

voters You are in the May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes section Home Our research Voter identification pilots May 2018 voter identification pilot schemes First published: 24 July 2019 Last updated: 24 July 2019 Impact on voters The evidence we have collected suggests that nearly everyone who wanted to was able to vote in the pilot scheme areas: Nearly nine in ten of people who voted in polling stations were aware that they had to take identification with them to the polling station to vote Nearly everyone who went to vote at their polling station was able to show the right identification The number of people who wanted to vote at their polling station who did not have the right identification was very small; many of them came back with the right identification, but some did not There is no evidence that levels of turnout in the pilot scheme areas were significantly affected by the requirement for polling station voters to show identification Impact on voters There were a small number of people who were unable to vote because they did not have, or did not bring with them, the right type of identification. It was not possible to collect demographic data on these people and so we have no evidence to suggest particular demographics were more affected than others. More work is needed to make sure that an identification requirement doesn't stop people who are eligible and want to vote in future elections. Overall findings from the pilot schemes Awareness of the identification requirements Most people in the pilot scheme areas knew about the identification requirements. Our research found that nearly nine out of ten (86%) of people who voted at polling stations said they were aware beforehand that they had to show identification to vote at their polling station. Some groups of people were less likely to say they knew about the identification requirements. Polling station voters in the C2DE social grade were less likely to say they knew beforehand (18% said they did not know about the requirement compared to 9% of ABC1s). In the population as a whole, some groups were less likely to say they had heard something about the pilot. This included people aged under 35, C2DEs, those who said they were generally less politically active, and those who said that they didn't vote in the elections. People in Swindon and Watford were also less likely to say they were aware that they needed to show identification. This may be because they didn't consider the requirement to show a poll card as 'identification', although we cannot confirm this from the available data. Returning Officers in the pilot scheme areas ran public awareness campaigns before the elections, and awareness about the identification requirements improved between January and May 2018. In January, 36% of people in the pilot scheme areas said they had seen or heard something about the requirement, and by May this had risen to 55%. Types of identification that voters used In Bromley, Gosport and Woking most voters were able to show either their passport or photo driving licence to vote at their polling station. Local travel passes were the third most frequently shown type of identification. In Swindon and Watford, the vast majority of voters showed their poll card to vote at their polling station. A small proportion of people showed their photo driving licence, passport, debit or credit card instead of their poll card. Most frequently shown types of identification in each pilot area Most frequently shown 2 nd most frequently shown 3 rd most frequently shown Bromley Photo driving licence (54%) Passport (24%) Freedom pass (15%) Gosport Photo driving licence (55%) Passport (21%) Concessionary travel card (17%) Swindon Poll card (95%) Photo driving licence (4%) Passport (1%) Watford Poll card (87%) Photo driving licence (8%) Debit card (3%) Woking Photo driving licence (60%) Passport (25%) Surrey Senior travel card (12%) Very few people applied to use the alternative options provided for those who did not have the required identification. No one in Bromley and Gosport

applied for a Certificate of Identity or Electoral Identity Letter. Feedback from the Returning Officers in both these areas suggests that most people who contacted them to ask about the alternative option found that they did actually have one of the acceptable forms of identification. In Woking, 64 people applied for a Local Elector Card before polling day and 43 voters showed their card as identification at their polling station. Voters in Swindon and Watford could show their poll card as part of the required identification, and they were able to apply for a replacement poll card before polling day. Returning Officers issued 66 replacements to voters in Swindon and 3 to voters in Watford. Voters in Swindon could also ask another elector at the same polling station to 'attest' their identity, and 107 voters used this option. Although all of the pilot schemes allowed voters to show their identification in private (for example because they were registered to vote anonymously or if they normally covered their face for religious reasons), we are not aware that anyone used this facility. We therefore cannot draw any conclusions about how this process would work in practice.

Impact on turnout and participation Although nearly everyone in the pilot scheme areas who went to their polling station to vote was able to show the required identification, a small number did not have the right identification with them and were not given a ballot paper. Many of these people returned later with the right identification, but some did not. People who did not return to their polling station to vote

| Area | Without right identification | Percentage of all polling station voters did not return |
|---------|------------------------------|---|
| Bromley | 569 | 0.2% |
| Gosport | 154 | 0.2% |
| Swindon | 120 | 0.4% |
| Watford | 54 | 0.06% |
| Woking | 64 | 0.06% |
| Swindon | 25 | 0.2% |
| Watford | 194 | 0.2% |
| Woking | 42-66 | 0.3% |
| Swindon | 89 | 0.3% |
| Woking | 51 | 0.3% |

There is little evidence that the voter identification requirements had a direct impact on turnout in the May 2018 pilot scheme areas. In three areas turnout at the local authority level was no more than 1 percentage point lower than the most recent comparable elections. Turnout in the other two areas was higher than, including in Swindon where turnout was 5 percentage points higher. Overall turnout across England in 2018 was the same, at 36%⁷, as at the last comparable set of elections in 2014. There were some larger changes in turnout at the individual ward level in the pilot scheme areas. These ranged from an increase of 12 percentage points in one ward in Swindon to a decrease of 8 percentage points in one ward in Bromley. The data on turnout and participation cannot tell us much about people who may have decided not to go to their polling station at all because of the identification requirement. However, our research with people in the pilot scheme areas found that 2% of those who didn't vote in May 2018 said it was because they didn't have the right identification. Many more people said they didn't vote because they were too busy (27%), didn't know who to vote for (13%), were away on holiday (12%) or were not interested (10%). Most people in the pilot areas (79%) said the requirement to show identification made no difference to whether or not they voted in May 2018, and overall 3% of people said it made them less likely to vote. However, our research did confirm that non-voters were more likely than voters to say that it had made them less likely to vote: 5% of non-voters said it made them less likely to vote, and 2% said that they wouldn't have been able to vote because they didn't have any identification. Before the May 2018 pilot schemes, accessibility organisations raised concerns that some groups of people would find it harder to vote because they would not easily be able to access the right types of identification. This included concerns about disabled people and people from black

and minority ethnic communities, who are also less likely to participate in elections in general. Overall, we found no clear pattern of decreased turnout based on the different demographic profiles of specific wards in the May 2018 pilot scheme areas. The relatively small size of the May 2018 pilot schemes, the level of turnout and the limited demographic variation across wards of the pilot schemes means that it is difficult to systematically identify examples of a negative impact for particular groups of people. The limitations of sample-based surveying also mean that we did not get enough responses from specific groups of people to be able to report experiences or views across those groups. In Watford we did find a correlation between the proportion of a ward's population that is Asian/British Asian and the number of electors both initially turning up without identification and not returning.⁸ We need to be cautious in drawing conclusions from this analysis as it is based on a small number of data points (only 12 wards in one local authority area). However, this does show that it would be helpful to have more pilots with more diverse populations in order to explore this further.

Beyond the pilots: implications for voters at future elections Although we have found that most people who wanted to were able to vote in the pilot scheme areas in May 2018, we have also seen some evidence that particular groups of voters might find it harder to show identification at future elections. Our research with people across all elections that took place in May 2018 found that most people (88%) said they would find it easy or very easy to show identification if they had to at future elections. However, we did find that younger people aged 34 and below were slightly less likely (83%) to say they would find it easy. There were no notable differences in responses based on other demographic factors, including social grade, disability or ethnicity. We know that more people vote at other types of elections: some people who don't normally vote at local elections often vote at UK Parliament elections, for example. This means, that at other kinds of elections in the future, more people who want to vote could find it difficult to show identification.

and equality implications Organisations representing the interests of different groups of people raised concerns with us about whether they would have easy access to the right identification if this requirement was applied at more elections in the future. For example, Mencap, RNIB and Stonewall highlighted the following concerns:

- Mencap submission People with learning disability often do not have ID such as a passport as they are unable to travel abroad or cannot afford it. Almost none will have a driving licence and in some cases will not even have access to utility bills or other forms of ID.
- Mencap submission RNIB submission The lack of driving licenses amongst blind and partially sighted people, meaning that they had fewer options of what they could provide at the polling station.
- RNIB submission Stonewall submission Trans and non-binary people may have been particularly vulnerable to these ID requirements as the photo on their ID may not reflect their gender expression or identity.
- Stonewall submission Final bits Several organisations also raised concerns with us about the public awareness campaigns that Returning Officers ran in the pilot scheme areas. They were concerned about whether the campaigns did enough to target people from groups that were less likely to have the right identification. For example, both Mencap and RNIB felt that activities to raise awareness with the people they represent did not begin early enough in the May 2018 pilot scheme areas. This wider evidence suggests that further work is needed to make sure that an identification requirement doesn't stop people who are eligible and want to vote in future elections. More research and analysis is needed to identify which types of identification will be easiest for people to show, and how those who do not currently have identification can get it. This is particularly important for people

who may find it harder to show the more common forms of photo identification such as passport, photo driving licence or travel card. We have previously recommended that any photographic voter identification scheme should include a free of charge photographic elector card for people who do not have any other acceptable form of identification. More work is also needed to find further ways to tell people about any identification requirement. Again, this should focus on how best to communicate any new requirement to people who are less likely to vote often and those who may find it harder to show one of the more common forms of identification. Related content Register to vote All you need to register to vote is 5 minutes and your National Insurance number. Our Commissioners Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Report: How the 2017 UK general election was run Read our report about how the 2017 general election was run