

# Evaluation of the UK Democracy Fund

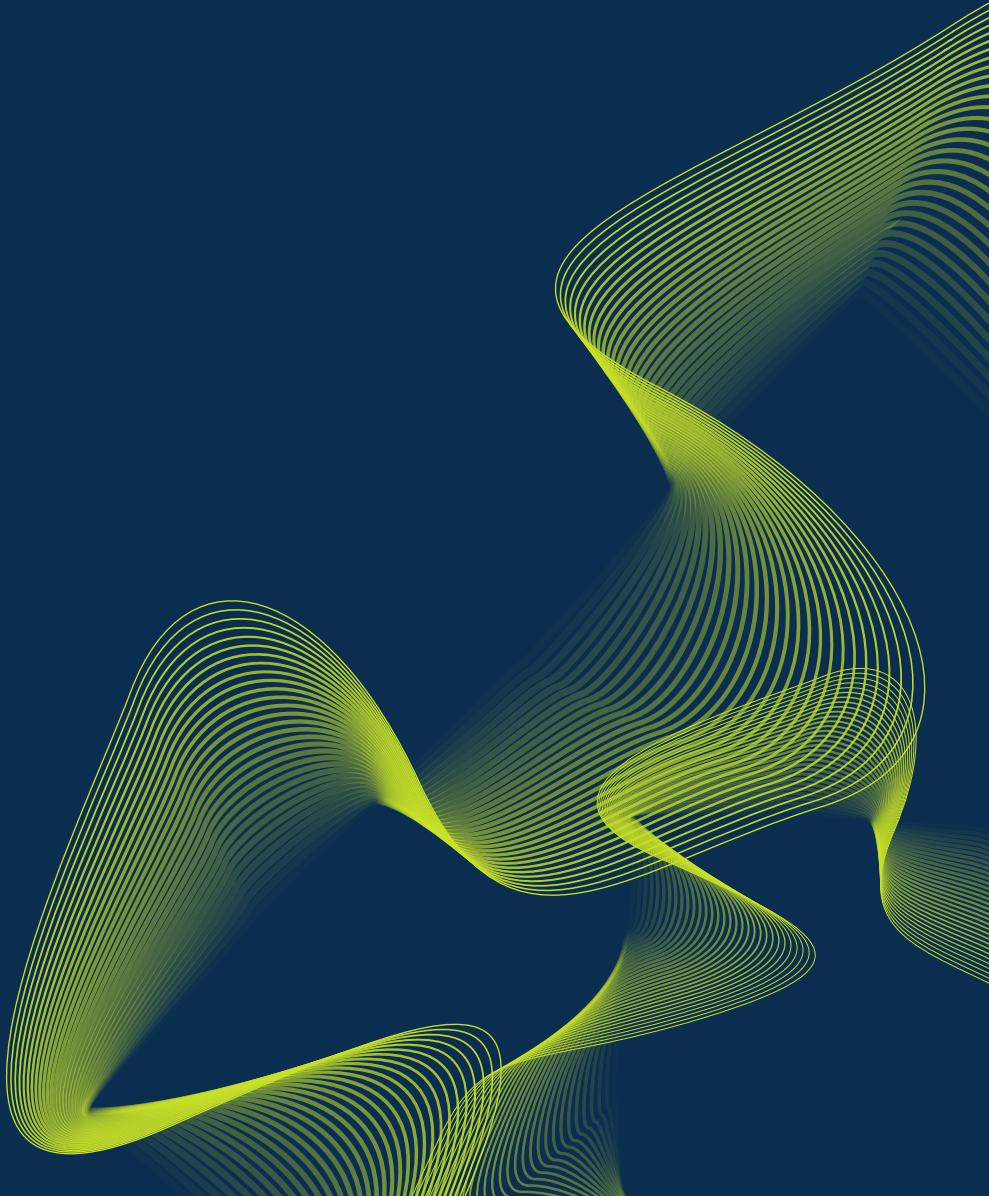
## Final report

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# Executive Summary

The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRRT) commissioned the Policy Institute at King's College London to conduct an independent evaluation of the UK Democracy Fund (the Fund). The Fund is a large-scale, independent and non-partisan pooled fund launched in 2019. It provides resources for initiatives working on electoral participation and electoral systems reform to encourage the engagement of low-propensity voters, to improve representativeness of the electorate, and to increase fairness in democracy. Further details on the Fund's<sup>1</sup> work can be found on their [website](#).

This evaluation explores the impact of the Fund, its grantees and collaborators, with a specific focus on (i) efforts to increase voter registrations, towards a goal of registering a million more voters between the 2019 and 2024 general elections, (ii) its participation in debates around electoral systems reform, and (iii) efforts to generate and use new knowledge for effective public engagement campaigns for elections. Evaluators at the Policy Institute used a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a grantee typology and descriptive analysis, economic analysis, grantees' and stakeholders' interviews, and an in-depth analysis of reports and evidence documents.

**The evaluation shows the Fund has achieved substantial results within all three of its goals** of (i) registering new voters, especially from minoritised and socially marginalised groups, (ii) actively advocating for automatic voter registration (AVR) and for votes at 16, and bringing evidence on the benefit of both reforms, and (iii) growing the evidence base on effective ways to campaign for public engagement with elections, democracy and politics at large, which this report is a part of.

The main limitation of this evaluation is that given constraints in the data environment the evaluators were not able to establish causal evidence linking the Fund's grants and grantees' efforts to the final achieved voter registrations and impact in the ongoing electoral reform debates. Therefore, the findings in this report should be treated as providing descriptive evidence with promise, rather than proof of causal impact.

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<sup>1</sup> The following funders have contributed to the UK Democracy Fund: Barrow Cadbury Trust Ltd (Registered Charity: 1115476.); Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (Registered Charity: 210037); John Ellerman Foundation (Registered Charity: 263207); Scurrah Wainwright Charity (Registered Charity: 1002755); Andrew Wainwright Reform Trust (Company No. 2608087); The Tinsley Charitable Trust (Registered Charity: 1020294); The Blgrave Trust (Registered Charity: 1164021); Unbound Philanthropy and the Family Office (Company No. OC384120); Paul Hamlyn Foundation (Registered Charity: 1102927); Porticus UK (Registered Charity: 1069245); The Symondson Foundation, a giving fund within the Master Charitable Trust (Registered Charity: 1139904). JRRT contributes directly to the Fund and additionally provides the grant management, office and finance services

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## Key findings

### Grants and grantees

The Fund granted £1,881,618 in resources for 49 grants and extensions, reaching minoritised, socially marginalised and disenfranchised voters. Between 2019 and 2024, the Fund's grant pool included a combination of small and large organisations where 74% of grantees primarily working on **campaigning and advocacy**, and 56% focussed on **service delivery**. Of all grantees, 41% centred on working with local communities in the UK, 88% focussed on **increasing participation in elections**, especially by driving new voter registrations, 18% of grants focussed on **enabling people to vote**, and 3% on **extending the right to vote**, and 33% of grantees had some element of **formal or informal learning** as a key part of their activities, contributing to building the evidence base of voter engagement in the UK. One in four projects was a pilot, with the Fund committed to identifying new learnings to reach disenfranchised groups. Grantees served a diversity of groups including **young people (50%)**, **racialised and minoritised communities (36%)**, **migrants and refugees (21%)**, those in **vulnerable housing or renting (11%)**, and **people with learning disabilities and autism (3.5%)**.

### The Fund contribution to voter registration

Grantees of the Fund reported an estimated **750,000 voter registrations completed through their activities**. The Fund's grantees deployed a range of strategies to widen electoral participation of low-propensity voters through both online and in-person initiatives. These include creating digital campaigns, new ads, and new messages, developing political education resources, and expanding their social media presence in multiple languages. To scale up campaigns, grantees built institutional partnerships with schools, universities, civil society, electoral officers, and private companies, organising events like community outreach, online political debates, voter registration days, and integrating discussions on electoral participation into their regular activities.

Grantees took part in learning and coproduction activities embedded in their campaigning, including volunteer training, listening sessions to under-served social groups, coproduction of campaigns' resources and content for public engagement, as well as public opinion surveys and pre-testing before launching campaigns. Efforts also included ongoing knowledge exchange with the Fund and stakeholders to strengthen sector evidence.

### The Fund contribution to electoral system reform

Our evaluation shows that the Fund played a significant role in influencing policy debates on electoral reform, particularly in areas such as votes at 16 and AVR. While identifying the precise impact on legislation and policy change cannot be definitively established in this evaluation, the Fund has established itself as a key player in electoral reform debates.

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Contributions to electoral reform debates include 11 Fund-commissioned reports, earning 28 academic citations and attracting media coverage from major outlets, and citations in the official Hansard record. The reports and the Fund's work also informed submissions to the UK Parliament, Welsh Senedd, and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

Furthermore, five grantees received funds to focus on electoral reform efforts, especially on votes at 16, AVR, and voter ID regulation, sharing evidence with policymakers and engaging key institutions such as the Association of Electoral Administrators, UK and devolved governments.

## Recommendations

Following the positive results highlighted by this analysis, evaluators recommend that **the work of the Fund should continue**. For this aim, the report provides some recommendations that can help identify new opportunities for the Fund and the sector at large.

### Recommendations for the Fund

- **Identifying new ways of working together to tackle new (and old) challenges:** the Fund should continue advising and facilitating stakeholder collaboration. To improve grantees' experiences, the Fund should enhance its own processes to offer more flexible funding options.
- **Keep advancing efforts to collect, share, and leverage evidence to drive impactful voter engagement campaigns:** the Fund should keep championing the collection of robust evidence and it should lead a renewed conversation on a *What Works Centre* for public engagement with democracy, politics, and elections.
- **Work towards better impact evaluation and evidence generation:** the Fund should continue promoting monitoring, evaluation, and learning among grantees. Evaluations could be improved by making reports more traceable, creating more opportunities to collect impact and evidence, improving data quality, embedding data verification processes, and utilising surveys and experiments. These efforts will help with future assessments of the Fund's impact on democratic participation and the effectiveness of grantees' approaches.

### Recommendations for grantees and organisations promoting democratic and electoral participation

- **Strengthening fundraising, data and monitoring capacities:** grantees should allocate more resources and staff time to these activities. Grantees could consider collaborating with universities to help build these capacities cost-effectively.
- **Keep advocating for the shared needs of the sector:** grantees should focus on highlighting two key needs: (i) the importance to keep engaging disadvantaged

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communities into elections and democracy, and (ii) the importance of tackling grantees' operational needs including on staffing and resourcing projects appropriately.

- **More collaboration:** grantees should seek new opportunities for closer collaboration on fundraising, sharing costs, and joint training, while sharing evidence and lessons learned.

## Policy recommendations

- **The case for AVR, and its wider implications:** AVR can break down barriers to political engagement and participation, which is especially powerful for disadvantaged communities. Electoral reform would mean registration-related campaigning resources could be relocated to increasing turnout, political engagement, and democratic education.
- **Making data on voter registration and turnout easier to access and use:** organisations in the sector struggle to access data on registration and turnout which complicates measuring impact. Government bodies, local authorities, the Office for National Statistics and the Electoral Commission should have a clearer and user-friendlier processes to share data to interested stakeholders and researchers, providing relevant demographic breakdowns that allow a better understanding of disenfranchised communities in the UK.
- **Funding the essential work of organisations tackling democratic participation:** with growing levels of political disengagement, the UK government should work with philanthropic organisations to allocate funds to organisations seeking to widen public participation in democracy.

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# Introduction

This report summarises the results from the evaluation that the Policy Institute conducted on the UK Democracy Fund, a pooled fund set up and hosted by Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. This large-scale programme was launched in 2019 to address gaps in electoral participation in the UK, especially for young people, minoritised ethnic groups, those in vulnerable housing or renting, and those with lower incomes or education levels.

The Fund is an independent and non-partisan body aimed at strengthening the integrity and vibrancy of democracy in the UK. Its focus is on participation in elections and on promoting electoral system reform. The Fund has been set up in recognition of how little funding is available to organisations working in this area. The Fund has [three broad goals](#):

1. Enabling everyone to vote.
2. Restoring and extending the franchise.
3. Increasing participation of everyone in our elections.

Another priority of the Fund is to fund new research, and to gather and share evidence with and from civil society organisations (CSOs) and government agencies on what works in voter participation campaigns, and to effectively advocate for electoral reform.

Following the 2024 General Election, the Policy Institute at King's College London was commissioned to evaluate the impact of the resources the Fund allocated through 49 grants and extensions across campaigns and initiatives from 33 grantees. Grantees' work was carried out in partnership with other stakeholders and research institutions. Taking a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation explored the Fund's impact both quantitatively and qualitatively, identifying strengths and areas of improvement, as well as key lessons. Table 1 summarises the research questions identified by the research team, as well as how specific methods were used to address them. More detail on the evaluation approach undertaken can be found in the [Appendix](#).

The main limitation of this evaluation's methodological approach is that due to data constraints it is not possible to identify and estimate the causal link between activities funded, voter registration rates, and participation in debates around electoral reform. Looking specifically at vote registrations, the work of the Fund has recognisably improved the quality and quantity of data collected from grantees and their impact monitoring approach. The practices promoted by the Fund are recognisable as an important guide for the sector at large. Yet, with the current data provided by the Fund, the funded grantees, and the data from UK government agencies, it was not possible to identify the achieved causal effect of the Fund's grants.

With these limitations in mind, results in this report should not be interpreted in a strictly causal way, and instead should be considered more cautiously as an effort to describe approaches and results, suggesting potential links between the two. That said, this report still



presents the most robust evidence of the impact of the Fund within the data constraints and reporting capacity. This report also represents an important improvement in gathering and systematising evidence around campaigns to increase voter registrations in the UK.

**Table 1: Research Questions**

Research questions	Qualitative analysis	Descriptive analysis	Economic analysis	Impact inventory
What is the overall impact of the UK Democracy Fund on registration rates and turnout ?	X	X		X
What is the overall impact of the UK Democracy Fund on advocacy for electoral reform ?	X	X		X
What are the profiles of grantees and interventions funded by the Fund, and their characteristics ?		X	X	
What is the estimated cost of each registration and vote and how does it vary across grantees type ?			X	
What are the drivers of potential impact of the interventions?	X			X

## The importance of increasing voter registrations and voter turnout in the UK

Increasing voter registration and turnout is widely recognised as essential for reducing political inequalities and strengthening the quality of democracy ([Lijphart, 1999](#); [Norris, 2004](#)). Four key groups face notably lower participation rates in voter registration and turnout in the UK: **young people** ([Marsh et al., 2006](#); [Ehsan, 2018](#); [Uberoi et al., 2022](#)); **those with lower educational attainment and low incomes** ([Coates et al., 2024](#); [Fox, 2024](#); [Ansell et al., 2022](#)); **minoritised ethnic/racial groups** ([Martin, 2015](#); [Sobolewska et al., 2021](#); [Uberoi et al., 2022](#)); and **those in insecure housing** ([Slee et al., 2023](#); [Singh et al., 2024](#)). Amongst these groups, turnout disparities are said to have reached a “[tipping point](#)”, with efforts to expand the franchise and increase participation becoming vital to preserve the legitimacy of the UK electoral system.

Young people are less likely to register to vote and vote, compared to older people. In 2018, 25% of 16–17-year-old, 66% of 18–19-year-old, and 68% of 20–24-years-old were registered to vote, compared with 94% of those aged 65 and over ([Uberoi et al., 2022](#)). Likewise, data from the British Election Study (BES) from 2015, 2017, and 2019 show 80–85% electoral turnout among those aged 75 and over, compared to 48–52% among 18–24-year-old ([BES, 2021](#)). Low voter participation is also prevalent among those with lower educational attainment, from low-income backgrounds, and those who are renters. Turnout gaps between graduates and non-graduates in UK general elections have widened – from

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5.2% in 2017 to 11.2% in 2024 ([IPPR, 2025](#)). Since education can reflect socio-economic status ([Bolton et al., 2024](#)), it is perhaps not surprising that low-income voters have traditionally had lower turnout and registration levels as well. A 2022 IFS report shows that the poorest groups in the UK were 20% less likely to vote than the richest group in the period 2010-2019 ([Ansell et al., 2022](#)). Likewise looking at housing tenure, the turnout gap between renters and homeowners has grown from 15.1% in 2017, to 16.5% in 2019, and 19.3% in 2024 ([IPPR, 2025](#)). Renters, often facing unstable or precarious living conditions, may have their housing needs overlooked in policymaking due to low voter turnout.

Lastly, racialised and minoritised ethnic groups face significant barriers to political participation ([Sobolewska et al., 2021](#)). A 2019 Parliamentary Research briefing report revealed that 25% of first-generation migrants from minority ethnic groups and 20% of second-generation individuals eligible to vote had not registered, compared to 10% of the white population ([Uberoi et al., 2019](#)). An IPPR report further found that the constituencies with low turnout in the 2024 General Election also had higher proportion of people from minoritised ethnic groups in their populations ([Patel et al., 2024](#)).

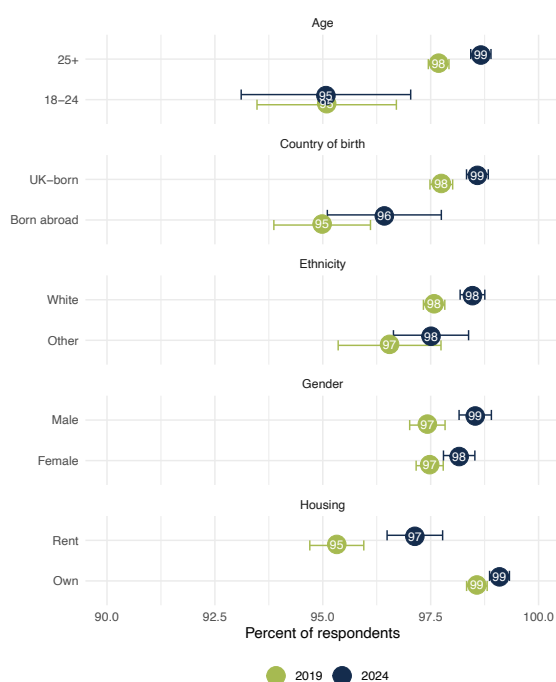
## The 2024 General Election – context and insights from the British Election Study

The year 2024 has been called a time of “[political disruption](#)”, marked by significant elections and political events worldwide, including general elections held in the United Kingdom and the United States, plus new elections for the European Parliament. In the UK, the 2024 General Election was the first with requirements for voters to show [identification at polling stations](#), and the first since all overseas voters were [eligible to vote irrespective of their time of residence abroad](#). This election is notable as it had the third lowest turnout since 1918, with the largest observed drop in turnout rate since 1918 ([-7.6% compared to 2019](#)), [with 48.2 million people registered to vote, 600,000 more than the 47.6 million registered in 2019](#), and media reports throughout the electoral campaign about new [registrations failing to materialise for overseas citizens](#) and for [younger citizens](#).

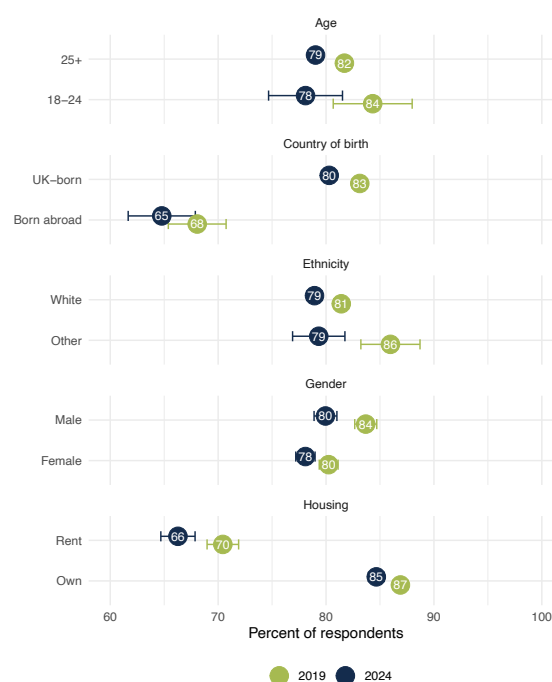
The [BES](#) provides valuable insight into electoral participation, particularly through its regular question on voter registration. In a July 2024 survey, conducted the day before the General Election, 97.6% of respondents reported being registered to vote, a slight but statistically significant increase from 96.2% in 2019. Within the overall registration figure, BES data show significant differences for registration rates across sociodemographic groups relevant to the work of the Fund. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below show registration rates and self-reported turnout rates for key groups.

The dots represent the percentage of people in each category who said they were registered (Figure 1) or turned out (Figure 2) to vote in 2019 (green) and 2024 (blue), bars around the dot offer a margin of error.

**Figure 1: Self-reported registration rates' change between 2019 and 2024 general elections– BES survey data.**



**Figure 2: Self-reported election turnout rates' change between 2019 and 2024 general– BES survey data.**



On registration rates, younger people were 3.5 percentage points less likely to say they are registered to vote, as were those who rent (-1.9 percentage points) compared to homeowners, those from an ethnic background different from white (-0.9 percentage points) compared to those who identified as white, and those who were born abroad (-2.1 percentage points), compared to those born in the UK. Turnout decreased significantly across these groups between 2019 and 2024, but evidence from regression models also shows significantly sharper decreases for respondents from racialised and minoritised ethnic groups, women, renters, and those born outside the UK. This is the context within which the Fund's grantees employed a variety of campaigning and public engagement strategies to increase participation in the 2024 election.

## Evaluation Results

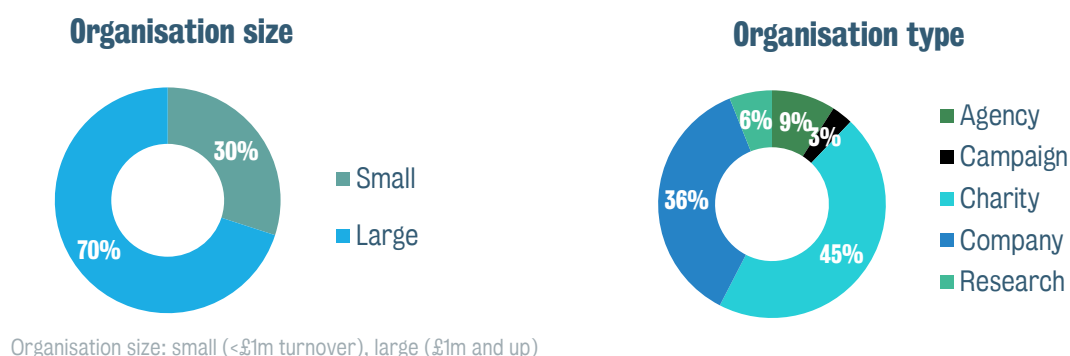
### UK Democracy Fund grantees: descriptive analysis and grantee typology

#### Grantee characteristics

This evaluation includes information on 33 grantees, who received a total of 49 grants and extensions. Figure 3 shows the grantee population included a mix of large (70%) and small

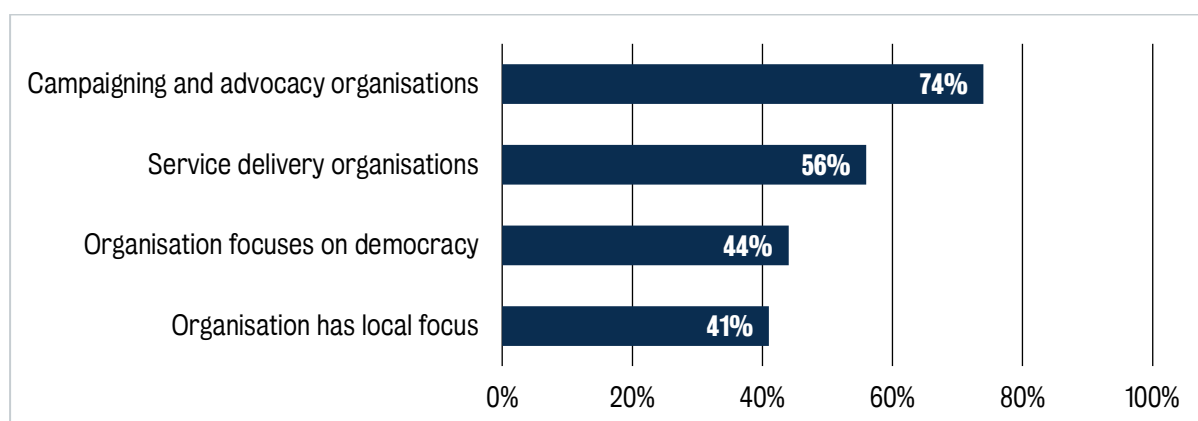
(30%) organisations, and different types of organisations, with the most common being organisations with charity status, and private companies serving the public interest.

**Figure 3: Grantee population – organisations’ characteristics**

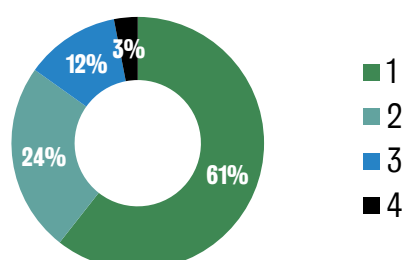


As presented in Figure 4, 74% of the funded grantees are primarily **campaign and advocacy organisations**, with a further 56% involved in **service delivery**. Of all grantees, 44% of organisations’ **missions** directly referred to **democratic participation**, and 41% of grantees had a focus on working with **local communities** across the UK.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 4: Grantee population – organisations’ approaches**



**Figure 5: Grantee population – number of grants and extensions**



<sup>2</sup> Characteristics are not mutually exclusive; organisations can fulfil one or more of these criteria.

In total, organisations included in the evaluation received **£1,881,618** in grants, with an average grant budget of **£57,019** (£67,569 if pilot projects are excluded), with budgets ranging between **£1,700** and **£334,626**. Six in ten organisations got one grant, with the remaining grantees receiving two to four grants, including extensions, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 6 shows the key goals pursued by grantees. Of all grantees, **88% focussed on increasing participation in elections<sup>3</sup>**, especially by driving new voter registrations, which are at the core of our quantitative impact evaluation. A further **18% of grants focussed on enabling people to vote**, and **3% on extending the right to vote**, which is discussed in a later section. **On top of the official goals**, **33% of grantees had some element of formal or informal learning** as a key part of their activities, to contribute to the Fund's priority of building the knowledge and evidence base of voter engagement in the UK.

**Figure 6: Grantee pool – UK Democracy Fund goals**

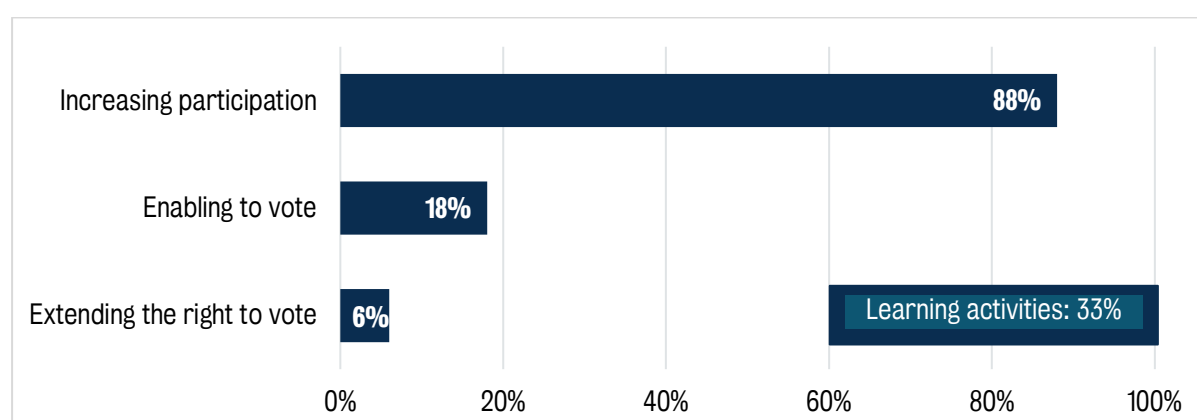
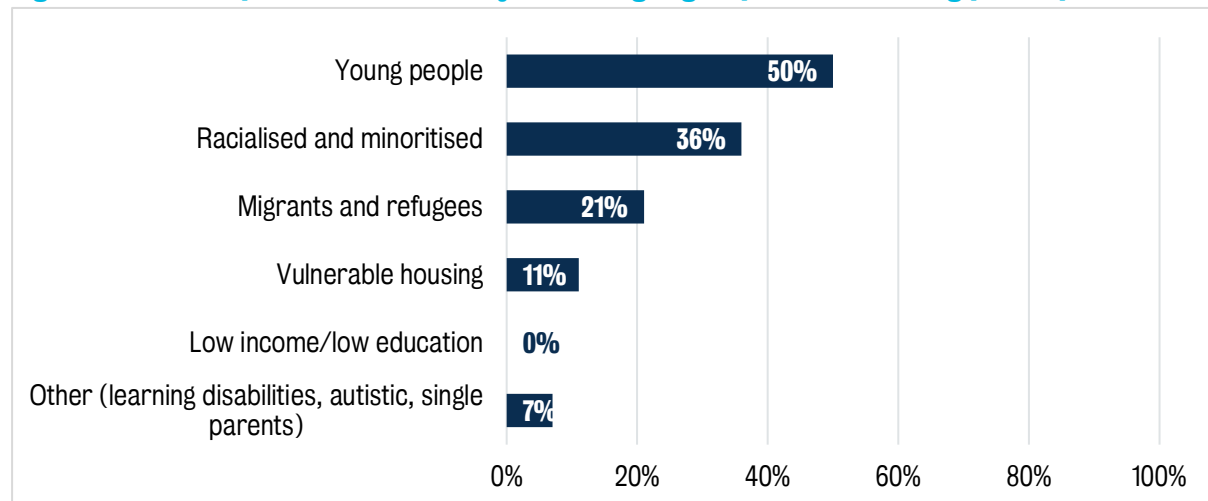


Figure 7 shows the target groups that grantees aimed to engage in voter registration campaigns. **One in two grantees focussed on young people**, with projects targeting both 16-17-year-old groups for early registration, and in view of the extended right to vote in Wales for younger citizens, and individuals aged 18-24 across the UK. A further **36% of grantees targeted minoritised ethnic communities**, **21% targeted migrants and refugees**. While **11% of grantees focussed on those in vulnerable housing** and a further **two grantees (7%) focussed on individuals with learning disabilities or with autism spectrum disorders**, and **single parents**. No grantee directly reported targeting low income and low education social groups, although some anecdotal evidence from the Fund's leadership show that they were indirectly targeted through the other groups mentioned above.

<sup>3</sup> Conversations with the Fund's management showed that this is reflective of a deliberate strategic decision made by the Fund in the lead up to the General Election, rather than the overall Fund's working priorities.

**Figure 7: Grantee pool – UK Democracy Fund target groups for increasing participation**



## Voter registrations

Within the key goal of increasing electoral participation, the Fund has worked with grantees to estimate the number of individuals registered to vote as part of Fund-backed campaigns, and more broadly to champion a culture of robust impact and evaluation monitoring. In an extremely constrained data environment, the Fund developed a counting methodology to help grantees estimate the number of registrations achieved by grantees towards a goal to register one million new voters. After a positive assessment of the counting methodology, estimations provided by the Fund following its methodology can be considered of the highest quality currently available. However, it must be noted that these figures represent a broad estimate due to the data limitations and should not be treated as definitive evidence of the Fund's impact.

The methodology was developed based on considerations around available data, and included rates applied to adjust estimated registration to keep into account that registration application could be incomplete or rejected (including duplicates). The complete methodology is available [online](#). Based on a range of higher or lower completion and rejection rates, the Fund produced low and high case scenarios for total voter registration figures achieved, including registrations from direct contact with grantee campaigners, and the number of click-throughs to the government website monitored in digital campaigns. Voter registrations reported by grantees were classified in high, medium, and low confidence groups to increase transparency for data users.

Table 2 summarises the estimated number of registrations in a lower and upper scenario,<sup>4</sup> as reported in the methodological documentation provided by the Fund.

<sup>4</sup> These were created by the Fund to provide two estimates with higher or lower completion and rejection rates applied to voter registrations reported by grantees.

**Table 2: UK Democracy Fund's estimation of impact on voter registrations**

Data type	Lower range/scenario	Higher range/scenario
<b>Verified data</b>		
Digital	290,000	370,000
Non-digital verified data	9,000	9,000
<b>Total registrations</b>	<b>300,000</b>	<b>380,000</b>
<b>Share of total registrations</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Unverified data</b>		
Self-reported	7,000	7,000
Estimated	400,000	400,000
<b>Total registrations</b>	<b>410,000</b>	<b>410,000</b>
<b>Share of total registrations</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>710,000</b>	<b>790,000</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>750,000</b>	

In total, taking the mean of the lower and higher range estimations, grantees reported 746,442 new voter registrations. This figure is reported as 750,000, as the closest, meaningful, rounded-up estimate to give a sense of the number of voter registrations achieved towards the goal of registering one million new voters.

Regression models using the grantee typology show some characteristics of grantees are significantly associated with higher or lower reported voter registrations. First, organisations who engage in **campaigning activities**, who focus on the **promotion of democracy**, and those targeting **young people** reported a significantly higher number of registrations, whereas organisations focussing on **local communities** and those who target **migrants and refugees**, or those in **vulnerable housing or who rent** reported a significantly lower number of registrations. Anecdotally, grantee reports suggest successful projects targeting young people benefited from scaling up campaigns on digital platforms, building institutional partnerships, coproduction activities, and training of campaigning ambassadors to increase peer-to-peer interactions. On the other hand, many grantees working with minoritised communities faced substantial engagement barriers due to deep mistrust towards public institutions and politicians. These findings are discussed in more detail in the **Grantees' learnings and experiences** section.

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## Economic evaluation

### Funding allocation

Regression analysis is used to examine the relationship between grantee characteristics and the total resources granted.<sup>5</sup> These results highlight key patterns in the Fund's resource allocation and should not be interpreted as implying that specific characteristics were necessarily “preferred” when funding decisions were taken by the Fund’s leadership.

Regression models show that **grantees whose approach include campaigning and advocacy activity** (receiving 214% higher funding compared to all other grantees) **and those whose mission explicitly included the promotion of democratic participation** (+194%) **received significantly higher grant funding**. On the other hand, organisations focussing on **local communities** (-75%), or **seeking to extend the right to vote** (-69%) received significantly lower funding. While the JRRT strategy included provisions to only fund national campaigns, exceptions were made within the UK Democracy Fund to fund a small number of pilot projects for learning purposes, which received on average 64% lower funding than non-pilot projects, due to their nature.

### Funding and voter registrations

Regression models showed a **positive association between total budgets and registrations reported**<sup>6</sup>: organisations with budgets of £10,000 or less on average reported 211 voter registrations, compared to 86,061 reported on average by organisations with budgets of £50,000 or more. This is less a causal finding, and more a pattern that describes the variety of projects backed by the Fund, from small-scale pilots aimed at reaching very specific groups, to larger projects that sought to scale up campaigning using digital and online communications, or expand their reach through institutional partnerships.

Another way to investigate the relationship between resources and voter registrations is to use a **pound-per-registration ratio** measure, which shows the estimated cost for each registration reported. Given the fact that voter registration numbers are estimated, the ratio is less a grantee and Fund performance-and-efficiency indicator, and more useful as a way to show the variety and evolution of the types of projects supported by the Fund. Considering the ratio of the total granted budget over the total number of registrations (higher and lower estimates), the figure shows a **ratio of £2.28 per registration**. **This is an average between £2.46 per registration, using the lower registration estimates, and £2.09, using the higher estimates**. Ratios were higher for pilot projects (£44.89). Conversations with the Fund’s

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<sup>5</sup> The JRRT makes information about the broader set of grants it provides on <https://grantnav.threesixtygiving.org/org/GB-COH-00357963>

<sup>6</sup> The analysis uses the higher estimates of registrations provided by the Fund for this modelling and to calculate other indicators in this section. The association was positive in statistical models even when controlling for factors including the goals, target populations, and whether the grantee engaged in pilot projects.

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leadership showed that this was in line with expectations that reaching different disengaged communities would entail different costs, reflecting different community-specific engagement needs. Descriptively, ratios also fell over time, going from a maximum of £184.06 per registration in 2020 to a minimum of £1.45 in 2023.

## Results enabled by the Fund's resources

### Digital campaigns

Most grantees engaged in some form of digital campaign, with activities including:

- **Generating large amounts of digital political information content:** from videos on how to [register and to vote](#), highlighting [national and regional issues](#), using [influencers as messengers](#), and using [more artistic frames](#), often youth-led or coproduced to increase their authenticity for desired target audiences. These resources were shared on [social media platforms](#), including [Instagram](#), and remain available on [grantee websites](#). Digital campaigns included [webinars](#), [online hustings](#), and information events.
- **Scaling up presence on social media:** the Fund's resources made it possible for grantees to invest and grow their presence online, allowing for more regular engagement with their audiences, especially to mitigate the effect of Covid-19.
- **Testing and scaling messages and mediums:** grantees noted that digital campaigns allowed them to collaborate with stakeholders to coproduce more authentic content, and to work with researchers and digital agencies to scale up.

### Learning and coproduction

Grantees' reports showed that learning has been a reflexive and continuous process throughout grantees' engagement with the Fund. Out of 33 grantees, three directly mentioned using the Fund's learning materials to inform their campaigning or generate new evidence. Anecdotal evidence from the Fund's leadership suggested that learning activities implicitly happened throughout the grant periods, including workshops on resources allocation and impact monitoring. Grantees' learning strategies included piloting approaches, reviewing available evidence and sharing best practices, with some grantees developing more structured evaluation and learning activities. The Fund acted as an effective convenor, providing opportunities for knowledge exchange including a day-long **Voter Registrations Lessons Learned** event held in October 2024.

Learning happened through coproduction activities embedded in campaigning approaches, including volunteer training, sessions to understand the perspective of under-served social groups, coproducing campaigns' resources for public engagement, public opinion surveys, and pre-testing campaigns to build an evidence base. Volunteer, staff and campaign "champions" training was seen as key to long-term impact, as trained volunteers and staff

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members could keep advocating for political engagement beyond the life of the grant/campaign alone.

## Events and campaigns

Grantees delivered numerous events including training sessions, listening sessions, registration days, evidence-sharing sessions and briefings with decisionmakers, picnics, community barbecues, hustings, livestreams, information sessions, conferences, event stalls, and more. Notably, many events were delivered even in the face of the severe social distancing constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, with grantees pivoting a large part of their activities online. This involved online hustings, calling and emailing campaigns, and, when in-person socialising returned, significant efforts to amplify in-person activities via social media, as reported in all grantees' documents.

The events included:

- **Voting Resources for Refugee Communities in Scotland**, an online event organised by Scottish Refugee Council, the Electoral Commission and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
- **The Privilege Café**, an online session part of a larger series organised by Boys' and Girls' Club Wales
- An impressive variety of online and in-person outreach campaigns including **WeVote** (formerly **SheVotes**) organised by POMOC, Migrant Democracy Project and New Europeans to mobilise Eastern Europeans, the **100% Registered** campaign by Citizens UK, and **#OurHomeOurVote** (the 3million) to mobilise EU voters in May 2021 local elections.

## Media coverage

The impact of grantees' activities is reflected in extensive media coverage, both locally and nationally. The reports of three grantees mentioned their focus on media coverage and relationships, including:

- **Scottish Refugee Council**: reported coverage including BBC Scotland, [Scottish election 2021: Right to vote 'changes my life'](#), says Syrian refugee, broadcast piece by Davy Shanks on voting rights.
- **United Response**: reported building partnerships with Channel 4, ITV, and BBC, notably producing content for broadcast on 18 June encouraging people to register before the voter registration deadline.
- **My Life My Say**: reported coverage for Give an X on the [Daily Mirror](#), [Independent](#), [Observer](#), [Daily Mail](#), and [Rolling Stone](#).

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## Impact on the electoral reform agenda

The Fund has evidenced robust presence in the policy debates around votes at 16 and AVR, through commissioned reports, and the work of grantees campaigning for electoral reform. While the evidence cannot causally conclude how much the Fund directly contributed to potential legislative changes, which are yet to unfold as this report is written, the Fund's and grantees' efforts likely played a notable role in advancing the conversation toward reform and informing Party manifesto commitments.

### UK Democracy Fund commissioned and authored reports

This report focuses on evidencing impact generated by 11 key reports, either directly published by the Fund, or commissioned to organisations including IPPR, the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath, the Universities of Edinburgh, East Anglia, Sheffield, and Nottingham Trent. These reports looked at topics including electoral participation (including turnout patterns amongst young voters and minoritised ethnic communities), making the case for the extension of the franchise to 16-17-years-old and for AVR, as well as looking at challenges related to the electoral data democratic deficit in the UK. In total, records on Google Scholar show these reports gained 28 citations in a variety of academic publications and reports. All 11 reports attracted high levels of attention in the media, including in the [Independent](#), the [Guardian](#), the [BBC](#), and on the websites of [think tanks](#) and [third sector organisations](#), and independent bodies including the [Electoral Commission](#). The Fund promoted the work of grantees and of organisations advocating for reforms in the media, including discussing [AVR](#), [voter registration](#), and the [approach behind the Fund](#).

### Impact in political institutions: evidence submissions and resources for policymakers

Grantees and the Fund have been actively submitting evidence to political institutions. Two reports by Toby James and colleagues looking at AVR and the democratic data deficit were at the base of multiple submissions of evidence to the UK Parliament, submitted by the [Patchwork Foundation](#), and the Welsh Senedd, submitted directly by the reports' authors. Two additional submissions of evidence are available online from 2018-2019 submitted by JRRT, one on [voter registration efforts](#), and one on the importance of rebuilding public trust in politics and public institutions. More recently, in 2025, the Fund's leadership also made two evidence submissions, one presenting a [plan on how to implement AVR](#), and one on [reaching low-propensity voters, advocating for AVR, and highlighting the challenges with the current electoral data environment](#), both submitted as part of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee review of the 2024 General Election.

The CEO of JRRT provided evidence about the barriers for potential voters to register in the [Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee](#) as well. Finally, worth noting is a

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direct mention of the Fund on the [POST website in 2024](#), as part of resources for policymakers who seek to understand the reason for low turnout in UK elections.

Beyond parliamentary records, evidence of impact in other institutions was also included in this evaluation. This includes the Fund-backed report “London Voices”, for which there was collaboration with local government in London, including on the [GLA Democracy Hub](#), and in third-sector organisations including the [Trust for London](#).

## Grantee projects campaigning for reform

Five grantees delivered projects advocating for electoral reform or worked on enabling people to vote, focussing on votes at 16, AVR, regulation around voter ID, and on the work of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) seeking to engage disenfranchised groups. Three out of five grantees focussed on gathering and sharing new evidence with policymakers and civil servants, engaging with institutions including the Association of Electoral Administrators, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Fair Elections, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and policymakers in Wales and Scotland.

Two campaigns focussed on directly influencing decisionmakers, including to gain support from MPs to bring forward legislation for votes at 16, and advocating for AVR through petitions and direct contact with MPs. The reports highlight engagement with the Labour shadow government, which committed to introducing [votes at 16 legislation in their 2024 General Election Manifesto](#), and expressed interest in [including AVR in future reforms after the elections](#).

## Grantees’ learnings and experiences

### Learnings from grantees’ reports – voter registration campaigns

This section summarises the key learnings from grantees’ reports focussing on emerging themes that are commonly observed across different grantees and grant types.

#### Learning from campaigns: from effective strategies to address key challenges

**Partnerships:** grantees viewed strong partnerships with other grantees, funders, schools, community organisations and government organisations as crucial for campaign reach and impact, highlighting the Fund’s role as a key convener in this space.

**Non-partisanship:** grantees saw impartiality as a driver of effectiveness in campaigns, enabling a more authentic and transparent communication style to engage the public.

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**Young people's engagement:** co-creation with young people<sup>7</sup> was seen as particularly crucial to create relevant and engaging campaigns. Grantees noted the need for more evidence to understand young people's experiences and perspectives, and how campaigns can reflect this.

**Refugee and migrants' voter engagement:** grantees working with these groups highlighted the importance of language-specific resources to engage unregistered voters. Grantees reported a need for deeper political education and organising to improve participation.

**Digital campaigning as an add-on and not a replacement to in-person activities:** while digital campaigns were seen as effective to scale up campaign reach, grantees still saw in-person engagement as more effective, especially in education contexts, and with disenfranchised minoritised communities. Grantees noted that digital campaigning does not reduce pressures around the need for financial resources and staffing in their organisations.

## Campaigning challenges

**Lack of resources:** a common theme across grantees' reports is that organisations engaging disenfranchised groups often lack the financial resources and staff for long-term campaigns, with funding mostly only available in the short term, often near elections.

**The impact of health and economic crises:** the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have made campaigning more difficult between 2019 and 2024. Grantees said that volunteers were harder to engage, and events were harder to organise as target populations' concerns switched to addressing the most pressing issues at hand.

**Campaign flexibility:** as grantees had to tackle an unexpectedly early general election announcement, they highlighted importance of having flexible campaigns capable to adapt to changing political events and time frames.

## Obstacles in the administrative and data environments

**Administrative hurdles and barriers:** grantees said that administrative requirements pose significant barriers both for voters and organisations seeking to engage the public with elections. Potential voters are mistrusting of systems asking for personal information, do not remember their National Insurance Numbers, and those who move frequently to new areas are burdened by the need to re-register. Even grantees sometimes reported struggling to engage with the EROs' administrative systems, including to find accurate data to reach target populations. They reported difficulties with the systems of universities and other educational institutions, an especially salient challenge for projects who trained ambassadors, who lacked the skills to deal with complex administrative systems. Administrative burdens were a salient issue for projects who sought to engage people with disabilities or mental health conditions for whom the administrative barriers were seen as especially punitive.

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<sup>7</sup> While young people were a key target audience for many Fund-backed campaigns, co-creation was also used in campaigns targeting renters and refugees who were not registered to vote.

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**Monitoring and evaluation:** while grantees argued that capturing impact and continuously learning from their efforts can be resource intensive, they also agree that better monitoring and evaluation systems are important to create a strong evidence base for effective engagement campaigns across the sector. While monitoring requires improving internal systems and data collection, these processes could be made easier and less resource intensive if grantees can have more accessible data sources from government agencies.

## Public perceptions of politics and elections

**Public perceptions of politics:** grantees reported a general sense that the public, especially in minoritised groups, are cynical, distrustful, and unaware when it comes to politicians and politics. This turns into feelings of apathy and mistrust in government, and a general unwillingness to elect representatives who are seen as not caring. Apathy also means that the public is unwilling seek further political education or opportunities to get involved in politics and elections. Nevertheless, despite widespread cynicism and lack of trust, grantees still found the public feel that voting is important.

**Effective strategies to challenge negative perceptions:** grantees highlighted three feasible strategies to challenge these perceptions: (i) building direct, personal, non-partisan relationships with disengaged voters, (ii) building continuous community presence, embedding conversations about elections within existing contexts and activities, and (iii) delivering engagement programmes in authentic, culturally competent ways.

## Learnings from interviews – working with the UK Democracy Fund

This section provides an overview of grantee experiences working with the Fund, highlighting both positive aspects of the Fund's approach, especially their supportive approach, involvement, flexibility, and approach to learning and feedback, and areas for potential improvement, especially around time commitment, administrative burden, and funding and staffing.

### Support

The Fund was often described as supportive and involved, both during the application process, and the development of projects. First, grantees highlighted that the Fund's leadership was approachable and open to organise meetings, including in more informal settings, which several grantees noted was unusual from funders. Second, they felt the Fund genuinely listened and took note of their concerns and perspectives, highlighting keenness to learn about what works, and how best to support grantees. Third, grantees felt they could be open and honest, and said the Fund nurtured friendly and collaborative relationships. Fourth, grantees felt the Fund gave helpful advice, especially on democracy and campaigning issues, and helped by connecting them with stakeholders and experts. Grantees noted that the board and senior Fund/JRRT figures were less visible and suggested more

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feedback and direct involvement would be helpful to improve understanding of the JRRT and the Fund's overall strategic objectives.

## Flexibility and trust

The Fund was often described as flexible, understanding and hands-off by grantees when they needed to be responsive to learnings and external circumstances such as Covid-19 and snap elections. Grantees said that the Fund had been understanding about plan changes and reduced capacity to deliver on original objectives, and felt reassured with the support of the Fund. Grantees appreciated the Fund's "enabling" approach, focussing on aims and objectives, while still being flexible on changes to their approach based on results from initial pilots and new learnings. Voter registration targets were seen as useful, with grantees reporting experiencing no pressure from the Fund to reach originally agreed number targets. However, one grantee said that they felt numerical targets should have been changed once the snap election was called, and when it appeared that advertising costs had increased.

## Feedback and learning approach

Grantees appreciated that the Fund listened to their learnings and feedback, rather than just looking at numbers such as registrations achieved. Grantees felt the Fund was clearly interested in learning and gaining insight from them, especially when it came to learning more about reasons for not voting across target groups. The Fund was seen as keen to see progress reports and case studies. In this context, several grantees thought it was perplexing to have a two-page limit on regular reporting, as they did not feel this space was enough to convey the fullness of their activities, efforts, and learning, with many aspects having to be left out. On the other hand, it should be noted that other grantees, while they did not mention it directly, appreciated the relatively "light touch" reporting requirements, so grantees are likely to need flexibility.

## Time commitment and administrative burden

Some grantees expressed the view that the Fund expected too much time commitment from them, both in the application process and the project delivery. They highlighted the burden experienced from providing a large amount of information through reporting and feedback, and to attend events and meetings, sometimes at short notice. These grantees felt the time and resources necessary to do this were not necessarily covered by the grant received and some felt it was an additional expectation, or at least one that had not been clearly communicated at the outset. This view was particularly strong among smaller organisations or organisations with smaller grants, who felt there was insufficient consideration of the cost and time demands on them compared to larger organisations, noting the disconnect between receiving a smaller amount of funding but facing the same meeting and commitment requirements. On the other hand, interviews showed larger organisations tended to be more enthusiastic about the networking and strategy meetings.



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## Funding and staffing challenges

Many grantees reported they struggled with staffing and resourcing on their grants. To address this, grantees had to spend more than the expected time and resources delivering planned activities, borrowing time from other staff members, and working overtime. The importance of having a paid coordinator role was raised both by organisations that had not funded a coordinator through their grant, and those that had. Lack of staffing and funding was often seen as a sectoral issue, also seen in other organisations evaluators spoke to, including in our conversations with EROs. Grantees often argued that their Fund-backed projects had been less effective because of low funding and staffing. This significantly affected organisations working with multiple competing priorities, particularly those who did not primarily work in the democracy space. Additionally, the squeezed timeline due to the snap election meant that grantees had to try and deliver the same amount of work in less time, without any real spare capacity to do so.

## Learning from interviews – programme delivery

This section will focus on grantee learnings and experiences of programme delivery, focussing on the key themes arising from the interviews with grantees and other stakeholders.

### Staff recruitment and turnover

Grantees and stakeholders said that the charity and democracy sector is experiencing significant challenges with high staff turnover, caused by several factors. While some are outside the control of organisations such as the Fund, others are a direct result of short-term grants such as those provided by the Fund itself. Short-term grants mean organisations hire key people into short-term and often part-time contracts, with low pay and in-work benefits. Several grantees had likewise experienced losing fixed-term contract staff to new jobs as the extension to their funding had come too late to retain them.

Many grantees described these contracts as “unattractive”, “undesirable”, and “hard to recruit for”, especially to ideal candidates with high levels of skills, knowledge, and experience on democratic participation or community outreach. Within funding constraints, grantees said they instead tended to attract university graduates, with substantial needs for training, and sometimes prone to underperforming or lacking motivation on their job. Most importantly, with contracts only running for a short term, efforts to train and upskill staff were regularly lost to organisations at the end of their projects, as workers move on to new jobs. At other times, grantees reported that they struggled to recruit due to tight timelines, including not being able to effectively recruit the right people, or to find, onboard, and train replacements for leavers or underperformers sufficiently quickly before the end of a grant project. High turnover additionally prevented grantees from planning ahead and having longer-term strategies due to a lack of consistently available workers.



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Grantees and other organisations interviewed reported ways to mitigate this issue, including: (i) raising money from other sources to move their staff from part-time to full-time contracts, including seeking extensions and longer-term funding from the Fund itself, (ii) seeking to produce internal documents and “playbooks” documenting how to approach general and local elections, aiming to build up institutional knowledge that could be transferred to the next person in the job<sup>8</sup>, and (iii) working with unpaid volunteers and freelancers, often young people to fill staff gaps. Grantees still reported that it had been difficult to maintain volunteers’ and freelancers’ engagement and prevent burnout as they were not necessarily as strongly committed or willing to take ownership of their work. Grantees especially felt this was an issue as they believed effective community engagement required staff to be invested in the outcomes. One of these grantees said their key learning from the programme was to budget for paid work opportunities for any future programme, and in fact those grantees who had been able to pay more casual staff, such as people doing on-street engagement and sitting on steering groups, reported that this had been an important element behind their projects’ success.

## Political neutrality

Regulations for electoral campaigning required grantees to use carefully neutral messaging as part of their efforts to reach the public. Interviewed grantees demonstrated a strong awareness of this requirement in their voting registration and broader democracy work with the Fund. Grantees adopted several measures to maintain impartiality, including:

- *Training staff and volunteers* to ensure they could facilitate non-partisan discussions and encourage voter registration neutrally. However, there were some concerns about inadvertently influencing voters, especially if they had low political literacy themselves.
- *Balanced social media advertising* by targeting different regional and local areas within which support for different parties varies.
- *Sharing and applying guidance from the Electoral Commission.*
- *Inclusive events and panels*, where grantees made sure to include candidates from all major parties, and guaranteed cross-party representation in steering groups.
- *Neutral voter registration processes*, with grantees often using QR codes to direct users to the official voter registration website.

Grantees reported that the campaign before the 2024 General Election had been especially politically charged, which had made non-partisan engagement more difficult. For instance, some grantees working with ethnic minorities and migrant communities found that issues such as the Middle East conflict and the Dianne Abbott suspension from the Labour Party dominated conversations, particularly in constituencies where MPs had taken notable stances on these topics.

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that grantees felt there was only so much a playbook could do to transfer knowledge across workers and in time, particularly in changing political environments.

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Neutrality was an opportunity for some grantees, and an obstacle for others. For some organisations it was exactly the non-partisan campaigning frame that enabled them to enter spaces with disengaged voters. For others, neutrality felt like they could lose credibility among their supporters who expected them to take clearer political or partisan positions. Others felt the neutrality requirement diluted the effectiveness of their voter registration campaigns, as messaging sometimes lacked the emotional appeal needed to engage hard-to-reach groups and those with political apathy.

However, even grantees facing these potential obstacles found that neutrality provided a good and different opportunity to engage their members using different frames and arguments, with initial apprehensiveness feelings dissipating after grantees took some time to adapt.

Neutrality was an equally important element of the interaction between grantees and their partner organisations. Many partner organisations were reluctant to participate in voter registration efforts, as they were hesitant of entering what they perceived as a political space. For instance, discomfort was reported when grantees sought to work with: (i) schools and teachers on political education, (ii) faith institutions like mosques, (iii) social media influencers who were concerned over potential follower backlash, and (iv) commercial brands. When grantees successfully engaged partner organisations, they often attributed this to the non-partisan nature of their initiatives. They especially pointed to the credibility their campaigns gained by being grantees of the Fund and JRRT.

## Working with non-democracy, community organisations

The Fund granted resources to a series of community organisations, with little or no prior experience of working in the democracy space. These grantees used their deep-rooted connections to engage community members in voter registration activities, making use of the trust they had already established through grassroots work and connections. Grantees appreciated that the Fund treated them as experts and respected their position within their communities.

Grantees said that their campaigns often relied on like-minded people from similar backgrounds to deliver their campaigning messages. For instance, youth organisations felt their campaigns were properly youth-led and they were effective exactly because young people themselves were more drawn to the messages when they were picked and conveyed by young people themselves. Trust and credibility in the messenger were an important determinant of campaign effectiveness more broadly.

However, while trusted messengers were seen as effective at engaging audiences, potential messengers recruited within target social and cultural contexts were sometimes themselves less knowledgeable about politics, and showing biases and concerns around democracy that grantees sought to address. Improving messengers' political literacy was sometimes seen as particularly challenging even for grantees themselves. In this context, some grantees said

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that they would benefit from simple, accessible political literacy resources, such as FAQs on boundary changes and postal deadlines.

Grantees, especially those with deep roots in their communities, argued that there was a need for in-depth, repeated conversations to counteract political apathy and disengagement, especially within minoritised ethnic groups. They found that people in their communities “wanted to meet and talk” about democracy. People needed to express their concerns, and they wanted to share their personal histories before they were ready to be encouraged to register or vote. Grantees argued that engaging disenfranchised groups needed to meet people on their own terms, within their communities and on the street. Grantees appreciated that repeated interactions and continuous presence were resource intensive to scale, but they felt this approach was crucial to make meaningful, lasting change in public engagement with elections and democracy.

Community organisations sometimes reported their Fund-granted projects had “upskilled” them as an organisation, which would benefit not just registration efforts in the future, but also wider participation in democracy and many other of their charitable functions. In some cases, it even meant that their projects had completely transformed how they viewed themselves as community organisations, highlighting their wider democratic engagement remit, including by getting people involved in issues that impact them.

## Electoral cycle and snap elections

Grantees reported both opportunities to build momentum and challenges to focus and shift priorities when discussing snap elections and the electoral cycle more generally.

Grantees said that a confirmed election can increase motivation for voter registration efforts. Many grantees saw strong engagement before the 2024 General Election, using the excitement and urgency to fuel their campaigns. However, engagement dropped off right after the election. The snap election forced grantees to deliver a wide range of activities in a shorter time than originally anticipated. While grantees generally felt they had delivered substantially against their plans, the snap election often limited the depth and scope of their efforts. Grantees reported having to drop street stalls, door knocking, partnerships, videos, and many other activities because of the condensed timelines.

Short-termism in funding and campaign focus further clashed with grantees’ expressed need for longer-term public engagement plans. Organisations noted that longer-term engagement would only be possible with longer-term funding and planning, including for the time in-between elections. Indeed, grantees who had longer-term funding were often more confident in responding quickly and efficiently to the snap election call. They said it was the continuous funding that enabled them to plan properly and build a flexible strategy. As such, many grantees recommended that the Fund should expand this approach, even if it came at the expense of having a smaller number of grants. For instance, one grantee said it was “better than the sector dying between elections and having to be rebuilt for every general election”.

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Local elections were seen as good opportunities to get ready and test ideas. However, grantees considered local elections as fundamentally different from a general election, with lower levels of care and interest in the public to both register and vote. Interestingly, grantees still noted the paradox that disengaged potential voters reached in campaigns before the 2024 General Election still mainly wanted to talk about local issues, such as schools, leisure centres and recycling.

Similarly, external factors had an impact on campaigns, and the exact timing of elections mattered. Specifically, grantees reported that students were harder to engage in the 2024 General Election due to it coinciding with exam time, and then many students going home for the summer. Moreover, high-profile events, as well as events affecting specific minoritised ethnic groups, were seen as having likely reduced the impact of grantee campaigns.

## Political mistrust and apathy

Grantees reported that political apathy remained a significant challenge, especially among certain marginalised groups, such as racially minoritised communities. Political apathy is rooted in political mistrust, where grantees explained that members of these communities displayed a deep-seated scepticism and strong distrust in the political system, state and establishment, which meant they were often less willing to engage. These groups would often question “why should we vote when this country doesn’t care about us” or “what is the point of voting”. Recent political events made some groups to feel particularly angry and undervalued, such as the race riots and the Dianne Abbott suspension controversy. Some grantees who worked with younger people had observed that parental influence was crucial, both negatively and positively, and wondered how future campaigns could be designed to involve parents alongside young people.

As explained earlier, these grantees learned that engaging these disenfranchised groups required a lot of in-depth and repeated conversation before eventually speaking about registration and voting. These grantees often argued that digital campaigns cannot address this apathy and scepticism sufficiently. Some grantees developed creative ways of approaching democratic participation, including actively avoiding terms such as “democracy” and “postcode lottery” and instead talking about the “community” or focussing on decision-making rather than politics. Generally, there was a sense among grantees, as well as the Fund’s stakeholders, that the journey from registration to voting for minoritised groups was particularly challenging.

Finally, grantees mentioned that a commonly observed barrier to participation in elections was that people did not feel represented by the candidates, or that the candidates did not care about the same issues they did. They felt a lack of connection to the candidates, and more broadly to the democratic process.

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## Convening

Collaboration was viewed positively by almost all grantees and stakeholders interviewed, fostering a sense of community within the democracy sector. The Democracy Network, which was often incorrectly perceived as coming out of the Fund's work, was described in particularly positive terms and highlighted as an example of convening work, including for bringing organisations at the fringes of the democracy space into the sector. Grantees described the relationships with each other and the Fund as collaborative, and particularly enjoyed seeing familiar faces at events, trainings, and conferences. One explained that "it felt like everyone funded was driven by the same goal". This helped grantees build better relationships, share best practices, start collaborations, and develop effective engagement strategies. They felt this ultimately created many positive spillovers that strengthened the sector's impact. Grantees even reported eventually submitting funding applications together, and developing closer working relationship both on Fund-backed projects and other campaigns. One of the key ways the Fund's convening power mattered was in connecting organisations working in the same social spaces or on connected challenges, which facilitated collaboration and shared learning. Grantees and stakeholders also said it was useful to be connected by the Fund with the Electoral Commission, EROs, and networks of organisations in the democracy space. Notably, some grantees said the Fund's networking and sharing events were more inclusive compared to previous initiatives they had participated in, where they felt their involvement was tokenistic.

Challenges were reported within the collaboration and convening aspect of the Fund's and grantees' work. Some grantees felt there was an element of competition between grantees who targeted the same groups, or who planned to deliver similar activities. This arose in terms of attribution of impact, credit, and securing further funding. In these cases, grantees felt collaboration could have been better coordinated by the Fund to ensure that effort duplication was avoided. In one notable case, a grantee reported that when two campaigns sought to adopt a similar approach, the Fund came across as having an unclear view on how these organisations could collaborate. Nevertheless, both organisations were successively brought together by the Fund to solve the issue.

## Working with partners

Grantees and stakeholders had worked with a range of different organisations, institutions and partners to facilitate their voter registration activities, and to scale their efforts. Leveraging partnerships like these, whether it is in education, commercially or social media influencers, clearly had proven effective for grantees. They reported a range of different impacts from partnerships, both formal or informal, old ones which were expanded, and new ones created as part of a Fund's project. Grantees worked with a vast array of external partners: universities, further education providers, schools, social care providers, third sector, media, companies, political parties and MPs, councils, EROs, and the Electoral Commission.

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Partnership proved effective, but some challenges still emerged for grantees. First, in addition to finding the right organisation, some grantees struggled with finding the right individual within that organisation who was committed and who could achieve buy-in from the wider organisation. Second, networking could be more difficult when grantees reached out to organisations with staff who often work away from their desks. This sometimes meant that they did not check emails often, leading to long lead-in times for building relationships. Third, networking was more challenging for organisations facing internal issues like funding and recruitment.

Other challenges included grantees having to use intermediary organisations to reach potential partners, or facing obstacles around their own teams' lack of political literacy or communication skills, especially for organisations without a dedicated communications team.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for the Fund

#### The work of the Fund should continue

With approximately 750,000 new voter registrations, including many recorded for typically disenfranchised minoritised and socially disadvantaged categories, plus robust evidence of the UK Democracy Fund work as an advocate for electoral reform, and as a convenor that has improved the quality and quantity of work in the space of democratic participation, our key recommendation is that **the work of the Fund should continue**. In their interviews and reports, grantees have often mentioned the importance of providing funding for work in this space, with grantee reports often noting that many of the projects would have simply not happened without support from the Fund.

Moreover, grantees have shown appetite for even deeper collaboration between each other and with the Fund, including its board, to work on longer-term goals and addressing more structural political participation issues. This shows that the Fund's initiatives have momentum going beyond voter registration during general election campaigns, including future funding for identifying and sharing better evidence.

#### Provide more opportunities and better guidance for collaboration between grantees

Collaboration between stakeholders in the sector is a key area where the Fund, with its convening power, can create new value if it considers new initiatives, or how to better advertise the initiatives it already provides. This could include providing incentives for potential grantees to collaborate more closely, providing better guidance and advice on how grantees can engage with each other and key institutional stakeholders, but also more visibly advertising opportunities for multiple organisations to submit shared grant applications. Shared applications would be especially useful to avoid duplicating efforts or involuntary

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competition when working on shared goals, and also help avoid issues in monitoring the impact of the Fund's work where multiple organisations have pursued overlapping goals, and it is unclear how to attribute impact to each organisation.

## Consider different application and monitoring pipelines for smaller and larger grants

As grantees and the Fund start to identify new ways of working to tackle longer term issues, the Fund can consider new ways of funding grantees. Within this space, the Fund could support larger and smaller, shorter and longer timeframe projects implementing different application and delivery pipelines. Flexibility could include establishing a small-grants and large-grants pathway, which could help reduce the perceived administrative burden for smaller projects, and set clearer expectations for grantees in each channel around the applications themselves, and for reporting, learning, and participation in Fund-convened events throughout the grant timeframe.

## New goals beyond voter registrations

Looking at the Fund's goals, to a largely unknowable extent political reforms might radically change the priorities of the sector, especially if AVR or votes at 16 become law under the current Labour government. But the Fund's and grantees' reports and interviews show that even with reforms to the electoral system, efforts are still needed to address the structural roots of low political participation, provide political education resources to young people, and address mistrust and apathy for politically disenfranchised groups: in other words, funding, convening, and evidence on effective approaches are still necessary if the work to protect the health of UK democracy and to politically enfranchise minoritised groups (and, potentially, new voter categories) continues. Many of the approaches that have been tested in the voting registration work will be applicable to these potential new goals, so any changes in focus and strategy will be able to build on learnings to date, especially if learnings are reported robustly, as discussed in the next recommendation.

## Towards a What Works Centre for democratic participation

These new challenges highlight the importance of the Fund's work to create, gather, and share evidence on effective ways to engage the public with elections and politics at large. In this aspect, the work that the UK Democracy Fund has done so far is like the work that several What Works Centres do in their respective areas of interest. While in the past it was established that the conditions weren't adequate for establishing a similar centre in this area, the Fund should reconsider opportunities for a What Works Centre for Democratic Participation to be created.

Indeed, the learnings from the Fund's work to date will greatly contribute to a nascent evidence base for the sector, and to better identify opportunities and challenges to establishing a What Works Centre. The central structure of the Fund, channelling resources into grantees, has already created relationships that can grow into a What Works Centre. In

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the longer term, the Fund and/or the Centre could start producing and sharing experimental evidence that can help inform campaigning for future elections with even better evidence.

## Working towards better impact evaluation and evidence

The Fund has arguably made substantial progress in promoting a culture of better monitoring, evaluation, and learning among its grantees. This work should continue, and new opportunities are identified to improve the collection of evidence around (i) whether the Fund's resources and efforts are having tangible effects on democratic participation, and (ii) whether the approaches grantees choose to take are effective at engaging the public or specific target groups. Some more specific recommendations include:

- **Make reports and other written outputs more traceable:** grantee-written public reports, research reports, and publicly available resources from the Fund are visible, enduring outputs of the efforts to engage publics with elections and politics. Our analysis showed reports have been often cited, reported on in the press, and submitted in evidence to political institutions. Having digital identifiers assigned to reports will help with the correct referencing and linking to the original documents, and tracing their impact using automated systems including Google Scholar, Altmetric, Overton, and others.
- **Create more and diverse opportunities to collect impact and evidence:** some grantees have already started engaging in more sophisticated attempts to monitor and evaluate their campaigns. With grantees developing closer working relationships with EROs, there will be new opportunities to evaluate the impact of specific campaigns (or specific aspects of a campaign, including for example monitoring the impact of a national campaign in a subset of regions). The Fund can act as a connector between researchers, grantees, EROs, local authorities, and other public institutions, highlighting the importance of collecting evidence on effective voter registrations and advocacy approaches. Not all grants and projects will be suitable for this kind of monitoring and evaluation approach, but the wealth of evidence the Fund could generate even from doing it with a limited number of grantees would still be a worthwhile investment and resource for the sector as a whole.
- **Improve data quality and introduce data collection mechanisms to identify individuals in voter registration and turnout campaigns:** identifier data can be collected to show which individuals have been exposed to a campaign (or to different aspects of a larger campaign). This doesn't necessarily mean collecting data on participant names, but rather collecting any information that can help in linking an outcome measure (registration, attitudes and knowledge data from surveys, self-reported voting) to a treatment (receiving an information leaflet, attending an event, seeing an appeal from a specific messenger). Collecting geographic identifiers, such as postcodes, is particularly useful as that information can be aggregated into other geographical identifiers for which it is easy to access socio-demographic data. These data could, for instance, be aggregated to local-authority level, where registration



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and turnout rates are reported by the Electoral Commission or the UK government. Not every project will be able to collect this type of information, but for example in projects including canvassing at people's homes, or letter/email campaigns, these data can be generated in partnership with local authorities or collected directly by registration volunteers or participants using online forms. In online campaigns, targeting can create identifiable groups by pushing different types of ads (varying messages, arguments, messengers) to different groups or different geographic groups, which can then be compared on an outcome of interest. As with other recommendations in this section, working closely with academic partners, practitioners from What Works centres, and evaluators, could facilitate future causal evaluations. Partnerships with What Works practitioners working in areas including gendered violence, homelessness, care work, and unemployment, could shed especially useful insights on how to overcome the challenge around public trust when identifiable data is collected. Based on the learnings from the wider What Works movement, it is important that such researchers and evaluators are on board from the design and inception of projects, to ensure that campaigns are built from the start to facilitate effective evaluation.

- **Embed data verification processes where possible:** verification processes could involve contacting a subsample (randomly ideally) of the individuals who were exposed to a campaign, according to the grantees' targets, to ask whether they registered or not for the election as a result of the grant, when resources and information availability permit this approach.
- **Survey data and experiments as an opportunity:** surveys can be used to collect data on self-reported public attitudes, intentions, and behaviours (including whether people plan to vote in future elections or have voted in past ones) around democratic participation before interventions are scaled and approaches are brought to the public. Embedding experiments in surveys can help investigate questions around effective messages, messengers, and other campaigning approaches, and survey companies now offer a variety of experimental approaches, with the possibility to reach different population groups through reasonably inexpensive online panels<sup>9</sup>. The Fund is well positioned to invest in these projects, as these can create opportunities to involve more researchers from academia, and create an initial public good evidence base on effective engagement strategies, especially when trying to reach

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<sup>9</sup> As a more detailed example, one can think of how survey experiments can be useful to test messages in digital campaigns. Grantees can work with academic partners to identify a set of messages and their characteristics to test, including alternative framing approaches, different arguments and styles, or different messengers who deliver the message. Survey companies can then help script the experimental survey, which shows different versions of the message to different respondents in a sample (which can be a general population sample, or a more specific sub-sample for a specific target group). Researchers can then compare how the different messages affected respondents' attitudes or reported behaviour intentions, identifying significant differences in responses, or, in other words, the messages that work best (and worst). Grantees can then use this evidence in their campaigning, or conduct ulterior survey studies to refine the original findings, or even test the most effective messages in a randomised control trial using real audiences.

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underrepresented, under-participating sociodemographic groups. Moreover, existing large survey studies like the BES, which are used to set the stage in this report, can be used to investigate the evolving trends of political attitudes, voter registration, and turnout at elections, with rich demographic data allowing for breakdown analysis. The Fund could investigate a partnership with the BES to collect further data on public exposure to the larger campaigns of its grantees. While self-reported attitudes and behaviours have limits compared to real world data, this would still provide useful insights on registration rates, turnout, and the conversion of registration to turnout, which could add further value to the impact, evaluation, and evidence collected by the fund<sup>10</sup>.

## Connecting with other funders to address working conditions in the sector

In their reports and interviews, grantees shared that they often face issues such as workforce burnout, challenges to maintain programme continuity, taxing conditions to promote efficiency, and unmet need for resources to upskill workforces. These are systematic, structural challenges for the sector that go beyond the immediate remit of the Fund, to some extent, but that still affect the capacity of organisations to pursue their goals.

Through interviews, grantees showed that the Fund engaged in substantial efforts to support grantees throughout the process, seeking to reduce these additional burdens, whenever possible, while ensuring high-quality projects are funded. Yet, grantees still expressed that they were negatively affected by these systematic issues. The size of the challenge is such that it requires the Fund to work with other funding organisations, CSOs and organisations working to promote democracy to address these systemic capacity issues. This could include considering providing funding or earmarking part of the grant funding value for staffing costs to guarantee better continuity and prevent burnout, or new coordinated investment in skills development programmes for the sector, or in initiatives that promote the retention of staff and of their institutional knowledge.

## Recommendations for Grantees

### Strengthening fundraising capacity

In the current UK landscape, competition for grants and funding is constantly increasing and evolving. Government, philanthropic and charitable organisations are regularly sharing new funding calls, tenders, and opportunities to allocate financial resources. Delivery organisations can benefit from investing in fundraising capacity in their organisations and from embedding this capability in their processes. This will lower entry barriers to different funding sources, as well as diminishing the burden attached to fundraising and will help

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<sup>10</sup> A similar approach could be taken using data from the Electoral Commission from previous elections, or when any general election turnout data is released, identifying the evolving rates of registration, turnout, and registration to turnout conversion rates, keeping in mind limitations around the granularity on demographics of what gets released by the UK Government or the Electoral Commission.

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them identify the funding bodies that are more interested in work within the nature of the organisation. In the longer run, a dedicated fundraising function within organisations can help build knowledge and skills within organisations to more effectively deal with the funding environment around them. The Fund could consider whether it could be helping smaller organisations campaigning for democratic engagement by providing them with support, training, or resources to become better fundraisers.

## Strengthening data and monitoring capacities

There is substantial room for improvement when it comes to measuring the impact of grantees' own work, even though monitoring, evaluation and learning capabilities vary across organisations (especially of different sizes) in this sector. Impact that is not measured or monitored is difficult to demonstrate and is often disregarded, especially when it comes to its use as evidence in funding applications, or when grantees seek new opportunities to collaborate with each other and with institutional stakeholders. More generally it is likely that within the current constrained funding landscape, grantees will keep being subjected to clear (and perhaps stricter) requirements from funders to measure their achievements. In this sense, it's important to allocate resources into monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and data management systems and staff training to manage it, starting from clearly budgeting for these activities in grant applications. In some cases, this requires a change in mindset in the organisation that could be challenging to navigate. Yet, the transition is necessary for an organisation to keep growing and to detect, internally, what their areas of improvement are. Working closely with universities, who can provide access to researchers, student internships, or placements, could be a potential option to build up this capacity without incurring in excessive costs.

## Keep advocating for the shared needs of the sector

This evaluation has revealed the needs that grantees have more broadly in the sector. In the UK, more efforts are needed to increase electoral participation of disadvantaged communities, and while this has motivated the Fund, which is aiming to respond to the needs, the work is not yet done. Organisations need to keep advocating for funding, training and other resources from the government and philanthropic sector to keep breaking inequalities.

There are two types of needs to consider in this context: the needs of the communities that grantees serve in order to integrate them in the UK political landscape, and the operative needs of the grantees as organisations. Regarding communities' needs, in the current political situation and with the increasing levels of polarisation in the world, there is a critical need to engage disadvantaged communities in politics and boost their electoral participation. By nature, this work involves communities that are harder to reach, and don't have strong links with government institutions or high levels of trust in politicians or political institutions. The needs of the communities are diverse, from access to information to make better political

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choices, to political education on political rights, which bodies represent them, among others.

When it comes to grantees, as third sector organisations, they are the link to empower and connect the citizens from these communities with politics, and they play a valuable role advocating for communities' needs and rebuilding their trust in government institutions. This core role therefore requires funding to operate, as they work in a constrained environment difficult to access. Continuing to advocate for a larger allocation of resources is key, especially considering the needs for better monitoring and impact data of grantees' work, and any demand for further funding is likely more effective if done collectively.

## Collaborate more within and beyond the sector

Collaborations, within and beyond the sector, are important to achieve structural changes in the sector. Within the sector, organisations working to promote public engagement with elections could identify opportunities to collaborate more closely. These opportunities could include fundraising for joint projects, sharing costs of implementing monitoring systems and data management tools, or joint hiring and training approaches to upskill staff in different areas. Collaboration can see organisations sharing evidence and lessons learned from their work more freely with each other, for example to identify and standardise use of evidence-based approaches that have been effective to reach specific target communities.

Beyond the sector, creating partnerships with other sectors and stakeholders is important for knowledge transfer. Particularly, when it comes to approaching data collection and identifiers, the sector could benefit from exchanging knowledge with organisations working in fields with 'sensitive' populations such as those working to address homelessness, reforming the care system, and tackling violence. Working with these organisations can provide substantive insights on approaches to rebuild trust in communities, but also technical ones, including on effective mechanisms to collect identifiable information and produce robust evidence. Moreover, establishing partnerships with organisations that can act as enablers is important. Having academic partners that can support the implementation and evaluation of programmes and campaigns, from inception, would mitigate related burdens in grantees.

The Fund is strategically well positioned to facilitate these partnerships and synergies in the sector, a priority which aligns with a recommendation included above on creating a What Works Centre for democratic participation.

## Policy recommendations

### The case for AVR and its broader implications

While this report doesn't delve into the discussion around the opportunities and challenges of a system with AVR, the need for a simpler or automatic registration system has been a constant theme throughout our research. Multiple barriers to register to vote affect the most low-propensity voters which are also the most disadvantaged in society. Moreover, the latest

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requirement for a photo ID has created even further barriers to participation. Organisations such as the Fund and grantees can invest resources and efforts to ease those barriers and increase registrations. Yet, those resources could deliver higher returns if they could be allocated to increase turnout, political engagement and democratic education in the UK.

The need for AVR is further shown when thinking about the fundamental issues around public mistrust to share personal information during the voter registration process, especially in minoritised and socially disadvantaged communities, as evidenced by the Fund and grantees. Especially for these communities, AVR and resources rerouted to political engagement campaigns could considerably increase levels of political participation.

## Voter registration and turnout data accessibility

Grantees, especially small charities and CSOs, and organisations such as the Fund struggle to access data and insights to inform their strategies and their efforts to run political engagement campaigns, including on how to target specific groups, and to robustly measure the impact of their approaches. Organisations often invest considerable resources to collect these types of data and evidence around voter registrations and turnout, and are overburdened by the requirements to analyse and report their findings. But data and insights on these dynamics are likely to already be captured in some form within government agencies.

More data and insights should be shared from government agencies and key stakeholders working on the elections, and a simplified and clear process to access these is required for the sector, as well as initiatives such as dissemination rounds to upskill key actors on how to access and use them. The Cabinet Office, MHCLG, organisations like the Office for National Statistics, local authorities and EROs, and the Electoral Commission are all in a position to facilitate data sharing approaches, including by providing data broken down by the main sociodemographic groups, not just for the work of the Fund, but for researchers and the sector as a whole.

As an example of the potential effectiveness of a system where better data is available to organisations, one can consider the case of the United States, where researchers and CSOs have led work on get-out-the-vote campaigns to improve public engagement with politics. This has only been possible because reform in the country has made it easier to access validated records of both voter registration and electoral turnout. While the UK presents a different political and institutional landscape, the benefits of having evidence to reach politically disenfranchised minoritised and socially disadvantaged groups through evidence-based approaches would be higher than the cost of improving the data environment.

## Funding the essential work of organisations tackling democratic participation

The strength of a democracy lies in maintaining healthy levels of public participation in politics and the public life. With [growing levels of political apathy in the UK](#) and worldwide,

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the UK government, in collaboration with philanthropic organisations, should directly intervene and allocate funds to organisations who seek to widen public participation in elections and other democratic activities. Beyond funding, the government should likewise consider partnering with stakeholders in the sector to unlock new evidence for better political engagement campaigning.

## Appendix

### Evaluation Approach

This section summarises the methodological approach that guided the evaluation of the Fund's work. This evaluation uses a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to evaluate the impact of grantees' efforts.

#### Grantee typology

The Fund provided us with a wealth of data on grants, grantees, and their projects, which needed connecting and categorising to better understand how resources were allocated and used, and the impact generated across the Fund's goals and strategically identified priorities. To this end, a dataset was created to bring together information about organisations' characteristics and goals, the characteristics of the campaigns or programmes they run, and outcomes, especially on registration rates.

First, linking information to grantees based on their characteristics, including:

- **Small and large organisations**, based on their turnover (over or under £1million)
- **Type of organisation**: charities, CICs, agencies, and research organisations.
- **Their approaches and focuses**: whether they take approaches like campaigning and advocacy, service delivery, whether promoting democracy is one of their key missions, and whether they focus on work with local communities.

Second, linking information about **groups targeted and goals pursued**, based on the Fund's strategy, adding a classifier for grantees who were also explicitly generating **new learnings and evidence** about democratic participation. Also echoing the Fund's strategy and existing data records, recording whether grantees were funded to carry out "**pilot projects**", and the **key approaches** they took in their projects, including:

- **Engaging in digital campaigns and communications**
- **Reaching out to local communities**
- **Reaching out to institutions and private companies**
- **Reaching out to schools, colleges, and universities**

Third, linking data on the **number of grants**, the **total budget granted**, and the outcomes of the projects, including, if applicable, the **number of registrations** reported back by grantees.



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This information is merged in a single master dataset for all 33 grantees, which was analysed throughout of this evaluation.

## Economic evaluation

The grantee typology allowed us to evaluate the economic dimension of the funded activities around voter registration. Three core questions were asked in the economic evaluation:

- Using the grantee typology data to identify any significant **association between grantee characteristics and the resources allocated** to grantees.
- Looking at resource allocation based on the Fund's priorities identified for campaigns towards the 2024 General Election, showing how **resources were allocated to the high/medium/low Fund-set priority objectives**.
- Considering the relationship between resources granted and voter registrations achieved, creating **cost-per-registration ratio** measures, and investigating how these vary by grants'/grantees' characteristics, and whether the ratio has evolved in time as the Fund resourced new projects.
- As an additional **sensitivity analysis**, presenting some of the core findings around funding and voter registrations excluding pilot projects, which had smaller budgets and smaller intended target groups by design.

## Impact inventory

Grantees submitted between one and six documents to the Fund including multiple grant activities and learning reports, together with other outputs (including presentations, research reports, campaign examples). Reports follow a basic structure set by the Fund, over which a flexible approach was adopted to gather and classify information, creating an impact inventory that captures the breadth and richness of all Fund-backed activities. This is not a systematic attempt at quantifying every item of impact, which is impossible due to the nature of the documents, but an impact “analytical narrative” that can help readers understand and quantify the Fund's impact. The narrative report touches upon various aspects such as **digital campaigns**, which focus on generating political education content, scaling up campaigns, and identifying effective messages and messengers; **learning and coproduction activities** that were embedded within projects; **communities reached** and their diversity; **institutional partnerships** which play a key role, involving collaborations with EROs, educational institutions, democratic participation organisations, and private companies; **events and campaigns**, and **media coverage**.

On top of the impact inventory, grantees' report are also analysed to systematically investigate the learnings reported from grantees in three thematic areas:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Further analysis was conducted to investigate how these themes vary by grantees' target groups and goals, but found that the main themes are overarching across these, and will focus on reporting the key insights overall, using examples from different target groups and goals to enrich the analytical narrative.

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- Learning from campaigns: effective strategies and key challenges.
- The administrative and data environment.
- Public perceptions of politics and elections.

## Semi-structured interviews

A total of 22 interviews were conducted. Table 3 below, lists the target number of interviews by type of respondents following the original evaluation specification, compared to the number of completed interviews. As agreed with the Fund, some respondents are counted as two respondent types, which means the achieved number of interviews adds up to more than 22 interviews. For instance, a respondent could count as both a grantee and a partner/stakeholder. As agreed with the Fund, given the diversity of contexts and perspectives among grantees, grantees were oversampled compared to the original target.<sup>12</sup> Notes and automated transcripts from interviews were analysed using a framework approach and case-and-theme analysis, aiming to identify key patterns and themes within the data.

**Table 3: Grantees and stakeholders interviews**

Type of respondent	Target (based on spec)	Achieved
Staff and directors	5	3
Funders who contribute to the UK Democracy Fund	2	1
Grantees	8	14
Partners and stakeholders	5	7
Experts in voter participation	2	2
Total	22	

## Capturing impact on the electoral reform agenda

While the Fund's efforts and resources were primarily focussed on delivering voter registration campaigns, resources and attention were also dedicated to influencing policymakers to reform the voting system, including to extend the right to vote to 16-17-years-old, and to make voter registration an automated process. To capture this impact, three potential areas are investigated:

1. Impact of the Fund's commissioned and authored reports.
2. Hansard records, POST, and evidence submissions.
3. Impact of the grants focussing on advocacy and campaigning for reform.

<sup>12</sup> The only respondent type where it was not possible to achieve the target number was for funders who contribute to the Fund. Due to anticipated time constraints, evaluators were only put in touch with one funder. In the reporting, the text refers to two types of respondents: "grantees" as one group, and a broader group called "UK Democracy Fund stakeholders" to ensure that those respondents are not identifiable.



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## Feasibility assessment of a future causal evaluation

The Fund has shared a strong interest in producing robust causal evidence on the effects of the funded grants, and of the Fund directly, on democratic participation. This is demonstrated especially by the Fund's efforts to deliver important improvements in the sector, upskilling impact measurement and facilitating evidence collection, which are key for conducting a full-scale causal impact evaluation in the near future. While a causal evaluation was not possible at this stage, methods still exist through which researchers and evaluators can more robustly ascribe cause-and-effect relationships between funds, grantees and Fund strategies, and the outcomes obtained through their work.

To work towards a future causal evaluation, we evaluated the appropriateness of different methodological options, discussing their key requirements and identification assumptions. We considered options including randomised controlled trials, difference-in-difference evaluations, matched comparator analysis, and regression discontinuity design. Based on the characteristics of the current grantees' pool, we assessed the feasibility of each method through a 'traffic light system', where green corresponds to design element ready to feed into a causal evaluation, amber is used when an element is not there yet, but could be developed shortly, and red used to identify if an element is not there yet and its development would be complex and time consuming. For each of the methods, we explored key parameters such as sample size, the existence of historical data to confirm parallel trends, willingness to randomise, a running variable, among others.

The analysis revealed that with the current data available, it was not possible to employ an experimental or quasi-experimental methodology to assess the causal effect of the funded grantees. The detected barriers are summarised below, along with the enablers we also identify that can contribute to future evaluations in the sector.

### Barriers

The main barriers detected from feasibility assessment for a causal impact evaluation are:

- The lack of identifiers of exposure to interventions and campaigns, as it is not possible to identify a 'treatment group' with individuals directly exposed, and hence it is not possible to construct a valid comparator group.
- Low trust in the institutions from the grantees to provide identifiers as part of data collection.
- Small effect sizes of the interventions, that limits research capacity to identify their impact in other data sources, such as the BES, for instance.
- Other data constraints, including accessing validated registration and voting turnout records from the Electoral Commission with relevant by-group breakdown.
- Heterogeneity in grantees' reported impact.

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## Enablers

Even though a causal evaluation was not feasible, the current Fund's set up and the relationship with grantees have several strengths:

- Intervention nature and opportunities to randomise, as grants are provided for defined initiatives, with clear outcomes and mechanisms to reach specific target groups.
- Fostering a culture of robust impact recording and capacity building through the Fund's monitoring requirements.
- The Fund's commitment with a stronger body of evidence on what works.
- Existing data bodies, as there are validated records of registration and voting turnout across several UK organisations.

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