

British Election Survey: Levels of Voter Registration under IER

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The British Electoral Study is the longest running social science survey in the UK and had made a major contribution the understanding of political attitudes and behaviour. As an intern at BES, my research

contributed towards a report that was to be produced for the Electoral Commission to determine the impact of IER on voter registration.

Objectives

The aim of the report was to look at the levels of voter registration following the transition to the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in 2014.

I used the British Election Study's datasets – datasets both pre-2014 and post-2014 – in order to determine whether the IER system had been either beneficial or perhaps detrimental to overall voter registration. The datasets contained the details of those who had answered BES survey's, and this included whether they are/have been/or are still registered, as well as their socio-economic status, race and gender.

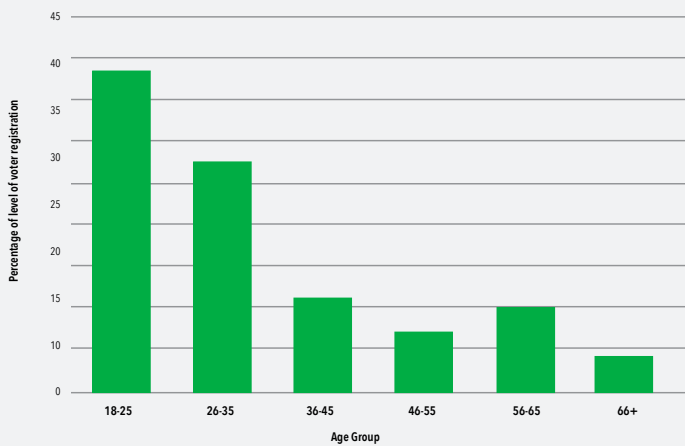
The central aim of the project was to determine whether the implementation of IER had been counter-productive and had consequently led to the decline of voter registration among certain demographic groups. I looked at the validated voter registration under both the 'household' system and IER system to determine which groups, if any at all, had become electorally disadvantaged.

Method

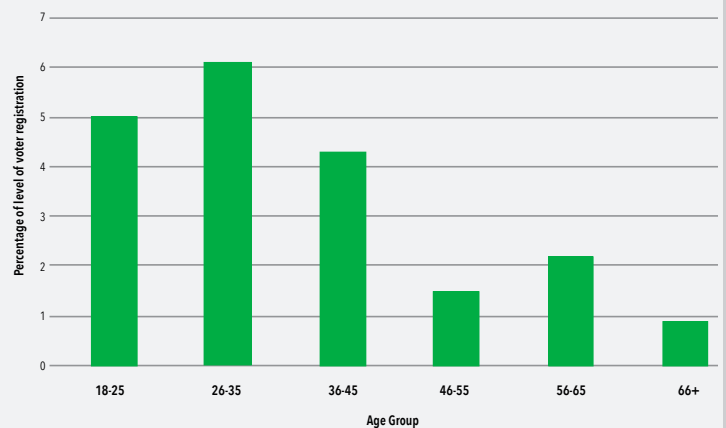
The Electoral Commission had already produced a document noting that under the IER system the overall accuracy of the electoral register had improved by approximately 4 per cent, whilst the overall completeness of the register had remained largely stable – declining by only 1 per cent under IER. These findings were used as a basis for my analysis.

I used SPSS to analyse Waves 2 to Waves 6 of the BES Surveys, and Microsoft Excel in order to produce a visual representations of my findings.

But there are two specific obstacles that may have limited my ability to produce a thorough analysis; a) many people who answered the survey at Wave 2 did not answer at Wave 6 – meaning that it was impossible to know whether they had gained registration or had fallen off the register. b) Since a particular type of person is participate in BES surveys (i.e those who are likely to take an interest in British politics), it is difficult to determine whether the sample population .



A graph to show percentage within each age group of those who fell of the register under IER



A graph to show the percentage of those who fell off the electoral register under IER across age groups

Results and Conclusions

Data shows that young people, i.e those between the ages of 18-35, were most likely to fall of the register under IER than any other age group. This may be because younger people tend to have reported higher levels of disengagement with politics and so fail to register themselves; or more likely, because younger people are more mbile and so fail to register under their

new (often temporary) households. This has serious implications for British electoral politics once we consider the fact that millennials tend to be further towards the left on the political spectrum, and thus we may see support for the left dwindling over the next few decades if the IER system is not rectified.