



# Electoral Registration Analysis

Analysis of factors driving electoral registration rates in local authorities in England and Wales

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Publication date: July 2013

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# Chapter 1

## Background

In July 2013, the Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform announced a Government campaign to increase the number of people on the electoral register during the transition to Individual Electoral Registration. This includes a number of initiatives aiming to inform and engage communities who are under-represented on the electoral register.

To maximise effectiveness of expenditure dedicated to increasing voter registration levels Cabinet Office analysed the population to find groups that are:

- 1) Under-registered: To ensure resources are targeted to engage voters who are not on the electoral register
- 2) Identifiable: Groups we can identify and engage in maximising registration activity due to their location (e.g. those living in council housing), or through common message design and positioning (e.g. young people, private renters)
- 3) Likely to 'confirm': Have a high likelihood of their data being digitally transferred onto the Individual Electoral Register (and therefore will not have to be targeted and registered again post-transition<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> For further details of confirmation see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/79355/Preliminary\\_Findings\\_Confirmation\\_Pilots.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/79355/Preliminary_Findings_Confirmation_Pilots.pdf)

## Chapter 2

# Under-registration analysis

Analysing a survey of electors, the Electoral Commission identified several under-registered groups<sup>2</sup>. The results below represent the completeness of the electoral register for each group:

**Table 1:** Great Britain's Electoral Registers, 2011: register completeness in under-registered groups (Electoral Commission, 2011)

Group	Register completeness
Private renters	56%
Social renters*	78%
BME groups**	77%
Young people (17-18)	55%
Young people (19-24)	56%
EU nationals	56%
Irish and Commonwealth nationals	68%

\* Renting accommodation from councils or housing associations

\*\* The Electoral Commissions most recent Winter Tracker however found that there was no significant difference between BME and white ethnic groups.

<sup>2</sup> The Electoral Commission: Great Britain's Electoral Registers, 2011:  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/145366/Great-Britains-electoral-registers-2011.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/145366/Great-Britains-electoral-registers-2011.pdf)

In order to target the maximising registration measures most precisely and effectively, Cabinet Office aimed to isolate which characteristics were associated with lower registration rates. We know, for example, that young people are under-registered, but it is not immediately obvious whether this is simply because they are more likely to live in rented accommodation or whether it is due to factors associated with youth, such as political disengagement. This analysis allowed us to determine whether low registration rate is a) due to youth b) due to tenure or c) due to both. This complements other evidence<sup>3</sup> and helps build a fuller picture of under registration.

This enables the government to then segment and target resources on eligible electors with these characteristics.

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<sup>3</sup> Such as Audit of Political Engagement (2012) which suggests that young people aged 18-24 are less likely than older age groups to say they are interested in politics or certain to vote<sup>3</sup>.

## Chapter 3

# Identifying under-registered groups

To estimate regional electoral registration levels, Cabinet Office used UK Electoral Statistics (ONS, 2011) for local government electors. This dataset includes, for every local authority in the United Kingdom, the number of electors on the electoral register, as well as the number of attainers.

We estimated registration rates for every local authority by dividing the number of electors registered (adults plus attainers<sup>4</sup>) by the number of residents of equivalent ages (ONS mid-year population estimates, 2011). Some residents are not eligible to vote due to not fulfilling nationality requirements – only citizens of UK, EU or Commonwealth countries are eligible to register and vote in UK local elections. The inclusion of those ineligible to register and vote can cause an under-estimation of registration rates. Local data on eligibility rates or immigration by nationality is not available; however, we expect ineligible residents will mostly form only a small percentage of residents.

We gathered **2011 Census data** and **2011 mid-year population data** for England and Wales on various demographic characteristics of local authorities<sup>5</sup>, including:

- **Population:** total population, population of those aged 16-17, and 18-24;
- **population density** –number of 16+ per square KM;
- **Ethnicity:** population of BME groups;
- **Tenure:** number of private renters, social renters, owners;
- **Socio-economic group:** number of residents by socio-economic category<sup>6</sup>;

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<sup>4</sup> In estimating the population of attainers, we added the total number of 17-year olds to 12.5% of 16-year olds. This is because only those 16-year olds who will turn 18 during the life of the register (between the following year's 15 October and 1 December =1.5 months, or 12.5% of the year) are registered by EROs.

<sup>5</sup> Note that this analysis did not focus on establishing attainer registration however as this is already disaggregated in ONS' annual "UK Electoral Statistics" which reports attainer registration separately. Comparing the 2011 UK Electoral Statistics to Census 2011 attainer population data shows strong rates of attainer under-registration. We estimate that only 55% of attainers are registered across Great Britain. In estimating the population of attainers, we added the total number of 17-year olds to 12.5% of 16-year olds. This is because, in most cases, only those 16-year olds whose birthday.

<sup>6</sup> Using National Statistics Socio-economic Classification analytical classes

- **Education:** number of students, number of persons who have attained various educational levels;
- **Residence and nationality:** number of residents not born in the UK, numbers resident for various periods of time (e.g. less than 2 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years);
- **Religion:** numbers of persons declaring various religions
- **Unemployment and deprivation:** number of unemployed persons, number of deprived<sup>7</sup> persons;
- **Communal establishments:** numbers of persons living in various communal establishments (e.g. nursing homes, homeless shelters, military bases).

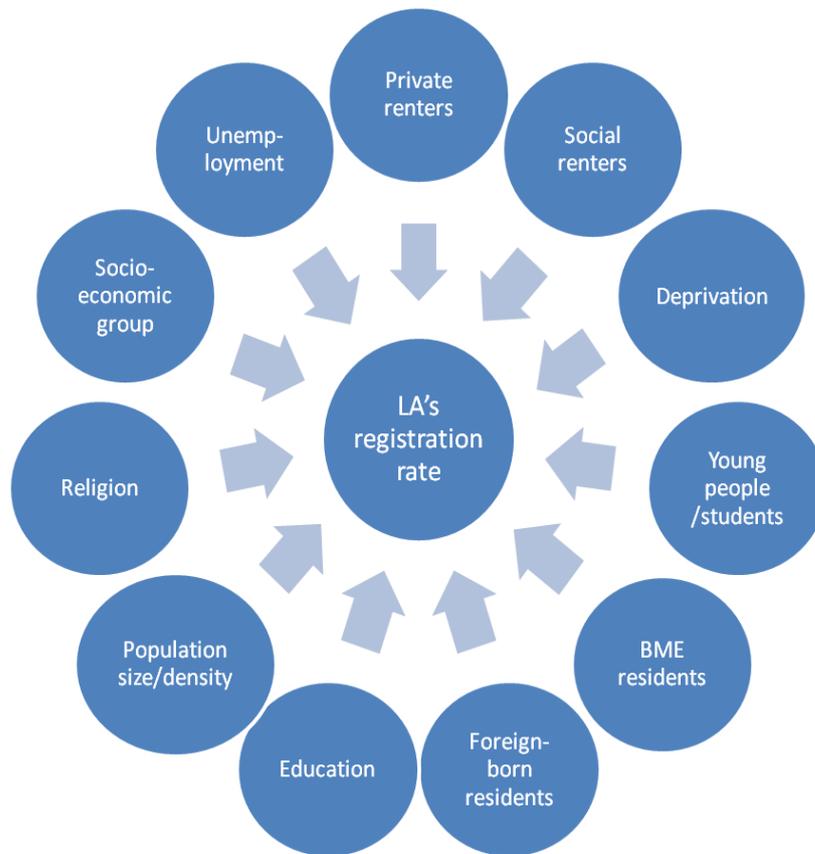
The use of the 2011 Census limited further analysis to England and Wales only, as equivalent Census data has not been published for Scotland. However, this is not considered to be a significant limitation due to the similarities in the registration process across Great Britain. Broad conclusions from this analysis should apply to Scotland equally, especially if they are found to be in line with the Electoral Commission's earlier findings for Great Britain.

Our regression analysis tested the relationships between demographic and economic variables, and registration rates in local authorities summarised in chart 1:

**Chart 1:** Factors influencing registration – relationships tested

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<sup>7</sup> The dimensions of deprivation used in the Census to classify households are indicators based on the four selected household characteristics: employment, education, health and disability, and housing. A household is classified as being deprived in none, or one to four of these dimensions in any combination.

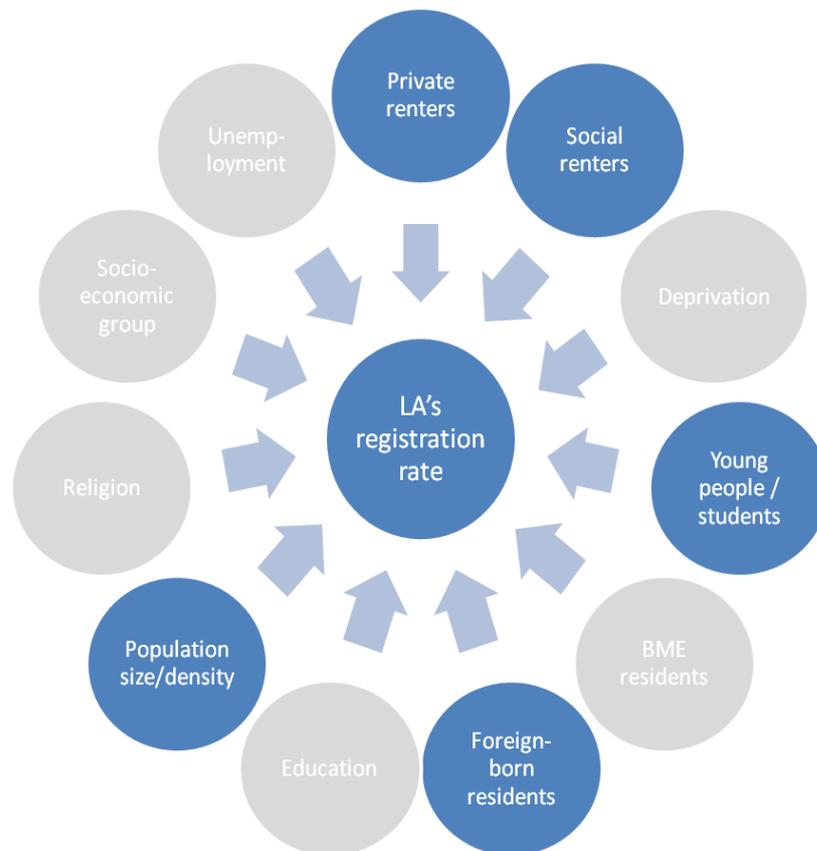


The regression found that the following demographic characteristics were associated with lower registration rates:

- Private renting;
- Social renting;
- Residents born outside the UK (although this will also be due to ineligibility; some Commonwealth and EU citizens are also eligible to register and vote in their country of origin which may affect their registration rates in the UK);
- 18 – 24 year olds and students.

This is summarised in chart 2 below:

**Chart 2:** Factors influencing registration – relationships confirmed (blue)



The regression result did not find, however, that BME groups were statistically less likely to be registered than their white peers who share otherwise the same characteristics. These results imply that a BME individual who is in privately rented accommodation is just as likely to be registered as a white peer who is in similar accommodation for example. This is most consistent with the EC's most recent Winter Tracker which suggested that there was no significant difference in the registration rates of BME and white communities.

Note however that this result does not imply that there is no under registration in BME communities, only that ethnicity does not seem to be a driver for under registration. Certain BME groups for example are disproportionately over-represented in the social housing sector<sup>8</sup> which is under registered. Any under-registration, such as that found in the Electoral Commission previous 2011 report, could therefore be explained by the social housing variable (% of persons living in social housing) rather than ethnicity;

Deprivation, unemployment rates, socio-economic composition, religion, and education levels were also not confirmed as statistically significant factors driving under-registration across local authorities in England and Wales. We therefore do not

<sup>8</sup> Markkanen et al (2008): Understanding demographic, spatial and economic impacts on future affordable housing demand; Paper Five – BME Housing needs and aspirations

expect these variables to be of as much use as tenure, age and nationality in identifying, segmenting and targeting under-registered voters.

## Chapter 4

# Confirmation rate analysis

Using ward level confirmation rates from the 2012 Confirmation pilots<sup>9</sup> and 2011 ward level census data for England and Wales, we similarly tested various demographic characteristics to assess whether particular characteristics were associated with a higher or lower confirmation rate. This analysis allows Cabinet Office to identify which groups are more likely to 'Confirm', and thus digitally transfer to the IER register in 2014. This enables the government to focus resources more effectively as those electors who digitally confirm in 2014 will not need to be registered twice.

Similarly this analysis allows us to assess which particular characteristic is most closely associated with confirmation - e.g. to determine whether it is young people that are less likely to confirm or students.

This regression analysis therefore tested which of the following potentially under registered groups were more likely to confirm:

- **Ethnicity:** population of BME groups;
- **Attainers:** population of attainers;
- **Tenure:** number of private renters, social renters, owners;
- **Education:** number of students, number of persons who have attained various educational levels;
- **Residence and nationality:** number of residents not born in the UK, numbers resident for various periods of time (e.g. less than 2 years, 2-5 years, 5-10 years);
- **Unemployment and deprivation:** number of unemployed persons, number of deprived persons;
- **Communal establishments:** number of persons living in various communal establishments (e.g. nursing homes, homeless shelters, military bases).

This regression analysis found that students, people living in communal establishments and private renters were less likely to confirm than peers who owned their own house. This is consistent with the Electoral Commission evaluation which found that moving was a major cause of not confirming. Equally significantly, it also

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<sup>9</sup>For further details on the findings of confirmation pilots, see: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/79355/Preliminary\\_Findings\\_Confirmation\\_Pilots.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/79355/Preliminary_Findings_Confirmation_Pilots.pdf)

found that young people (18-24 year olds), people born outside the UK, people living in social housing, and ethnic minorities were just as likely to confirm as their peers<sup>10</sup>. This enables the government to focus funding on these groups prior to transition. It also found that attainers were more likely to confirm.

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<sup>10</sup> The difference in their confirmation rate was not statistically significant

## Chapter 5

# Limitations

Whilst our results are statistically significant and confirmed previous findings, there are some limitations. Firstly, we established registration rates by comparing 2011 UK Electoral Registration statistics to 2011 Census data. Both data sets adhere to conventional statistical standards individually; registration rates estimated through their comparison, however, do not take into account eligibility requirements. Only nationals of UK, EU or Commonwealth countries are eligible to register to vote in local government elections in the UK and therefore could appear in the UK Electoral Registration statistics. Residents of any nationality, by contrast, would be counted in the Census. Local authorities with large populations of ineligible residents might therefore be identified as having high rates of under-registration. Given the wide franchise for local elections stated, we do not believe this effect to limit our analysis significantly. Democratic engagement pilot activities in regions will help us expand on analysis in the future by providing additional insight into regional registration eligibility rates.

In assessing which groups are most likely to confirm only the results of the pilot areas available. When the results of the Confirmation Dry Run are available Cabinet Office will be able to draw further insights. As mentioned above, Scotland 2011 Census data was not available, limiting our regression analysis to local authorities in England and Wales only. However, this is not considered to be a significant limitation due to the similarities in the registration process across Great Britain. We expect drivers of under-registration in this analysis to apply equally well to Scottish local authorities.

# Chapter 6

## Summary and implications

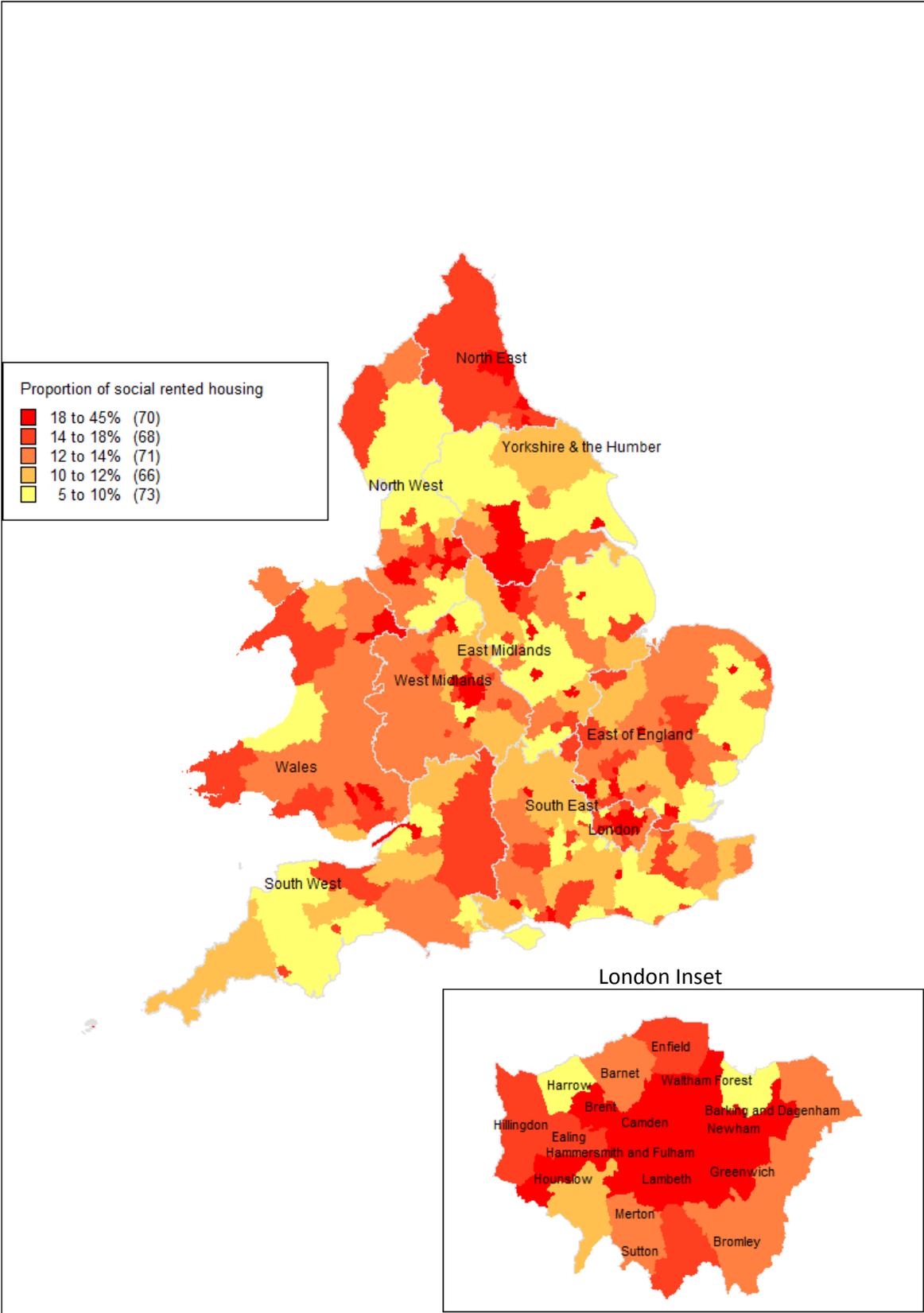
The analysis outlined above confirmed our hypotheses on cross-local authority (England and Wales) trends with regard to under registration in several demographic groups – private and social renters, young people and students, and residents not born in the UK. Registration activities targeting these groups will have a higher likelihood of reaching unregistered electors and therefore succeeding in increasing the size of the electoral register than untargeted activities.

Confirmation rate analysis further established groups for whom registration activity in 2013/14 will be more cost-efficient as they are likely to have their registration successfully digitally transferred onto the Individual Electoral Register. These include **social renters, attainers, and young people**. Charts 3 and 4 use Census 2011 data to show differences between rates of social renting and proportions of young people aged 18-24 in the population of adults and attainers.

The multiplicity and diversity of under-registered groups mean that a range of approaches are needed to increase their registration rates. Hence the government has diversified maximising registration expenditure into a number of approaches, including, for example, **Schools Outreach** activities aimed at registering attainers.

Our results should, however, not be interpreted as an exhaustive list of *all* under-registered groups in the UK. Regression analysis enables us to identify patterns of under-registration common to many local authorities across England and Wales. Not establishing a strong effect across local authorities through such analysis, however, does not rule out the existence of localised patterns of under-registration in some areas. It is possible that individual local authorities will identify, for example, community establishments where registration rates are extremely low which cannot be captured nationally. We rely on measures such as the **Innovation Fund** to attract providers who have identified such groups and devised ways of increasing registration.

**Chart 3:** Percentage of residents living in rented social accommodation, local authority level, England and Wales, Census 2011



**Chart 4:** Percentage of persons aged 18-24 in the population of attainers (16-17) and adults (18+), local authority level, Great Britain, Census 2011

