Electoral Reform Society

Briefing on Voter ID

February 2026

Mandatory photographic ID for voters was introduced via the Election Act 2022 and required for the first time in the local elections in 2023. Voters were asked to show photographic ID at the local elections, mayoral elections and General Election in 2024 and all subsequent English local and Westminster by-elections.

What do we know about the impact so far?

The Electoral Commission reported that in the 2024 General Election around **16,000 electors attempted, but were unable to vote due to the Voter ID requirement**; this equates to 1 in every 1,200 voters.[1] Similarly, the **May 2024 local and mayoral elections reported around 13,000 electors attempted to vote but were turned away because they lacked accepted ID and did not return; in the May 2023 local elections this figure was around 14,000.**[2] However, as recognised by the Electoral Commission, this is likely to be an underestimate as many voters were turned away by 'greeters' outside the polling station and were not recorded in the official figures.

Across the first three sets of elections using Voter ID, at least 42,368 voters were denied their right to vote.*[3] [4]

According to the Electoral Commission, when given a list of options, **10% of non-voters gave voter ID as the reason that they did not vote in the 2024 General Election**, this figure was 4% when unprompted. Similarly, 7% of non-voters in the 2023 local elections gave voter ID as the reason that they did not vote when given a list of options.[5] Ipsos polling also found that 8% of people said that voter ID made them less likely to want to vote in the May 2023 local elections.[6]

Analysis of British Election Study Internet Panel data indicates that at the 2024 general election, 1% of people did not attempt to vote due to lacking ID and 0.3% reported being turned away. This represents a small but meaningful population of voters (over half a million people) who were unable to vote due to the new legislation.[7]

Together these findings suggest that voter ID has had a chilling effect on turnout.

Evidence from the Electoral Commission suggests that some groups were more likely to have a problem voting due to the voter ID requirement than others at the 2024 General Election. Specifically, those in the C2DE social grade - 8% of C2DE non-voters when prompted said they didn't vote because they didn't have required

*Those recorded as having been turned away and did not return at the 2023 local elections, 2024 local and mayoral elections and 2024 General Election combined. The 2024 General Election was the last election in which returning officers were legally required to collect these statistics.

ID in comparison to 3% of ABC1 voters. The same research also showed that in comparison to the general population, voter ID created more of a barrier to voting for disabled people and unemployed people.[8] This is echoed in the 2023 Electoral Commission survey which showed that unemployed and disabled non-voters were more likely to say that they didn't vote because they didn't have ID, and that young people and people from black and minority ethnic communities were more likely to have not been able to vote because they turned up without ID.

Democracy Volunteers (an organisation authorised by the Electoral Commission to provide electoral observers) found that in the May 2023 English local elections, of the people turned away from polling stations because they lacked relevant ID or were judged not to have it, 53% were identified by observers as being 'non-white passing'.[9] In addition, Electoral Commission evidence indicates that more deprived areas had a higher proportion of voters turned away compared to less deprived areas.[10]

Research into the impact on electoral services by the LGIU found that voter ID has added to existing pressures on electoral administrators, increasing stress, adding complexity, and making it **harder to find staff for polling stations**.[11] They also found that electoral administrators were 'unconvinced' that the introduction of voter ID had reduced public concerns about fraud and noted that voters had raised complaints that voter ID had been introduced for political reasons. The report warns that this perception is **a risk to public confidence in elections**.

Following the 2023 local elections, the cross-party Democracy and the Constitution APPG inquiry concluded that voter ID is a *"poisoned cure"* in that it disenfranchises more electors than it protects.[12] The inquiry found that voter ID brings with it a risk of injustice and discrimination, highlighting that the standard that ID documents need to meet is unclear, that the approved list of ID 'appears arbitrary', and that there is significant scope for unequal application of the rules. The report also highlights that **there is no immediate right to appeal for those who have been denied a ballot**.

The APPG inquiry also heard evidence from academic experts in face recognition. They indicated that 'face matching' exercises, such as matching a photo-ID to the person who presents it, carry a high likelihood of error and point to research into the effectiveness of passport checks, which indicate an error rate of between 20% and 35%. Moreover, where the document shows the person when they were substantially younger (such as UK passports, which may depict the holder up to ten years ago) the error rate increases to 75%.[13]

Two areas that don't appear to have been impacted are voters' perception of how secure in-person voting is (which remains at the same level after the introduction of voter ID),[14] and the instances of personation fraud. The government's 2023 report concluded that the evidence is '**inconclusive' on whether the scheme has reduced personation or made it more easily identifiable**. Two cases of personation fraud were reported to the police at the May 2023 local elections – consistent with previous years. The same government report notes that 'all groups' in their research *"held the perception that fraud was more likely to be conducted via postal or proxy voting"*.[15]

What are the main issues?

Voter ID creates a barrier to voting for many.

Unlike most countries which require ID to vote, there is no universal ID card in the UK, leaving many people without the ID needed. Whilst a voter authority certificate has been made available, 56% of respondents to the government commissioned survey said they would be unlikely or very unlikely to apply for an ID document, and 42% of those with no photo ID said they would be unlikely or very unlikely to apply.[16]

Only 25,000 Voter Authority Certificates were used as ID in local elections 2023, 22,749 at the local and mayoral elections in 2024 and 72,497 in 2024 General Election. This is far fewer than the number of registered voters who are estimated to need one (around 750,000).[17]

The government's own research finds that older voters (aged 85+) are less likely to have ID that is recognisable (91% compared to 95%–98% for those in younger age groups) and that those with severely limiting disabilities, the unemployed, people without qualifications, and those who had never voted before, were all less likely to hold any form of photo ID.[18] Post-election research in 2023 confirms that these groups were more likely not to have voted because they didn't have ID.[19]

Analysis of British Election Study Internet Panel data indicates that at the time of the 2023 and 2024 local elections, approximately one in 20 electors did not own *any* recognised voter identification and that this lack of ID was more concentrated amongst poorer households and voters without educational qualifications.[20]

Voter ID is putting up another barrier to people who are already likely to be less engaged in democracy and may already find it harder to participate.

Confidence in the voting system could be undermined.

As it stands, confidence in our elections is high. The last Electoral Commission tracker, prior to the introduction of voter ID (2022), found that 87% of the had confidence that voting at polling stations is safe from fraud and abuse.[21] At the same time **there does not appear to be an increase in public perception of the security of voting after the introduction of ID**. The Electoral Commission found that 87% of respondents to their 2024 post poll survey rated voting at the polling station as safe from fraud or abuse, the results *"are consistent with the long-term average"*.[22]

However, research findings suggest that there has been some public concern around the introduction of the voter ID scheme[23] and some people have chosen not to vote because of it.[24] The potential for the rules to be applied unevenly creates a problem for perceptions of electoral integrity.

The voter ID scheme is a solution looking for a problem.

Out of all alleged cases of electoral fraud in the 2019 elections, only 33 related to personation fraud at the polling station[25] – this comprises 0.000057% of the over 58 million votes cast in all the elections that took place that year. Only one of those allegations resulted in a conviction, and one a caution.[26] Despite this, the voter ID scheme introduced in the Elections Act is one of the most restrictive with only a limited number of photographic IDs deemed acceptable and no alternatives for voters who turn up without ID.

The government assessment in 2023 notes that there were just two allegations of personation at the May 2023 elections which is 'consistent' with previous elections – before the introduction of the ID scheme. The government report also concluded that the evidence is 'inconclusive' on whether the scheme has reduced personation or made it more easily identifiable.[27]

What can be done about it?

Given the problems with the scheme to date and the lack of evidence of a need for strict photo ID laws in the UK, the ERS believes voter ID should be scrapped. However, there are also several ways to improve the scheme.

Expand the list of acceptable identity documents

Increasing the range of acceptable identity documents, including non-photographic ID, and IDs that voters are likely to be carrying on them (such as bank cards), would make the scheme more proportional. The Pickles report 'Securing the ballot', which

first suggested introducing ID, recommended that: *"There is no need to be over elaborate; measures should enhance public confidence and be proportional."*

Many of the pilots of voter ID included poll cards and/or non-photographic identification. When it introduced voter ID, Northern Ireland did not initially require solely photographic ID – elections took place for almost 20 years with a less stringent ID requirement.

The Electoral Commission have also recommended expanding the list of acceptable IDs with a particular focus on identifying forms of ID which would support people who currently are least likely to have the correct identification documents such as people from a lower social grade (C2DE), disabled people, and those who are unemployed.[28]

Include poll cards

In the 2018 Voter ID pilots, areas which allowed poll cards to be used as identification along with other forms of photo ID recorded the lowest percentages of voters not returning with correct ID (Swindon 0.06% and 0.2% Watford). In Swindon, 95% of voters produced their poll card instead of another form of ID, 87% in Watford.

Similarly, the poll card pilots in 2019 recorded lower percentages of voters being turned away than the photo ID or mixed ID models. In the poll card pilots (Mid Sussex, NW Leicestershire, Watford) 93% of voters produced a poll card instead of an alternative form of ID.

Introduce vouching

Vouching is used in some US states and in Canada. The vouching system allows for another voter, who has ID, to vouch for someone who doesn't. The person vouching for someone else signs an affidavit which means there is a paper trail should any irregularities need to be investigated. The House of Lords Constitution Committee recommended vouching (attestation) in their recent inquiry.[29] The Electoral Commission has also recommended the introduction of vouching.[30]

Allow for statutory declarations

Measures to allow voters to cast provisional ballots or sign an affidavit attesting to their identity are common in countries requiring voter ID. Even the US states with the strictest photo ID laws allow for provisional ballots to be cast and later verified.[31] The Democracy and the Constitution APPG report recommends allowing voters to 'cure' any failure to produce the required documentation by making a statutory declaration on the day of the poll.

Continue to collect data and improve data collection

It is essential that the impact of voter ID is monitored and that data collection is detailed and robust to ensure that we have a full picture of how this policy is affecting voters.

Endnotes

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