

Written Evidence to the Representation of the People Bill Committee

Submitted by Elect Her

Elect Her welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee considering the Representation of the People Bill.

Elect Her is a non-partisan organisation, a CIC, working to motivate, support and equip women in all their diversity to stand for political office, in Britain, and thrive once there. Alongside that, through our Fix the System programme, we work with elected representatives, political parties, civil society organisations, academics and researchers to identify the structural barriers - that prevent many people, particularly women and those from minoritised backgrounds, from entering and remaining in political life - and we have also mapped the levers to removing those barriers.

We are encouraged by the Government's intention to widen participation in democratic processes through the Representation of the People Bill. However, evidence from across the UK political system demonstrates that barriers to participation do not begin and end with voter access. Structural issues within candidate selection processes, party governance standards, institutional support for elected representatives, and the growing impact of online abuse all influence whether individuals are able to participate fully and sustainably in democratic life.

Our evidence therefore focuses on how the Bill could be strengthened to address these systemic barriers. This submission proposes five targeted amendments designed to complement the Bill's objectives by strengthening democratic infrastructure around elections and elected office. These amendments are proportionate, workable, and compatible with the existing regulatory framework governing elections and political parties.

Taken together, this evidence indicates that widening democratic participation requires both improved access to elections and stronger institutional protections for those who take part.

Our Amendments -

1. Transparency in Candidate Selection
2. Bringing Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 into Force
3. Mandatory Induction and Support for Newly Elected Representatives
4. Independent Standards and Complaints Mechanisms
5. Online Protections for Candidates ([Elections Code of Practice](#))

Transparency in Candidate Selection

Confidence in democracy depends not only on fair voting processes but also on fair and transparent candidate selection. At present, selection procedures vary significantly across parties and are often difficult to understand from outside. Timelines, decision-making structures, criteria for selection, and routes for appeal are not always consistently published or accessible.

Research on political recruitment consistently finds that informal networks and opaque selection procedures disadvantage individuals who are not already embedded within party structures.

We propose a requirement for registered political parties to publish clear and accessible information about how candidates are selected, including who makes decisions, the criteria applied, the timetable for selection, and available routes for appeal or complaint.

This reform would not interfere with party autonomy. Rather, it would establish a baseline standard of transparency, promoting fairness, clarity, and public confidence. Transparent processes reduce suspicion, strengthen internal accountability, and make participation more accessible to those who may not already be embedded in established networks. This information would be held with party registration documents by the Electoral Commission.

This amendment would be inserted in Part 5 of the Bill (Campaigns and Political Finance), alongside existing provisions regulating political parties and Electoral Commission oversight.

Bringing Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 into Force

Transparency in selection processes is an important step. However, transparency alone is insufficient if we do not also measure outcomes.

International experience demonstrates that transparency through diversity reporting improves institutional accountability and enables policymakers to identify where barriers occur within candidate pipelines.

Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 provides a statutory basis for requiring political parties to publish anonymised data on the protected characteristics of their candidates. However the provision has not been commenced or operationalised.

We propose that this Bill would be strengthened by bringing section 106 into force which requires the standardised collection and publication of anonymised diversity data relating to:

- a. successful applicants for nomination as a candidate at the relevant election;
- b. unsuccessful applicants for nomination as a candidate at that election;
- c. candidates elected at that election;
- d. candidates who are not elected at that election.

This data would be published in aggregated form, safeguarding individual privacy while enabling meaningful analysis of patterns of representation.

The purpose of this reform is not to mandate outcomes or impose quotas. It is to enable visibility, accountability, and informed debate. Without reliable, comparable data, of all candidates at all levels, it is not possible to understand where barriers arise in the candidate pipeline or whether existing reforms are effective.

Activating section 106 would complement the Bill's focus on democratic participation by ensuring that representation can be assessed transparently and consistently across parties. This amendment is supported by a wide range of organisations, including Centenary Action, The Electoral Reform Society, 50:50 Parliament, The Jo Cox Foundation and The Fawcett Society.

This amendment would also sit within Part 5 of the Bill, in the section amending political party regulation and compliance frameworks, ensuring alignment with existing Electoral Commission enforcement mechanisms.

Mandatory Induction and Support for Newly Elected Representatives

Entering elected office can be an abrupt and demanding transition. Many newly elected representatives receive inconsistent onboarding and limited structured support. Yet the expectations placed upon them, from ethical standards and safeguarding responsibilities to public scrutiny and digital risk, are substantial.

Comparable professions with significant public responsibility, including the civil service and the judiciary, require structured induction and professional development to support effective performance and ethical standards.

We propose that following each election, all newly elected representatives at every level of government should be offered access to a standardised induction programme. This induction should cover ethical standards and codes of conduct, equality and anti-discrimination duties, preventing and responding to harassment and abuse, work-life balance and caring responsibilities, digital safety and media engagement, and the support mechanisms available to representatives in their roles.

Such induction would benefit all genders and backgrounds. It would professionalise public office, reduce preventable misconduct, strengthen wellbeing, and improve retention. Crucially, it would acknowledge and address the evidence that abuse,

financial precarity, and caring responsibilities can have disproportionate impacts on some representatives.

This is not a special measure; it is a governance improvement.

This amendment would be inserted in Part 4 of the Bill (Conduct of Elections), reflecting its focus on post-election democratic standards and institutional practice.

Independent Standards and Complaints Mechanisms

A healthy democratic system requires clear, trusted pathways for addressing misconduct. Where complaints processes are internal, opaque, or inconsistent, confidence is weakened and issues may go unresolved.

Clear and trusted reporting mechanisms are widely recognised as essential components of good organisational governance across both public and private institutions.

We propose that registered political parties be required to maintain independent and confidential complaints mechanisms, alongside published codes of conduct and clear enforcement procedures. Compliance could be overseen through existing regulatory structures. Alongside The Jo Cox Foundation, Compassion in Politics we call for a minimum requirement for political parties to have and publish codes of conduct as part of their registration with The Electoral Commission. And we call for additional requirements for parties to report how their codes are implemented i.e. what proportion of complaints were handled, and the candidate selection processes.

This would not impose new ideological requirements on parties. It would establish minimum governance standards that protect members, candidates, and elected representatives, and reinforce public trust.

This amendment would be inserted in Part 5 of the Bill, complementing existing governance and compliance provisions applying to registered political parties.

Online Protections for Candidates and Electoral Participants

While the Bill strengthens certain aspects of electoral process and participation, it does not currently address the growing impact of online abuse, intimidation, and disinformation on candidates, campaigners, and electoral staff.

Evidence submitted to the Speaker's Conference highlighted that a significant proportion of abuse experienced by MPs occurs online and intensifies during election periods. The Electoral Commission found that around 70% of candidates experienced harassment or abuse during the 2024 UK General Election campaign, including online abuse, threatening behaviour and intimidation.

Evidence shows that elections are high-risk periods for online harm, including harassment, threats, deepfakes, false statements, and coordinated abuse. These harms disproportionately affect women and minoritised candidates and have a direct impact on participation, with some prospective candidates deciding not to stand and some elected representatives choosing not to seek re-election.

We support the proposal set out in the [Elections Code of Practice Briefing \(February 2026\)](#) to amend the Online Safety Act 2023 through this Bill by requiring Ofcom to produce an Elections Code of Practice. Such a Code would:

- Clarify expectations on social media platforms during election periods;
- Define and address “electoral harm”, including threats, harassment, deepfakes, doxxing, and false statements;
- Provide consistent protections for candidates, elected representatives, campaign staff, and electoral administrators;
- Strengthen cooperation between Ofcom, the Electoral Commission, and law enforcement during election periods.

This proposal builds on recommendations from the Speaker’s Conference and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, both of which have highlighted the role of online platforms in enabling abuse during elections.

The Representation of the People Bill is an appropriate legislative vehicle for this reform, given its focus on protecting democratic participation and strengthening electoral integrity.

Bringing online protections into scope would ensure that efforts to widen participation are not undermined by digital harms that silence candidates and distort democratic debate.

This amendment would be inserted after Clause 74 of the Bill, amending the Online Safety Act 2023 to require Ofcom to prepare and issue an Elections Code of Practice addressing electoral harm.

Why These Amendments Matter

Together, these amendments would strengthen the democratic infrastructure that surrounds elections and elected office.

Widening access to participation is essential. But participation must also be transparent, safe, and sustainable. Without reliable data, clear processes, credible standards, structured support, and effective protection from online abuse, barriers persist – even when formal access improves.

Activating, and extending, section 106 of the Equality Act would provide the evidence base needed to understand patterns of representation and assess

progress. Transparency in candidate selection would improve fairness and public confidence. Clear codes of conduct and independent complaints mechanisms would reinforce trust and accountability within political parties. Structured induction would support effective and sustainable participation in public life.

In parallel, requiring the development of an Elections Code of Practice under the Online Safety Act would address the growing impact of online abuse, intimidation, and disinformation during election periods — harms that disproportionately affect women and minoritised candidates and undermine democratic participation.

Taken together, these proposals align with the Bill's objectives. They are proportionate, workable, and rooted in strengthening democratic standards.

The Bill widens access to democracy. These amendments help ensure the system — both offline and online — is fit for purpose.

Recommendations to the Committee

Elect Her recommends that the Committee consider amendments to the Bill that would:

1. Require transparency in political party candidate selection processes.
2. Bring section 106 of the Equality Act 2010 into force to enable standardised diversity reporting.
3. Introduce structured induction and support for newly elected representatives.
4. Establish baseline standards for political party codes of conduct and independent complaints mechanisms.
5. Require Ofcom to produce an Elections Code of Practice under the Online Safety Act to address electoral harm during election periods.

These measures would strengthen the democratic infrastructure that surrounds elections while remaining consistent with the Bill's overall objectives.

By addressing both access to participation and the conditions under which participation takes place, the Bill can more effectively support a representative and resilient democratic system.

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