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British public supports local elections voting rights for all residents

63% of people agree that all residents should have the right to vote in local elections in the UK. Excluding respondents who said “don’t know”, those supportive of votes for all residents outweighed those opposed by nearly 3 to 1.

An online poll conducted by [Number Cruncher with a sample of 1,000 UK adults](#) on behalf of the Young Europeans Network’s [OurHomeOurVote](#) campaign showed that the British public is in favour of a voting system which gives all residents with lawful residence in the UK the right to vote in local elections.

The question asked “Do you think that all adults living legally in the UK, regardless of their citizenship, should or should not have the right to vote in local (e.g. council) elections?”

In every one of the regions (London, South, Midlands, North, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), over 60% of people said all residents should have the right to vote in local elections.

Amongst those who voted Labour in 2019, 76% said all residents should have the right to vote in local elections, while only 8% disagreed. Amongst those who voted Conservative in 2019, 49% said “should” vs 38% who said “should not”. 77% of those who voted Liberal Democrat in 2019 said “should”.

Background

At the moment, EU citizens can vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland. In Scotland and Wales, EU citizens, like all qualifying foreign citizens, can vote in both local and devolved national elections.

Owing to the UK leaving the EU, the Elections Bill currently in Parliament proposes to reform the voting rights of EU citizens. Only those EU citizens with settled and pre-settled status who entered the UK before 2021 will continue having a right to vote in English and Northern Irish elections. This would deny EU citizens with (pre-)settled status who join their family members in the UK after January 2021 a vote. In contrast, in Scotland and Wales, the voting rights of EU citizens will not change.

EU citizens who enter the UK from 2021 onwards will only have the right to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland if their countries of origin have a bilateral voting rights agreement with the UK. At present, the UK has only secured these agreements with Portugal, Spain, Poland.

A more comprehensive overview of the changes proposed can be found in this [briefing paper](#).

What are we asking for?

the3million’s Young Europeans Network, in partnership with Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC), believes **all residents, no matter where they are from, should have the right to vote in local elections**. If you live somewhere, use public services, pay council tax, should you not have a say in how these are run? It is already the case in Scotland and Wales that all lawful residents should have the right to vote in local elections.

A UK-wide approach entitling all residents to vote could enfranchise approximately **1,027,000** residents in England and Northern Ireland. In London, **377,000** residents could potentially gain the right to vote.¹

Local level politics affects all residents equally. Residence-based voting rights is already in [place in many countries](#). We should be removing, not adding, barriers to political participation.

Why was the poll conducted?

The Elections Bill prompted a rethink about voting rights in local elections and we wanted to undertake the first poll of its kind to establish how people feel about who should be able to vote in local elections.

[Cross party politicians](#) and [various organisations](#) already endorse the model. Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the UK Labour Party, was supportive of the residence-based voting rights at the Labour Party Conference stating that [“if you're putting in, you should be able to influence what's around you”](#).

Comments in response to the poll results:

Dr Nik Johnson, Labour Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, said:

“Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are amongst the most diverse areas in the UK. Many thousands in communities across the county would gain the right to vote if we introduced residence-based voting rights. As Mayor, I want to speak for and be a representative for everyone in the area, regardless of where they were born. It seems perfectly sensible for all residents to have a say in how their communities are run and all residents get the chance to choose their local representatives.”

Gio Spinella, Conservative Councillor at the London Borough of Camden, said:

“Most voters - regardless of political affiliation - agree with this campaign and with the principle that if you live in a community and pay taxes towards that community, you should have a say in how that community is run, i.e. a vote!”

Sunder Katwala, Director of the independent think tank British Future, said:

“If we want to build a shared sense of local identity and belonging in our communities, it seems only fair that we all get a say in how things are run. Most people take this common-sense view, which will help promote integration in the towns and cities where people live.”

Christie, Romanian student at The University of Oxford, entered the UK in 2021 with a student visa, said:

“I consider voting one of the most important things I can personally do in politics, and one of the best ways to be heard. The fact that I won't be able to vote in local elections in a country where I will probably be living for most of my twenties is very disappointing - ultimately, political decisions made will affect us just as much as they will affect those with settled status. Especially since all this bill will do is take away voting rights we already have. If settled EU citizens keep their voting rights, we should keep ours as well!”

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¹ Using [Office for National Statistics](#) data, we (Young Europeans Network) added the number of Commonwealth and EU citizens across the UK who already have the right to vote in local elections. We subtracted this from the total figure of non-British residents in the UK. These statistics are estimates. They are not exact because, for example, some residents may have dual nationality and be able to vote with one nationality but not another.