

Addressing Future Election Challenges

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Policy Context: The Electoral Integrity Program me aims to ensure UK elections remain secure, fair, modern, and transparent. The Political Parties Elections & Referendums Act (PPERA) establishes key principles of political finance.

Recent changes pose opportunities and threats for electoral integrity and participation: significant willingness to vote online; growing numbers of registered UK overseas voters, who can donate to political parties; increasing levels of non-party campaigning; and lower real-terms party spending limits.

Consider resuming online voting trials, banning overseas UK voters from donating, reducing spending limits for non-party campaigners, and increasing party campaign spending limits.

Key research findings

In a <u>2022 study</u>, mean voter willingness was 6.6, on a scale of 0-10. Voters were 6% more willing if online voting was administered by an independent public body rather than even a well-regarded private sector tech company.

This figure increased by over 8 times between 2014 and 2017, to 285,000. Until the Elections Act 2022, overseas citizens were only eligible to register to vote for up to 15 years after they left the UK. A 2023 study -year limit could result in 692,000

registered UK overseas voters, if there was the same rate of registration as in 2017.

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campaigners at the 2016 EU referendum spent around 5% more than the designated campaigns (analogous to political parties in elections). Unlike those standing for election, non-party campaigners are not accountable to the electorate. Also, there is no mechanism for ensuring non-party campaign spending is not disproportionately negative towards one party.

This presents a challenge to the ability of parties to campaign effectively, or possibly to their ability to comply with spending limits.



Policy advice

Voting online can be more secure than by post. Also, the postponement of elections in 2020 showed the need to prepare for holding pandemic-safe elections in the future. Individual registration is now in place, which the Electoral Commission recommended should be a precondition for further trials. The Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) could link these trials with the individual digital verification processes that the government is already using. Trials could be administered by an independent public body to increase voter willingness.

The growth in registered UK overseas voters, who are entitled to donate to political parties, amplifies the risk of foreign money influencing UK politics. It is unclear