



THE JO COX
FOUNDATION

Written Evidence: Representation of the People Bill 2026 – House of Commons, Committee Stage

Mar 6, 2026

1. Overview of Submission

1.1. We welcome the publication of the Representation of the People Bill and are pleased to be coordinating with other civil society organisations across the democracy sector. The bill provides an opportunity for a more respectful and more representative democracy.

1.2. We support the bill's provisions to address harassment including: removing the requirement for agents' home addresses to be published, improving communication between candidates and the police, extending the disqualification order to include hostility towards election staff, and making hostility an aggravating factor in sentencing.

1.3 Our key recommendations to strengthen the bill include: embedding standards of conduct through requirements for political parties, disseminating candidate safety resources consistently and addressing online harms through a code of practice for social media platforms.

2. About The Jo Cox Foundation

2.2 [The Jo Cox Foundation](#) makes meaningful change on issues that the late Jo Cox MP was passionate about. The charity works in two areas: nurturing stronger communities and championing respect in politics. Underpinning this work is the understanding that we have more in common than that which divides us. Jo Cox was murdered on 16 June 2016 in the place she loved – Batley and Spen – doing the work she loved, as an MP on behalf of her constituents.

2.2 Our [Respectful Politics](#) and Jo Cox Civility Commission work sees abuse and intimidation of elected representatives as a threat to democracy. Our long-term vision is a political culture where everyone can safely participate in respectful, robust debate in the spirit of Jo's message that we have "more in common than that which divides us."

3. The problem of abuse and intimidation

3.1. Abuse and intimidation of elected representatives – including violence towards them – is a threat to democracy. It leads to politicians stepping down, self-censoring and fewer people putting themselves forward as candidates. It is disproportionately impacting those who are already under-represented.

3.2. Key statistics:

- (i) 96% of [MPs](#) have experienced threatening behaviour, with threats of sexual violence disproportionately experienced by women and disabled MPs.
- (ii) Of 2024 general election [candidates](#), women were twice as likely to experience abuse as men, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds were three times as likely as those from white backgrounds.
- (iii) 72% of [councillors](#) report having experienced abuse or intimidation in the last year. This is higher among women and ethnic minorities (84%), and LGBT+ and disabled councillors (85%).
- (iv) Over a third of young women and girls surveyed by [Girlguiding](#), said they were put off certain careers including politics because of the abuse they see high-profile women receive.

4. Welcome Proposals in the Bill

4.1 Extending the disqualification order to include hostility towards election staff and making hostility an aggravating factor in sentencing, which recognises the seriousness of the threat. (Part 6. Hostility Towards Candidates Etc: Disqualification Orders and Sentencing)

4.2. The introduction of a police contact form so police can contact candidates directly regarding their safety. This builds on the ongoing work of the Electoral Commission on candidate contact forms. (Part 3. Conduct for Elections Etc)

4.3. The removal of requirements of candidates' home addresses to be published in the Notice of Election Agents. We have long campaigned to make the personal addresses of candidates and elected representatives' private by default. (Part 4. Campaigns and Political Expenditure)

5. Suggestions for Strengthening

5.1. Embed Standards of Conduct

5.1.a Problem: Political parties have an important role to set and ensure standards of conduct. Political parties have made progress, including implementing principles of The Jo Cox Foundation's [Statement on Conduct of Political Party Members](#) that we produced with the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). However, these are not consistently applied. Of the candidates who [reported](#) experiencing abuse in the 2024 general election, 27% reported that campaigners or volunteers (of any party) were at least one of the sources of abuse, and

11% reported that another candidate was. This is also observed [internationally](#), with party cultures, campaign practices and internal processes contributing to the problem.

5.1.b Solution: We recommend the bill introduce mechanisms to improve transparency and accountability of standards of conduct, and promote a culture in which minimum levels of respectful standards of conduct are as important as proper campaign finance practices.

- (i) We specifically recommend changes are made to Part 3 of the Bill, ‘Conduct for Elections’, including:
 - A minimum requirement for **political parties to have and publish codes of conduct** as part of their registration with The Electoral Commission.
 - Additional requirements for **parties to report how their codes are implemented** i.e. what proportion of complaints were handled, and the candidate selection processes.
- (ii) These changes are supported by other organisations including Compassion in Politics, 50:50 Parliament and Elect Her.
- (iii) We also support recommendations made by [Centenary Action](#) and others for the implementation of section 106 of the Equality Act. This would require parties to publish data on the protected characteristics of candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament and the Senedd.

5.2. Disseminate Candidate Safety Resources

5.2.a Problem: While information for candidates and others in the election ecosystem on safety and security has hugely improved in recent years, many candidates are unaware of existing resources (such as the UK Government Joint Election Security and Preparedness Unit (JESP)’s [Candidate Security Guidance](#) collection and the [Electoral Commission](#) resources and information).

5.2.b Solution: We recommend that these measures are **strengthened** to ensure that resources are updated and consistently disseminated by amending Part 3 of the Bill, ‘Conduct for Elections’:

- (i) **Guidance on safety for candidates** and campaigners safety should be reviewed and improved and also be widely disseminated so all campaigners are aware of available resources.
- (ii) Specifically, the **Electoral Commission could have the responsibility and resources to update, review and share** safety resources/ guidance directly with candidates shortly after candidate registration.

5.3. Address Online Harms

5.3.a Problem: Online harms, including mis- and disinformation, and gendered abuse, threaten the integrity of our elections. They distort debate, deter participation and erode trust.

5.3.b Solution: We recommend measures to address online harms:

- (i) As part of the Online Safety Act Network, we support a proposal to introduce a duty on Ofcom, in consultation with others, to produce a **code of practice for social media platforms** to address potential harms during the electoral process. Other supportive information organisations include Center for Countering Digital Hate, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the Fawcett Society. For more information, please see the Network's own evidence submission.
- (ii) We also support [calls](#) from the Epistemic Security Network Information Crisis Coalition – led by Demos in partnership between [Full Fact](#), Transparency International, the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition, the Online Safety Act Network and others – **to clarify and update rules to deal with political deepfakes.**

5.4 Promote Political, Digital and Media Literacy

5.4.a Problem: Political, digital and media literacy remains low, and seems to be a driver of abuse towards those in public life. The 2024 [Opinium](#) poll found that 70% of young people could not name their MP. The [Electoral Commission](#) found an increase in the public's acceptability of bullying behaviours towards politicians with only 25% of 18-24 year olds believing that it is completely unacceptable to verbally threaten a politician in public.

5.4.b Solution: We recommend that the bill includes measures to embed political, digital and media literacy as a core part of our culture – in schools and beyond:

- (i) In Part 2 of the bill 'Registration of Voters', we recommend amending that **political literacy materials are part of automated voter registration**
- (ii) We are supportive of other efforts to promote political, digital and media literacy such as those offered by [ShoutOutUK](#)

For more information, please contact Hannah Phillips, Respectful Politics Policy Manager, hannah.phillips@jocoxfoundation.org