

Research Briefing

6 August 2025

By Neil Johnston

Voter ID



Summary

- 1 Voter ID rules
- 2 What happens in the polling station?
- 3 Access to ID
- 4 How much of a problem is personation?
- 5 The impact of voter ID
- 6 Recommendations for amendments to voter ID scheme
- 7 Background to voter ID

Image Credits

[Polling station \(way in\)](#) by [Paul Albertella](#) . Licensed under [\(CC BY2.0\)](#)

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing [‘Legal help: where to go and how to pay’](#) for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk or visit commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources for more information.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Contents

Summary	5
1 Voter ID rules	8
1.1 Elections where voter ID applies	8
1.2 Elections where voter ID does not apply	9
1.3 Permitted ID for voting	9
1.4 Adding to the list of approved documents	12
1.5 Voter Authority Certificates	13
1.6 Anonymous Elector's Documents	15
1.7 Emergency proxies	16
2 What happens in the polling station?	17
2.1 Refusing a ballot paper	18
2.2 Data collection	20
2.3 What happens to the data?	22
3 Access to ID	24
3.1 Passports	24
3.2 Driving licences	25
3.3 Who is less likely to have photo-ID	25
3.4 Voter Authority Certificates	26
3.5 Votes at 16	27
4 How much of a problem is personation?	28
5 The impact of voter ID	31
5.1 Turnout	31
5.2 Does it prevent personation?	32
5.3 Awareness of voter ID	34
5.4 Voters turned away	34
5.5 Voter Authority Certificates	36

5.6	Impact on election staff	37
6	Recommendations for amendments to voter ID scheme	39
6.1	2023 recommendations	39
6.2	2024 recommendations	41
6.3	Government proposals	42
7	Background to voter ID	44
7.1	Fraud research	44
7.2	Voter ID pilots	47
7.3	Elections Act 2022	51

Summary

What is voter ID?

Voters must show photo ID in a polling station before being issued with a ballot paper. This also applies to proxy voters (someone voting in person on someone else's behalf).

The provisions for Great Britain were introduced by [Elections Act 2022](#). Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to show ID when voting in all elections there since 1985, and photo ID since 2003.

Which elections does it apply to?

Voter ID is required for:

- UK Parliament elections
- All other elections in England and Northern Ireland
- Police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales

These requirements do not apply to elections to the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru and to council elections in Scotland and Wales.

What ID can you use?

The ID voters can use includes passports, full and provisional driving licences, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) cards, Blue Badges, and some concessionary travel cards. The full list is available on the Electoral Commission website: [Accepted forms of photo ID](#). Voters may request their ID is inspected in private.

The ID used in a polling station must be original, not a photo on someone's phone or a photocopy. It does not matter if a document has expired, as long as the photo is a good likeness. Digital forms of ID are not currently accepted, except for eVisas.

People without an existing acceptable form of voter ID [can apply online](#) or by post for a free Voter Authority Certificate (VAC). The VAC will display the name and a passport style photo of a voter.

Why was voter ID introduced?

Voter ID is meant to prevent personation – the electoral offence of using someone else's vote.

The Electoral Commission has previously found no evidence that electoral fraud is widespread and that reports of fraud were concentrated in a small number of areas. It also [found public perception](#) (PDF) of electoral fraud mainly came from media reports and second-hand information.

The commission [also found](#) (PDF) that providing information on electoral processes helped to reduce concerns. [However, it recommended in 2014](#) that voter ID should be extended from Northern Ireland to the whole of the UK, particularly as registration and postal voting had been made more secure but polling station voting had few checks in place to detect fraud. A report by the then government's Anti-Corruption Champion [recommended in 2016](#) that the government should consider pilot voter ID schemes in Great Britain.

Critics of voter ID say the problem it is designed to solve, personation, is very rare. Only a handful of alleged cases have been reported in the last five years and only two convictions and two cautions. These were in 2021.

What has the impact been?

[According to the Electoral Commission](#) voter ID has been introduced in Great Britain with few administrative problems, but administrators [have expressed concern](#) about the additional burdens placed on, and the rise in abuse of, polling stations staff.

[Awareness of the requirements](#) to bring ID to vote has been high. Awareness of the VACs, for people without any other form of acceptable ID, is low and the number issued is low compared with the number who might need one. Despite over 210,000 applications for VACs before the 2024 general election, only around 26,000 were used.

Changes in turnout at an election cannot be attributed to a single factor.

Some people have been prevented from voting because they lack the correct ID. At least 50,000 voters were initially turned away at polling stations [at 2024 general election](#), with 34,000 returning. This meant 16,000 did not return. The Electoral Commission's post-election research also found around 4% of people who didn't vote said this was because of the voter ID requirement but the commission's research also found negative perceptions of party politics and politicians contribute to people's decisions not to vote.

The [Electoral Commission has said](#) that the impact of the voter ID requirement has not been uniform. Some people are less likely to have one of the acceptable types of ID. The commission says the evidence on which groups were more affected is mixed but the clearest impact is on the lower social grades (C2DE). The commission's research suggests disabled people and the unemployed had more of a problem trying to produce ID compared to the general population.

Recommendations for change

Although the Labour Party opposed the introduction of voter ID, along with most opposition parties in the previous Parliament, the UK Government has not pledged to scrap the requirements. Labour had a manifesto commitment to “address the inconsistencies in voter ID rules that prevent legitimate voters from voting”.

In July 2025 the government [published its policy paper on elections](#). The main changes the government want to introduce are:

- Allow bank cards showing the person’s name to be added to the list of acceptable ID
- Allow digital versions of ID to be used as they are added to the gov.uk wallet
- Make VACs available in digital form

The [Electoral Commission has welcomed](#) the use of more digital forms of ID but has said “using bank cards as voter ID has risks for security and voter trust.”

1 Voter ID rules

Voters must appear on the electoral register to be able to vote. The details on eligibility to register are in the Library briefing, [Who can vote in UK elections?](#)

The voter ID rules are designed to prevent the electoral crime of ‘personation’. This is where someone votes pretending to be someone else. This is usually associated with polling stations but can also apply to postal voting or proxy voting.

Personation is an offence.¹ Someone found guilty of personation could be subject to an unlimited fine and/or up to two years in prison. They can also be disqualified from being registered and voting at any election for five years.

1.1 Elections where voter ID applies

The elections where voter ID is required in polling stations are:

- UK Parliament general and by-elections
- Local elections in England – including mayoral and parish elections
- Local referendums in England
- Police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales
- All elections in Northern Ireland
- UK Parliament recall petitions

These are elections where responsibility for making the rules lies with the UK Parliament and are known as ‘reserved’ elections.

The requirements also apply to proxies voting in a polling station on someone else’s behalf. They must have photo ID to verify their identity before voting as a proxy for someone else.

¹ Section 60 of the [Representation of the People Act 1983](#) for UK Parliament elections. It also appears in other conduct rules legislation for other elections

1.2 Elections where voter ID does not apply

Voters **do not** need to show photographic ID when voting in Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru elections, or local council elections in Scotland and Wales. These are elections where the rules have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Senedd Cymru and are known as ‘devolved’ elections.

In these elections voters will be able to vote in person at a polling station without presenting any ID. They do not need to take their polling card to vote.²

1.3 Permitted ID for voting

The list of permitted documents is set out in legislation.³ The list can be altered by secondary legislation if approved by Parliament.

The permitted photo documents for elections where photo ID is required are:

- A UK, Commonwealth, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, British Overseas Territory, or EEA passport
- A UK (DVLA or DVA Northern Ireland), Channel Islands, Isle of Man or an EEA driving licence (including a provisional licence)
- A Blue Badge
- A PASS card issued by the National [Proof of Age Standards Scheme](#) bearing the PASS hologram
- A biometric immigration document issued in accordance with regulations under section 5 of the UK Borders Act 2007, including eVisas
- An MOD Defence Identity Card (Form 90)
- Ministry of Defence Form 100 (HM Armed Forces Veteran Card)
- Electoral Identity Card issued in Northern Ireland
- Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) or a temporary VAC
- Anonymous Elector’s Document
- National identity card issued by an EEA state

² The only exception is anonymously registered voters who require their polling card

³ [Schedule 1 of the Elections Act 2022](#) inserted the requirements into rule 37 of [Schedule 1](#) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended

- Scottish National Entitlement Card
- Concessionary travel passes as follows:
 - Older Person’s Bus Pass funded by the Government of the United Kingdom
 - Disabled Person’s Bus Pass funded by the Government of the United Kingdom
 - Oyster 60+ Card funded by the Government of the United Kingdom
 - Freedom Pass
 - 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
 - Disabled Person’s Welsh Concessionary Travel Card
 - Senior SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
 - Registered Blind SmartPass or Blind Person’s SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
 - War Disablement SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
 - 60+ SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland
 - Half Fare SmartPass issued in Northern Ireland

During the passage of the Elections Bill, amendments were tabled to attempt to broaden the range of documents on the list. During the House of Lords report stage of the bill, an amendment from Conservative peer Lord Willetts was approved. It would have added various non-photographic types of ID to the list. This was overturned by the House of Commons.⁴

Commonwealth passports

The original wording in the 2022 act said a “passport issued by an EEA state or a Commonwealth country” is acceptable ID. A technical amendment was made by secondary legislation in 2024 to clarify that a Commonwealth country is one listed in schedule 3 to the British Nationality Act 1981.⁵ The list of countries in this schedule is updated sometimes to reflect changing membership of the Commonwealth. For example, the list includes Zimbabwe, which was previously a member of the Commonwealth. Voting rights are only altered if a country is deleted from schedule 3 of the 1981 act. As Zimbabwe has not been deleted, and is seeking readmission to the Commonwealth, its citizens are still considered Commonwealth citizens.

⁴ Library briefing, [Elections Bill 2021-22: Progress of the Bill](#)

⁵ [Voter Identification \(Amendment of List of Specified Documents\) Regulations 2024](#)

Scottish National Entitlement Card

The 2024 changes also made a technical amendment to the use of the Scottish National Entitlement Card. Cards issued for concessionary travel were an accepted form of voter ID. However, they are issued for a variety of reasons other than just concessionary travel, for example for accessing libraries and membership of council run leisure centres. Any card issued for non-travel purposes could not be accepted at the polling station under the original wording. The 2024 change clarified that any Scottish National Entitlement Card issued by a local authority in Scotland can be used as voter ID, not just those issued as travel cards.⁶

Expired ID

An approved identification document does not have to be in date to be accepted. Expired ID will still be accepted providing it is on the approved list of documents and the photograph is still a good likeness.

A VAC does not expire but has a recommended renewal date.

A temporary VAC is valid only for the election it was issued for.

Digital ID

At the moment documents in the polling station used for voter ID need to be the original version, and not a photocopy or digital image of the original. The only current exception is if a voter uses an eVisa.⁷

The UK Government is introducing a gov.uk digital wallet and app to make government-issued documents available on telephones. Drivers' licences will be one of the first digital documents available on the service.⁸ The government's ambition is that "in time, the digital driving licence will be usable in the same way as its physical counterparts".⁹

The UK Government's policy paper on elections, published in July 2025, notes that:

The voter ID legislation currently stipulates that ID accepted at the polling station must be an original document – it does not specify that it must be a physical document.¹⁰

The government plans to allow for digital forms of official documents to be used in polling stations as they become available. It will also allow electoral registration officers to produce digital VACs.

⁶ As above

⁷ Electoral Commission, [Accepted forms of ID](#)

⁸ UK Government press release, [Digital driving licence coming this year](#), 21 January 2025

⁹ [PQ 25734 \[Digital licenses: digital technology\] 30 January 2025](#)

¹⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections](#), July 2025, paragraph 44

Why not all types of travel cards?

The list of allowable ID was based on [existing guidance](#) on proving identity. The guidance categorises types of ID based on their security features and robustness of the verification measures in the application process.

60+ Oyster card, Older person's bus passes, Freedom Pass, and the Blue Badge were included in the list of permitted documents. They had lower security scores than passports and driving licences but were included to increase the availability of ID for groups less likely to have these major forms of identification.

Other railcards, including the 18+ Oyster card in London, were rejected because the current application processes are not as rigorous.

For example, an older person's bus pass application must have proof of address (driving licence, utility bill, bank or credit card statement, or a council tax bill) and proof of eligibility (birth certificate, passport, driving licence, or a letter confirming you a pensioner from the pension service). For an 18+ Oyster the applicant needs you must have an email address, student enrolment ID from your course, an address in London, and a digital photo.

1.4

Adding to the list of approved documents

The provisions of the [Elections Act 2022](#), which introduced the new voter ID rules, allow for the list of approved documents to be added to.¹¹ This can be done using secondary legislation and must be approved by both Houses of Parliament (the draft [affirmative procedure](#)). Changes can only be made if recommended by the Electoral Commission. An example of this is the addition of the Armed Forces Veteran Card, which was added in time for local elections in England in May 2025.¹²

The Electoral Commission has recommended that the government consider reviewing the list of approved ID. It first did this in its report on the May 2023 elections.¹³ The then government's response to the report, published in November 2023, rejected calls to add to the list but said that it would be kept under review (see section 6).¹⁴

¹¹ New Section 59A inserted into the Representation of the People Act 1983, inserted by schedule 1 of the 2022 Act

¹² [Voter Identification \(Amendment of List of Specified Documents\) Regulations 2024](#). Separate secondary legislation will extend the use to elections in Northern Ireland in due course. The next scheduled elections there are due in 2027.

¹³ Electoral Commission, [Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#), 13 July 2023

¹⁴ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Government response to Electoral Commission report on May elections](#), Accepted identifications, 30 November 2023

The commission renewed its call for the list of ID to be reviewed in its report on the 2024 general election, saying:

This should include a particular focus on forms of ID that would support people who are least likely to have documents on the current list, including people from a lower social grade (C2DE), disabled people, and those who are unemployed.¹⁵

The UK Government's July 2025 policy paper has said it plans to legislate to permit the use of UK-issued bank cards as an accepted form of voter ID in Great Britain, providing the bank card displays the elector's name.¹⁶

The Electoral Commission has said "using bank cards as voter ID has risks for security and voter trust."¹⁷

1.5 Voter Authority Certificates

Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) are a form of photo ID created by the 2022 act. They are for use by people who do not have another form of acceptable photo ID. They are free of charge and currently only available in physical form. The government has said it will change the rules to allow digital VACs to be issued.¹⁸

People can apply for a free VAC online at the gov.uk page [applying for a photo ID to vote \(called a 'Voter Authority Certificate'\)](#). It is also possible to [apply by post](#). The Electoral Commission has provided advice on [applying for a Voter Authority Certificate](#) on its website. [An easy read version](#) of the VAC application procedure is available on the gov.uk website.

Voters applying for a VAC will need to provide their National Insurance (NI) number and a photograph. There is an exceptions process for people without a NI number.

A digital photo can be submitted as part of the online application, but the photo must fulfil certain criteria, like those required for passport photos. The guidelines are on the [applying for a Voter Authority Certificate](#) page. Electoral administrators reported that obtaining a suitable photo caused the most issues with VAC applications at the 2024 general election. Some applications came with selfies with inappropriate backgrounds or with dogs, which caused delays.¹⁹

¹⁵ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), recommendation 2, 29 July 2024

¹⁶ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections](#), July 2025, paragraph 40

¹⁷ Electoral Commission press release, [Electoral Commission responds to Government's Strategy for Elections](#), 17 July 2025

¹⁸ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections](#), July 2025, paragraph 46

¹⁹ IFF Research for MHCLG, [Electoral Integrity Programme Evaluation: Year 2](#), p52-3

Some councils have made in-person applications available, including assistance with taking pictures. Decisions on providing such assistance are a matter for each local electoral registration officer.

VAC applications are processed locally by council electoral registration teams but the printing and distribution of them is done centrally. The service level agreement between the government and the contractor is that VACs will be issued (printed) 1-2 days after authorisation for their issue from an electoral registration officer and then delivered by first class Royal Mail.²⁰

The design of the VAC is the responsibility of the Electoral Commission. It shows the elector's name and photograph, the local authority that issued the VAC, and a unique number. In the run up to the local elections in England in May 2023 the Commission issued a publicity photo of what a VAC looks like, shown below.



Source: Electoral Commission, [photos for media use](#), Voter Authority Certificate (cropped)

The VAC does not display the holders' date of birth as it is not intended to be used for demonstrating proof of age. The government says this is "consistent with the fact we have always been clear that this policy will not introduce a national identity card by the back door."²¹

VACs do not expire but they have a recommended renewal printed on them that is ten years after the date of issue.

²⁰ Information supplied by the Association of Electoral Administrators

²¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Protecting the integrity of our elections: Voter identification at polling stations and the new Voter Card, January 2022, [the voter card](#)

The deadline for applying for a VAC before any given election is 5pm on the sixth working day before polling day. For local elections in England on 4 May 2023, that was 5pm on Tuesday 25 April.

Temporary VACs

A temporary VAC may be issued by an electoral registration officer when a voter has applied for a VAC close to the deadline before polling day, but it is unlikely to turn up in time to use. A temporary VAC is only valid for that poll and can only be issued in certain circumstances.

The conditions for issuing a temporary VAC are:

- The application for the substantive VAC was received by the deadline (5pm six working days before polling day), and
- The substantive VAC has been printed after the application deadline and before 5pm on polling day, and
- The electoral registration officer has reason to believe the substantive VAC may not be delivered to the elector in time to use on polling day

All the conditions must be met. If the conditions are not all met a temporary VAC cannot be issued. It may be possible to apply for an emergency proxy to get someone to vote on behalf of someone who has neither a VAC nor a temporary VAC (see below).

Temporary certificates may be issued from 5pm on the sixth working day before polling day up to 5pm on polling day if the conditions have been met. In the case of a recall petition the deadline is one hour before the petition closes for signatures.

A temporary VAC must be collected by the elector in person. The electoral registration officer for the local council can determine the location and times for collection of a temporary VAC.

1.6 Anonymous Elector's Documents

A person who is registered to vote anonymously must bring their polling card to a polling station if they want to vote in person.²² The voter ID requirements mean they must also now bring an [Anonymous Elector's Documents](#).

Anonymously registered electors should be invited to apply for an Anonymous Elector's Document (AED). A returning officer must also send a reminder to anonymously registered voters of the need to bring their Anonymous Elector's Document if they wish to vote in person. The application deadline for an AED

²² Library briefing, [Anonymous electoral registration](#)

to be used in an upcoming election is the same as for a VAC, 5pm on the sixth working day before polling day.

Anonymous voters who vote at polling stations are not listed on the electoral register by name, but by their electoral number. Instead of showing the person's name, an anonymous electoral document shows the person's electoral number which corresponds with the register being used in the polling station. It still needs to contain a photograph.

1.7 Emergency proxies

A proxy is someone who votes on your behalf because you are unable to.

Normally a voter can apply for an emergency proxy because of something that they were not aware of before the normal proxy vote deadline (the emergency must be related to illness or being away for work). A new category of emergency proxies has been created to deal with issues relating to voter ID.

Applications for an emergency proxy may be made after the deadline for appointing a normal proxy, which is 5pm, 6 working days before election day in England, Scotland, or Wales, or 5pm, 14 working days before election day in Northern Ireland.

There are five categories relating to voter ID where someone can apply for an emergency proxy:

- ID has been lost, stolen, or damaged to the point it is no longer usable, and the loss, theft or damage took place after 5pm, 6 working days before the election (the deadline for applying for a VAC)
- ID has been sent away after the deadline for applying for a VAC for the purposes of proving identity (for example renewing a passport) and it is unlikely to be returned in time to use on polling day
- An application for ID (including a VAC) was sent in the last three months but it was not received by 5pm, 6 working days before the election someone wants to vote in (and the application has not been refused)
- An anonymous elector does not have a valid Anonymous Elector's Document
- A temporary Voter Authority Certificate for a specific date was issued but the election was adjourned (this means voting at a polling station was disrupted on polling day and was postponed until the following day).

As noted earlier, anyone appointed as a proxy will also need to show photo ID to prove they are the person they say they are before being issued with a ballot paper.

2

What happens in the polling station?

Polling station staff will first check that the voter is on the polling station register of electors and is entitled to vote in the election being held.

Voters will then be asked for their photo ID. Polling station staff will check the ID produced is one of the allowable types, the photo is a good likeness, the name matches the register, and the ID is genuine.

If the photo ID is accepted the voter will then be issued with their ballot paper and they can vote in the normal way.

Checking photo ID in private

Voters may request that their ID is checked in private. Returning officers must provide a separate area for the checking of ID. This may be a sectioned off area in the polling station or a separate room or area near-by.

Voters do not need to give a reason and polling station staff should not ask for any reasons for the request. It may be because the voter is wearing a face covering for religious reasons. Mirrors should be provided for people to ensure their face covering is in place before leaving the private area.

Voters who are registered anonymously and trans or non-binary voters may also prefer to have their ID checked in private. Polling station staff should not refer to any detail other than the name (or elector number for anonymously registered voters) on the ID presented, including any gender marker.

Female voters may also request that a female member of polling station staff carries out the check. If no female polling station staff are available returning officers will have contingency plans in place. This may be in the form of female polling station inspectors, who will be authorised to check photographic ID, and who will be on call to attend polling stations at short notice. Voters may be asked to wait, or to return later.

If ID is checked in private only the member of polling station staff should be present. No other people who are allowed to be in a polling station, such as polling agents or official observers, may observe the private checking of ID.

Approximately 2,250 voters were recorded as having asked to have their ID check done in private during local elections in England in May 2023.²³

²³ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the May 2023 local elections in England: interim analysis](#), Impact of the voter ID requirement on polling day, 19 June 2023

At the 2024 general election 5,237 electors in Great Britain had their ID checked in private, although the figure may have been higher as 20 constituencies in Great Britain did not provide data. The statutory report on the voter ID provisions at the general election commissioned by the government concluded there was not enough evidence to determine whether all electors who wanted a private ID check had one.

Awareness of the opportunity to have a private check was low and although most polling stations provided for private checking:

some electoral services teams did not feel the need for dedicated privacy provisions due to the demographics of their area, and an underlying assumption that checks in private would not be needed.²⁴

2.1 Refusing a ballot paper

No photo ID

If a voter does not have an approved piece of voter ID they will not be issued a ballot paper. They will be told they may return later in the day with one of the approved types of ID.

If a voter refuses to produce ID they cannot, by law, be issued with a ballot paper.

Photo is not a good likeness

If poll clerks have reasonable doubt the voter is who they say they are, the poll clerks should refer the matter to the presiding officer. The presiding officer is the person in charge of the polling station.

Only a presiding officer may make the decision to refuse to issue a ballot paper if the likeness raises reasonable doubt. If the presiding officer has reasonable doubt and decides to refuse to issue the ballot paper they must explain this to the voter. They will then ask them to return with another accepted piece of ID with a current likeness.

If a female voter who has requested their ID is checked in private by a female member of staff, and that member of staff has reasonable doubt as to the likeness they must refer to their presiding officer. If there is no female presiding officer in the polling station, or in another polling station in the building, the returning officer should have provided contact details to the presiding officer for female members of staff who can check ID in these circumstances.

²⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [Evaluation of the Electoral Integrity Programme: Year 2 Report](#), section 2.6

ID is a suspected forgery

If a polling station clerk suspects a piece of ID is not genuine they must refer it to the presiding officer.

If the presiding officer has reasonable doubt that the ID is genuine they must return it to the voter and explain they believe it to be a forgery. They should also advise the elector to return with an alternative form of accepted photo ID.

Voter refuses to remove a face covering

In these cases, which may include coverings used for medical reasons, polling station staff should explain the law does not allow them to issue a ballot paper unless they can verify the ID by comparing the picture with the elector's face.

They should also explain that a separate area is available for checking ID in private.

Local circumstances may vary but reasonable adjustments to accommodate electors who may have safety concerns about removing a face covering might include:

- Offering to check the electors photo ID outside the polling place
- Providing face coverings for polling station staff to wear while checking a voter reluctant to take off their face mask.
- Asking voters to briefly move their face covering to their chin like passport checks at border control posts.

Name discrepancies

The photo ID should show the name of the voter as it appears on the electoral register. Examples where it may differ are a mis-spelling, the voter has a double-barrelled family name or uses a shortened version of their full given name.

If the variation does not give the polling station staff reason to doubt that the person is who they claim to be, they should issue the voter with a ballot paper.

If the poll clerk has reasonable doubt they must refer the matter to the presiding officer. The presiding officer may ask for additional evidence to help resolve the discrepancy, for example a marriage certificate, divorce papers, deed poll paperwork, a birth certificate, or a household bill. The presiding officer can also ask the prescribed questions.

Prescribed questions

The only way polling station staff can challenge someone's right to vote in an election is to ask the prescribed statutory questions.

Before voter ID this was the only way of ensuring someone was who they said they were when voting. If the prescribed questions were answered satisfactorily then the person must be issued with a ballot paper, regardless of any doubt that polling station staff may have of their identity. The wording varies depending on the type of election, but the questions are a way of confirming the elector is the person registered on the polling station copy of the register and that they have not voted elsewhere.

The prescribed questions may still be asked in certain circumstances even with the introduction of voter ID.

If the presiding officer is satisfied the identity of the elector is correct they may issue a ballot paper.

If a presiding officer has reasonable doubt over the discrepancy they cannot issue a ballot paper and must explain to the voter that they may return. This may be with a different piece of ID or with additional evidence. If a presiding officer has reasonable doubt they cannot ask the prescribed questions.

What happens if you are refused a ballot paper?

The presiding officer's decision on whether to refuse to issue a ballot paper to someone is final.

There is no right of appeal either in the polling station or after the poll.

A voter may ask for information relating to a refusal after the election and may apply to their local electoral registration officer after the election if they were refused a ballot paper. The officer can then provide information on the refusal to issue a ballot paper to that person. The voter cannot inspect the list nor ask for information relating to anyone else.

2.2

Data collection

New requirements have been placed on polling station staff to record certain data on the new voter ID requirements. This applied to the May 2023 elections in England and will also apply to the two UK general elections after voter ID was implemented.²⁵

²⁵ [Section 59A](#) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by the Elections Act 2022

This data will be used to record specific issues relating to the checking of photographic ID and assist with the evaluation of how the ID requirements are working in practice. The evaluation of this data is explained in section 5.

Voter identification evaluation document

The voter identification evaluation document (VIDEF) records in each polling station how many voters:

- used a Voter Authority Certificate
- used an Anonymous Elector's Document
- asked to have their ID checked in private
- were turned away

These will be simple tallies for the polling station and will be recorded on the note sheets at each polling station.

The VIDEF tracks the number of electors who were turned away by noting their elector number (or name and address if acting as a proxy) and allows data collection on the number of people who return later. The list will note whether the individual voter produced a document that was not on the accepted ID list or was unable to produce ID. The VIDEF will be updated if that same voter returns with an accepted type of ID later in the day.

The VIDEF will also record whether the polling station has used 'meeters' or 'greeters' or not. There is more information on the data in section 5.

Ballot paper refusal list

The ballot paper refusal list (BPRL) will record if voters are refused a ballot because the photo was not a good likeness, it was believed to be a forgery, or the elector failed to answer the prescribed questions (if they were asked) and then left the polling station. If they are refused but then produce an acceptable type of ID with a good likeness without leaving the desk they will not be recorded.

Each voter refused for these reasons will have their elector number noted and the reason for the refusal. It will be updated later in the day if they return and are refused again, or if they return and are issued with a ballot paper. The layout of the BPRL is prescribed in [schedule 4](#) of the Voter Identification Regulations 2022.

The totals from the BPRL will be added to the relevant fields in the VIDEF.

SCHEDULE 4
Prescribed form of ballot paper refusal list at parliamentary elections

Ballot Paper Refusal List

Guidance

You should only record a refusal to issue a ballot paper on this List when an elector or proxy presents one of the required forms of identification, but **either**:

1. You are not satisfied the identification is of who they claim to be (e.g. the photo was not a good likeness); **or**
2. You believe the document is a forgery; **or**
3. The elector or proxy was asked the Voter Identification statutory questions and did not answer as required.

Please enter 1, 2 or 3 based on the reasons outlined above in the 'reason for refusal' column.

If an elector or proxy is initially refused for one of the above reasons, but then produces an accepted document before leaving the desk and is issued a ballot paper – you do not need to record their details on this form.

If you refuse to issue a ballot paper to an elector **for any other reason** (e.g. they did not bring any identification or do not have one of the required forms of identification) - **DO NOT record this on this form.**

An elector or proxy can only be refused for one reason at a time but can be refused more than once if they return and attempt to vote again. **If you refuse an elector or proxy more than once, mark each reason for refusal in order on the same row for that elector.**

Elector's elector number <i>OR</i> If a proxy voted on behalf of that elector, the proxy's name and address	Reason for refusal(s) – separate by comma if elector or proxy refused more than once 1. You are not satisfied the identification is of who they claimed to be 2. You believe the document is a forgery 3. The elector or proxy was asked the Voter Identification statutory questions, and did not answer as required	Tick if elector or proxy later returned and was issued a ballot paper

2.3 What happens to the data?

At the close of poll each presiding officer must ensure the data from the BPRL and the VIDEF are completed. The data from the BPRL will be totalled and added to the VIDEF.

Sensitive material used in polling stations must be placed in sealed envelopes at the close of poll and sent to the returning officer at the count. This will include the BPRL and the completed VIDEF. The returning officer will then forward these to the electoral registration officer for the local authority. They will collate anonymised data from all the polling stations in their local authority. Only the electoral registration officer can open the sealed packets containing the VIDEF and BPRL so they can compile the data.

The collated detailed local authority level data can only be shared with the Electoral Commission and the government.²⁶ The data forms part of the evaluations of the conduct of the elections. Returning officers can also make

²⁶ Rule 40B(7) of the Parliamentary election rules in schedule 1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended

information public on the number of voters who were not given a ballot paper in the local authority area. They may make ward level data available but are not required to and they cannot provide a breakdown the number not issued a ballot paper into the categories. This data can only be shared with the Electoral Commission or the government.

The Electoral Commission [produces statutory reports](#) on the conduct of each national election. As well as using the new data on voter ID, the Commission also collect other administrative data, such as on the number of postal votes, and survey data to produce their evaluations. The survey data includes survey of elections staff and public survey work on people's perceptions and confidence in the electoral process.

The government is required to conduct evaluations of the impacts of voter ID on the 2023 local elections and after the first two general elections after the voter ID provisions have been introduced.²⁷ The evaluation will include public opinion survey conducted by an independent agency.²⁸

Can you FoI the data?

No. Returning officers and electoral registration officers are not a public authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. However, they may release data they have available in the interests of transparency if the data is already in the public domain, or if the information requested does not include personal data.

Registration officers will be unable to release the two sets of anonymised data collated and sent to the Electoral Commission and the government as this is specifically prohibited in the rules, as noted above. They may provide data that is anonymised but not collated, for example, data at polling station or ward level, but are not required to and may refuse an FoI request.

²⁷ Rule 2, [Schedule 1](#), elections Act 2022 inserted the requirement as [section 59A](#) of the Representation of the People Act 1983

²⁸ [Letter from Rachel Maclean MP, Minister of State, DLUHC, to Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee](#), 28 April 2023

3 Access to ID

Estimates for the number of people eligible to vote without a pre-existing form of ID accepted for voting range from 925,000 to 3.5 million.

The Electoral Commission's [Public Opinion Tracker 2022](#), carried out in February 2022, found that 4% of people in Britain (equivalent to around 1.9m voters) did not have any of the pre-existing forms of photo ID required to vote. The Public Opinion Tracker is a national survey of around 5,000 people.²⁹

Government figures suggest at least 2% of people do not hold one of the forms of ID currently listed for use as voter ID.³⁰ These estimates suggest suggests approximately 1.3 million people do not hold any form of photo ID in Britain.³¹ If the same proportion of electors did not have ID, then around 925,000 voters would not hold any form of photo ID.³²

3.1 Passports

Some data is available from the 2021 census on the number of people who hold passports in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

56.1 million usual residents of England and Wales (86.5%) held at least one passport in March 2021. 42.5 million residents held a UK passport (76.7%).³³

In Northern Ireland, 1.6 million residents (84.1%) held at least one passport. 1.0 million (52.6%) held a UK passport. 1.4 million (73.6%) held a UK passport, an Irish passport, or both.³⁴

Scotland's census took place in 2022. Data on passports held has not yet been published.

²⁹ Electoral Commission, [Public Opinion Tracker 2022](#), June 2022

³⁰ Cabinet Office, [Voter identification: photographic ID ownership in Great Britain data tables](#), May 2021, and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections, July 2025, paragraph 38](#)

³¹ ONS, [Great Britain population mid-year estimate, 2019](#), June 2021: the GB population was 64.9m in June 2019

³² ONS, [Electoral Statistics, UK: March 2020](#), January 2021: the GB electorate was 46.3m in March 2020

³³ Office for National Statistics, [International migration, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), 2 November 2022

³⁴ NISRA, [Census 2021: Main statistics for Northern Ireland statistical bulletin: Passports held](#), 22 September 2022

Not everyone resident in the UK will be eligible to vote. Eligibility depends on nationality, as well as age and residency. The Library briefing, [Who can vote in UK elections?](#) provides more information.

3.2 Driving licences

It is estimated that around 77% of people aged 17 and over across the UK hold a full car driving license:

- In [England](#), it was estimated that 77% of people aged 17 and older held a full car driving license in 2021.
- In [Scotland](#), it was estimated that 76.0% of people aged 17 and over held a full driving license in 2020.
- In [Northern Ireland](#), it was estimated that 77.6% of people aged 17 and over held a full license in 2022.
- Comparable figures are not available for Wales.

3.3 Who is less likely to have photo-ID

The proportion of respondents to the Electoral Commission's Public Opinion Tracker 2022 who did not have a suitable form of ID for voting was higher among more disadvantaged groups. 14% of unemployed people, 10-17% of those living in rented local authority or housing association accommodation and 7% of people with lower levels of education did not have a suitable form of ID.³⁵

The Commission's 2015 analysis also highlighted that access to some forms of pre-existing photo ID varies. For example, older people were found to be less likely to hold a passport and women under 20 and over 65 less likely to hold a driving licence.³⁶

The Cabinet Office's 2021 research found non-voters and people over the age of 85 were least likely to have pre-existing forms of photo ID.

³⁵ Electoral Commission, [Public Opinion Tracker 2022 tables \[xlsx\]](#), June 2022

³⁶ Electoral Commission, [Delivering and costing a proof of identity scheme for polling station voters in Great Britain](#), December 2015, p17-8

3.4 Voter Authority Certificates

After the 2024 general election the Electoral Commission estimated that around 750,000 registered voters do not have any other accepted form of photo ID and might want to apply for a VAC to be able to vote.³⁷

The 2021 [Cabinet Office research](#) found that among people without any photo ID, 42% said they were unlikely or very unlikely to apply for VAC-type ID, while 43% said they were likely or very likely to do so.

Among people with a photo ID that was not recognisable, 50% were likely or very likely to apply for a VAC-type ID, compared with 30% of those with recognisable IDs.

For comparison, the [Electoral Commission's Public Opinion Tracker 2022](#) found that less than half of those people without a pre-existing form of photo ID (43%) would probably or definitely apply for a free voter ID card.

The Electoral Commission report on voter ID for the 2024 general election found 210,000 applications for VACs were made from the time they were made available in early 2023 to the deadline for applications in time for the July 2024 general election. Applications from those aged over 65 made up 11.4% of applications and from those under 25 made up 8.2%. The most applications (28.3%) came from the 55 to 64 age group.

Only around 26,000 certificates were used as a form of ID for the 2024 general election with the commission commenting, "It is not clear why a significant number of people applied for a certificate but did not use it on polling day."³⁸

Research commissioned by the government, as required by the 2022 act that introduced voter ID, found that awareness campaigns promoting VACs were conducted and processing applications received was generally straightforward.³⁹

In surveys for the research, awareness of VACs was low. This was partly because many electors had an accepted form of identification so did not need to be aware of VACs, but even among those without an accepted form of ID awareness was low. The research suggests, "that lack of awareness of VACs could have contributed to electors without an accepted photographic identification not being able to vote."⁴⁰

³⁷ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 general election](#), 29 July 2024

³⁸ As above

³⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [Evaluation of the Electoral Integrity Programme: Year 2 Report](#), section 2.4

⁴⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [Evaluation of the Electoral Integrity Programme: Year 2 Report](#), section 2.4, p49

3.5

Votes at 16

The UK Government has a manifesto commitment to reduce the voting age for all elections. 16 and 17-year-olds who can vote in Scotland and Wales do not need to show voter ID for those elections. The voter ID rules only apply to reserved elections.

The Electoral Commission does not hold information on photo ID ownership among 16- and 17-year-olds in England but has said it:

would expect to carry out further research to understand current levels and types of ID ownership in this group, to inform its work to support newly enfranchised voters to understand the ID requirement.⁴¹

The UK Government's policy paper of July 2025 has said it intends to allow the use of bank cards as voter ID as long as the card shows the person's name. Its research has suggested:

that 96.37% - 99.76% of those aged 14 and over in the United Kingdom have a bank account... with the majority also likely therefore to have a bank card. This change is expected to allow a far greater proportion of legitimate electors to easily meet the voter identification requirements.⁴²

⁴¹ [PQ 31892 \[Elections: proof of identity\] 3 March 2025](#)

⁴² Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections, July 2025, paragraph 41](#)

4 How much of a problem is personation?

The Electoral Commission has found little evidence of widespread electoral fraud in the UK.

The Commission produces annual updates of the number of electoral fraud cases by type. This data is collected from monthly returns from all 45 territorial police forces across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since 2016 there have been five convictions and six cautions for polling station personation.⁴³

The most recent convictions for polling station personation were in 2021. In one incident a man fraudulently applied for three ballots (there was a combined poll for three separate elections). He spoilt the ballot papers and then placed them in the ballot box whilst videoing himself. He then posted the film to social media. In the other incident a man was heard giving a name to polling clerks at a local council election and another person in the polling station knew he was not the voter he claimed to be. He was also convicted of multiple voting as he had voted as himself in another ward.⁴⁴

In 2022 police recorded 13 allegations of personation. Seven of those cases involved allegations of personation in polling stations, All the polling station cases resulted in the police taking no further action because there was no evidence or insufficient evidence. The remaining six cases related to allegations of personation relating to absent votes (three were postal votes and three were proxy votes).⁴⁵

In 2023 there were two allegations of polling station personation. Neither resulted in any further action as police no offence had been committed.⁴⁶

In 2024 there were seven allegations of polling station personation, but none led to prosecution.⁴⁷

‘A solution in search of a problem?’

Critics of voter ID often point to the lack of alleged cases of personation and even fewer cases of proven personation that lead to a caution or conviction.

During the House of Commons committee stage of the Elections Bill, Richard Mawry KC gave evidence on electoral fraud. He has presided over high-profile

⁴³ Electoral Commission, [Electoral fraud data](#)

⁴⁴ Electoral Commission, [2021 electoral fraud data](#)

⁴⁵ Electoral Commission, [2022 electoral fraud data](#)

⁴⁶ Electoral Commission, [2023 electoral fraud data](#)

⁴⁷ Electoral Commission, [2024 electoral fraud data](#)

legal challenges to election results. He told the committee “Voter ID at polling stations, frankly, is neither here nor there. Personation at polling stations is very rare indeed”.⁴⁸

Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, who has written extensively on issues concerning electoral integrity and is a trustee of Democratic Audit, has called the voter ID policy a “solution in search of a problem.” In 2018, he noted the small number of personation cases and argues that other forms of electoral fraud are more prominent:

the main reason to be sceptical that voter ID can prevent further instances of electoral fraud in Great Britain is that recent convictions for voting offences have overwhelmingly related to postal votes, not personation at polling stations.

However, he does also acknowledge:

Certainly, the absence of voter ID at polling stations is an obvious vulnerability. Fraud could also shift to polling stations as voter registration and postal voting safeguards become more robust.⁴⁹

Dr Toby James, a Senior Lecturer at the University of East Anglia, has argued that administrative reforms in one area displace reforms in another area. He has highlighted research, including the Electoral Commission’s own research, which shows millions of eligible voters are missing from the electoral register.

His view is reforms to the electoral registration process to ensure a more complete electoral register are more pressing than voter ID reforms.⁵⁰ He has also conducted research, with Dr Alistair Clark, which suggests people being turned away for not being registered is a much bigger problem than suspected fraud in polling stations. The evidence was presented to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry on electoral law.

Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg and Professor Maria Sobolewska expressed the view to the Committee that it was “difficult to square the government’s sole focus on voter ID with the wider evidence of threats to electoral integrity in the UK”, explaining that allegations of personation “accounted for a total of 178 cases alleging from 2010–18, with a peak of 44 cases in 2016” and the number of convictions for personation “could be counted on one hand”.⁵¹

Dr Toby James and Dr Alistair Clark surveyed over 2,200 polling station staff across 42 local authorities in England and found the most widespread problem in 2018 was voters being turned away from polling stations because their name was not on the electoral register. Over half (52%) turned away at

⁴⁸ [HC Deb 15 September 2021 \[Elections Bill \(First sitting\)\], c15](#)

⁴⁹ Stuart Wilks-Heeg, Manchester Policy blog, [Voter ID at British Polling Stations – Learning the Right Lessons from Northern Ireland](#), 1 March 2018

⁵⁰ Toby James, Democratic Audit blog, [Voter ID is a risky reform when 8m people are already missing from the electoral register](#), 4 May

⁵¹ Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [Electoral Law: The Urgent Need for Review](#) (PDF), 1 November 2019, HC 244 2019, para 53, p18

least one voter. In contrast only 1% suspected fraud had taken place and, according to the authors, implied that it might have been through administrative error rather than deliberate manipulation.⁵²

Most Opposition parties voted against voter ID during the passage of the Elections Act through Parliament. Some members of the Conservative Party have also questioned whether voter ID will improve electoral integrity. David Davis, a former Conservative minister, has described the voter ID policy as an ‘illiberal solution for a non-existent problem.’⁵³ Baroness Davidson of Lundin Links, former leader of the Scottish Conservatives, said in an interview, “I think it’s trying to give a solution to a problem that doesn’t exist, and that makes it politics as performance.”⁵⁴

Lord Pickles acknowledged the number of allegations of polling station fraud were low and prosecutions were rare in his [2016 review of electoral fraud](#). However, he cautioned that:

...there is a concern that the absence of evidence does not mean this practice is not taking place. And even if it is not, there is a precautionary principle that comes into play in terms of the potential for it to happen... the absence of some form of verification at the polling station has been identified by a number of expert organisations as a significant vulnerability.⁵⁵

⁵² Toby James and Alistair Clark, [Voter ID: our first results suggest local election pilot was unnecessary and ineffective](#), August 2018

⁵³ Independent, [Boris Johnson’s voter ID plans ‘illiberal solution for non-existent problem’, says senior Tory](#), 9 May 2021

⁵⁴ Times, [Former Scottish Conservatives leader Ruth Davidson lashes out at voter ID plans](#), 13 May 2021 (log in required)

⁵⁵ Eric Pickles’, [Securing the ballot: Report of Sir Eric Pickles’ review into electoral fraud](#), August 2016, para 29

5 The impact of voter ID

The government is required to commission independent research on the implementation of voter ID. It was required to do this after the first local elections in England after voter ID's introduction (2023) and after the first two general elections after implementation. The Electoral Commission has also reported on the introduction of voter ID in its statutory reports on elections held to date.

Overall voter ID has implemented without major problems and awareness of the requirements have been high. However, concerns have been expressed that electors from some groups were less aware of the requirements and find it harder to meet the requirements. It also found awareness of Voter Authority Certificates (VACs) is low amongst those without other types of ID that would benefit from a VAC.

Some voters were turned away, but it is not possible to determine the impact of voter on turnout. Turnout is affected by various factors and cannot be attributed to one change.

Electoral administrators and registration officers have also warned of the increasing workload brought about by voter ID and other changes from the Elections Act 2022. This, on top of already stretched electoral services, increases the risk of elections going wrong or people not being able to vote in elections in which they are entitled to vote in.

5.1 Turnout

It is not possible to attribute a change in turnout to one factor.

The Electoral Commission report for the 2023 local elections noted turnout was slightly down, at 32.0% down from 32.5% from the previous equivalent elections. The report noted 3% of non-voters said they did not vote because they did not have ID, and 1% said it was because they did not agree with the requirement to show ID to vote at a polling station.⁵⁶ Around 4% of all non-voters said they didn't vote because of the voter ID requirement at the 2024 general election.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Electoral Commission, [Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#), September 2023

⁵⁷ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), July 2024

Turnout at the 2024 general election was 59.7%. This was down from 67.3% in 2019.⁵⁸ The only lower figures since 1918 have been 57.2% in 1918 (when 107 of 707 seats were uncontested and there was low turnout among armed forces personnel posted overseas) and 2001 when turnout was 59.4%.⁵⁹

The Electoral Commission report on voter ID for the 2024 election again found evidence that some people who did not vote said it was related to the requirement to show photo ID, but the figures cannot be used to accurately quantify the impact of voter ID on turnout.⁶⁰

The commissions full statutory report on the 2024 general election notes that turnout in all elections in the UK has been steadily declining in recent years and this has been “largely driven by political factors”. It goes on to say:

For example, the 2024 election was widely expected to not be as closely contested as the four elections between 2010 and 2019. All four of these elections had a higher turnout than in 2024.

...

we also consistently find that negative perceptions of party politics and politicians contribute to people’s decisions not to vote. This includes a general lack of interest, the view that all parties are ‘the same’, a feeling that no party or candidate represented ‘their views’, and an absence of trust in politicians.⁶¹

In its qualitative research it said, “some electors also reflected that the identification checks don’t necessarily guard against use of fraudulent identification documents.”⁶²

5.2

Does it prevent personation?

The Electoral Commission report for the general election did not make an assessment on the impact on personation specifically. It reported that its research indicates 90% of voters were satisfied with the process of voting at the general election:

These generally positive perceptions of the poll are reflected in views on electoral fraud – 87% of people said that they thought voting in general was safe from fraud and abuse (England 86%, Scotland 90%, Wales 88%, and Northern Ireland 88%). This is a positive change from the 2019 general election when 72% said that they thought voting was safe from fraud and abuse.⁶³

⁵⁸ Commons Library briefing CBP 10009, [General election 2024 results](#)

⁵⁹ Commons Library briefing CBP 7529, [UK Election Statistics: 1918-2023: A century of elections](#)

⁶⁰ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), July 2024

⁶¹ Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), 7 October 2024

⁶² IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p59

⁶³ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), July 2024

Specifically on polling station voting, voters were significantly more likely than non-voters to say that voting is safe with 93% of all voters said voting in a polling station is safe compared to 77% of non-voters.⁶⁴

There were seven allegations of polling station personation in 2024, but none led to prosecution.⁶⁵

The government commissioned report on the general election analysed whether personation is identified more easily and reduces in the longer-term. It concluded there is not enough evidence to determine whether this is the case and that it cannot be determined whether or not the identification checks made it easier to detect personation:

Polling station staff were well prepared to carry out the identification checks, both in terms of training and staffing, and faced minimal challenges with delivery of checks on polling day. However, both public perception of personation and cases of detected personation have remained stable, and there's no way to know whether there were any cases that went undetected.⁶⁶

In Northern Ireland voter ID was introduced in 1985 and photo ID was introduced in 2003, The then Chief Electoral Officer of Northern Ireland reported that in the early 1980s personation was taking place on a “planned and well organised basis”.⁶⁷ Concerns about the level of voter fraud in Northern Ireland culminated in 1983 when 149 arrests were made for personation during the June 1983 General Election.⁶⁸

The experience in Northern Ireland was that controversy over the introduction of voter ID decreased over time and it eliminated personation without impacting turnout.

Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg wrote in 2018:

There was no evidence to suggest a fall in turnout, but there was plenty of evidence that fraud declined sharply. At the 2005 UK General Election, just 55 tendered ballots were issued in Northern Ireland, a 94% reduction compared to 1983. There has been just one conviction for personation in Northern Ireland since 2002. Meanwhile, public confidence in the integrity of elections in Northern Ireland is up. In the early 2000s, 66% of Northern Irish electors believed electoral fraud was commonplace in some areas. By 2017, the proportion who thought at least some fraud took place was 28%, in line with the rest of the UK.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ As above

⁶⁵ Electoral Commission, [2024 electoral fraud data](#)

⁶⁶ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p58

⁶⁷ Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, Electoral Malpractice in Northern Ireland, Minutes of evidence, 5 November 1997

⁶⁸ Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, Electoral Malpractice in Northern Ireland, Minutes of evidence, 3 December 1997

⁶⁹ Stuart Wilks-Heegs, [Manchester University Policy blogs. Voter ID at British Polling Stations – Learning the Right Lessons from Northern Ireland](#), March 2018

5.3 Awareness of voter ID

The UK first elections outside of Northern Ireland to use voter ID were the local elections in England in 2023. The first general election to require voter ID was the July 2024 election.

The Electoral Commission's 2023 analysis found that immediately before polling day 87% of people in England outside of London were aware that they needed to show photo ID to vote at a polling station (there were no scheduled local elections in London in 2023).⁷⁰

The commission found similar levels of awareness at the local elections in England in 2024 and the general election of July 2024. Awareness for the general election was highest in Scotland, slightly ahead of England and Wales, even though that election was the first time voters in Scotland were required to present photo ID.⁷¹

In both reports the commission said some groups of people were significantly less likely to know about the requirement. Younger age groups and black and minority ethnic communities were less likely to know about the voter requirements. The commission cautioned that people who may not have known about the need for voter ID until they got to a polling station would miss out on the opportunity to apply for a VAC.⁷²

The research commissioned by the government in 2023 found although general awareness of the need for voter ID was high there was some confusion about what types of ID were allowed. The research after the 2024 general election found that this confusion persisted. Some voters tried to vote with NHS, police or local authority passes, firearm licenses and digital images of accepted forms of ID. Also, some electors were also unaware that out-of-date identification documents could be used as long as the photo was still a good likeness.⁷³

5.4 Voters turned away

Although awareness was high some people did get turned away from polling stations. At the 2024 general election at least 0.25% of electors were turned away from polling stations, around 50,000 people. Two-thirds (34,000) did return with acceptable ID and were issued with a ballot paper. This meant 16,000 did not return. This is equivalent of 0.08% of all polling station

⁷⁰ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the May 2023 local elections in England: interim analysis](#), 23 June 2023

⁷¹ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), 29 July 2024

⁷² As above

⁷³ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p44-5

voters.⁷⁴ This is an underestimate as 20 constituencies in Great Britain did not provide data.

At the 2023 local elections in England, at least 0.7% of voters were turned away initially. Most people did come back after being turned away (63%), but some did not (37%). This means at least 0.25% of all people who tried to vote in person (or around 14,000 people) did not get a ballot paper.⁷⁵

Both the Electoral Commission and the government commissioned research note that the proportion of voters turned away has declined with each of the three elections so far, but both noted the data needed to be treated with some caution.

These figures are likely to be an underestimate because of the way the data was collected. In 2023 local elections and the 2024 general elections some returning officers employed 'greeters' outside polling stations. This was to remind voters of the need to bring voter ID.

However, the official data on how many people were refused a ballot paper was not collected until someone reached the desk inside a polling station and attempted to get a ballot paper from a polling clerk.

The Electoral Commission report on the 2024 general election found polling stations with greeters recorded a slightly lower proportion of people turned away (0.07%) compared to those without greeters (0.08%).⁷⁶ The government commissioned report on the 2024 election found a similar difference between polling stations with or without greeters.

The then chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee asked an Urgent Question on 27 April 2023 about confusion about how voters turned away by greeters would be collected.⁷⁷

The Chair of the Electoral Commission, in an exchange of letters with the Chair of the Committee, gave further information.

We are not asking Electoral Registration Officers to also collect data via greeters...This is because the process of collecting the data, for example using tally charts, risks providing inaccurate data in an inconsistent way. Practically, it also does not allow for the accurate recording of voters who might return to polling stations with the correct ID having been previously turned away. This can only be accurately recorded at the desk where the elector numbers of individual voters are held.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), 29 July 2024

⁷⁵ Electoral Commission, [Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#), September 2023

⁷⁶ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), 29 July 2024

⁷⁷ [HC Deb 27 April 2023, c919-30](#)

⁷⁸ [Voter ID – Levelling Up Committee Chair presses Electoral Commission on voter turnout data concerns](#), Electoral Commission [letter of 27 April 2023](#)

The AEA expressed concern about false media reports that meeters and greeters were being used to suppress data on those turned away and an increase in freedom of information requests. The AEA said:

Clear guidance on what can and should be published publicly, and in what format, would be helpful for everyone involved in running and reporting on elections.⁷⁹

5.5

Voter Authority Certificates

Awareness

In the report on voter ID at the 2024 general election the Electoral Commission estimated 750,000 registered electors do not have an accepted form of ID based on the commission's previous research.

Just over 210,000 applications for certificates were submitted between the launch of the service in early 2023 and the deadline for applications at the general election. Around 57,000 applications of these came between general election being called and the deadline for the general election six working days before the poll. People applying for a VAC were most likely to be 55 to 64 years old (31% of all applications) or 45 to 54 years old (23%).

Only VACs 26,000 were used as voter ID for the general election.⁸⁰ This was only 1,000 more than the local elections in England in May 2023.⁸¹ The commission said it was “not clear why a significant number of people applied for a certificate but did not use it on polling day.”⁸²

The Electoral Commission and the government commissioned research found that awareness of the VAC was low. The commission said only 58% of people were aware of the Voter Authority Certificate and this was similar across England, Scotland, and Wales, but commented “This is unsurprising given that only a small proportion of the population might need to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.”

The 2024 government commissioned research found that another possible reason was campaign materials focused heavily on the voter identification requirement, potentially detracting electors' attention from information on VACs.⁸³ Although nearly all electoral administrators in Great Britain reported confidence in the effectiveness of communication about VACs, but the qualitative research suggested communications about the option to apply for

⁷⁹ AEA [2023 Post Polls Review Under pressure: increased demand on the UK electoral system](#), June 2023, paragraph 3.4

⁸⁰ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), 29 July 2024

⁸¹ Electoral Commission, [Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#), September 2023

⁸² Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), 29 July 2024

⁸³ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p47

a VAC were alongside the voter identification requirement. Some administrators reflected that this could have meant the message about VACs got lost.⁸⁴

Processing applications

The government commissioned report suggested that most electors who wanted a VAC obtained one, but there is still evidence of barriers to uptake of VACs amongst some groups.

Only a small proportion of applications were rejected and the few cases where applications were not processed by the deadline for the 2024 general election, this was primarily due to electors not replying to outstanding queries.

Generally processing applications was straightforward but there were some teams found challenges with registration software. The main issues were with applicants' photos and where this meant going back and forth with applicants to acquire an appropriate photograph took time. In some cases, was made difficult if applicants had provided incorrect or insufficient contact information or were unresponsive. Some people had also applied for a VAC without having registered to vote.⁸⁵

5.6

Impact on election staff

Voter ID has been implemented by election staff effectively. The government commissioned reports on the 2023 local elections and elections in 2024 both found strong evidence that local authority election teams and polling station staff were well prepared and delivered voter ID as required by law.⁸⁶ In the report on the 2024 elections qualitative interviews, polling station staff commented that adequate staffing levels also supported the successful delivery of the voter identification requirements. At busy times though, when checking led to longer queues some voters were frustrated by the delays.⁸⁷

The Electoral Commission also found the elections to be well run but commented on the administrative burdens placed on elections staff resulting from various changes to election law, not just voter ID. These included changes to absent voting arrangements and overseas voters' eligibility and

⁸⁴ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p48-9

⁸⁵ As above

⁸⁶ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Evaluation of the Electoral Integrity Programme: Year 1 Report](#), section 2.2 and 2.3 and IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), section 2.1 and 2.2

⁸⁷ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p39-40

were made more complex by boundary changes to constituencies implemented at the 2024 general election:

Despite significant changes and challenges to delivery processes, the elections were delivered successfully. However, the capacity and resilience of the broader electoral system continues to be a key area of concern, especially with several, new, interconnected and complex changes layered onto an already stretched system.⁸⁸

The Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), an independent, not-for-profit membership organisation that supports local government, has conducted a research survey of electoral administrators through its Local Democracy Research Centre. It concluded the 2024 general election was well-managed despite some issues with postal voting delays but the administrative burdens on electoral staff should raise concerns:

From the perspective of administration, the specifics of voter ID are often less important than the fact of voter ID acting as yet another complication in the delivery of elections: more complexity, more resources needed for dealing with voter communications and processing, and another series of tasks that need to be completed within the limited timetable.⁸⁹

It found the majority of survey respondents said voter ID had made recruiting polling station staff (54.3%) more difficult and made processing voters at the polling station more difficult (79%).⁹⁰ Staff were more divided on whether voter ID impacted certain groups of voters than others.⁹¹

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) has highlighted the pressures election staff are under. Most members of the public are unaware of the processes that have to happen behind the scenes to make an election happen, and this can lead to unrealistic expectations. The chief executive of the AEA said after the 2024 general election:

election staff faced more vitriol from electors than ever before. They delivered the “toughest election yet”, with a tangible rise in the verbal abuse of frontline staff. That is simply not acceptable.⁹²

The AEA has previously said “It is becoming increasingly apparent fewer people are willing to take on evermore complex polling station roles.”⁹³

⁸⁸ Electoral Commission, [Report on the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election and the May 2024 elections](#), October 2024

⁸⁹ Local Government Information Unit, [Electoral administration at the 2024 UK general election](#) (PDF), March 2025, p23

⁹⁰ As above, p22-3

⁹¹ As above, p30-2

⁹² Local Government Chronicle, [Peter Stanyon: Election was beyond tough for returning officers and their teams](#), 10 July 2024

⁹³ AEA [2023 Post Polls Review Under pressure: increased demand on the UK electoral system](#), June 2023, paragraph 4.21

6 Recommendations for amendments to voter ID scheme

Most opposition parties opposed the introduction of voter ID when the proposals were brought forward in the bill that went on to become the Elections Act 2022, including the Labour Party.

The Labour Party manifesto for the 2024 general election did not include a commitment to abolish voter ID but instead said:

To encourage participation in our democracy, Labour will improve voter registration and address the inconsistencies in voter ID rules that prevent legitimate voters from voting.⁹⁴

The Electoral Commission and others have made recommendations to improve the operation of voter ID.

6.1 2023 recommendations

After its analysis of the 2023 local election in England the commission recommended prompt changes be made to improve the voter ID provisions:

It is crucial that improvements are made at the earliest opportunity, particularly given there are important elections that are due to be held during the next 18 months, to improve accessibility and support those people who do not have an accepted form of ID.⁹⁵

These included:

- Review the list of accepted forms of ID to identify any additional documents that could be included to improve accessibility for voters, particularly disabled and unemployed people
- The UK Government should explore whether the deadline for Voter Authority Certificate applications could be moved closer to polling day. The government's original policy intention was for the deadline to be the day before polling day
- The UK Government should enable registered voters who do have accepted ID to make an attestation at their polling station on behalf of

⁹⁴ Labour Party, Manifesto 2024: Change (pdf), p108

⁹⁵ Electoral Commission, [Report on the May 2023 local elections in England](#), 13 July 2023

someone who does not have any form of accepted ID (also referred to as ‘vouching’).

The commission also recommended that more and better data on voter ID should be collected beyond what was set out in the 2022 act. The legislation required data to be collected in May 2023 at local elections in England and at the first two general elections after the ID requirement was introduced.

Others had also made recommendations. The AEA’s view was that a review of accepted identification is needed as a matter of urgency to confirm if the current list should be expanded or reduced.⁹⁶

Government response

The then government responded to the Electoral Commission recommendations in November 2023. It declined to add any additional types of ID to the list of accepted ID but said it would keep the list under review. It said it had been unable to identify any additions that would succeed in significantly increasing coverage, in the groups identified and more generally, but would add to the list if any suitable additions were found at a later date.

The government also cited the “diminishing return of including additional documents on the list.” It pointed to its earlier research that 96% of voters already have an accepted form of ID and said, “as such the addition [to the list] would not be able to significantly increase coverage.” The government also argued that the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) has a significant role to play in ensuring everyone has access to a suitable form of ID.⁹⁷

The government rejected the commission’s recommendation that the deadline for applying for a VAC should be closer to the close of poll. It said it had worked with stakeholders in deciding the most appropriate deadline and highlighted that appointing an emergency proxy was an option for people with problems with their VAC application after the deadline.⁹⁸

On allowing vouching for voters without acceptable ID it said:

We do not believe there is a practical way to assure the attestation process in the polling station, that it would undermine the integrity of the check, and risk adding time and complexity to the polling station process both to those running it, and to those using it.⁹⁹

It also said the availability of VACs and emergency proxies would provide sufficient opportunity for votes without other forms of ID.

⁹⁶ AEA [2023 Post Polls Review Under pressure: increased demand on the UK electoral system](#), June 2023, paragraph 3.5

⁹⁷ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [Government response to Electoral Commission report on May elections](#), Accepted identifications, 30 November 2023

⁹⁸ As above, Voter Authority Certificates

⁹⁹ As above

The then government's view was that additional data collection should remain at the discretion of the returning officer:

We will therefore work with the Electoral Commission and the electoral sector to identify the best means of ensuring that robust data is collected in polling stations at future polls, beyond what is required by the voter identification legislation.¹⁰⁰

6.2 2024 recommendations

Following the 2024 general election the Electoral Commission reiterated the recommendations it had made in 2023.

It also recommended the UK Government should undertake and publish a review of the design, implementation and use of the Voter Authority Certificate, in order to encourage greater take-up and usage by people who don't have any other form of accepted ID. The commission said this should consider whether Voter Authority Certificates could be issued digitally as well reiterating the consideration to moving the deadline for VACs closer to polling day.¹⁰¹

The AEA also recommended issuing VACs digitally. If this were to be implemented then it also suggests the VAC application deadline could be closer to polling day. It has also recommended extending replacement VAC provisions to any elector who applied in the previous 28 days but has not received it, regardless of when it was issued.¹⁰²

And the government commissioned [independent evaluation](#) recommended that the Electoral Commission and electoral administrators could better emphasise current gaps in awareness and understanding around what is and is not acceptable ID for a polling station. For example, the report recommends they could better emphasise the options available for those without valid photographic identification (such as VACs, out-of-date identification documents and postal voting), and raise awareness of VACs in a way that stands out from other communications about voter ID requirements generally.¹⁰³

Government response

The Labour Government elected in 2024 responded to the Electoral Commission report in February 2025. It said that in line with its manifesto

¹⁰⁰ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, [Government response to Electoral Commission report on May elections](#), Data collection in polling stations, 30 November 2023

¹⁰¹ Electoral Commission, [Voter ID at the 2024 UK general election](#), 29 July 2024

¹⁰² AEA, [AEA New Blueprint for a Modern Electoral Landscape](#), February 2025, p17

¹⁰³ IFF Research commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Integrity Programme evaluation: Year 2](#), p186

commitment it was conducting a review both of the list of identifications currently accepted in polling stations and of the wider voter ID policy:

Conclusions from the government’s review of the voter identification policy, including outcomes of the above considerations, will be brought out in the government’s Strategy for Elections, to be published later this year.¹⁰⁴

6.3 Government proposals

In July 2025 the UK Government published its policy paper on elections.¹⁰⁵ It noted the current government was elected with a manifesto pledge to “address the inconsistencies in voter ID rules that prevent legitimate voters from voting”.¹⁰⁶

The main changes the government want to introduce are:

- Allow bank cards showing the person’s name to be added to the list of acceptable ID
- Allow digital versions of ID to be used as they added to the gov.uk wallet
- Make VACs available in digital form.¹⁰⁷

The government’s view on bank cards is that:

There is longstanding precedent of the use of bank cards as identification and our desk-based research has shown that 96.37% - 99.76% of those aged 14 and over in the United Kingdom have a bank account...with the majority also likely therefore to have a bank card.¹⁰⁸

The government highlights plans for more government issued documents to be included in digital form in the [gov.uk wallet](#). This is will soon be expanded to include the digital Veteran Card and driving licences. The government expects them to be allowed in polling stations:

The voter ID legislation currently stipulates that ID accepted at the polling station must be an original document – it does not specify that it must be a physical document. As documents already on the accepted list become

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Electoral Commission’s reports on the 2024 elections: government response, Voter identification, February 2025](#)

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections, July 2025](#)

¹⁰⁶ [Labour Manifesto 2024: Change](#) (PDF), June 2024, p108

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections, July 2025, paragraphs 37 to 47](#)

¹⁰⁸ As above, paragraph 41

available in digital form, these too will therefore be accepted at the polling station.¹⁰⁹

The Electoral Commission has welcomed the use of more digital forms of ID but has said “using bank cards as voter ID has risks for security and voter trust.”¹¹⁰ The Association of Electoral Administrators has echoed those concerns.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections, July 2025, paragraph 45](#)

¹¹⁰ Electoral Commission press release, [Electoral Commission responds to Government’s Strategy for Elections](#), 17 July 2025

¹¹¹ AEA, [Statement on UK Government’s policy paper “Restoring trust in our democracy: Our strategy for modern and secure elections”](#), 17 July 2025

7 Background to voter ID

The trust-based nature of voting in Great Britain before the introduction of voter ID was highlighted as a potential weakness in the security of UK elections.

The Electoral Commission noted that polling stations remained vulnerable to personation fraud “because there are currently few checks available to prevent someone claiming to be an elector and voting in their name” in its [2014 review of electoral fraud in the UK](#).¹¹²

In 2015, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, asked the then government’s Anti-Corruption Champion to review electoral fraud and make recommendations on what could be done to tackle it. The report recommended the government should consider options for voter identification.

International observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) suggested that voter ID would make UK polling stations more secure after observing the 2005 and 2010 General Elections.¹¹³

7.1 Fraud research

Electoral Commission

In 2012 the Electoral Commission began a review see if there were opportunities to improve confidence in the security of the electoral process. The commission said it not believe electoral fraud was widespread:

It is also clear that the majority of cases of alleged electoral fraud relate to local government elections, rather than elections to the UK Parliament or other legislative bodies.¹¹⁴

In 2013 the commission published two reports based on qualitative research it had undertaken to better understand concerns about electoral fraud and the

¹¹² Electoral Commission, [Electoral fraud in the UK: final report and recommendations](#), January 2014, p26

¹¹³ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, [UK General Election 5 May 2005 OSCE/ODIHR Assessment Mission Report](#), p16; Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, [UK General Election 6 May 2010 OSCE/ODIHR Assessment Mission Report](#), p22

¹¹⁴ Electoral Commission, [Electoral fraud in the UK: evidence and issues paper](#), May 2013, p1

actual level of fraud. The work was based on focus groups and in-depth interviews.

The first report, in May 2013, focused on public perceptions and understanding of electoral fraud. It found that most people's concerns did not come from first-hand experience of electoral fraud, but from media reports and anecdotal accounts.

It also found the public feel concerned but are not clear what their concern is based on, but that electoral fraud was not at the forefront of people's minds. For some, being provided with information on electoral fraud could heighten the concern of it. There was some assumption from participants that the topic would not be brought to attention unless it existed as an issue.¹¹⁵

In the second stage of the research the Electoral Commission found that providing specific information on electoral processes helped to reduce their concerns. On the specific policy of requiring some sort of ID at polling stations, the participants felt it would be likely to be effective by:

- Creating a sense that the electoral operators have security in mind
- Strengthening the idea that 'it is difficult for someone to take my vote'
- Having an additional 'halo effect' when the public consider other aspects of the system of which they are less aware.¹¹⁶

The commission's final report on electoral fraud, published in January 2014, confirmed that there was no evidence to suggest there had been widespread, systematic attempts to undermine or interfere with recent elections through electoral fraud.¹¹⁷

The report made three key recommendations on improving the security of voting. One of those was that voters in polling stations should be required to show proof of their identity. The commission said any such scheme should provide sufficiently robust security, be accessible, include an alternative form of ID for those without any other form to be specified in the scheme, and be cost-effective and affordable.

On polling station voter fraud, it concluded that:

This part of the system could become more vulnerable to fraud as other processes (including electoral registration and postal or proxy voting) become more secure.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Electoral Commission, [Perceptions of Electoral Fraud: Qualitative Research Report of Findings for Stage 1 \(PDF\)](#), May 2013, pp4-5

¹¹⁶ Electoral Commission, [Perceptions of Electoral Fraud: Qualitative Research Report of Findings for Stage 2 \(PDF\)](#), September 2013, p35

¹¹⁷ Electoral Commission, [Electoral fraud in the UK Final report and recommendations \(PDF\)](#), January 2014

¹¹⁸ As above, p5

It noted there was “little evidence” that the “photographic scheme applied in Northern Ireland presents difficulties for people in terms of accessibility” and said that any the system in Northern Ireland should form the basis of a Great Britain-wide scheme.¹¹⁹ Voters in Northern Ireland have been required to show some form of ID in elections since 1985. In 2003 the system was switched to a photo ID scheme. Voters without one of the approved types of ID could apply for a free photographic electoral identity card.

In December 2015, the commission published a report following further consultation and analysis of options for a voter ID scheme modelled on the Northern Ireland scheme.¹²⁰ The report considered the balance between the need for security and the need to minimise any adverse impacts on people’s ability to vote. The commission developed a scheme based on cost effectiveness and that would:

- Be sufficiently robust to verify electors’ identities.
- Be sufficiently accessible to electors.
- Provide for electors to obtain an alternative form of identification specifically for the purpose of voting if they did not have access to any other specified form of identification.

The commission recommended only forms of ID which “possess certain security features and which require an adequate level of verification to obtain” should be included. It listed those as having the required features as including photographic driving licences, passports, Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) cards, military identification cards, police identification cards and firearms licences. The commission said some transport passes, such as Freedom Passes and Oyster photocard could also be added to the list.¹²¹

The commission estimated the number of people who would have one of the forms of photo ID it had highlighted was around 92.5% of the electorate. The commission estimated that limiting the acceptable form of ID to passports and photographic driving licences could potentially see almost a quarter of the electorate without acceptable photo ID.¹²²

The commission’s analysis also highlighted that access to some forms of photo ID varies and some groups would less likely than the general population to hold certain forms of photo ID.

¹¹⁹ Electoral Commission, [Electoral fraud in the UK Final report and recommendations](#) (PDF), January 2014, p5

¹²⁰ Electoral Commission, [Delivering and costing a proof of identity scheme for polling station voters in Great Britain](#) (PDF), December 2015

¹²¹ As above, p17

¹²² As above, p17-8

The Pickles report

On 14 August 2015, the Cabinet Office announced that Lord Pickles, then Sir Eric and the then government's Anti-Corruption Champion, was to review electoral fraud and make recommendations.¹²³ The final report was published by the Cabinet Office on 12 August 2016.¹²⁴ The report made 50 recommendations for the government to consider.

On voter ID, Pickles highlighted the trust-based nature of the current polling station procedures:

Trust has been an enduring factor in British elections for many decades. But a number of commentators now point to the potential for significant abuse if people can commit personation at polling stations with little risk of detection.¹²⁵

The report examined various options for which forms of ID might be considered without recommending which might be best.

Pickles recommended the government should consider options for voter identification and that it “should consider the options for electors to have to produce personal identification before voting at polling stations and might consider piloting different methods.”¹²⁶

7.2

Voter ID pilots

Following the publication of the Pickles report the government announced that it would take forward one of his recommendations to pilot voter ID schemes. In March 2017, the Cabinet Office issued a prospectus inviting local authorities in England to apply to host a pilot scheme in May 2018.¹²⁷

2018

Five local authorities were chosen for the 2018 voter ID pilots and were announced in September 2017, Bromley, Gosport, Swindon, Watford, and Woking.¹²⁸ Polling day was 3 May 2018.

Each area had its own prescribed list of acceptable documents, but all five areas included five key documents in their list of acceptable photo-ID:

- UK, EU, or Commonwealth passport

¹²³ [Sir Eric Pickles to examine electoral fraud](#), Cabinet Office press release, 14 August 2015

¹²⁴ Cabinet Office, [Securing the ballot: review into electoral fraud](#), 12 August 2016

¹²⁵ As above, p11

¹²⁶ Cabinet Office press release, [Eliminating electoral fraud in polling stations](#), 27 December 2016

¹²⁷ Cabinet Office, [Prospectus on Electoral Integrity Pilots in May 2018](#),

¹²⁸ Cabinet Office press release, [First British voters required to show ID before casting their ballots in crackdown on fraud](#), 16 September 2017

- Photographic driving licence
- Northern Ireland Electoral Identity Card
- Biometric immigration residence permit
- European Economic Area Identity Card.

The requirements for whether a passport had to be current or expired to be a valid form of ID, or for the driving licence to be full or provisional varied depending on the area. Other prescribed documents varied.

The post-pilot evaluation from the Cabinet Office noted there had been no allegations of electoral fraud in the period 2014-17 in three of the five areas. Watford and Woking had 11 and seven, respectively. Of these, six cases in Watford related to personation, legal incapacity to vote or multiple voting offences. The equivalent number in Woking was 3.¹²⁹ None resulted in a prosecution.

2019

In November 2018, the government announced the details of the pilots to be held in May 2019. Voters in Pendle, East Staffordshire and Woking would be asked to show photo ID before they were given their ballot papers.

In Ribble Valley, Broxtowe, Derby, North Kesteven and Braintree voters would be required to present either one form of photo ID or up to two forms of non-photo ID.

Mid Sussex, Watford and North West Leicestershire would require voters to show their polling card. Cards in Watford and Mid Sussex would have to be scanned but North West Leicestershire poll cards were not scanned.

Proxy voters in Peterborough would also be required to show ID before they could cast their proxy vote. In addition, Peterborough and Pendle would run a separate postal vote pilot, looking at the security of postal votes and providing additional guidance in postal vote packs.¹³⁰

Following the announcement of the scheme three local authorities withdrew from the pilots: East Staffordshire, Peterborough, and Ribble Valley. One additional local authority was added to the pilots, Craven.¹³¹

Opposition parties wrote to the government urging ministers to abandon the policy of introducing voter ID after the pilots.¹³²

¹²⁹ Cabinet Office, [Electoral Integrity Project - Local Elections 2018 - Evaluation \(PDF\)](#), August 2018, p56

¹³⁰ Cabinet Office press release, [Next round of Voter ID pilots announced for 2019](#), 3 November 2018

¹³¹ [PQ 217666 \[Proof of Identity\], 11 February 2019](#)

¹³² Guardian, [Tories 'trying to rig elections' with compulsory voter ID](#), 13 May 2020

Evaluations

The Electoral Commission and the government both evaluated the pilots. The Electoral Commission evaluation of the 2018 pilots found little evidence that voter ID requirements had a direct impact on turnout overall. Turnout was down about 1% across the pilot areas but rose in two areas with pilots. Turnout across other areas of England with elections turnout was stable.¹³³

In 2019, for the pilots with comparable figures, turnout was down by two to six percentage points on the 2018 elections. However, the evaluation noted that turnout depends on various factors and changes cannot be attributed to a single factor. Turnout across English local elections in 2019 was down around two percentage points on 2018.¹³⁴

2018

The Electoral Commission found that the pilots were well run but said the 2018 pilot areas were not sufficiently varied to be representative of Great Britain. It called on future pilots to be held in a wider variety of local authorities.

The commission found that the pilots improved perceptions around security in polling stations, but the commission could not be sure “whether people in other areas would have problems showing identification.” It went on to say the government should focus on what further evidence they need to answer questions and address concerns about the more detailed impact of a voter identification requirement.¹³⁵

The Cabinet Office produced its own evaluation of the 2018 pilots. It found similar results to the Electoral Commission in terms of effective delivery of the pilots and on the most common types of ID used by voters but also noted the limited data collected across five authorities made general conclusion on a wider rollout difficult.¹³⁶

The Cabinet Office estimated that a national roll out of the mixed ID model was expected to range in cost from £4.6m to £17.1m per general election.¹³⁷ The photographic ID model was expected to range in cost from £5.9 to £17.9m. The main drivers of costs were additional staff costs, especially additional administrative staff costs, training costs, facilities costs, and the cost of producing and issuing local elector cards.¹³⁸

¹³³ Electoral Commission, May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes, [Impact on voters](#)

¹³⁴ Electoral Commission, May 2019 voter identification pilot schemes, [Impact on voters: experience](#)

¹³⁵ Electoral Commission, May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes, [Impact on electoral administration](#)

¹³⁶ Cabinet Office, [Electoral Integrity Project - Local Elections 2018 - Evaluation \(PDF\)](#), p54

¹³⁷ As above, p38

¹³⁸ As above, p43

2019

The Electoral Commission evaluation saw no administrative problems but noted that if voter ID were to be rolled out nationwide it would need a significant level of resourcing.¹³⁹

In the 2019 evaluation the commission found some evidence that certain groups found it harder to show appropriate ID. Polling station staff were not asked to collect demographic data in 2018 or 2019.

As in 2018, the 2019 pilot areas saw an increase in voter confidence and in perceptions of the safety of voting in the pilots compared to non-pilot areas.

However, the commission noted the ten pilot areas were not representative of Great Britain as a whole and it would be difficult to draw conclusions about the impact on confidence across the UK as a whole.¹⁴⁰

The Cabinet Office evaluation stated the 2019 pilots were:

designed to understand how the potential impact of an ID requirement for voters at the polling station is likely to vary between areas with different demographics and electoral administration capacity. The results from the data gathered are not nationally representative, but do enable an understanding of the potential effects of rolling out an ID requirement on particular demographic groups and type of local authorities.¹⁴¹

The perception that voting at polling stations is safe from fraud and abuse increased consistently across all models after polling day.

The Cabinet Office stated the data collected did not indicate that any single demographic group, of those examined, was adversely impacted by the requirements of the pilots.¹⁴²

The evaluation also considered a national roll-out and reflected that those authorities that trialled polling cards as the required form of ID required the least behavioural change, as many voters do this already. However, it did not include costings.

The photographic ID model sites felt the photographic ID was most appropriate for national rollout due to the level of security it provides compared to the other models. Mixed ID model pilot areas felt that the number of non-photo ID documents approved should be shortened as the majority of electors who used this option brought similar documents (poll card and bank card).¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Electoral Commission, May 2019 voter identification pilot schemes, [Impact on administration of the polls](#)

¹⁴⁰ Electoral Commission, May 2019 voter identification pilot schemes, [Impact on voters: confidence](#)

¹⁴¹ Cabinet Office, [Evaluation of Voter ID Pilots 2019 \(PDF\)](#), July 2019, p10

¹⁴² Cabinet Office [Evaluation of Voter ID Pilots 2019 \(PDF\)](#), July 2019, pp12-15

¹⁴³ As above, p18

In May 2020, the Local Government Information Unit (LGiU) published a briefing which summarised the pilot evaluations. It commented on the Cabinet Office evaluations by saying:

The decision to introduce a requirement for photo ID is based on an optimistic interpretation of extremely limited evidence, of the photo model appearing to have the most pronounced impact on the measures of integrity.¹⁴⁴

It also criticised the evaluations for not considering the people turned away, as noted in section 4.1. In the LGiU's view, the pilots provided some insight to the operation of potential voter ID systems, but proper assessment of whether voter ID was a proportionate response to preventing fraud and enhancing public confidence has been "submerged by an overwhelming political drive to be seen to do something to address voter confidence."

The LGiU concluded by saying:

Ministers like to compare the lack of an ID requirement when voting to the need to prove identity when collecting a parcel from the post office. Being able to collect a parcel is not a basic human right, unlike taking part in a free and fair election. There is a case for self-identification in polling stations to protect the security of the poll: the point is that it should be inclusionary, not ignore obstacles to providing identification, and rely on proportional safeguards to address risks that are real, not overstated.¹⁴⁵

7.3

Elections Act 2022

The government took the voter ID policy forward with provisions for a voter ID scheme introduced in the Elections Bill 2021-22. The [Elections Act 2022](#) received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022.

The Library briefings, [Elections Bill 2021-22](#) and [Elections Bill 2021-22: Progress of the Bill](#) provide more detail on the background to voter ID and the progress of the debate as the Bill went through its parliamentary stages.

Section 1 of the act makes provisions for the introduction of photographic ID for UK Parliament elections, police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales, and local elections in England. It does this by amending other legislation, principally the Representation of the People Act 1983.

The [Voter Identification Regulations 2022](#), were [approved by Parliament](#) and made in December 2022. These are the detailed regulations that allowed for the application and issuing of Voter Authority Certificates and Anonymous Elector Documents. These were laid in Parliament in draft form on 3 November 2022.¹⁴⁶ The Voter ID Regulations 2022 were approved by the House

¹⁴⁴ LGiU, Photo voter ID in the UK? Should it be challenged?, May 2020

¹⁴⁵ As above

¹⁴⁶ The [draft Voter Identification Regulations 2022](#)

of Commons on the 12 December 2022,¹⁴⁷ and by the House of Lords on 13 December 2022.¹⁴⁸

Implementation

Concerns were raised by electoral administrators about the timetable for introduction of voter ID for local elections in England in May 2023. They also raised concerns about recruitment of polling station staff, already affected by the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁴⁹

In September 2022, the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) wrote to the government with specific issues that raised concerns about the timing of legislation and guidance in advance of polling day in May 2023. This included the introduction of VACs just four months before polls in England.

They were also concerned about lack of additional funding for local authorities to advertise voter ID provisions alongside the Electoral Commission's campaign and recruitment of polling station staff. Recruitment had already got harder because of the coronavirus pandemic and could be exacerbated by the new burden of staff having to check voter ID.¹⁵⁰

The Chair and chief executive of the Electoral Commission gave evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on 19 October 2022. They both spoke of role of polling station staff being “fundamentally different” and set out the risks of the delay in producing all the necessary legislation to implement voter ID.¹⁵¹

In December 2022, the chair of the Local Government Association, James Jamieson, called for the voter ID requirements to be delayed until after May 2023's local elections in England. He noted the Gould Principle, that electoral law should not be changed within six months of an election that the change would impact. The LGA statement came the day before the House of Commons approved the Voter Identification Regulations. Mr Jamieson said:

...electoral administrators and returning officers should be given the appropriate time, resource, clarity and detailed guidance to implement any changes to the electoral process without risking access to the vote.¹⁵²

Speaking to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee in April 2023, Peter Stanyon, the chief executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, said:

¹⁴⁷ [HC Deb 12 December 2022, c797-818](#)

¹⁴⁸ [HL Deb 13 December 2022, c563-91](#)

¹⁴⁹ Guardian, [Delay UK voter ID checks or face election result challenges, officials warn](#), 10 November 2022

¹⁵⁰ AEA, [Letter to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for electoral matters](#) (PDF), 29 September 2022

¹⁵¹ Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, [Oral evidence: Draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission](#), HC 672, Q56 to Q61,

¹⁵² [LGA statement: Parliamentary vote on plans to introduce voter ID](#), 11 December 2022

There are lots of unanswered questions still but I can hand on heart say, with a fair degree of confidence, that in every single area the elections will be delivered safely. Will the elections be delivered to the standards that everybody wants to achieve? Possibly not. Will they be delivered to safe standards? Yes, and they may be two slightly different things in that respect.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, [Oral evidence: Electoral Registration](#), HC 841, Q96

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)