

Improvements needed to ensure voter ID does not become a barrier to voting | Electoral Commission Search Improvements needed to ensure voter ID does not become a barrier to voting You are in the section Home

Posted: 23 June 2023

Improvements needed to ensure voter ID does not become a barrier to voting Further work is required to ensure that elections remain accessible to all, according to interim findings from the Electoral Commission on the new voter ID policy. New public opinion research on the measure found that 4% of all people who said they did not vote at the elections on 4 May listed the ID requirement as the reason. 3% said they did not have the necessary ID, and 1% said they disagreed with the new requirement. Of those that went to polling stations on 4 May, 0.25% of people who tried to vote were not issued with a ballot paper because of the new voter ID requirement. The data suggests that approximately 14,000 voters who went to a polling station were not able to vote as a result of not being able to show ID. In the context of very high awareness levels of the new requirement, the analysis also found lower levels amongst those who did not own ID, and 57% awareness of the availability of the free ID (Voter Authority Certificate). The results indicate that further work is required in order to ensure that elections remain truly accessible to all; to ensure the Voter Authority Certificate works well as a back-up for those with no accepted ID, that it is well set-up, delivered and communicated. The Commission is undertaking further research ahead of making recommendations for improvement, to be published in September. Craig Westwood, Director of Communications, Policy and Research, said: "The evidence suggests that the vast majority of voters were able to present an accepted form of ID at the May elections; but, it also shows that some people were prevented from voting in polling stations due to the requirement, and significantly more did not attempt to because they lacked the required ID. "Overall awareness was high and achieved in a matter of months, but we can see that people who lacked ID were less likely to know they needed to show it. We don't want to see a single voter lose the opportunity to have their say. We are working to understand the challenges people faced, and will make recommendations that, with the engagement of Government and wider electoral community, will support the participation of all voters." The Commission's independent analysis, compiling polling station data and public opinion research, found: 92% of people were aware of the need to bring ID to vote at a polling station, though awareness was lower among people who said they did not have ID (74%). 89,552 people applied for a Voter Authority Certificate before the deadline, though only 25,000 were actually used as a form of ID. Awareness of the free ID stood at 57% in May 2023. 0.7% of people were initially turned away from polling stations, but around two thirds of these people (63%) returned later in the day and were able to vote. Among those recorded as being turned away from a polling station, 70% had not brought any ID and 30% brought a type that was not accepted.

Impact of the voter ID requirement on specific groups While definitive conclusions cannot be drawn from the public opinion survey, the data does suggest that disabled people and those who are unemployed were more likely than other groups to give a reason related to ID for not voting. Where the relevant data is available, there is some correlation between the numbers turned away and specific socio-demographic factors, such as ethnicity and unemployment. The Commission is continuing to collect and analyse data to explore these concerns and will report further on the impact in September. Craig Westwood added: "It is too soon to draw conclusions about the impact of voter ID on specific groups of people, but some of the emerging evidence is concerning. Elections should be accessible to everyone, so we are working to build a better understanding of the specific experiences of voters at these elections. This

includes consultation with those voters we know are most at risk of facing barriers to participation.” The Commission’s full election report will be published in September. This will include further scrutiny of the public opinion and polling station data results, as well as a full assessment of the feedback received from charities and civil society organisations, candidates, Returning Officers, polling station staff, election observers and the police.

Ends Notes to Editors

The requirement to show photo ID at the polling station is a requirement, introduced by the UK Government’s Elections Act, which was passed last year. The legislation requires voters at polling stations to show an accepted form of ID before they receive their ballot paper. From May, voters need to show photo ID before voting in local council elections in England, parliamentary by-elections, and police and crime commissioner elections in England and Wales. From October 2023, photo ID will be needed at UK parliamentary general elections. It will not be a requirement at local elections in Scotland or Wales, or elections to Scottish Parliament or Senedd. The requirement already exists in Northern Ireland. Data on polling station voters recorded as turned away, and the reasons for refusals, was captured by polling station staff across England and reported to the Commission. Data on Voter Authority Certificate applications was provided by the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities. Public opinion figures are from two separate surveys both carried out by YouGov plc. For levels of public awareness: Total sample size was 3,705 adults (18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 5 - 22 May 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults within electorate areas (aged 18+). For all other opinion figures: Total sample size was 3,225 adults (aged 18+) who are eligible to vote. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5 - 24 May 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults in the electorate by age, gender, region, social grade and ethnicity.

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.