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Improvement in quality of electoral registers but urgent reform needed to get thousands of people registered to vote You are in the section Home Posted: 18 September 2023

Improvement in quality of electoral registers but urgent reform needed to get thousands of people registered to vote Substantial improvements have been made to the quality of the electoral registers in Northern Ireland following the last canvass of electors in 2021, according to research published today by the Electoral Commission. However, up to 300,000 people in Northern Ireland are still either incorrectly registered to vote or missing completely. In particular, young people, private renters, and those who have recently changed address continue to be less likely to be correctly registered to vote. This means that almost one fifth (17%) of the eligible voting population in Northern Ireland may not be able to vote if an election was called now. The Electoral Commission is calling on the UK Government to create clear legal gateways for government departments and public bodies to share data on potentially eligible voters Ireland to further improve accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers. Such reform could enable the Chief Electoral Officer to register voters directly or send them invitations to register. Cahir Hughes, Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland, said: "While the increased levels of accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers in Northern Ireland are welcome, almost 300,000 people are still either missing from the registers or not correctly registered to vote. While some may not want to participate in elections, for many people, it is a consequence of an outdated registration system that disproportionately affects private renters and young people. "Changes to the current electoral registration system are needed. A more automated form of voter registration could see applications made at the same time as other tasks, such as updating the address on your driver's licence or when enrolling at university." In addition to improving the experience for voters, these changes would address the burdens faced by the Chief Electoral Officer, who is currently required to use limited resources and capacity at the most critical time ahead of major elections to manage high numbers of applications to register to vote. The full report shows the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers across Northern Ireland, including breakdowns by age and gender. It also sets out a range of options for how specific data sources could be used to improve the system. Ends

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Notes to editors by: enabling the delivery of free and fair elections and referendums, focusing on the needs of electors and addressing the changing environment to ensure every vote remains secure and accessible. regulating political finance – taking proactive steps to increase transparency, ensure compliance and pursue breaches. using our expertise to make and advocate for changes to our democracy, aiming to improve fairness, transparency and efficiency. The Commission was set up in 2000 and reports to the UK, Scottish and Welsh parliaments. The Commission runs accuracy and completeness studies to measure the quality of the electoral registers. The last time we carried out this research was in 2019, on the 2018 electoral registers. Fieldwork and data analysis was carried out by Ipsos on behalf of The Electoral Commission based on the December 2022 Electoral Registers. Fieldwork was conducted between 11 January and 19 May 2023. A total of 5,298 interviews were achieved across 127 local authority areas in Great Britain, and 1,015 interviews in 100 wards in Northern Ireland. Estimates are based the local government registers and within a margin of error of 1.1% in Great Britain

and 1.9% in Northern Ireland. This means between 6.7 – 7.8 million eligible voters were incorrectly registered or missing from the register in Great Britain and between 228,000 – 283,000 in Northern Ireland. These estimates are based on incompleteness figures from the survey. They include the proportion of eligible residents who are currently not included on the register at their current address (e.g., the surveyed address) and entries found containing errors which would prevent an eligible elector from casting their vote (e.g., incorrect name or a recorded date of birth which is later than an attainer's birthday). Completeness is now at its highest level in Northern Ireland since the Commission began measuring it in 2012. Related content Our Commissioners Donations and loans Find out about donations and loans to a political party, individual or other organisation Our Executive Team Meet our Executive Team, and find out more about them Donations accepted View data about donations accepted by parties and campaigners