

July 2021



Access denied?

The introduction of voter ID laws and the potential impact on Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller people

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement is a registered UK charity promoting inclusion and community engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers. The Traveller Movement seeks to empower and support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to advocate for the full implementation of their human rights.

Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
1.1 Key findings	4
1.2 Recommendations.....	5
2. Introduction and Background.....	6
3. Methodology.....	8
4. Findings	10
4.1 Alienation, language and politicians.....	10
4.1.1 Language and political rhetoric.....	10
4.1.2 Relationship to Politicians.....	11
4.2 Perception to voting in the UK.....	12
4.3 Mistrust of state institutions.....	13
4.4 Pyramid of Needs	14
4.5 Bureaucratic Barriers (Voter ID).....	15
4.5.1 Literacy barriers.....	15
4.5.2 'Logistical barriers'	16
5. Summary and conclusions	17
6. References	18
7. Appendices	19
Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire.....	19
Appendix 3: Codebook.....	20
Appendix 4: Informed consent form	21
Appendix 5: Demographics of Survey Respondents	23



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1. Executive Summary

In response to the government's Elections Bill 2021, which would mandate the provision of photo ID at polling stations, many civil society groups have raised concerns about the impact of voter ID legislation on poor and minoritised voters. Given two million people in the UK do not possess photo ID (Cabinet office, 2021), voter ID laws pose a severe threat to free and fair elections, and specifically discriminate against poorer, minority ethnic voters including Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers.

We wanted to hear from Gypsy, Roma and Traveler people about the barriers they currently face to political engagement, and how voter ID laws would impact them in the future.

We conducted a series of interviews with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers ("GRT"), key stakeholders in the charity sector, as well as politicians and activists. We also sent out a survey to members of GRT communities to find out how common it was to vote, and what kind of, if any, photo ID they possessed.

This research conclusively shows that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) people view elections as a vehicle for hate, with politicians using Travellers as political footballs. It also shows that the government is introducing costly voter ID legislation to address very low levels of voter fraud and it would better spend its time and money encouraging widespread voter registration and improving political literacy in schools.



1.1 Key findings



All the Travellers interviewed for this research either thought voter ID laws did nothing to tackle existing barriers to participation, or they thought that ID laws were a barrier in and of themselves.



Voter ID laws would require Gypsies and Travellers to produce even more documentary evidence in order to vote, something this report finds that some Gypsy and Traveller people will disproportionately struggle with.



Racist and hostile rhetoric used by politicians and political parties alienates and pushes away many potential Gypsy, Roma Traveller voters.



Nomadic Travellers and Travellers who live on sites already struggle with access to basic infrastructure, including postal services and internet access, which prevents them from registering to vote, or acquiring other forms of documentation or ID.



Ethnicity data is not recorded at any point in the electoral process, therefore it is impossible know what groups will be impacted by voter ID laws.



There are very low levels of voter fraud in the UK, therefore voter ID legislation is disproportionate and potentially quite costly.



The 2018 and 2019 voter ID pilots didn't collect ethnicity data so it is impossible to know what groups were impacted



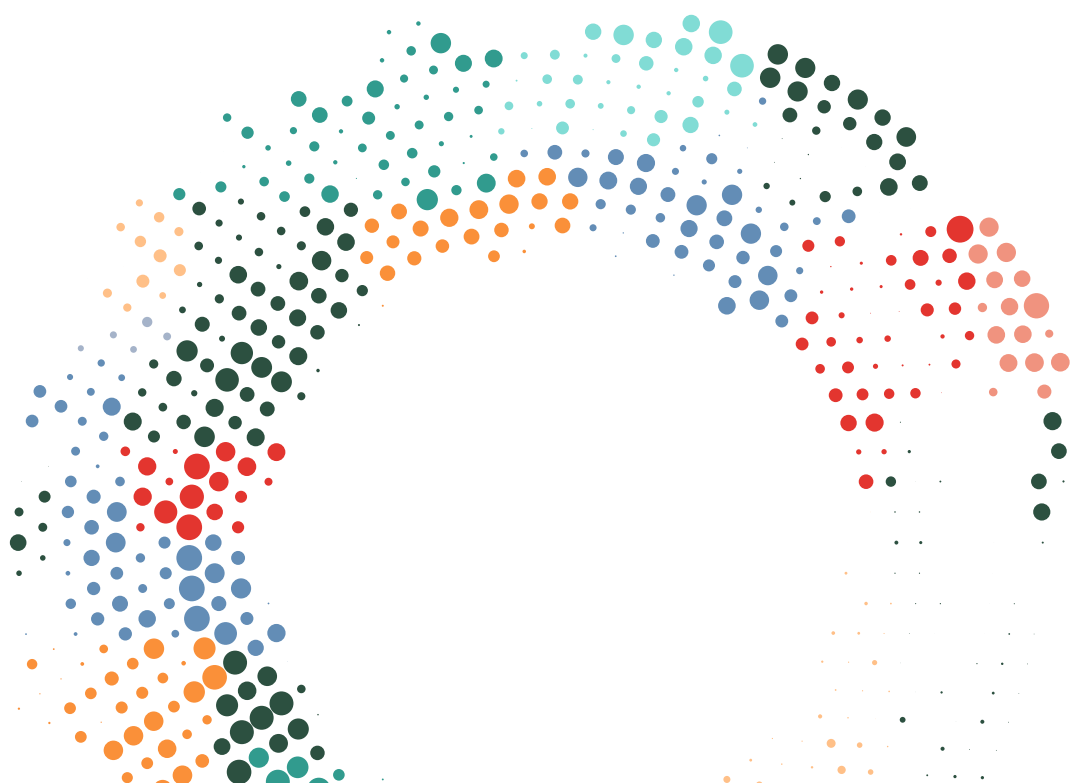
There is no conclusive evidence that voter ID legislation will make people more likely to vote, in fact the opposite may be true.

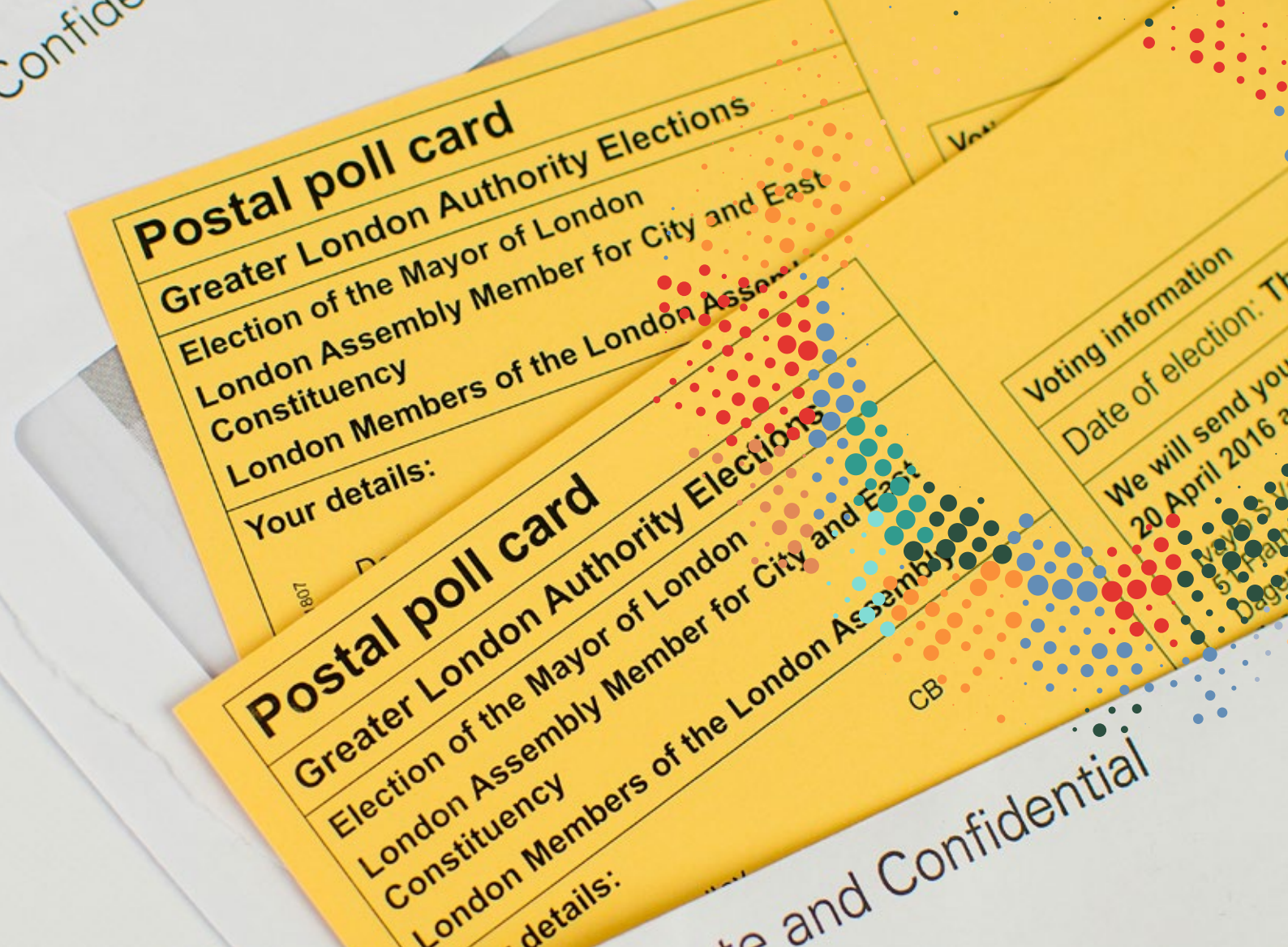


Voting ID legislation does nothing to tackle the already existing barriers to political participation for many GRT people.



Gypsy, Roma Traveller people face some of the worse discrimination and outcomes of any ethnic group (WEC, 2019; EHRC, 2009). The financial or time requirements of acquiring the necessary documents to receive a photo ID would place a disproportionate burden on them.





1.2 Recommendations

- **Withdraw the Electoral Integrity Bill** – there is little evidence of widespread voter fraud in the UK; instead **spend allocated funding on voter registration campaigns**, like Operation Traveller Vote¹;
- More research is required to understand the impact of voter ID legislation on people with protected characteristics;
- More effective engagement and consultation with minoritised and disenfranchised groups to understand why voter turnout is poor in these communities;
- Anti-Gypsyism in politics must be urgently recognised for the corrosive effect it has on GRT voter turnout;
- Conduct widespread outreach campaigns to encourage voter registration with politically under-represented groups;
- Enhance parliamentary code of conduct to include a sanction on hate speech against people with protected characteristics, including Gypsies, Roma and Irish Travellers;
- A funded programme of political literacy should be mandatory in schools.
- A funded programme of political literacy should be fully resourced and commissionable to third sector organisations.

¹ <https://travellermovement.org.uk/campaigns/operation-traveller-vote>

2. Introduction and Background

As outlined in the Queen's Speech on May 11th 2021, the government is introducing voter ID legislation in time for the next general election. The introduction of voter ID laws is deeply alarming and has been flagged by a number of groups as unnecessary and an attack on our democratic right to vote.

In a letter dated 4th May 2021 from the Cabinet Office to The Traveller Movement, the government outlined its justification for voter ID as follows:

*“This Government is determined to strengthen the integrity of our electoral system and give the public confidence that our elections are modern, fair and secure. **If people are confident about the electoral system, they are more likely to participate in it.**”*

A central justification for voter ID therefore is that it will increase political participation. The significant barriers to GRT political participation, including hurtful and racist language used by public figures, historic discrimination, poor relationships between politicians and GRT communities, and other physical/bureaucratic barriers, would not be solved by voter ID laws. In fact, **voter ID laws are themselves a significant barrier to participation**. It places an unfair and discriminatory burden on poorer sections of society, including those from minoritised backgrounds, and homeless people who already struggle to be democratically included. Further, the cost of introducing this legislation is estimated at £20 million at each general election, according to the government's own research making it a costly endeavour.

The government has stated that the introduction of voter ID will not impact on any group, however, **ethnicity data isn't collected at any point of the electoral system**, therefore how could it possibly know that it won't impact certain groups, when:



- The 2018 and 2019 voter identification pilot schemes did not collect demographic data about either the people who could not initially show ID or about those who did or did not return with ID later.
- This was because of the practical challenges involved in carrying out that data collection.

There is early evidence that voter ID requirements have already caused significantly more harm than benefit. An analysis of the 2018 voter ID trials² found that the rate of people turned away from pilot areas relative to actual cases or allegations of fraud was “extremely high”³. Of the 2000 people turned away in ID trial areas, 750 people did not return – compared to the 8 allegations of voter fraud made in 2018⁴, it is evident that ID requirements are a disproportionate response.

This report therefore considers the wider barriers facing GRT people, and places voter ID laws in the context of other discriminatory bureaucratic barriers facing GRT people.

² <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/five-things-we-have-learnt-about-englands-voter-id-trials-in-the-2019-local-elections/>

³ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/five-things-we-have-learnt-about-englands-voter-id-trials-in-the-2019-local-elections/>

⁴ <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/five-things-we-have-learnt-about-englands-voter-id-trials-in-the-2019-local-elections/>

2.1 Background – Voter ID trials

Two voter ID pilot studies were conducted during the May 2018, and subsequent 2019 local elections by the Electoral Commission. The government's stated intention for these schemes were to "*strengthen the integrity of elections in Great Britain and protect voters from electoral fraud*". The government described the two trials as a success⁵ because they improved perceptions that elections were safeguarded from fraud.

Chloe Smith, then Cabinet Office Minister, now Minister for the Constitution stated that:

*"Based on the independent Electoral Commission's evaluations of the 2018 and 2019 voter ID pilots, **there is no indication that any consistent demographic was adversely affected by the use of voter ID.**"*⁶

The Electoral Reform society has addressed the claim that voter ID laws are a proportionate response in a letter to Chloe Smith in 2019. They argue there is no evidence that voter fraud is a problem in the UK; in 2016 there were 44 allegations of impersonation, out of 64 million votes⁷. According to the Electoral Commission, in 2019 out of 592 electoral fraud allegations, 3 led to a conviction and one person was cautioned by police⁸. The Electoral Commission stresses that **large-scale electoral fraud was not and continues to not be an issue in UK elections**. The number of people denied a voter in pilot schemes outnumbered the scale of alleged voter fraud by 100 in 2018⁹. Therefore, the government's claim that **voter ID laws are proportionate to electoral fraud is deceptive**.

Minister Smith's claim that the pilot schemes did not indicate any demographic was impacted by voter ID requirements is a claim she could not possibly verify as no **demographic data was recorded in the voter ID pilots**¹⁰. The 2018 voter ID pilot led to 1000 being turned away, of which 350 voters did not return. In the 2019 trial 2000 were turned away, with 750 not returning. According to the LSE politics blog, in the 2019 trial the number of people turned away from each pilot area relative to the number of allegations and cases of personation was "*extremely high*"¹¹.

The government claims the perception of voter fraud seems to be that as long as the government is seen as trying to stop fraud, they can improve voters' trust in democracy. However, a post-poll conducted by the Electoral Commission during the 2019 pilot found 24% thought electoral fraud was somewhat of a serious problem. On the other hand, 64% thought low voter turnout and media bias were problems. Any concerns over voting safety largely concerned postal voting (72%) compared to polling stations (81%)¹².

5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/another-success-for-the-governments-voter-id-pilots-22-july-2019>

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jul/28/mps-may-have-been-misled-over-bame-voter-id-claims>

7 <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/parliamentary-briefings/letter-sent-to-chloe-smith-mp-minister-for-the-constitution/>

8 <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/electoral-fraud-data/2019-electoral-fraud-data>

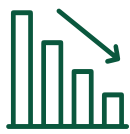
9 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/oct/13/conservatives-accused-of-election-rigging-leaked-id-plans-voter-fraud>

10 "Polling station staff were not asked to collect demographic data about the people who did not come back, owing to the practical challenges involved in carrying out that data collection exercise." <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/voter-identification-pilots/may-2019-voter-identification-pilot-schemes/impact-voters-experience>

11 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/five-things-we-have-learnt-about-englands-voter-id-trials-in-the-2019-local-elections/>

12 https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-07/ID%20pilots%20post%20wave%20report%20BMG_FINAL_.pdf

Further, the Cabinet Office published research in April 2021 which indicated two million people in the UK do not possess photo identification, and of that two million, 42% of respondents with no photo ID said they were unlikely to apply for a voter card, and therefore risk becoming disenfranchised.



1%
chance of
decreasing voting



6%
said was less likely
to vote in person



5%
said more likely
to vote in person
(on page 9/16)

3. Methodology

This is an exploratory report looking into the impact of voter ID laws on GRT political participation, including voter registration and voting in local and general elections. For this report, The Traveller Movement conducted an online survey from the beginning of March 2021 to the middle of May 2021, asking questions ranging from reasons for voting, likelihood of possessing photo ID, likelihood of voting by mail or in person etc. This survey was circulated on Facebook and Twitter. A total of 69 people responded to the survey.

We also conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 8 people, including Travellers, stakeholders from the charity and political advocacy sector, activists, an MP and a parliamentary assistant. Participants were asked their views on voting, what they thought the barriers to political engagement were and whether they had photo ID (see appendix 2).

3.1 Literature Review

We first conducted a literature review on the impact of voter ID laws on minoritized voters. We reviewed American political science literature on US voter ID laws, particularly focusing on Hajnal et al's (2017) study on congressional elections and Ross' (2019) 'sociological theory of voting'¹³. Ross (2019) distinguished between passive barriers to voting - conditions that drive lower turnout in specific groups, such as poverty, discrimination, and low access to information, typically found in marginalised or vulnerable communities) - and active barriers - obstacles erected to lower turnout.

This passive/active barrier distinction led us to consider the wider barriers to political engagement for GRT people. We considered the impact of poor outcomes in education, poor access to sites and accommodation for the minority of Travellers who are still nomadic, and the effects of marginalisation and alienation. We therefore distinguished between apathy and alienation (our 'passive barriers') that made GRT people less willing to engage in politics, and bureaucratic and logistical barriers that may actively impede GRT people from registering to vote or acquiring the necessary documentation.

Our literature review drove us to take a more holistic view of the barriers to voting facing GRT people, and how voter ID requirements would fit within this broader context. We shifted the semi-structured interviews to consider these wider barriers (see appendices) including asking about relationships with politicians, literacy barriers, logistical barriers etc.

¹³ Ross, Bertrall L. "Passive Voter Suppression: Campaign Mobilization and the Effective Disfranchisement of the Poor." *Nw. UL Rev.* 114 (2019): 633.

3.2 Survey Demographics

- Romany Gypsies most common respondent (36%)
- Skewed younger (large percentage 25-34 (29%)), with a larger 55-64 (21%) group
- High level of education and political engagement.
- Response bias a potential issue in the way we circulated the survey – people with time and regular users of social media may skew towards educated people, therefore impacting our sample group.

Circulating our survey on social media platforms utilised convenience sampling; site users were invited to fill in the survey. Whilst we focused exclusively on specific ethnic groups/identities for the purpose of our study, respondents still self-selected.

Our use of non-probable convenience sampling poses several problems. Response bias may have led to overrepresentation of certain age groups/levels of education/ethnic identity in our respondents¹⁴.

This study has discussed internet and time barriers: relying on easy access to social media arguable excludes a key demographic of people with no access to computers or the internet. The kinds of people most negatively impacted by ID requirements to vote may be the same people who don't regularly use social media, or volunteer to fill in surveys online. Therefore our survey sample may not be representative of the wider GRT population, excluding certain groups, and overrepresenting others.

Semi-structured Interviews

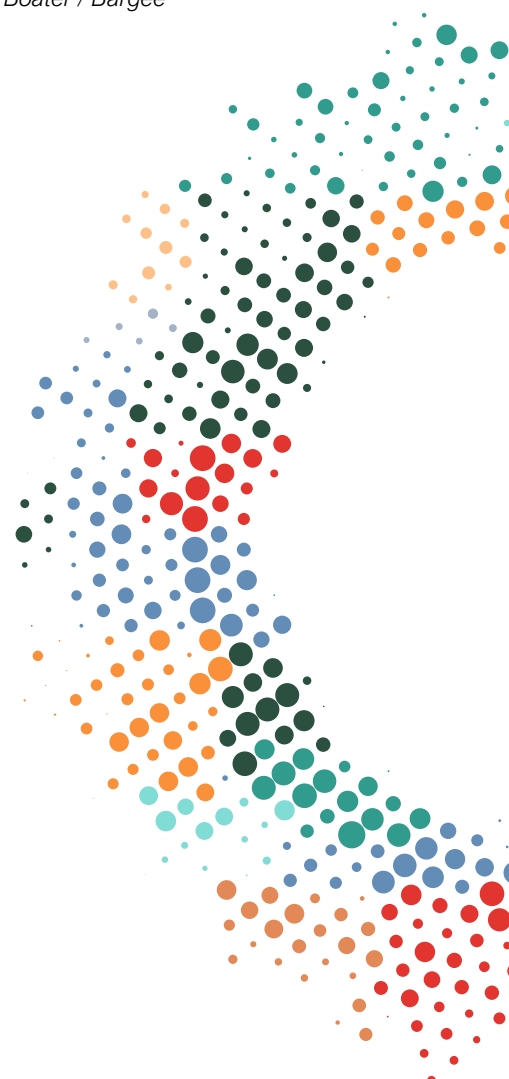
We used non-probable sampling in our selection of candidates for semi structured interviews. Interviews were recorded and conducted from the 5th of March to the 1st of May 2021. The interviews ranged from around 20 minutes to an hour long. Interviews were transcribed and qualitatively analysed, creating a codebook (appendix 3) and breaking respondents' answers into key themes. The research participants are anonymized in the report and all participants were provided with information sheets, and informed consent was sought before interviews took place.

- Issues: offers a narrow view that we can't extrapolate to make general statements on wider population.
- The findings from our interviews serve as background/context to suggestions/exploration of potential barriers.
- Value of individual perspective.

How do you identify?



- Irish Traveller (Mincéir/Pavee)
- English Traveller
- Welsh Traveller
- Scottish Traveller
- English Romany Gypsy
- Roma
- New Age Traveller
- Showmen
- Boater / Bargee



¹⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/online-survey>

4. Findings

4.1 Alienation, language and politicians

“You feel non-existent, and you feel that you don’t belong, and you’re not a valued citizen”

Simon

The vast majority of Travellers we interviewed described feelings of alienation and exclusion from society and the political process. The reasons most commonly cited were the language and rhetoric of public figures and the media, and previous interactions with politicians.

4.1.2 Language and political rhetoric

Racist language constitutes a serious barrier to political engagement for two reasons. First, it isolates and pushes many Travellers away from voting as it alienates and discourages them from engaging in the political process. Secondly, many Travellers feel elections themselves are a major vehicle for anti-Traveller hate. Interviewees described an escalation in racist and violent language towards Travellers around elections. Others frequently saw both major political parties weaponising anti-Traveller bigotry in campaigns.

All of the Travellers interviewed described anti-Traveller rhetoric as commonplace, and socially permissible. Hostile language against Travellers varied from open racism, to dehumanising terms and ‘othering’:

“It’s always ‘The Gypsies and Travellers or, you know, it’s the vermin. It’s the pikeys and they’re here and they’re there’. So it’s always that rhetoric”

Rachel

To less overt, coded language:

“The undertones of everything they say is based in racism and prejudice and discrimination.”

Simon

Anti-Traveller rhetoric was viewed as pervasive in all levels of British politics. One Traveller thought that GRT people were always scapegoated in local elections:

“[With] local elections coming up there’s two things that come up, potholes and Travellers”

Liam

Harmful rhetoric was common at the national level too. A parliamentary assistant described

“politicians of all stripes” engaging in *“thinly veiled...racism towards GRT people”* in Parliament. An MP we interviewed described the language used against Travellers in Parliament as *“dreadful”* and something *“you hear all the time”*. Even the more ‘neutral’ language used in Parliamentary debates has undertones of racism and exclusion towards Travellers. One interviewee described the impact of hearing about the debate in Parliament entitled *“Parliament, Gypsies and Travellers and our Local Communities”*:

“The name of the debate says that we’re outsiders. It says that we’re not part of the local community.”

Liam

Interviewees mentioned offensive language being employed in campaign leaflets:

“We’ve got [then] Labour Shadow Minister for equalities not proofreading a flyer that she went canvassing with to say we’re going to stop Traveller incursions.”

Sara

Similarly, a 2019 report by OpenDemocracy found that anti-Traveller rhetoric was rife in Conservative campaign literature and rhetoric during the 2019 election¹⁵ while the local elections in 2021 saw many candidates using the promise of Traveller camp removal as an electoral selling point.¹⁶

The cumulative effect of anti-Traveller rhetoric is that it alienates many Travellers, and makes them feel like their voice is not heard or respected. Many view politicians as either openly hostile and intolerant towards GRT people, or dismissive towards Travellers, and careless in the rhetoric they use.

4.1.2 Relationship to Politicians

Nearly all the Travellers we interviewed said politicians had never visited Traveller sites to campaign or canvas. This often means Travellers never form personal or political bonds with political representatives or parties:

“I’ve never met a councillor. No councillor has ever come to visit my home. No one campaigning has ever come to visit. So this is why a lot of people aren’t political” Samantha

The lack of outreach from politicians even meant that political mobilisation within Traveller communities were often hamstrung.

“How can I look my parents in the eye and say they care about us when none of them have ever actually shown up on the sites?”

Liam

The sentiment that politicians never reached out or expressed interest in Travellers was widely held by interviewees:

“There’s been an unwillingness on behalf of all the politicians... to embrace Traveller identity and culture and to show willingness that they want to work with Travellers”

Simon

Of the limited times Travellers engaged with politicians, they faced open hostility. In one case an interviewee described being personally attacked by an MP during a home visit during an election.

“There’s a candidate that’s in my area that has been very anti Traveller and has been to visit me and said ‘Why don’t you pay tax Rachel? Why don’t you pay council tax?’ And I’m like, Uh, duh, yeah I do, I’m on an authorised site and I can show you my bills if you like. ‘Well, how much do you pay? You must get a discount, right?’ No, I pay the same as everyone else in the local housing around there. I’m in the same band. And he’s like, ‘Oh, I can’t really see that. You must have free rent, then’. No, I pay rent also.”

The kind of language public figures use matters. Hostile rhetoric convinces many Travellers that they are not respected or valued by politicians. There is a severe lack of outreach to many GRT communities to counteract feelings of alienation and disenchantment many Travellers feel towards politics. This constitutes a major political barrier to participation because it means GRT people are much less likely to engage in any level of politics, let alone turn up to vote.

“I think politicians need to do a hell of a lot more to reach out. And no, I don’t think any politician can stand up and say that their party is fully representative and fully engages with the GRT community.”

Kate

¹⁵ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/dark-money-investigations/tories-accused-of-fanning-flames-of-racism-against-gypsytravellers-ahead-of-uk-election/>

¹⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/20/removal-of-traveller-camps-pledged-in-tory-facebook-campaigns>

4.2 Perception to voting in the UK

Many Travellers described political apathy and feelings of powerlessness as major barriers to GRT participation in the political process. In our survey, 21% of respondents said they didn't see the point of voting.

Some Travellers felt like their voice was never heard or respected:

"I've reached a point where I'm disenfranchised"

Samantha

"When you have people in politics that are just dead against you...it's people like that whose voices will be heard every time over the Traveller community"

Sara

For other Travellers, a major barrier to political engagement was the lack of Traveller representation in local or national politics.

"If you are disenfranchised, if you don't see yourself reflected, if you don't see Members of Parliament who care, why would you and why should you get involved, you know?"

Samantha

"Not being able to see someone that like represents you in Parliament, is a barrier in itself for democracy."

Liam

Many of the written responses in our survey mentioned the lack of GRT representation as an issue in politics.

"I'd like to see more Travellers standing for council & hopefully mp's one day" Respondent

Several Travellers we interviewed had personally tried or considered entering into electoral politics, but feared racial discrimination or harassment:

"Why would you want to put yourself in that environment where, you know, you're being picked off one by one by several people, and you're constantly having to defend every Traveller in the country"

Rachel

A lack of political representation turns Travellers away, and fears of racial discrimination makes the choice of entering politics incredibly difficult for many GRT people. One Traveller described being told to hide his identity while running as a candidate:

"I get things from like lords and MPs and things saying "why don't you run as a candidate? And then tell people after you won your background?"

Liam

Feelings of powerlessness and disenfranchisement induce apathy and disengagement in many GRT communities. A lack of representation, and the severe barriers to entering electoral politics for even politically active Travellers worsens the situation.

"I've spoke to my parents and said, you know, you need to vote and they're like "Why? What's our number gonna make any difference? What are they going to do for us? They're going to give me somewhere to live? And are they going to stop persecuting me?"

Rachel

4.3 Mistrust of state institutions

Many Travellers described feelings of fear, wariness, or skepticism of the state. Much of this was brought about by what many interviewees saw as the “chipping away at the travelling people’s way of life” by the state (Simon).

“We’re constantly living in fear, basically, of local councils, of the government.”

Liam

Several people mentioned how badly the proposed Police and Crime Bill had affected them:

“Look at the police bill. Right, the feeling is I’m getting from my family and people that are close to me I know very well it’s persecution again” Rachel

One Traveller stated that Trespass and Policing laws made her feel like:

“They’re doing their best to just wipe you out. Like what would you call it? Taking you off the face of the world.”

Sara

One Romani Gypsy described the generational trauma of the Porajmos (the Gypsy Holocaust) had made her family extremely wary of sharing information with the state.

“They live their whole life with that motto that if anyone’s coming, they’re coming for them first, because they filled all these forms in because they settled because of health reasons. And they were registered with the council. I couldn’t really explain to them any different because they would talk of war times and family that were in the war”.

Rachel

Many felt like their way of life was under constant attack from the government and politicians. Most felt like their relationship with the government was built on persecution and hostility:

“When anyone turns out that’s from a statutory or, you know, wanting to find out information or do tick box exercises the police or enforcement come with them. We’re human beings, let’s have conversations.”

Rachel

One respondent stated a key reason for voting was:

“To keep out any politician that means ill for myself or my kin”

It should not be taken lightly that three interviewees independently expressed fears of genocide or ethnic cleansing when describing their feelings towards the state. Whilst generational trauma and historic persecution cannot be ignored in explaining why some GRT people are wary of the state, many interviewees expressed feelings that state persecution was an ongoing issue.

Fears and wariness of the state has much the same effect of alienation. It forces many Travellers outside of society, and discourages them from engaging in the political process. Another serious barrier to consider is the potential unwillingness of many Travellers to apply for ID due to past experiences with the state. Fears of sharing personal information, or interacting with the state that some Travellers, older Travellers in particular, must be considered as a potential barrier.

“Travellers just don’t trust authoritarian figures in any shape, way or form.”

Simon



POLLING STATION



4.4 Pyramid of Needs

Many Travellers said it was hard to find the time to be politically active. Several interviewees framed the barriers day-to-day survival posed to political engagement in terms of a ‘pyramid’ of needs. They contrasted the need to survive with the relative luxury of keeping themselves politically engaged and voting.

“It seems like they’re fighting, they’re fighting all their life to be accepted. Not to be forced to live the way the government wants it. So it comes down to voting and they say ‘Why should I vote?’. And there’s nothing ever done for me no one is listening to me or my way of life”

Sara

“If you have a life, you have money, you have kids, you know, kids need feeding, care and responsibilities. People then just do the day to day”

Samantha

For many of the Travellers, they had no time to prioritise remaining informed or engaged. Whilst voting ID laws may make it harder for them to vote, it forms part of a far wider set of barriers:

“I think the voter ID thing is at the end of the pile of things”

Simon

For nomadic Travellers, there are often severe physical barriers to being politically engaged.

“When I was being moved on, I didn’t really have a clue when the elections was on because I was constantly being moved on, or you have access to electricity only through a generator. And that’s only for an hour or two of night... so you didn’t really have the coverage or being able to access what voting meant, or who to vote for.”

Beyond a struggle to remain informed and engaged, the struggle to find a site to stop at, or working infrastructure takes precedent over voting for many Travellers.

Even where there was an appetite to engage in politics, many Travellers stressed that they often had limited time or resources to remain politically engaged. Many saw voter ID as yet another barrier that made voting harder.

Mandatory voter ID may incur ‘considerable hidden costs’ on GRT people as travel expenses and acquiring the correct documents for registration take time and money¹⁷. Faced with a pyramid of needs, GRT people may be further incentivised to retreat from politics.

“It’s a massive pyramid to climb.”

Sara

¹⁷ Stanford, B 2018, ‘Compulsory Voter Identification, Disenfranchisement and Human Rights: Electoral Reform in Great Britain’

4.5 Bureaucratic Barriers (Voter ID)

There are a range of barriers that could be considered ‘bureaucratic’ barriers to political engagement. For nomadic Travellers for example, government policies like enforced mobility, or the lack of permanent sites for Travellers mean many don’t have a fixed address. This can make applying for ID or registering to vote is significantly harder.

“Travellers don’t have the kind of things like National Insurance numbers, they’re not registered with local GP services and things like that. Don’t have NHS numbers. In many ways, they’re non existent.”

Simon

“Because you don’t have an address, people can’t go through to put in a driving licence. You have a passport, but still you need an address.”

Sara

4.5.1 Literacy barriers

Another serious barrier to engagement several Travellers brought up was the issue of low literacy rates in GRT communities. Filling out paperwork or reading forms therefore constitutes a serious barrier to many GRT people.

Literacy is an issue in the community. What support is offered to these people? Survey Respondent

It doesn’t affect me because I am younger but I have a lot of family members who cannot read or write so they don’t have photographic ID.

Requiring GRT people to overcome yet another bureaucratic barrier in applying for a form of ID will significantly impact political engagement:

“Applying for a passport might seem like an easy thing for most families. For my family. It’s very difficult. Getting a passport and a driving licence, I’m considered the educated one. I have to do passports, all that stuff for my whole family. Not everybody has people like me in their family, you know, I mean, some families don’t even have people that can read.”

Liam



16%

of respondents said they do not possess any form of ID



4.5.2 'Logistical barriers'

Nomadic Travellers, and Travellers who live on sites described difficulties with reliable access either to the Royal Mail, or terrestrial television or internet.

"Living on an authorised site, battling with Openreach... making sure my internet don't get disconnected, being able to not have raw sewage running through our drains... it's killing us, you know, with all those barriers" Rachel

Several interviewees who lived on sites described difficulties getting mail delivered by the Royal Mail. This finding confirms an issue already raised in the 2009 EHRC *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities* report¹⁸.

"The Royal Mail decided they wouldn't be delivering letters...so we had to pick our mail from the sorting office probably for about eight months, which is just not great."

Rachel

Some Travellers being unable to register to vote by mail or cast a mail in ballot, or receive a polling card, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, are just a few examples of currently existing barriers to political engagement.

"How'd you get a postal ballot if you know the post office don't turn up? When they don't want to serve you in the local post office. How do you get a postal ballot?"

Liam

Impact of voter ID pilots (and voter turnout)

On whether the voter ID pilots found evidence of minoritised or GRT people being impacted by voter ID requirements, a respondent from the electoral commission said the following:

*"Polling station staff in the Government's 2018 and 2019 voter identification pilot schemes were not asked to collect demographic data about either the people who could **not initially show ID or about those who did or did not return with ID later**. This was because of the practical challenges involved in carrying out that data collection. That means we have no direct evidence to tell us whether people from particular backgrounds were more likely than others to find it hard to show ID".*

Electoral Commission

In a recent submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Electoral Commission noted *"that people who are from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are less likely to be involved at in the democratic process in the UK than people who are white"*¹⁹. However it is impossible to know who will be affected by the introduction of voter ID legislation as ethnicity data is not collected at any point in the electoral system.

In response to the question *"Has the electoral commission evidence of voting patterns (voter turnout) in GRT communities"* the EC stated:

"Data on turnout by any demographic is not collated because (as explained above) no direct demographic data is held on the electoral registers. Any reliable estimates of turnout by demographics, including for GRT communities, would come from public opinion surveys and research using marked electoral registers".

Therefore it is impossible to know if GRT people will be impacted by the introduction of voter ID legislation, or any other ethnic group for that matter, and any reliable estimates of turnout by demographics, including for GRT communities, would come from public opinion surveys and research using marked electoral registers.

18 Cemlyn, Margaret Greenfields, Sally Burnett, Zoe Matthews and Chris Whitwell . *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, EHRC. Access here: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-12-inequalities-experienced-by-gypsy-and-traveller-communities.pdf>

19 <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/11633/html/>

5. Summary and conclusions

The Gypsies, Roma and Travellers we interviewed for this research project thought the voter ID laws did nothing to tackle existing barriers to democratic participation, or that ID laws were a further barrier. In essence, implementing mandatory voter ID adds yet another barrier to participation, while additional barriers like lower levels of literacy mean it is harder for Travellers to complete forms or fill in paperwork.

Voter ID laws represent a serious bureaucratic barrier to participation, and may permanently lock many GRT people out of a system they already struggle to participate in.

The issue of receiving post on sites is also a serious barrier to participation as this is a key avenue for Travellers to register to vote or receive registration documents. ID laws would particularly affect people who already have fallen outside of the system. The Cabinet Office's own report into the effect of voter ID requirements notes that:

“close to half of those without photo ID would not seek to apply for the Voter Card, and therefore be at risk of ending up without photo ID.”

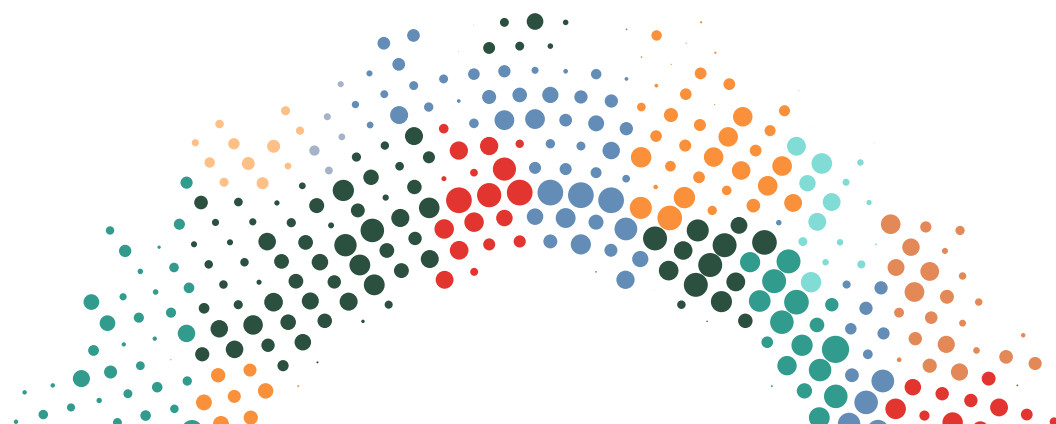
Political participation is made even more difficult by the racist and hostile language which is extremely commonplace in all levels of British politics. Whether it be naked racism, or coded language in campaign flyers, it offends and alienates many GRT people from society and the political process. Fundamentally, anti-Gypsyism is a significant barrier to democratic engagement for GRT people. As demonstrated by this research, GRT people feel dehumanised by mainstream politics, at the local and national level. This is especially prevalent in the run up to an election. There should be zero-tolerance for anti-Gypsy language and rhetoric. Rather than introducing additional barriers to voting, the government must make it easier for GRT people to register to vote and participate in elections, and voter ID laws place an unfair burden on a group of people.

Conclusion

The introduction of voter ID legislation raises more questions than answers, as there is no existing research on the potential impact on marginalised voters.

The current focus on preventing electoral fraud is misleading given the low levels of voter fraud in Britain; it only serves to undermine the integrity of electoral processes, which in itself is highly questionable. The government would better spend their time doing outreach to marginalised and minority ethnic people to engage them in politics, rather than put petty bureaucratic and expensive barriers in their way.

Fundamentally, there needs to be so much work done to ensure meaningful engagement and awareness, and simply introducing voter ID without that engagement will create more barriers, which begs the question - is voter ID legislation a solution looking for a problem? Given the current attack on our democratic institutions, let's call this what it is - an attack on our democratic right to vote.



6. References

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- Women and Equalities Committee (2019) *Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*; London; House of Commons Library. Access here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/360.pdf>



7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Voter ID Survey

A survey for Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers living in the United Kingdom

The UK government will introduce voter identification legislation next year. That means that people who vote in an election must produce valid photographic identification. This includes local elections, national elections, mayoral elections and referenda.

We want to know for the purposes of voting how many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have photographic identification.

This is a short survey and your participation will be much appreciated.

1. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

2. What is your age?

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 75 and older

3. How do you identify?

- ☐ Irish Traveller (Mincéir/Pavee)
- ☐ English Traveller
- ☐ Welsh Traveller
- ☐ Scottish Traveller
- ☐ English Romany Gypsy
- ☐ Roma
- ☐ New Age Traveller
- ☐ Showmen
- ☐ Boater / Bargee

4. At what age did you leave school

- ☐ Less than 12
- ☐ Less than 15
- ☐ Less than 18
- ☐ Completed secondary school
- ☐ Attended university
- ☐ Never attended school

5. Are you registered to vote?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

6. Have you ever voted?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

7. What photo identification do you have?

Tick as many boxes as apply.

- ☐ Passport
- ☐ Driver's license
- ☐ Freedom pass
- ☐ Senior Railcard
- ☐ Senior Coach card
- ☐ Military of Defence identity card
- ☐ PASS scheme card
- ☐ Photocard parking permit
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None of the above

8. Will you vote in the local elections (May 2021)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

9. Why will you vote?

.....

.....

.....

.....

10. What prevents you from voting?

Tick as many boxes as apply

- ☐ Not registered to vote
- ☐ Don't know how to register
- ☐ Don't know about postal votes
- ☐ Don't have an address
- ☐ Don't feel confident to vote
- ☐ Don't understand politics or who to vote for
- ☐ Low levels of literacy
- ☐ Don't see the point in voting

11. Would you vote by postal vote?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know how

12. Have you anything to add about voting in the UK?

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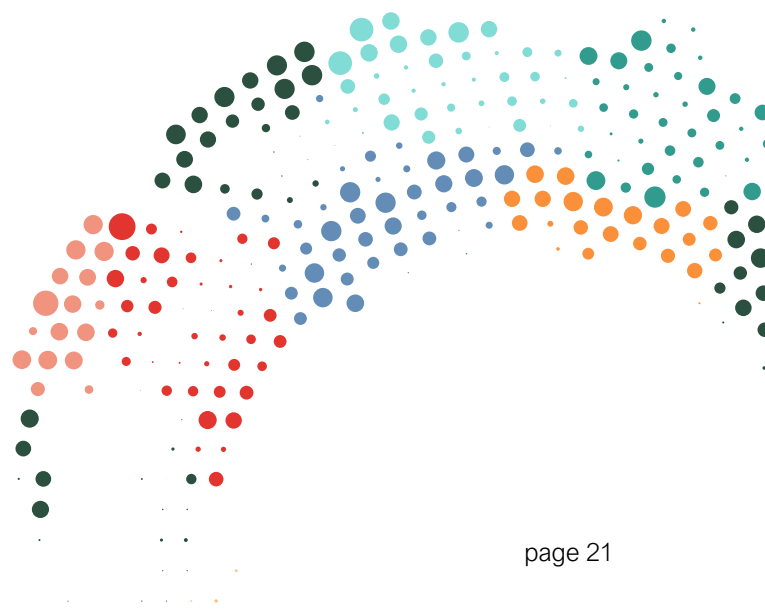
Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview questions

1. How do you feel about voting? / What is your perception of voting? (better phrasing here)
2. Do you vote, and why? How often have you voted in recent elections?
3. What kind of barriers do you think you and other GRT people face?
4. What do you think of Voter ID legislation?
5. Do you have the voter ID that the government requires?
 - a. Do you think it will make it materially difficult to you or your family to vote?
 - b. What kind of voter ID do they have?



Appendix 3: Codebook

Theme	Description
The State	Any mention of interactions with government, including the police or government representatives.
Bureaucratic Barriers	Includes paperwork or filling in forms, acquiring documents. Also includes barriers associated with government agencies or organisations, such as the postal service.
Discrimination/Alienation	Unfair treatment or exclusion from society. Includes poor outcomes in education, exclusion from politics, or unfair treatment in planning applications.
Electoralism	References to national or local elections.
Empowerment	References to a sense of personal authority or feelings of agency and self-worth.
Information Barriers	Lack of information or awareness of politics. May include not knowing how elections work, how to register, who to vote for, or when to vote.
Language/rhetoric	Mentions of public speech, or political language/writing in campaigns, Parliament, councils, or political literature.
Literacy	References to illiteracy.
Local government	Local councils, council elections.
National government	'Westminster', Parliament. References to MPs.
Emotional/Passive Barriers	Internal, emotional and responsive reasons to not engage in the political process. Includes alienation, frustration etc.
'Pyramid of Needs'	The prioritisation of more urgent needs over less urgent needs. For example, the need to find shelter taking precedent over turning out to vote.
Racism	References to prejudice or persecution based on ethnic identity.
Relationship to Politicians	Interactions or opinions of politicians.
Representation	Having one's interests, values, identity, or culture represented politically.





Appendix 4: Informed consent form

Consent form

For: The Traveller Movement

Funding: Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust

Research: Voting ID laws and barriers to voting for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller People

1. What is the research about?

You are invited to take part in research on the effect of proposed voter ID laws on GRT participation in elections. This piece of research will have finished by December 2021.

Voter ID laws would require voters to produce photo ID when they vote at polling stations. We want to know if these new laws would prevent GRT people from voting. It is likely that voter ID laws will be introduced at the next General Election.

2. How will you be involved?

The study will largely consist of interviews with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, and stakeholders - specifically those involved in the political process or charities related to voting rights. The interviews will be semi-structured and will likely last 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews will be recorded so we can transcribe them.

3. How can I withdraw from the study?

You can choose to opt out from the study at any time without having to give any reason. If any of the questions you are asked make you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. You will be given a pseudonym to guarantee anonymity that you will be able to identify should you wish to opt-out of this study.

4. How will this data be used?

This piece of research is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, an organisation working on voting rights and democracy. This research will be published and may be used to lobby parliament.

Any recordings or transcriptions will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared outside of the people involved in this research project. We will delete these recordings once we have finished our research.

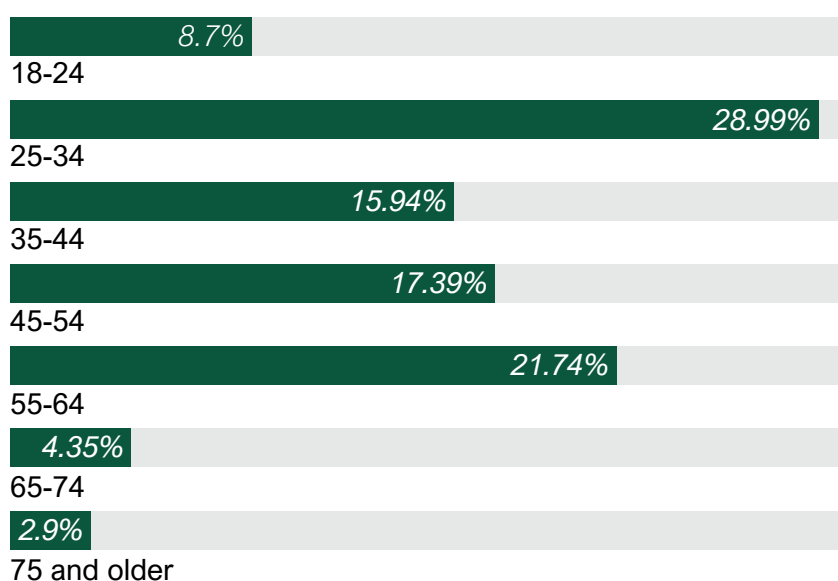
Signed Date

Appendix 5: Demographics of Survey Respondents

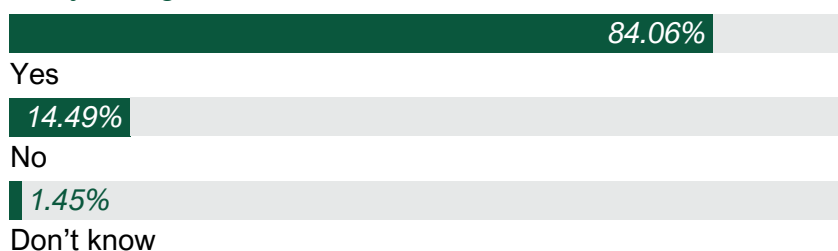
Identity	Responses	Percentage of sample
Irish Traveller (Mincéir/Pavee)	9	13%
English Traveller	7	10%
Welsh Traveller	2	3%
Scottish Traveller	7	10%
English Romany Gypsy	25	36%
Roma	6	9%
New Age Traveller	4	6%
Showmen	4	6%
Boater / Bargee	5	7%

Gender	Number	Percentage of sample
Male	23	33%
Female	41	60%
Prefer not to say	3	4%
Other	2	3%

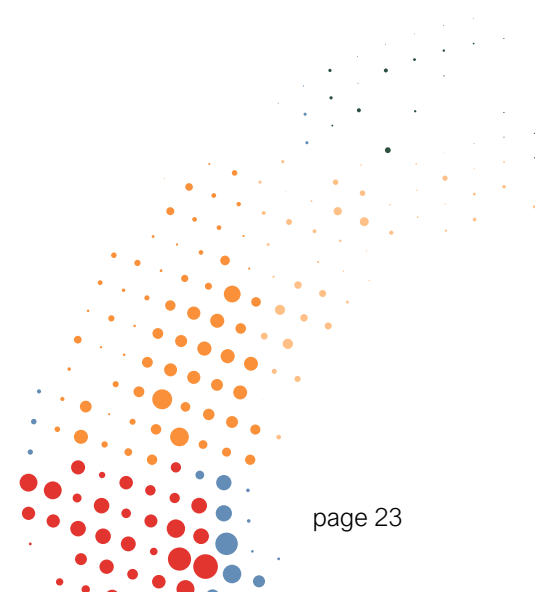
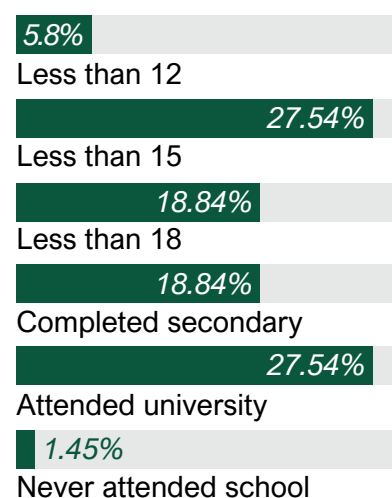
What is your age?



Are you registered to vote?



At what age did you leave school?





The Traveller Movement would like to say THANK
YOU to our funders for their support

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