Representation of the People Bill
Committee Call for Evidence – Generation Rent submission
March 2026

Summary

1. The UK Government's *Representation of the People Bill 2026* proposes several major changes to our democratic system, with key measures including lowering the voting age to 16 for all UK elections, expanding the list of accepted voter ID, and introducing more automated forms of voter registration. Generation Rent supports these measures.

Background

2. Under the current system, individuals must proactively register to vote, usually online. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) maintain the electoral register through an annual canvass reminding households to make sure their registration is up to date. They currently use National insurance (NI) records held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to verify voter identity.

Problems with the current system

3. ***Accuracy:*** According to the Electoral Commission, the current electoral register is significantly inaccurate, with almost 8 million people missing. This figure has remained consistent across the last four General Elections, demonstrating the need to modernise electoral registration.

4. ***Barriers to registration:*** Research by the University of Manchester found that the UK has a significantly more difficult registration process compared to over 25 other international democracies. Many of these higher performing countries do not require action from eligible voters before they show up to polling stations. A survey of polling station workers found that 46% reported turning people away because they were not properly registered to vote. This suggests that failure to register is not necessarily due to voter apathy but rather reflects structural barriers within an outdated system.

5. ***Private renters disadvantaged***: The current registration system creates particular barriers for private renters, particularly younger renters who move frequently. In 2022, only 65% of private renters were registered to vote compared with 95% of home owners. Frequent moves and insecure tenancies, along with complex registration processes, make private renters significantly less likely to appear on the electoral roll. Amid unpacking their belongings and setting up the utilities, registering to vote is not a high priority for the typical renter, particularly if there's a good chance they will have to move before the next polling day. While the Renters' Rights Act strengthens security of tenure, landlords can still evict to sell or move in after the first year. Efforts by some landlords to avoid their legal or tax obligations appear to lead to renters facing pressure not to register at their address.

6. The English Housing Survey reports that 68% of renters move home within the typical five-year General Election cycle, and our survey found 45% move across local authority boundaries. This means renters re-register to vote more frequently, often with different EROs, increasing their risk of dropping off the electoral register all together.

7. Two participants in our focus groups explain how moving home as private renters affected their registration.
8. Participant 1: "There was a period of time where after I moved, the tenancy came to an end, I had to do sofa surfing for a bit, to save up for a new deposit. Because deposits are ridiculous. At the time I didn't realise you could register to vote when you are sofa surfing, and that's only something I've subsequently found out because there was no information about it at the time."
9. Participant 2: "A lot of it depends on the circumstances in which you move. I moved once to escape a relationship; in that situation I didn't update anything because I just didn't have the headspace. And then in other situations, when I faced an eviction, and then six months later another eviction, I didn't do it in those circumstances either, because I needed to meet my immediate needs first."

Solution

10. An automated system of voter registration, described in the Bill as **Registration without Application (RWOA)**, could help enfranchise the millions of private renters and other under-represented groups who face barriers to registering to vote, and remaining registered. By automatically updating electoral records when people interact with trusted public services, RWOA would help remove many of the obstacles created by frequent moves, insecure housing, and complex registration processes which currently makes renters so underrepresented on the register.
11. Generation Rent's 2025 democracy research estimated that using public sector datasets could lead to more than nine in ten private renters being registered to vote. Of the 9.41m private renters over the age of 16 in England and Wales at the 2021 Census, 8.53m (91%) lived in households likely to interact with the council for Council Tax, HMRC for self-assessment tax returns, DVLA for driving licences or the DWP for Universal Credit, State Pension or other means-tested benefits.
12. The UK Democracy Fund has addressed concerns about electoral fraud within the new system, saying that international evidence suggests a more automated registration system would increase both the accuracy and the completeness of the register, empowering EROs with more data to update registers with changes of addresses, and identify duplicates. Citizens would be notified of their automatic enrolment and be able to make any corrections if necessary.
13. The *Representation of the People Bill* presents a major opportunity to establish these processes in law and tackle barriers to private renters taking part in the democratic process. Measures in the *Renters' Rights Act* also offer an opportunity to improve registration processes at a local level and reach renters who might otherwise fall through the gaps. Notably, 23% of households with children rent privately, a higher proportion than the overall population, meaning that newly enfranchised 16- and 17-year-olds living in private rented homes are especially likely to benefit from RWOA.

Lessons from Welsh Automatic Voter Registration Pilots

14. In early 2025, the Welsh Government piloted a range of approaches to automatic voter registration in four local authorities (Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd, Newport and Powys). This primarily included the use of council tax data as it was the largest dataset readily available to EROs. The findings are very pertinent to this Bill, and highlight areas that need particular attention:
15. These pilots added over 14,500 new electors to the register, equating to 2-8% of local registers, with the vast majority of new registrations being accurate and valid. According to the report, 83 were removed after the November canvass. From the evidence, nearly all the additions accurate.

16. Although Newport has a larger number of private renters than the other councils, Newport council registered fewer new voters, indicating that a lot of renters won't be visible in council data, so additional data sources are needed for a more complete picture.

17. The use of education data was key in reaching young and under-registered groups. However, it is important to consider the timing of the use of student data in relation to university term dates when significant numbers of students will change their address.

18. The system required no action from electors unless opting out, but required significant work and resources through individual data-matching exercises by ERO teams to identify an elector's eligibility to vote in UK General Elections as well as local government elections.

How can the law be strengthened further?

19. The Bill currently contains no clear legal duty or timeline for nationwide rollout of a registration without application system. Without this, there is a risk that this reform will only be fully effective for a General Election in the 2030s, rather than the next one. The government should commit to lay out regulations by specific date and ensure adequate resourcing and equality impact monitoring.

20. EROs should have access to a wide range of public body data sets, including DWP, DVLA, HMRC and NHS data, to make sure as many private renters as possible get picked up by the new system.

21. Because many renters will not interact with the bodies above when they move, the Bill must also empower EROs to use the forthcoming Private Rented Property Database, expected to be introduced at the end of 2026, to help identify renter households that could be missed.

22. Passport Office data could help verify voter eligibility and reduce administrative burdens on EROs.

23. A full system of registration without application should be implemented as soon as possible so voters can take part in the next General Election.

24. Greater clarity is needed on how quickly individuals, particularly private renters who are frequently moving home, will be added to the electoral register after moving to avoid uncertainty of their registration status ahead of elections.

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