Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

Reform of electoral law and practice

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- Works with public services to access, generate, evaluate and apply evidence about what works in addressing key economic and societal challenges; and

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Contents

Summary

- This report brings together evidence on several areas of electoral administration reform.

- It draws on international evidence on how changes in electoral administration have affected turnout, to inform Welsh Government decisions in this area and suggest possible areas of improvement.

- There were four areas of focus: early voting, innovative electoral practices, candidate and agent safety, and campaign financing and spending. The role of electoral management bodies in these areas was also analysed.

- Early voting has potential to modestly increase turnout if combined with other measures, such as same-day registration. Those people in older age groups, with higher levels of political interest, education, and income are most likely to use early voting.

- Other innovative practices, such as flexible voting, mobile voting, and improvements in registration practices have shown minor effects on voter turnout, although the research in this field is not clear. Postal voting is the type of innovative practice that has demonstrated the strongest impact on increasing participation.

- Almost all research into candidate and agent safety is focussed on gender and politics. The evidence shows that violence experienced by political actors is gendered and racialised which should be considered when undertaking prevention measures.

- There is some evidence indicating that the possibility of violence is factored into the decision of women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds to go through with a candidacy, but the importance of this factor is unclear.

- There is ample space for the Welsh Government to improve the provision of election data and transparency. This would require changes in how campaign finance data is collected and submitted by political parties.

Introduction

Elections were devolved to Wales through the Government of Wales Act 2017. Since then, Welsh Ministers have embarked on a programme of electoral reform most noted by the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. These extended the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds and qualifying foreign citizens for Senedd and local government elections, and provided the legislative framework for future electoral reform, particularly around automatic registration and the optional use of a different electoral system (Single Transferable Voting) at local government elections.

In line with an ongoing agenda to ensure that elections in Wales are as accessible as possible, the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) was asked to conduct research on the following four topics to ensure any future legislative developments are informed by robust evidence:

1. Early voting

2. Innovative electoral practices

3. Candidate and agent safety

4. Campaign finances and spending

Changes to electoral administration have the potential to be as impactful as changes to the electoral system on issues such as voter inclusivity, turnout, and concerns about the reliability of electoral processes. This report draws on international evidence (including academic and grey literature) to consider how elections could be effectively reformed in Wales. Over 300 individual pieces of research were analysed.

Early voting

Summary

- Early voting is defined as any voting conducted prior to a set polling day, which can include postal voting.

- It is present in some form in 73 countries. In 14 of these countries, all voters have access to early voting, while 59 offer it to some eligible voters.

- Early voting has the potential to modestly increase voter turnout as it can offer more flexibility in when citizens choose to vote, allowing them to vote around work and care responsibilities.

- The opportunity of early voting tends to be used most often by the elderly, and those with high levels of political interest, knowledge, and partisan ties. However, these are groups who are most likely to be vote in elections regardless of early voting.

- There is some evidence which suggests that early voting is more widely used by rural voters and disabled people, as it increases the opportunity for voting.

Research questions

The evidence on early voting was reviewed in line with the following research questions:

1. What is the evidence regarding early voting and inclusivity and engagement? What frameworks of early voting are in existence?

2. What package of reforms (e.g., postal/proxy voting in conjunction with early voting) are used elsewhere and with what effect?

3. Does early voting encourage voting? If so, does this impact population groups differently?

The aim was to discover how early voting is done elsewhere, what have been the results, and consider how this strategy could be used in Wales.

Introduction

Early voting is defined as any voting conducted prior to a set polling day. It can take place in locations other than usual polling places and includes postal voting. An early voting period typically lasts for a few days prior to an election but can last for weeks. Early voting is present in some form in 73 countries, with different eligibility rules (see Figure 1). Fourteen countries allow all voters access to early voting. For example, in Scandinavian countries, all voters have access to early voting and registration is not required, while in Angola and Portugal, anyone who wishes to vote early must register to do so (IDEA, 2021).

Depending on the country, eligibility includes:

- **Shift workers** (e.g., health workers, police officers)
- **Those away for work** (e.g., pilots, journalists)
- **Members of the Armed Forces**
- **Residents of remote areas** or in areas likely to suffer extreme weather
- **Being away on polling day**
- **Accessibility needs or illness**, including Covid-19, disability, or pregnancy-related issues
- **Senior citizens**
- **Incarcerated people**

Figure 1: Countries with early voting by eligibility
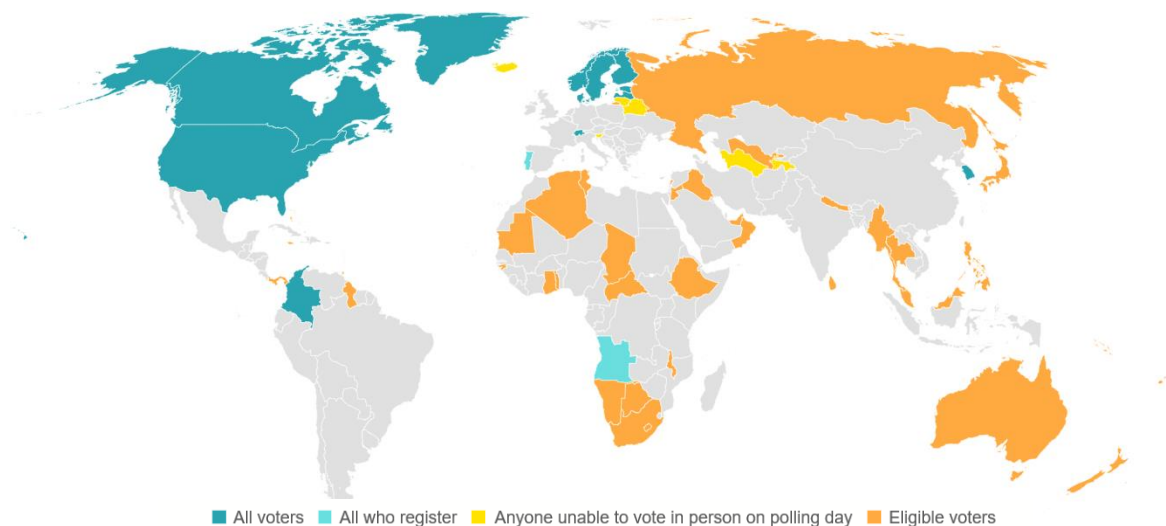
Source: the authors, using data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network

Using early voting to change habits

Voting is a matter of habit and tradition. Individuals vote because it is ingrained in them from previous behaviours and the way they vote is similarly affected (Blais et al., 2007; Kersting, 2007; Rojas and Müller, 2014; Weil, 2017; Wass et al., 2017; Heinmaa and Kalandadze, 2021). Therefore, to evaluate the impact of early voting arrangements on the likelihood to vote, it is important to understand:

- Why individuals are not voting

- If there are systemic reasons for non-voting

- How and for whom the added convenience of early voting would increase political inclusion (Garnett, 2019)

Research in this area aims to understand if early voting reforms change the patterns of behaviour of **habitual voters** (people who will vote regardless of processes offered) and **habitual non-voters** (people who are not in the habit of voting). Habitual non-voters might be alienated from the democratic process not out of preference, but due to factors that affect their day-to-day lives at both an individual and societal level – and both need to be addressed to effectively increase participation. For example, systemic exclusionary processes may result in immigrants, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, young people, people in deprived communities, women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and disabled people being excluded or marginalised from society and politics. Improving accessibility in voting, such as through early voting, might reduce individual barriers to voting, but do not remove systemic reasons that contribute to habitual non-voting.

It is also important that administrative factors that impact voting behaviour, such as whether early voting is permitted, intersect with the systemic factors outlined above as well as other factors discussed in this report – including both personal characteristics (e.g., access to formal education) and other characteristics to do with voting administration (e.g., polling site location). How early voting impacts voting behaviour when these factors are considered together is unclear.

Elderly and young voters

Where early voting is available, it is shown to have a stronger impact on senior citizens, who are more likely to vote in person before polling day (Neeley and Richardson, 2001; Blais et al., 2007; Gronke and Toffey, 2008; Blitzer, 2010; McAllister and Müller, 2018; Sheppard and Beauregard, 2018). However, elderly voters are most likely to vote overall than other age groups, be more attuned to politics, and have stronger party affiliations.

In Swedish elections between 2006-2018, for every 1% increase in the level of 65+ voters, there was a 1.17% increase in early voting. However, when that was tested in the presence of rurality and density (voting sites available per area), age became less relevant (Högström, 2020).

There are several reasons why elderly people might take advantage of early voting. These include the fact that senior citizens tend to be more experienced voters and may prefer avoiding a busy polling station by voting early. The presence of early voting might also impact different groups of voters based on their available free time.

In Australian elections in 2013, early voting ranged between 16% and 19% among those aged 60+ and 11-12% among those aged 18-44 (Rojas and Müller, 2014).

Older voters are more likely to have developed the habit of voting and, in a location where early voting has become the norm, combine those habits. Mobilisation efforts by parties or electoral administrators are also better suited towards elderly voters, with transportation provided to/from and polling stations in care homes (Fullmer, 2015b; Galicki, 2017; Garnett, 2019). Specifically, there is evidence that locations with a larger number of senior residents have more polling stations (Fullmer, 2015b).

In an international analysis of several elections (1999-2015), the probability of early voting for voters 66+ was (Garnett, 2019):

Canada >10%   Germany >35%

Finland >40%   Switzerland >50%

For younger voters, **targeted approaches** to facilitate early voting have yielded positive results (Finseraas and Vernby, 2014; Quilan, 2015). These include transportation for students, voting days that are mindful of university schedules (such as weekend voting), and locating polling stations where young people tend to live. Weekend voting has been trialled to take advantage of students being at home to vote with their families, but this did not have a significant effect on voter turnout (Quilan, 2015).

Education, political interest, and income

Voter characteristics such as education, political knowledge and/or interest, income and age tend to overlap, and have all been shown to influence voting behaviours. Generally, formal education is taken as a proxy for the ability to understand the political process. Political interest and political knowledge are two variables that are often conflated, although they mean different things. Older citizens are argued to be more socially connected than younger citizens, and therefore more interested in politics (Neeley and Richardson, 2001). Citizens are also more likely to vote if they feel engaged and that their vote matters.

The evidence presents mixed results in relation to the impact of early voting across different groups of voters. Some studies have shown that early voters tend to be more politically interested (Blais and Dobrynska, 2007; Gronke and Toffey, 2008; Stein, 1998) whereas others show no difference in the political interest of early and non-early voters (Garnett, 2019; Sheppard and Beauregard, 2018).

Some researchers suggest that individuals with fewer years of formal education might feel marginalised and excluded from politics, while others take it to mean that they do not fully understand or follow the topic (Garnett, 2019; Högström, 2020). The evidence suggests that a higher level of formal education[1] is usually correlated with higher income and higher political interest, and an increased likelihood to vote (Gronke and Toffey, 2008; Miller and Powell, 2016).

The impact of early voting on people with different levels of formal education is mixed. Some evidence shows a negative impact on those with fewer years of formal education (Blais et al., 2007; Finseraas and Vernby, 2014) while other research has found no impact (Fullmer, 2015a; Garnett, 2018a; McAllister and Müller, 2018; Stein, 1998). This suggests that these studies were either unable to separate the effect of different variables or that contextual differences contribute more to the likelihood of early voting than levels of education.

The evidence on early voting and income is also mixed. In Australia, the majority of early votes (including postal votes) come from people of average income (Rojas and Müller, 2014). Other studies found little to no difference in early voting due to income (Neely and Richardson, 2001; Gronke and Toffey, 2008; Högström, 2020).

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[1] The measures of 'education level' varies between studies, which include the highest degree achieved, number of years in school, or if the individual did (or not) have a university degree.

Disabled people and individuals with medical conditions

There is an overall marginalisation of disabled people from politics (Priestly et al., 2016) and a recognised need to expand participation opportunities. Accessibility issues affect those, for example, who are blind, deaf, have cognitive disabilities, or use a wheelchair. There is a lack of awareness of or provision for accessibility needs – for example, an electoral pilot scheme, which included accessibility measures, blocked the wheelchair entrance and parking space (Broxbourne Borough Council electoral pilot scheme, 2006).[2] Currently, there are no accessible ballots[3] for blind and visually impaired voters in the UK.[4] This denotes that all possible experiences need to be accounted for to ensure each voter has the same access to the voting booth.

Similarly to the elderly, individuals with medical conditions and injuries, or pregnant or disabled people, can use early voting measures to more easily plan their voting and make use of fewer queues and quieter times. Countries that have mandatory entitlements allowing these people (in addition to the elderly) to skip queues have improved their polling day experience.[5]

A comparative study of European countries found that countries with lower levels of health are more likely to implement convenience voting measures, including early voting. The study presented data issues, with no conclusive results regarding whether people with self-reported ill-health use early voting more often than those in good health (Wass et al., 2017). Disabled people in the United States vote at lower rates than people without disabilities, but rates increase in states where it is easier to vote by post (Miller and Powell, 2016).[6]

There are very few studies focusing on the voting habits of disabled people, especially once we consider the multiple needs individuals may have. By making

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[2] The *Representation of the People Act 2000* enabled councils to develop their own electoral pilot schemes through 2000 and 2007. The Broxbourne Borough Council pilot occurred in response to this opportunity and trialled early voting, with accessibility measures as a part of the early voting sites.

[3] Since a High Court of Justice ruling in 2019, it was found that Tactile Voting Devices removed a person's right of a secret vote (RNIB, 2019).

[4] There are 17,000 visually impaired individuals registered in Wales:
https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics

[5] Brazil, Law 10048/2000; Decree 5296/2004; Law 10741/2003 (Elderly Bill of Rights); Portugal Decree-Law 58/2016.

[6] There are two types of postal voting in this case: an absentee ballot, which voters need to register for, with some states only allowing certain reasons for absentee voting; and mail-in voting, which are states that have a regular system for postal voting.

voting as easy, convenient, and accessible as possible, including the option of early voting will help to increase the likelihood of voting for this group.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds

The evidence on the relationship between early voting and race/ethnicity is mostly focused on the United States. It shows a link between interest, mobilisation, and early voting, with a statistically significant higher number of black people voting early in the Obama election compared to white voters (Bitzer, 2010). This finding has not, however, been replicated in studies which do not take mobilisation/interest into account, suggesting that the presence of a black presidential candidate mobilised black people to vote early (Stein, 1998; Neely and Richardson, 2001). In Sweden, early voting is associated with higher participation by 'born abroad voters' – a 10% increase in this population of voters sees a 2.9% increase in early voting (Högström, 2020). The study can only offer speculative explanations for this, including increased mobilisation of specific groups.

Workers

Early voting provision means greater flexibility for those who work to vote. Weekend or holiday voting will not be convenient for all working voters, meaning early voting can address this gap (McAllister and Müller, 2018). In Australia, where polling day is on a Saturday and voting is compulsory, early voters include 'machinery operators, labourers, community and personal service workers, and technicians and trade workers', with 9 to 5 workers more likely to vote on polling day (Sheppard and Beauregard, 2018, p. 124).

Rest day voting

Rest day voting refers to voting occurring on a weekend or in some cases, the polling day being made a holiday. The evidence on the effect of weekend voting on turnout is mixed and varies across countries (Massicote et al., 2004; Quinlan, 2015). In some countries, elections are more clearly seen as important cultural events, while in others there is a perception of voting as 'work' and weekend as 'fun', which can disengage voters.

Countries that have made the change to a rest day polling day have tended to combine that with other changes, which makes looking at the impact on voting difficult (Neeley and Richardson, 2001). However, most countries in the world use weekends (either Saturdays or Sundays), as polling days (NDI Elections Calendar).

Location

The literature on the differences between rural and urban voters shows that **distance travelled** and the **density** in number of polling places in an area are two factors that help determine whether voters choose early voting.

There are few studies in this area, but they show little difference between urban and rural voters using early voting (Blais et al., 2007; Finseraas and Vernby, 2014). This could be because the availability of early voting for these groups provides equal access to the process (Fullmer, 2015a; 2015b). This was exemplified in the case of reforms in Portugal which increased early voting access but decreased the number of polling sites for rural areas, negatively impacting those voters (Heinmaa and Kalandadze, 2021). Other behavioural factors will also have an impact – for example, in Sweden, it is suggested that rural voters tend to 'combine' voting with other activities, and thus are more likely to vote early for that reason (Högström, 2020).

Other studies, which focus on distance and ease of access, show that these are, in general, relevant factors considered by voters when deciding whether to vote.

A study in Denmark found that individuals living 5km away from their polling station are 10% less likely to vote than people living less than 1km away; half of that difference is already present at the >1-1.2km mark (Bhatti, 2012).

A natural experiment in Pierce County, Washington State found that ballot boxes being closer to voters increased turnout for those voters by 0.64%, with no significant differences across socio-demographic groups (McGuire et al., 2020).

A study on Swedish elections found that an increase in one voting site per 1,000 voters increased early voting by 3.6% (Högström, 2020).

Discussion and summary

Overall, the evidence shows that early voting has minor positive results on turnout but can improve the experience for citizens in choosing to vote, given work and care responsibilities (Neeley and Richardson, 2001). Marginalised groups tend to be the most affected by these intersecting issues (i.e., unusual work hours and care) and are most likely to benefit from measures to increase electoral participation.

The lack of consistency in the evidence base may be due to the contextual nature of each study. For instance, one study may find that early voting is associated with high participation of rural voters while another does not, which may reflect the number of polling stations available rather than their location. Research has found that early voting can have a high mobilising potential, but it needs to be introduced with other initiatives that take the local context and needs into account, for this potential to be realised (Galicki, 2017). For example, in New Zealand, where early voting has been associated with an increase in turnout, this has been credited to the long period allowed and the permission to register and vote on the same day (Garnett, 2018). Figure 2 shows the potential of different types of mobilisation strategies for early voting.

Figure 2: Continuum of electoral procedures and mobilisation effects

Type of mobilisation	Demobilising potential				Mobilising potential	Control of administration
Stimulation/ visibility	Long early voting period – diminished election day stimulation			Information about early voting sites/ vote centres sent out to voters	High density and high visibility of early voting sites/ vote centres	Effect more under control of election administration
Impulse voting	Voter registration closes before early voting starts	Early voting requires an application in advance or justification	Early voting requires ID	Registration possible at the same time and locations as voting	Automatic registration, no ID requirement	
Cost-efficient targeting of mobilisation activities	No information about who votes where and when – increased uncertainty		Access required prior application and names of people registered to use a specific method are known to campaigns	Information on aggregate socio-demographic and geographical patterns of convenience voting rom past elections available to campaigns	Individual-level information on who already voted available to campaigns	
Improved mobilisation opportunities	Early voting subject to the same campaigning restrictions as election day				Festivals and campaign activities next to an early voting place allowed	
Social pressure	Possible to hide one's non-voting from people who know the voter and from society			Information on individual turnout available to people who know the voter	Individual-level information on who already voted available to the public (but may cause privacy backlash)	Effect less under control of election administration

Source: Galicki, 2017

A reduced turnout on polling day because of early voting is possible, but it is the overall rate of participation across early voting and polling day which is important. To avoid engaging only already interested voters in early voting, and ensure early voting successfully provides for the needs of marginalised or disengaged voters, intersectional factors that impact voting behaviour must be considered. This requires considerations of issues such as:

- Is the polling site conveniently located?

- How long does it take voters to get to the site?

- How difficult is the journey (i.e., do they need to combine modes of transportation)?

- What kind of travel costs will they incur?

- Will voters feel reasonably safe while travelling to and from the polling site?

- How long will the queue be, and will there be available seating?

- Is the site accessible to voters with mobility issues or with disabilities?

Finally, the argument that early voting can be undemocratic must also be considered, as early voters will vote with less information than others, especially if the early voting period is lengthy (Thompson, 2008). Therefore, how long early voting is provided must be considered carefully, and measures must be in place to ensure that early voters can make as equally informed a decision as non-early voters.

Innovative electoral practices

Summary

- Innovative electoral practices include postal voting, flexible voting, offline electronic ballot boxes, and practices to make registration easier and more accessible.

- The evidence on these types of practices has shown either no effect on voter turnout, or modestly positive results.

- More research into non-voters in Wales is required to understand motivations behind voting behaviour – it is unlikely that many voters are abstaining due to lack of convenience.

- Flexible voting should be considered as a way to ease the voting experience of those with mobility issues.

- Voting is a matter of habit and the uptake of postal votes during the Covid-19 pandemic indicates that people were more likely to use it out of need rather than preference.

- Measures that can be put in place to lessen the rate of spoiled postal ballots include:

    o Creating ways for voters to 'fix' spoiled ballots (e.g. being able to return it on polling day and voting in person)

    o Campaigns in schools and television adverts to teach voters how to use their ballots

    o Pre-filled ballots

Research questions

The evidence on innovative electoral practices was reviewed in line with the following five research questions:

1. What evidence (if any) is there that current electoral practice in the UK – as opposed to voter apathy or deliberate abstention – deters participation in elections?

2. What innovations could be introduced to engage voters and enable greater participation in elections? How can these inform the vision for future electoral pilots in Wales?

3. How can the uptake of postal votes be promoted? How can the rate of spoiled postal ballots be reduced?

4. How might it be possible to allow 'flexible voting' i.e. not limited to one specific polling station?

5. What are the risks (if any) in terms of electoral fraud and the security of such innovations?

Introduction

Innovative electoral practices (sometimes also referred to as special voting arrangements) are electoral methods that differ from the traditional 'voter → polling site → queue → ballot paper → box' pathway. These arrangements understand that voters differ in how they live and vote and strive to make political participation and electoral procedures easier and more manageable. The following sections discuss the evidence in relation to postal voting, flexible voting, offline electronic ballot boxes, and measures to make registration easier and more accessible.

Postal voting

Postal voting is a form of early voting since voters submit their ballots in advance of polling day. There are variations between countries regarding when postal ballots can be sent in, who is eligible to vote by post, and whether people need to be registered for this mode of voting. Figure 3 shows countries by whether postal voting is available to all, or restricted to a few groups including:

- **Those living a set distance from the closest polling place** or living away from the allocated polling place (e.g., students or people travelling)

- **Disability or infirmity**, including Covid-19

- **Senior citizens**

- **Incarcerated people**

- **Shift workers**, public servants, Armed Forces

- **People of religious backgrounds** that prevent involvement on polling day

Figure 3: Countries that offer postal voting, by eligibility

No restrictions ■ Some eligibility
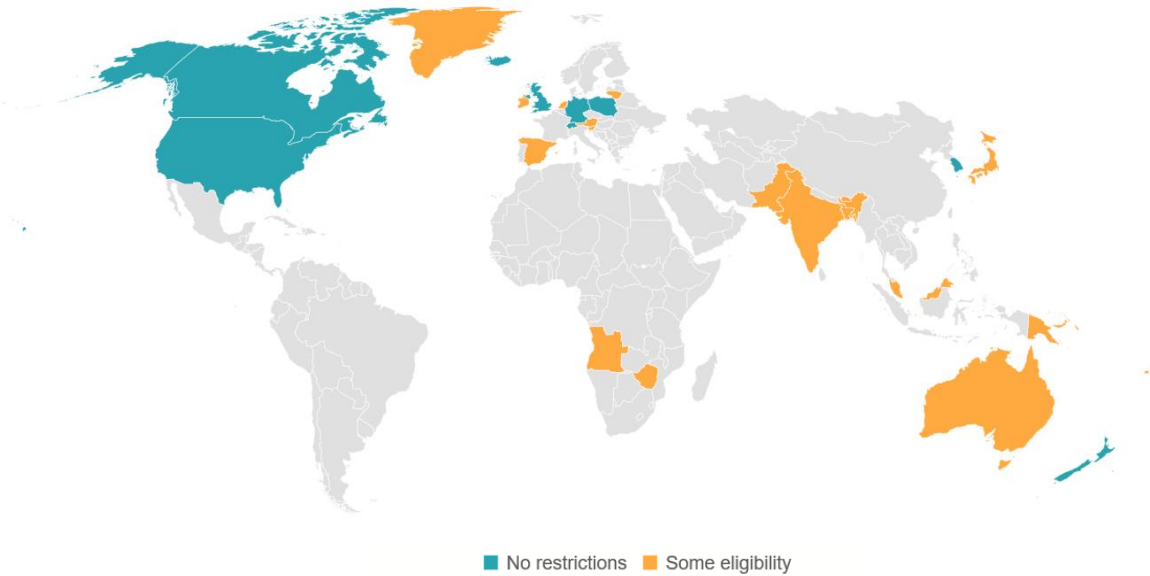
Source: the authors, using data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network

As Figure 3 shows, postal voting is available to all voters in the UK. The proportion of people making use of this arrangement has remained steady over time (Figure 4). Importantly, turnout is higher among those who vote by post than those who vote in person (Table 1).

Figure 4: Postal voting in UK General Elections 2015-2019 - % of the electorate
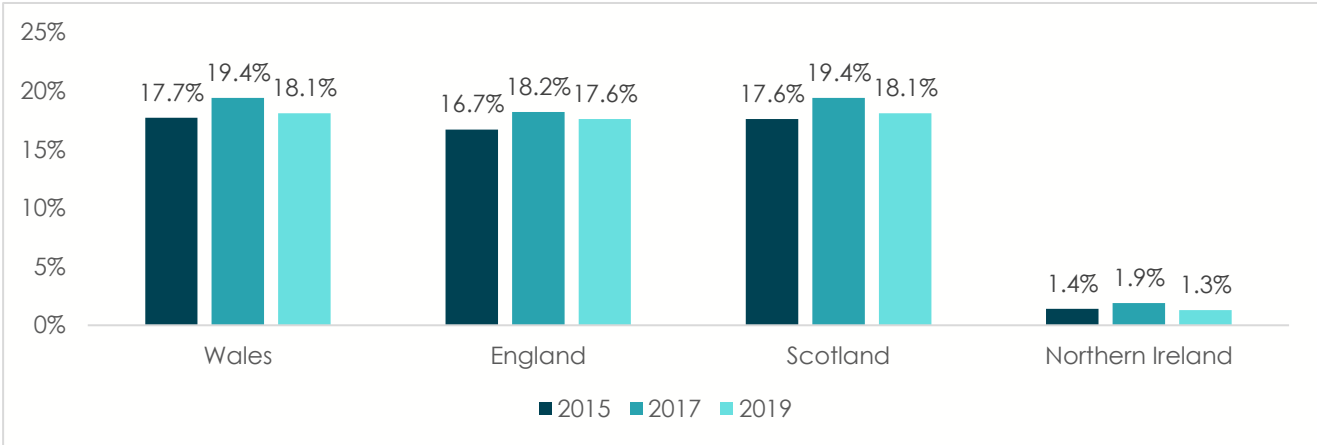
Source: Electoral Commission

Table 1: Postal voting in UK General Elections 2010-2019 - Turnout

	Postal vote turnout	In-person turnout
2019	**84.0%**	64.5%
2017	**85.1%**	65.9%
2015	**85.8%**	63.2%
2010	**83.2%**	62.6%

Source: Electoral Commission

In the 2016 National Assembly for Wales elections, 72.8% of those who requested a postal vote returned their ballots. These accounted for 27.7% of the total of votes cast (282,512 valid votes). In 2021, 458,928 people received postal ballots but data on how many were returned is not yet available. However, the Electoral Commission released a report on the 2021 elections[7] with the following conclusions:

- 50% of first-time postal voters did so due to Covid-19

- 25% of first-time postal voters chose it due to convenience

- 96% said it was easy to understand

- But first-time (15%) and young voters (16-34, 14%) were more likely to say it was difficult

- The rate of rejection was 3.9% compared to 3.2% in 2016

- 10% of first-time voters were dissatisfied with the process (in contrast with 3% of repeat voters)

- 82% of first-time voters said it was easy to get registration information and 75% said the same on how to cast their vote

- 94% and 88% of repeat voters said the same, respectively

[7] **https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/senedd-elections/report-may-2021-elections-wales#voting-at-the-elections**

Feedback from first-time and young voters is a concern and suggests a need to consider whether the ease of voting by post could be improved. Given the possibility that first-time voters could be immigrants due to recent changed in enfranchisement, this issue should be studied more carefully.

Table 2 shows the take-up of postal ballots in the 2019 General Election. Approximately 65% of people in Wales live in areas of fewer than 10,000 people (Statistics for Wales, 2008). Highlighted in Table 2 are the constituencies included in the most sparsely populated areas in Wales – Ceredigion, Ynys Mon, Gwynedd, and Pembrokeshire. This data seems to indicate that there is no pattern of rural voters being more likely to use postal voting.

The table shows that the percentage of postal ballots rejected in this election varied between less than 1% to just over 5%. Figure 5 outlines the reasons for postal ballot rejections. It shows that 18% of voters had an issue with mismatched signatures and 31% had mismatched dates of birth. It may be that these errors stem from issues in the electoral roll and how citizens are registered, as well as potential voters making a mistake on the form (e.g., providing the date of completion rather than their date of birth).

Table 2: Postal ballot statistics relative to valid votes in Wales – General Election 2019

Constituency	Electorate	Valid votes	% Issued postal ballots	% Postal ballots returned	% Postal ballots rejected
Carmarthen East and Dinefwr	57,419	71.41%	24.69%	84.66%	3.68%
Llanelli	60,518	63.18%	23.74%	81.45%	4.08%
Neath	56,419	65.15%	22.45%	82.86%	3.90%
Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire	59,158	71.19%	20.96%	83.84%	2.15%
Cardiff North	68,438	76.95%	20.65%	88.41%	3.84%
Vale of Glamorgan	76,508	71.64%	20.35%	83.63%	2.83%
Aberavon	50,750	62.26%	20.33%	81.58%	3.96%
Gower	61,762	72.02%	20.11%	86.74%	2.13%
Ynys Mon	**51,925**	**70.39%**	**19.39%**	**84.30%**	**1.19%**

Monmouth	67,098	74.84%	19.28%	80.29%	2.72%
Preseli Pembrokeshire	**59,606**	**71.17%**	**19.26%**	**83.35%**	**2.07%**
Ceredigion	**56,250**	**71.30%**	**18.99%**	**79.69%**	**2.71%**
Brecon and Radnorshire	**55,490**	**74.46%**	**18.89%**	**86.56%**	**1.15%**
Torfaen	62,330	59.64%	18.83%	82.04%	2.61%
Bridgend	63,303	66.72%	18.78%	85.11%	0.83%
Blaenau Gwent	50,739	59.56%	18.56%	81.40%	2.14%
Rhondda	50,262	58.97%	18.41%	81.47%	4.44%
Vale of Clwyd	56,649	65.69%	18.25%	86.10%	1.63%
Arfon	**42,215**	**68.87%**	**17.69%**	**85.27%**	**1.73%**
Aberconwy	44,699	71.29%	17.67%	86.29%	1.29%
Swansea West	57,078	62.77%	17.48%	83.37%	3.50%
Cynon Valley	51,134	59.13%	17.42%	83.24%	2.82%
Wrexham	49,737	67.42%	17.38%	86.02%	2.04%
Caerphilly	63,166	63.51%	17.32%	82.93%	1.33%
Cardiff West	68,508	67.40%	17.23%	84.43%	4.13%
Delyn	54,560	70.33%	17.11%	87.62%	1.82%
Clwyd West	57,714	69.66%	16.97%	87.59%	0.90%
Cardiff South and Penarth	78,837	64.16%	16.85%	79.81%	3.17%
Pontypridd	60,327	64.75%	16.74%	83.78%	3.85%
Newport West	66,657	65.16%	16.72%	86.14%	1.88%
Swansea East	58,450	57.45%	16.54%	80.33%	2.36%
Alyn and Deeside	62,789	68.50%	16.45%	86.45%	2.69%
Islwyn	55,423	61.98%	16.21%	78.72%	2.19%
Ogmore	57,581	61.46%	16.17%	82.61%	0.98%
Montgomeryshire	**48,997**	**69.83%**	**15.83%**	**81.01%**	**1.77%**
Clwyd South	53,919	67.33%	15.82%	87.16%	2.04%

Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	56,322	57.25%	15.13%	81.11%	0.36%
Newport East	58,554	61.96%	14.65%	86.03%	4.97%
Dwyfor Meirionnydd	**44,362**	**67.46%**	**14.46%**	**84.60%**	**1.93%**
Cardiff Central	64,037	65.31%	14.26%	84.97%	5.09%
Total	*2,319,690*	*66.49%*	*18.10%*	*83.82%*	*2.52%*

Source: Electoral Commission

Figure 5: Types of postal ballot errors in the General Election 2019
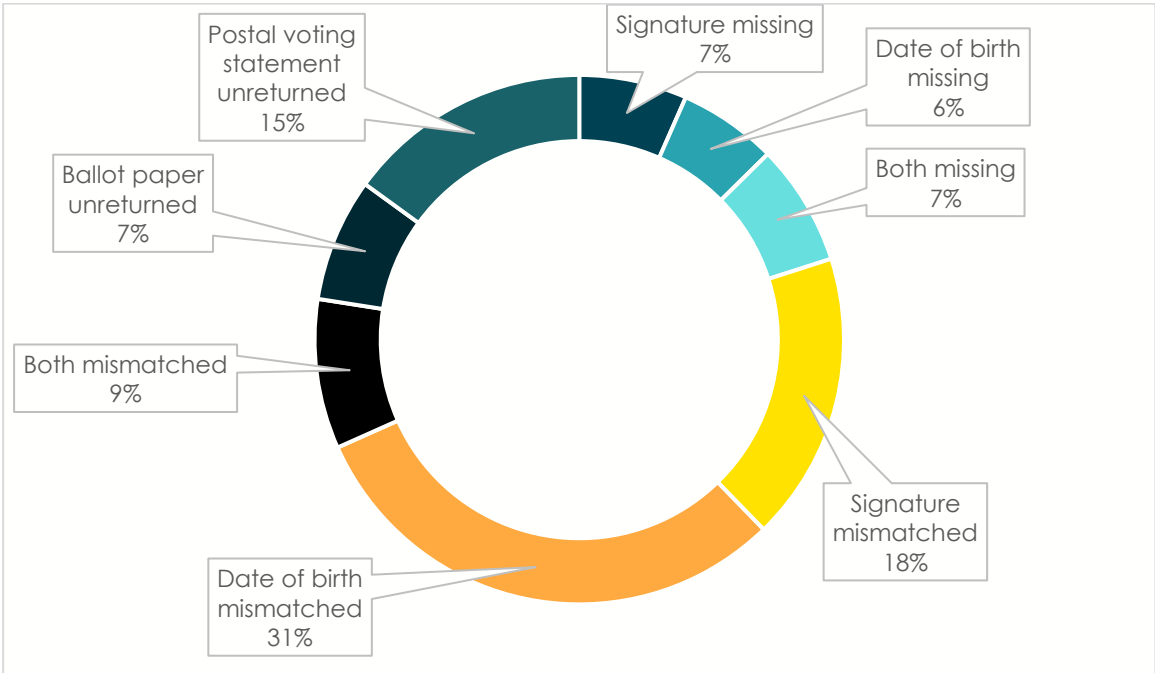
Source: the authors, with data from the Electoral Commission

The experiences of postal voting in other countries are moderately encouraging as they generally show a positive impact on turnout across different social groups (Bechtel and Schmid, 2016; Townsley and Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020). Postal voting is used mostly by people who are already politically interested or who specifically need it, such as the elderly, people in rural areas, disabled people or, based on the increase in the number of Welsh postal voters in the Welsh 2021 elections during the pandemic, people who did not want to go to the polls due to Covid-19. The Electoral Commission's report for the 2021 elections showed that 96% of postal voters believed that the process was simple, and it is possible that this will have an impact on future elections.

In Switzerland, widespread access to postal voting led to roughly 80-90% of the population voting by post (Bechtel and Schmid, 2016; Musial-Karg and Mickiewicz, 2016). Research comparing Swiss cantons and their uptake of postal voting demonstrates a larger increase in turnout in cantons that previously showed lower overall turnout (Luechinger et al., 2007).

Keeping a permanent postal voting register (meaning voters did not need to request postal ballots at every election), in addition to in-person voting, increased turnout between 2.4% to 5% in Colorado, U.S. (Menger et al., 2015). And other research found that pre-filled ballots[8] also increased turnout (Hassel, 2017).

Evidence from UK pilots

Between 2000 and 2007, several UK local authorities conducted electoral administration pilots which included **early voting** and **all-postal voting**[9] and other measures, as detailed in Table 3. Although there was evidence of increased turnout by 50% in some postal voting pilots (James, 2011), the analysis of the overall impact of this arrangement (considering all pilots in the study) on turnout was limited (Rallings et al., 2010). Early voting and all-postal voting were conducted alongside other pilots, hindering adequate evaluation of their independent effects. There is, however, some evidence that voters without cars were more likely to use postal voting. Despite public awareness of the pilots being low, results showed that in comparison to other available methods (internet, TV, phone), postal voting seemed to be the most trusted, relying on habits already present in the population. Postal voting in general might provide a great incentive to less engaged voters, but the Electoral Commission (2006) argues for choice to be maintained.

> The Electoral Commission (2004; 2014) found that:
>
> - People were satisfied with all-postal voting by a margin of two to one with most citing convenience.
>
> - However, postal voting on demand and all-postal ballots suffered from **perceived weaknesses in terms of the integrity of voting**. This view was more prevalent in individuals who prefer in-person voting.

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[8] These come pre-filled with the voter's and the election information, with the voter simply having to make their choice of candidate(s) or issue(s).

[9] All-postal voting means no in-person voting at all.

Table 3: Pilot schemes used in the UK 2000–2007

Election	Changes instigated in procedures
May 2000 English Local Elections	Weekend voting, freepost delivery of election addresses, early voting, electronic counting, extending postal-vote entitlement, all-postal ballot, extending voting hours, mobile voting facility
2001 English Mayoral Elections	All-postal elections
May 2002 English Local Council and Mayoral Elections	All-postal, electronic counting, early voting, multi-channel, telephone, SMS, and remote electronic voting
May 2003 English Local Council	Electronic counting, all-postal voting, internet, SMS, telephone, kiosk, voting hours
June 2004 European and English Local Elections	All-postal elections in four regions
May 2005 General Election	Universal postal voting on demand
May 2006 English Local Elections	Advance voting and electronic counting, plus other administrative changes
May 2007 English Local Elections	Electronic counting, advance voting, internet voting, signing for ballot papers

Source: James, 2011.

There is evidence that postal voting and other measures can be very inclusive of those with mobility issues. Research has shown that 69% of British polling sites are inaccessible in some form (Morris et al., 2002), and postal, internet, telephone, and SMS voting can mitigate that problem by giving voters flexibility in how they vote. However, the adoption of these alternative methods is hindered by concerns over voter privacy.

Flexible voting

Flexible voting is defined as voting in-person outside of a designated polling station. It can, however, take many different forms including:

- Voting in transit – while travelling within the country

- Voting abroad – voting while travelling or residing in another country

- Voting at any polling station in the country

- Voting at any polling station in the electoral area

Voting abroad is the most common form of flexible voting with 177 countries permitting it to some degree (some citizens; all citizens in some elections; all citizens in some locations; or all citizens in all elections).[10]

Innovations that have arisen out of flexible voting arrangements include **Election Day Voting Centres** (EDVCs), **non-traditional polling sites**, and **mobile voting**. All of these flexible voting measures seek to increase a voter's access to the polling station and their opportunities to vote by allowing voters to incorporate voting into their day-to-day lives and make the process easier for them. Another option is extending voting hours, meaning polling stations stay open beyond commercial hours. There are few studies on the impact of extended hours – in Austria it was found to increase turnout (Potrafke and Roesel, 2020), but it did not in Ireland (Quilan, 2015). Some marginally positive results were found in English pilots (James, 2011). Voting hours in Wales are between 7am and 10pm, giving voters ample time to access their polling stations. There were, however, reports of long queues in the 2021 election.[11]

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[10] Some of the impact of flexible voting was discussed under 'Location' in the Early Voting section. This is due to the fact that flexible voting means making distances more manageable for voters, as they have more control over where they vote.

[11] **https:// www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-56766948**

EDVCs are strategically placed to facilitate voting and 'running errands' (Galicki, 2017). They may be specifically dedicated to early voting or not (Fullmer, 2015b; Galicki, 2017). The evidence is mixed with slight increases in turnout (Stein and Vonnahme, 2008; 2012) and with voters reporting poor voting experiences (Chen et al., 2021).

Non-traditional polling sites refer to polling stations placed in locations where people conduct other activities, such as supermarkets, post offices, or schools (Stein, 1998; Finseraas and Vernby, 2014). There is little evidence on the outcomes of these polling places and there are logistical and security concerns that must be considered, such as the safety of poll workers, voters, and ballot boxes, and how these places will function alongside other voting arrangements (i.e. would only students be allowed to vote in the school?)

Mobile voting sees polling stations being placed in locations where people are unable or find it difficult to leave, such as residents in care homes, patients in hospitals, and inmates in the prison system. These may also be available to the individuals who work in these institutions. Individual mobile stations can also go to people's homes. Mobile voting can be a form of early voting. Sixty-four countries offer this in some form; it can make voting easier, but for individuals requiring it in their homes, it always requires pre-registration, which can increase participation costs for the voter.

Extending voting hours sees polling stations staying open beyond commercial hours.

Offline electronic ballot boxes

Offline electronic voting relies on mechanical ballot boxes that are not connected to any ethernet, wi-fi, or Bluetooth networks (see Figure 6). The best-known country to use this voting method is Brazil, partially since 1996 and fully since 2000. As the ballot boxes are offline and function individually, election fraudsters would need to be physically present at every single polling site simultaneously to attempt to hack an election.

When it comes to inclusivity, these devices are highly innovative:

- The keypad uses numbers and braille
- It has sound notifications that let voters know which button they are pushing and when they have finished voting
- Images appear on the screen showing the candidates selected by the voter

Votes are automatically counted *in loco*, with five receipts being printed at the end of voting; then all ballot boxes' memories are taken to the same location for verification and uplink to the central Superior Electoral Court's computer. Official results are reported within a few hours for the whole country.

This system has eliminated electoral fraud in the country, reduced polling station queues to only a few minutes, and enabled disabled voters and voters with learning difficulties to fully participate in elections. It also facilitates vote counting, record-keeping, and data maintenance and access, which is discussed in a later section covering campaign finances and spending.

Figure 6: Brazilian offline electronic ballot box

Source: Brazilian Electoral Superior Court

Making registration easier and more accessible

Registering to vote is compulsory in the UK, under threat of a fine, but it is rarely enforced. Particularly with newly enfranchised populations, such as 16-17 year-olds and qualifying foreign citizens who legally reside in Wales, making sure they understand and feel included in the process is paramount. As Figure 7 indicates,

there is no clear trend as to whether compulsory registration encourages turnout on its own.

Rolling registration is also available in Wales, meaning citizens can register to vote at any time. The Electoral Commission has reported issues with managing registrations around 'peak times', that is, when elections are about to happen or when politicians call for citizens to register. A year-round campaign and signposting on government websites reminding Welsh citizens they are allowed to register at any time might help with this issue.

Figure 7: Countries with compulsory registration (excluding those with compulsory voting) and their voter turnout
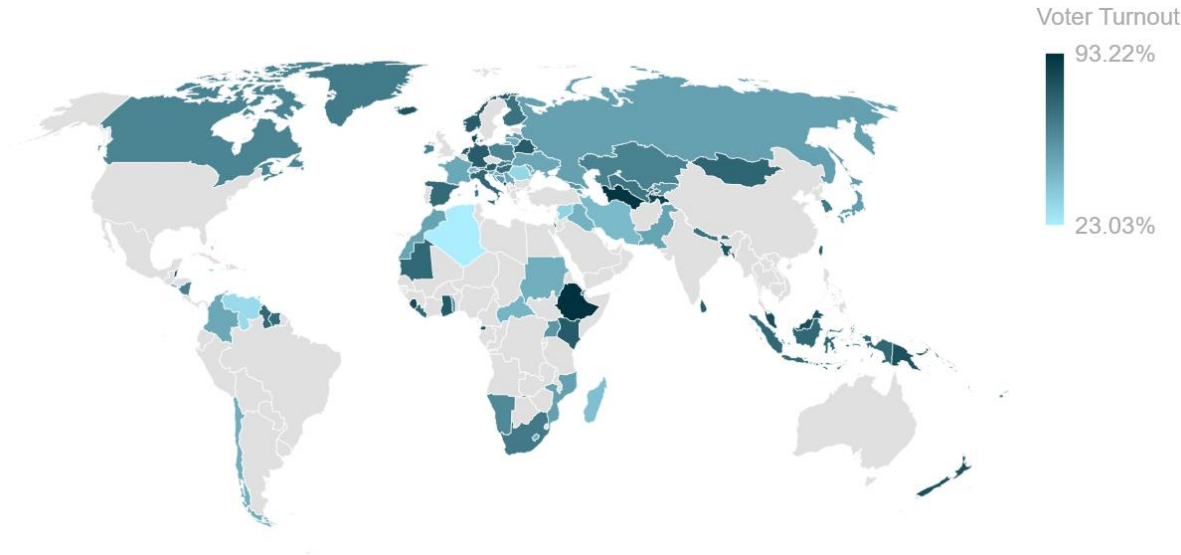
Source: the authors, with data from the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and IDEA; data from latest parliamentary elections, 2014-2021

The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 allow qualifying foreign citizens to vote in Welsh elections. According to the 2011 Census, 5.5% of the population in Wales were not born in the UK. Immigrants to Wales receive the electoral registration form in the post and are directed to fill it out and post it or to do so electronically. It is important to ensure that their language skills allow them full participation – the postal electoral registration is produced in English and Welsh, but is not always available in other languages online. For example, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea offers print-out versions of the electoral registration form in several languages (Figure 8). This could be something replicated by councils across Wales.

Figure 8: Example (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) of electoral registration form in other languages available online
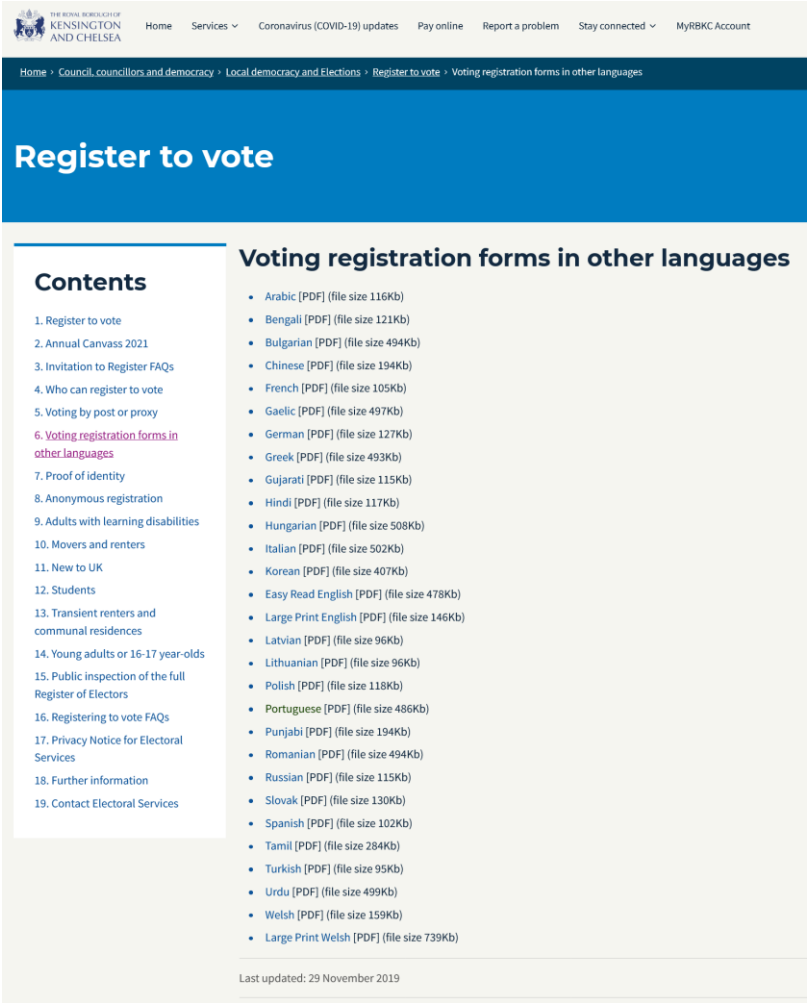
It is crucial to include foreign nationals in law and in practice and show them that Welsh politics has an impact on their lives. Other countries that have taken measures in inclusion and integration have seen enfranchisement as both a tool and outcome in this process. The enfranchisement of foreign nationals does not mean an immediate take-up of voting, as demonstrated in other countries (Ericsson, 2020; Engdahl et al. 2018; Ferwerda et al., 2018; Tossutti, 2007). A Swedish study found the enfranchisement of foreign nationals and their participations in associations requires some other form of action to link these activities and create the link between societal participation and voting (Bevelander and Spång, 2017). Research has found that in places with a more open political structure, there were higher rates of political participation, including voting by foreign nationals, although this does not match the levels of citizens born in that country (Cinalli and Giugni, 2011).

Across both these studies, the following characteristics were considered: command of the country's main language, generation (i.e., descendants of foreign nationals), timing of migration, type of migration, citizenship, gender, age, religion, and employment. Wales has an open policy when it comes to the enfranchisement of foreign nationals, but work can be done by Welsh Government with local councils and the third sector to ensure that knowledge on voting rights is widely distributed. There is also space for information-gathering at this stage, given that Wales has only had one election with this new group.

Another option for improving the registration process is **automatic registration**, which sees citizens being registered to vote whenever they register for other services (James and Bernal, 2021). This can complement compulsory registration and rather than just a financial penalty, citizens might need to register to voter to access certain services. An intervention in the United States that included voter registration along with access to social services was linked to an increase in turnout from people in lower socioeconomic groups (Bhatt et al., 2020). A cross-check system should be implemented to prevent double registrations.

For the 2021 Welsh elections, the Electoral Commission reported that '86% of people were satisfied with the process of registering to vote'. In 2017, for the General Election, 96% of newly registered people used online services; this was particularly true for young people and individuals abroad.

There are several ways of making registration easier and more accessible, with the caveat that this might lead voters to register more than once if they are often prompted to do so and do not remember if they have already registered, leading to additional work for election officials. This issue was found by the Electoral Commission in the 2021 Welsh elections. While registering should be as easy as possible, it must also make electoral management simpler and more streamlined.

The Electoral Commission recommends automatic and rolling registration, reinforcing online channels, as well as automatic registration and wider awareness of the anonymous register for security and accountability (James and Bernal, 2020). A recent report on automatic voter registration in the UK made several recommendations to the UK government on how to develop automatic voter registration (James and Bernal, 2021). The following recommendations apply to Wales:
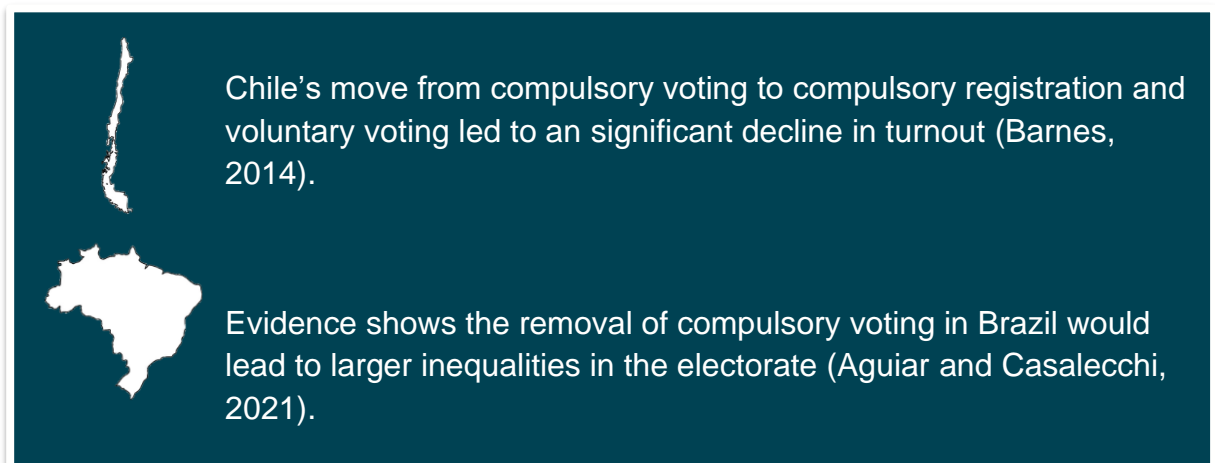
1. Letters to citizens in Wales notifying them of their National Insurance number ahead of their 16th birthday should include a voter registration form (James and Bernal, 2021)

2. Citizens should be able to 'opt-in' and effectively register to vote when accessing Welsh services, with clear instructions of what that means and immediate access to the anonymous register (James and Bernal, 2021)

     a. This should be done with sensitivity, in consideration of people's vulnerable situation when applying for certain services

3. Colleges and universities should be strongly encouraged to have voter registration events on their grounds (James and Bernal, 2021)

4. Universities should be required to build voter registration practices into their annual student enrolment processes (James and Bernal, 2021)

5. Registration 'events' should be conducted with immigrant populations, after consultation with community groups and leaders

6. While the electoral register is public, information on how to be anonymised needs to be made clearly available and the process easily accessible to voters

7. An effort to erase duplicates and ensure the validity of the Welsh electoral roll should be made. This might include an online tool that allows individuals to check their status (Electoral Commission, 2017)

8. Polling day registration should be made available in Wales, allowing individuals to register and vote on the same day, as that has been shown to lessen inequality among groups, especially young voters and renters (Grumbach and Hill, 2021; Knack and White, 2000), and to increase turnout overall (Garnett, 2018)

9. Efforts should be made to maintain a clean roll without forcing citizens to re-enrol

10. Year-round campaign and signposting on government websites should be put in place reminding Welsh citizens they are allowed to register at any time

Although there is little evidence on the connection between maintaining the electoral roll and turnout, there is a clear democratic rationale for having an accurate record of potential electors (Piccolino, 2015; Rosenblatt et al., 2012; Roy, 2012). There is potential to learn from 'best practice'. Costa Rica, for example, has procedures including automatic registration, unified ID, and daily verification of accuracy (González, 2007).

Finally, some countries with compulsory registration also have compulsory voting. Countries that have included this measure have seen an increase in turnout, but there is a debate on whether it is democratic to 'force' someone to vote. Evidence shows that compulsory voting increases turnout and decreases inequalities among voters, although it is not necessarily habit-forming (that is, if it were to be removed,

people might return to not voting) (Gaebler et al., 2020; Hoffman et al., 2017; Jaitman, 2012; Singh, 2011; 2014).

Chile's move from compulsory voting to compulsory registration and voluntary voting led to an significant decline in turnout (Barnes, 2014).

Evidence shows the removal of compulsory voting in Brazil would lead to larger inequalities in the electorate (Aguiar and Casalecchi, 2021).

The democratic argument indicated above is framed from an individual perspective. From a state perspective, compulsory voting ensures that voters have the same voting experience, accountability, and responsiveness, regardless of where or who they are. When registration and voting are compulsory, the onus is on the state to ensure all citizens are able to access these processes.

Discussion and summary

The evidence discussed in this section explores ways of making registration easier for citizens and for election administration. A well-run electoral roll is crucial to ensure the integrity of elections and that the process runs smoothly between and during elections.

While registering is already compulsory in Wales, the government must ensure that registration is inclusive and available to all. It should treat voting as if it were compulsory, with accessible polling stations at various locations, taking into consideration the working habits and care needs of Welsh citizens.

None of the measures presented here are likely to decrease turnout – research has shown them to either have no or modestly positive effects. **Voting and the ways people vote are a matter of habit**, which grow gradually. Care must be taken when introducing reforms alongside an understanding that measures will take time to have an impact, and any impacts may be small. There is also no evidence that the innovative electoral practices analysed here are more conducive to electoral fraud than in-person, polling day voting.

When considering which reforms to introduce, it is important to acknowledge that measuring impact is difficult, especially when multiple reforms are introduced simultaneously. Since there are no 'silver bullets', expectations on outcomes should be defined accordingly. Accessible and safe elections should be the democratic norm and no effort should be spared in their design and maintenance.

Postal voting is already common in Wales, both for UK and Welsh elections. Efforts to expand postal voting need to mindful that it should decrease costs of participation and be easy to accomplish. There need to be safeguards against voters making errors and alternatives for those who mistakenly spoil their ballots. Changes to postal voting should be introduced gradually, to enable information gains and habit-formation; and should consider rural and abroad voters' timelines (IDEA, 2000).

Efforts to make the population more aware of postal voting and expand its use should be part of a package of reforms to increase effectiveness (Herrnson et al., 2019; James, 2011). Other innovative electoral practices discussed include flexible voting, Election Day Voting Centres (EDVCs), non-traditional polling sites, mobile voting, and offline electronic ballot boxes. These take into account that:

- The Welsh population now has diverse working habits and may no longer be attached to the 9 to 5 work schedule

- People have care responsibilities

- Disability affects people differently and may include other aspects other than mobility

- Not all have or want to have cars and/or live in urban environments

Candidate and agent safety

Summary

- Candidate and agent safety is a growing concern in Welsh politics given reports of violence against Welsh politicians.

- Most current research is on women in politics, with some insights on ethnicity and race.

- There is a continuum of violence ranging from, but not limited to, social media abuse to physical attacks. Violence often becomes compounded, meaning the same individual suffers multiple offences.

- Violence due to gender and ethnicity is different from violence due to political differences.

- Where and how violence is factored in the decision to seek election is unclear and more research is required to disentangle this.

Research questions

The evidence on candidate and agent safety was reviewed in line with the following four research questions:

1. What evidence (if any) is there that **individuals in general** or more particularly from **under-represented groups are deterred from seeking election by concerns about their personal safety**?

2. What **measures** could be taken to ensure electoral candidates and agents are adequately protected from intimidation or abuse when campaigning for elections?

3. To what extent could these measures be used to **encourage a more diverse range of candidates** to consider standing for elected office?

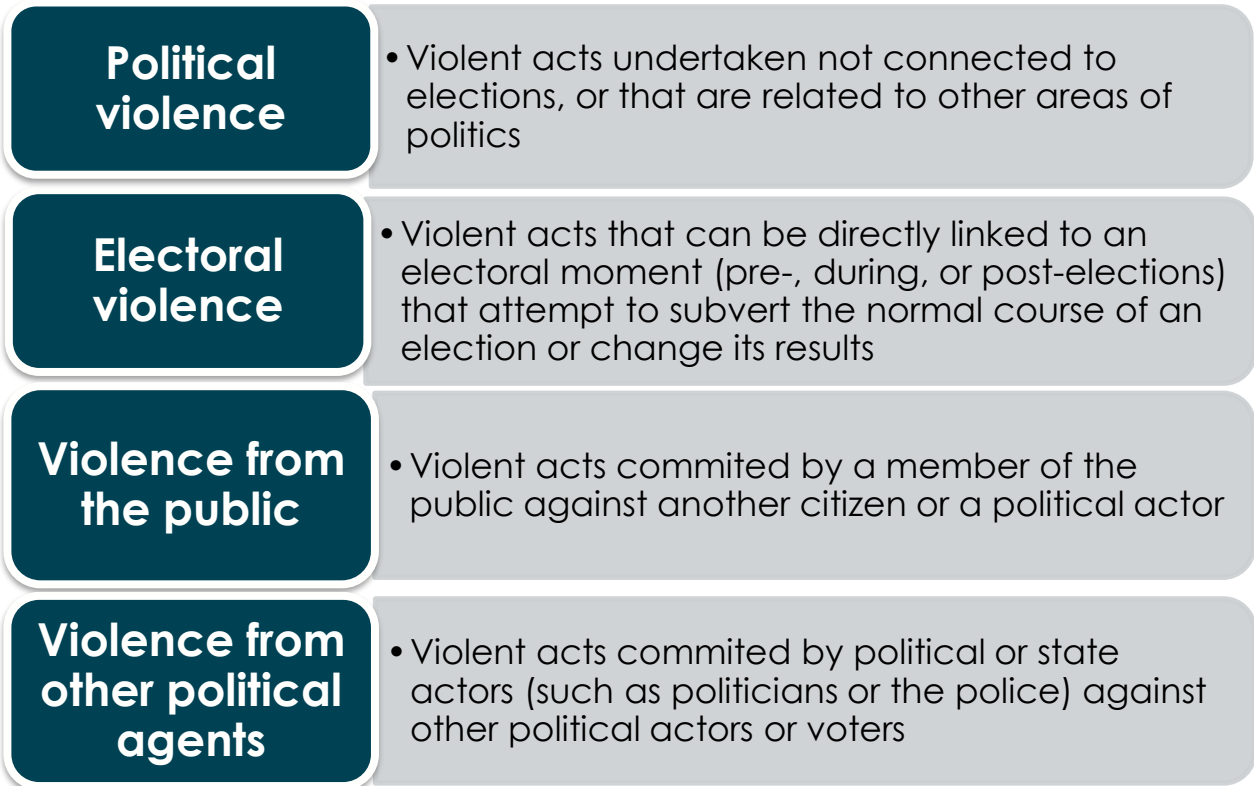4. How can the **present safety measures be enhanced**?

Introduction

Understanding violence against political actors

To answer the first research question, we must understand violence within the context of electoral politics and who it is likely to affect, whilst also considering how citizens become politicians. This section explores the patterns in how political systems filter individuals into making the decision to become candidates and seek election and the relative importance of the threat of violence in this decision-making.

The concepts of political violence and electoral violence are much broader than our scope here (Birch and Muchlinski, 2020). There are several reasons why violence might occur within political contexts, either against political actors or between them. This review focuses on violence against populations marginalised from institutional politics and how that violence might be a deterrent to their participation. Figure 9 outlines definitions for violence within politics (Bjarnegård, 2018; Birch et al., 2020).
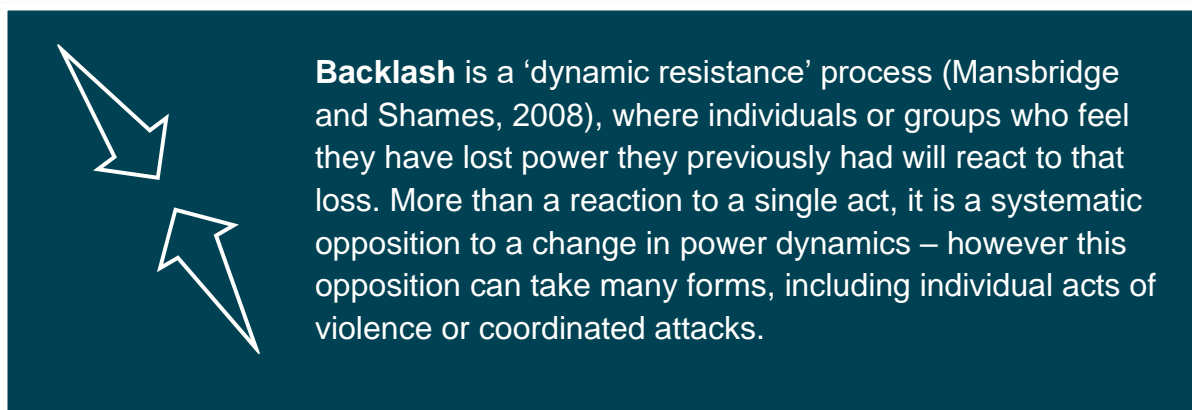
Figure 9: Definitions within violence in politics

Political violence	• Violent acts undertaken not connected to elections, or that are related to other areas of politics
Electoral violence	• Violent acts that can be directly linked to an electoral moment (pre-, during, or post-elections) that attempt to subvert the normal course of an election or change its results
Violence from the public	• Violent acts commited by a member of the public against another citizen or a political actor
Violence from other political agents	• Violent acts commited by political or state actors (such as politicians or the police) against other political actors or voters

The persistent gender and ethnic/racial inequalities in society today, which result in different life experiences for people, create a **systemic marginalisation** of certain groups from positions of power, including in politics. Consequently, the perceived threat of violence is only **one of many possible intertwined factors** that prevent marginalised individuals from entering into politics.

There is little aggregate evidence on the systematic violence suffered by LGBTQI+ individuals in politics, especially at the candidate level. However, there is case study evidence that it happens, in addition to the data on specific violence suffered by LGBTQI+ individuals. Therefore, any measures to curb violence in politics against marginalised communities should include these groups perspectives and experiences.

Within the political context, violence takes many forms and occurs among different actors. Its significance also varies. When discussing how to be more inclusive of women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds in politics, it is important to understand that the violence they experience is unlike any other, and to recognise how and why it happens. This includes 'backlash', which is the term used to refer to acts against progressive measures.

> **Backlash** is a 'dynamic resistance' process (Mansbridge and Shames, 2008), where individuals or groups who feel they have lost power they previously had will react to that loss. More than a reaction to a single act, it is a systematic opposition to a change in power dynamics – however this opposition can take many forms, including individual acts of violence or coordinated attacks.

Within the violence literature and, specifically, gendered violence literature, there is a **continuum** of violence which ranges between 'distant, with no direct contact' to 'physically close and threat of bodily harm'. These are broad categories that are meant to denote a range of possibilities, both in violent act and perpetrators and victims (or groups of perpetrators and victims).[12] For instance, a woman poll worker

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[12] Most of the research is focused on women in politics. This is partly explained by the recent increase of women candidates and women in office which has, in turn, increased the backlash against their presence (Bardall, 2011; Schneider and Carroll, 2020; Håkansson, 2021).

who is slapped by voter who is a man is a political agent being victimised by close, physical contact (Dyer et al., 2019). A woman MP experiencing violent tweets is not in close contact but is in a situation of constant psychological abuse by multiple perpetrators that may or may not be acting jointly (Kuperberg, 2018).

Whether either of these cases represent gendered violent acts is arguable: would the man in the first case have slapped the poll worker had she been a man? Would that violence have been greater? Male MPs are also the victims of online abuse and physical violence, so is the latter case evidence of a gendered attack?

> ## Violence against women (VAW) can take many forms
>
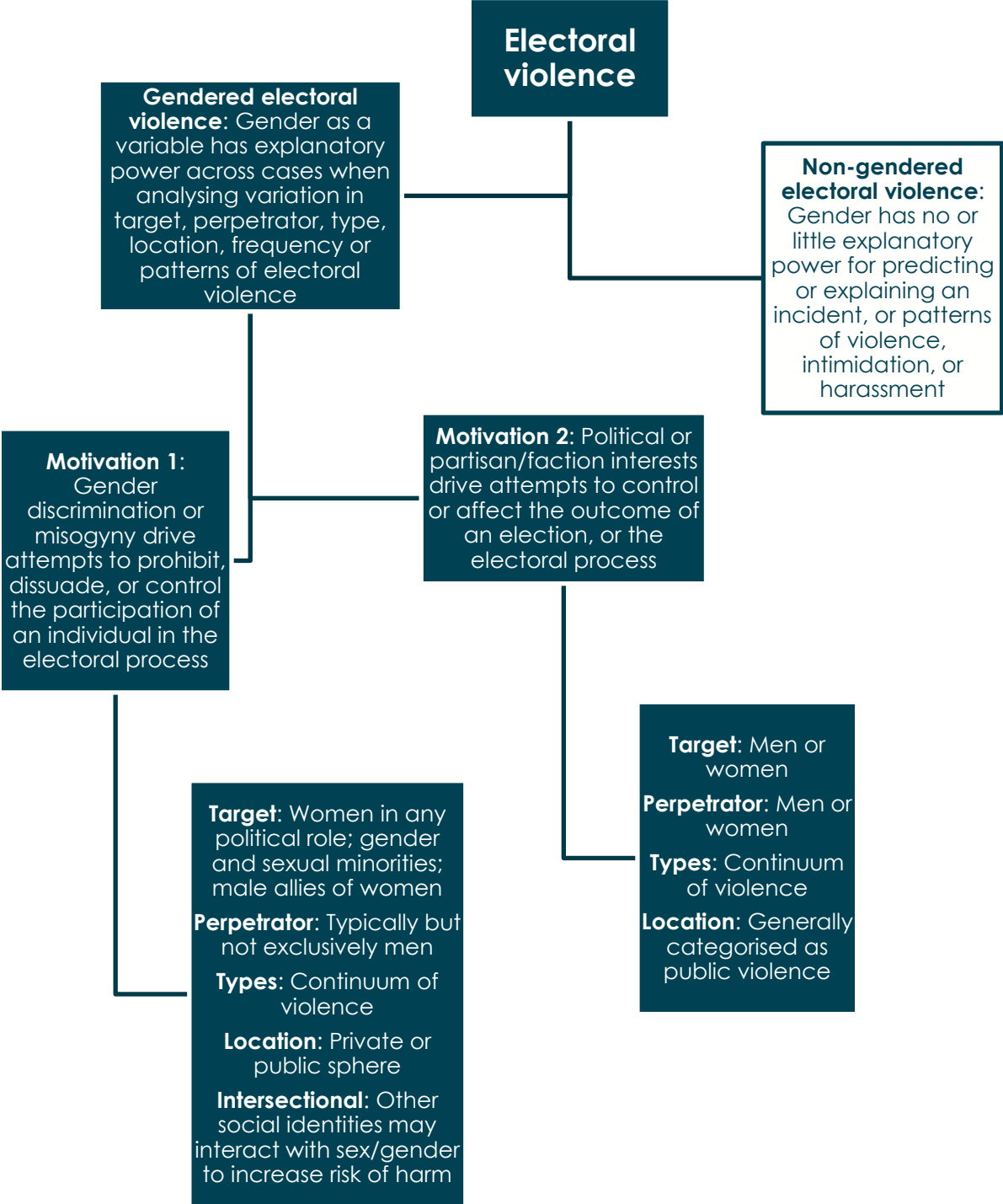> Direct physical violence, social-psychological violence, economic violence (Bardall, 2011).
>
> Physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and semiotic/symbolic (Bardall, 2019; Espinoza and Sandoval, 2019; Krook and Sanín, 2016; 2019).
>
> Physical, psychological, sexual, patrimonial, and moral violences (Brazil Law 11340/2006).

There are two lines of thinking here. The first argues that violence against women in politics is derived from violence against women, that is, it is an attack on women not following traditional gender roles (Bardall, 2011; Krook and Sanín, 2016). This approach sees the experiences of men being prioritised in discussions of violence in politics and seeks to re-frame it, by demonstrating that women in politics suffer violence *because* they are women.

The second argues that violence against women in politics is derived from political violence – rather than look at the subset 'women', it looks at the subset 'political actors', and examines the violence that occurs against women within this framing (Bjarnegård, 2018; Piscopo, 2016; Scheneider and Carroll, 2020). This view is helpful when formulating legislation and understanding that political and electoral violence affect multiple actors, preventing them from fulfilling their political duties (see Figure 10). Ultimately, these conceptualisations arrive at a similar question: when is violence against a woman in the political sphere gendered (see Figure 11)? More broadly, when is a political actor being attacked for who they are, rather than their ideology or political actions? While there is little research regarding other subgroups, the same questions can be asked about people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people, and intersecting populations.

Figure 10: Gendered dimensions of electoral violence

Electoral violence

Gendered electoral violence: Gender as a variable has explanatory power across cases when analysing variation in target, perpetrator, type, location, frequency or patterns of electoral violence

Non-gendered electoral violence: Gender has no or little explanatory power for predicting or explaining an incident, or patterns of violence, intimidation, or harassment

Motivation 1: Gender discrimination or misogyny drive attempts to prohibit, dissuade, or control the participation of an individual in the electoral process

Motivation 2: Political or partisan/faction interests drive attempts to control or affect the outcome of an election, or the electoral process

Target: Women in any political role; gender and sexual minorities; male allies of women

Perpetrator: Typically but not exclusively men

Types: Continuum of violence

Location: Private or public sphere

Intersectional: Other social identities may interact with sex/gender to increase risk of harm

Target: Men or women

Perpetrator: Men or women

Types: Continuum of violence

Location: Generally categorised as public violence

Source: adapted from Schneider and Carroll, 2020

Figure 11: Violence against women in politics as derived from political violence
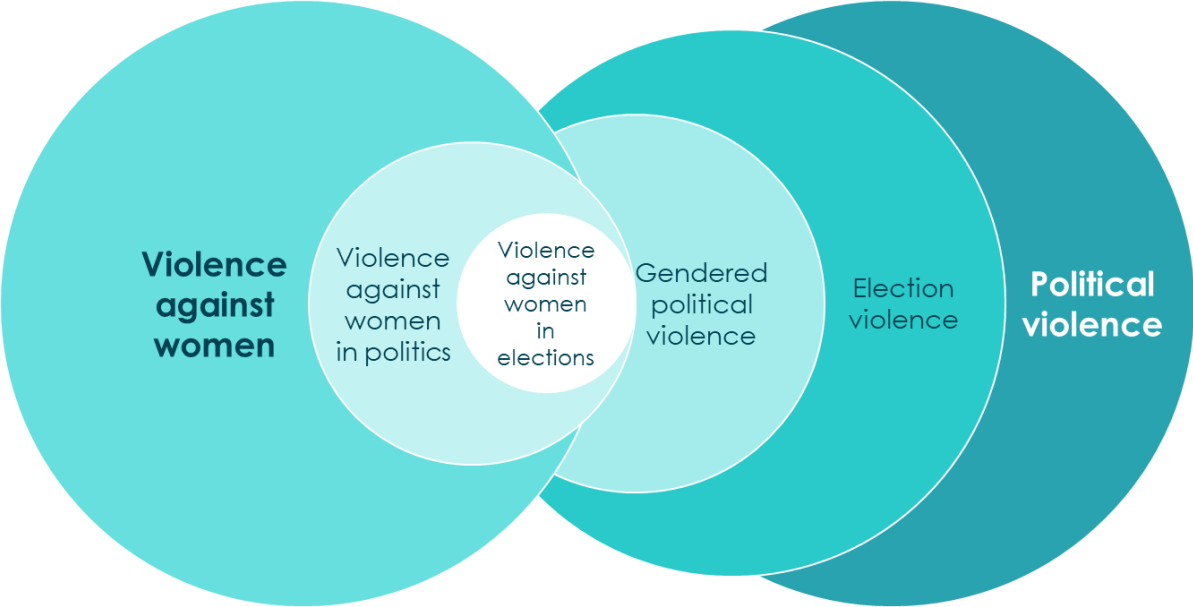
Source: Schneider and Carroll, 2020

The continuum of violence does not merely categorise types of violence, it also describes **a pathway of escalation** that normalises violent behaviour. Physical violence is more likely to be reported and be preceded by unreported events of verbal, written, and psychological abuse (Krook and Sanín, 2016; Ballington et al., 2017; Bjarnegård, 2021).[13] The **normalisation of political violence** in general is therefore of concern, particularly given the opportunities provided by social media.

In Bolivia, violence against Juana Quispe, councillor in Ancoraimes, culminated in Law 243/2012. Her torture and murder due to her position as town councillor and work in assisting other women victims of abuse and violence exposed the untenable situation of violence against women in politics in that country.

#NotTheCost
STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

Spearheaded by the National Democratic Institute, the #NotTheCost awareness campaign has been key in defining violence against women in politics and in exposing the several types of violence women

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[13] Because physical violence is often more reported than other types of violence, the perception of violence is highly linked with it. If there are few reports of physical violence, there is a danger in considering that no violence is present, when that might not be the case.

The *Law Against Political Violence and Harassment of Women* defines violence or harassment as:

> **"…against women candidates, elected, appointed or exercising a political-public function or against their families, aiming to curtail, prevent, hinder, or restrict the functions inherent to her position, to induce or force her to act against her will or omit an action while fulfilling her duties or in the exercise of her rights."** (Ley 243/2012, translated from Spanish).

The law further specifies harassment as pressure, persecution, hostile behaviour or threats, and violence as physical, psychological, and sexual aggression, including: These include:

- The enforcement of gender stereotypes
- The imposition of additional responsibilities that hinder the exercise of political duties
- Keeping a woman politician from attending any sessions or other political gatherings she is entitled to and thus supressing her voice and vote
- Giving false information regarding the candidate to the Plurinational Electoral Office
- Keeping her from returning to office after a justified absence
- Restricting her from speaking in sessions, committees or other meetings
- Restricting women who come from differentiated elections (Indigenous and AfroBolivian procedures) from fulfilling their political rights
- Restricting her from protecting her rights with legal instruments
- Imposing unjustified sanctions
- Retaining wages or other financial sanctions
- Any discrimination due to other identities that women might recognise
- Pregnancy discrimination
- Publication of private information to bully a woman into resigning
- Publication of false information regarding the fulfilment of her political duties
- Any pressure to resign

- Pressuring or forcing an elected woman to sign legislation she does not agree with[14]

While these are issues that no political aspirant, candidate, or elected official should have to contend with, the evidence shows that women are systematically more likely to experience them. Additionally, women voters likely also face pressure and violence to vote against their preferences, but there is little research on this issue (Bardall, 2013; Birch and Muchlinski, 2018; Dyer et al., 2019). Given the evidence on racial inequality (Fisher et al., 2015; Park et al., 2020; Showunmi and Price, 2021; Taylor-Collins and Park, 2020), it is likely individuals of ethnic minority backgrounds face similar problems.

Understanding the pipeline to institutional politics

The 'pipeline' refers to the pathway that takes someone from citizen to politician. Because of patterns in politicians' experiences, it usually means certain paths are more likely to lead to elected office, such as particular degrees; early party affiliation; union participation; and activism (Burns et al., 2001; Fox and Lawless, 2003; 2005; 2010; Gomes, 2016; Murray, 2015).

There is, however, a debate on this issue as to whether politics selects these individuals or are they self-selecting? That is, if these careers/activities are more likely to prepare someone for an elected role, are they also being sought out by people who want to go into politics? Different groups of people are likely to have different reasons for seeking election which can explain gender differences in politicians' experiences and trajectories (Araújo, 2010).[15]

Research has shown that the pipeline includes other variables: white, heterosexual men are more likely to be included in **political networks** from a young age and to choose those traditional professions or pathways (including family ties) into politics. This means that the pipeline to politics excludes in a more subtle way than formal exclusion once did (Phillips, 1995). Members of minority groups have less access to networks, funding, and experience, and are seen **as less viable candidates by the establishment and even themselves** (Lawless and Fox, 2005; 2010; Folke and Rickne, 2016; Maškarinec, 2021). Although women have increased their numbers in areas generally considered as pathways to politics, such as law, and accrue more years of formal education than men in most countries (Gomes, 2012), they are still

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[14] http://www.diputados.bo/leyes/ley-n%C2%B0-243

[15] The study showed that men were more likely to state politics as their ultimate goal, while women entered into politics to solve another matter they were involved in. In other words, it is possible that men see politics as end in itself, while women see it as a means to an end.

less likely to be active party members, achieve leadership positions within parties, or become candidates. This means, that having the 'right' career is not the only factor that needs consideration:

> **"But women's emergence as candidates has not kept pace with the educational and professional credentials they have acquired. These circumstances suggest that understanding the gender dynamics that underlie the process by which individuals decide to run for office is a fundamental step for developing a fuller understanding of the root causes of women's underrepresentation. When women run, women win. But if they are systematically less likely than men to emerge as candidates, then the horizon for gender parity is not as bright as conventional assessments suggest."** (Lawless, 2015, p. 353)

Figure 12 indicates the factors found to be crucial in deciding to seek election. A potential candidate – that is, an individual with an interest in politics, likely a member of a party, with some connections or networks in the community – will consider their chances of winning and the results they might achieve. Their potential status as a marginalised member of the community will also impact on their decision to stand for election.

If that person thinks that the likelihood of experiencing violence throughout the campaign is high, either due to prior violent encounters not connected to politics, issues within the party, or known negative experiences of other similar candidates/politicians, they might choose not to seek election. If all these factors are present and the aspirant still wants to run, then their ambition becomes 'expressive ambition' and it is now shaped by the political opportunities that are outside of their control (that will still be shaped by structural inequalities).

Figure 12: A diagram of political ambition
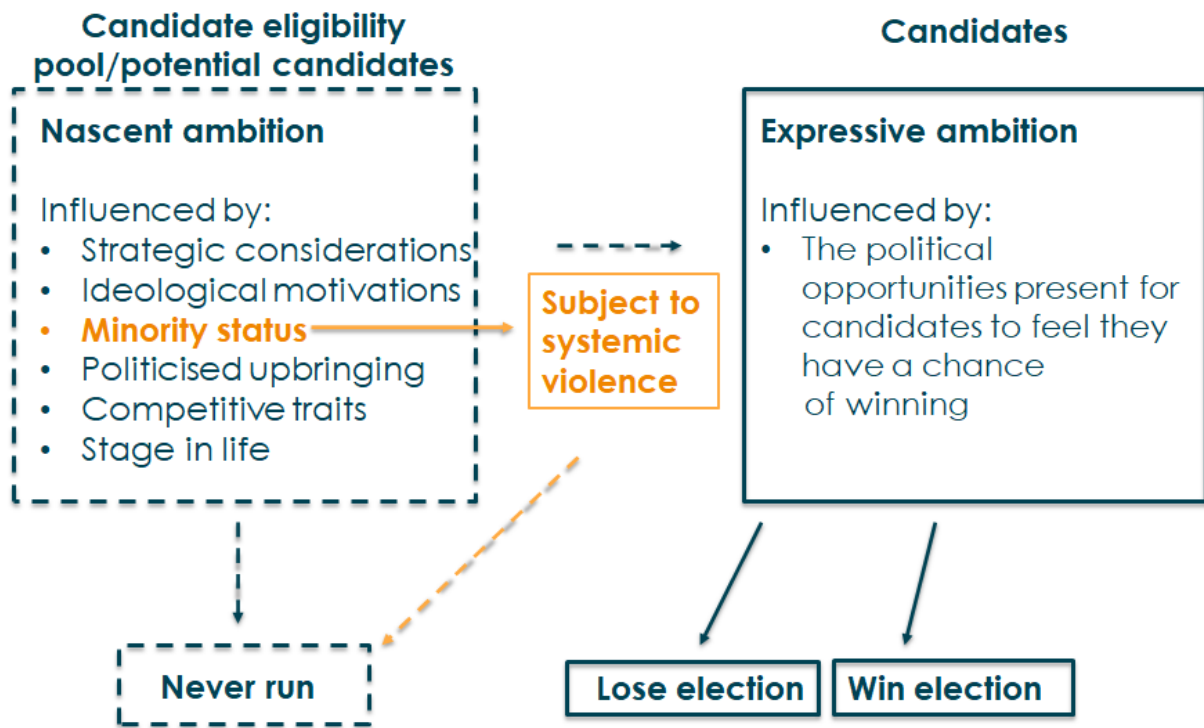
Source: adapted from Lawless and Fox (2005).

Continuing with the gender example, Figure 13 shows the 'apparent' political pipeline, with women represented as smaller to indicate fewer numbers, but the path seemingly the same. A more realistic, but still simplified gendered pipeline is shown in Figure 14, with 'drop-out' points indicated.

Figure 13: The 'apparent' gendered pipeline
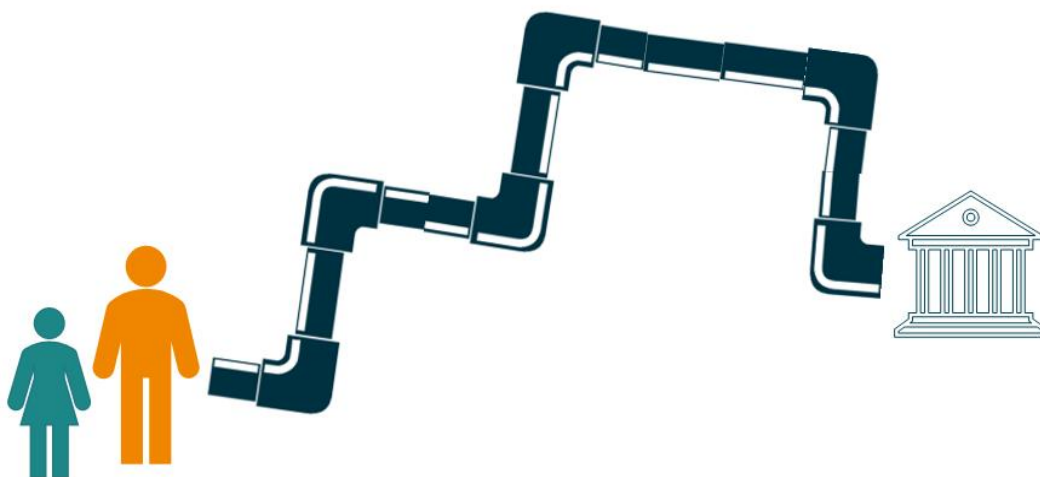
Source: the authors

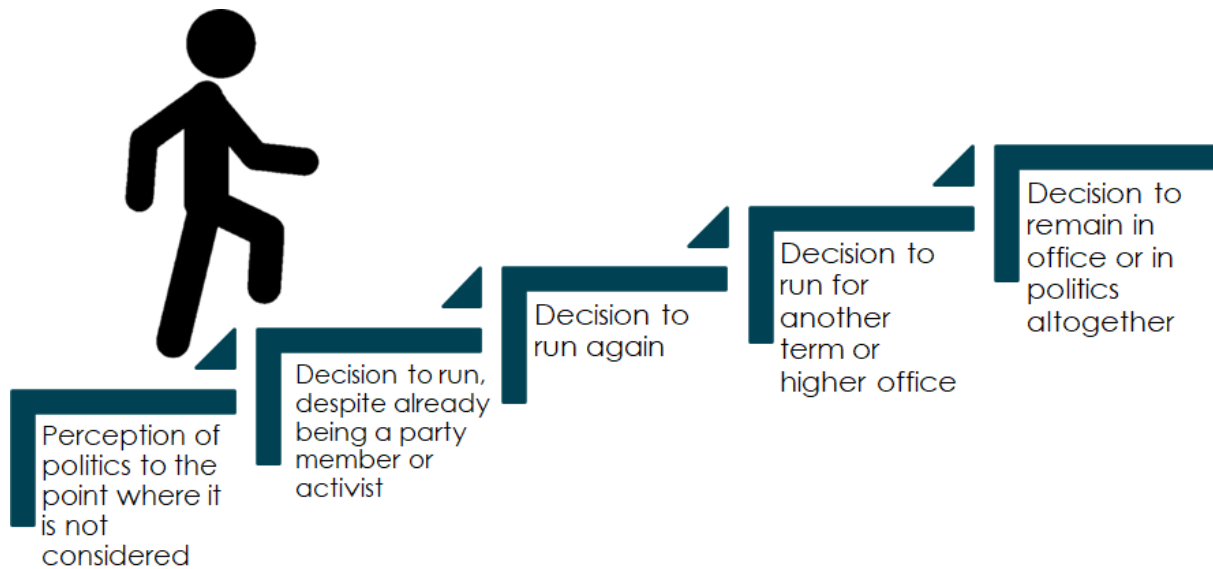**Figure 14: A 'simplified' gendered pipeline**
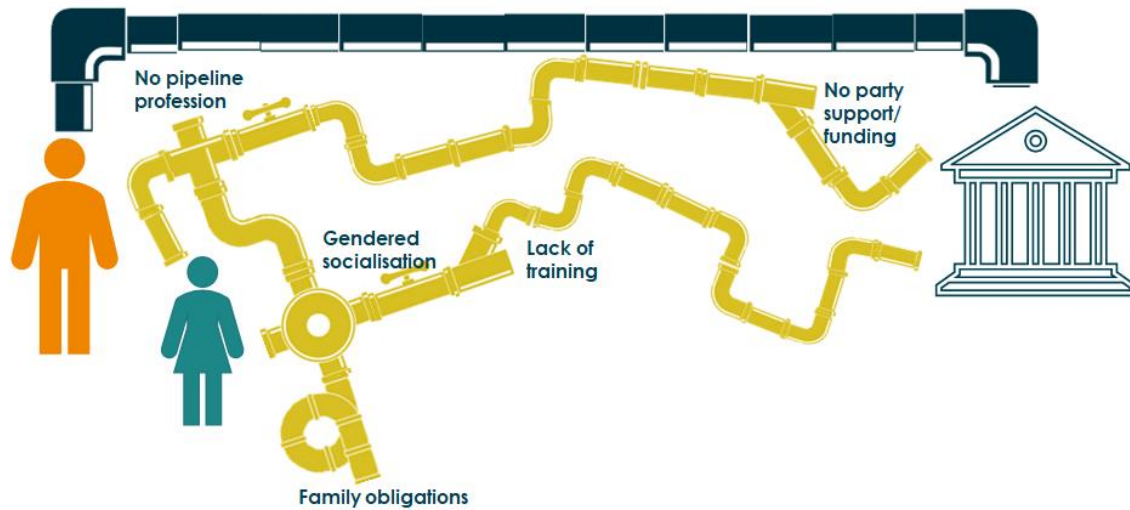
Source: the authors

Does violence deter political aspirants?

The effect of potential violence on political participation is less well understood. It is already known that other aspects of individuals' lives and the systemic marginalisation they face will affect their interest in politics (Fox and Lawless, 2003; Bernhard et al., 2021), but does the prospect of violence affect aspirants (Bjarnegård et al., 2020)? In a survey with over 1,500 women aspirants,[16] **25% claimed fear of violence during the electoral process as the reason to not go through with a candidacy** (Bernhard et al., 2021). Among other life factors, such as political socialisation, work, and care responsibilities, the consideration of public exposure from politics (and the harassment and violence that comes with it) seems to be increasing as a possible deterrent. The prospect of violence may then be a factor that influences decisions at different points in someone's consideration of politics – see Figure 15 (Collignon et al., 2020; Håkansson, 2021; Krook and Sanín, 2016).

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[16] The survey was conducted with women training in the Emerge America programme which prepares Democratic women to run for office in the United States.

Figure 15: Possible impact of experience of perceived violence on participation in politics

Perception of politics to the point where it is not considered

Decision to run, despite already being a party member or activist

Decision to run again

Decision to run for another term or higher office

Decision to remain in office or in politics altogether

Source: the authors

In the UK, the Elections Bill 2021 considers candidate safety under the heading of 'undue influence' and 'disqualification orders'. It removes the right to run for elections from those who were convicted of a Schedule 8 offence when that offence was conducted during elections and against candidates, incumbents, or campaigners. It does not take into account systemic inequalities and oppressions that may affect different members of society more than others. It does not consider violent actions from a member of the public against a politician/aspiring candidate but does consider violence against electors. The only penalty considered is banning an individual from seeking election for five years.

There are no studies in Wales on violence in politics, but some councillors responding to the Welsh Local Government Association Exit Survey (2017) did state that 'Treatment by the press and some members of the community' was one of the least enjoyable aspects of government work. However, 71% of councillors would recommend the job to others. Importantly, these are people who have already decided to seek election and won – that is, they believe that seeking election is worth the risk of exposure and possibility of violence.

When considering the evidence analysed, a few general points are important to highlight:

- **Gender gap**: women and men experience different types of violence at different rates, threat levels, and content

  - Men may experience gendered attacks if they do not conform to masculinity norms (Kuperberg, 2018)

- **Racial/ethnic gap**: there is no research that is specific to race/ethnicity and violence in politics

- **Different exposure**: the experience of violence is different for higher- and lower-ranking politicians. Research has shown that the gender gap is greater at higher levels

- **Interrelated experiences:**
  - *Intersectional*: experiences will be different both between and within groups due to the intersection of race, ethnicity, origin, language, religion, class, and other demographic factors

  - *Compounded*: multiple types of violence can be suffered by the same person

- **Qualitative difference**:

  - Physical violence is **usually** perpetrated against men, rather than women; the root of this violence is often ideological/party differences

  - Minority politicians are attacked for who they are and being in politics

- **Quantitative difference**: most attacks (when considering all types of violence) are against women

Social media has become a space where violence can more freely occur, as it is harder to monitor and the level of harm is considered smaller (Bardall, 2013). The rise in these platforms has, however, increased the debate on the level of exposure of politicians, as they are now more known and easier to find by citizens. This is good for transparency and direct communication, but has come with negative aspects. There is evidence that each social media platform is used differently by politicians and citizens to communicate (Almeida, 2018), but it has also increased citizens' access to politicians and their private information and, in turn, increased politicians' experience of violent speech.

Cardiff Council have tried to be proactive in this area by introducing a Social Media Code. This aims to set expectations about councillors being respectful in online engagement and behaving in a transparent manner. After previous reports of bullying

by Cardiff Council members against each other,[17] this is a step towards politicians 'leading by example'.

> **Study on candidate violence in the UK (Collignon, 2020):**
> **Data from the general election survey 2017**
>
> - **Women** are 9% more likely than men to suffer harassment.
>
> - **Younger candidates** are more likely to become victims of intimidatory behaviour and this likelihood decreases with age.
>
> - **Leading candidates** are 9% more likely to be harassed than non-leading candidates.
>
> - Social media:
>   - **29% received improper communications on social media** at least once during the campaign (34% women/26% men).
>
>   - 23% of candidates received inappropriate messages at least once during the campaign via email (28% women/20% men).
>
> - 5% of women reported having been **threatened three or more times** during the campaign (3% men).
>
> - **All candidates who suffered sexual harassment were women.**
>
> - **32% of candidates** affirmed that they felt moderately to very fearful as a result of harassment and intimidation.
>
> - **Women and incumbent MPs were more fearful.**

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[17] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-41110602>

The evidence shows that there are gendered and racialised patterns to violence against political actors, with women either experiencing (quantitatively) more attacks, and/or (qualitatively) attacks that are more organised and gendered in nature. A study of violence in social media against Swedish MPs, for example, shows that women face more sexualised and gendered attacks and feel their 'personal agency' becomes more limited given their online experience (Erikson et al., 2021). Women from ethnic minority backgrounds receive more hate speech than white women:

> **"Despite representing only 8.8% of women MPs in Westminster, Asian women MPs were found to receive the most abusive tweets per MP. (…) Asian women MPs receive 132 abusive tweets per MP. This is 30% higher than white women MPs who receive 92 abusive tweets per MP. Given the disproportionately high levels of abuse against Diane Abbott, black women MPs were found to receive 2,781 abusive tweets per MP — but when Diane Abbott is excluded from the analysis — the findings show black women MPs receive 81 abusive tweets per MP."**
> (Amnesty International, 2017)

In order to stop and prevent political and election violence, countries should consider (Ballington et al., 2017):

- **Mapping issues**: Political violence is contextual; countries should be aware of the issues, actors, and how violent acts take place

- **Integrating actions**: Integration of specific actions against violence (against people from minority groups) in election guidelines

- **Developing protection**: Provide protection for groups targeted, with additional training for the police

- **Engaging with political parties**: Work with political parties to engage in advocacy, raise awareness, update party regulations towards inclusivity and ensure enforcement

- **Engaging with society**: To raise awareness on the obstacles towards political participation, including violence, and the pressures faced by politicians.

These considerations for preventing election violence are broken down by election phase in Table 5.

Table 5: Preventing election violence, by election phase

Pre-election phase	Election phase	Post-election phase
• Develop and review laws and policies **which define and protect** against violence against women in elections (VAWE) • **Adapt or amend existing legislation** to explicitly delineate and provide measures on protecting against VAWE • **Encourage protocols and regulations to be adopted by Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)** to prevent VAWE in the electoral process • **Develop election and political party codes** of conduct to address VAWE • Provide **gender-sensitivity training** to electoral administrators, judges, solicitors	• Increase access to **electoral justice** for women, and pursue justice for victims as well as prosecution of perpetrators • Establish methods of **safely/ confidentially reporting cases** of VAWE	• **Ensure implementation** of laws and policies on VAWE • Review laws and policies and make adjustments as needed • Adjudicate electoral disputes involving VAWE • **Prosecute** human rights abuses against women in politics • Adapt and integrate new **victim resources** into existing services for VAWE

Source: adapted from Ballington et al., 2017

Specific measures that can be suggested for Welsh Government are:

- Information-gathering on the issues faced by political aspirants and a discussion on what could be done in response, as there is little data available.

  - Consider developing a survey, similar to the Swedish 'The Politician's Safety Survey', run at regular intervals, with national and local level politicians.

- Enhancing the training of police forces in Wales on internet-based violence.

- Awareness campaigns targeted at society and political parties to improve the number of candidates from marginalised groups.

Discussion and summary

This section presented evidence on whether the possibility of violence might stop underrepresented individuals from standing for election.

Legislative politics is a constructed practice and has been moulded over centuries (Pitkin, 1972). The exclusion of certain groups from public spaces including politics has generated vicious cycles of marginalisation (Puwar, 2004) and exclusion through informal obstacles (Gomes, 2019; Phillips, 1995). Gradual processes of inclusion have, in turn, led to reactionary actions, referred to as backlash, which can turn into violence. On the path from citizen to politician, women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, and LGBTQI+ individuals tend to suffer systematic violent acts.

Violence in politics and, specifically, electoral violence, is an issue that affects democracy worldwide (Birch et al., 2020; Höglund, 2009; Opitz et al., 2013), and no politicians or aspirants should face the threat of violence when serving their community. The evidence demonstrates that systemic inequalities present in society are replicated in politics. This means that underrepresented groups are more likely to face violence and be targeted for their identity and presence in the political arena.

Violence appears as one of many factors that aspirants might consider when deciding whether to seek election. The extent of the problem in Wales is largely unknown, beyond increased media reporting of violence against Welsh politicians,[18] meaning there is scope to further research and quantify the issue to inform preventative measures and effective responses.

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[18] https://nation.cymru/news/councillors-plea-for-kinder-politics-as-they-reveal-horrific-abuse/

Campaign finances and spending

Summary

- There is ample opportunity for Welsh Government to improve its offering of publicly available data on elections and campaign financing.

- This would require measures that are in keeping with current legislation, but that change current practices on how information is reported by political parties.

- Best practices in open data should be combined with user-friendly interfaces to encourage public access.

- There is little aggregate data from the evidence that directly links improved transparency and accountability on campaign finances to higher public trust and participation. However, improvements in these areas would enhance access and are recommended by international organisations. There are examples of good practice for the Welsh Government and others to consider.

Research questions

The evidence on campaign finances and spending was reviewed in line with the following research question:

1. What, if any, additional approaches to **openness and transparency** regarding campaign finances and political party spending **during Welsh elections** can be taken that are consistent within a UK-wide context?

Introduction

Initiatives surrounding transparency of political finance have been supported by international organisations such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (Scarrow, 2016; Carolan and Wolf, 2017; Wolf, 2021), OECD (2016), and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) of the Council of Europe (Tonhäuser and Stavenes, 2020), given their potential to reduce opportunities for corruption and increase public trust. This potential, however, relies on other societal and political variables that impact public trust. There is little

research analysing the impact of political finance data transparency on public trust (Scarrow, 2016; Wolf, 2021). Researchers have highlighted the need for further research in this area:

> **"[I]f one of the intended purposes of political finance regulation is to foster more positive public attitudes towards governments and electoral democracy, as is frequently implied, then we need more research about whether certain rules, or perhaps certain approaches to rule making, show greater success in bolstering public confidence."**
> (Scarrow, 2016, p.10)

Nevertheless, there are examples from other countries of how they have attempted to increase transparency and accountability. For example, in Norway, political finance transparency has been worked on pre-emptively, following international discourse and recommendations by GRECO that included 'disclosure requirements for party expenditures, assets and debts, separate and complete reporting of campaign and regular finances in a standardised format, as well as more comprehensive sanctions, including formal warning, partial or complete withholding of state funding, administrative and criminal sanctions' (Tonhäuser and Stavenes, 2020, p. 590).

Conversely, in 2014, after a hotly-contested election in Indonesia and claims of corruption from both sides, the government acquiesced to demands from political parties and the population, and released information needed to create an open system for election results, in a project called *Kawal Pemilu* or 'Guard the Election'[19] (Carolan and Wolf, 2017, p. 28). Given the need for a quick response and the lack of accessible information, volunteers ensured the data was digitised and made available,[20] indicating public interest in political matters and in improving processes to generate trust (Graft et al. 2016). Due to its grassroots nature and crowdsourced funding, the project cost only $54 US, enough for a domain and hosting server (ibid., p. 8). Importantly, despite having a government partnership and accreditation, this remains a civil society effort and **does not** include financial data. Findings indicate that this initiative has positively impacted public trust, which had knock-on effects on citizen involvement and empowerment:

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[19] See: **https://odimpact.org/case-indonesias-kawal-pemilu.html**

[20] Some data existed in pdf form and some was handwritten. Volunteers in Indonesia and all over the world digitised what was required and worked from the pdfs to create usable data.

"Beyond its direct impact on the 2014 elections, Kawal Pemilu has also had an overall effect on Indonesia's electoral process and political climate, helping to increase transparency and public trust. (…) The greater public trust has, in many ways, translated into a new sense of citizen involvement and stakeholdership in Indonesia's political process." (Graft et al., 2016, p. 10)

Evidence from the United Kingdom suggests that citizens are concerned with political financing. In 2008, a YouGov survey showed that 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'politics would be more honest if political parties were required to report donations and expenditures of any amount' and 67% supported the view that 'there should be a limit on how much any one person can donate to a political party'. Only 22% agreed or strongly agreed that 'on balance UK party finance is clean' (vanHeerde-Hudson and Fisher, 2013, p. 50). Additionally, 21% of British Election Study respondents said party funding was of 'great' importance in 2011, which rose to 33% in 2016. In a later study, 78% of respondents believed that donations to parties are given to gain access and influence or favours and special treatment (Goddard, 2016). Overall, the evidence suggests that the public perceives elections to be more expensive than they are and are not aware of how much comes from private donations (vanHeerde-Hudson and Fisher, 2013).

Within this context, and the scope of this report, the development of a platform that enables Welsh citizens to access political data is a measure that could have a positive impact on public trust. A framework for managing political finance needs to be open, accountable, and transparent to develop public trust and confidence (Hamada and Agrawal, 2020; Kabullah et al., 2020; OECD, 2016). A standard framework means less scope for doubt, error, or corruption, given clear and well-established boundaries.

There needs to be a clear pathway for reporting campaign finances and a way of making data easily available for audit both by government institutions, civil society organisations, the media, and the general public.

The evidence reviewed for this report indicates that this is a particular area where there is potential for the Welsh Government to effect positive and swift change. This following section shows examples of good practice from other countries and outlines what Wales might introduce in this area.

Good data practices

The proactive disclosure of data is comprised of four components (Pfeiffer and Speck, 2008). It is:

- Timely
- Reliable
- Accessible
- Intelligible

The Global Open Data Index (GODI) outlines the following good practice characteristics for data made available by states:

Openly-licenced

Data should be openly licenced, meaning the data is in the public domain or under an open licence (and therefore free to use).

In an open and machine-readable format
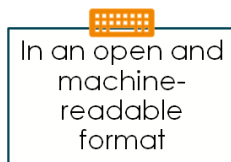
Data should also be **available in open and machine-readable formats.** This means having data in files that open in free software.[21]

Downloadable at once

Data should be made available for '**batch' or 'bulk' downloads**, that is, individuals should be able to download more than one case or timeframe (e.g. the campaign finances of one candidate or one campaign cycle).

Up-to-date

Data should be up-to-date with the latest developments. In the case of data that is revised periodically, updates must be added and dates noted.

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[21] Some examples of open and machine-readable formats are comma-separated values (CSV), tab-separated values (TSV), or JavaScript Object Notation (JSON).

Publicly available

Data should be made public and easily accessible.

Free of charge

There should be no cost associated with downloading and using data.

Election results in Great Britain have received a 0% rating for open data by the GODI, while 'government spending' received 70% (see Figure 16). These ratings refer to the parameters mentioned above – ratings depend on how well countries meet the requirements in each area analysed. Because Great Britain does not meet any of them in the 'election results' category, it received a 0% rating. The GODI does not have a rating for campaign financing.

Figure 16: Global Open Data Index page for Great Britain

Source: https://index.okfn.org/place/gb/
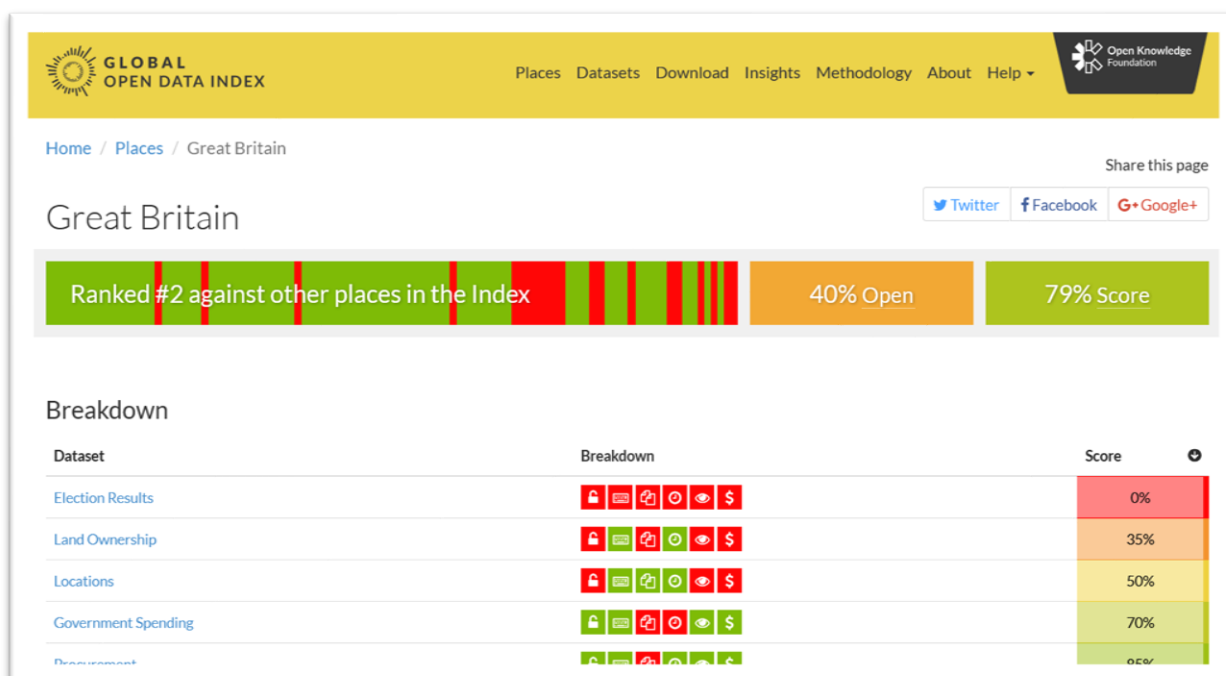
Campaign financing

There is no aggregate evidence on how other countries report their campaign financing and the effects on public trust. Open data measures could form part of reforms that seek to make the whole system more transparent, accountable, and inclusive. A country may have an robust system of reporting political financing, but if its citizens are not aware of its presence, it will do little to improve their perception of political transparency. In this section, the ways in which countries have designed their platforms is discussed, with pros and cons evaluated in line with open data aims.

Colombia, through the **Cuentas Claras** website, offers citizens a chance to access detailed information for each candidate, but fails to offer these in batch downloads and in open, machine-readable formats. This prevents journalists, researchers, independent auditors, and even electoral management bodies from adequately assessing the information at the aggregate level (Scarrow, 2016).

The **Financial Electoral Commission** in the United States has the option of individual checks on candidates or committees and individual donors, and batch downloads for summary amounts raised and spent in .CSV format.

The website of the Superior Electoral Court in Brazil includes a **user-friendly interface** and has a **repository of electoral data** using .CSV files. Data on candidates and election results is available from 1933 and data on campaign financing since 2002. This includes funds raised and spent as well as data for each expenditure (e.g. transport, food services, etc., with information for each company used).

The Estonian **Political Parties Financing Surveillance Committee** website offers quartely individual downloads per organisation or election. They are also divided by revenue and expenditures. Again, without a batch download option, users would need to download each file individually to create a whole picture of an election. The interface is not user-friendly so it is difficult to access aggregate data unless the user has high-level digital skills.

The Norwegian system is based on the official statistics website, **Statistisk sentralbyrå**. It offers aggregated data both on specific elections and general political funding that can be downloaded by users. More specific data can be found at **Partifinansiering**, but the link between election results and financing cannot be made as that data is not available beyond the party level. The batch download of data is not available.

The Electoral Commission in the United Kingdom has no systematic data reporting measures, but it does have a **Political Finance Database** (see Figure 17). It is possible to download a .CSV file but the parameters are unclear and the user needs to 'track down' the option. There is no information for candidate-specific spending except for monthly donations to individual members and the data cannot be filtered by country. The data is also out-of-date, and does not include any information on the Welsh elections of 2021.

The recent *Regulating Election Finance* report, by the Committee on Standards in Public Life of the UK Government recommends that only election expenditures above £250,000 need to be published, within six months of the election or referendum and only those that spend over that amount must do so electronically.

Figure 17: Electoral Commission Political Finance Database

Donations and loans	Spending	Registration and accounts
Q2 2021 Donations to Parties	Party spending in the 2019 UKPGE	2020 accounts
Q2 2021 New Loans to Parties	Party spending in the 2019 European Paliamentary Election	GB Register of Political Parties
Regulated Donee Donations September 2021	Party spending in the 2017 UKPGE	NI Register of Political Parties
		Register of Non-party campaigners
		Register of Participants in the EU Referendum

How can Wales improve upon this?

Based on this evidence, the Welsh Government could commission or create their own campaign finance data platform that includes:

- Updated information for the latest elections

- Financial data inclusive of local elections

- Election results from local and national elections

- All finance reporting, regardless of amount.

Based on international examples and recommendations from organisations such as International IDEA and OECD, this platform should:

- Provide users with user interfaces that enable citizens to visualise aggregate data and search for individual politicians

- Provide users with open-licence, machine-readable datasets that enable them to evaluate the data themselves

- Include detailed information on politicians' gender, ethnicity, age, religion, political experience, among other characteristics, to enable research on the profile of Welsh politicians

- Collate the above data with election results

To provide this data to the public, the Welsh Government would need to work with the Electoral Commission and parties to ensure that it is adequately inputted in a system. Most countries rely on online systems of reporting and relaying data (Hamada and Agrawal, 2020; Wolf, 2021) which are seen as the best tool in guaranteeing quality data (Jones, 2017). Consideration could be given as to whether supplying candidate and financial information should be a requirement to participate in Welsh elections.

Discussion and summary

There are clear democratic benefits to more openness and transparency in politics, specifically in campaign finance (Norris and van Es, 2016). Among them are electoral integrity, access to data to inform policy development in inclusive practices (such as where are persistent inequalities in campaign financing) (Gomes, 2021), and citizen participation.

The evidence presented here suggests that there are areas in which Welsh Government (and the Electoral Commission) can improve, including data collection and the provision of accessible data to allow citizens, the media, and researchers to analyse election data.

Ultimately, this process will also allow the Welsh Government to give political parties the tools to work on more inclusive measures as they come to understand informal patterns of marginalisation that prevent certain groups from accessing elected office, such as differences in campaign finance.

Electoral management bodies

Throughout this research, electoral management bodies (EMBs) have appeared as key actors in mitigating the issues raised here or preventing them from arising. When functioning routinely (as opposed to only during election time), EMBs are **a point of reference** for parties, politicians, governments, and society to **produce information, regulation, and prevent issues** around elections. The operation and set-up of EMBs can differ in a number of ways:

- **Independence:** EMBs may be linked with one of the branches of government, affecting its autonomy to make decisions.

- **Permanent or temporary:** EMBs might only function during certain times, usually to organise and oversee election processes.

- **Centralisation:** Countries with more than one level of government may have local/regional EMBs.

Regarding innovative electoral practices, including early voting, EMBs are the bodies tasked with developing new rules and frameworks, as well as producing information on pilots tested. They ensure standardisation in electoral processes for all citizens (Rojas and Müller, 2014).

An EMB is the point of reference for aspirants, candidates, and politicians who might be experiencing violence and may also take a pro-active role in awareness and prevention campaigns (Ballington et al., 2017; Birch and Muchlinski, 2018).

When it comes to campaign financing and transparency, the logistical role of EMBs is even more prominent, being responsible for receiving reports, inputting data, maintaining datasets, and auditing accounts (OECD, 2016).

The role of EMBs throughout the policy cycle is summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Election policy cycle and the role of EMBs

Pre-electoral phase	Electoral phase	Post-electoral phase
Election planning: budgets and funding, electoral calendar and operational work plans, logistics and security, staff recruitment, procurement	**Nomination:** candidates, code of conduct	**Review:** audits and evaluations, data maintenance
Training: development of procedures, operational training for electoral officials	**Campaign:** media access, campaign coordination, dispute resolution	**Reform:** achieving reforms and conducting research on them, legal reform proposals, EMB reform
Information: voter and civic education, publicity, stakeholder liaison, observer accreditation	**Voting:** organisation of ballots boxes, voting, innovative electoral practices	**Strategy:** voter register upgrade, networking, institutional strengthening, professional development
Registration: party financing, party and candidate registration, voter registration	**Results:** counting, results tabulation, complaints and appeals, official results, data publication	

Source: adapted from Onishi, 2012

Conclusion

This report gathered evidence on various electoral administration instruments and how their reform might affect voter turnout, candidate diversity, and transparency in campaign financing. Political engagement was found to be relevant in all these areas, as citizens who feel included and empowered will tend to be more participative. Political activity, including voting, is habit-forming, and measures taken now are likely to produce results in the longer-term. Convenience voting is likely to impact citizens who have an interest in politics but find it difficult to include it in their lives. It is important to also consider the reasons for disengagement beyond convenience.

Research indicates that most successful experiences of **electoral management bodies** will have them be proactive throughout the year (in the pre-electoral phase outlined in Table 6) as well as post-election. This means administering data collection, management, and output, citizen engagement, conducting education and awareness campaigns, and working with political parties to ensure inclusivity in candidacies and improved transparency of data. There is good practice from across the world which could be replicated in Wales.

A summary of the results for each of the report's four sections are summarised below, with recommendations when applicable.

Early voting

The evidence showed that early voting offers a potential way of being more responsive to voters' needs. This is dependent on which measures are taken in tandem, and could include the following:

- Early voting periods include weekdays and weekends (e.g., Wednesday through Saturday)

- Introducing same-day registration and allowing citizens to register to vote or correct their registration information when they go into the polling station

- Polling sites are placed cognisant of people's needs regarding distance and access to transportation and potential to combine other activities with voting

Innovative electoral practices

Other innovative electoral practices considered in this report were postal voting, Election Day Voting Centres, pre-filled ballots, non-traditional polling sites, rest day voting, extended voting hours, and accessible ballots, including offline electronic

ballot boxes. These innovative practices should be considered as ways to modernise the electoral process, with the understanding that even small returns are positive results.

Given the concern with rejected postal ballots and issues with mismatched signatures and dates of birth, as well as evidence indicating that pre-filled ballots have shown modest success in turnout, it is recommended that:

- An analysis of the use of pre-filled ballots be considered. These are ballots which already include the voter's name and date of birth

- The electoral roll be routinely maintained, with campaigns to invite voters to correct their registration in case of name change

- Ways for voters to 'fix' spoiled ballots are offered, such as returning them at a polling site and voting in person

Measures to allow voters to vote at any polling site or create non-traditional polling sites, have had mixed results. Voting centres tend to have larger queues and overworked staff if not supported by other polling sites. The flexibility of having an option of deciding where to vote does better accommodate voters' different routines and accessibilities. The Welsh Government could consider:

- Analysing the use of flexible voting (i.e., not designating a single polling site for each voter) regarding the logistics of having the electoral roll in each and being able to verify the voter's status

- Conducting logistical and security analyses for the use of non-traditional polling sites. For example, if schools are used as polling sites for multiple polling districts, it needs to be decided whether schools would close on those days; if only students/staff will be allowed to vote there; what the ramifications of this would be along with flexible voting?

- Setting up polling sites in areas where the mobility of voters in an issue, such as care homes and hospitals

The Brazilian offline electronic ballot box demonstrated a safe way to conduct elections faster and accessibly. Blind and visually impaired voters in the UK do not currently have access to a secret ballot.

The current registration system offers another potential area for reform. Although it is compulsory to register and would-be voters receive a form reminding them to do so, there are no cross-check systems in place which means there are duplicates in the current roll, which is detrimental to the work of electoral administrators. Other potential changes include:

- Letters to citizens in Wales notifying them of their National Insurance number ahead of their 16th birthday also including a voter registration form

- An offer to 'opt-in' and effectively register to vote is made when accessing certain services

- Colleges and universities should encourage voter registration and to build voter registration practices into their annual student enrolment processes

- Registration 'events' should be conducted with immigrant populations, after consultation with community groups and leaders

- Information on how to register anonymously needs to be made clearly available and the process easily accessible to voters

- An online tool that allows individuals to check their registration status may be introduced

- Polling day registration should be made available in Wales

- Efforts should be made to maintain a clean roll without requiring citizens to re-enrol

Voting in Wales should be treated as if it were compulsory, ensuring standardisation of practices and access to all voters. All polling sites should be accessible to voters with mobility issues and have adequate installations for pregnant people and the elderly.

Candidate and agent safety

There is little evidence on the impact of perceived violence on the decision of political minorities to seek election. However, examples of violence against politicians suggests that the issue is concerning and that measures need to be taken to curb it, along with other actions to improve diversity in politics. Social media has been shown to be a consistent source of daily abuse. It is recommended that the Welsh Government:

- Maps the depth of the issue with aspirants in political parties and considers a periodic safety survey with national and local level politicians

- Integrates actions against violence in election guidelines

- Works with the police to improve training on internet-based violence

- Works with the police and local government to provide protection for targeted groups

- Engages with political parties to increase awareness and encourage internal inclusive measures

- Engages with society to educate on issues of violence against politicians and mitigate violent discourse on social media

Campaign finances and transparency

The transparency of campaign finances can be improved which may have broader effects on public trust. Specifically, it is recommended that results of Welsh elections and campaign finances:

- Be officially reported with an online tool that gives voters an access point to that information

- Utilise a user-friendly interface that allows voters to find the data they are looking for

- Support good data practices and offer data that is:

    o Open-licence

    o Machine-readable

    o Batch-downloadable

    o Up-to-date

    o Publicly available

    o Free of charge

    o Timely

    o Reliable

It is also recommended that the Welsh Government develops a data reporting system that enables parties to provide information on candidates and includes data on sources of funding and details of expenditure.

Final remarks

This report analysed international evidence on early voting and other innovative voting practices, candidate and agent safety, and transparency in campaign financing and spending. The overall aim of the research was to find examples of good practice for the Welsh Government to consider in making elections safer and more inclusive, for the electorate and candidates alike. Potential changes to electoral administration are likely to be context-dependent and it is important, therefore, for pilots to be discussed and undertaken alongside debates with key stakeholders in Wales.

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