

Evidence
Development and
Incubation Team

THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE

KING'S
College
LONDON

Evaluation of the UK Democracy Fund

Paolo Morini
Johnny Runge
Domenica Avila

May 2025

Executive summary: the Fund's goals, targets, and grants

The UK Democracy Fund

The Fund, launched in 2019 to promote electoral participation and to advocate for electoral reform.

Three key goals

- Enabling everyone to vote
- Extending the right to vote
- Increasing electoral participation

Five key target groups

- Low income
- Migrants and refugees
- Racialised and minoritised communities
- Private renters, and those in vulnerable housing
- Young people

Grantees, grants, and funds

The Fund granted **£1,881,618 in resources for 49 grants and extensions to 33 grantees.**

88% of grantees worked to increase participation, 18% on enabling everyone to vote, 6% on extending the right to vote, and 22% of grantees also generated new learnings.

50% of grantees targeted young people, 36% racialised and minoritised groups, 21% migrants and refugees, 11% those in vulnerable housing, and 7% targeting other groups.

The key goals of the Fund have been reached

The Fund has substantially contributed to developments towards all three of its goals, funding activities which resulted in:

- An estimated 750,000 voter registrations
- Influence, advocacy, and new evidence for electoral reform towards automatic voter registration and to lower the voting age to 16
- a growing evidence base on effective ways to campaign for public engagement with elections, democracy and politics.

Executive summary: the goals achieved in detail

Voter registrations

Grantees achieved an estimated **750,000 voter registrations** through their campaigns, with an estimated £2.28 funding to registration ratio.

Grantees activities included **events, community outreach, large scale social media campaigns, institutional partnerships and registration schemes.**

Grantees reached a multitude of **marginalised communities**, including migrants and refugees and racially marginalised ethnic groups, as evidenced by the creation of **new resources in more than 13 languages.**

Electoral reform

The Fund commissioned **11 reports**, earning 28 academic citations and attracting media coverage from major outlets, and funded **five grantees to work on influencing policymakers** towards votes at 16 and automatic voter registration.

The reports and the Fund's work informed **submissions to the UK Parliament, Welsh Senedd, and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.** Work supported by the Fund is also referenced in Hansard debate records.

Learnings

Digital campaigns are effective for scaling up interventions, but **sustained in-person engagement** remains crucial for reaching marginalised communities.

Approaches like coproduction, authentic messengers, and embedding democratic participation discussions in day-to-day activities were more effective at engaging disaffected audiences.

The public remains cynical and distrustful of politicians and elections, even though they recognise the importance of voting.

Executive summary: recommendations

Recommendations to the Fund

- The Fund should **keep promoting stakeholders' collaboration** and enhance its own processes to offer **flexible funding and collaboration options**.
- The Fund should keep **advancing efforts to collect, share, and leverage evidence** to inform impactful public engagement campaigning for voting.
- The Fund should keep **working towards better impact evaluation**, and **campaign for better voting data quality**.

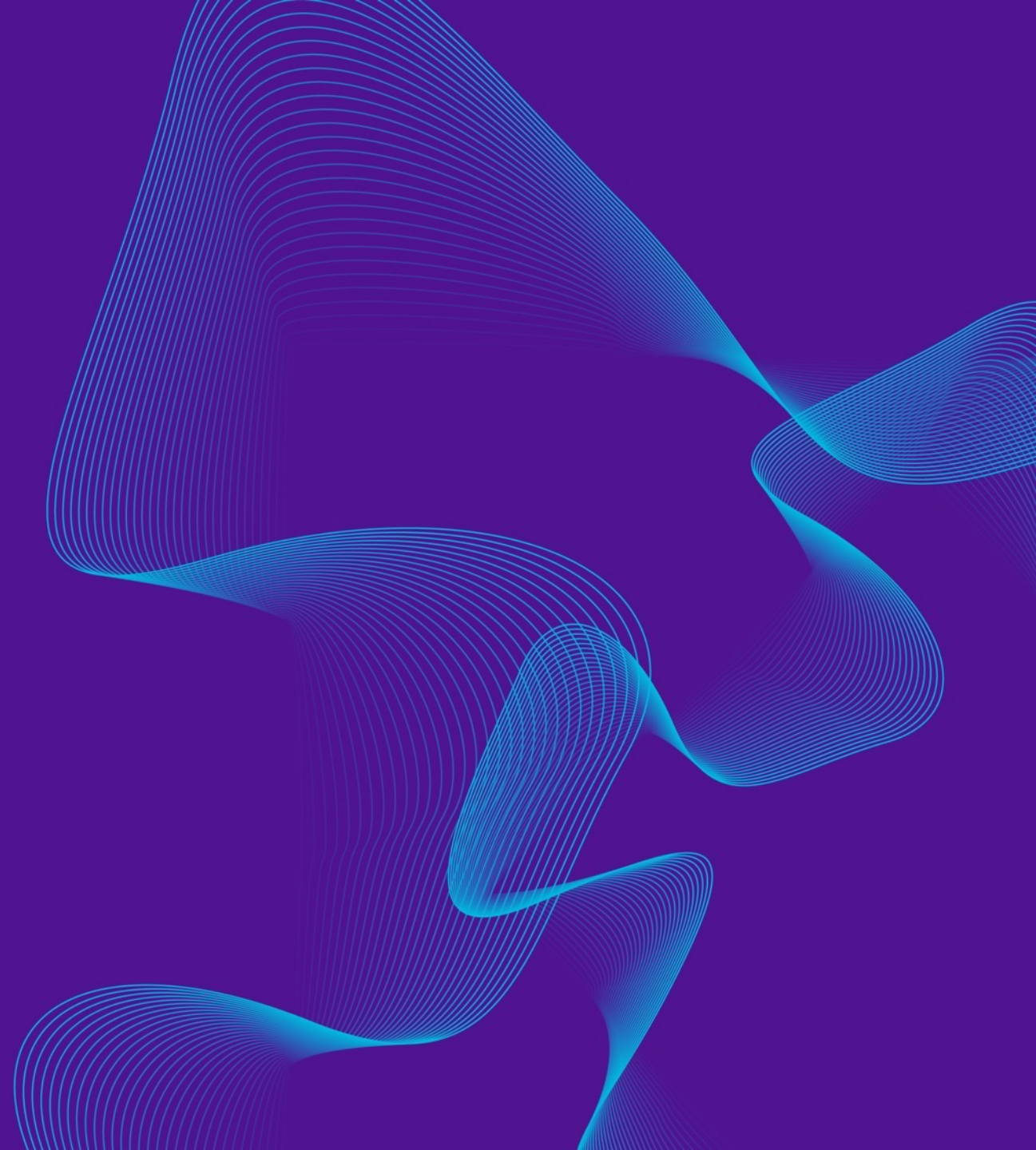
Recommendations to grantees

- Grantees should **strengthen their fundraising, and data and monitoring capacities**.
- Grantees should keep advocating for the shared needs of the sector, including to **support their operational needs**.
- Grantees should collaborate more to **share resources and objectives**, and to **tackle the structural workforce issues** of the sector. **Collaboration with academia** can unlock better evidence and evaluations.

Policy recommendations

- Policymakers should **deliver automatic voter registration**. This will also allow redirecting resources dedicated to register voters to increase political education and turnout.
- Government bodies should **make data on voter registrations and turnout easier to access and use**.
- Government bodies should work with philanthropic organisation to **tackle declining levels of democratic participation**.

Introduction and context of the evaluation



About the UK Democracy Fund

Set up by the **Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust** in 2019 the UK Democracy Fund is an independent and non-partisan pooled fund aimed at **strengthening the integrity and vibrancy of democracy.**

Its focus is on participation in elections and electoral system reform, providing funding to organisations working in this area.

Three key goals, plus a focus on evidence



Enabling everyone to vote

The Fund supports reforms to ensure a simple, seamless and accessible voting system fit for the 21st century.



Restoring and extending the franchise

The Fund supports advocacy initiatives to expand the franchise, specifically for 16- and 17-year-olds and settled Europeans.



Increasing participation of everyone in our elections

The Fund supports efforts to raise the turnout of low-propensity voters to improve fairness in our democracy.



Gather and share evidence for campaigning

Fund new research, and to gather and share evidence on what works in voter participation campaigns, and to effectively advocate for electoral reform.

About this evaluation

1

To evaluate the impact of the Fund as a whole, against its objectives, including specifically the “a million more” voters target.

2

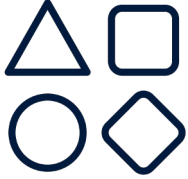
To share and publish learnings about the Fund’s direct advocacy work and its contribution to electoral systems reform.

3

To evaluate the impact of individual grants and projects since the 2019 General Election, including assessing their impact on voter registration, voter turnout, contribution to electoral systems reform, and drawing out learnings on the factors that characterise effective interventions in this area.

The full evaluation report, including information on the evaluation method, is available to download on the [UK Democracy Fund website](#)

Evaluation approach



Grantee typology, economic evaluation, impact inventory

- Consolidated data to describe the **grantee pool's characteristics, the goals pursued, and populations targeted**
- Investigated **significant patterns in resource allocation and a cost-per registration ratio.**
- **Impact inventory** from grantee reports and interviews



Impact on the electoral reform agenda and on voter registrations

- Investigated **association between grantee characteristics and reported voter registrations**
- Investigated the **impact of Fund's commissioned and authored reports** in the academic literature, and the official record of political institutions



Interviews

- **22 total interviews** with grantees, Fund staff, stakeholders and experts in voter participation
- Notes and transcripts analysed using a framework approach and **case-and-theme analysis approach.**

Increasing voter registration and turnout is widely recognized as essential for reducing political inequality and strengthening democracy



Not all social groups are equally **represented in government and parliament.**

Current **policy approaches are not reflective** of the needs and interests of all social groups equally.

Political participation is both a cause and an effect of the representation gap.



Four key groups in the UK show notably lower levels of political participation:

- **Young people**
- **Low education and low income**
- **Minoritised ethnic groups**
- **Renters and those insecurely housed**



Increasing engagement for these groups can improve representation in institutions and policy responsiveness.

This requires **increasing participation** among disenfranchised voters, **expanding the franchise**, and **making voting more accessible.**

Context: the 2024 General Election

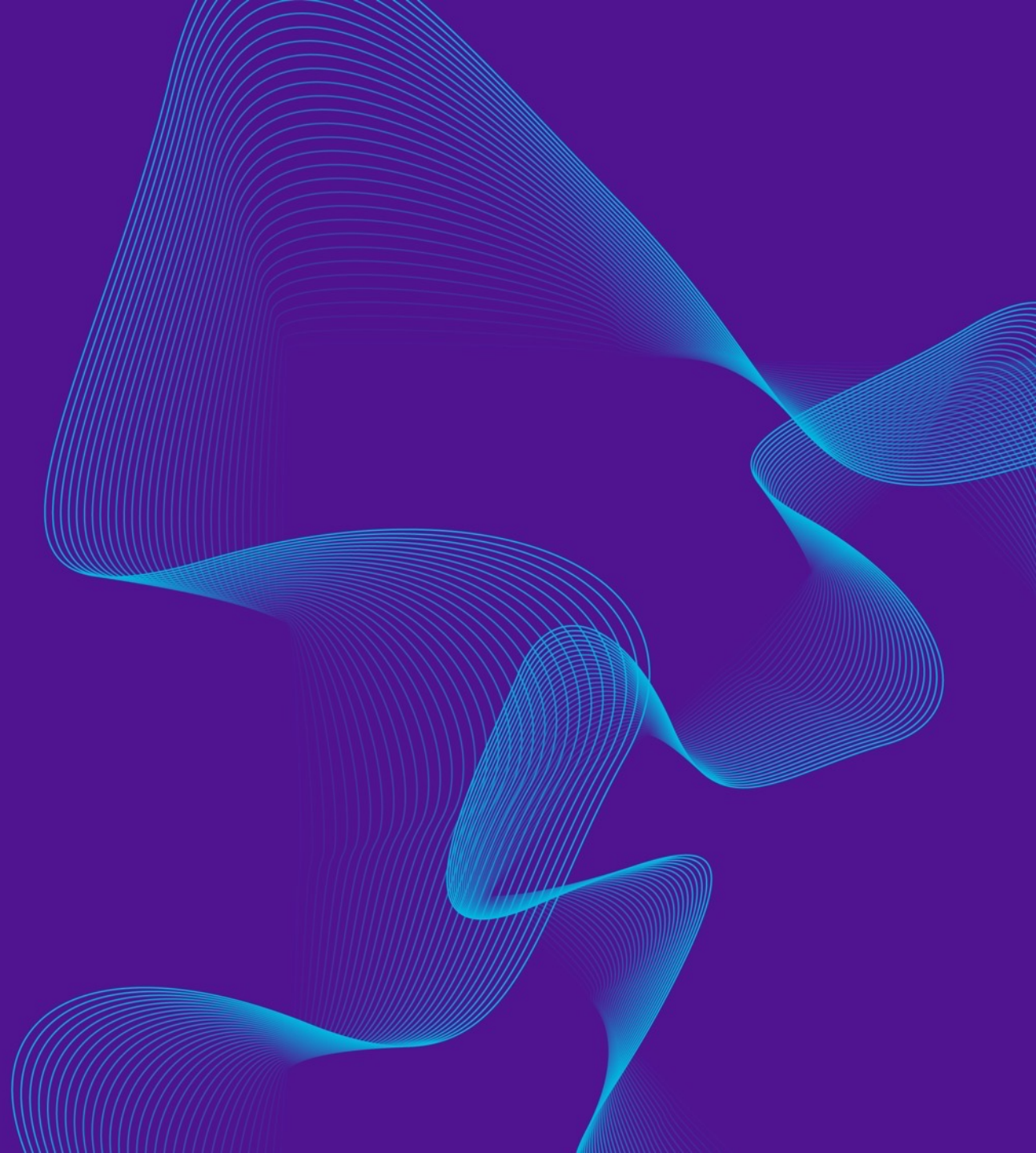
- 2024 was a remarkable year for politics in countries worldwide, with **general elections held in 32 countries**, including in the United States and Great Britain, with many incumbents failing to secure new terms.
- In the UK, the 2024 General Election was the first with requirements for voters to show **photographic ID at polling stations**, and the first with the right to vote extended to **UK citizens who have been living overseas for more than 15 years**.
- **48.2 million citizens were registered to vote**, an increase of 1 percentage point over those registered before the 2019 General Election.
- The **final reported turnout for the 2024 General Election was 59.7%**, the third lowest since 1918, dropping by 7.6 percentage points compared to the 2019 General Election.
- In this context, the Fund granted resources to 33 organisations to increase voter registrations, influence electoral reform, and learn more about effective approaches to engage the public with democracy and elections.



Photo by [Phil Hearing](#) on [Unsplash](#)

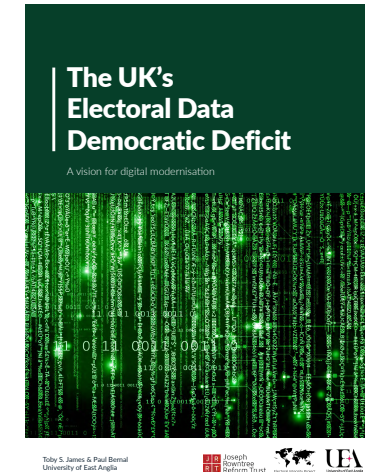
Evaluation results

Electoral reform agenda impact



Impact on the electoral reform agenda: commissioned and authored reports

- We focused on the impact generated by **eleven key reports**, either directly published by the Fund, or in partnership with organisations including IPPR, the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath, the Universities of Edinburgh, East Anglia, Sheffield, and Nottingham Trent.
- **Google Scholar** show these reports gained **28 citations in a variety of academic publications and reports, and tens of quotes in the press, and on websites of CSOs and think tanks.**
- The report “**Is it time for Automatic Voter Registration**” by James and Bernal is by far the most successful report in terms of citations, gathering 11 citations in academic articles, and mentions in two further policy reports.



Impact on the electoral reform agenda: evidence submissions, resources for policymakers, Hansard records and grantees campaigns for reform

Evidence submission

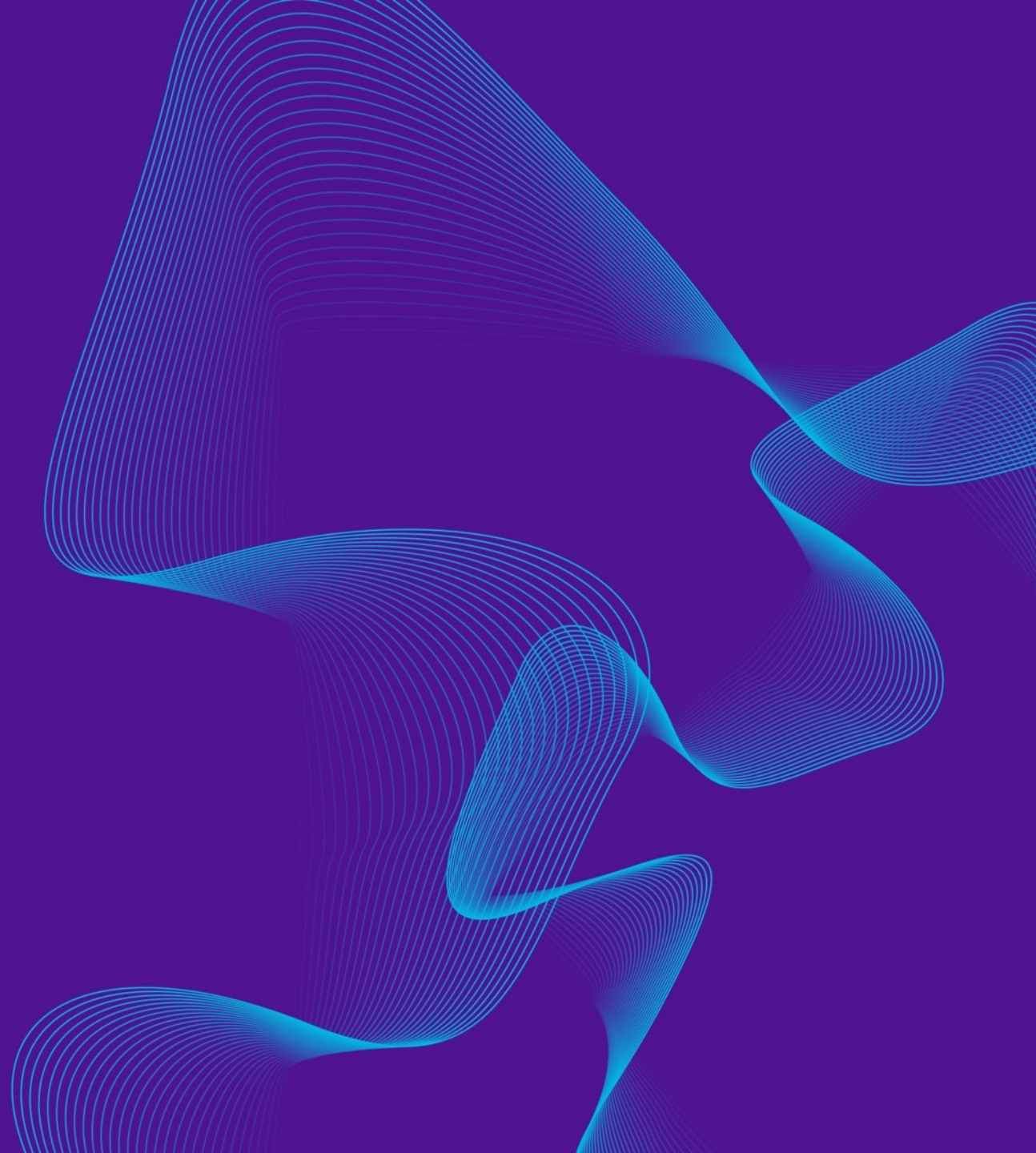
- Two reports by **Toby James and colleagues looking at AVR and the democratic data deficit** were at the base of **multiple submission of evidence to the UK parliament**.
- In 2025, the Fund's leadership also made **two new evidence submissions**, on **automatic voter registration**, **learnings from voter registration campaigns**, and **challenges around electoral data** as part of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee review of the 2024 General Election.
- The Fund's work also featured on ***London Voices***, a report produced in collaboration with **local government in London** and third-sector organisations.

Grantees campaigns

- Three out of five grantees working to influence electoral reform **gathered and shared new evidence** with policymakers and civil servants, organising **briefings and engaging with institutions** including the **Association of Electoral Administrators**, the **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Fair Elections**, **DLUHC**, and policymakers in Wales and Scotland.
- Two grantees focussed their efforts on more **direct influencing of decisionmakers**, including to commit MPs to bring forward legislation for **votes at 16**, and advocating for **automatic voter registration** through petitions and direct contact with MPs, including engagement with the then **Labour shadow government team**.

Evaluation results

Voter registrations impact



Voter registrations: UK Democracy Fund estimations

Within the key goal of increasing participation by registering voters, the Fund has worked with grantees to count and estimate the number of voter registrations generated by their campaigns. Initial estimates are rounded up to the nearest tens of thousands of registrations.

As evaluators, we have assessed and confirmed the approach taken by the Fund to estimate voter registration numbers, including the use of verified and estimated registrations, and applying completion and rejection rates to the final estimates.

Lower and higher range scenarios reflect the use of higher or lower completion and rejection estimates for verified registrations. A complete discussion of the “How we count” methodology is available on the UK Democracy Fund website.

Data type	Lower range scenario	Higher range scenario
Total verified registrations	300,000	380,000
Share of total registrations	42%	48%
Total estimated/self-reported registrations	410,000	410,000
Share of total registrations	58%	52%
Total registrations	710,000	790,000
Average	750,000	

Grantees impact: digital campaigns

Grantees created and disseminated information about elections to engage target audiences through digital media including with videos, social media content, and online events. These included:

- **Generating large amounts of digital political information content, and organising online events**

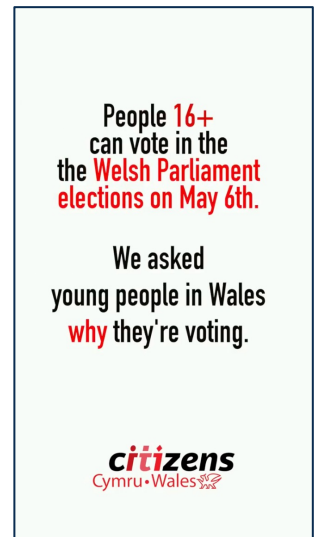
Grantees created videos, guides, and organised webinars to educate voters, which remains available on grantees' websites. Work included youth-led content generation and partnerships with influencers.

- **Scaling up presence on social media**

Grantees used resources to invest and grow their online presence, enabling regular audience engagement, especially during the Covid-19 lockdowns when in-person engagement was restricted.

- **Testing and scaling messages and mediums**

Digital spaces allowed grantees to test campaigning approaches and content with researchers and stakeholders before scaling up.



Grantees impact: public engagement and outreach campaigns

Grantees organised a variety of public engagement and outreach campaigns in both local and national spheres. These included:

- **SheVotes 2022** (POMOC): the first campaign designed by and for Polish migrant women and gender non-conforming people.
- **100% registered campaign** (Citizens UK Cymru): aimed to develop youth leadership, and to understand their views and participation in democracy.
- **Democracy Classroom** (The Politics Project): aimed at getting young people registered to vote, including school sessions, an election countdown, and a platform where schools can download information and resources.
- **#OurHomeOurVote** (the3Million): a targeted political rights programme to mobilise EU voters in the May 2021 local elections in England.
- **Rolling for Change VR Campaign** (Skate Cabal): aimed to increase participation of everyone in our elections, specifically people of African and Caribbean heritage.
- **#BallotBound** (Shout Out UK): a digital campaign aimed to promote voter registration among young people for the UK 2024 General Election.



Josephine Becker

Josephine Becker is a writer, co-host of the YIKES podcast, activist.

As a sustainability and climate justice activist, Josephine uses her blog as a learning platform on environmental justice and regenerative just futures, and runs a podcast series, YIKES, on climate and social justice, refugee rights, anti-oppression and overall "allyship".



#OurHomeOurVote
Launch & Youth Panel
1st March 6-7.30pm



Grantees impact: events, gatherings, learning and listening sessions

Grantees delivered a wide variety of events, including training sessions, listening sessions, and community gatherings, often pivoting to online platforms due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Examples include:

- **Carib Eats**

Carib Eats embedded discussions around the elections in their day to day activities, including information sessions in their canteens, voter registration pledging drives, bingo, and targeted listening sessions.

- **Boys and Girls Club Wales**

The Privilege Cafe, facilitated by Mymuna Soleman, held weekly Zoom sessions discussing how to use white privilege for good. A session in April 2021 addressed **representation in Welsh politics and political engagement with young people of colour**.

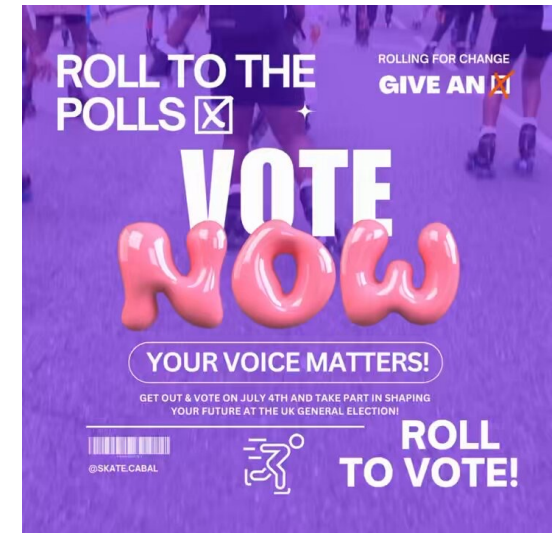


Grantees impact: languages and communities

Grantees worked to reach diverse communities including minoritised ethnic communities, eligible migrants, and refugees living in the UK with the right to vote, including **Black and Asian British** people, and Europeans, especially **east-Europeans**.

Campaigning and outreach materials were produced in a wide range of languages, including **Arabic, Bulgarian, Farsi, French, Irish, Kurdish, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Scottish Gaelic, Vietnamese, and Welsh**.

Outreach strategies also included engaging communities through religious organisations, including **Islamic centres, mosques, Anglican, Apostolic, Catholic, and Methodist churches**.



Grantees impact: media coverage of campaigning activities



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c03d68pd96zo>

Love Island star Sharron Gaffka is part of a new campaign to get young people to vote.

She told the BBC she was "shocked" to find out 70% of 18 to 34-year-olds have voted in reality TV shows in the last 12 months, but only 37% of those people are planning to vote in the mayoral election.

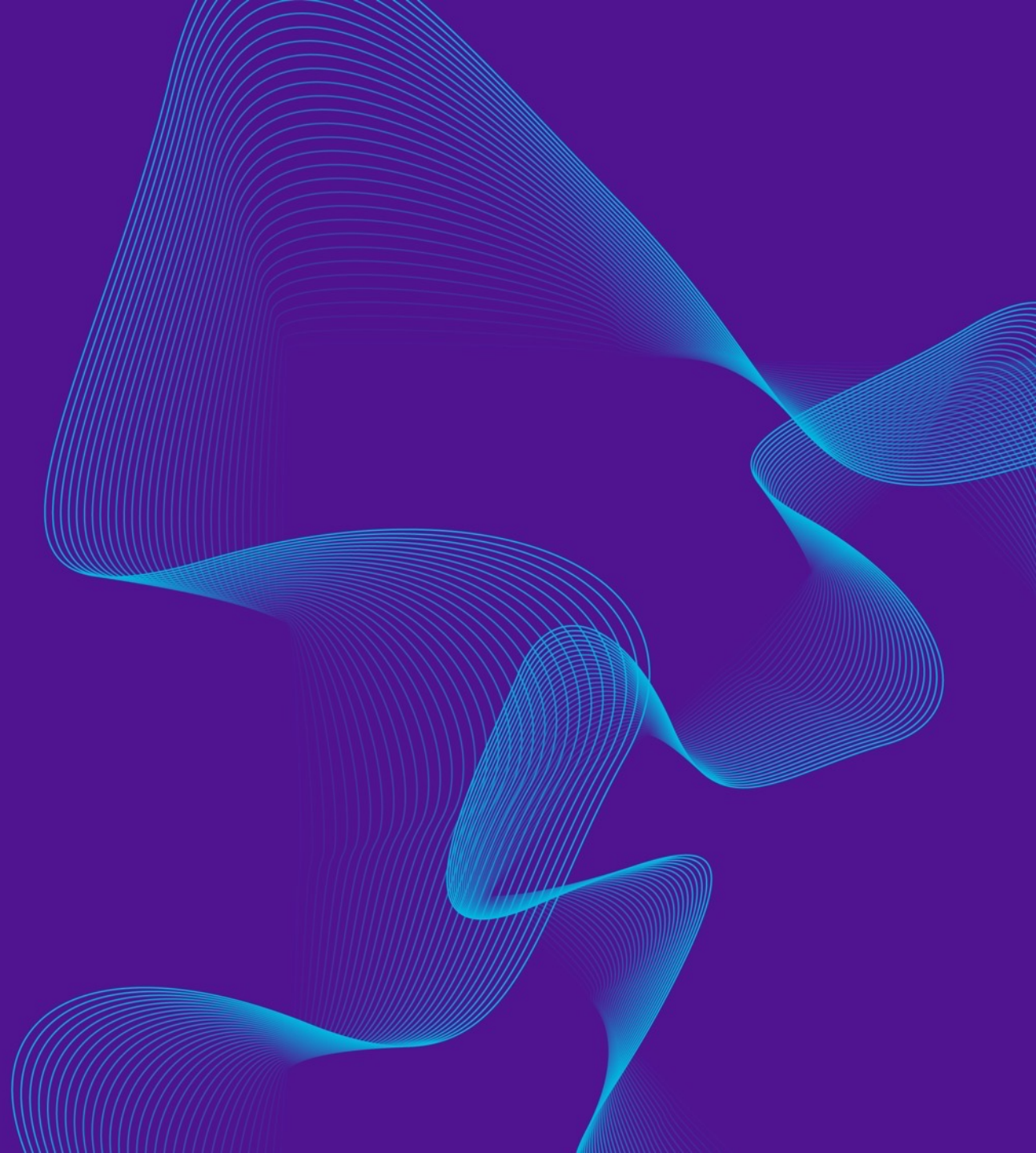
The data from the non-partisan campaign organisation, My Life My Say, highlights "the problem that young people do not have the right tools to make informed decisions".

Grantees and Fund activities were featured in a wealth of news coverage, talking about campaigns both in the local and national press and media. Some examples include:

- **Scottish Refugee Council:** 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:** partnerships with Channel 4, ITV, and BBC, notably on June 18th encouraging people to register before the voter registration deadline.
- **My Life My Say:** coverage for Give an X on the Daily Mirror, Independent, Daily Mail, and Rolling Stone.

Evaluation results

Grantees learnings on campaigning for voter registration and participation in elections



Grantees learnings: effective campaigning strategies



Engaging young people

Co-creation was a crucial factor in the delivery of engaging campaigns targeting young audiences.

Grantees also reported that **more evidence is needed** to understand young people's perspectives and experiences when it comes to democracy and politics.



Engaging refugees and migrants

Two factors were seen as key when engaging refugees and migrants: **providing resources in more languages** to reach to a broader group of refugees and migrants, and **providing more resources for political education**.



Digital campaigning

Digital campaigns were seen as useful to **scale up interventions**, bringing content and activities to more followers and other audiences online.

This was especially useful when activities could not take place in person during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Grantees still found **in-person activities more engaging** especially for political education campaigns and to reach marginalised communities.

Grantees learnings: effective campaigning strategies



Partnerships

Good partnerships with EROs, other CSOs, and private companies were **crucial elements for campaign reach and impact**.

This emphasises the importance of the work of the Fund as a convenor, discussed later on.

Key challenges for grantees included a lack of networking and communication skills, and knowledge on how to deliver a collaboration opportunity.



Political impartiality

Impartiality in campaigning was a key factor in effective campaigns as well.

Campaigns used **impartiality to communicate more authentically/transparently** to improve public engagement with democracy and elections.



Innovative engagement

Peer-to-peer campaigning, creative approaches like art-based outreach, pop-up events, and digital communications were effective means to engage the public.

These approaches, especially when used together with **new arguments and frames** for voter registration, and **more authentic language and frames** were particularly effective in reaching disenfranchised minoritised groups.

Grantees learnings: focus on community organisations



The Fund's community-based approach was seen as effective

The Fund's strategy of **supporting community organisations** new to democratic campaigning was deemed highly effective by both stakeholders and grantees.

Grantees improved their campaigning, communications and data skills, and **leveraged their existing connections and trust within their communities** delivering voter engagement campaigns.



Community engagement is a pathway to renew engagement

Grantees emphasised the importance of **sustained, in-person conversations and meeting people on their own terms** to effectively engage disenfranchised groups.

In-depth conversations were essential to counteract political apathy and disengagement, particularly among **minoritised ethnic groups who often felt unheard**.



Messengers matter in rebuilding trust

Trusted, credible messengers, especially those who shared sociocultural backgrounds with their audiences, was seen as essential for campaign effectiveness, as seen with the impact of **youth-led campaigns** and with the curiosity about elections generated in grantees' campaigns.

However, challenges may arise when messengers share the same biases or low political knowledge as the campaign's target groups.

Grantees learnings: public perceptions of politics and elections



The public is cynical and distrustful of politicians and elections

Grantees said their interactions with the public, especially marginalised groups showed individuals were **cynical, distrustful and/or unaware of politicians** and their work.

This leads the public to feel **apathy and mistrust towards voting as well**. This was seen as especially true for minoritised groups.



Challenging mistrust is possible, but requires long-term efforts

Grantees argued that tackling mistrust requires new **longer-term, more personal and authentic relationships** with disengaged communities and the public at large.

Grantees also highlighted opportunities to **reframe the conversation** from “voting” to “community” and “active engagement” to improve participation.



The public feels unrepresented, but still think voting is important

Grantees reported that disengaged groups feel disconnected from politics, noting especially the lack of **representative candidates** and a widespread belief that their **votes don't make a big difference**.

Nevertheless, the same groups still saw **voting as inherently important**.

Grantees learnings: campaigning challenges and opportunities



Staff recruitment and turnover

Grantees reported that the sector faces significant challenges with **high staff turnover**. This was attributed to **short-term funding**, the use of **part-time contracts**, and **low pay**, making it hard to recruit and retain skilled staff.

Staff issues impacted performance, caused campaigns to stall, and were seen as a factor causing **loss of institutional knowledge**, hindering longer term plans.



Political neutrality

Grantees had strong awareness of the need for political neutrality in their campaigns.

They employed strategies such as **staff training**, **balanced social media advertising**, and **inclusive events**.

While some found maintaining political neutrality challenging, especially in politically charged environments, it ultimately provided **opportunities for engagement and credibility**.



The electoral cycle and snap elections

Grantees said that **snap elections energise voter registration efforts**, but they also force a **rush to deliver** activities in a short period, limiting the depth and scope of their efforts.

Longer-term funding and planning are needed for sustained engagement, especially in disenfranchised communities.

Local elections could be an opportunity to test ideas but are less exciting to voters, who are harder to engage.

Grantees learnings: campaigning challenges and opportunities



Lack of resources

Organisations often said they lacked **financial resources and dedicated staff** to engage disenfranchised groups.

This was an especially salient challenge when it came to planning and delivering long-term efforts to promote engagement, as **funding is often short-term** and used for project closer to elections.



The impact of health and economic crises

The Covid-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis made campaigning more difficult, especially when grantees sought to reach vulnerable groups, and as **interests and priorities shifted** for the public.

Crises also affect campaigns by driving **volunteer shortages**, and making **events harder to organise**.



Campaigning flexibility

Delivering campaigns got harder as grantees faced the Covid-19 pandemic and an earlier than expected **General Election announcement**.

This highlighted the need for **flexible campaigning plans**, adaptable to changing political events and timelines.

Grantees learnings: obstacles in the administrative and data environments



The public does not trust registration systems requiring their personal information

Members of the public engaged through campaigns were mistrusting of systems requiring them to share personal information needed to register to vote, including their national insurance numbers.

Mistrust was higher in politically disaffected and disengaged groups.



Administrative hurdles

Grantees experienced notable challenges when navigating the **complex administration** of voter registration processes.

This was a challenge both when **seeking data to properly target campaigns and interventions**, but also when **interacting with other organisations**, such as EROs or administrators in universities and other education institutions, to deliver campaigns and voter registration drives.



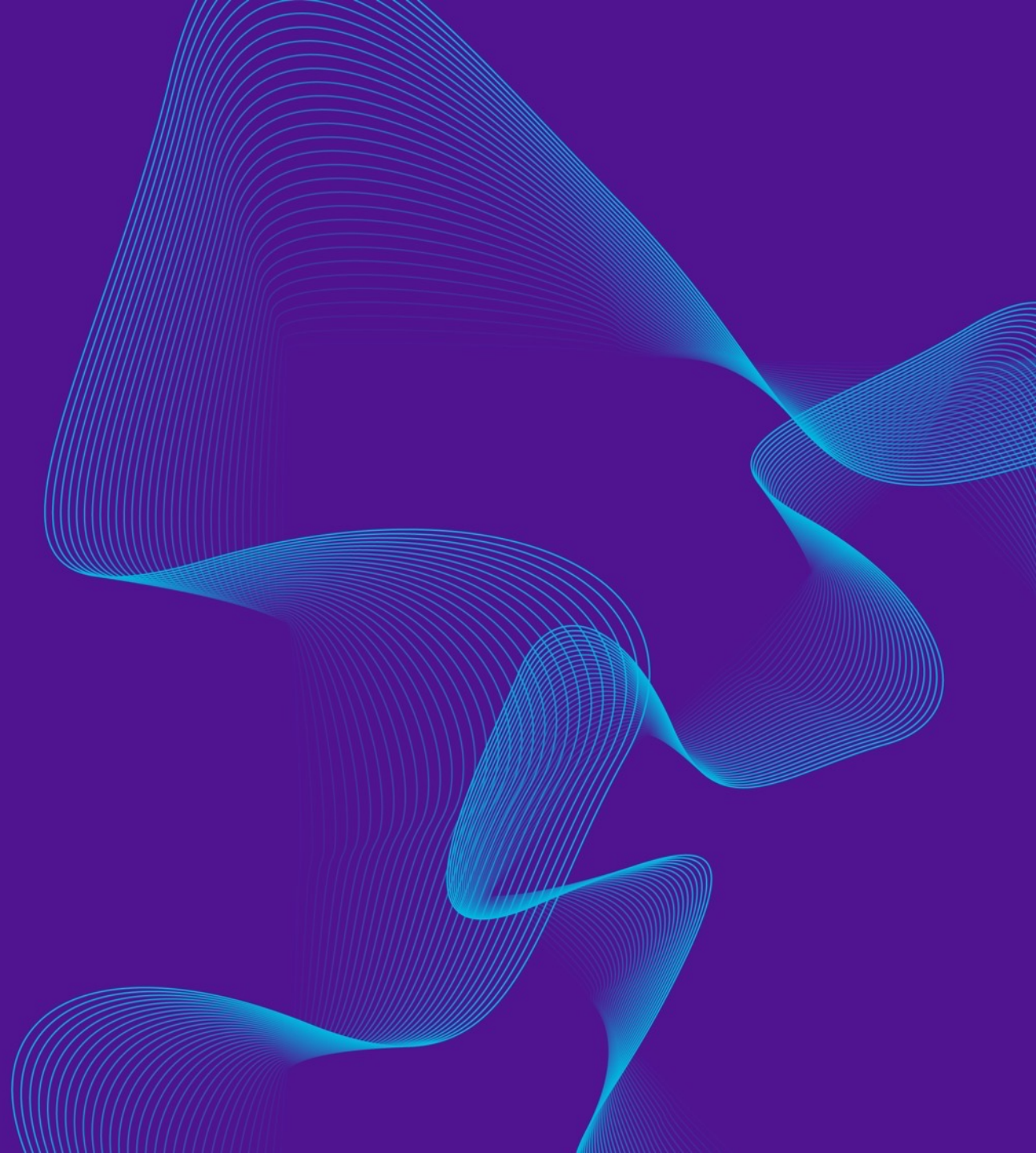
Monitoring and evaluation challenges

Grantees found monitoring and evaluation activities **resource-intensive**, especially in a challenging funding landscape.

However, they also agreed that better monitoring and evaluation systems are important and essential for the goal to create a robust **evidence base for effective voter engagement campaigns**.

Evaluation results

Working with the Fund



Grantees learnings: awareness of the Fund and application process



Awareness of the Fund and initial approach

Grantees discovered the UK Democracy Fund through **online searches, previous funding from JRRT and similar organisations, sector knowledge**, or by being **directly reached by the Fund**.

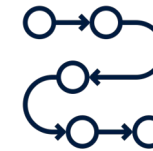
The Fund's informal conversations and processes before applications helped highlight the Fund's strategies and aims to potential grantees, and encouraged applications.



Reasons to apply

Grantees cited three reasons and opportunities for applying for funding:

- To **implement** projects which had been previously considered but which were not funded.
- To **scale up** existing practices.
- To **pursue effective approaches**, building on existing strong relationships with target groups.



Application process

Grantees had **mixed views** on the Fund's proactive approach to the application process.

While some appreciated the Fund's involvement and feedback, others found the process too time-consuming and bureaucratic, especially given the possibility that applications could be unsuccessful.

Grantees learnings: targets and perceived impact



Setting targets

Grantees found voter registration **targets difficult to set** and felt they were often **arbitrary**.

Grantees agreed with the need for an **ambitious goal**, but also acknowledged they were aware that the Fund would judge grant performance according to other parameters as well. Challenges were reported around potential **competition or duplication of efforts among grantees**.



Focus on voter registrations as a target

Grantees argued that the focus on voter registration as a metric was **too simplistic and difficult to measure**.

They felt this focus shifted resources away from effective in-person community engagement and towards online ads.

Additionally, **competition between grantees** for similar target groups was perceived as **counterproductive**.



Data collection

Grantees and stakeholders found it **difficult or frustrating to gather data** measuring the impact of voter registration campaigns, when the constraints in the current data environment made it impossible to do so.

While the focus on voter registration was seen as good, others emphasised that meaningful, sustained change in participation could only come from **legislation and systems reform**.

Grantees learnings: a supportive, flexible, and trusting Fund



The Fund was seen as supportive

Grantees appreciated the Fund's supportive approach, including their **openness, genuine interest in grantee success, and helpful advice.**

However, some grantees felt more involvement and feedback from board members and senior figures would be beneficial.



The Fund was described as flexible and trusting

Grantees appreciated the Fund's **flexibility and “understanding approach” to working together.**

This was especially appreciated during Covid and after the snap election announcement, allowing grantees to confidently identify **adjustments to plans and approaches based on new learnings and changing scenarios.**



The importance of feedback and learning

Grantees appreciated the Fund's interest in their learnings and feedback, but sometimes found the **two-page reporting limit restrictive.**

Specifically, while some grantees valued the “light touch” reporting requirements, others felt they needed more space to convey their learning and impact.

Grantees learnings: the challenges of project delivery



Grantees struggled with the time commitment and administrative burden

Some grantees felt the Fund required **too much time commitment**, including for reporting, feedback, and event attendance, without adequate compensation.

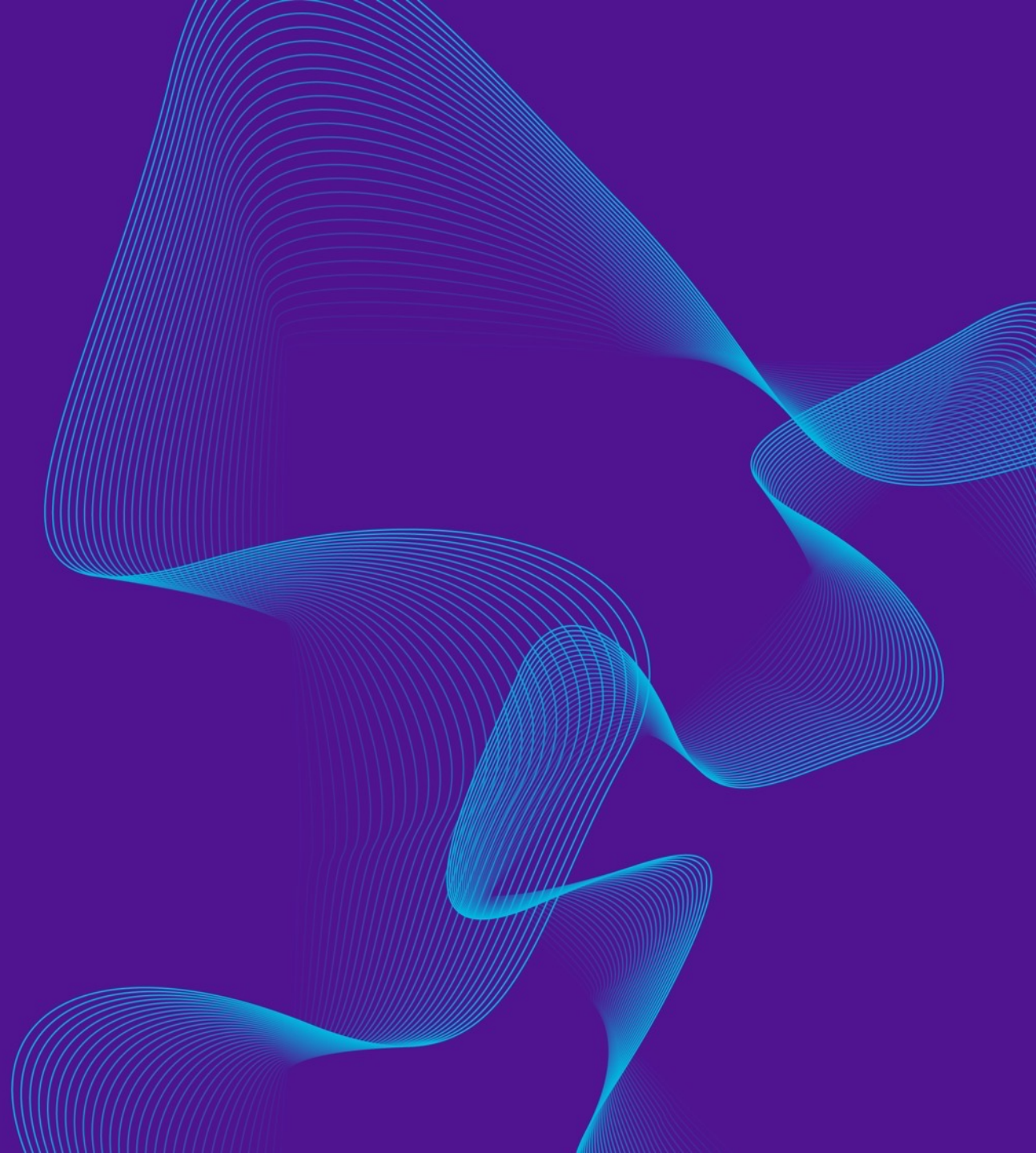
Smaller organisations, in particular, expressed concerns about the time and resource demands.



Low funding could impact grantees' willingness to apply for funding in the future

While some organisations secured additional funding or extensions, to tackle under-resourced projects, others found the **low funding levels and high resource demands made them hesitant about pursuing new grant applications with the Fund in the future.**

Recommendations



Recommendations for the Fund

The work of the Fund should continue

With an approximate estimated **750,000 new registered voters**, work to engage disenfranchised voters, a substantial record of participating and contributing with **evidence to the debate around electoral reform**, and grantees commenting on the essential nature of the Fund's resources to their work, our key recommendation is that the Fund should continue investing its resources in this area.

Identifying new ways of working to tackle new (and old) challenges

The convening efforts of the Fund have created an engaged group of grantees who can now **identify new opportunities for deeper collaboration, reaching out to other stakeholders, and working to tackle structural issues** including public mistrust in politicians and political institutions, and high levels of political apathy. The Fund can work to advise grantee on how to best identify stakeholders' collaboration opportunities with public institutions and researchers, and can improve its own processes to provide more flexible opportunities to grantees seeking small, or large, short, or long-term grants and funding.



Photo by [Red Dot](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Recommendations for the Fund

Continue the work to gather, share, and use evidence to inform public engagement campaigning approaches

The Fund is best positioned to **keep championing the collection of robust evidence** on effective campaigning approaches, to lead a renewed conversation on a **What Works Centre studying public engagement with democracy and electoral participation**, and to better connect grantees, stakeholders, and funders with researchers in universities.

Work towards better impact evaluation and evidence generation

The Fund's efforts have ushered a **better culture of monitoring, evaluation, and impact in the sector**. Grantees and the Fund can achieve even more robust results in future funding rounds with **new efforts to create more and diverse opportunities to collect impact evidence**, improving data quality, introduce the use of identifiers and data verification processes, and augmenting current findings using data from survey and experimental studies.



Recommendations for grantees and organisations promoting democratic participation

Strengthening fundraising, data and monitoring capacities

Grantees should **invest in fundraising capabilities and build long-term skills to face an increasingly competitive funding environment**. Strengthening data and monitoring capacities is crucial, as these functions are often underdeveloped. Funders are likely to impose stricter requirements, making it essential to invest in monitoring, evaluation, and data management systems. **Collaborating with universities to identify shared research opportunities**, including hosting research interns, can help build these capacities cost-effectively.

Keep advocating for the shared needs of the sector

Organisations need to **keep advocating for funding, training and other resources from funders and the government** to keep breaking political participation inequalities. There are two key needs: (i) **engaging disadvantaged communities into elections and democracy**, and (ii) **supporting grantees' operational needs**. Disadvantaged communities require access to information, civic education, and digital accessibility to boost electoral participation. Grantees, as third sector organizations, connect these communities with politics and advocate for their needs, requiring adequate funding and resources to operate effectively.



Photo by [Jorge Percival](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Recommendations for grantees and organisations promoting democratic participation

Collaborating more within and beyond the sector

Organisations can **collaborate within the democratic engagement sector on fundraising, sharing costs, and joint training, while sharing evidence and lessons learned**. Beyond the sector, **academic partners can support program implementation and evaluation**, and lessons can be learned from other efforts to engage vulnerable groups. **The Fund is well-positioned to facilitate these partnerships**, aligning with the recommendation to renew conversations for a What Works Centre for democratic participation.

Connecting with other funders to address working conditions in the sector

Workforce burnout, challenges to maintain programme continuity, and unmet need for resources to upskill workforces are systematic issues across the sector. The Fund and other organisations promoting democratic participation should work together to address these by earmarking grant resources to improve project continuity, preventing burnout and upskilling workforces. **New coordinated investments and initiatives across the sector can also help with skills development or to promote staff retention**.

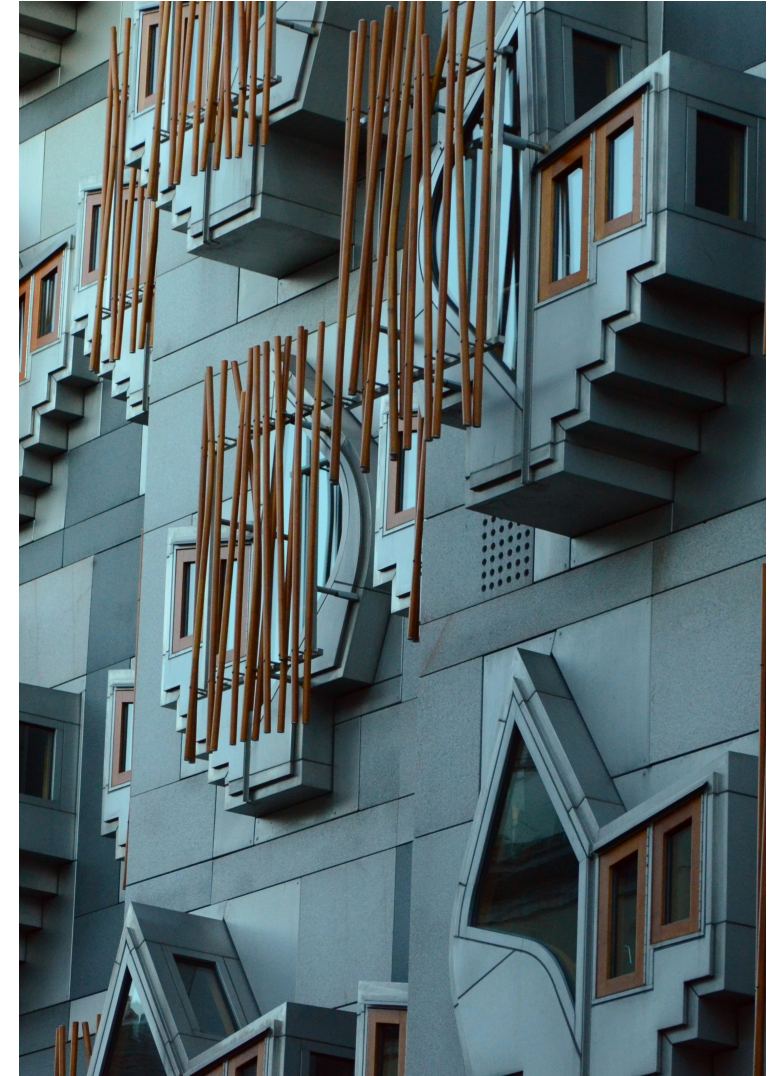


Photo by [Chris Flexen](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Policy recommendations

The case for automatic voter registration, and its wider implications

Automatic voter registration can break down barriers to public participation in elections and democracy. Electoral reform would also mean that **organisations can invest in boosting turnout, political engagement, and democratic education** instead of dedicating funds to campaigning for AVR and to increase voter registrations.

Making data on voter registration and turnout easier to access and use

Grantees and organisations like the Fund struggle to access data and insights for political engagement campaigns and impact measurement. **Government, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry for Housing, Communities, and Local Government, local authorities, and organisations including the Office for National Statistics and the Electoral Commission should have a clearer process to share data to interested stakeholders and researchers.**



Photo by [Phil Hearing](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Policy recommendations

Funding the essential work of organisations tackling democratic participation

The strength of democracy lies in healthy levels of public participations in politics and the public life. With growing levels of political disengagement, **the UK government should work with philanthropic organisations and allocate funds to organisations seeking to widen public participation in democracy.** The government should also consider **partnership with stakeholders in the sector to unlock new evidence for better campaigning.**



Evidence
Development and
Incubation Team

THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE

KING'S
College
LONDON

Paolo Morini - paolo.morini@kcl.ac.uk
Research Fellow – King's College London

Johnny Runge – johnny.runge@kcl.ac.uk
Senior Research Fellow – King's College London

Domenica Avila – domenica.avila@kcl.ac.uk
Research Associate – King's College London

Connect with us

- | | |
|---|--|
| 📍 kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute | 🦋 @policyatkings.bsky.social |
| ✉️ policy-institute@kcl.ac.uk | ✂️ @policyatkings |
| 📘 The Policy Institute | 📷 policyinstitute |