Chapter 9:

Voter Registration Reform

9.1 Introduction

In the fourth part of this book, we turn to policy instruments – reforms or measures that are introduced with the aim of improving electoral management. Although research on elections had traditionally focussed on voters and electoral system design, the study of EMB design, the polling process and electoral registration has seen increased interest. Mirroring this, highly political debates have often played out in legislative chambers and newspaper editorials around the globe. In the US, attempts to introduce voter ID laws have been introduced to combat electoral fraud, but have been characterised as partisan attempts to rig the electoral process by deterring particular voters (Hasen 2012). Estonia's use of internet voting has been held up as an exemplar by advocates seeking remote voting elsewhere in the world, but the system has been criticised at home (Kickbusch 2015). Automatic electoral registration has been advocated in many other countries as way of building a more inclusive register and democratic system.

Research that has sought to investigate the effects of using different voting and registration technologies is unsatisfactory. It only evaluates the *front-office* effects - the direct effect on the citizen's experience. This chapter argues that this approach is extremely limited in its scope. Implementing new voting technologies or electoral registration processes affects many aspects of the electoral process and we should also consider the effects on the people and organisations that implement elections themselves. We should, in other words, be more sensitive to the *back-office* effects. The impact that reforms have on staff, resources and broader the functioning of EMBs are important too since effect the performance of EMBs as set out in chapter 4.

Part II of the chapter reviews the existing literature on voting technologies. Part III explains the evolution of plans to introduce individual electoral registration (IER) in Britain and the existing

evidence about the effects of the reform. Part III explains the methodology. A thematic analysis of interviews with British local election officials was undertaken prior to implementation to identify the likely effects prior to the implementation of the reform. This research was then disseminated prominently during the UK – and may have had some effect on implementation effects. A post-implementation survey was undertaken to identify whether these predictions came true. Part IV explains the results. The initial interviews suggested that IER would improve the security of the registration process. However, it was expected to lead to consider 'spill-over' effects in terms of staff training, recruitment and resource drain. The post-implementation study revealed that the reform did indeed reduce opportunities for electoral fraud and the accuracy of the electoral register. There were some effects on the completeness of the electoral register. However, what was more striking was that there were significant effects on costs of running electoral services and the workplace experiences of employees with significant effects on workload, workplace environment, stress and the propensity of the employee to quit. The chapter concludes by encouraging further research uses the local knowledge of street-level bureaucrats to examine the 'back-office' effects of election administration reforms. They are useful for both academics and policy makers seeking to pre-empt the effects of a policy reform. In other words, they enable bottom up learning.

9.2 Research on voting technologies

Election administration refers to the 'administrative systems through which the electoral register is compiled, and votes are cast and counted' (James 2010a, 369). There is enormous variation around the world in the practices that states adopt for running elections such as whether there are sanctions for citizens who do not register, the methods through which citizens can register and whether postal voting is available for all citizens or not (Massicotte, Blais, and Yoshinaka 2004). There is a large body of work, largely based on studies of US elections, that seeks to identify the effects of variations in procedures on voter turnout and registration levels. These studies date back to at least the 1930s (Harris 1934), but this research has accelerated over the last thirty years. The seminal work of Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) was a key marker. However, the politics of the National Voter Registration Act 1993, the US Presidential election in 2000 and more recent debates about voter identification laws has brought a new generation of studies (see, for example: Alvarez and Sinclair 2004; Ansolabehere and Konisky 2005; Atkeson et al. 2010; Barreto, Nuno, and Sanchez 2009; Wolfinger, Highton, and Mullin 2005). Much of the work implicitly or explicitly deploys a rational choice logic that some forms of election administration create barriers to participation by increasing the 'costs' to the citizen of registering to vote and casting a vote. Individuals will be more likely to

register to vote and cast their ballot when it is more convenient to do so (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Elsewhere, I differentiated between procedures which are 'expansive' i.e. increase participation and those which are 'restrictive' i.e. reduce participation. This was then used to developed a continuum which categorised each of the registration procedures according to the effects on electoral participation (2010a, 378-80). At the same time, there are often concerns about electoral fraud at elections – and some procedures have been argued to make fraud or undue influence on the voter more likely (Birch and Watt 2004; Wilks-Heeg 2009) or produce lower levels of confidence amongst voters that their ballot has been counted (Atkeson and Saunders 2007). The study of election administration is therefore of vital importance at a time when many states are concerned about declines in levels of electoral participation, mistrust of political institutions or vulnerabilities to electoral fraud.

There are some deficiencies in the literature. The overreliance on studies of U.S. elections is certainly one of these.[1] The ability of US states to choose their procedures, within a framework of federal legislation, has provided a fertile research opportunity for researchers to analyse the effect of variations in practices on levels of participation. These studies have advanced our knowledge of electoral procedures immeasurably. However, one consequence of this is that we know little about procedures which have not been used in any state in the US. One of these is IER (as will be explained below). Further research on this procedure can therefore make significant contributions to our knowledge of electoral procedures and assist practitioners deciding how to run elections.

A second deficiency is that research on the effects of reforms have been limited to analysing the effects on registration rates, turnout and voter fraud. Important as these are, the effects have of reform have been restricted to the researcher's existing expectations about what effects reforms might have. This, in turn, is usually shaped by the political science literature. As Sayer (2010, 24) suggests, scholars develop knowledge within the cognitive and conceptual resources available in the language communities. There are no notable open-ended attempts to look at the effects of reforms in their entirety. This chapter therefore makes a contribution to redress both of these gaps in the literature – which are both empirical but also methodological.

9.3 Individual electoral registration in Britain

---

[1] There are exceptions, e.g. Garnett (2019)

IER was first proposed for mainland Britain by the Electoral Commission in 2003 as part its electoral modernisation programme, *Voting for Change*, on the basis that it was 'vital to security… particularly in relation to absent voting' and other forms of remote voting (Electoral Commission 2003, 16). The Labour governments were long resistant to introducing IER, however, at least partly because many senior ministers thought that it might affect their 'core vote' (James 2010b, 15-7). However, the case for IER gained momentum with support from the Select Committee of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004), The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2005, 1), the Committee for Standards in Public Life (2007, 6-7), and the Association of Electoral Administrators (2010). These recommendations came on the back of high profile cases of postal vote fraud (Stewart 2006) and a report published by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (2008) which argued that the processes for registering to vote and casting votes were insecure and had been proven vulnerable to fraud. Eventually the Labour government conceded to the case for IER and legislated to introduce it on a voluntary basis for those wishing to register after July 1, 2010 in the Political Parties and Election Act (PPE). The Act also mandated the Electoral Commission to evaluate the impact of this change and required Parliament to consider whether it should be made compulsory after a review in 2014. The Coalition government, elected in 2010, sought to fast-track implementation, however, as part of a series of reforms with the stated aim of reducing fraud (Deputy Prime Minister 2011). Some reforms, such as providing an 'opt-out' box so that citizens can choose to not be on the register, were dropped. Those to survived which embodied a number of simultaneous changes included (Electoral Commission 2016b, 25-7):

- **From household to individual registration.** An annual canvass would take previously place, usually each Autumn, whereby a form was sent to each property listing those citizens registered. The 'Head of Household' would then delete individuals no longer resident at the property and add those eligible citizens who were. This information was then used by electoral registration officers (EROs) to update the register. Citizens living in university or care-homes could previously be registered by the landlord or university administrator – but would now be forced to do so individually.
- **The use of personal identifiers and verification.** Applicants were required to provide their National Insurance Number and Date of Birth. This information was then verified against the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) database before they are added to the electoral register. If the individual could not be matched then EROs had some discretion to use other local records to verify them.

- **Two-stage canvass.** Households were still sent annual canvass forms (now called 'Household Enquiry Forms). However, those citizens who were listed on this form were then sent an individual form asking them to register.

- **Online registration.** Applicants were able to register online for the first time following the launch of a central government website. The submission of an application through this website would be passed to EROs to verify.[2]

- **Funding.** Additional short-term funding was provided by the government to EROs to cover some of the additional costs involved in running elections.

IER was phased in. From June 2014 onwards[3], new applicants were required to register individually with the personal identifiers before they were added to the register. Existing entries which could not be verified by December 2015 were removed. Approximately 770,000 such names were removed – 1.7% of the total December 2015 electorate (Electoral Commission 2016a, 6).

9.4 Existing knowledge about IER

Most countries operate IER rather than household electoral registration (HER) so there have been few opportunities for researchers to assess the effects of the change from one to the other and their relative merits. Research on this procedure is limited since it consists of various policy reports following its implementation in Canada and Northern Ireland. HER was abolished in Canada in 1997 when a new national electoral register was compiled by Elections Canada. Widespread confusion was reported with the new system when it was adopted for the first election in 2000 and there was some evidence that the new system led to a decline in electoral participation, especially amongst citizens from lower socio-economic groups (Black 2000, 2003). IER was introduced in Northern Ireland after the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and roughly 10% of the electorate dropped off the register overnight. However, drawing lessons from the Northern Ireland experience is difficult because the annual carry-forward of names was ended at the same time. It was also argued that the names removed were not 'real' people – they were false registrations or duplicates (James 2011a, 47-8).[4]

---

[2] Prior to this, a central Electoral Commission website only provided an application form that needed to be printed off and posted to the local ERO, whose details were provided if the citizen entered their postcode.

[3] For England and Wales. IER began in Scotland from September 2014, following the Scottish Independence Referendum.

[4] Registration levels subsequently increased in Northern Ireland after provisions were made for the government to reinstate names on the register and the need for citizens to re-register reach year was removed.

No other academic knowledge about the effects of IER in Britain has been published, apart from the research described in this chapter which was disseminated during the implementation process. Some pressure groups argued that IER would lead to millions of voters being disenfranchised. Hope Not Hate, for example, claimed in September 2015 that IER could mean that '1.9 million people may fall off the electoral register in December' (Hope Not Hate 2015, 2). This was based on the assumption that all unconfirmed names on the electoral register were real entries and would not be confirmed. Their survey of universities found that many were unaware of the reforms and were scaling down voter registration work because there was no general election that year (Hope Not Hate 2015, 2).

The most complete assessment to date of the impact of IER was that undertaken by the Electoral Commission. The Commission undertook an evaluation of the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register prior to the introduction of IER in 2014 (Electoral Commission 2014b), and then immediately afterwards the transition to IER in 2016 (Electoral Commission 2016b). The methodology involved house to house surveys with the aim of checking the accuracy and the completeness of the electoral register. In 2014, 5,000 households were canvassed; On the basis of a 'before and after' comparison of the statistics for accuracy and completeness, the Commission concluded that:

> 'These accuracy and completeness findings suggest that there was no notable effect on the completeness of the registers from the removal of these entries and that the main impact is likely to have been the improvement in accuracy' (Electoral Commission 2016b, 8)

There were some important qualifiers to this. Although there was an only a small, non-statistically significant, aggregate decline in completeness, the Commission did report drops in completeness among younger age groups. A drop of approximately nine percentage points among 18-19 year olds, for example.

The Electoral Commission research has some limitations in its ability to identify causation. It assumes that the introduction of IER was the sole variable to affect levels of accuracy and completeness during this time – there are no controls for other push/pull factors. Policies are not implemented in hermetic sealed environments, however. There are other factors that may cause these levels to change. This was a period, for example, that included a general election in 2015 which was forecast to be close and may have led to a spike in participation. It was also a time when national registration drives were organised by Bite the Ballot (see chapter 6) which added a considerable number of entries to the electoral register. Concerns raised about the IER may have also had a mobilisation effect in increasing registrations. I explain later in the chapter how this research actually played a role in this.

9.5 Methodology

A methodologically innovative approach is taken to evaluating the effects of IER in this chapter. Rather than using undertaking an analysis of the electoral registers themselves, which is the most common approach taken (for example, see: Wilks-Heeg 2012, 25-6). The approach here is to use the knowledge of electoral officials themselves. As chapter 3 set out, public officials are front-line workers with 'local knowledge' and first-hand experience of the everyday life of working in a particular setting. Their insights therefore provide a privileged insight into the effects of change and the see the effects of reform on the ground in their local areas. Qualitative interviews were undertaken with the local election officials involved in implementing elections by the author in 2011. The aim was to establish the likely effects of IER prior to its implementation. The author undertook interviews with 74 senior elections staff across 41 organisations in England, Wales and Scotland.[5] In most cases these were individual interviews, but in a few cases participants were interviewed in pairs. Urban and rural authorities and different authority types were included. The interviews were semi-structured in order to let the interviewees define the issues. The names of individuals and authorities included in the study were withheld so that the interviewees could speak freely. This chapter then uses Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012) approach to thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. Interviews were transcribed and themes identified inductively from the texts. The aim was to identify both semantic and latent meanings. This research process requires the researcher to undertake 'a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data... and the analysis of the data' (ibid, p.86). Having generated the core themes from the data, Braun and Clarke suggest using the themes to construct an analytic narrative of any processes at work – in this case, the likely effects of introducing IER.

To identify what effects the implementation of IER had had, a post-implementation survey was put into the field in January 2016 asking officials about the impact of IER in practice. The survey was circulated by email to the official email address for each department and respondents were asked to circulate the link within their team. The survey questions were premised on the interview responses from 2011 with the aim of identifying the frequency of themes and whether the anticipated effects materialised. However, before the survey was sent out qualitative interviews were undertaken with electoral officials in four local authorities to see whether additional questions were required. As a result of these, an additional battery of questions relating to working conditions and job satisfaction

---

[5] Northern Ireland was not included in this study.

were added and will be discussed below. Likert scales were used for battery and the respondent had the option to also provide qualitative responses which provided considerable additional data. There were 271 responses to the survey. Of the potential 382 local and electoral authorities, 189 local electoral organisations were represented giving a high response rate of 49.5 per cent. Respondents were asked to pick from a range of job titles and these were coded by the author accordingly the level of seniority.[6] The composition of the responses by management level were a greater mix than with the pre-implementation interviews (Table 9.1).

Role	Frequency	Percentage
Administrative/clerical	99	36.5
Deputy Management	27	10.0
Management	95	35.1
Upper Management	21	7.7
Senior/Strategic	29	10.7
Total	271	

Table 9.1: Number of survey responses by job role

Overall, the chapter therefore provides new research on the effects of IER, but also a more holistic understanding of the effects of introducing reforms. This is important since the side-effects of reforms, can also have indirect effects on the voter's experience.

9.6 Pre-empting the impact of IER

The themes that were raised in the interviews anticipating the effects of IER in Britain are presented in Table 9.2. As Braun and Clarke note, the significance of a theme is not equal in proportion to its prevalence in a text because the aim is to identify the nature of the phenomena, not its frequency. However, it is important to be transparent about how codes are constructed and why their significance

---

[6] 'Retuning Officers' and 'Electoral Registration Officers' were coded as Senior/Strategic. 'Democratic Services Mangers' were coded as Upper Management. 'Electoral Services Managers' were coded as Managers. 'Assistant Electoral Services Managers' were coded as Deputy Managers. 'Electoral Services Administrators' were coded as 'Administrative/Clerical'.

is emphasised in the analysis. Table 9.2, therefore, also summarises the frequency of the themes raised.

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency
T1: Fraud, Accuracy and Voter Confidence		*14*
T2: Declining registration levels		
	Harder for citizens to register (general)	10
	Citizen concerns about giving out personal identifiers	7
	Citizen concerns about use of personal identifiers	2
	Other citizens & organisations undertaking registration	4
	Young people less likely to register	7
	Students less likely to register	2
	Accessibility issues will arise	2
	Sub-total	34
T3: Concerns about increased costs / administrative burden		
	Higher administrative work loads and staff costs	28
	Fear of late implementation	1
	Resources of Data-checking	5
	Urban areas especially difficult	2
	New software	3
	Additional stationary costs	7
	Sub total	46
T4: Data Issues		
	Data quality from public completion of forms	3
	Data quality arising from public completion of forms	1
	Physical storage problems	2
	Increased transactions	1
	Sub total	7
T5: Spill-overs & Displacements on other Practices		
	Delayed other reforms	3
	Other changes made in preparation	2
	Cuts anticipated elsewhere to implement IER	3
	Sub-total	8

Table 9.2: Frequency table of themes and sub-themes raised by election officials

One theme from the interviews was that IER would *reduce opportunities for fraud and improve voter confidence* (T1). No respondents claimed that fraud was a problem in their authority, but some thought that it would help to alleviate concerns by removing some opportunities for fraud. According to one:

> 'I think something needs to be done to reassure the electorate that there is some form of double-checking that, you know, everybody needs to produce a PIN number or a signature for most things they do nowadays.'

Others suggested that it was necessary modernisation of procedures that were now out of date as 'this idea of a household form is from a very, very old fashioned time.'

Concerns were raised about *declining participation rates* (T2). Some citizens would be reluctant to provide their national insurance numbers because of the additional task involved because the national insurance number would not be readily accessible for most – and they might also have concerns about how such information would be used. Other members of households, interviews suggested, were also playing an important role in registering others. Young people and students were pinpointed as groups among whom registration levels would drop the most. University students may have previously have been registered by their university administration, for example.

> 'I think it's going to be very, very difficult to collect the information from all these people. I've got a 17 year old son, I can't imagine he's going to be the least bit interested in filling in a registration form to be honest.'

A third theme was the effect on *local government resources (T3).* Canvassing individuals would take more time and resource than canvassing households. There would be additional costs involved in postage and stationary. Two local authorities expected that their staff numbers would need to double to deal with the implementation. One had done some initial costing estimates and expected their overall costs to increase by 50%.

> 'I think the biggest concern now is that all that it's doing is adding to the bureaucracy… Because with the annual canvass, you could do it by household, with individual registration, you've got almost, you know, for every single person some sort of contact with them.'

A fourth them was concerns about *data quality and management* (T4). On the one hand the public were reported to be prone to make errors on their forms. One LEO worked in an authority that had piloted internet voting and reported that some citizens, especially the elderly, found difficulty in providing key identifiers that were necessary for the system to work. According to her:

> '[individual registration] is designed by these intelligent people who don't realise how daft some members of the public can be. It's a lovely idea but when I was in authority x … [we had to] get them to supply their national insurance number.'

The use of personal identifiers would also involve further data-checking tasks by administrators. Data quality issues may arise because conflicting data between different information systems, respondents thought. New and higher levels of staff skills such as manipulating datasets might be required. Some authorities would require new computer systems to deal with the changes. This would compound problems with resources and staffing.

A final theme was that IER would or has already created a number of *'spill over' and displacement effects* (T5) on the reform of other internal and external processes or aspects of election administration. Often IER was reported to compound declines in registration levels indirectly by affecting other procedures. For example, one authority delayed introducing new telephone, mobile phone and internet re-registration methods for citizens whose details have not changed as a result of IER.

> 'Our thinking was "We don't want to introduce something that the public will get used to and then dismantle it"'.

In other cases officials anticipated making cuts in other services to compensate for the new additional costs involved in implementing IER. These might include reduced payments for canvassers and public awareness work.

9.7. Negotiating IER

The findings from the interviews outlined above we used by the author to present policy briefings to Parliament about the likely consequences of IER. A briefing was made at Welsh Assembly in 2011 and a submission of written evidence was made to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (James 2011b), which was undertaking pre-legislative scrutiny of the bill. This argued for additional longer-term funding for electoral services and the use of expansive measures such as 'Motor Voter' or automatic registration. Blogs were published in a variety of settings such as with the Huffington Post. Concerns were also raised by civil society groups about a potential fall in registration levels. Operation Black Vote, the British Youth Council and the National Union of Students raised similar concerns in their evidence (Select Committe on Political and Consitutional Reform 2011, 12).

Meanwhile the Electoral Reform Society held a roundtable about the under-registration (Electoral Reform Society 2011).

The Select Committee report was sympathetic to these concerns noting that the 'introduction of IER carries the risk that people will drop off the register and become disenfranchised, particularly in urban Areas' (Select Committe on Political and Consitutional Reform 2011, 3). Behind closed doors, senior Liberal Democrat peers lobbied for the 'opt out' system to be dropped which the Coalition government eventually agreed to.

The passage of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act made IER a reality. From 10 June 2014 all citizens wanting to re-register or register form the first time had to do so individually and provide national insurance numbers.[7] As part of a transition process, all existing elector details were checked against the government's Department for Work and Pensions database during a 'confirmation dry run'. 87% of records were matched and automatically added to the electoral roll. However, the matching rate varied enormously across the country. It was as low as 59% in Hackney, but as high as 97% in Epping. Those that did not match government records were written to and invited to register. Gradually, the number of unconfirmed entries on the register fell to 1.9 million in May 2015 and then 770,00 by December 2015. Against the advice of the Electoral Commission and stiff opposition in the House of Lords, ended the transition period early at this point so that all of these names were removed (Electoral Commission 2016a, 6). The total drop in names on the electoral register since 1 December 2013 was 1.4million fewer entries on it than the February 2014 register – the last one before IER was introduced (James 2016).

As chapter six lays out, the transition period was also marked by the establishment of the APPG on Democratic Participation, informed by the research documented in the first half of this chapter. Bite the Ballot undertook a National Voter Registration Week leading to 441,696 people registering to vote in a single week of coordinated social action (BIte the Ballot 2019). As Chapter two sets, research does not take place in a hermetically sealed environment – it can be, and should be, interactive with the policy environment. This needs to be considered when the effects of IER are considered, which are set out now.

---

[7] The implementation was delayed in Scotland to allow for the Scottish Independence Referendum in September 2014.

9.8 Post Implementation Effects

The post-implementation survey identified nine key effects of IER.

9.8.1 Opportunities for electoral fraud

The reduction of opportunities for electoral fraud was both the stated aim of the government reform and the anticipated effect of officials. Quantitative replies provide evidence that IER had achieved this goal. As Table 9.3 illustrates, 77 per cent agreed (with a score of 6-9) that opportunities for electoral fraud are reduced and 68 agreed that the accuracy of the electoral register had improved. Qualitative replies were more sceptical. Some pointed out that electoral fraud of this type was rare. Most notably, however, many pointed out many other vulnerabilities existed. The check against the DWP database only established that the identity was real, however, it is not a guarantee that their nationality and/or residency entitled them to vote.

> 'Anyone can register online with someone else's details. It's not reduced it but it is flagged up more.'

> 'Checking with the DWP only checks that the person exist it is still down to the ERO to verify if they exist at the property, with it now being on-line more people can register at different properties and if the confirmation letter gets lost in the post or doesn't get delivered the official owners would not know that someone has registered at their property fraudulently'

> 'In a sense IER has actually increased the potential for fraud in that previously we would never register anyone unless they could prove residence at an address. Now if they can't be linked to an address any other way we are obliged to seek additional evidence but that can be a passport which of course doesn't bear a person's address! Hence anyone so minded could attempt to register at multiple addresses, pass the DWP identity check and use their passport to support their application when they fail the address check usually done with Council Tax.'

> 'The documentary evidence stage is just to establish someone's identity, not to prevent fraudulent applications! Cabinet Office have been informed of this, but it is the least of their priorities!'

There was less evidence that this increased accuracy had improved citizen's confidence in the electoral register, however, with only 25 per cent agreeing. Respondents said that the public rarely gave it much thought and 'didn't care' except, perhaps for when they heard occasional news stories about it. Neither was it felt that local politician's confidence had increased much, as Table 9.3 illustrates. Electoral officials described them as having little understanding of the change. Concerns, as far as

they were expressed, were often about the completeness of the register and were often dependent on the party affiliation of the member.

%	Don't agree at all								Very much agree	Don't know	Mean	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
Opportunities for electoral fraud are reduced	2	0	3	3	14	14	26	27	10	0.7	6.7	270
The accuracy of the electoral register has increased	2	3	6	5	13	13	20	26	9	2	6.4	269
Citizen's confidence in the electoral register has increased	4	4	10	10	27	10	8	6	1	19	4.8	270
Local politician's confidence in the integrity of the electoral register has increased	2	3	7	6	20	16	10	7	4	25	5.5	270

Table 9.3 Effects of IER on electoral security and the accuracy of the register

The data also allows to investigate the socio-geographical distribution of the effects. We might expect that if IER reduced opportunities for electoral fraud, then the effect would be greater in areas where concerns had been raised. Prior to the implementation of IER, the Electoral Commission published the results of a 'review of electoral vulnerabilities in the UK to identify what could be done to improve confidence in the security of our electoral processes' (Electoral Commission 2014a, 9). This identified 16 of nearly 400 local authority areas where cases of alleged or suspected case of electoral fraud were

especially high and deemed these to be 'at risk'. These were areas that the Commission identified as being:

> 'often characterised by being densely populated with a transient population, a high number of multiple occupancy houses and a previous history of allegations of electoral fraud… these areas are also often home to communities with a diverse range of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds' (Electoral Commission 2014a, 16).

Subsequent to this, a research report also found evidence that vulnerabilities for electoral fraud were greater in Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities (Sobolewska et al. 2015). If IER had reduced opportunities for electoral fraud more in the 'at risk' areas then we might imply support the hypothesis that these were the causes of electoral fraud and the specific effects of IER in resolving these vulnerabilities.

The data does not seem to support this. Of the 16 'at risk' local authorities, six responded to the survey (Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Derby, Peterborough, Walsall). The mean response was similar for this group (6.57) to all other responses (6.7) on the question of whether opportunities for electoral fraud had been reduced.

We can also compare responses in urban areas against those in more rural or sub-urban areas. The local government structure provides a good proxy for this. Metropolitan and London Borough Councils are typically urban areas, densely populated with a transient population. Unitary and District authorities are typically the smaller more rural authority. A bivariate analysis of the relationship revealed a Pearson's coefficient did not reveal a relationship, however.

Lastly, we can compare electoral officials' responses between those areas which have large Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. Information is drawn from the 2011 on the percentage of the population within a local authority area that self-identifies as being Pakistani and Bangladeshi. There appears to be little statistical relationship, however. Bivariate analysis of the relationship between the Pakistani population and a perceived reduction in opportunities for electoral fraud is revealed a Pearson's coefficient of -0.031. The value for the Bangladeshi community was -0.011. Neither value was statistically significant. In short, there is no real evidence that this plugged a problem with electoral fraud in these communities, perhaps because any problem was not specific to these areas as first thought.

9.8.2 Effects on completeness and inclusiveness

The second theme of interest was whether the new process would make registration more bureaucratic and negatively affect the completeness of the electoral register. The picture here was more mixed. Respondents were asked whether completeness had declined as a result of the reforms on a scale of 1 to 9. Figure 9.1 shows that there was a very broad distribution in answer to this question with a mean score was 4.9.
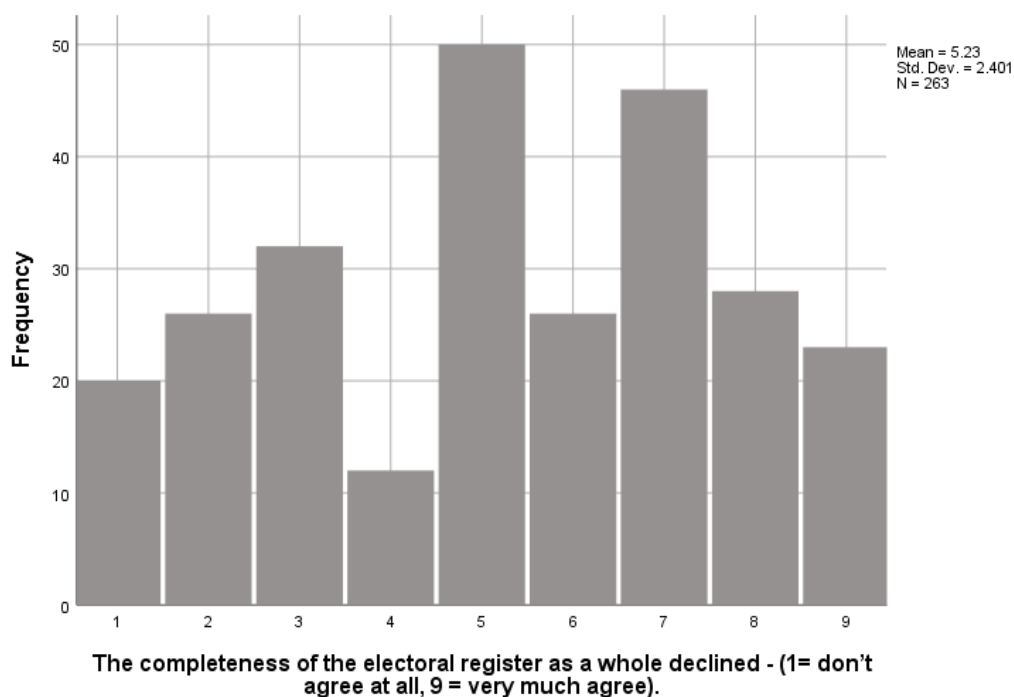

Figure 9.1: The effects of IER on the completeness of the electoral register

Unpacking the qualitative comments helps to interpret this data. Electoral officials stressed that the online registration system had made electoral registration much easier. This was commonly described as 'a massive step forward in the democratic process' and having made the 'process vastly more accessible'. However, there was a heavy caveat, that the process was more complex for those who failed the DWP record check and some groups were finding the process especially difficult.

> 'The process is difficult for those that don't and have to provide evidence or for vulnerable people such as those in care homes.'

Qualitative comments suggested that many electoral officials experienced 'a few' problems with citizens providing identifiers. One response was typical of many, saying that: 'original concerns that people would be concerned about the provision of NiNO and DoB have proven incorrect'. However, others said that: 'there is a reluctance to provide NI numbers,' or that:

> Concern isn't about what electoral services departments do with the information. Rather, it has made collection of the necessary information on the doorstep more difficult with individuals being understandably reluctant to give this to a stranger at the door.

While the online process was thought to have generally made the process smoother, the new two-stage canvass process had made electoral registration more bureaucratic. As one official argued: 'the disengaged now have two processes to disengage with!' Others suggested that:

> It is incomprehensible to many why we would send out a HEF form and not register them from the information provided.

One large northern unitary authority said that they had 7,500 'pending electors' – those who had been identified as being present on a HER form but had not completed an individual form. This was 4% of their potential electorate. Another responded explained that 'there always used to be the one person in a household that would take responsibility, now it is down to individuals apathy sets in'. Other authorities thought that a decline in completeness has been avoided because of the additional work and resources.

Analysis of the quantitative replies reveals socio-geographic variations. *An urban – rural split* might be expected. Urban areas have been reported to have higher population churns which can make the register more difficult to compile (James 2014). Table 9.5 compares the means for different local authority areas. It does suggest that there was a higher-drop in completeness levels in the London boroughs, but not in the Metropolitan areas, which, counter-intuitively was much less affected. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare completeness effects for London boroughs and District councils. There was significance at the 90% confidence interval for London boroughs (M = 6.15, SD = 2.13) and districts (M=5.12, SD =2.36; t (157) = -1.84, p = 0.68, two-tailed).

Type of authority	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
District council	5.1	139	2.4
Unitary authority	5.5	46	2.4

London borough	6.2	20	2.1
Metropolitan district	4.8	29	2.8
Total	5.3	235	2.4

Table 9.4: the effects of IER on completeness by local authority type

The survey also provided information about whether specific groups had been adversely affected more than others. Table 9.5 compares the proportion of people in agreement and disagreement that completeness or accessibility had been adversely affected for specific groups.[8] Answers were very centrally located, and there were many respondents provided qualitative answers to suggest the case for positive and negative effects for both groups. This divided opinion probably reflects the multiple causal mechanisms in place because of the number of simultaneous reforms undertaken. Overall, it seems that completeness was negatively affected and that students were the principally affected group with a net agreement of +18.5 percentage points. Students were described as being 'notoriously difficult to register, and the requirement to register individually made this significantly harder'. However, many areas were unaffected by a decline in completeness because they had no universities in their local authority, and there was a higher standard deviation compared to other categories. Attainers were also less likely to register because 'as it is their responsibility to register now, rather than their parents' and they 'still do not know their NI numbers which delays their registration'. BME groups were broadly not thought to have been as affected and accessibility for disabled and non-native speakers was not affected either. One respondent remarking that they visited all properties at canvass and have found 'our BME population quite proactive compared to some non BME areas'. Meanwhile, non-English speakers and those with disabilities were argued to have been the beneficiaries of the reforms because it was online.

Completeness of the register declining		Percentage in agreement	Percentage in disagreement	Net agreement
	Overall	46.8	34.2	12.6
	Attainers	44.1	43.0	1.1
	Young people	40.3	40.3	0.0
	Students	49.5	31.0	18.5

[8] The respondents who selected 1-4 were assumed to disagree – those who chose 6-9 were interpreted to agree..

	BME groups	35.3	38.6	-3.3
Accessibility being reduced for				
	Disability	35.7	48.5	-12.8
	Non-native speakers	31.0	50.0	-19.0

Table 9.5: The effects of IER on the completeness of the electoral register and accessibility of the electoral registration process

9.8.3 Increased costs and administrative burden

The effects on the resources involved in compiling the electoral register were much clearer. Electoral officials were asked whether they had to employ new staff, faced additional IT costs, stationary/postage costs or higher costs in general. Figure 9.2 provides the mean of these responses on a (1-9 scale). All answers were well above the mid—point on the scale (5). The additional stationary and postage costs received the highest score.
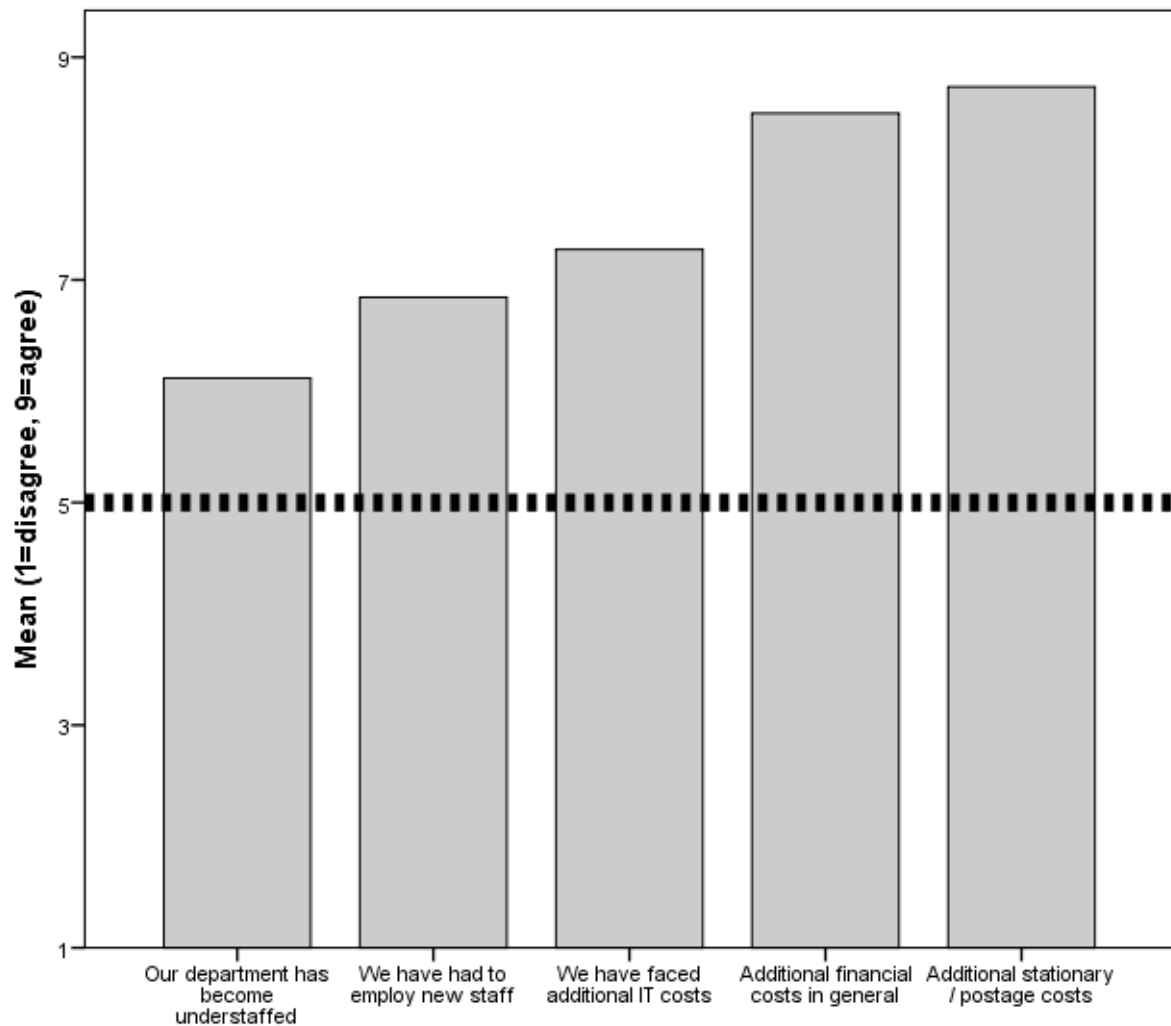
Figure 9.2. The effects of IER on the costs of running electoral registration

In their qualitative comments, respondents most often explained that temporary staff were taken on, especially during 'peak periods' to cover the additional work involved. Some authorities, however, added permanent staff, with one authority employing two additional full-time staff. This was important to so that 'we have maintained a reasonable level of work in the team with no one being unreasonably overworked'. In other cases the contracted hours of existing staff were extended or employees 'just had to work longer hours.' The government provided additional funds to local authorities to implementing IER but some expressed concern about what would happen when this transitional funding expired.

> The costs of this will continue after the additional government funding ceases. This is a concern as there is no local funding. The outcome is likely to be that we will be forced to allow the accuracy of the register to decline because we cannot afford the additional resources to maintain it at its current high level of accuracy.

Many officials, who had not been allocated additional staff, argued that this was because the funds were not available, perhaps because of other cuts to their services. The volume of letters that electoral officials had to send out had increased postal costs by 'astronomical degree.' One official raised concerns that:

> A large number of additional mailouts are now mandatorily required, and as it costs this authority about £100k for each of these it is a major concern how this will be funded in the future.

9.8.4 Workplace conditions and employee outcomes

The survey was unanimous that there were considerable effects on the workplace setting within electoral services and individual employees. As noted above, the existing literature on voter registration reform has focused purely on the effects on electoral participation and fraud. The electoral officials themselves are given no importance since they are simply part of the bureaucratic machine that was expected to deliver the outcomes in a machine-like way. Yet the effects on employees matter for two core reasons. Firstly, state employees make up a considerable proportion of the population. The state therefore has a duty of care towards employees. Workers are more than 'units of labour'. They are people, individuals, and members of teams and communities whose happiness matters in and of itself. Secondly, the consequentialist case is that employee outcomes matter because they cause other problems. For example, job satisfaction is thought to affect organisational performance, staff turnover and intension to quit (Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes 2002; Judge et al. 2001; Saari and Judge 2004; Wegge et al. 2007). For this reason, employee outcomes are given formal weight in the PROSeS method used to assess electoral management set out in chapter 3.

Measures were developed to identify the effects on a number of key properties of workplace conditions and employee outcomes based on Gould-Williams et al.'s (2014) study of local government employees. The concepts behind each measure are discussed in the next chapter. Each measure was assessed using a 1-9 point Likert scale asking respondents whether they agreed with a particular question. An additive index score was created and divided by the number of measures. Cronbach's alpha calculated to test for the reliability of the new scale where measures were combined and a high reliability was found with values firmly over .8 (see Table 9.6).

Concept	Measures	Cronbach's alpha
Workplace environment	'Our department has become understaffed'	-
Work overload	'I have been required to work very intensively' 'I have been put under pressure to work long hours' 'I have been required to do too much work to do everything well'	.879
Civic duty	'Less willing to work beyond your usual hours for no further pay'	-
Job satisfaction	'Enjoy your job more' [reversed]	-
Intension to quit	'Think about leaving your job at some point in the last year'	-
Stress	'Negatively affected your quality of life (e.g. family or social activities)' 'Feeling unable to continue in your job due to work pressures' 'Confronted with problems that you cannot do much about'	.807

Table 9.6: Measures of workplace conditions and employee experiences

Figure 9.3 provides a boxplot of the effects of IER on employee outcomes. The box represents the interquartile range of 50 per cent of the cases. The line in the middle of the box represents the median and the whiskers outline the smallest and highest values. The outcomes were ranked according to the median value. The figure shows that workload and workplace environment was generally negatively. These effects are described in more detail next, in combination with the qualitative comments.
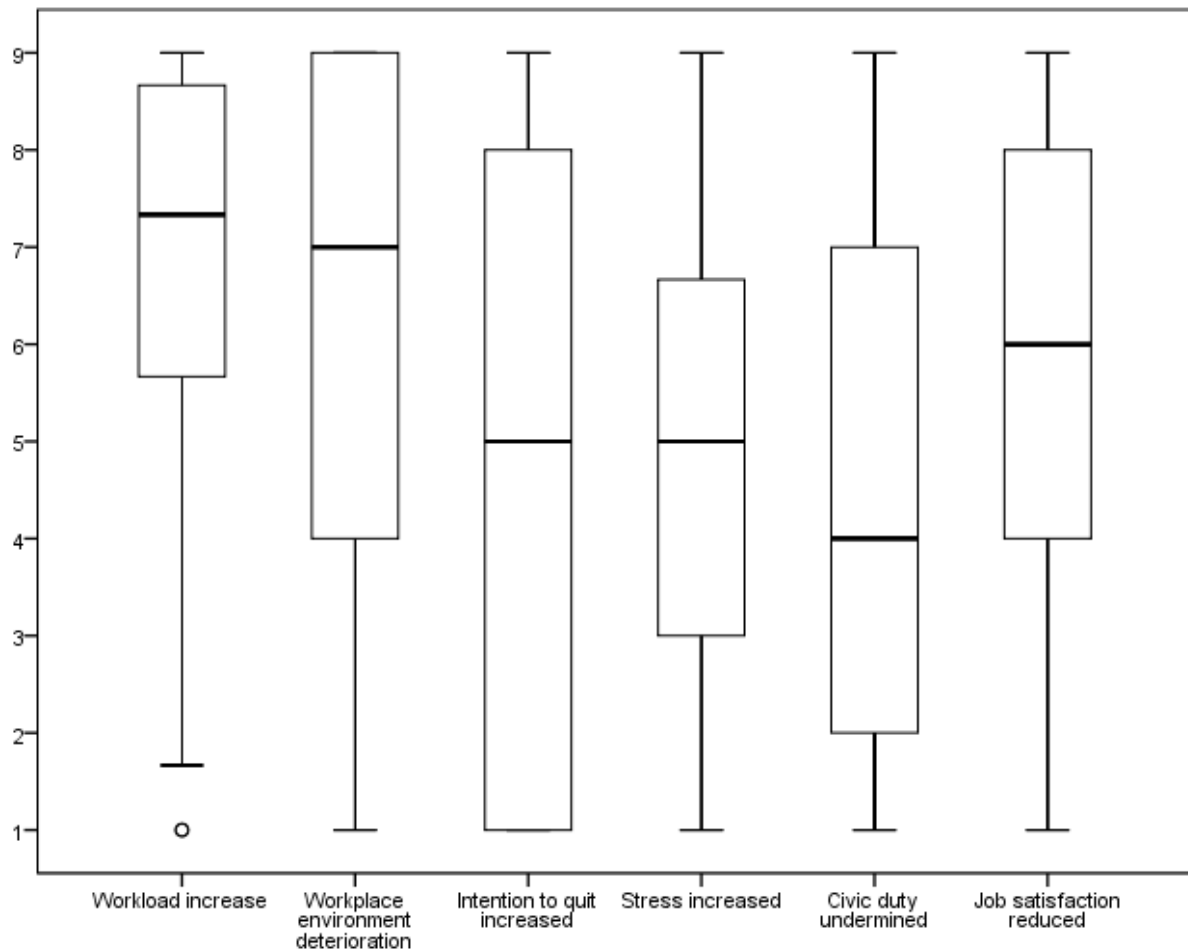
Figure 9.3: The effect of IER on employee outcomes

9.8.5 Workload and workplace environment

Many respondents noted that they, or their colleagues, had had their workload increase and had needed to work additional in hours during the transition to IER:

> Workloads have increased significantly and consistently - IER is an ongoing process and does not
> stop at election time!

Some respondents suggested that the increase in workload from the new system might be temporary as there is a process of adjustment or 'a phase of learning and development'. 'Stress points' were also highly seasonal, peaking during the annual canvass or in advance of an election:

In the run up to the combined General/Local/Parish elections, two members of staff worked in excess of 400 hours each (late nights, weekends and bank holidays), over and above the normal working hours.

Others suggested that while they had managed so far, this was as a result of short-term government funding and that 'we will be significantly understaffed when this post is no longer funded.' As a consequence, other activities were being culled such as 'follow-up visits to non-responding addresses and electors'. A minimalist approach would therefore be taken:

'we have to concentrate on just getting the job done rather than looking at best practice etc. It is reactive rather than proactive with little opportunity to forward plan or review properly.'

The working environment was also affecting managerial and staff relations, levels of absenteeism and physical working conditions.

'Colleagues have become less tolerant of each other & distrust the management.'
'Moodiness, arguments and absences have increased noticeably'
'Very cramped for space to work and storage due to very large forms and double envelopes'
'Staff morale in the department is low due to additional pressures for the same pay'
'Taking holidays has also been a near impossible exercise during the last two years'.
'Tensions between staff members have been increased and absence, particularly through stress related illness, has increased. Morale is low as staff feel a lack of confidence in their abilities caused by constant change on top of heavy workloads.'

Table 9.7: Examples of changed workplace environment

9.8.6 Job satisfaction

Some reflected positively that they enjoyed the 'challenge' of IER. Others pointed out that the job was now about 'survival' rather than 'quality' and that the additional work had undermined their enjoyment.

I still enjoy elections side not so much registration side (sic).

9.8.7 Stress

Stress was much less affected at the aggregate level with a median value of 5. But at an individual level – there were significant number of people claiming to be adversely affected. Many respondents reported that the job had negatively affected their quality of life.

'At peak times, yes. Not leaving the office until midnight during period of high activity did not go down well.'

'There were some days when I barely saw my family in the run up to May 2015 elections'

'I had to visit my doctor for anxiety'

Some thought that increased stress levels were brought about during pinch points in the transition to IER, such as the software changes in 2014, but while 'it has undoubtedly been very hard' they could now 'see the light at the end of the tunnel'. Software weaknesses and unclear legislation added to stress levels. Stress had also brought about increased staff sickness in some cases:

'Combined with the pressures of elections has increased staff sickness absence which has put additional pressures on remaining staff'

9.8.8 Intention to quit

The median value for intension to quit was also centrally located, but there was a very wide distribution. This suggests that while for many, IER had no impact on their intension to leave their post, it was a major trigger for some. In fact, almost half (48.9 per cent) of respondents selected 6-9 on the scale. One respondent said that 'My wife wanted me to leave!!!!!!' while another said that quitting was not an option because they had a 'wife and two kids to feed'.

9.8.9 Civic duty

Civic duty was much less affected with a median value of 4. As one put it: 'it is a requirement of my job to be willing to work beyond core hours at key points'. For another: 'I would always work additional

hours as required to undertake role satisfactorily.' Electoral officials, in general, did not suggest that they were now less likely to work more without pay. This suggests that the levels of civic ethos amongst UK electoral officials is high. However, they equally stressed that it could be improved and that many had been compensated for their additional work:

> We are professional and have been suitably recompensed and supported. If I was not then there would be issues. The same applies to the whole team.

And, indeed, some did express frustrations that may affect their longer-term willingness to go above and beyond:

> 'Last year I lost 164hrs flexi working hours'

> 'New canvass process is de-motivating. There is a lack of understanding from council management about the demands of IER both on staff time and on department budgets.'

This again, reinforces the point that although the averages might be centrally located, the presence of some extreme values on a scale can demonstrate that there is a causal process in place.

9.9 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the traditional academic and policy focus on reforms made to the electoral process have some inherent weaknesses. Reforms to electoral registration and polling processes tend to only be evaluated in terms of whether they reduce opportunities for electoral fraud or increase participation. There are broader consequences on the functioning of organisations, however, including on resources and employees. This case study of the introduction of IER shows that although it was effective in terms of increasing the accuracy of the register and reducing opportunities for electoral fraud (the extent to which there was any fraud, is questionable), it made electoral registration a much more resource in intensive process and had negative effects on the employee outcomes. This has academic and policy implications. Both future researchers and policy makers need to be more aware of the broader effects of reforms. Under-taking risk assessments and using bottom-up learning about the likely intended consequences can help to mitigate many of the negative consequences.

Bibliography

Alvarez, Michael R, and D.E. Sinclair. 2004. "Who Overvotes, Who Undervotes, Using Punchcards? Evidence from Los Angeles County." *Political Research Quarterly,* 57, (1), p. 15-24.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, and M. David Konisky. 2005. "The Introduction of Voter Registration and Its Effect on Turnout." *Political Analysis,* 14, (1), p. 83-100.

Association of Electoral Administrators. 2010. *Press Release – Individual electoral registration*, *Norwich*. Association of Electoral Administrators.

Atkeson, Lonna Rae, Lisa Ann Bryant, Thad E. Hall, Kyle Saunders, and Michael Alvarez. 2010. "A new barrier to participation: Heterogeneous application of voter identification policies." *Electoral Studies,* 29, (1), p. 66-73.

Atkeson, Lonna Rae, and Kyle L. Saunders. 2007. "The Effect of Election Administration on Voter Confidence: A Local Matter?"*. PS: Political Science & Politics,* 40, (4), p. 655-60.

Barreto, Matt A., Stephen A. Nuno, and Gabriel R. Sanchez. 2009. "The Disproportionate Impact of Voter-ID Requirements on the Electorate-New Evidence from Indiana." *PS: Political Science and Politics,* 42, (1), p. 111-5.

Birch, Sarah, and Bob Watt. 2004. "Remote Electronic Voting: free fair and secret?"*. POLITICAL QUARTERLY,* 75, (1), p. 60-72.

BIte the Ballot. 2019. Case Studies. https://www.bitetheballot.co.uk/case-study.

Black, Jerome H. 2000. "The National Register of Electors: Raising Questions About the New Approach to Voter Registration in Canada." *Policy Matters,* 1, (10), p. 1-126.

———. 2003. *From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors: An Account and an Evaluation*. Vol. 9, *Choices*. Quebec: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 3, (2), p. 77-101.

———. 2012. "Thematic Analysis." In *The Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, edited by H. Cooper. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Committee on Standards in Public Life. 2007. *Eleventh Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life: Review of The Electoral Commission*. London: HMSO.

Deputy Prime Minister. 2011. *Individual Electoral Registration*. London: The Stationary Office.

Electoral Commission. 2003. *Voting for Change*. London: Electoral Commission.

———. 2014a. *Electoral fraud in the UK: Final report and recommendations*. London: Electoral Commission.

———. 2014b. *The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain* London: Electoral Commission.

———. 2016a. *Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain*. London: Electoral Commission.

———. 2016b. *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain*. London: Electoral Commission.

Electoral Reform Society. 2011. *Missing Millions Individual Electoral Registration Roundtable*. London: Electoral Reform Society.

Garnett, Holly Ann. 2019. "Evaluating Online Registration: The Canadian Case." *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy,* 18, (1), p. 78–92.

Gould-Williams, Julian S., Paul Bottomley, Tom Redman, Ed Snape, David J Bishop, Thanawut Limpanitgul, and Ahmed Mohammed Sayed Mostafa. 2014. "Civic duty and employee outcomes: Do high commitment human resource practices and work overload matter?"*. Public Administration,* 92, (4), p. 937-53.

Griffeth, Rodger W, Peter W Hom, and Stefan Gaertner. 2000. "A meta-analysis of antecedents and correlates of employee turnover: Update, moderator tests, and research implications for the next millennium." *Journal of management,* 26, (3), p. 463-88.

Harris, Joseph P. 1934. *Election Administration in the U.S.* Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company.

Harter, James K, Frank L Schmidt, and Theodore L Hayes. 2002. "Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: a meta-analysis." *Journal of applied psychology,* 87, (2), p. 268.

Hasen, Richard L. 2012. *The voting wars: From Florida 2000 to the next election meltdown*. Grand Rapids, MI: Yale University Press.

Hope Not Hate. 2015. *Britain's Missing Voters: Individual Electoral Registration and the Boundary Review*. London: Hope Not Hate.

James, Toby S. 2010a. "Electoral Administration and Voter Turnout: Towards an International Public Policy Continuum." *Representation,* 45, (4), p. 369-89.

———. 2010b. "Electoral modernisation or elite statecraft? Electoral administration in the U.K. 1997-2007." *BRITISH POLITICS,* 5, (2), p. 179-201.

———. 2011a. "Fewer 'costs,' more votes? UK Innovations in Electoral Administration 2000-2007 and their effect on voter turnout." *Election Law Journal,* 10, (1), p. 37-52.

———. 2011b. *The Impact of Individual Electoral Registration on British Elections - Evidence to the The Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee*. London: House of Commons.

———. 2014. "Electoral Management in Britain." In *Advancing Electoral Integrity*, edited by Pippa Norris, Richard Frank and Ferran Matinez I Coma, 135-64. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2016. "The growing electoral registration crisis." *Eastminster*, 24th February 2016. http://www.ueapolitics.org/2016/02/24/2268/.

Judge, Timothy A, Carl J Thoresen, Joyce E Bono, and Gregory K Patton. 2001. "The job satisfaction–job performance relationship: A qualitative and quantitative review." *Psychological bulletin,* 127, (3), p. 376-407.

Kickbusch, Jari. 2015. "Estonia E-votes Despite Cyber Security Concerns." *Baltic Times*, 3rd April 2015. https://www.baltictimes.com/estonia_e-votes_despite_cyber_security_concerns/.

Massicotte, Louis, Andre Blais, and Antoine Yoshinaka. 2004. *Establishing the Rules of the Game*. London and Toronto: Buffalo and University of Toronto Press.

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. 2005. *United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland General Election 2005 Assessment Mission Report*. Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. 2004. *Seventh Report of Session 2003–04: Postal Voting* London: ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee.

Saari, Lise M., and Timothy A. Judge. 2004. "Employee attitudes and job satisfaction." *Human Resource Management,* 43, (4), p. 395-407.

Sayer, A. 2010. *Method in Social Sciences*. Revised Second Edition ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

Select Committe on Political and Consitutional Reform. 2011. *Individual Electoral Registration and Electoral Administration* London: The Stationary Office.

Sobolewska, Maria, Stuart Wilks-Heeg, Eleanor Hill, and Magna Borkowska. 2015. *Understanding electoral fraud vulnerability in Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin communities in England. A view of local political activists*. Manchester and Liverpool: Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity.

Stewart, John. 2006. "A Banana Republic? The Investigation into Electoral Fraud by the Birmingham Election Court." *Parliamentary Affairs,* 59, (4), p. 654-67.

Wegge, Jürgen, Klaus-Helmut Schmidt, Carole Parkes, and Rolf Van Dick. 2007. "Taking a sickie: Job satisfaction and job involvement as interactive predictors of absenteeism in a public organization." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* 80, (1), p. 77-89.

Wilks-Heeg, Stuart. 2008. *Purity of Elections in the UK: Causes for Concern*. York: Joseph Rowntree Trust.

———. 2009. "Treating Voters as an Afterthought? The Legacies of a Decade of Electoral Modernisation in the United Kingdom." *POLITICAL QUARTERLY,* 80, (1), p. 101-10.

———. 2012. *A literature review for the Cabinet Office Electoral Registration Transformation Programme*. London: Cabinet Office.

Wolfinger, Raymond E., Benjamin Highton, and Megan Mullin. 2005. "How Postregistration Laws Affect the Turnout of Citizens Registered to Vote." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly,* 5, (1), p. 1-23.

Wolfinger, Raymond E., and Steven J. Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.