



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

# Evaluation of Electoral Integrity Programme: Public Opinion Research

Ipsos for DLUHC

Gideon Skinner, Glenn Gottfried, Stuart Smedley, Holly Day, Rebecca Flynn



September 2023  
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



© Crown copyright, 2023

*Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.*

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

This document/publication is also available on our website at [www.gov.uk/dluhc](http://www.gov.uk/dluhc)

If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication or write to us at: [correspondence@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:correspondence@levellingup.gov.uk) or

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF  
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

For all our latest news and updates follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/luhc>

September 2023

# Contents

|          |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Introduction and Methodology</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
|          | Background – Electoral Integrity Programme                                   | 5         |
|          | Methodology of the UK KnowledgePanel   | 6         |
|          | Survey fieldwork   | 7         |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Executive Summary</b>   | <b>9</b>  |
|          | General attitudes towards and experience of voting                           | 9         |
|          | Voter Identification and Voter Authority Certificates                        | 9         |
|          | Accessibility  | 11        |
|          | Absent Voting  | 11        |
| <b>3</b> | <b>General Attitudes Towards Elections</b>                                   | <b>13</b> |
|          | Methods of voting  | 14        |
|          | Important factors when voting  | 15        |
|          | Perceptions of the voting process and elections                              | 16        |
|          | Perceptions of fraud in polling stations                                     | 19        |
|          | Awareness of policy changes – Voter Identification                           | 20        |
|          | Impacts of Voter Identification policy changes – voter participation         | 20        |
|          | Impacts of Voter Identification policy changes – for voters and non-voters   | 22        |
|          | Impacts of Voter Identification policy changes – confidence in voting system | 24        |
|          | Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) – awareness and perceptions               | 25        |
|          | Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) – likelihood of applying                  | 26        |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Accessibility</b>   | <b>27</b> |
|          | Context – Disability and Voting Processes                                    | 28        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Context – Ease of Voting                        | 30        |
| Awareness of companion voting                   | 30        |
| Awareness of policy changes                     | 31        |
| Consequences of policy changes                  | 32        |
| <b>6 Absent Voting</b>                          | <b>35</b> |
| Current Context                                 | 36        |
| General perceptions of the voting process       | 38        |
| Application Process                             | 38        |
| Ease of Voting                                  | 38        |
| Knowledge and Awareness (Northern Ireland only) | 39        |
| Security and Fraud                              | 39        |
| <b>7 Our standards and accreditations</b>       | <b>42</b> |

# 1 Introduction and Methodology

- 1.1. This report presents findings from a survey commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, undertaken by Ipsos in May 2023 following the local elections in England and Northern Ireland. The aim of this research is to understand public views towards and experiences of voting and the potential impact of the government's Electoral Integrity Programme (EIP), contributing insight towards the evaluation of this important set of policy measures.
- 1.2. The first wave of this study was conducted between 26 January – 1 February 2023 in England, Scotland and Wales as a baseline for general attitudes, experiences of voting, and perceptions of the changes to the process of voting. The second wave of this research (conducted in England and Northern Ireland only) focuses on general attitudes and experiences of voting, perceptions of electoral fraud, awareness of the changes to the process of voting as part of the EIP (within Northern Ireland this is focused on changes to accessibility when voting only, as presenting an accepted form of photo identification is already a requirement when voting at a polling station), awareness of the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) and the impacts of these changes on voters during the elections of May 2023,<sup>1</sup> in addition to perceptions of absent voting.
- 1.3. This report presents findings from the second wave of the Electoral Integrity Programme (EIP) survey, conducted between 18 – 24 May 2023 in England and Northern Ireland. While the data from Northern Ireland serves as a baseline for public attitudes, the findings within England are compared to the first wave conducted in January 2023 where applicable.

## Background – Electoral Integrity Programme

- 1.4. Overall, the Electoral Integrity Programme has five primary objectives. These are to: improve the security and integrity of the ballot; improve the transparency and fairness of elections; protect the democratic debate; enhance engagement in UK democracy; and modernise the electoral system. The first tranche of changes introduced by the Elections Act were first implemented in the May 2023 elections, and included:
- 1.5. Changes related to the security of the ballot assessed in the survey were:
  - The requirement for photographic identification to be shown when voting in person at a polling station for all elections in England; and
  - The introduction of Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) that can be used by voters who do not have an accepted form of photographic identification to vote in person at a polling station.

---

<sup>1</sup> Local elections were held in England on May 4th across 230 councils, with 8,025 seats up for election. In England, these elections were the first to be held with the requirement for registered voters to show photo identification when voting in person at a polling station. Local elections were held for all seats on the 11 local councils in Northern Ireland on 18th May.

- 1.6. The aim of these policy measures is to: tackle the potential for and actuality of electoral fraud taking place in polling stations, increase the level of trust and confidence that voters have in the voting process, and ensure access for all to alternative identification documentation.
- 1.7. Changes related to the accessibility of elections assessed in the survey included:
  - Requiring authorities to provide a range of equipment to support people with disabilities when voting in person at a polling station if needed; and
  - Allowing anyone who is aged 18 and over to act as a companion to assist a voter with disabilities when voting in person at a polling station.
- 1.8. These measures are being introduced to improve the support provided to voters with a disability to cast their vote at a polling station and to furthermore provide support for people with a wide range of disabilities.
- 1.9. In relation to absent voting, the questionnaire (conducted in Britain in January 2023 and Northern Ireland in May 2023) assessed the length of time for which absent voters had applied to vote by post or proxy, and the preferred method of applying for an absent vote (online or via paper application) among recent absent voters.

## Methodology of the UK KnowledgePanel

- 1.10. The data for this survey was collected using the UK KnowledgePanel, Ipsos's online random probability panel which provides highly robust insights into the British population.
- 1.11. Panellists are recruited via a random probability, unclustered address-based sampling method. This means that every household in the UK has a known chance of being selected to join the panel. Letters are sent to selected addresses in the UK (using the Postcode Address File) inviting them to become members of the panel. Members of the public who are digitally excluded are able to register to the KnowledgePanel either by post or by telephone, and are given a tablet, an email address, and basic internet access which allows them to complete surveys online.
- 1.12. As a random probability panel, KnowledgePanel does not use a quota approach when conducting surveys. Instead, invited samples are stratified when conducting waves to account for any profile skews within the panel.
- 1.13. Two members per household are allowed to register on the KnowledgePanel. Therefore, we employ a design weight to correct for unequal probabilities of selection of household members. Calibration weights are also applied using the latest population statistics relevant to the surveyed population. Calibration weighting was applied using the following variables:
  - Region and an interlocked variable of Gender by Age. Both use ONS 2020 mid-year population estimates as the weighting target.

- Demographic weights were then applied to correct for imbalances in the achieved sample. The data was weighted on: Education, Ethnicity, Index of Multiple Deprivation (quintiles), and number of adults in the household. Estimates from the ONS 2020 mid-year population estimates and Annual Population Survey were used as the weighting target.

## Survey fieldwork

- 1.14. Fieldwork for this survey was conducted on the UK KnowledgePanel between 18 – 24 May 2023 with adults aged 18+ within England and Northern Ireland. In all, 8,318 responses were achieved in England and 777 in Northern Ireland. A total of 5,988 interviews in England were in areas which held local elections. The England sample consists of both longitudinal participants (those who participated in the January wave) in addition to fresh participants. This allows us to analyse individual level changes since January while also being able to appropriately track any questions pertaining to awareness of the electoral changes and awareness campaigns. In total, 6,145 participants also took part in the first wave while 2,173 are new participants.
- 1.15. The below table breaks down the number of responses received in some of the most relevant groups for this research:

**Table 1.1: Number of achieved responses by sub-group**

|   | NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS IN ENGLAND (UNWEIGHTED) | PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE IN ENGLAND (WEIGHTED) | NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS IN NORTHERN IRELAND (UNWEIGHTED) | PERCENTAGE OF SAMPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND (WEIGHTED) |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>8,318</b>                                 | <b>100%</b>                                | <b>777</b>  | <b>100%</b>   |
| <b>2023 ELECTION AREAS</b>                                | 5,988  | 69%  | 777   | 100%  |
| <b>LONGITUDINAL SAMPLE</b>                                | 6,145  | 72%  | -   | -   |
| <b>FRESH SAMPLE</b>                                       | 2,173  | 28%  | 777   | 100%  |
| <b>MALE</b>   | <b>3,877</b>                                 | 48%  | 375   | 48%   |
| <b>FEMALE</b>   | 4,368  | 52%  | 397   | 52%   |
| <b>18-34</b>  | 992  | 26%  | 101   | 29%   |
| <b>35-54</b>  | 2,527  | 34%  | 306   | 34%   |
| <b>55+</b>  | 4,799  | 40%  | 370   | 37%   |
| <b>WHITE</b>  | 7,552  | 86%  | 758   | 98%   |
| <b>ETHNIC MINORITIES</b>                                  | 674  | 13%  | 15  | 2%  |
| <b>NO DEGREE</b>  | 5,101  | 64%  | 427   | 71%   |
| <b>DEGREE</b>   | 2,771  | 32%  | 317   | 24%   |
| <b>DISABILITY (LIMITING ACTIVITIES A LOT OR A LITTLE)</b> | 2,603  | 30%  | 259   | 34%   |
| <b>POSTAL/PROXY VOTERS</b>                                | 2,365  | 26%  | 39  | 5%  |

- 1.16. Overall, we can expect a sampling tolerance of +/- 1 percentage point in England and +/- 4 percentage points in Northern Ireland for a 50% finding (for example where 50% of respondents select option A and 50% select option B) at the '95% confidence interval'. This will be wider for sub-groups and geographies according to their sample size. For example, among those with a disability in England the sampling tolerance would be +/- 2 percentage points and +/- 6 percentage points in Northern Ireland, while among 18-34-year-olds it would be +/- 3 percentage points in England and +/- 10 percentage points in Northern Ireland. Differences between groups and geographies referenced in our commentary are statistically significant, unless otherwise indicated.
- 1.17. Additionally, when conducting surveys using any approach, it is important to acknowledge potential limitations such as the social desirability effect and unintentional response errors. The social desirability effect refers to individuals providing responses that are considered socially acceptable, for example voting can be seen as a socially desirable action therefore responses for the proportion of those saying they voted in an election can be higher than actual turnout. These factors should always be considered when interpreting survey findings.



## 2 Executive Summary

### General attitudes towards and experience of voting

- 2.1. The majority of voting age adults (62%) in England prefer to vote at the polling station, while three in ten (29%) prefer voting by post, with a similar pattern among those who voted in the recent local elections: 63% voted in person and 37% by post.
- 2.2. General views towards the process of voting remain positive when compared to January 2023 (wave 1). Seven in ten (69%) in England are satisfied with the process of voting at elections generally (although this is slightly down from 74% in January), and a greater proportion of voters (82%) are confident that elections are run well (84% in January). In Northern Ireland 74% are satisfied with the process of voting and 82% are confident elections are run well. Nearly 8 in 10 are also confident the recent local elections were run well. Positive perceptions also extend to the ease of voting in person or by post, which the vast majority of voting age adults find easy (in line with wave 1), although perceptions of the ease of voting in person and by post are slightly less positive among people with disabilities.
- 2.3. As in wave 1, the two most important aspects of voting for the voting aged public are being safe from fraud and abuse (especially for those aged 55+) and voting being easy or convenient (especially for younger people). Those with disabilities were more likely to emphasise having a choice of methods of voting as the most important aspect of voting. Fraud also remains one of the top reasons why people lack confidence in the running of elections, along with feeling the voting system is unfair and a lack of trust that votes are counted accurately (and in Northern Ireland, worries about coercion).
- 2.4. Among those who did not manage to vote in the recent local elections, being away on polling day was the most mentioned reason (22% in England and 35% in Northern Ireland) followed by a lack of interest or belief in the election, such as they are not interested (17% in England), they did not want to vote for anyone running (16% in England) or that their vote would not make a difference (16% in England).

### Voter Identification and Voter Authority Certificates

- 2.5. In England, awareness of the requirement to provide photo identification when voting has risen since January from 34% to 76% in May while awareness of the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) rose more modestly from 9% to 21%.<sup>2</sup> Overall, 96% claimed to have at least one form of an accepted photo identification while 2% said they did not, with the remaining 2% preferring not to say or not knowing if they held accepted identification<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The awareness figures presented here from the most recent wave of the study are based on fresh sample only, in other words, those who did not participate in the January wave.

<sup>3</sup> Given the nature of survey research, it should be borne in mind that groups least likely to have a photo identification might be less likely to take part

- 2.6. In line with wave 1, most people in England say having to present photo identification at the polling station would make no difference to the ease of voting in person (65%, vs 10% who would find it easier and 21% who would find it more difficult). On how likely they are to want to vote at all, 79% say it would make no difference, whereas 7% would be more likely to vote and 11% would be less likely to vote. There is a similar pattern when thinking about the recent local elections: 68% of voters said it made no difference to the ease of voting at a polling station, 12% said it made it more difficult; 82% no difference to their desire to vote, and it made 8% less likely to want to.
- 2.7. However, there are some groups who felt they would be more affected generally and reported that to be the case during the local elections, either because they thought the introduction of photo identification makes voting harder or because it makes them less likely to want to vote, including graduates, ethnic minorities, those living in urban or the most deprived areas, the long-term unemployed/never worked, renters, and those with a disability that impacts on their ability to vote in person. The biggest impact is reported by those without an accepted form of photo identification (e.g., 47% say it made it more difficult to vote in the recent local elections, 41% that it made them less likely to want to vote).
- 2.8. 4% of non-voters in the recent local elections in England said issues due to photo identification were one of the reasons they did not vote (including 2% who said it was because they did not have an accepted form of photo identification). This was higher among social renters, those living in the most deprived areas, those with a disability that limits their ability to vote in person, and highest of all among those without photo identification (36%).
- 2.9. As in wave 1, concerns about the security of voting overall remain relatively low, especially for voting in person (for example, 84% think voting in person is safe from fraud, and just 9% think there is a fair amount of fraud in their local area, increasing to 17% in England overall). Nevertheless, broadly people think that the photo identification requirement will make voting more secure. Half (51%, though down slightly from 57% in January) of those in England say presenting photo identification at the polling station makes them more confident in the security of voting system (38% say it makes no difference and 6% it makes them less confident).
- 2.10. Six in ten voting age adults (61%) in England say that if they went to vote but did not have their photo identification they would be likely to return to vote later that day with their photo identification. A third (32%), however, say they would be unlikely to return.
- 2.11. Among those in England who voted in the May local elections, seven in ten (70%) used a driving licence as their form of photo identification. This was followed by 23% using a passport and 5% using an older person's bus pass. The VAC was used by 1% of voters. There were also relatively few reports of issues with the need to show photo identification (such as them being rejected) among voters in the recent local elections, but 9% said they felt uncomfortable with having to show identification.

## Accessibility

- 2.12. Overall, around half of voting age adults in England (53%) and Northern Ireland (51%) with a disability agree they receive the materials and support needed in order to vote. Very few with a disability in England think that the way elections are run prevents them from voting in person (6%) or by post (5%), although only four in ten say staff at polling stations are properly trained to assist them in voting.
- 2.13. Relatively few voting age adults are aware of the recent policy and legislative changes to improve accessibility, although this has increased slightly (for example, awareness of the change to companions assisting voters with a disability increased from 8% to 12% in England, and awareness of the requirement to provide a wide range of equipment rose from 7% to 12%; in Northern Ireland 10% are aware of each policy and legislative change).
- 2.14. As in wave 1, reactions to these changes are positive, with most adults with a disability, or disabled member of the household thinking it will make voting in person easier (although also saying it will make little difference to how likely it is that they want to vote). Around three in four of those in England and Northern Ireland who are either disabled or live with an individual who is disabled think both these changes will make it easier to vote in person at a polling station.
- 2.15. Around seven to eight in ten of those in England and Northern Ireland with a disability say the changes will make no difference to how much they want to vote (and if anything this figure was slightly higher when thinking about the impact on the recent local elections). Among those who do think it would make a difference, more feel it would have a positive impact (for example, in England 8% of disabled adults said each change made them more likely to want to vote in the recent local elections, just 2% less likely, and the figures were similar in Northern Ireland).

## Absent Voting

- 2.16. In England, not having the time to vote in person (27%), wanting to avoid queuing at the polling station (26%) and being away on polling day (23%) are the most cited reasons for voting by post. In Northern Ireland, where absentee voting is more restricted,<sup>4</sup> most postal voters say they voted by post because they were away on polling day (although caution is needed due to small base sizes).
- 2.17. Among those who voted by post in England at a recent election, nine in ten (89%) say that applying for a postal ballot was easy to do. Postal voters in Northern Ireland also found the application process easy. Nearly all postal voters in England also found the process of casting their vote in this way easy in the recent local elections (94%).

---

<sup>4</sup> In Northern Ireland, unlike in the other nations, reasoning must be provided for a postal vote application, and deadlines for proxy vote submissions are much earlier than in the other nations.

- 2.18. While absent voting methods are broadly seen as being safe from fraud overall, they are viewed as less secure than voting in person. In England, 43% of voting age adults believe that voting by post is less secure than voting at a polling station (42% say no difference while 9% say it is more secure) while 45% say that proxy voting is less secure than voting in person (43% say no difference and 3% say more secure). This view is more strongly held in Northern Ireland, where 59% of voting age adults say voting by post is less secure (with 31% saying no difference and 4% more secure) while most (54%) say that voting by proxy is less secure (41% say no difference and 4% say more secure).
- 2.19. The most mentioned reason for those who believe postal voting is less secure is because they cannot be certain the person who the postal vote belongs to is actually the one who has filled in the ballot (58% in England and 60% in Northern Ireland). Those who believe postal voting is more secure cite it is easier to vote by post without other people potentially influencing them (38% in England and 23% in Northern Ireland).

# 3 General Attitudes Towards Elections

## Chapter Summary

- In line with wave 1 findings, the majority of voting age adults in England (61%) say they prefer to vote in person at a polling station followed by 29% preferring to vote by post and 1% by proxy. At the recent local elections, of those who voted, 63% said they voted in person and 37% by post.
  - Those who were not able to vote in the local elections were asked the reason for not voting, with responses varying. The most common response was that they were away on election day (22%).
  - Of those who say they voted in the recent elections in England, over nine in ten (95%) found it easy to vote in person or by post.
  - In Northern Ireland, an even greater proportion of the public prefer to vote in person at a polling station (84%) while only a very small minority prefer postal (5%) or proxy (1%) voting. In Northern Ireland, unlike in the other nations, reasoning must be provided for a postal vote application, and deadlines for proxy vote submissions are much earlier than in the other nations.
  - Thinking about the recent local elections, practically all who voted found the process of voting in person at a polling station easy (99%), with 81% finding it very easy.
  - Around seven in ten voting age adults (69%) are satisfied with the voting process at elections in England, compared with three in four (74%) at wave 1.
  - A strong majority of voting age adults are also confident in the way elections are run in general in England (82%, similar to the 84% in wave 1). Consistent with the wave 1 findings fraud is the main reason for a lack of confidence.
  - Confidence is also high among voting age adults (although marginally lower) when thinking specifically about the recent local elections, at 77% confident.
  - 74% of voting age adults are satisfied with the process of voting in Northern Ireland, and four in five (81%) are confident in the way elections are run in Northern Ireland (79% when it comes to thinking specifically about the recent local elections).
- 3.1. This chapter sets out public opinion on voting in general and suggests that generally the British public are capable of voting using their preferred method, satisfied with voting processes and confident that elections are well run. However, strong importance is placed on the security and integrity of the ballot: voting age adults prioritise their vote being safe from fraud and abuse, while those who are not confident that elections are well run are most likely to mention fraud as their reason for not being confident.

## Methods of voting

- 3.2. In line with wave 1 findings, the majority of voting age adults in England (61%) say they prefer to vote in person at a polling station, while three in ten (29%) prefer to vote by post, and 1% prefer to vote by proxy.
- 3.3. However, certain groups are more likely to prefer to use absent voting methods, especially postal voting. Those aged 65+ (38%), those with a disability that impacts on voting in person (38%) and those with a disability that limits activities a lot (38%) are more likely than average to prefer to vote by post.
- 3.4. Similarly, among those who say they voted in the recent local elections, 63% said they voted in person at a polling station and 37% by post. Again, certain groups were more likely to use absent voting methods in the local elections. Those aged 65+ were more likely than average to vote by post (54%). Additionally, those with a disability were also more likely to vote by post (41%), especially those with a disability that impacts on voting in person (43%) and those with a disability which limits activities a lot (48%).
- 3.5. Those who were not able to vote in the local elections were asked the reason for this. The most common response was that they were away on election day (22%). This was then followed by a lack of interest in the election (17%), not wanting to vote for anyone running (16%) or that their vote would not make a difference (16%). With the local elections being the first elections held in England at which it was compulsory to show identification when voting in person 4% said they were not able to vote for a reason related to the need to show an accepted form of photo identification. This will be discussed further in the following section.
- 3.6. Of those who voted in the recent elections, the majority found it easy to vote. Nearly all adults who said they voted in person at a polling station or by post at the local elections found the process of voting easy (95% in person and 94% by post).<sup>5</sup> Findings across each voting method have remained fairly consistent with the previous wave.
- 3.7. When it comes to voting in person at a polling station, large majorities across demographic groups find it easy to vote using this method. However, satisfaction with the ease of voting in person is slightly lower among people with a disability. In particular, 84% of those whose condition limits their activities a lot and 86% of those who have a disability that impacts on voting in person are less likely to say voting in person was easy for them.

---

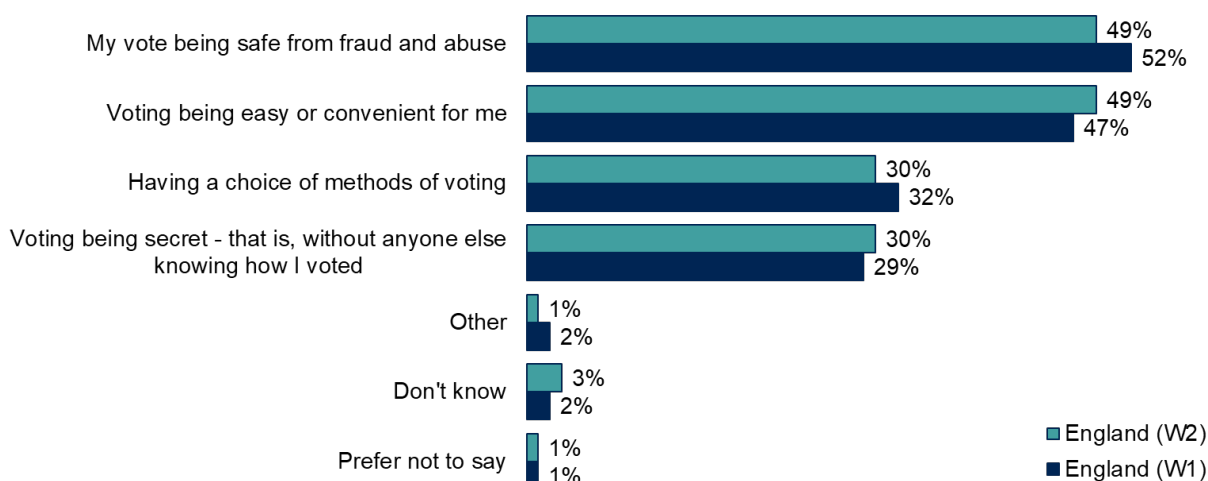
<sup>5</sup> Base sizes are too small to analyse by proxy voters.

3.8. In Northern Ireland, a substantial proportion of the public prefer to vote in person at a polling station (84%) while only a very small minority prefer postal (5%) or proxy (1%) voting.<sup>6</sup> Thinking about the recent local elections, practically all who said they voted found the process of voting in person at a polling station easy (99%), with 81% finding it very easy.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority (96%) of those who said they voted in the recent local elections also said they did so in person at a polling station. A third (35%) of those who could not vote in the local election said it was because they were away on election day.

## Important factors when voting

3.9. When asked which factors are most important to them when they vote, voting age adults in England are most likely to prioritise their vote being safe from fraud and abuse (49%) along with voting being easy or convenient (49%). Three in ten prioritised having a choice of methods of voting (30%) and voting being a secret (30%) as most important to them when they vote. These findings have remained largely consistent with the previous wave.

**Figure 3.1 Thinking broadly about elections, which one or two of the following would you say is most important for you when you vote?**



Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+: England (8318); Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023  
 Wave 1: All adults 18+: England (7166); Fieldwork dates: 26th January-1st February 2023

3.10. However, there are significant differences among age groups. Older age groups are more likely to prioritise their vote being safe from fraud (54% among those aged 55-64 and aged 65+) and voting being a secret (33% among those aged 55-64 and 38% among those aged 65+), while over half of younger voters prioritised voting being easy or convenient (53% among those aged 18-34 and 58% among those aged 35-44). In addition, those with a disability that impacts on voting in person (37%) and those with a disability that limits activities a lot (36%) are more likely to choose having a choice of methods of voting.

<sup>6</sup> In Northern Ireland, unlike in the other nations, reasoning must be provided for a postal vote application, and deadlines for proxy vote submissions are much earlier than in the other nations.

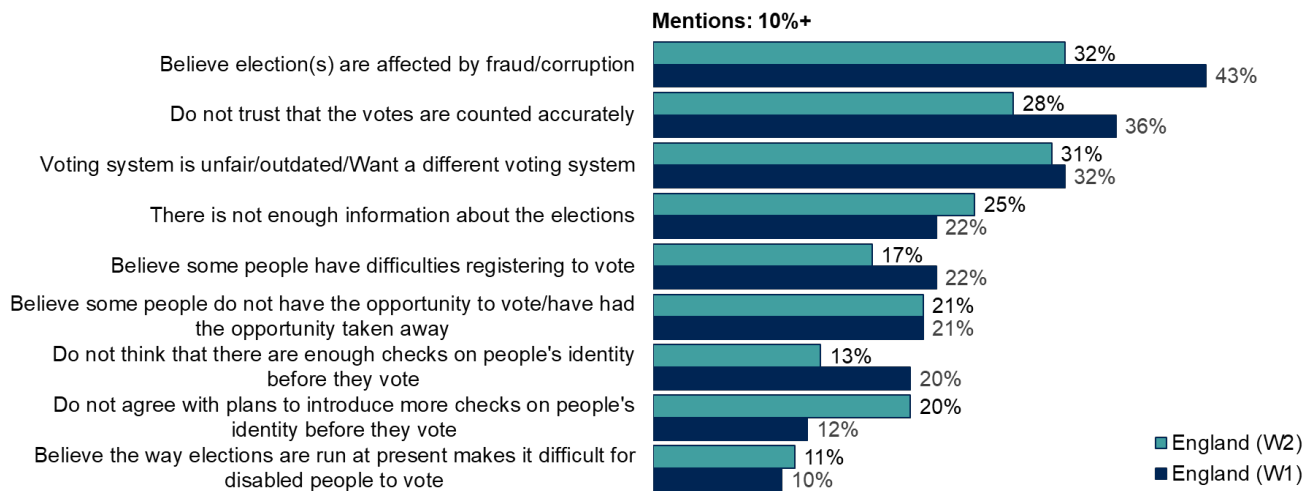
<sup>7</sup> Base sizes are too small to analyse postal or proxy voters in Northern Ireland.

## Perceptions of the voting process and elections

- 3.11. As found in the previous survey wave, the voting process in England is one that voting age adults are generally satisfied with, although this has decreased slightly since wave 1. Around seven in ten adults (69%) are satisfied with the voting process at elections in general in England, compared with three in four (74%) in wave 1. Satisfaction increases with age, with higher satisfaction among those aged 55+ (81%). Satisfaction with the voting process is also higher among graduates (76%), those who own their home outright (80%), those interested in politics (79%) and those who voted in the local elections (84%). In contrast, satisfaction is lower among those aged 18-34 (53%), those from ethnic minority backgrounds (51%), those with a disability that limits activities a lot (60%), those not interested in politics (50%) and those who did not vote in the recent election (52%).
- 3.12. A strong majority of voting age adults are also confident in the way elections are run in England, with 82% saying they were confident (similar to 84% in wave 1). Confidence is very high across voter types with nine in ten voting age adults in England having confidence that elections are run well (90% of in person voters, 89% of absent voters). Confidence in elections is also linked with political engagement and interest as 90% of those who are interested in politics and 85% of those registered to vote are confident in the way elections are run. Confidence in how elections are run decreases with age, older age groups are more likely to be confident in the process (93% of those aged 55+) compared with 67% of those aged 18-34.
- 3.13. Confidence is also high among voting age adults (although not quite as high) when thinking specifically about the recent local elections, at 77%. Confidence is higher in election areas than those that did not (79% vs 72%). Lower levels of confidence are again apparent among younger age groups, with a quarter of those aged 18-34 not confident that the recent elections were well run (24%, vs 14% overall). Those with a disability, those with a condition that limits their activities a lot (24%) and those with a disability that impacts on voting in person (22%) are also more likely to say they are not confident elections are well run. Similarly, those with low political engagement are also more likely to lack confidence that recent elections were well run, with 21% of those not interested in politics and a third (37%) of those not registered to vote not confident in the election process. This is also apparent for those without any form of accepted photo identification (31%).
- 3.14. Consistent with the previous wave findings, the main reason given by those who lack confidence in elections include fraud (32%), that the voting system is unfair/outdated (31%), and a lack of trust that votes are counted accurately (28%). A new option code was also added for wave 2, with 25% believing some people are coerced/pressured to voting in a particular way.



**Figure 3.2: Why do you say that you are not confident that elections in your nation are well run?**



Base: Wave 2: All who are not confident that elections are well run in England (834): Fieldwork dates: 18th - 24th May 2023

- 3.15. A fifth of those lacking confidence said they did so because they do not agree with photo identification checks (20%, up from 12% in wave 1 – though note that because of the extra codes added, the two questions are not exactly comparable), driven by those with a high interest in politics, and those who voted at local elections – and it was also more likely to be given as a reason among those in local election areas (23%). On the other hand, 13% said they lacked confidence because there are not enough identity checks (down from 20% in wave 1, though again note extra codes were added in wave 2) – this was more likely to be given as a reason in non-election areas (18%).
- 3.16. Satisfaction levels are also high within Northern Ireland with 74% saying they are satisfied with the process of voting. Confidence levels in Northern Ireland are similar to those in England, with four in five voting age adults (81%) confident in the way elections are run in Northern Ireland, and 79% when thinking specifically about the recent local elections. Among those who are not confident that elections are well run in Northern Ireland, perceptions that people were being coerced/pressured (52%) was the most common reason.

# 4 Voter Identification

## Chapter Summary

- In England, among all voting age adults, awareness of the requirement to provide a photo identification when voting has risen since January from 34% to 76% in May, while awareness of the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) rose more modestly from 9% to 21%.\*
- Two-thirds (65%) of voting age adults in England say having to present photo identification at the polling station would make no difference to the ease of voting in person (in line with January - wave 1). One in five adults (21%) say it would make it more difficult to vote in person while 10% say it will make it easier. Those without photo identification were most likely to find it harder to vote in person at the recent local elections (47%).
- Similarly, eight in ten voting age adults in England say that presenting photo identification would make no difference in them wanting to vote generally (similar to wave 1), or in the recent local elections.
- In the recent local elections, 4% of voting age adults in English election areas said it made them more likely to want to vote and 8% less likely, again rising to 41% of those without an accepted form of photo identification. Generally speaking, 11% of voting age adults in England say it makes them less likely to want to vote, showing no change since wave 1.
- When non-voters in the recent local elections were asked generally why they were unable to do so, 4% said it related to an issue with photo identification (half of whom said it was because they did not have photo identification). This was highest of all among non-voters without photo identification (36%).
- Half (51%) of voting age adults in England say presenting photo identification at the polling station makes them more confident in the security of voting system. This is down slightly from January when 57% of voting age adults in England said it made them more confident.
- Six in ten (61%) in England say that if they went to vote but did not have their photo identification they would be certain or likely to return to vote later that day with their photo identification. A third of voting age adults (32%), however, say they would be certain not to or unlikely to return, similar to wave 1.
- Among those in England who voted in the May local elections, seven in ten (70%) used a driving licence as their form of photo identification. This was followed by 23% using a passport and 5% using an older person's bus pass. The VAC was used by 1% of voters. A quarter of those without photo identification (25%) say they would be likely to apply for a VAC, down from 36% in wave 1.

\*Based upon comparing results for Wave 2 fresh sample only.

- 4.1. This chapter sets out public awareness of the policy to introduce the requirement to show accepted forms of photo identification to vote in polling stations, perceptions of fraud and the security of the ballot, confidence in the electoral system, and experience of its implementation at the recent local government elections. This findings in this section will refer to England, given the policy was introduced in advance of the May local elections here. Voter identification for in person voting was already in place in Northern Ireland.

## Perceptions of fraud in polling stations

- 4.2. Perceptions that fraud is occurring in polling stations remain relatively low and in line with January 2023 (wave 1), with eight in ten voting age adults (79%) believing that voting in general is either very or fairly safe from fraud, and 6% saying it is unsafe. The proportion of voting age adults who said voting in person is safe from fraud is slightly higher at 84% (again in line with wave 1). In contrast, and again in line with earlier findings, absent voting methods are seen by voting age adults as less safe (61% think postal voting is safe from fraud, and 50% think the same of proxy voting).
- 4.3. Few people think that electoral fraud is taking place in their local area - 9% think that at least a fair amount of electoral fraud is taking place in their local area, increasing to 17% who think that it takes place in England in general (both in line with wave 1). Of those with concerns, the main reasons were a general impression that fraud is a problem (37%) and a belief that fraud is on the rise (35%). In wave 2 following the introduction of voter identification at the recent local elections, 27% of those with concerns gave the reason that there are not enough checks on people's identity before they vote.<sup>8</sup> Those living in non-election areas in England were more likely than those living in election areas to say they think there are not enough checks on identity when voting (32% vs 25%).
- 4.4. When it comes to getting away with electoral fraud in polling stations, half (51%) of voting age adults think it is difficult, a small increase of 3 percentage points since wave 1. Adults in areas that held elections in May 2023 were also slightly more likely to think it was difficult (52%) than those in areas that did not hold elections (48%). Older age groups are more likely to believe it is difficult to get away with electoral fraud (58% of those aged 55+). In contrast, the view that fraud is easy to get away with is stronger among voting age adults who are dissatisfied with the voting process (26%), lacking confidence in the way elections are run (34%) or who feel that voting is not safe from fraud (53%).

---

<sup>8</sup> This response option was a new code for wave 2 following the introduction of voter identification checks at the local elections in May 2023 and was not included in wave 1 conducted in January 2023 prior to the policy change.

## Awareness of policy changes – Voter identification

- 4.5. Fieldwork for this survey took place from 18th May to 24th May 2023 – following the local elections that took place across some parts of England and all of Northern Ireland, with a requirement for voter identification to be shown at polling stations for the first time in the English elections. Awareness of this policy change had risen in England among voting age adults from 34% to 76% since January 2023 (wave 1), and was highest in election areas (84% in election areas had heard a great deal or fair amount). Just 5% overall said they had heard nothing at all about the change.<sup>9</sup>
- 4.6. Awareness among all adults of the policy change relating to show photo identification when voting was highest among older age groups (89% of those aged 65+), those with a greater interest in politics (88%), adults with photo identification (82%) and those who regularly vote in local elections (87%). Those most likely to have heard nothing at all about the policy change were younger adults (11% of those aged 18-34), ethnic minorities (12%) and those who rarely or never vote at local elections (18%).
- 4.7. Among voting age adults aware of the change, 37% recalled seeing something through an official UK Government advert on TV/radio, 22% in a newspaper/magazine and 20% on social media. Three in ten voting age adults reported hearing about the policy through word of mouth - an increase of 8ppts since wave 1. For those living in areas where elections were held, half (50%) recounted seeing communications from the local council, whether that be via post (26%), newspapers/magazines (18%), on TV/radio (18%), or via social media (16%).<sup>10</sup>
- 4.8. Prompted awareness of the Electoral Commission advert around this policy change increased significantly between wave 1 and wave 2 among voting age adults, from 16% to 48%. Recognition was higher still in local election areas, where a majority (52%) said they had seen the materials before. Again, awareness was higher among the longitudinal element, who had seen this before. However even among the fresh sample, 37% of voting age adults said they recognised the advert, compared with 16% in wave 1.

## Impacts of Voter Identification policy changes – voter participation

- 4.9. A majority (65%) of voting age adults continue to say the need to present photo identification will make little difference to how easy or difficult it is to vote in person – 10% say it will make voting easier while 21% say it would be more difficult, in line with earlier findings.

---

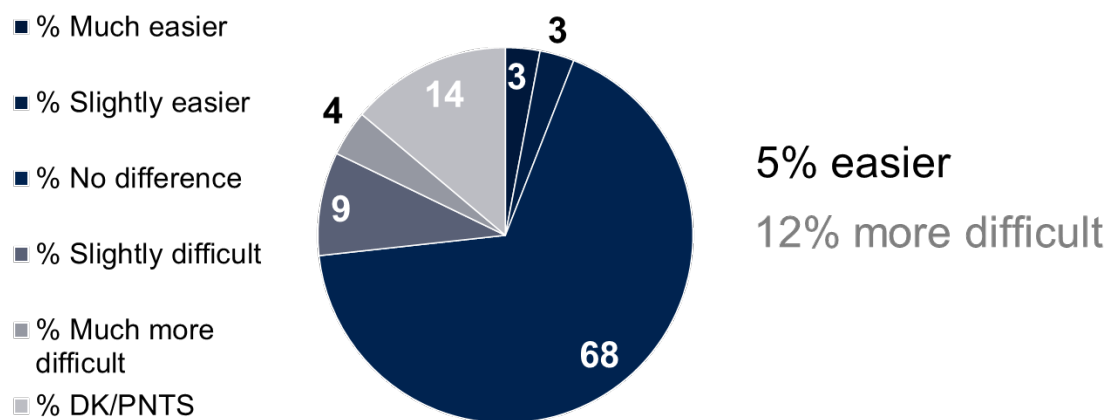
<sup>9</sup> Awareness was 76% among wave 2 fresh sample. Overall awareness including returnees was 81%. Awareness was higher among the longitudinal sample who had been informed about this change in the first wave.

<sup>10</sup> The local council codes were not separated out in January 2023 (wave 1).

4.10. Furthermore, during the local elections themselves, most voting age adults in election areas (68%) said it made no difference to how easy or difficult they found it to vote if presenting a photo identification – while fewer voters in practice said it made things easier (5%) or more difficult (12%). However, particular groups were more likely to report that the introduction of photo identification made their experience more difficult in the local elections, including:

- Under 54s (16%);
- Ethnic minorities (18% - though 16% also said it made it easier);
- Graduates (17%);
- Long-term unemployed/never worked (22%);
- Those with a disability that impacts on their voting in person (18%);
- Those dissatisfied with voting process (33%); and
- Those without identification (47%).

**Figure 4.1: Did having to present photo identification at the polling station make it easier or more difficult for you to vote in person at a polling station, or did it make no difference?**

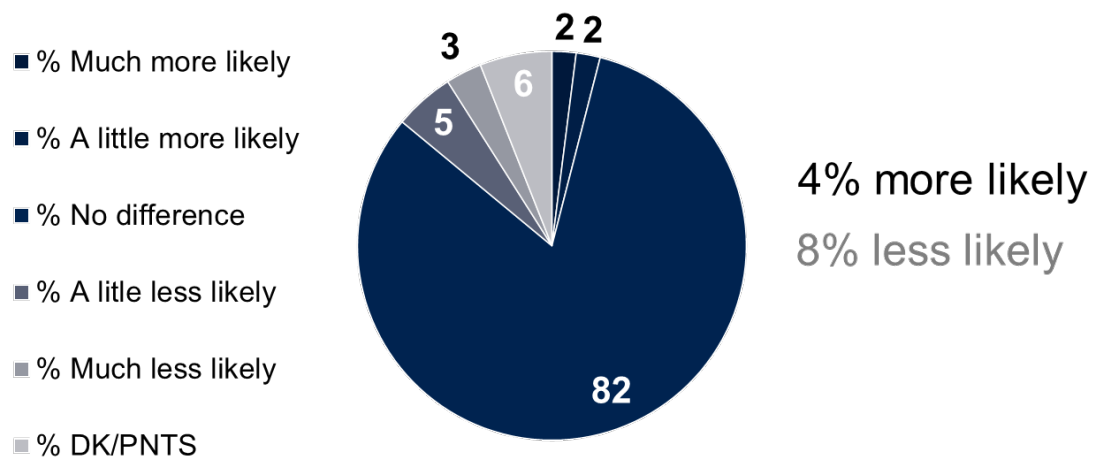


Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+ with local elections in May: England (5988): Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023

4.11. A large majority of voting age adults also concluded that the introduction of photo identification when voting makes no difference to their likelihood to want to vote at all (79%), or in the local elections specifically (82%). Similarly, the policy made no difference to voters wanting to vote either in person (78%), or by post/proxy (75% and 80% respectively). These findings were in line with those collected in wave 1 where similar proportions of voting age adults also said that photo identification would make no difference to their likelihood to vote.

- 4.12. Of the 8% of voting age adults in election areas who said photo identification made them less likely to want to vote in the local elections in May, the groups holding this view largely reflected those who also said the policy change would make it more difficult for them. One in six (15%) of those from ethnic minority backgrounds, a similar proportion of renters (14%) and 11% of those from the most deprived areas in England said it would make them less likely to want to vote in the recent local elections, as did 22% of those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person.
- 4.13. Larger proportions of voting age adults put off by the introduction of voter identification included two in five of those without identification (41%), and a quarter of those dissatisfied with the voting process (26%).

**Figure 4.2: Did having to present photo identification make you more or less likely to want to vote at the recent local government elections in your area?**



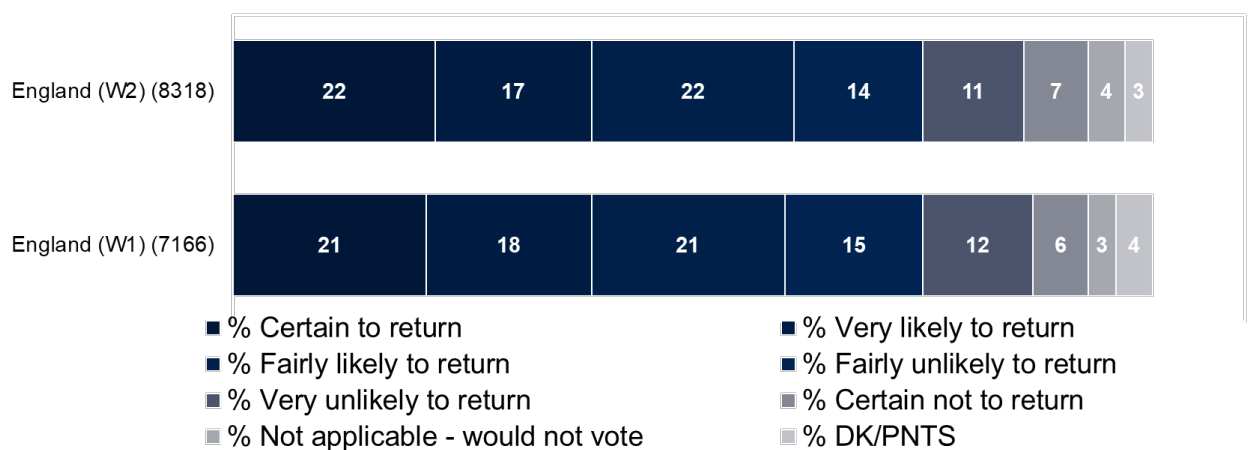
Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+ with local elections in May: England (5988): Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023

## Impacts of Voter Identification policy changes – for voters and non-voters

- 4.14. In terms of voter experiences, driving licences were the most used form of identification voters presented when voting in person at the local elections (70%). Just under a quarter of voters presented their passport (23%), while a further 5% used an Older Person’s Bus Pass. Few voters (1%) used the newly introduced Voter Authority Certificate as their proof of identification to vote.
- 4.15. Among in person voters at the recent local elections, there were few reports of issues with photo identification such as them being rejected (1%), people being asked to remove a face mask/face coverings to prove their identity (1%) or having to present more than one form of identification (2%), but 9% did say they felt uncomfortable showing their identification. Voters aged 18-34 were most likely to have felt uncomfortable about having to show their identification to vote (16%), as well as voters who claim to be dissatisfied with the voting process (31%).

- 4.16. At the recent local elections in England, there were more frequent reports of noticing someone at the polling station reminding voters about the need to show identification (22%),<sup>11</sup> or of voting using privacy screens (28%).
- 4.17. As was the case in wave 1, around one in three (32%) voting age adults in England say that if they forgot to bring their photo identification, they would be unlikely to return to vote in person later that day. This was more likely to be the case for women (34%), 18-34-year-olds (38%), those from ethnic minority groups (40%) and social renters (42%). Those with accessibility issues and weaker levels of engagement are least likely to return. Voters with a disability that limits them a lot (41%), lacking an interest in politics (45%) or who rarely/never vote in local elections (51%) said they would be unlikely to return.

**Figure 4.3: If you went to vote in person, but did not have photo identification, how likely or unlikely would you be to return at a later time that day, this time bringing your accepted form of photo identification?**

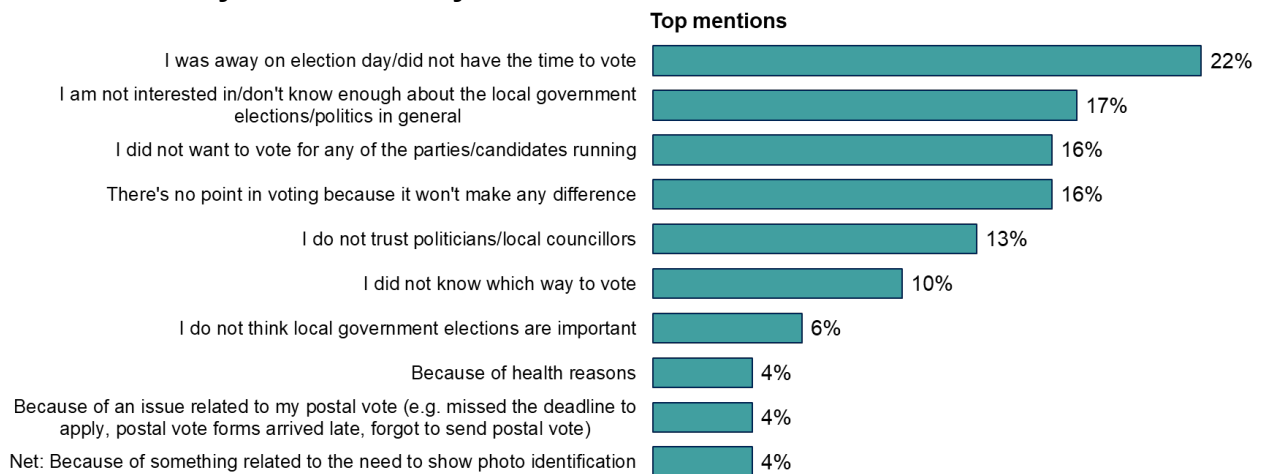


Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+: England (8318): Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023  
 Wave 1: All adults 18+: England (7166): Fieldwork dates: 26th January-1st February 2023

- 4.18. Those who did not vote at the local elections in May 2023 were asked for their reasoning. The most cited reason was down to their availability on the day of the polls, given they were either away or did not have the time to vote (22%). Secondary reasons given by non-voters related to political apathy, including 17% who said they are not interested or don't know enough, and 16% each who said there was no point in voting or didn't want to vote for anyone who was running.

<sup>11</sup> The questionnaire did not refer to greeters specifically but instead referenced 'a person at the entrance to the polling station where I voted reminding people about the need to show photo identification.'

**Figure 4.4: Please tell us why you were not able to vote in the local government elections held in your area in May 2023?**



Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+ who did not vote in local elections in May 2023 in England (1865): Fieldwork dates: 18<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> May 2023

4.19. Following the introduction of voter identification at the local elections in May 2023, 4% of non-voters said they did not vote due to something related to the need to show photo identification. This 4% is made up of 2% of non-voters who said it was because they did not have photo identification, 1% of non-voters who did not agree or felt uncomfortable with the requirement, and 1% of non-voters who could not find their photo identification (and a handful of other minor reasons). However, there are certain groups who were more likely to cite the introduction of photo identification as a barrier to voting. Among those who did not vote, social renters (8%), those living in the most deprived areas (7%) or with a disability impacting their ability to vote in person (7%) were all around twice as likely than average to cite this issue. Again, the group who felt the biggest impact were non-voters who do not have photo identification – 36% of them said the introduction of photo identification was a reason why they were not able to vote.

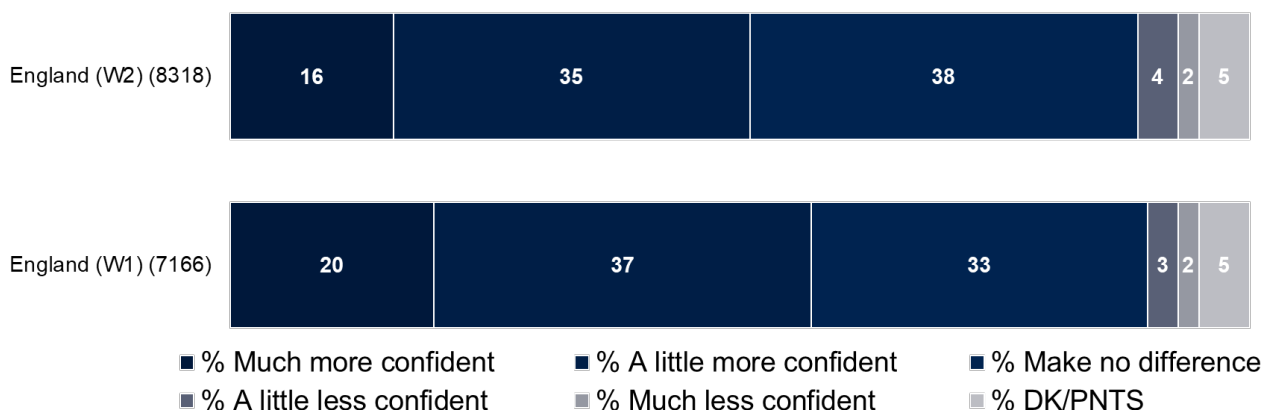
## Impacts of Voter Identification policy changes – confidence in voting system

4.20. The introduction of photo identification at polling stations continues to instil more confidence in the security of the voting system (which is generally already high, see the previous section), for half (51%) of voting aged adults, although this figure has decreased from 57% in wave 1. There has been a 5ppt increase in voting age adults saying it would make no difference to their confidence in the security of the ballot (from 33% to 38%), and 6% say it would make them less confident in the security of the system – in line with January (wave 1).



- 4.21. Confidence that the policy will improve security of the vote increases with age among all voting age adults, as three in five aged 65+ (61%) believe this to be the case, compared to two in five (40%) of those aged between 18-34. However, for those who aren't currently registered to vote, or don't already have a valid form of photo identification, over one in ten (12% and 14% respectively) say that the introduction of photo identification to vote gives them less confidence in the security of the voting system. For those who have existing concerns that fraud is easy to get away with at polling stations, three in five (62%) say that the measure gives them more confidence in the security of the system.
- 4.22. Similarly, most voting age adults (65%) think it will be effective at preventing fraud – though again this is slightly down from 71% in January. The policy is seen more positively by those who think that electoral fraud is easy to get away with in polling stations, 75% of whom believe it to be an effective deterrent. However, some groups are less convinced that the policy will be effective in preventing fraud, such as those dissatisfied with the voting process (37%), or lacking confidence in the elections being well run as well as a third of those who currently don't have an accepted form of photo identification (34%).

**Figure 4.5: To what extent does the requirement for voters to show photographic identification at the polling station make you more or less confident in the security of the voting system?**



Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+: England (8318); Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023  
 Wave 1: All adults 18+: England (7166); Fieldwork dates: 26th January-1st February 2023

## Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) – awareness and perceptions

- 4.23. The introduction of the Voter Authority Certificate (VAC) had low awareness levels among voting age adults in January 2023. This has increased from 9% to 21%<sup>12</sup> saying they know a great deal or fair amount about them in May. Reported

<sup>12</sup> Awareness among fresh sample respondents at wave 2 was 21%. Awareness was higher among returnees who had previously responded at Wave 1 of the study in January 2023 at 34% meaning overall awareness in England overall was 30% accounting for both groups.

awareness was higher among those with a disability (35%), and those with an increased interest in politics (37%).

- 4.24. A quarter of voting age adults without a valid form of identification said they were fairly aware of the VAC (26%), while a further (35%) said they knew not very much but had heard of it.

## Voter Authority Certificates (VAC) – likelihood of applying

- 4.25. Very few people have applied for VACs so far, and just a quarter of those without photo identification (25%) say they would be certain or likely to apply for one, which has decreased from 36% in wave 1.
- 4.26. Only 1% say they have a VAC – marginally higher among ethnic minorities (3%), renters (3%), and those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person (4%). Of the very few who do have a VAC, around half say they applied for it shortly before the May local elections, but note the very small base size here.
- 4.27. One in five (19%) of those with photo identification say they would be likely to apply for a VAC, which is in line with January 2023.

# 5 Accessibility

## Chapter Summary

- Overall, around half of those in England (53%) and Northern Ireland (51%) with a disability agree they currently receive the materials and support needed in order to vote, although only four in ten believe staff at polling stations are properly trained to assist them in voting.
- In England, among voting age adults, 19%\* are aware of the existing provision in place for disabled voters to have a companion to help them vote in person at a polling station.
- Around one in ten voting age adults (12%) know a great deal or fair amount about the expansion of the provision, to allow more people to act as a companion to assist disabled voters. In Northern Ireland, one in ten (10%) are aware of this.
- Regarding the new provisions on companion voting, eight in ten (81%) of those in England with a disability say that expanding the list of those who can act as a companion would make no difference to their likelihood to vote in person with a companion in the future. Three quarters (74%) of those with a disability in Northern Ireland say the same.
  - In the May local elections, more than eight in ten (85%) with a disability said that in practice, allowing more people to act as a companion to disabled people made no difference to their likelihood to vote. In Northern Ireland 81% of those with a disability said it made no difference to their likelihood to vote in May.
- Regarding the new provisions for a wide range of support to be provided for disabled voters at polling stations, 12%\* of voting age adults in England know a great deal or fair amount, up from 7% in January. In Northern Ireland one in ten (10%) are aware of this.
- Eight in ten (79%) of those in England with a disability say providing a wide range of equipment to support people voting in person would make no difference to their likelihood to vote in person at a polling station on their own in future. Three quarters (72%) of those who have a disability in Northern Ireland say the same.
  - In the May local elections, more than eight in ten (84%) of those with a disability said that in practice, the wide availability of equipment made no difference to their likelihood to vote. In Northern Ireland, 79% said it made no difference to their likelihood to vote in May.
- Among those in England and Northern Ireland who are either disabled or live with an individual who is disabled, around three in four think that overall, both changes will make it easier to vote in person at a polling station.

\* Percentages based upon fresh sample from Wave 2 only and not returnees.

5.1. This chapter sets out attitudes towards the introduction of measures relating to accessibility, including voting with the assistance of a companion and the availability of assistive equipment, as well as levels of awareness of these changes and opinions on the potential impact these changes may have on those with a disability. Also, the context for those with a disability when voting is considered, relating to confidence levels, preferred voting methods and ease of voting.

## Context – Disability and Voting Processes

5.2. Satisfaction with the process of voting in England is high among all voting aged adults (69%) and those with a disability (70%). However, differences do exist when considering the severity of the disability. For those with a condition limiting their activities a lot, satisfaction with the voting process is significantly lower (60%). This proportion decreases further, to 56%, for those who say that their disability prevents them from voting in person.

5.3. Similarly, confidence that elections in general are well run varies by level of disability. Overall, 82% of the voting age population as a whole are confident that elections are run well in England, decreasing to 70% for those with a disability limiting their activity a lot, and to two-thirds (66%) for those with a disability preventing them from voting in person.

5.4. In the recent local government elections, just over three-quarters (77%) of the population as a whole were confident in the way that the elections were run, and a similar proportion of those with a disability were in agreement (76%). However, for those with more severe disabilities, confidence was lower. A quarter (24%) of those whose disability limits their activities a lot said they were not confident that the recent elections were well run - rising to three in ten (30%) for those whose disability prevents them from voting in person.

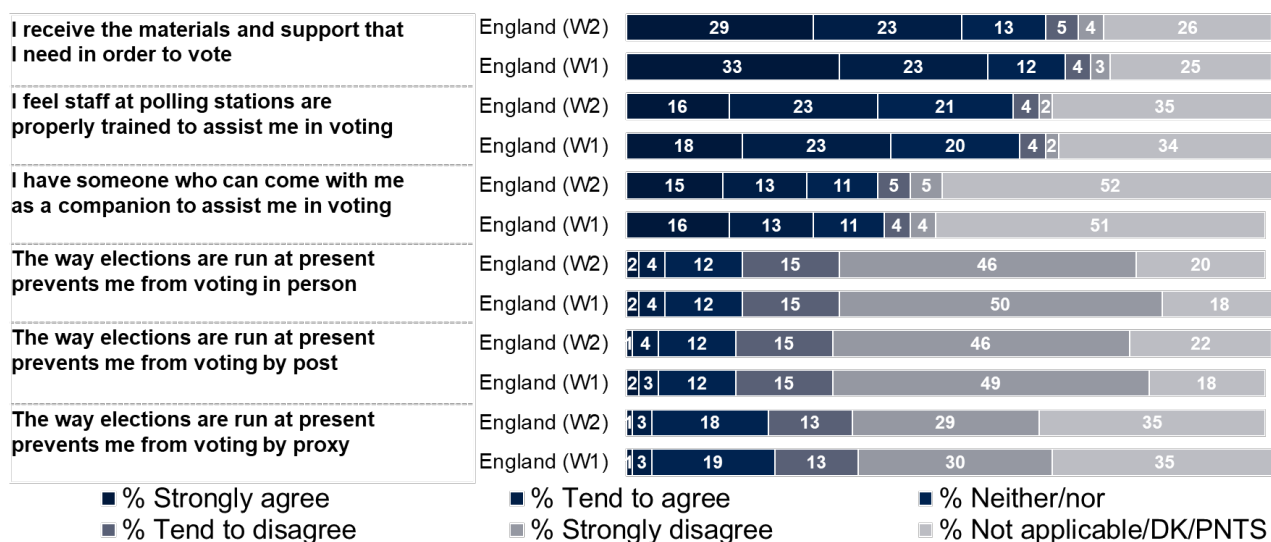
5.5. When asked for the reasoning behind their lack of confidence, 14% of those with a disability said the way elections are run make it difficult for disabled people to vote. This increased to 19% for those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person.

5.6. Adults with a disability were additionally asked specific questions relating to their condition and ability to participate effectively in elections. Among those with a disability, although the majority feel that the way elections are run currently works for them, more could be done to support and assist disabled voters particularly when voting in person. Regarding the support provided, assistance from staff, and way elections are run for in person and absentee voting, those with a disability said the following:

- 53% agree (down 3ppts since January 2023) that they receive the materials and support that they need in order to vote (8% disagree). A majority also agree in Northern Ireland (51%);
- 39% agree (similar to January 2023) that staff at polling stations are properly trained to assist them in voting (6% disagree). Agreement rises to 52% in Northern Ireland;

- 28% agree (similar to January 2023) with the statement that they have someone who can come with them as a companion to assist them in voting, while 9% disagree. More than a third agree in Northern Ireland (35%);
- 61% disagree (down 4ppts since January 2023) that the way elections are run prevents them from voting in person (6% agree). A similar proportion disagree overall in Northern Ireland (60%);
- 61% disagree (down 3ppts since January 2023) that the way elections are run prevents them from voting by post (5% agree). This is lower in Northern Ireland, where 46% disagree that the way elections are run there prevent them from voting by post;
- 42% disagree (similar to January 2023) that the way elections are run prevents them from voting by proxy (4% agree). A slightly lower proportion disagree that this is the case for proxy voting in Northern Ireland (38%).

**Figure 5.1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about voting in elections?**



Base: All with a disability/long-term health condition in England (7057): Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023

5.7. Satisfaction with the process of voting in Northern Ireland (75%) is in line with England (75%) among voting age adults, and similar for those with a disability (70%). However, satisfaction is again slightly lower for those in Northern Ireland with more severe disabilities that prevent or impact upon their ability to vote in person (64%). One in five of those with severe disabilities in Northern Ireland are dissatisfied with the voting process (20%) compared to 9% in Northern Ireland overall.

5.8. Similarly, confidence that elections are well run in Northern Ireland are high among voting age adults (81%). However, for those in Northern Ireland with a disability, one in five (21%) are not confident and a third (33%) of those with disabilities preventing or impacting their ability to vote in person are not confident that elections are well run in their nation. During the recent local elections in Northern Ireland, confidence levels reflected those in England, both overall and for those with disabilities.

## Context – Ease of Voting

5.9. Of those with a disability, a quarter (26%) say that their condition impacts their ability to vote in person. Within this, 5% say it completely prevents them from voting in person at a polling station, 6% say it has a significant impact but they are still able to vote, and one in six (15%) say it has a small impact.

5.10. Among voting age adults in England with a disability limiting their activity a lot, a smaller proportion (than all adults overall) - 83% - found the process of casting a vote in person at a polling station at the recent local elections to be easy. Difficulties were not widely reported though, as just 5% of voters with a disability limiting their activity a lot said that the process of casting a vote in person was fairly or very difficult.

5.11. Of those with a disability in Northern Ireland, 31% say their condition has an impact on their ability to vote in person. Within this, 1% say that it completely prevents them from voting in person, 12% report a significant impact but they are still able to vote and one in five (19%) say it has a small impact.

5.12. Despite this, almost all those with a disability who voted in person at the recent local elections in Northern Ireland said that they found the process of casting their vote easy (99%).

## Awareness of companion voting

5.13. In England, there is low awareness among voting age adults of the existing right to vote with a companion among the population as a whole, as well as among adults with disabilities. One in five adults in England overall at wave 2 (19%)<sup>13</sup> say they are well aware of this provision, in line with awareness levels of voting age adults in wave 1 (20%).

5.14. Awareness of the ability to vote with a companion is higher than average among those with a disability (29%). This increases to one in three (33%) whose disability impacts their ability to vote in person, 13% of whom have either voted with or acted as a companion for someone in the past.

---

<sup>13</sup> Awareness among fresh sample at wave 2 is 19%. Awareness is higher among the longitudinal sample who were previously surveyed in January 2023 (25%).

- 5.15. Among those who have a disabled person within their household, awareness is also slightly higher than average, with three in ten (30%) saying they are well aware of the policy and 3% having voted or acted as/with a companion. However, there are still 38% of people who live with someone with a disability, who know nothing about the provision.
- 5.16. In Northern Ireland, one in five voting age adults (21%) say they are well aware of the provision for companion voting and 5% have acted with or as a companion in the past. Among those with a disability in Northern Ireland, awareness levels are similar to those of the population as a whole – 23% are aware of the provision but almost half (48%) say they know nothing about it.

## Awareness of policy changes

- 5.17. Overall awareness of the policy and legislative changes to make voting in person at a polling station more accessible for voters with a disability remains low among voting age adults in England. Awareness of allowing more people to act as companion to assist in person disabled voters increased from 8% to 14% among voting age adults in England (with relatively little difference between the longitudinal (14%) and fresh (12%) sample).
- 5.18. Those with a disability impacting their ability to vote in person were only slightly more likely to be aware of the policy change than overall (18% said they knew a great deal or fair amount). Similarly, people living with a disabled household member were only slightly more likely than average to be aware of the policy change than overall (16% said they knew a great deal or fair amount).
- 5.19. On the policy change to provide a wide range of equipment to support disabled people when voting in person, awareness levels were very similar to those of companion voting. Just 13% said they know a great deal/fair amount about the policy, a 5ppt increase since January (again awareness was similar for the longitudinal (13%) and fresh (12%) samples). For those whose disability impacts their ability to vote in person, awareness was again slightly higher than overall at 17%.
- 5.20. Among those aware of the changes, this was driven largely by informal channels such as hearing about them on TV/radio (26% for both measures), in newspapers or magazines (22% for both measures) or on social media (19% for equipment measures and 18% for companion voting). Local council communications may have had an impact on awareness levels, with around one in five saying they heard about the changes from the council through a variety of channels.<sup>14</sup>
- 5.21. In the recent local elections, of those aware of companion voting and with a disability, 28% voted with or acted as a companion.<sup>15</sup> Of these, 23% voted with a companion, and 5% acted as the companion for the voter.

---

<sup>14</sup> Wave 2 split out codes relating to local council channels such as TV/radio, social media, post, and newspapers/magazines which wasn't the case in wave 1 so results for this net are not directly comparable.

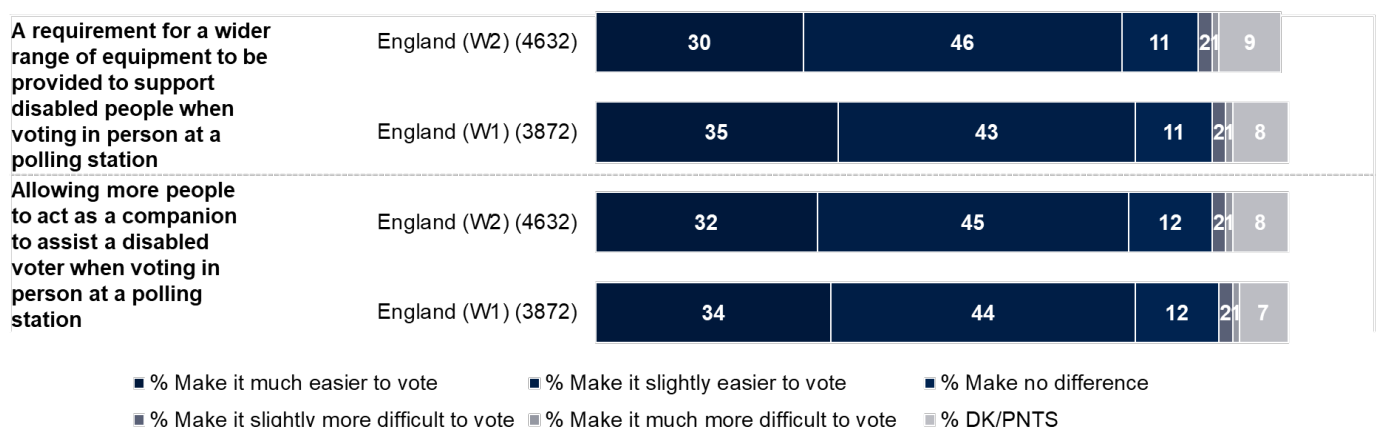
<sup>15</sup> Note low base size.

- 5.22. Of those with a disability who voted in person, 93% say they did not request equipment to help them vote when at the polling station because they did not feel they needed it, while very few requested equipment but did not receive it to help them (1%) or would have requested it but were not aware they could (2%).
- 5.23. One in ten of voting age adults in Northern Ireland know a great deal or fair amount about each of the two accessibility measures (10%). Awareness levels of measures for a wide range of equipment provision increased for those who have a more severe disability to 18%, but eight in ten of this group still say they know not very much or nothing about it. Similarly on companion voting, those with a more severe disability are twice as likely to have heard of the measure to allow more people to act as a companion, but three quarters of the same group (77%) remain unaware.
- 5.24. In Northern Ireland, awareness was driven by word of mouth with three in ten (29%) saying this is how they had heard about changes to companion voting and one in five (21%) for equipment provision. Around a quarter had heard of one of the measures on TV/radio (26% and 24% respectively).
- 5.25. Of those who voted in person and have a disability in Northern Ireland, 2% requested and received equipment, while a further 4% said they would have done so, but were unaware of its availability.

## Consequences of policy changes

- 5.26. Despite low levels of awareness about the changes to accessibility at the polling station, there is a widespread perception among voting age adults in England that the policy changes will make it easier for people with a disability to vote in person at a polling station.

**Figure 5.2: To what extent, if at all, do you think these measures will make it easier or more difficult for disabled people to vote at a polling station in elections?**



Base: All adults with a disability/long-term health condition (personally or another member of the household (8504): Fieldwork dates: 18<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> May 2023



- 5.27. In line with the original findings for both measures, a strong majority of voting age adults in England with a disability and those with an adult with a disability in their household continue to feel the changes will make it easier for people with disabilities to vote in person at a polling station (77% for providing a wide range of equipment; 77% for allowing more people to act as a companion). Just 3% believe the changes will make things more difficult for disabled people to vote in person.
- 5.28. However, one in five of those who have a disability that prevents them from voting in person say widening the equipment range would make no difference to their ability to vote in person – compared to 11% of disabled adults or those with disabled household members.
- 5.29. Similarly in Northern Ireland, strong majorities of voting age adults feel that both policy changes will make it easier to vote in person for those with disabilities (78% for equipment provision and 75% for companion voting). There are no differences between those with different levels of disability on whether the policy changes will make in person voting easier or more difficult.
- 5.30. When translating this into propensity to vote, one in six voting age adults in England with a disability (16%, down 4ppts since wave 1) say the requirement to provide disabled voters with a wide range of equipment is more likely to make them want to vote, compared to 12% (down 4ppts since January 2023) who say the same when asked about allowing more people to act as a companion. A significant say it will make no difference to their likelihood to vote by providing a wide range of equipment (75%) or allowing more people to act as a companion (81%). However, for 13% of those with a disability, a wide range of equipment would make them more likely to vote in person, and for 12% allowing more people to act as a companion would do the same.
- 5.31. In Northern Ireland, when considering the impact of these measures on propensity to vote for those with disabilities, 22% say that a wide range of equipment is more likely to make them vote, compared to 15% who say the same about the expansion of companion voting. However, for a large majority, the measures would make no difference to the propensity of those with a disability in Northern Ireland to vote- 67% for a wide range of equipment and three-quarters for allowing more people to act as a companion. Sixteen percent and 12% of disabled people in Northern Ireland respectively say it would make them more likely to want vote in person.
- 5.32. In the recent local government elections, just 8% of those with a disability said that the provision of more equipment made them more likely to want to vote. However, this rose to 15% among those with a disability limiting their activity a lot, and 24% among those who say that their disability prevents them from voting in person usually. Overall, 84% of those with a disability said it made no difference to their likelihood to want to vote in the recent elections.

- 5.33. On companion voting, again 8% of voting age adults in England with a disability said that allowing more people to act as a companion made them more likely to want to vote. However, this increased for those with more severe or activity limiting disabilities. 18% of those with a disability limiting their activity a lot, and a quarter of those who are prevented from voting in person usually said that this change made them more likely to want to vote recently. Overall, 85% of disabled people said it made no difference to their likelihood to want to vote.
- 5.34. Similarly in Northern Ireland, although just one in ten with a disability (9%) said that the widened range of equipment available at the polling station made them more likely to want to vote in person during the recent local government elections, this rose to 16% of those whose disability prevents or impacts upon their ability to vote in person. This is also the case for the expansion of companion voting, where one in ten (9%) of those with a disability said the policy change made them more likely to want to vote in the recent local elections in person, rising to 16% of those with more severe disabilities.

# 6 Absent Voting

## Chapter Summary

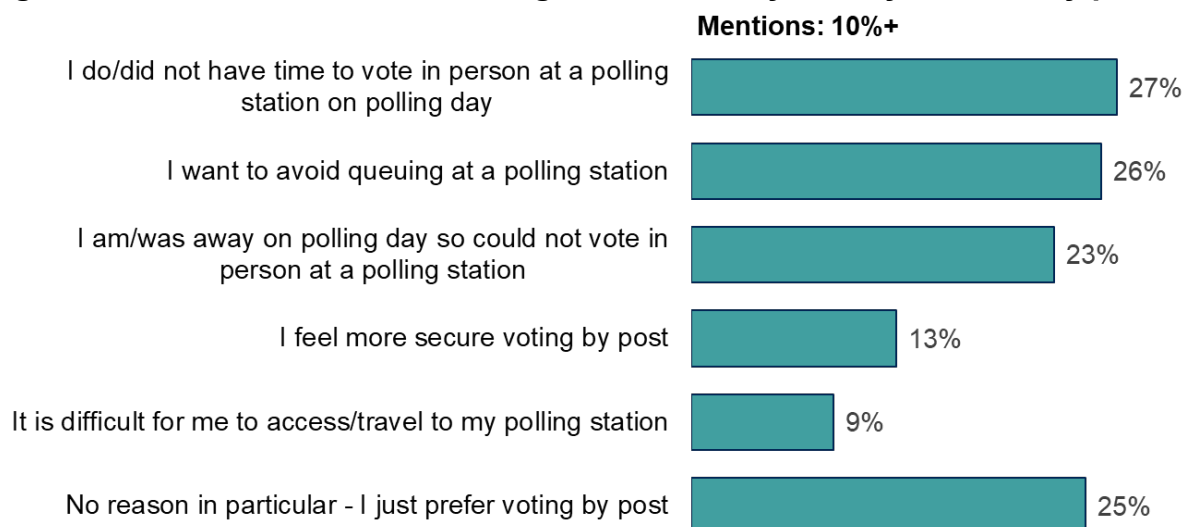
- Around three in ten voting age adults in England prefer to cast their vote by either post (29%) or by proxy (1%). These findings have remained consistent since the previous wave in January 2023.
- Within Northern Ireland, only a small minority of individuals prefer to vote by post (5%) or proxy (1%). In Northern Ireland, unlike in the other nations, reasoning must be provided for a postal vote application, and deadlines for proxy vote submissions are much earlier than in the other nations.
- The most widely cited reasons as to why people chose to vote by post in the recent local elections in England related to convenience. Around a quarter (27%) of non-voters said they did not have time to vote in person, followed by a further quarter (26%) saying they want to avoid queues. Around one in twenty said it was due to an issue with the requirement to show photo identification at polling stations.
- As with the population at large, the majority of absent voters are generally satisfied with the voting process in England and confident that, in general, elections are well run.
- Applying for a postal vote is seen as straightforward, with majorities those applying to vote by post finding this process to be easy (90% wave 2 vs 89% for Wave 1).
- Absent voting methods are seen as being safe from fraud, but less so than voting in person at a polling station by voting adults in England, with findings remaining consistent with the previous wave.
- Overall, three in five voting age adults (61%) say that voting by post is safe from fraud (60% wave 1) and 50% for voting by proxy (50% wave 1).
- Less than half (43%) of voting age adults think that voting by post is less secure than voting in person (47% in wave 1), while 45% of adults think voting by proxy is less secure (52% in wave 1).
- In Northern Ireland absent voting methods are also seen by voting age adults as being less secure than voting in person.
- Overall, three in five voting age adults in Northern Ireland (59%) say that voting by post is less secure than voting in person at a polling station, while over half (54%) say that voting by proxy is less secure.

- 6.1. Absent voting allows individuals to vote in an election if they are unable to vote in person at the polling station on the day of the election. Postal voting is available to all who do not want to vote in person at a polling station. However unlike in the other nations, postal voters in Northern Ireland must give a reason for their application. Electors can also appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf in particular circumstances. In Northern Ireland, the deadline for submission is 14 days before an election compared to 6 days in other nations, and emergency proxy votes can be requested up to 6 days before the election, whereas in other nations this can be requested on election day. This chapter sets out the prevalence of absent voting, reasons for doing so and the experience of the process of applying and voting in this way.

## Current Context

- 6.2. Around three in ten voting age adults in England prefer to cast their vote by either post (29%) or by proxy (1%). Notably, those aged 65+ (38%) and those with a disability that either impacts on their ability to vote in person or limits their activities a lot (38%) are more likely than average to prefer using absent voting methods (specifically by post). These findings have remained consistent since the previous wave in January 2023.
- 6.3. Regarding the recent local elections held in May 2023, 37% of those who voted in England opted to do so by post. This increased to 41% of voters with a disability, especially those with a disability which impacts on voting in person (43%) and those with a disability which limits activities a lot (48%). Additionally, the preference for voting by post in the recent election also correlates with age, with 46% of voters aged 65+ opting for this voting method compared with only 31% of 18-34-year-olds.
- 6.4. The most widely cited reasons why people choose to vote by post in England related to convenience, remaining consistent with the findings from the previous wave. Just over a quarter of recent postal voters in England (27%) said they do not have time to vote in person, and that they want to avoid queues (26%).
- 6.5. A sizeable proportion of recent postal voters in England also mentioned reasons related to necessity with 23% saying they were away, while another quarter (24%) opted for no reason in particular – they just prefer voting by post. Very few recent postal voters in England said they prefer to vote by post either because they do not have photo identification (1%) or because they do not want to bring identification to a polling station (4%).

**Figure 6.1: For which of the following reasons, if any, have you voted by post?**



Base: Wave 2: All who have voted by post in a recent election: England (2337): Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023.

- 6.6. The picture is similar among recent proxy voters in England, although the limited base size means this data must be interpreted with caution (it was also not possible to explore sub-groups among proxy voters) and margins of error will be wide. The most common reasons for choosing to vote by proxy in England related to both convenience and necessity. Around one in five of proxy voters in the recent elections in England said that they were away on election day so could not vote in person, that they wanted to avoid queuing, and that it was difficult for them to access/travel to their polling station.
- 6.7. Within Northern Ireland, only a small minority of individuals prefer to vote by post (5%) or proxy (1%) – this smaller number is likely reflective of voters needing to meet certain conditions in order to be allowed to have an absent vote in Northern Ireland.<sup>16</sup> Notably, older voters are more likely than all other age groups to prefer voting in person (93% of those aged 65+). Those without a disability are also more likely than disabled voters to prefer in person voting (87% compared to 82%). Of those who voted in the local elections held in May, a small proportion of voters chose to vote by post (3%) or proxy (1%). This increases among those with a disability that prevents them from or impacts on voting in person (9%), though due to the limited base size this data must be interpreted with caution.
- 6.8. Similarly to England, the main reasons participants selected voting by post or proxy in Northern Ireland was because of both necessity and convenience such as being away or not having time (again, given small base sizes results here are just indicative).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> In Northern Ireland, unlike in the other nations, reasoning must be provided for a postal vote application, and deadlines for proxy vote submissions are much earlier than in the other nations.

<sup>17</sup> Note: small base size for postal (31) and proxy voters (8).

- 6.9. When assessing the potential impact of the introduction of a three-year time limit on postal vote applications, among those who mentioned they had voted by post or proxy, around half stated they chose to vote by post for a specific election only – again though very small base sizes mean these results are indicative only.<sup>18</sup>

## General perceptions of the voting process

- 6.10. As with the population at large, the majority (80%) of absent voters are generally satisfied with the voting process in England and confident that, in general, elections are well run (89%). When thinking specifically about the recent local elections, confidence that these elections were well run is slightly lower at 84%.

## Application Process

- 6.11. Consistent with the findings from the previous wave, the current system of applying for a postal vote is seen as straightforward, with the majority of absent voters in England finding this process to be easy (90% wave 2 vs 89% for wave 1). Among demographic groups, older voters were more likely to find the process of applying for a postal vote easy, with 80% of those aged 18-34 compared with 93% aged 65+. Those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person were less likely to find the postal vote application process easy (76%). Over half (56%\*\*\*) of proxy voters in England found this process easy, compared with 76% in the previous wave (but given small base sizes this difference is not significant\*).<sup>19</sup>
- 6.12. The application process in Northern Ireland is generally regarded as straightforward, with two thirds of postal voters finding the process of applying for a postal vote easy, although this is based on very small sub-groups so should be seen as indicative only.<sup>20</sup> When asked about the application process in Northern Ireland, six in ten (60%) of those who have recently applied for an absent vote said they would prefer to apply for a postal or proxy vote online, while only 15% would prefer to do this by filling out an application form and sending it by post (though again note small subgroups).

## Ease of Voting

- 6.13. As with the application process, the vast majority of postal voters in England (94%) found the process of casting their vote in this way to be easy at the recent local elections. Over three-quarters of postal voters in England (78%) said it was very easy, with around one in five (17%) of the view that it was fairly easy. It was particularly easy for older postal voters (96% of those aged 65+, vs 87% of those aged 18-34). Those with a disability that prevents them from voting in person were slightly more likely to find it difficult (8%) than postal voters overall (2%).

---

<sup>18</sup> Note: \* = small base size for postal (31). \*\* = very small base size for proxy (8).

<sup>19</sup> Note: \* = small base size (48). \*\* = very small base size (38).

<sup>20</sup> Small base size for postal voters (31).

- 6.14. Among those who voted in any recent elections in Northern Ireland, most absent voters found the process of casting their vote in this way to be easy, but again note small base sizes.<sup>21</sup>

## Knowledge and Awareness (Northern Ireland only)

- 6.15. In Northern Ireland overall, voting age adults are not well informed about laws, the application and voting process and where to find information on absent voting in general (again likely reflecting that there are more restrictions on absent voting in Northern Ireland).
- 6.16. Among the voting age public, there is slightly greater knowledge and awareness of postal voting than there is of proxy voting. A third or more of voters in Northern Ireland feel very or fairly well informed about where to find information on postal voting (38%), how to apply for a postal vote (32%) and how to cast their vote by post (33%), while only a quarter feel informed about the law surrounding postal voting (23%).
- 6.17. These findings are similar regarding proxy voting, although slightly lower. A third (33%) of voting age adults in Northern Ireland are informed about where to find information on proxy voting, followed by around a quarter saying they are informed about how to apply to appoint a proxy to vote for them (24%) and how to cast their vote by proxy (23%), and only 17% feel well informed about the laws surrounding proxy voting.

## Security and Fraud

- 6.18. There is a perception among voting age adults in England that voting by post and proxy are less safe from fraud compared with voting in person at a polling station, although most still believe these methods are safe. All findings remain consistent with the previous wave. When asked about voting in person at a polling station, 85% of all voting age adults say this is very or fairly safe (84% wave 1) compared with 61% who say the same for voting by post (60% wave 1) and 50% for voting by proxy (50% wave 1). Meanwhile, 3% say voting in person is unsafe (4% wave 1), compared with 15% (17% wave 1) and 16% (18% wave 1) respectively for voting by post and proxy. The gap among absent voters themselves is much narrower: 88% think voting in person is safe and 82% postal voting.
- 6.19. Looking demographically, younger age groups and those with a disability that limits their activities a lot tend to feel that both voting in person and voting by post are less safe from fraud or abuse (those with a severe disability also feel the same way about proxy voting).
- 6.20. These views are mirrored in a subsequent question that directly compares absent voting with voting in person. Perceptions of voting age adults are that voting by post and proxy are less secure than voting in person, albeit slightly lower than the

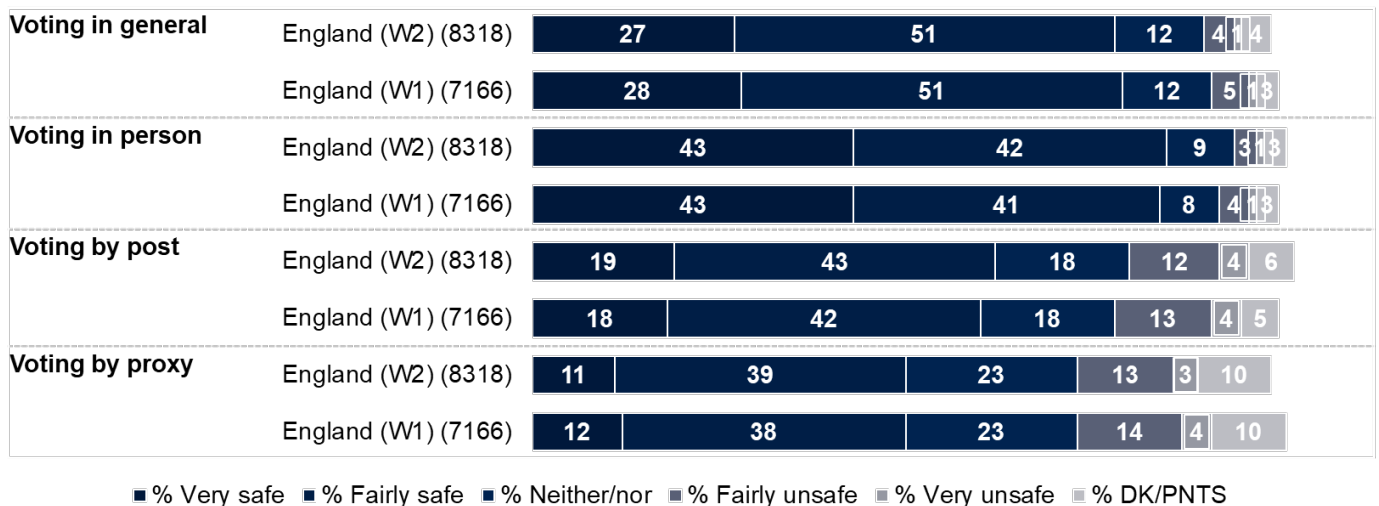
---

<sup>21</sup> Small base size for postal voters (31).

previous wave. Around two in five voting age adults in England (43%) think that voting by post is less secure than in person (47% in wave 1, with the drop primarily in local election areas from 49% to 42%). The rise has been in those who think there is no difference (from 39% to 42%), rather than those who think postal voting is more secure (9%). Just under half of voting age adults in England (45%) think voting by proxy is less secure, again a drop from the previous wave (52%, this time in both election and non-election areas).

6.21. As seen with the previous wave, perceptions of security appear linked to experience of voting using these methods. Around half of recent postal and proxy voters in England think there is no difference in the security of these methods compared to in person voting, and there is little difference between whether they think their preferred method is less secure or voting in person is less secure.

**Figure 6.2: When it comes to being safe from fraud, would you say that each of the following is safe or unsafe?**



Base: Wave 2: All adults 18+: England (see above): Fieldwork dates: 18th-24th May 2023  
 Wave 1: All adults 18+: England (see above): Fieldwork dates: 26th January-1st February 2023

6.22. The most common reasons why voting by post is seen as more secure than in person voting are related to deception and privacy. Two in five voting age adults in England (38%) say it's because it is easier to vote by post without other people potentially influencing you, a third believe it is easier to vote in secret by post than it is to do so when voting in a polling station (32%) and that the process of registering for a postal vote is thorough (32%). One in ten voting age adults (11%) felt postal voting was safer because previously they did not have to show photo identification before voting in person.

6.23. Correspondingly, the reasons selected why voting age adults think voting by post is less secure than voting in person are related to security and fraud. Three in five (58%) have concerns around the person who the postal vote belongs to not being the one who has filled in the ballot, followed by 40% not trusting the post to be reliable, and three in ten (30%) not being sure people are filling in their postal vote in secret. A quarter of voting age adults in England (27%) said it is because you must show photo identification to vote in person at a polling station.



- 6.24. In Northern Ireland, absent voting methods are also seen by the voting age public as being less secure than voting in person. Overall, 86% of adults describe voting in person as safe from fraud, compared to 55% postal voting and 49% proxy voting.
- 6.25. When comparing directly, three in five voting age adults (59%) say that voting by post is less secure than voting in person at a polling station, and over half (54%) say that voting by proxy is less secure (suggesting that perceptions about the relative safety of absent voting methods are particularly negative in Northern Ireland).
- 6.26. Among the few who think postal voting is more secure in England, the reasons include because it is easier to vote by post without other people potentially influencing you (23%), that checks on people's identity when voting in a polling station are not thorough enough (20%), the process of registering for a postal vote is thorough (20%) and 16% relating to the need to show photo identification before voting in person.
- 6.27. Those who think that voting by post is less secure in Northern Ireland identified the following as their main reasons: not being certain the person who the postal vote belongs to is the one who has filled in the ballot (60%), having to show photo identification in person (42%), distrust in the reliability of the post (34%) and the belief that there is nothing to stop canvassers and candidates from handling postal ballots (32%).

# 7 Our standards and accreditations

7.1. Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



## ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



## Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation. We were the first company to sign up to the requirements and self-regulation of the MRS Code. More than 350 companies have followed our lead.



## ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



## ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security, designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



## The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018

Ipsos is required to comply with the UK GDPR and the UK DPA. It covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.



## HMG Cyber Essentials

This is a government-backed scheme and a key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos was assessment-validated for Cyber Essentials certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.



Fair Data™

## Fair Data

Ipsos is signed up as a "Fair Data" company, agreeing to adhere to 10 core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.