

Plans to detect and prevent electoral fraud are under way ahead of this May's General Election

By Democratic Audit UK

*Robust plans are in place ahead of the May elections, but it is vital that voters know what does and doesn't constitute acceptable campaigning behaviour and where to report concerns, argues the Electoral Commission's Head of Electoral Policy, **Tom Hawthorn**.*



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This morning the [Electoral Commission published](#) the details of work which is now under way to help prevent electoral fraud ahead of the May elections, including work by Returning Officers, the police and Crimestoppers.

During [our wider review of electoral fraud](#) last year, specific concerns were also raised about whether people in British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities were able to exercise their right to vote and participate in elections on the same basis as other voters in the UK. We committed as part of last year's review to do further research into this and we have also today published [two research reports](#) looking at this.

The research – which was carried out by NatCen and academics from the universities of Manchester and Liverpool with members of the public and political activists – takes a closer look at whether there was any evidence to support claims that people from British Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are more vulnerable to electoral fraud.

The research studies provide a useful insight into some of the particular issues faced by voters in these communities, and how they can be tackled. One of the main findings from the research was that while strong community networks provide valuable support to people in many areas, the nature of those networks may also mean that pressure could be put on people to vote in a way that limits their individual choice. Where there are low levels of awareness about what sort of campaigning activity is acceptable, and what constitutes electoral fraud, the research suggests that these vulnerabilities could be more pronounced. Low levels of literacy and a lack of English language skills may also exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

Some individuals also stated that they weren't aware of where they should report concerns about electoral fraud, and that they were nervous about revealing their personal details if they did want to report it.

The studies also found that reduced levels of campaigning activity by political parties in some areas, coupled with

a reliance on kinship networks or those perceived to be “community leaders”, may also exacerbate these vulnerabilities by focusing on winning the support of voters as a single group rather than as individuals.

Overall the research confirms our understanding from [police data](#) that proven cases of electoral fraud are rare, and that when fraud is committed voters are the victims while candidates and campaigners tend to be the most likely offenders. It also emphasises the need for anyone who has evidence of electoral fraud to report it immediately: [directly to the police](#) or anonymously via [Crimestoppers](#). We will be producing some simple messages in a range of different languages to help people explain what is and isn't acceptable behaviour during election time and how to report fraud.

Work is already underway to prevent and detect fraud ahead of the elections: we have worked with the College of Policing to publish [comprehensive guidance for police forces](#) and we're holding a national seminar for specialist police officers in Birmingham in February; we're working with Crimestoppers to make sure people can report electoral fraud as easily as possible; and we're continuing to work closely with Returning Officers and police forces in areas where there have been allegations of electoral fraud at previous elections, and where additional measures may therefore need to be put in place.

This is not something Returning Officers, police forces or Commission can do alone, though. There is a clear challenge to campaigners here. They must ensure their behaviour builds trust with all voters, and all those involved in elections need to make it a priority to communicate what is and [what is not acceptable behaviour at election time, and to live up to those standards](#).

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