

Make Your Voice Heard

Analysis of how many eligible voters are not currently registered to vote ahead of the 2019 European elections



 GetVoting

BEST FOR BRITAIN
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Executive Summary

This analysis estimates the number of people eligible to vote who are not registered, based on prior research from the Electoral Commission and subsequent data on population and registration changes.

It finds that around 7 million eligible voters are not registered for Westminster elections, **rising to 7.9 million for local government and European elections**, with EU26* citizens living in the UK twice as likely as Westminster electors to be missing.

These estimates are subject to the caveats outlined in this report, but are fully consistent with other research.

“The numbers we’re seeing for people who aren’t yet registered to vote are staggering.

“That’s why we’re launching getvoting.org, to make registering to vote and getting a postal vote much easier, and reminding people when they need to get registered.

“This is a big moment for the country, and every voter should be counted.”

Naomi Smith, Interim CEO of Best for Britain

* EU26 excludes Republic of Ireland citizens, who can vote in Westminster elections.

Background

The size of the electoral register substantially overstates the number of people registered to vote. This is because the size of the register is best interpreted as a count of registrations, not a count of people.

The difference arises for two reasons:

- Some people will legitimately be registered to vote twice, if they have more than one address. That's within the rules.
- However, a large number of registrations are inaccurate. When people die or move home they are not automatically removed from the electoral register at their old home. For example, the private rental sector has grown in recent decades and double the number of private renters now move house each year than they did 20 years ago. This is not necessarily fraudulent, it is a product of busy and complex lives.*

“It’s really concerning that huge swathes of people across the country who have the right to vote in the European elections this May, aren’t currently registered.

“This analysis shows nearly 8 million people could be at risk of losing the right to have their voice heard at such a crucial juncture for the country’s future, with young people, private renters and EU citizens some of the groups most at risk of missing out. That needs to change.

“Whether you voted leave or remain, your voice needs to be heard. Get out and get registered.”

Caroline Lucas MP

* [English Housing Survey, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#), Page 4.

Churn within the private rented sector (i.e. moves within the sector) has increased over the last 20 years, from 465,000 households in 1996-97 to 860,000 in 2016-17, and churn accounts for a larger proportion of private rented sector moves than 20 years ago (72%, compared with 57% in 1996-97).

This overestimate of the number of people registered to vote in turn means that the difference between that number and the size of the eligible voting population – in other words, the number of people eligible to vote but not registered – is far larger than would be inferred simply from comparing the sizes of the electoral register and the eligible population.

This analysis seeks to provide best estimates of the number of eligible voters who are not registered, as of December 2018.

Methodology

The estimates are modelled based on prior research from the Electoral Commission* combined with up-to-date estimates of the eligible voting population using the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS) together with the December 2018 electoral registers.

The following steps are taken to calculate eligible voters by region:

- Take regional estimates of the eligibility rate using nationality data from the 2018 APS.
- Calculate 2018 estimates of the voting age population from the ONS population projections.
- Multiply the 18+ population by the eligibility rate. This gives the voting eligible population (VEP) – the total number of people eligible to vote.

"This is a timely reminder for everyone of the importance of making sure you are registered to vote.

"We cannot sit idly by while millions risk not having their voices heard in the upcoming European elections.

"Democracy thrives when people take part in it and it's crucial that we get as many eligible voters to register as possible."

Dr Phillip Lee MP

* [The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#); [The December 2015 electoral register in Northern Ireland](#)

The following steps are taken to estimate the number of registered voters:

- Take the size of the electoral registers as at Dec 2018.
- Adjust for estimated over-registration rates (assuming the same level of accuracy as in 2015) in each home nation.
- Divide by the VEP to get registration rates.
- Use a log ratio space model to adjust English regions to match the regional pattern of registration rates as of 2015, while constraining to the English total for 2018.
- Multiply registration rates by VEP to get numbers registered in each region.
- Sum all nations and regions to derive UK totals.

Each of these steps are carried out separately for Westminster and local government (including European election) electorates.

“The right to vote is one of the most important rights we hold. It creates a healthy channel of communication between communities and those tasked with representing them.

“But in order to get that far we must ensure as many people as possible are registered to vote.”

Rachael Maskell MP

Results

	Voting Eligible Population (millions)		Estimated Registration Rate (per cent)		Estimated Number Registered (millions)		Difference (millions)	
	Westminster	Local	Westminster	Local	Westminster	Local	Westminster	Local
England	40.3	42.7	86	85	34.5	36.1	5.8	6.6
North East	2.0	2.1	80	79	1.6	1.6	0.4	0.4
North West	5.4	5.6	86	85	4.6	4.7	0.8	0.9
Yorkshire and The Humber	4.1	4.2	84	83	3.4	3.5	0.7	0.7
East Midlands	3.5	3.7	85	84	3.0	3.1	0.5	0.6
West Midlands	4.2	4.5	89	88	3.8	4.0	0.5	0.5
East	4.5	4.8	87	85	3.9	4.1	0.6	0.7
London	5.6	6.4	83	82	4.6	5.2	1.0	1.2
South East	6.7	7.0	88	87	5.9	6.1	0.8	0.9
South West	4.2	4.4	86	85	3.6	3.7	0.6	0.7
Wales	2.4	2.5	86	85	2.1	2.1	0.3	0.4
Scotland	4.2	4.3	86	86	3.6	3.7	0.6	0.6
Northern Ireland	1.4	1.4	80	79	1.1	1.1	0.3	0.3
UNITED KINGDOM	48.2	50.9	86	85	41.3	43.1	7.0	7.9

Notes: Figures may not sum due to rounding

The electorate for European elections is the same as for local elections

In percentage terms the estimates for Westminster and local elections are 86 per cent and 85 per cent respectively, which are broadly similar to the 85 per cent and 84 per cent in December 2015.

The limited estimated changes are because the increase in electoral registrations has been only modestly larger than the increase in the eligible population over the intervening period.

The differences between the figures for Westminster and local government electorates suggest that 900,000 of the 2.7 million voting age EU26 citizens in the UK are not registered, making them twice as likely as Westminster electors to be missing.

Cross-checks

The 2017 British Election Study (BES) provides an independent cross-check on registration levels. It found that 88 per cent of Westminster eligible voters were on the electoral register. This is within the margin of error of the 86 per cent estimate above. Additionally:

- The BES estimate is based on the subset of respondents who consented to validation against the electoral register. As there is some evidence to suggest that they are more likely to have been registered than those who did not consent to validation, the estimate may be slightly inflated.
- Registration rates may genuinely have declined in 2018 compared with 2017, due to the latter being a general election year and the former not.

As such, this independent cross-check is fully consistent with our 2018 estimates.

“Nothing is more vital to the healthy working of our democracy than the participation of as many people as possible.

“The fact that so many people who are eligible to vote are currently not registered is therefore something we must act on and change.

“No one should be left without a voice on polling day.”

Wera Hobhouse MP

Further work

While it is possible to poll on the subject of registration, such polling may be unreliable as very few people report not being registered to vote (most of course simply do not realise). However the British Election Study, which validates against the register, provides reliable estimates and a wealth of other data.

Polling on the related subject of turnout is likely to be more reliable, though heavily dependent on sample quality.

Limitations

A number of caveats apply to these estimates. In particular they require the assumption that the accuracy of the electoral registers is the same as it was in 2015, when it improved markedly after the introduction of individual electoral registration.

If it were the case that accuracy improved further since 2015, our estimates of the number of people registered will be too low and the estimates of unregistered eligible voters too high. If, instead, accuracy has fallen back towards pre-2015 levels, the reverse will apply.

Estimates for regions within England are subject to greater uncertainty than the UK figure due to the need for additional modelling to produce them. The estimate for Northern Ireland is subject to greater uncertainty due to the lower (but improved) level of registration accuracy there.

Local government electorate estimates are subject to slightly greater uncertainty than the Westminster electorate. Much of this relates to the uneven distribution of EU26 citizens within England.

Additionally, all of the data besides the electoral registers are based on surveys (by the ONS and Electoral Commission), so are subject to margins of error, although the large sizes of these surveys mean that the margins for error are small.