the two. These verification requirements could mirror those used in the voter registration portal and be set up through an automatic process.

Recommendation

- The Government should enable an Application Programming Interface to allow data sharing from universities and colleges directly with the Government's voter registration website. This could be introduced as part of wider measures for Automatic and Assisted Voter Registration.

Digital campaigns

For the 2024 general election, the UK Democracy Fund supported two separate large-scale, youth-focused digital campaigns. These campaigns, delivered by Shout Out UK and My Life My Say, along with agency support, between them delivered 974,608 click-throughs to the Register to Vote site. Adjusting to account for average application completion and rejection rates, we estimate these to have resulted in 298,230 additions to the electoral register. The campaigns used a mixture of paid digital ads, corporate and CSO partnerships and work with influencers. Shout Out UK focused on a data driven approach, relying on hyper-targeting of hard to reach demographics. The 'Give an X' campaign delivered by My Life My Say was highly visible and successfully brought in a number of high-profile brands with a large reach to young people such as Snapchat, Tinder, Glastonbury Festival and Deliveroo.

The success of these campaigns suggests that when well engaged, young people are often open to registering to vote. An Automatic Voter Registration system would enable CSOs to focus their interventions on encouraging these young people to get out and vote on polling day, instead of focusing resource on the administrative step of registering.

Voter registration in schools and colleges

The UK Democracy Fund supported several interventions in schools and colleges, delivered by The Politics Project, Citizens UK/Citizens Cymru and I have a voice. Schools engaged in a variety of ways – including through directly delivered voter registration work, or by accessing resources. Some schools and colleges had better engagement with young people when the voter registration was combined with democratic education activities to participate in the election more broadly, such as use of youth-focused manifestos. Evidence from previous elections shows the importance of engagement with candidates and hustings. This supports the Electoral Commission's evidence to the committee that the role of politicians and political parties in engaging these potential voters is important.

The Electoral Commission also referred, in their oral evidence to the committee, to the importance of habit forming for participation in elections. Ensuring that young people are not only enfranchised, but also on the register, motivated, and informed to use their vote is likely to lead to longer-term voting habits in the future. This has the potential to undercut low participation of other low-voting demographics, as these newly enfranchised young people cut across all other low-voting demographics.

The Government has committed to introduce legislation to enable 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, a measure that will significantly help to address political inequality in the UK. The success of this measure will partly depend on young people being on the register and able to use their votes. Overall, despite well-run interventions, the registrations achieved were not at the scale needed to close the gap in youth registration. The most effective way to address the very low registration rates for 16- and 17-year-olds would be automatically registering young people when they are issued their National Insurance number.

More insight into how Votes at 16 can best be introduced for successful implementation can be found [in this briefing by Dr Christine Huebner, University of Sheffield and Dr Jan Eichhorn, University of Edinburgh for the UK Democracy Fund](#).

Recommendation

- As part of wider measures to enable Automatic Voter Registration, data from the National Insurance database should be used to automatically register people when they turn 16.

Small-scale interventions for racialised and minoritised ethnicity voters

The UK Democracy Fund supported engagement from community groups focused on under-registered racialised and minoritised ethnicities. This was built on the knowledge that “it is generally agreed that the method and style (face-to-face, and personalised) is more crucial than the content of the message” for voter engagement with these communities (from 2021 [research by Professor Maria Sobolewska and Dr Andrew Barclay](#) for the UK Democracy Fund).

The three pilots (referenced above) focused on engaging the Black community confirmed the findings of existing literature that trust and relationship building are critical; that addressing political disillusionment requires nuanced, empathetic engagement; and that community leaders play a pivotal role in mobilising voters. For example, Carib Eats engagement with elderly Caribbean potential voters found that hours of discussion were needed before the would-be voter was motivated to register.

Prior to this, in 2022, the UK Democracy Fund supported three pilots focused on registering members of the South Asian Diaspora. These were delivered by the Southern Women’s Aid Network; the Bangladeshi Women’s Association of Wales; and

Aspire and Succeed. The pilots found high levels of distrust of local and national government, and suspicions of voter registration drives, even when delivered by trusted local leaders.

The Southern Women's Aid Network, a South London Muslim women's organisation, found that, "The general consensus was that their vote didn't matter, their voices are not heard, and their issues are often overlooked."

While these were effective campaigns at engaging their communities, they are very difficult to scale. Each pilot delivered a small number of registrations, at a high cost per registration, because of the time required to mobilise members of their community to vote. The localised nature of the campaigns – which is required when working through trusted leaders – by definition means the scale will be very small.

Automatic Voter Registration would more effectively register these voters at scale.

How can voter registration be improved for future elections?

The Government's 2017 [Every Voice Matters](#) report set out ambitious plans to counter the problem of low voter participation, but funding was eventually cut, and very little Government funding has been made available for voter engagement in recent years.

The UK Democracy Fund was set up to build evidence and learning and make the case for urgent electoral system reform. As we've shown above, the kind of person-to-person engagement which is effective for low-voting demographics requires considerable resource. Closing the up-to-8-million-person gap using this model would require funding at an unrealistic level. Given other funding pressures on charitable funders, it will not be possible to sustain this level of investment. Without electoral system reform, there is high risk that registration levels for certain demographics will worsen.

The Government has committed in their manifesto to improve voter registration. International evidence shows that the best way to resolve this is through Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). This process upgrade would enable a voting system fit for the 21st century. AVR is an effective solution to address democratic inequality, improve the accuracy and completeness of the register, respect voters' privacy and save money.

Additionally, AVR fits well into the Government's approach to digital infrastructure. In "[A blueprint for modern digital government](#)" they set out plans for better use of digital technology to make people's lives easier, including by better joined-up public services which are able to share data within Government. This could be used to improve electoral registration, a vital point of connection between state and public, fit for our modern democracy.

There is wide support for the importance of a voting system which works for all potential voters

- 2024 [YouGov polling](#) shows that 81% of the population support Automatic Voter Registration
- In their 2024 manifesto, the Labour Government committed to [improve voter registration](#) and the Liberal Democrats called for “[an automatic system of inclusion in elections](#)”.
- The registration process was investigated in 2023-2024 by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (LUHC) Committee. [Clive Betts MP, the Committee Chair noted that](#), “It is a major and fundamental defect in our democratic system that many millions of UK citizens face being unable to make their voice heard at election time.” UK Democracy Fund/JRRT evidence to the inquiry can be found [here](#).
- In 2019, the then Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith, set out in her [preface to the Cabinet Office’s report into Democratic Engagement](#): “The case for democratic engagement is not only one of individual rights but also of collective benefit: we help to secure our democracy by respecting, protecting and promoting it for the greater good”.

Recommendations

- Government should introduce Automatic Voter Registration in time for the next general election. Further detail is set out in our joint submission with Professor Toby S. James and Professor Paul Bernal.
- UK-wide legislation should be proposed to Parliament in 2025 which would empower EROs to register people without application, where EROs are satisfied that the person is eligible.
- EROs should be given access to datasets such as the DWP’s Customer Information System (CIS) for AVR, and public agencies should be required to provide assisted registration options.
- Newly enfranchised citizens should be automatically registered as they become eligible for the first time. This will be an essential step in making the Government’s commitment to Votes at 16 a success.
- The Government should move to implement a central register, effectively re-introducing the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) which was originally established in 2006.
- Options should be piloted UK wide (using UK wide data sets).
- To better protect citizens’ privacy and the security of our elections, the Open Register should be abolished.

The UK's Victorian electoral data infrastructure does not work for our modern democracy and is a challenge for administration

A thorough review of the UK's electoral data environment can be found in "[The UK's Electoral Data Democratic Deficit: A vision for digital modernisation](#)" by Professor Toby S. James and Professor Paul Bernal of the University of East Anglia, commissioned by the UK Democracy Fund. It identified a 'democratic deficit' in the UK's electoral data, whereby data on voter registration and participation is inconsistently available. The report found that better electoral data is vital to:

1. Improve participation at UK elections
2. Help create more efficient systems for electoral administration
3. Promote greater trust and transparency in elections

At the 2024 general election, access to data seems to have worsened. Here are some examples of how this has proven challenging for deeper insight into improving participation in elections:

CSOs working on voter registration cannot access the data they need to understand whether their targeting worked

For many persistently under-registered communities, in-depth engagement from trusted messengers is essential to overcome hesitancy to vote. CSOs are often best placed to deliver this, due to their long-term role, the trust they hold, and their deep understanding of communities. However, good quality and strategic engagement requires good data, and without insight into the impact of CSO campaigns, it is not possible to learn more about what works.

As [argued by James and Bernal](#), "There is considerable inequality in who has access to data. The larger political parties and those with sufficient resources have the ability to compile much of this data. Civil society groups seeking to promote non-partisan political engagement have no effective tools to measure the success of their activities. Overall, this means that too little is done to address inequalities in participation in elections."

Two specific examples of this are: the availability of data on which voters are registered; and data on which voters turn out to vote.

a) Data on which voters are registered

For CSOs to access the best quality data about the register – enabling them to follow individual voters through the process and confirm whether or not they made it onto the register – requires a high level of resource impossible for most civil society groups. Even if a CSO is able to negotiate permission from a Local Authority to view the register, they would have to review it manually and take handwritten notes. Given the scale of the data set, this would be unrealistically time consuming for most.

On the other hand, private companies with the available resources are able to purchase copies of the open register, which they can use for commercial purposes, such as for sales and marketing. [James and Bernal](#) point out the risks of this, for individual voter privacy and the security of our elections.

b) Data on which voters voted

Whilst being on the electoral register is an essential step, the ultimate aim is a democracy where most, if not all, potential voters take part on election day. However, for CSOs it is almost impossible to identify how far their interventions led to votes.

The best way to understand if an intervention has had an effect is through the analysis of the marked registers. Whilst anyone can access marked registers for a fee, this can only be done in person with hard copies of the registers, and so transcribing makes this exercise burdensome and costly.

Recommendation

- The Government should require EROs to provide electoral data to the Electoral Commission, who should be required to make the data available to those who need it.
- The Government should investigate how to make relevant electoral registration and turnout data available to CSOs (and others), enabling the sector to learn more about what has and has not worked to mobilise potential voters. For example –
 - Returning Officers should facilitate digital access to the marked register for civil society groups and researchers.
 - Electronic poll books should be broadly piloted, enabling digital datasets of who has voted, which could be used to enable CSOs and others to target voter engagement resources more effectively and promote better learning of what works.
- Government should consider if electoral data collected, including ineligible registration applications, could, with the appropriate considerations for privacy concerns, be broken down by demographic to enable better insight into who is unable to take part, allowing for better interventions. It should also be available at constituency, Local Authority and ward level, to enable better targeted interventions.

The 2024 general election saw an unusually high level of rejected applications, but we do not know why

Once an application is made, it is sent to EROs to carry out checks against current Government data and reject applications due to incomplete or incorrect information, ineligibility, or where an elector is already on the register (a duplicate application). This

data is reported back to the Electoral Commission, who then analyse and publish it in their post-election reports. Data on the reason for the rejection is only available for duplication. This data is also not broken down by demographic. As we have shown above, demographic identity plays an important role in voter engagement, and this information would likely be very valuable for both Government and CSOs seeking to engage underrepresented communities.

Electoral Commission data on rejection rates are set out in the table below. The rates for 2021-2023 (non-general election years) are relatively similar (35.5-40%) and were recorded for local elections in those years. The 2024 general election rejection rate is considerably and unexpectedly higher at 55%.

The majority of these rejections (39% of all applications) were due to duplicate applications, while a further 16% of all applications were either ineligible or incorrect applications. No data on the location or demographics of these applications appears to have been published.

Year	Rejection rate
2021	40.0%
2022	37.0%
2023	35.5%
2024	55.0%

Note that the [Electoral Commission reported](#) that at the 2019 General Election approximately one in three applications was a duplicate – and that the “large number of duplicate applications added unnecessary pressure for EROs and their teams” and that “Only around half of all applications led to an addition to the register”. Far from addressing these high rates, the figures for 2024 have worsened.

Processing such a high number of duplicate applications is extremely time consuming for EROs. For a voter, making a duplicate registration is not a good use of time, and it is inefficient use of limited resource for the CSOs targeting them.

Recommendation

- The Government should investigate why rejection rates were so high at the 2024 general election.
- The Government should require EROs to report in greater detail on the reasons applications are rejected, alongside demographic data.

The Cabinet Office no longer publishes standard KPIs for the UK's voter registration website

The Cabinet Office holds detailed data on the use of all government websites and passes only limited sets of that data to relevant Government departments. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) manages the Register to Vote site where the majority of voter registration applications are made. CSOs are able to track the number of people who they send to the site (for example those who click a link in an online advert, or scan a QR code on a poster), but cannot track how many people completed their application to vote.

The Government hosts a [voter registration dashboard](#). At previous elections, the dashboard provided public access to application completion rates (the number of people who clicked through to the website who went on to complete an application) in 5-minute intervals. This enabled campaigns to make proxy assessments about the impact of their interventions, by comparing the timing of click-throughs to the general completion rate at the time.

[Official Cabinet Office guidance](#) is that online digital services should publish data as frequently as possible, but “at least monthly”. However, in 2024 this information was not available. After the election, as the UK Democracy Fund sought to evaluate the impact of our funding, we asked the Government to provide an average application completion rate across the election period. At time of writing this has not been provided.

Without access to this data, campaigns are only able to estimate their impact. This does not effectively enable them to learn and improve or make the best use of limited resources.

The Government seeks to embrace technology to improve the functioning of the state, committing in “[A blueprint for modern digital government](#)” to a more transparent and accountable set of services, “publishing and acting more on performance data, and doing more of the work of government ‘in the open’ so that people can help shape changes that affect them”. Across all of these examples, better access to data would enable insight into barriers and motivators for broader participation in democracy.

Recommendation

- The Register to Vote service should publish granular completion information for online voter registration applications.
- Government should consult (including with low voting demographics) on safeguards on data handling, consent, security and privacy.

Summary of UK Democracy Fund's recommendations

- The Government should introduce full Automatic Voter Registration before the next general election.
 - UK-wide legislation should be proposed to Parliament in 2025 which would empower EROs to register people without application, where EROs are satisfied that the person is eligible.
 - EROs should be given access to datasets such as the DWP's Customer Information System (CIS) for AVR, and public agencies should be required to provide assisted registration options.
 - Newly enfranchised citizens should be automatically registered as they become eligible for the first time. This will be an essential step in making the Government's commitment to Votes at 16 a success.
 - The Government should move to implement a central register, effectively re-introducing the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) which was originally established in 2006.
 - Options should be piloted UK wide (using UK wide data sets).
- Government should introduce an "Am I registered?" online tool to enable potential voters to check if they are already on the register, to enable efficiency.
- To better protect citizens' privacy and the security of our elections, the Open Register should be abolished.
- The Government should enable an Application Programming Interface to allow data sharing from universities and colleges directly with the Government's voter registration website. This could be introduced as part of wider measures for Automatic and Assisted Voter Registration.
- PACAC should encourage institutions including the BBC to use their reach to encourage voters to ensure they are on the electoral register, have appropriate voter ID, and to turnout to vote on polling day. These are non-partisan public interest activities.
- The Government should require EROs to provide electoral data to the Electoral Commission, who should be required to make the data available to those who need it.
- The Government should investigate how to make relevant electoral registration and turnout data available to CSOs (and others), enabling the sector to learn

more about what has and has not worked to mobilise potential voters. For example –

- Returning Officers should facilitate digital access to the marked register for civil society groups and researchers.
- Electronic poll books should be broadly piloted, enabling digital datasets of who has voted, which could be used to enable CSOs and others to target voter engagement resources more effectively and promote better learning of what works.
- Government should consider if electoral data collected, including ineligible registration applications, could, with the appropriate considerations for privacy concerns, be broken down by demographic to enable better insight into who is unable to take part, allowing for better interventions. It should also be available at constituency, Local Authority and ward level, to enable better targeted interventions.
- The Government should investigate why rejection rates were so high at the 2024 general election.
- The Government should require EROs to report in greater detail on the reasons applications are rejected, alongside demographic data.
- The Register to Vote service should publish granular completion information for online voter registration applications.
- Government should consult (including with low voting demographics) on safeguards on data handling, consent, security and privacy.

A fuller set of recommendations about the use of electoral data have been [set out by James and Bernal](#).