Viral Voting

Future-proofing UK elections with an #onlinevoting option.
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Forewords

It’s time for politics to fast-forward to the present.

Areeq Chowdhury
Chloe Smith MP
Graham Allen MP
Frances O’Grady
Jonathan Birdwell
Agatka Cienciala
Forewords

Areeq Chowdhury

It is time for politics to fast-forward to the present and have online voting introduced.

This report is the work of over a year’s worth of research into the potential of online voting in the UK and I am delighted to share the results.

WebRoots Democracy started as a result of perceived youth apathy and low voter turnouts, however over the course of this research it is evident that the appeal of online voting is much wider. Online voting has the potential to enfranchise voters currently locked out of the current voting methods and will help future-proof elections for an increasingly digital population in the UK.

One of the respondents to our survey summed up the issue perfectly in saying that ‘half the battle isn’t persuading people why they should vote, it’s actually about ensuring they take the time to have their say.’

The UK is a politically active nation online, and we need to translate this passion to voting: the bedrock of our democracy. Analogue methods of politics will increasingly become incompatible with the digital world of today.

Combined with effective marketing and integration with social media platforms, I am confident that the introduction of an online voting option will significantly increase voter turnout in the UK. The estimate within this report is that online voting could boost youth voter turnout to 70%, up from 44% in the 2010 General Election.

I urge all political parties to commit to introduce an online voting option in elections, as will-power is the main stumbling block to progress. If the recommendations in this report are followed, we may well see voting go viral one day.

@AreeqChowdhury
Report Author and Founder of WebRoots Democracy
Chloe Smith MP

I’m one of the Commons’ youngest members and have the privilege of being able to represent my generation in Parliament and politics.

It is an extremely unusual thing for Generation Y not to be able to do something online or by mobile. We shop, we bank, we date, we chat, we organise with ease. However, our method of voting is entirely on paper.

Old-fashioned paper-and-booth voting is alien to many young people, and indeed to anyone who is excited by the capability of the internet, but this report shows how it can also disadvantage those with vision impairments or voters with other disabilities as well as overseas voters and the Armed Forces.

Politics has to adapt and the internet is central. Today’s politicians have to engage today’s young people once again in the nuts and bolts of democracy, so that in ten years’ time that generation can lead legitimately.

This report is well-timed and stuffed full of smart facts that make the case for future-proofing our democracy. The technical method in which we vote isn’t everything – ideas, policies, leadership, vision, involvement and achievements are paramount – but our democracy will wither if it doesn’t keep up with the way people live their lives.

Of course there are important security and cost considerations, but those pertain to paper voting too. This report wisely looks at how spoilage, fraud and cost could be addressed by new methods. Sensibly legislating and implementing online voting can be done if politicians admit that it is almost immoral by now to fail to consider it.

This is too obvious an area for reform if politicians are to think and act anything like the new generation which will grow to dominate. It’s an essential move which we should begin to plan for now.

@ChloeSmithMP

Conservative Member of Parliament for Norwich North
Graham Allen MP

Democracy is facing a crisis if we do not take urgent action to make elections more accessible to the public and convince them that it is worth voting.

Turnout for the last general election was only 65% - almost 16 million voters chose not to participate - and millions of people are not even registered to vote. This is not an acceptable state of affairs for a modern democracy. We need new and innovative ways to get British people voting again.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee, which I Chair, recently published its Voter Engagement report which proposed several radical ideas to improve voter turnout in the UK. Introducing online voting received significant support from our respondents.

My Committee believes online voting could lead to a substantial increase in the level of participation at UK elections, particularly for groups such as young people and British citizens living overseas. We use postal voting, and you can now register to vote online: being able to cast your vote online is the next logical step in voter reform.

Viral Voting outlines why voting online is so important for the future of our democracy, and how it can be achieved. This important report will kick-start the much needed debate on the future of voting in the UK and how we engage future generations in our political system.

@GrahamAllenMP  
Chair of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee
It’s no surprise that so many people are turned off voting when some politicians seem so out of touch with the way people’s lives have changed and when they block changes that would make it easier to participate in democratic life. This is true at work, as well as in society. Take ballots for industrial action.

Compulsory postal votes were introduced when the post was our main means of communication. Now, a lot of mail is junk mail or bills, and for many people life has moved online and onto smart phones. That’s why the TUC has argued for the right to use modern balloting methods.

But the government has refused to grant union members the right to vote securely and secretly online.

Most disputes are settled without strike action being necessary but balloting for action can be an important way to bring otherwise reluctant employers to the negotiating table.

It is in everyone’s interest to ensure that that as many people as possible participate. But the government has saddled unions with twentieth century postal balloting methods that make it harder for working people to do just that.

Online voting is the way to bring balloting bang up to date and help ensure some equality in the workplace.

True democrats should add their voice to the campaign for the right to vote online – at work, as well as in the community.

@FrancesOGrady
General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress
Politics – like everything else in society – must move online to remain relevant.

In 1964, 18 to 24 year olds voted in the same proportions as those 55 years old and over.

In 2010, the difference in turnout between these two age groups widened to a shocking 30% point gap, with 44% of 18 to 24 year olds voting versus 74% of over 55s.

The gap between voter turnout of young voters and older voters in the UK is now the widest among all OECD countries.

As this excellent report from WebRoots Democracy argues, online voting could help to close this troubling gap.

In the recent Demos report Tune In, Turn Out, produced in partnership with vInspired, we found that two thirds of 18 to 25 year olds said that they would be more likely to vote if they could do so online.

Online voting is not a silver bullet to increasing political distrust and apathy. Young people in particular want to see more policies that tackle the issues they care about – such as affordable housing, rising education costs and unemployment – they want to see politicians from more diverse backgrounds, and they want to feel as if voting makes an impact on their lives.

But the migration of voting to online platforms is inevitable and the UK should be at the forefront.

Plus, as this report points out, online voting could not only increase voter turnout, but it could also save the government a significant amount of money.

This report provides all you need to know about the possibilities, benefits and challenges of online voting. It should be read and taken seriously by everyone who is concerned with ensuring that our democracy remains relevant for the next generation of digital natives.

Jonathan Birdwell
Head of Citizenship and Political Participation, Demos
Agatka Cienciala

As a partially sighted 18 year old, I feel that I have a foot in the camp of two groups of people who often feel alienated from the democratic process: young people because politicians seem out of touch, and disabled people because voting is so often inaccessible.

By introducing online voting I believe that this situation would change.

I’m so excited to be voting for the first time in the upcoming general election. It’s going to be such an important vote with so many different possibilities for the future government, let alone the direction that the country will take.

I’m so glad that I have the chance to take part in this by casting my vote and by encouraging others to do the same. But how can I do so when young people feel disconnected from the democratic process and that their needs are not understood? How can I encourage my blind and disabled friends to vote, knowing full well that we will not have the possibility of a secret ballot?

I believe that politics is, or rather should be, inclusive - seeking to represent all members of society. This is one of the key principles of democracy and the secret ballot is one of the pillars of democracy.

By introducing online voting, I believe that the increasingly digitalised young people of today will feel more included in the democratic process and disabled people may, at last, receive the possibility of a secret ballot.

How could we pass such an opportunity by?

@RLSBcharity
Royal London Society for the Blind’s Youth Forum
Executive summary

Purpose and background of this report
Recommendations
Estimated impact
Key findings

“Introducing an online voting option could increase turnout in a General Election by up to 9 million.”

WebRoots Democracy
Purpose and background of this report

We are currently living in the most connected generation in history. Technological advances and the rise of the internet have opened up new and exciting opportunities for society, however these opportunities have not been fully realised in our democratic sphere.

We are living in the Internet Age.

Millions of people in the UK are able to communicate, find romantic partners, bank, shop, and watch television online. With the prevalence of smartphones and apps, they are now able to do this in the palm of their hands.

However, despite being able to email, follow, and tweet their elected representatives online, they are as yet unable to vote for them online.

This report is a result of over a year’s worth of research and aims to make the case for the introduction of an online voting option in the UK.

It highlights the shift in the culture of society towards instant gratification via digital technology and argues that in order to future-proof elections from further digital cultural change, the UK needs to invest in developing an online method of electing politicians.

The report outlines the decline of ‘physical’ access to services and the growing preference for instant digital access.

It looks at political participation in the UK, global examples and benefits of online voting, and the current challenges for gaining political support for online voting.

WebRoots Democracy

WebRoots Democracy is a voluntary, youth-led pressure group, campaigning for the introduction of an online voting option in UK elections.

In addition to this, the pressure group intends to reverse growing political apathy and low electoral turnout in the UK, particularly amongst young people.

Whilst political apathy has a variety of causes, we must recognise that we live in an age of distraction and rapid technological advances. As such, WebRoots Democracy is also campaigning for an accessible, informative, and interactive election website to help reach out to new voters.

It was conceived in February 2014, and launched in May 2014 following the European Parliament and Local Council elections.
Summary

Recommendations

1. The UK Government should invest in a programme to implement an accessible online voting option in elections with a view to the public being able to vote online by the 2020 General Election.

2. The Government should pilot an online voting option in the 8 directly elected Mayoral elections taking place in the middle of the next Parliament in Doncaster; Hackney; Lewisham; Manchester; Newham; North Tyneside; Tower Hamlets; and Watford.

3. The Government should engage with companies such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube in order to integrate the online voting platform with social media channels.

4. The Government should create a central ‘voting’ website.

5. Amendments should be made to the electoral registration system to include mobile and/or landline telephone numbers.

6. The Government should seek to adopt an accessible online voting method using 2-step mobile verification codes.

7. The Government should embark on a year-long educational campaign prior to the 2020 General Election about online voting and secure internet usage.

8. The Government should have a fair and open competition process for online voting providers beginning in 2015.


10. All major UK political parties should sign a cross-party commitment to online voting.

Estimated impact

All other things being equal, the introduction of an online voting option in elections could increase turnout in a General Election by up to 9 million.\(^3\) This would increase the percentage turnout to 79%, a level not seen since 1959.

The turnout for young people could increase by up to 1.8 million. This would make youth voter turnout equal 70%, an increase of 26 percentage points on 2010.

Other estimated key impacts are:

   a)  Savings of £12.8 million and for the cost per vote to reduce by a third.

   b)  A reduction in the number of accidentally spoilt ballots cast.

   c)  An electorate that is more informed about each election.
Key findings

- 65% of the UK population are in support of online voting (based on analysis of surveys with a combined sample size of 11,704).
- 68% of 4,316 survey respondents would be more likely to vote if they could do so online (based on analysis of surveys by Demos/vInspired, Lodestone, Survation, and WebRoots Democracy).
- Online voting could boost overall turnout to 79% with up to an extra 9 million voters in a General Election.
- Online voting could boost youth voter turnout to 70% with up to an extra 1.8 million young voters in a General Election.
- The introduction of online voting could reduce the cost per vote by a third from £3.78 to £2.59.
- In the long-term, online voting could reduce the cost of General Elections by £12.8 million.
- Online voting could reduce the number of accidentally spoilt ballots. In 2010, over 300,000 votes were registered as invalid.
- Online voting could allow vision impaired voters to cast a secret ballot for the first ever time. Under the Human Rights Act, all voters have the right to cast a secret ballot.
- Online voting has the potential to be a more secure method of voting due to additional safeguards that it provides which the current options cannot offer.
Internet activity in the UK

How accessible is the internet in the UK?
What are the growing habits elsewhere?
What can change in 18 years?

“We lived on farms, then we lived in cities, and now we’re going to live on the internet!”
The Social Network
Internet activity in the UK

How accessible is the internet in the UK?

Having wide access to the internet will be crucial to any future plans to introduce an online voting option in elections. The ability for citizens to access the internet is vital in any modern democracy and in this case ensuring that voters have access to the new method of voting is of utmost importance.

Fortunately in the UK, the vast majority of households have access to the internet.

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics in August 2014 show that **22 million households in the UK have an internet connection representing 84% of households**. This is up from 83% in 2013 and 57% in 2006. The ONS figures show that there are still 4 million households without internet access in 2014. However, this is a dramatic reduction compared to 2006 where 10 million households had no access.

The ONS has found that internet access varies depending on household composition. For example, 96% of households with children have access to the internet whereas in households with an adult aged 65 or over, only 41% have access.

For the 4 million households without internet access, 53% said they did not need it. 32% said it was due to a lack of skills. Further barriers to access are related to the cost of an internet connection.

This suggests that more work needs to be done to obtain universal internet access for those households that require it.

It is, however, worth noting that the current Government is working to meet its aim of providing access to the ‘superfast’ broadband to 95% of the UK by 2017. It is therefore likely that the upward trend of internet access in the UK will continue on its path over the next few years.

What are the growing habits elsewhere?

Online shopping

One of the arguments in favour of modernising elections is the fact that more and more people in the 21st century are accessing services online. They are shopping, banking, and socialising online.
In the same data release in August 2014, the ONS presented an insight into how the UK has embraced the internet in their daily routines.

With regards to online shopping, **almost three quarters of adults (74%) reported buying goods or services online.** This has risen from just over half (53%) in 2008. The ONS notes that the younger age groups appear to have embraced internet shopping the most with 90% of the 25 to 34 year olds having bought goods online. However, they note that there has been a significant increase in internet shopping activity amongst those aged over 65. In 2014, 40% of those aged over 65 bought goods online compared to just 16% in 2008.

Clothes appear to be the most popular item bought online particularly amongst 25 to 34 year olds with 64% reporting to have bought clothes over the internet. 63% of 16 to 25 year olds have also done so.

Household goods such as furniture are the next most popular item with 59% of 25 to 34 year olds purchasing these goods online. 55% of 35 to 44 year olds have also purchased household goods online.

Other popular items bought online include films and music, holiday accommodation, and groceries.

Perhaps the most important statistic with regards to online voting is that **87% of these transactions required the shopper to provide their credit or debit card details over the internet.**

In another data release regarding retail sales, the ONS found that on average, weekly spending online in August 2014 was £707.7million. This is an increase of 8.3% when compared to August 2013.

They found that the amount spent online accounted for 11% of total retail spending.

According to the Financial Times, reporting in December 2014, the UK spends more money online per head than any other developed country. They reported that consumers in the UK spend almost £2,000 a year on online shopping, 50% higher than the next highest valued market of Australia.

Ofcom found that 40% of advertising spend in the UK is now online, more than any other country they analysed.

Former Ofcom chief executive, Ed Richards, is quoted as saying that ‘the internet has never been more important to the lives of people in this country’.

**Internet banking**

Internet banking is also on the increase in the UK. Statistics from the ONS show that 53% of adults in the UK now bank online. This has increased significantly from 2007.
when less than a third (30%) used internet banking and has risen year-on-year since.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Adults that use internet banking (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ONS 2014

Similar to online shopping, internet banking is particularly popular amongst the younger age groups with 71% those who bank online being between 25 to 34 years old. This is followed by 66% of the 35 to 44 year olds and 62% of 45 to 54 year olds.

In August 2014, the British Bankers Association (BBA) released figures\(^8\) which showed that customers use internet banking almost 800,000 times an hour. They reported customers of the UK high street banks used internet banking 7 billion times in 2013.

Via internet banking, in 2013, there were 316 million bill payments; 293 million inter-account transfers; 152.6 million direct debits or standing order creations or amendments; 1.1 billion account queries; and 10.5 million stop payment instructions.

Richard Woolhouse, the BBA’s Chief Economist, described the figures as representing an ‘ongoing revolution in the way millions of us spend, move and manage our money’.

The BBA also carried out a study\(^9\) in July 2014 which showed that mobile and internet banking is now used for transactions worth £6.4 billion a week, up from £5.8 billion in 2013. They also found that banking apps for mobiles and tablets have been downloaded at a rate of 15,000 per day in 2014. They reported that internet banking services typically receive 7 million log-ins a day.

Socialising

By far, one of the most visible ways the internet has revolutionised the UK is with social media. Websites such as Facebook and Twitter have become essential not just to individuals but to businesses and marketing companies.

According to the ONS, 54% of adults in the UK use the internet for social networking. This is up from 45% in 2011 when they began collecting this data.

Unsurprisingly, the figures show that social networking is most popular amongst the younger age groups with 91% of 16 to 24 year olds using social networking websites. They are followed by 80% of 25 to 34 year olds and 68% of 35 to 44 year olds. The lowest usage is amongst over 65 year olds with 13% using social networking websites.
According to Facebook’s advert function, there are around 38 million UK Facebook accounts, representing almost 60% of the UK population. Of these, 9.6 million are aged between 25 and 34. 9.4 million are aged between 16 and 24.

The lowest number of users is for those aged 65 or over of which there are 2 million.

Facebook’s advert function also presents data by town or city. With regards to online voting, one of the arguments in favour is the impact it could have on smaller elections that traditionally have lower turnouts and less public interest. These include Local Council elections, European Parliament elections, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and Parliamentary by-elections.

In the table below, the number of Facebook users is shown against the size of the electorate and the total number of voters for certain by-elections post-2010. These constituencies are for areas that have data available on Facebook’s advert function. Whilst there is certainly no mutual exclusivity between having a Facebook account and voting in the by-election, it is interesting to compare the sizes of online constituents to the total number that voted. Should there be an online voting option introduced, it may be more likely for those who are already active online to vote online.

The most striking statistic is for South Shields which appears to have more constituents on Facebook than it had voting in their new Member of Parliament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By-Election Constituency</th>
<th>Number of Facebook users</th>
<th>Electorate</th>
<th>Total Poll</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corby</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>79,878</td>
<td>35,775</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastleigh</td>
<td>14,200</td>
<td>79,004</td>
<td>41,616</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Shields</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>64,084</td>
<td>24,736</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newark</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>73,486</td>
<td>38,707</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clacton</td>
<td>6,400</td>
<td>69,118</td>
<td>35,338</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Facebook/UK Parliament 2014
Figures\textsuperscript{11} released by the Pew Research Center in February 2014 show that half of all Facebook users have more than 200 friends which can offer a substantial reach for the user were they to post a link to an online voting platform.

In August 2013, Facebook released the statistic\textsuperscript{12} that 24 million UK users log onto Facebook everyday. 20 million log on daily via their mobile phones.

Users on Facebook have the ability to chat and video message their friends, create discussion groups, engage with fan pages, post statuses, and share links to other websites. In the UK, the most ‘liked’ Facebook pages include artists and bands such as Adele, the Beatles and One Direction. They also include football teams such as Manchester United and Chelsea. The most popular political Facebook pages in the UK are currently Britain First, David Cameron, and George Galloway MP. More detail about political activity on Facebook can be found in the ‘Twitter and Clicktivism’ chapter.

Micro-blogging website, Twitter also boasts enormous popularity in the UK reporting\textsuperscript{13} in September 2013 to have 15 million users, around 23% of the UK population. This is up from 10 million UK users in May 2012.

Twitter have also said that 40% of its users worldwide prefer to use Twitter to read and as a ‘curated news feed of updates that reflect their passions’. 80% of Twitter users are active on mobile devices.

Career networking website, LinkedIn has not released many statistics about UK growth but reported\textsuperscript{14} in 2014 to have passed 15 million UK users. Users post details about employment history in addition to their contact email addresses on their accounts.

LinkedIn have said their fastest growing demographic are students.

As of July 2013\textsuperscript{15}, visual content sharing app, Pinterest has over 2 million UK users.

UK figures for photo sharing apps, Snapchat and Instagram are not available in the public domain, however, Snapchat’s core audience globally\textsuperscript{16} is young people aged 13 to 20 years old and 70% of users are female.

There are 400 million images sent on Snapchat per day.
Online dating

In his ‘rant’ in favour of online voting\(^\text{17}\), Canadian comedian, Rick Mercer describes himself as a ‘dinosaur’ and says of young people that they ‘go to school online, they work online’ and that ‘heck, they find husbands and wives online!’

Does the same apply for the UK? If the facts\(^\text{18}\) are anything to go by, then it sure does look like it.

Online dating website, Match.com has a total of 4.5 million UK users with an average age of 25 to 30 year olds for both men and women. The website allows users to upload up to 26 photos of themselves alongside information about their interests, background, and personality.

The website Plenty of Fish, more commonly known as POF.com, has 2 million active members in the UK with an average age of 35 to 44 year olds for both men and women. The website allows users to upload a photo and take personality tests to help them find their match.

DatingDirect.com has a total of 3.5 million registered users in the UK with an average age of 25 to 30 year olds for women, and 27 to 33 year olds for men. The website allows users to create a profile and search for others in their local area.

Zoosk.com does not have publicly available figures for the total number of UK users, but reportedly has almost 1 million monthly users from the UK. The average age is 25 to 34 years old for women and 27 to 33 years old for men.

Asian marriage website, Shaadi.com claims to have over 105,000 active registered users from the UK. The website allows users to create profiles (with details that can even include the users’ blood type) and find future marriage partners.

There are no publicly available figures for the total number of UK users for mobile app Tinder; however, co-founder Justin Mateen claimed that more than 1 million users\(^\text{19}\) from the UK signed up in January and February 2014. The app requires users to connect with their Facebook profiles and presents potential matches within up to 100 miles of their location.

Source: DatingSiteReviews.com
Current affairs

Reading or downloading online news, newspapers, or magazines is near the top of the most popular internet activities in the UK. The ONS figures for 2014 show that 55% of all adults read their news online. This reflects similar findings by Ofcom who in June 2014 reported that the number of people reading their news online had overtaken the number of people reading printed newspapers. They found that 41% of the UK population use the internet to keep up-to-date with current affairs, compared to 40% from printed newspapers.

According to the ONS, reading the news online is most popular amongst 25 to 34 year olds with 73% doing so, followed by 35 to 44 year olds with 69%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Proportion that read the news online (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>25-34</td>
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<td>65+</td>
<td>24</td>
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Source: ONS 2014

The ONS figures also show that the popularity of reading the news online has increased significantly since 2007. In 2007, less than half of the current proportion did so, with just 20%.

Statista released figures in 2014 displaying the most popular news websites in the UK in the month of April 2014. The figures show that the BBC News website is by far the most popular with a total of 17.21 million unique UK visitors in April 2014, down from 20.82 million in the previous year.

The MailOnline, the Daily Mail’s news website is the next most popular in the UK with 6.75 million visitors, followed by the Guardian with 5.21 million, and the Telegraph with 4.73 million. Other popular news websites include Yahoo News, the Huffington Post, and Trinity Mirror Nationals all with over 3 million unique UK visitors.

Many of these news outlets have also embraced the reach of social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook.

BBC News UK has 3.75 million followers on Twitter and 14.6 million Facebook likes. The Daily Mail has 875,000 Twitter followers and 2.5 million Facebook likes. The Guardian has 3.3 million followers on Twitter and over 4 million likes on Facebook. The Telegraph has 854,000 Twitter followers and over 2 million likes on Facebook.

<table>
<thead>
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<td>2007</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ONS 2014

News outlets aren’t the only source that the public are receiving their current affairs news from though. A number of individual journalists are able to boast a huge online
following such as Guardian columnist Owen Jones who has 257,000 Twitter followers and the Huffington Post’s Mehdi Hasan who has 168,000 followers.

Actor, comedian, and now revolutionary, Russell Brand has started his own news programme on YouTube called ‘The Trews’ in which he says he provides the ‘true news’ so that people do not have to buy newspapers which ‘charge you for the privilege of keeping your consciousness imprisoned in a tiny box of ignorance and lies.’ His YouTube channel has 980,000 subscribers more than double that of BBC News (372,000 subscribers) and more than seven times as many as the Guardian’s channel (130,000 subscribers).

**What can change in 18 years?**

One of the concerns associated with failing to invest in online voting now is that the gap between technologically-induced cultural change and the current electoral system will continue to widen beyond repair.

We have been through a flavour of what has changed with regards to activity on the internet, but how much is going to change in the future?

In just eight years (1998 – 2006), we went from no Google, no Wikipedia, no Facebook, and no Twitter to millions of us relying on them every single day.

If that can happen in just eight years, what will happen in 18 years? What will the UK be like when a child born today votes for the first time?

2016

*Micro-chipped dogs.*

As of April 2016, a law requiring all dog-owners in England to micro-chip their animals coded with the owner’s details comes into force. It is hoped that this change will help reunite owners with lost or stolen pets and reduce the burden on animal charities and local authorities.
First hotel launched in space.\textsuperscript{23}

In 2016, Russian firm, Orbital Technologies are planning to open the first hotel in space. The hotel called ‘Commercial Space Station’ will float 250 miles above Earth and accommodate a maximum of seven people at a time.

Agricultural robots.\textsuperscript{24}

It is expected that there will be a much greater use of technology in farming by 2016 with innovations such as intra-tractor communication, variable rate swath control and genetically designed food becoming mainstream or scientifically viable.

Three-person babies.\textsuperscript{25}

If it is made legal, it is expected that scientists will be ready to create babies from three people by 2016. The technique uses eggs from two women and sperm from one man and is expected to prevent deadly mitochondrial diseases.

Polymer banknotes.\textsuperscript{26}

In 2016, the Bank of England is to introduce £5 and £10 banknotes printed on polymer. The benefits are that they will provide enhanced counterfeit resilience as well as a more environmentally friendly alternative.

2017

The world’s first kilometre high skyscraper.\textsuperscript{27}

Phoenix Towers in Wuhan, China is scheduled to be completed in 2017. It is to be 172 metres taller than the current tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. The Towers could be beaten by the Kingdom Tower in Saudi Arabia which is also expected to be completed in 2017.

The world’s first lunar tourist.\textsuperscript{28}

Russia is to fly two space tourists to the far side of the Moon and back by 2017. They will fly aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft with tickets for the trip costing $150 million each.

Web-connected video devices exceed the global population.\textsuperscript{29}

More than 8 billion internet-connected video devices are expected to be installed by 2017. This includes products such as tablets, smart TVs, game consoles and smartphones. The global population is expected to be 7.4 billion by 2017.
Viral Voting: Future-proofing UK elections with an #onlinevoting option.

Wireless, implantable health devices.\textsuperscript{30}

It is predicted that by 2017, 1.8 million people worldwide will be using wireless remote health monitoring devices. These devices range from devices that can measure blood glucose levels to web-based video conferencing technology.

2018

Robotic surgeons.\textsuperscript{31}

The international medical robot market is projected to be worth $3.7 billion by 2018. This market includes surgical robots, rehabilitation robots, non-invasive radiosurgery robots and hospital and pharmacy robots.

The first private supersonic jet.\textsuperscript{32}

American-based company, Spike is planning to have the first supersonic business jet ready for take-off in December 2018. The aircraft will have a top speed of 1,370 mph and is theoretically capable of flying from London to New York in less than four hours.

2019

Computers break the exaflop barrier.\textsuperscript{33}

Computer chip producer, Intel is planning to create an exaflop computer by 2018. This would allow computers to make a quintillion calculations per second.

Bionic eyes.\textsuperscript{34}

The BBC predicts that high resolution bionic eyes will be commercially available in 2019. These devices are intended to restore vision in those suffering from partial or total blindness.

Connected vehicle technology.\textsuperscript{35}

The global connected car market is projected to be worth $131.9 billion by 2019. These are cars that come with internet-connectivity which is increasingly becoming a ‘must-have’ feature.

2020

Internet use reaches 5 billion worldwide.\textsuperscript{36}

The National Science Foundation has predicted that there will be 5 billion internet users worldwide by the year 2020.
The 5G standard is released.\textsuperscript{37}

Samsung Electronics has developed core technology that will allow it to deliver high speed 5G wireless data connections to consumers by 2020. The technology will allow users to transmit large data files including ultra-high definition movies ‘without limitation’.

Holographic TV.\textsuperscript{38}

The Japanese Government is developing three-dimensional virtual reality television with an aim to have the technology available by 2020. This would allow consumers to watch television in holographic form in their living rooms.

Smart meters in every UK home.\textsuperscript{39}

The UK Government is planning to have smart meters installed in every home and small business by 2020. Consumers with smart meters will be offered an in-home display that lets them see how much energy they are using and at what cost.

2021

The first Arabian mission to Mars.\textsuperscript{40}

The United Arab Emirates is planning to send the first unmanned Arab spacecraft to Mars by 2021. The monarch of Dubai has said that the mission will prove that the Arab world is still capable of contributing to humanity’s scientific progress despite conflicts in the region.

2022

Nanotech clothes.\textsuperscript{41}

Some are predicting that by 2022, nanotechnology will allow consumers to dress in clothes that allow them to monitor their activities and recharge their smartphones.

2024

3D printed clothes at near zero cost.\textsuperscript{42}

According to the book ‘iDisrupted’, in 2024, the technology may exist for designers to sell codes for consumers to print out clothes using 3D printing technology rather than manufacturing the products themselves.

Technology predictions and expectations beyond this point are difficult to verify but include general visions of heavier automation in supermarkets and retail in addition to a rapidly changing workforce in the UK.

It is clear, however, that technology will significantly advance over the next decade with high-risk and ambitious projects being completed; an increasingly connected
global population; greater adoption of tech devices; a change in the way we use the internet in our daily lives; and a growing use of technology for complex processes in medicine and agriculture.

The speed of growth and the rate of adoption of technological and web-based innovations are already set to increase based on the knowledge we have today. Unforeseen innovations may increase internet use in even greater and more intelligent methods. It is, therefore, clear that resisting change and continuing with a paper-based system of voting is likely to further widen the gap between the general public and the political system.
Culture change

How have industries performed since the rise of the internet?

“you’re happy to bank online, but you don’t want to vote online?”

Rick Edwards
Culture change

How have industries performed since the rise of the internet?

In order to draw accurate comparisons between the current method of voting and other societal changes, it is important to examine the precise impact that the internet has had on everyday activities such as postal services, reading the news, and shopping.

Shopping

In a study\textsuperscript{43} by the Center for Retail Research (CRR) entitled ‘Retail Futures 2018’, the researchers forecast that by 2018 the number of stores on UK high streets will fall by 22% from 281,390 stores to 220,000. They also calculated that 164 major or medium sized companies will go into administration.

They estimate that the share of online retail sales will increase from 12.7% (2012) to 21.5% by 2018. The study also found that with high numbers of transactions being carried out online, retailers with a strong web offering now need just 70 high street stores to create a national presence compared to 250 in mid-2000’s.

Historically, the report said that in 1920s there were around 950,000 stores and in the 1950s numbers were down to 583,000. Since then, store numbers have fallen by more than half to just over 280,000 in 2012.

CRR predict that by 2018, the online share of food will increase to 9.5% and to 32.1% for non-food items.

On the future of shopping they state that customers now shop in multiple ways which include ‘checking a store’s website’, ‘viewing the prices of competitors on a smartphone whilst standing outside a store’ and ‘choosing finally whether to buy the goods in-store or online or have it delivered to a nominated address.’

For retailers, they recommend that they make ‘clear strategic responses to the changing patterns of how consumers shop’ and to fully integrate their physical stores, online sites and social media.
Postal services

In 2008, the Government commissioned an independent review\textsuperscript{44} into the postal services in the UK. The resulting report entitled ‘Modernise or decline’ found that a ‘digital revolution’ was contributing to the structural decline of the postal sector.

It described the continuous decline as ‘unprecedented’ and said that new technologies such as broadband, email, mobile telephony, text messaging, and digital broadcasting were offering alternative ways for people to stay in touch, carry out business transactions and advertise. They found that, compared to postal mail, these new alternatives are immediate, flexible and have low and ‘often zero’ marginal cost.

The report found that the main challenges created by the digital revolution are surrounding ‘transactional’ mail and ‘social’ mail. With transactional mail, they found that, in order to reduce costs, large companies are actively encouraging their customers to switch to receiving bills and statements online. With social mail, they found that the public have switched to using mobile phones as the method of sending messages to friends and family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UK Letters Market (no. of items)</th>
<th>UK Parcels Market (no. of items)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>19.7 billion</td>
<td>1.3 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>13.8 billion</td>
<td>1.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023</td>
<td>8.3 billion</td>
<td>2.3 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: PwC 2013*

A review\textsuperscript{45} in 2013 by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) for the Royal Mail Group, had similar findings that ‘the main driver of mail declines has been electronic substitution of paper communication’. They also however, credit the internet for the increase in parcel deliveries due to the increase in online shopping. By 2023, they expect the letters market to decrease to 8.3 billion items from 13.8 billion in 2013, and they expect the parcels market to increase to 2.3 billion from 1.7 billion in 2013.

Newspapers

Figures\textsuperscript{46} released in 2014 by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) stated that the overall daily newsprint newspaper market is declining at a rate of more than 8% a year.
Compared to twelve months prior, in September 2014, every major UK newspaper except for the Times saw a decline in the number of newspapers sold. The Times saw an increase of 1.52%, amounting to an extra 5,937 newspapers in 2014.

The largest reduction was for the Daily Record which had a decline of 14.5%, followed by the Daily Star with a 14.15% reduction. The best-selling newspaper of 2013, the Sun saw a decline of 194,052 newspapers in 2014. The Daily Mail saw a reduction of just over 85,000 newspapers.

In total, for the 12 national dailies, the circulation declined by 7.7% with 619,287 less newspapers sold in 2014. If the Daily Star is to continue on the same trend, in 10 years’ time it will be selling less than 45,000 newspapers, a reduction of 90%. The Financial Times would be selling just over 74,000 newspapers, a reduction of 66%.

As we saw in the ONS figures, whilst the numbers reading printed newspapers has been declining in recent years, the proportion of those who read the news online has increased to 55% from 20% in 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Circulation - September 2014</th>
<th>Circulation - September 2013</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>2,019,032</td>
<td>2,213,084</td>
<td>▼ 8.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>951,179</td>
<td>1,025,970</td>
<td>▼ 7.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Star</td>
<td>462,491</td>
<td>538,751</td>
<td>▼ 14.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Record</td>
<td>210,858</td>
<td>246,615</td>
<td>▼ 14.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>1,692,610</td>
<td>1,777,780</td>
<td>▼ 4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>467,994</td>
<td>524,944</td>
<td>▼ 10.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>505,473</td>
<td>550,023</td>
<td>▼ 8.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>399,915</td>
<td>393,978</td>
<td>▲ 1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>217,121</td>
<td>241,884</td>
<td>▼ 10.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>180,731</td>
<td>197,543</td>
<td>▼ 8.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent i</td>
<td>63,135</td>
<td>69,388</td>
<td>▼ 9.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>286,833</td>
<td>296,699</td>
<td>▼ 3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABC 2014

As we can see, there has been a general declining trend in the consumption of paper or physical services across the retail, postal, and newspaper industries. At the same time, there has been significant growth in digital, online alternatives such as online shopping, email, and online news. It is likely that these trends are reflected in numerous similar industries such as in the greeting cards market, retail banking, and the booksellers industry.

**Viral Voting:** Future-proofing UK elections with an #onlinevoting option.
It is clear that there has been a cultural shift away from the physical and paper-based methods of carrying out traditional daily activities and as the 2014 ONS figures show, this change is most prominent amongst the younger generation. It is therefore likely that this change will continue into the future.
Twitter and clicktivism

How do people participate in politics today?
How do politicians engage with the online community?

“I promise there won’t be “too many tweets…””
David Cameron
Twitter and clicktivism

Whilst the rise of the internet in the UK has contributed to a decline in certain physical or paper-based industries and services, it has also created plenty of opportunity and growth. One of these areas has been politics, with ever-increasing numbers of people engaging with politics online.

When asked on the BBC’s Daily Politics Show about declining party memberships, Conservative chairman Grant Shapps pointed towards Facebook and Twitter following as a new measurement of party membership.

With hundreds of MPs on Twitter, and hundreds of thousands of people following political parties on Facebook, has the internet evolved the political landscape in the UK?

How do people participate in politics today?

Following the Kitschelt and Rehm definition of political participation, we will look at some of the ‘new’ methods that people are using to become involved in politics today.

Voicing demands

Since the turn of the century, demonstrations have remained a popular method for voicing demands in Britain with several large scale protests occurring in London and elsewhere in the UK over a range of issues.

In 2001, there were two major demonstrations in London, one on the first of May called the ‘May Day Protest’ campaigning against capitalism, and the second in November by the Stop the War Coalition against the war in Afghanistan. The May Day Protest attracted around 5,000 people, and the Stop the War protest had around 15,000. The following year saw 400,000 people march against the fox-hunting ban to ‘protect the right to hunt’ which was organised by the Countryside Alliance pressure group.

In 2003, two more major protests were organised by the Stop the War Coalition, this time against the war in Iraq with around 50,000 people marching in Glasgow and 750,000 marching in London.

As well as this, austerity measures brought in with the 2010 Coalition Government have led to anti-cuts demonstrations by groups such as the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC).
‘March for the Alternative’ organised by the TUC had approximately 250,000 people taking part in 2011.

Although demonstrations are not a ‘new’ method of voicing demands, recruitment for them has included the use of social media websites such as Facebook.

The ‘March for the Alternative’ in 2011 used a Facebook event page in which people can invite friends to attend an event and those people can then RSVP on the page. The Facebook event had over 23,000 people as ‘Going’, almost 13,000 with ‘Maybe’, and almost 140,000 people invited to the page overall. The event page, created by the TUC, also contained information about when and where to meet for the protest with ‘Assemble Victoria Embankment, 11am to march to a rally in Hyde Park’.50

The NUS also used Facebook for recruitment to their march in November 2010 against education cuts labelled ‘Fund Our Future: Stop the Cuts - National Demonstration’. The event page had almost 11,000 people ‘Going’, over 8,000 as ‘Maybe’, and almost 40,000 others invited.51

Videos are also used as a method for organisations such as the Stop the War Coalition and the People’s Assembly Against Austerity to voice their demands and galvanise support for demonstrations. The figures show that online videos can engage thousands and millions of people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Facebook likes</th>
<th>Twitter followers</th>
<th>YouTube views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>League Against Cruel Sports</td>
<td>Animal welfare</td>
<td>114,170</td>
<td>27,260</td>
<td>186,102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Influence</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>10,753</td>
<td>9,195</td>
<td>876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside Alliance</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>59,509</td>
<td>14,574</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign for Better Transport</td>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>2,638</td>
<td>3,339</td>
<td>24,892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers 4 Justice</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>35,563</td>
<td>12,838</td>
<td>75,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign for Real Ale</td>
<td>Food &amp; Drink</td>
<td>39,299</td>
<td>45,916</td>
<td>14,732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amnesty International UK</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
<td>221,190</td>
<td>134,715</td>
<td>3,334,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop the War Coalition</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>108,662</td>
<td>28,526</td>
<td>3,730,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Defence League</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>179,509</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>56,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawcett Society</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9,405</td>
<td>23,483</td>
<td>8,057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Viral Voting: Future-proofing UK elections with an #onlinevoting option.
Demonstrations in the digital age now always come accompanied with a Twitter hashtag which can help spread the campaign message online should the hashtag ‘trend’. The NUS 2012 demonstration used the hashtag ‘#demo2012’ and the public sector protests in July 2014 used the hashtag ‘#J10’.

Hashtags on Twitter are used ‘to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet’ with ‘tweets’ meaning posts by users. Hashtags also ‘categorise messages’.  

Facebook in particular has been noted as improving communication within organisations with tools such as its ‘secret group’ function in which individuals can communicate with each other online in private.

Although demonstrations and other forms of direct action are nothing new, the methods of communication appear to have advanced which has potential to lower the costs of organising demonstrations and protest actions in general.

**Communicating views to policy makers**

The introduction of online petitions or ‘e-petitions’ has reduced the effort needed for creating petitions in support of a cause and ‘communicating views to policy-makers’.

The search term “create petition online” offers up a number of websites on Google that offer online petition generators such as ‘ipetition.com’, ‘change.org’, ‘gopetition.com’, as well as the official Government e-petition creator at ‘epetitions.direct.gov.uk’.

Anyone with access to the internet can set up an online petition and get people to add their name using social media networks and email.

At the time of writing, the Government e-petition website has 5,769 open petitions and 25,873 closed petitions. The petition with the highest number of signatures in the open petition category is a petition entitled ‘Sophie’s choice, smear tests lowered to 16’ which is campaigning for the cervical cancer smear test age to be lowered from 25 to 16. This petition currently has 327,046 signatures.

The closed petition with the highest number of signatures is entitled ‘Stop the Badger Cull’ with a total of 304,253 signatures.

On the website, Change.org, a petition entitled ‘David Cameron: Stop the 11% pay rise for MPs’ salaries’ currently has 351,791 signatures.

A Hansard Society report on e-petitions in 2012 noted that the first petition to reach the 100,000 signature threshold for debate in the House of Commons ‘did so in just five days’.

It is evident that with petitions, the clipboard and pen has been replaced by the smartphone and finger.
Involvement with non-party organisations has largely continued to increase over this period with groups such as the National Trust reaching four million members in 2011\textsuperscript{56} and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reaching one million members in the early 2000s.

The internet has seen the creation of new forms of campaigning groups using the advanced methods of communications that come with the technology. A prime example of this would be the UK-based, political activism organisation ‘38 Degrees’ which was founded in 2009 and campaigns for ‘a more progressive, fairer, better society.’\textsuperscript{57}

The organisation claims to have over a million members and uses ‘the power of the internet’ to ‘link up, discuss, and vote to decide which issues we campaign on together.’

When outlining their methods of campaigning, 38 Degrees state that:

‘38 Degrees members use a lot of different tactics to bring about change, like signing petitions, emailing or phoning our MPs and chipping in to fund newspaper ads about our campaigns. We also get together to get our voices heard face-to-face, for instance by meeting up locally to hand petitions to our local MPs, or hosting discussions about the issues of the day. We also hold local celebrations when we have a campaign breakthrough.’

Ideas for future campaigns are also suggested by members by a number of ways using the internet with members being able to ‘suggest campaigns on the 38 Degrees website as well as sharing ideas on the Facebook page, blog, or by tweeting their idea to @38_degrees.’

Selecting politicians

With regards to ‘selecting politicians’, average turnout at General Elections have decreased by 14.3 percentage points with the average turnout from the elections of 2001, 2005, and 2010 being 62\%.\textsuperscript{58}

The following three tables display the turnout of the elections in relation to age groups. The turnout for the 18-24 category was the lowest in all three elections in comparison to other age groups at 39\%, 37\%, and 44\% respectively. The tables also display which parties that people of different age groups voted for.
### 2001 UK General Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Con (%)</th>
<th>Lab (%)</th>
<th>LD (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Turnout (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
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<td>59</td>
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<td>32</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos Mori

### 2005 UK General Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Con (%)</th>
<th>Lab (%)</th>
<th>LD (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Turnout (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>25-34</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos Mori

### 2010 UK General Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Con (%)</th>
<th>Lab (%)</th>
<th>LD (%)</th>
<th>Other (%)</th>
<th>Turnout (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>76</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ipsos Mori

Viral Voting: Future-proofing UK elections with an onlinevoting option.
As we can see, the problem with voter turnout is most severe amongst young people aged 18 to 24 with less than half of them voting in the past three General Elections. In addition to this, it is almost half the proportion of over 65 year olds voting. As it is impossible to deny that young people represent the future, this paints a stark picture for the future of voter turnout in the UK should we continue to fail to address the issues today.

How do politicians engage with the online community?

Twitter

According to Tweetminster, there are currently 409 Members of Parliament on Twitter, including the Prime Minister David Cameron with 925,101 followers, Labour Leader Ed Miliband with 381,595 followers, and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg with 211,611 followers.

An example of one of David Cameron’s tweets is:

‘On average, 1000 new jobs have been created for every day we’ve been in office. Our long-term economic plan is working #AutumnStatement’
Similar tweets by politicians regarding current affairs is common on Twitter and is further evidence as to how political discussions are increasingly moving onto the internet and at how social media is used as a tool of political engagement.

Facebook

The evidence suggests that politicians use Facebook extensively in order to engage with the public.

All of the main political parties have Facebook pages which allow users to 'like' and follow in order to keep updated with the news and views of the party. Additionally, many politicians have their own individual Facebook pages, either as a profile or a fan page.

The Conservative Party currently has a total of 349,881 likes and the opposition Labour Party has 216,140 likes. Both of these parties are eclipsed by the recently formed political party 'Britain First' which has 671,416 likes.

The Liberal Democrats have 110,245 likes.

David Cameron’s Facebook fan page has a total of 482,345 likes which is almost seven times as many as Ed Miliband who has 69,918 likes. Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg has 89,228 likes.

Posts on Facebook pages by politicians tend to be lengthier and go into a greater amount of detail than they would be able to on Twitter.

YouTube

All the main political parties have channels on YouTube, often uploading videos that are later posted on their social media pages or on their websites.

Subscribers to YouTube channels receive notifications whenever a new video is posted and are thus counted as followers.
The Conservative Party currently has 9,207 subscribers and over 2.7 million views on their videos. The Labour Party has 8,245 subscribers and over 3.7 million views. The Liberal Democrats have 3,694 subscribers and almost 1.3 million views.

Videos posted online by political parties include information about their policies, messages from the leaders, conference speeches, and party broadcasts.

In 2014, the leaders of Labour, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and the Greens appeared on a series of online video debates with influential young people called #LeadersLive. This was organised by Bite the Ballot and ITV and currently has more than 113,000 views on YouTube.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
<th>Combined</th>
<th>MPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>136,548</td>
<td>349,881</td>
<td>9,207</td>
<td>495,636</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKIP</td>
<td>81,355</td>
<td>339,211</td>
<td>21,989</td>
<td>442,555</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>176,856</td>
<td>216,140</td>
<td>8,245</td>
<td>401,241</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>107,949</td>
<td>151,998</td>
<td>3,828</td>
<td>263,775</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNP</td>
<td>72,834</td>
<td>182,578</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>255,412</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lib Dems</td>
<td>81,648</td>
<td>110,245</td>
<td>3,694</td>
<td>195,587</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinn Fein</td>
<td>32,038</td>
<td>64,294</td>
<td>7,202</td>
<td>103,534</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>4,761</td>
<td>21,577</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>26,648</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaid Cymru</td>
<td>12,936</td>
<td>12,452</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>25,869</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUP</td>
<td>11,555</td>
<td>3,975</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>15,877</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance</td>
<td>9,025</td>
<td>2,929</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>12,068</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDLP</td>
<td>9,013</td>
<td>1,454</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>10,573</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Total</td>
<td>736,518</td>
<td>1,456,734</td>
<td>55,523</td>
<td>2,248,775</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Source: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and UK Parliament. Based on number of followers, likes, subscribers and seats._
Previous UK pilots

“Unless our electoral system keeps pace with the way many voters live the rest of their lives, it risks being seen as increasingly alien and outdated.”

Jenny Watson
Previous UK pilots

In 2002, 2003 and 2007, the UK carried out over thirty pilots of various internet-related voting methods including telephone and online voting in controlled and uncontrolled environments.

The overall conclusion of these pilots are that they were broadly successful however issues were raised over the process of carrying out pilots, in particular that they should be allowed more time.

2002 pilot projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Polling station/postal voters</th>
<th>Online voters</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool City Council</td>
<td>Internet, telephone, and text message</td>
<td>3,957 (59.4%)</td>
<td>1,093 (16.4%)</td>
<td>1,162 (17.4%)</td>
<td>445 (6.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield City Council</td>
<td>Internet, text message and kiosk</td>
<td>8,881 (67.7%)</td>
<td>2,904 (22.1%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1,327 (10.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Albans City and District</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and kiosk</td>
<td>1,539 (49.5%)</td>
<td>825 (26.5%)</td>
<td>744 (23.9%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crewe &amp; Nantwich Borough Council</td>
<td>Internet and kiosk</td>
<td>1,839 (83.5%)</td>
<td>364 (16.5%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swindon Borough Council</td>
<td>Internet and telephone</td>
<td>33,329 (84.1%)</td>
<td>4,293 (10.8%)</td>
<td>2,028 (5.1%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the pilots, the Electoral Commission published a statement, which said that the pilots had ‘proved popular in improving access to voting’ and that technology based voting had ‘worked well’.61

In the report62 they published, a number of recommendations were made including:

- The need ‘to create an integrated UK-wide pilot strategy, looking at elections to the devolved assemblies and Parliament, elections to the European Parliament, elections to the Greater London Assembly and Mayor, as well as local authority elections and other mayoral elections.’
- The need for pilot schemes to be conducted in ‘real life’ circumstances.
- The need for ‘a wide range of suppliers to contribute towards the piloting of technology-based voting mechanisms.’
- Ensuring that technology should ‘provide opportunities to increase the security of elections and increase accessibility.’
Feedback from voters in the pilots showed that they found electronic voting ‘easy, convenient and quick to use.’

2003 pilot projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Electronic voters</th>
<th>Turnout compared to 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stroud</td>
<td>Internet and telephone</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>+0.4ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swindon</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and digital TV</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>+3ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerrier</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and digital TV</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-3.9ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale Royal</td>
<td>Internet and telephone</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>-2ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shrewsbury &amp; Atcham</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and digital TV</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>+17.8ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratford on Avon</td>
<td>Internet and kiosk</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-2.8ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipswich</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and text message</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>-0.7ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norwich</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and text message</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>+0.8ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>Internet, telephone, text message and kiosk</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>-1.6ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Somerset</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and kiosk</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>+9.3ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Albans</td>
<td>Internet, telephone and kiosk</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>+5.6ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorley</td>
<td>Internet and telephone</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>+19.2ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushmoor</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>+3.5ppt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Tyneside</td>
<td>Internet, telephone, text message and kiosk</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>+20.1ppt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the Electoral Commission’s report following the 2003 pilots, they recommended that:

- The Government should ‘commit to developing a detailed road map towards its stated goal, drawing on expertise across the public and private sectors in the successful development of major IT projects.’
- Future pilots ‘should explore more explicitly the key issue of scalability with respect to the total cost of the services.’
- ‘In the short to medium term, the focus of pilot schemes should be the provision of the internet and telephone channels with a view to providing this scalability.’

Across the 14 pilots with electronic voting, turnout saw an average increase of 4.9 percentage points.

### 2007 pilot projects

In 2007, five electronic voting pilots were conducted and the Electoral Commission considered that these had been ‘broadly successful’ but that ‘there were some issues concerning accessibility, public understanding of the pre-registration process and, in at least one pilot area, technical problems in relation to telephone voting.’

One of the issues highlighted by the Commission was that there was ‘insufficient time available to implement and plan the pilots.’

They recommended that no further e-voting pilots are undertaken until the following four elements are in place:

- ‘A comprehensive electoral modernisation strategy outlining how transparency, public trust and cost effectiveness can be achieved.’
- The implementation of a central process ‘to ensure that sufficiently secure and transparent e-voting solutions that have been tested and approved can be selected by local authorities.’
- ‘Sufficient time must be allocated for planning e-voting pilots.’
- The implementation of ‘individual registration’.
Examples from around the world

Australia    Lithuania
Canada       Netherlands
Estonia      Norway
France       Portugal
India        Spain
          USA

“The web is the place most people express their opinions on every subject under the sun. So, when it comes to voting, shouldn’t it happen online too?”

Sir Richard Branson
Examples from around the world

Electronic voting has been trialled and is in use in a number of countries across the world. The term ‘electronic voting’ however includes the use of kiosks or electronic machines within the polling station. The term ‘online voting’ refers to the method of voting on smartphones, laptops and PCs etc.

The table below shows information about a number of countries that have used online voting in elections. In particular, it shows methods of verifying the voter and authenticating the vote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Authentication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Low vision, disabled, and absentee</td>
<td>One factor, PIN from voter and iVote number from system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>2008, 2009</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>One factor: PIN and date of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Markham</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>2003, 2006, 2010</td>
<td>Not publicly available</td>
<td>One factor: Two PINs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peterborough</td>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>2006, 2010</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>One factor: PIN and date of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Federal, European</td>
<td>2004, 2006</td>
<td>Dutch voters living abroad</td>
<td>One factor: Voter code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>One factor: Username/password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Portuguese citizens residing abroad</td>
<td>One factor: Username/password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Catalonia</td>
<td>Parliamentary – Non-binding pilot</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Catalan citizens living abroad</td>
<td>One factor: 16 character voter identification key</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Estonia

The 2007 Estonian Parliamentary elections saw a ‘world premiere’ of the first time an electorate could vote over the internet in elections of a national parliament.

The number of online votes cast in 2007 was 30,243 out of a total of 550,213. This amounted to 5.4% of the total number of votes being cast via the internet. The percentage of online votes cast by voters aged 24 and under was 11% with the smallest percentage coming from the 55 to 59 age category with 6%. The turnout in the election was 62% of the population.

In 2011, the number of online votes cast was almost five times larger than in 2007 with a total of 140,764 out of 580,264 votes cast via the internet. This amounted to 24.3% of the total number of votes. The percentage of online votes cast by voters aged 24 and under was 9%. The turnout in comparison to the 2007 elections had increased by 1.5% with a turnout of 63.5%.

In 2007, it was estimated that 63% of the Estonian population use the internet, with 53% of households having a computer, and with every school having an internet connection.

Preconditions to online voting included a ‘high e-readiness of the Estonian population’. Voting was conducted using electronic ID cards and a legislative basis was created by the Estonian Parliament in 2002.

Since introducing an online voting in 2007, the turnout in Estonian Parliamentary elections has increased by 5.3 percentage points. If applied to the UK, this would equate to 2.25 million votes. However, at the time of writing, the 2015 Estonian Parliamentary elections are taking place in what is their tenth anniversary of electronic voting. It has been reported that a new record has been set for the number of online votes with 176,491 votes being cast online.
Lithuania

In February 2015, it was reported\(^{68}\) that the Lithuanian Government approved a proposal put forward by Members of Parliament to introduce an online voting option in elections. This covers Presidential, Parliamentary, Local and European Parliament elections. It also covers referenda.

A survey conducted by the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice found that 65% of Lithuanians are in favour of online voting.

In a press release, the Prime Minister, Algirdas Butkevičius said that:

“Such a form of voting is very relevant for people of younger age, furthermore, online voting would be a far more convenient option for citizens who live outside Lithuania.”

India

In February 2015, the Gujarat Election Commission announced\(^{69}\) that they would be offering the option of online voting beginning in October. It will be offered for the election of all six municipal corporations of Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, and Jamnagar.

The combined population of these areas is approximately 14.7 million.

The Secretary of the Election Commission, M V Joshi described the move as a ‘one of its kind project in Asia.’ He said it would help address ‘urban apathy’ and that:

“We expect the facility to be availed by those who have no time to come out to booths and vote. Now that voting is compulsory in the local body elections from this time, the online facility will facilitate and complement the same.”

Regarding the security of the system, the Secretary said:

“Voters will have to use the same hardware for which the verification has been done. At the time of voting, a one-time password will be sent to their mobile phones, which will be followed by verification online. Then, the voter will be allowed to cast the vote online.”

In 2014, the Gujarat Local Authorities Laws Bills 2009 was passed. This made voting mandatory and ensured a 50:50 male-female gender balance in local bodies.
Benefits

Young people
Vision impaired voters
Voters with other disabilities
Ensuring the human right to a secret ballot
Informed votes
Armed forces
Accidentally spoilt ballots
Greater security
Financial
Future-proofing elections

“The more people that are engaged in the process, the healthier our democracy.”

Graham Allen MP
Benefits

For the UK to be a functioning and leading example of democracy, the issue of low voter turnout needs to be addressed. The bedrock of any democracy is that the politicians and decision-makers have been selected by the public. As such, the most important benefit of online voting is the potential it has for boosting voter participation and future-proofing elections in an increasingly digital society.

The benefits however are not limited to just turnout. Groups of voters who currently have to rely on others to cast votes on their behalf, such as those with vision impairments, would be able to cast a secret ballot with an online voting system. Other benefits include the potential for more informed voters, more secure votes, faster results and cheaper elections.

Young people

The primary motivation behind WebRoots Democracy’s work is to boost political participation amongst young people in the UK and to help ensure that more young people vote in elections.

In the past three General Elections, voter turnout amongst young people aged 18 to 24 has been below 45%. At the other end of the age scale, over 70% of those aged 65 and over have voted in the past three elections. In 2010, 76% of those aged 65 and over voted compared to just 44% of those aged 18 to 24.

Unlike other generations, young people of the 21st century have grown up with technology. Television, VCRs, game consoles, mobile phones, computers, mp3 players, laptops, smartphones and tablets are just some of the devices that have formed a core part of the lives of those aged under 25. The direction of these devices has always been towards greater convenience for the user and the theme has been instant gratification.

Young people no longer turn towards dictionaries and encyclopaedias for information but towards Google and Wikipedia. There is no need to obtain a pen, ink, paper, an envelope, and a stamp to send a message to a friend or a pen pal; they can send emails, texts, or a WhatsApp message. They don’t have to find the nearest red post box before a specific time and wait days or weeks for their message to be received. Thanks to technology, for the majority of young people, communication has always been instantaneous.

Television and videos can now be watched in the palm of their hands on their smartphones or on tablets.

Young people turn to computers to work on their school assignments and submit essays over the internet.
If they are to work in an office, they will likely be sat in front of a computer screen responding to emails and accessing files from a cloud storage website.

The cultural change in society is significant and should not be underestimated when we analyse our political system. As the ONS figures show, more and more people are using the internet to bank, shop, communicate, and learn.

In a survey conducted by WebRoots Democracy in 2014, 71% of respondents said that they would be more likely to vote if they could do so online. 55% of respondents to the survey are aged between 16 and 25. 74% of female respondents said they would be more likely to vote compared to 68% of male respondents.

87% of respondents said they think there should be the option to vote online in elections.

These results are similar to surveys conducted by other organisations on the same issue.

In a survey of young people carried out by Survation for Sky News, 80% of respondents said they would be more likely to vote if they could do so online. 84% of female respondents said they would be more likely compared to 77% of male respondents.

In the last General Election, only 39% of young women voted compared to 50% of young men.

Similar results can be found in a recent report released by Demos and vInspired. In their survey of young people, 66% of respondents said that they would be more likely to vote if the government introduced online voting. Of the reforms they asked about, online voting was the most popular.

In a 2013 Survation survey for Lodestone Communications, 63% of respondents said they would be more likely to vote if they could do so online. 80% of respondents aged 18 to 34 said they would be more likely. 66% of female respondents said they would be more likely compared to 60% of male respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Male respondents more likely (%)</th>
<th>Female respondents more likely (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WebRoots Democracy</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky News/Survation</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demos/Populus</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodestone/Survation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It has been argued that should greater number of young people turn out to vote, political parties will begin to take consideration of the issues that they care about and adjust their policies accordingly. Speaking to the Mirror in 2014, television presenter, Rick Edwards said that young people are 'getting screwed' and concluded that:

“The cycle is they’re not voting and therefore their needs and wants are marginalised and that makes them less likely to vote because they feel like they are being further pushed out. It’s a huge problem and I think you have to break that cycle.”

Echoing this point, Guardian journalist Rowena Mason has written of low youth voter turnout and said:

“This may explain why pensioners have kept hold of their free bus passes and TV licences for over-75s, while under-25s are targeted for benefit cuts and are struggling to find jobs.”

Should online voting be introduced and encourage young people to vote in elections, it could lead to an impact on policy that may favour young people as politicians attempt to ‘woo’ their votes.

**Vision impaired voters**

Members of the public with vision impairments would benefit greatly from an online voting option due to it having the potential to allow these voters to cast a secret ballot for the first time ever.

The Royal London Society for the Blind (RLSB) Youth Forum launched a campaign last year entitled ‘Votes Without Limits’ in which they are pushing for accessible online voting to be introduced in time for the 2020 General Election. They argue that this would ‘make voting easier for blind and partially sighted people’.

A survey carried out by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) showed that two-thirds of blind and partially sighted respondents had to give up their right to vote in secret at the May 2014 elections due to polling stations being ‘unequipped’ to assist voters with vision difficulties.

According to the RNIB, there are currently almost two million people in the UK living with ‘sight loss’.

In September last year, a US Federal Judge ordered Maryland to allow blind and disabled voters to fill out absentee ballots online in what has been described as a ‘civil rights issue’.

In a blog post, Agatka Cienciala, a RLSB Youth Forum member wrote that:
“The truth is that blind and partially sighted people, together with other disabled people, are the biggest group in our society still not to have the possibility of voting, using the secret ballot.”

She goes on to say that:

“With the wide availability of technology that would make the secret ballot possible for disabled voters, I believe that there is no excuse for this flaw in our electoral system to remain.”

The Chief Executive of the RNIB, Lesley-Anne Alexander has written that ‘it shouldn’t be acceptable that blind and partially sighted people are cut off from the voting process in the UK.’

In a blog post80, she said:

“There are still a large number of people who feel excluded from important votes and who are frustrated at not being able to exercise their right to vote, simply because the traditional process has not moved on. How can it be that in 2014, people with sight loss still cannot vote as easily as everyone else?”

“Unfortunately, problems with the voting system stretch even wider, as the survey showed that nearly 80 per cent said they cannot read all or some of the elections information sent to them by their council, and 90 per cent had problems with the information sent by the political parties. There are around 2 million people in the UK who are affected by sight loss; do none of the parties care enough to inform and engage with this community by simply providing information in an accessible format?”

Should the option of voting online be introduced, the potential for making information about the elections accessible to those with vision-impairments would be much greater. Similar to young people, a greater turnout of those with visual impairments in elections could lead to better provision and consideration of accessible services.

**Voters with other disabilities**

The physical accessibility to polling stations is another strong argument for online voting. In an age where we are able to order our groceries online, book our GP appointments online, and send documents via email rather than post; it is clear that the benefits of the internet should now expand to include voting in elections.

In 2010, the disability charity, Scope, called for an online voting option to be introduced after a survey they carried out found that more than two-thirds of the general election polling stations failed basic access tests. In addition to this, 35% of those interviewed as part of their study said they would prefer to vote online.

In the charity’s ‘Polls Apart' report81 in 2010, they stated that:
“For some groups of voters, both polling station and postal voting continued to be fundamentally inaccessible. Visually impaired voters and those with complex physical impairments still had to rely on others to physically mark their ballot paper on their behalf, denying them their right to a secret ballot.”

On the topic of online voting, the report says:

“New technologies are now being used by disabled people to improve accessibility in every part of their lives, and the potential of it to revolutionise voting remains considerable.”

In the foreword of the report, Anne Begg MP, who is the Chair of the All Party Group on Equalities and has been a wheelchair user since 1984 wrote:

“There are still challenges in making sure that elections are open to all disabled people. While physical access for those of us in wheelchairs has been improving over recent years, it is still difficult for people with a visual impairment, learning disability or motor limitations. It is not good enough to say that they can always get a postal vote and someone to help, although making postal votes easier to get has made things much easier for many elderly people. But for those who want to vote in person on election day, as most people still want to do, then it should be possible regardless of one’s disability.”

According to the Government’s facts and figures\(^2\) on disability, there are currently over 11 million people with ‘a limiting long term illness, impairment or disability.’ The figures also show that ‘around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 16% of working age adults and 45% of adults over State Pension age.’

Again, the expansion of voting to another marginalised group has the potential to lead to policies that will benefit their lives. Last year, Operation Disabled Vote was set up\(^3\) to ensure that more people with disabilities engage at the ballot box. One of the founders, Ellen Clifford said that:

“Disabled people make up around one in five of the population yet remain one of the most excluded and marginalised groups in the UK. To change that, we need politicians to realise that our votes matter.”

Ruth Scott of Scope, said to the BBC\(^4\) in 2010:

“In a digital age where people can vote by text for the X Factor and shop and bank online, our voting system really needs to catch up.”

In a study by Survation and Lodestone Communications, they found that 9% of non-voters did not vote because they were unable to access a polling station or get a postal vote.
Ensuring the human right to a secret ballot

In the Human Rights Act 1998, Protocol 1, Article 3: ‘Right to free elections’ reads as follows:

“The High Contracting Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.”

According to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, this right is ‘absolute’ and ‘must never be restricted in any way.’

The failure to provide an accessible, secret method of voting for those with vision impairments and other disabilities could therefore be a breach of the Human Rights Act.

This has similarly been argued in Australia, when in 2011, Vision Australia argued that the Government ‘has an obligation to enact necessary legislation and provide sufficient resources to facilitate the development and continuation of equitable voting practices.’

One of the methods they said would enable their service-users ‘to cast an independent, secret ballot’ was the introduction of an online voting option ‘in which votes are cast using an accessible website.’

Informed votes

Bringing the vote online has the ability to not only boost turnout, but to boost the number of informed votes. It is often reported that in elections that aren’t the General Election, voters tend to punish political parties based on their national politics at the ballot box. This is despite there being significant differences in the roles of Local Councillors, Members of the European Parliament, and Members of Parliament.

Following the 2012 Local Council elections, the Liberal Democrats fell victim to this with 335 Liberal Democrat councillors being voted out of office. At the time, former Liberal Democrat MP, Lembit Opik blamed national politics for councillors losing their seats and said:

“The problem is Nick Clegg. There is poll today which suggests that 19 per cent of the people like the Lib Dems without Clegg. We would have done better with a different leader.”

In a study by Survation and Lodestone Communications, they found that 18% of non-voters didn’t vote because they did not have enough information. 27% said they did not believe that their vote would make any difference.
With the introduction of online voting, more information about elections and candidates can be brought online too, onto a central, accessible, election website. This could incorporate tools such as voter-advice applications, explainer videos, and information about the roles of Local Councillors and Members of Parliament for example.

As we learned earlier from the ONS figures, 55% of the population now read the news online. It is, therefore, feasible that the public may take advantage of reading independent information on political parties, their policies, and the candidates in one centralised website that is agreed across parties. Due to the sheer volume and broad range of issues covered in elections, it would be near impossible to have an equivalent source of information in paper format.

**Armed forces**

British soldiers serving abroad would also be beneficiaries of an online voting option. In the USA, in 2010, nearly three million overseas and military voters from 33 states were permitted to cast ballots over the internet. According to the Overseas Vote Foundation, approximately 22% of military and overseas voters surveyed in their study were unable to return their ballots in the 2008 election due to the distance from which they were voting and the unreliable mail service.

According to the British Army’s website, there are British soldiers currently deployed in over 80 countries around the world. These are mainly in Afghanistan; Africa, Brunei; Canada; Cyprus; Germany; Gibraltar; and the South Atlantic Islands.

Currently, there are two methods of voting when you are abroad which are to vote by post or to vote by proxy, in which you get someone else to vote on your behalf.

**Accidentally spoilt ballots**

In elections, the voter is able to ‘spoil’ their ballot by submitting an invalid vote. It is often stated that spoilt ballots are protest votes by members of the public that want to make it known that they do not agree with any of the candidates. However, this is not necessarily the case. As part of the research for this report, we attended the European Parliament election count in Bexley, South East London. Amongst the many piles of paper, were piles for spoilt ballots. However, these ballot papers were mainly ballot papers that were filled in incorrectly.

As the European Parliament election and the Local Council election were held on the same day, a number of voters mistakenly ticked three candidates on the European Parliament ballot paper as well as the Local Council ballot paper. As they were able to vote for up to three candidates in the Local Council election, it is understandable why this confusion arose. However, these mistaken votes were therefore invalid and labelled as spoilt ballots.
This was especially the case in the 2004 London Mayoral and Assembly elections where approximately 552,000 spoilt ballots were counted amid claims that the elections were ‘badly designed’ and that ‘voters were confused’. Simon Hughes, the then defeated Liberal Democrat Mayoral candidate said that ‘the rejected votes showed that a lot of people voted for two people as their preference.’

Voters who accidentally spoil their ballots are never informed that their vote is discounted.

In the 2010 General Election 308,912 votes were registered as invalid.

This is a serious democratic problem that could be very easily fixed in an online voting method where voters could be barred from voting for more than the allowed number of candidates.

**Greater security**

When you talk to people about the idea of an online voting option in elections, there are some who say we should not have it because it cannot be secured. Despite this, in many respects, an online voting option has the potential to offer much greater security than the current methods of voting. It is within the current parameters of acceptable voting methods that we should compare an online voting option to.

In a report on electoral fraud in the UK, the Electoral Commission stated that:

“Electoral fraud tends to be committed by candidates or their supporters. Where significant cases of organised electoral fraud have been found to have taken place, they have been committed and coordinated by a relatively small number of individuals.”

The report particularly highlights vulnerabilities within the current postal voting system. Committing fraud in a postal voting system by candidates and campaigners has relatively low barriers and requires little specialist knowledge. It would involve collecting postal vote forms and filling them out on behalf of the legitimate voter. In an online voting system, the barriers would be higher due to the likely involvement of secure ID codes. In addition to this, breaking into a secure online voting system would require highly specialist knowledge.

In Estonia, where online voting is used in Parliamentary elections, voters log in using a secure code and can vote multiple times with only their final vote counting. This is to reduce the risk of being pressured by others to vote in a particular way, a safeguard not offered in the postal voting system. In addition to this, voters are able to vote in person at a polling station, which discounts any online vote cast in their name.
The table below shows a comparison of safeguards between polling station voting, postal voting, proxy voting, and online voting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safeguard</th>
<th>Polling booth</th>
<th>Postal</th>
<th>Proxy</th>
<th>Online</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure ID</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote receipt confirmation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-cast vote</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disincentive to vote-buying</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secret ballot</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No accidental spoilt votes</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before we continue, it is important to note that no method of voting has 100% security against mass vote tampering. All voting methods have vulnerabilities such as human corruption.

An online voting method would have to require a secure identification code and login which could involve the voter’s national insurance or passport number, which they would be unlikely to surrender to others. It could also involve authentication by a unique code being sent to a voter’s registered mobile or landline telephone number. Alternatively it could involve a security USB stick or card reader as used with some online banking transactions. Whichever method used, the online voting method offers secure identification of the voter, which is not offered in the current methods of voting.

In the current methods of voting, only the polling booth method offers some level of confirmation that your vote has been received. This takes the form of you being able to see your vote being placed into a ballot box. This confirmation is not available in the postal method or the proxy method of voting. In an online voting method, there is potential for confirmation of receipt to be given to the voter instantaneously.

Should a vote be tampered with in the traditional methods of voting, it is not possible to retract it and re-cast your vote. Once it’s been submitted, it’s gone. In an online voting method, as in Estonia for example, you may be able to re-cast your vote in person and cancel an online vote.
Only the polling booth method offers a disincentive to vote-buying out of the current options available. A fraudulent candidate or campaigner is unlikely to want to buy a vote from someone who could lie about who they voted for in a polling station. With postal and proxy voting, that safeguard is not there, as the vote-buyer would be able to ensure that the correct vote is being submitted. In an online voting system, the safeguard of being able to vote in person and cancel an online vote would act as a disincentive to purchasing votes.

The ability to cast your vote in secret is only guaranteed with the polling booth method out of the current options. Whilst voting online itself isn’t safeguarded from someone being able to watch you vote, the ability to vote in person afterward and cancel a vote cast online, as in Estonia, would allow the individual to vote in secret.

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, only an online voting method would offer protection against accidentally spoilt ballots.

Aside from these safeguards, it is important to not have unrealistic expectations of the security of our voting systems. Many expect a 100% secure voting system, however 100% security is a concept that is not present in any other aspect of life be that digital or analogue. Homes are not 100% secure, nor are cars, planes, or even the residence of the Royal Family.

Any online voting system adopted would have to be at least as secure as the current system and include the ability to identify when vote tampering takes place in addition to having credible contingency plans in place.

In the introduction of the Electoral Commission’s report into electoral fraud, the Chair, Jenny Watson wrote:

“In making our recommendations for change, we have been conscious of the need to strike the right balance between making the system accessible, and making it secure. Getting this right will mean that voters and candidates can participate in elections, but corrupt campaigners cannot win votes through fraud.”

“The need to achieve this balance means that some of the changes that have been suggested during our review should not be pursued – they would tip the balance too far away from accessibility. For example, restricting access to postal voting would prevent many innocent voters from casting their vote, not just the people who attempt to undermine the system.”

In March 2014, Jenny Watson said that the UK should consider online voting in elections.94
Financial

There are potential financial benefits to be gained from introducing an online voting option. Elections can be an expensive affair. The 2010 General Election cost the taxpayer £113 million. The cost per vote for this election was £3.77. This cost varies with turnout. The cost of holding the 2014 West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner by-election was an estimated £3.7 million. As the turnout was only 10%, this meant the cost per vote was £18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Election</th>
<th>Cost of election (£)</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
<th>Cost per vote (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>13,784,153</td>
<td>31,233,208</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>23,420,862</td>
<td>30,722,241</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>26,893,831</td>
<td>32,566,523</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>40,715,550</td>
<td>33,653,800</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>53,124,095</td>
<td>31,289,097</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>56,200,000</td>
<td>26,365,192</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>71,000,000</td>
<td>27,148,510</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>113,255,271</td>
<td>29,991,471</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online voting estimate</td>
<td>100,442,915</td>
<td>38,835,056</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: British Electoral Facts/International IDEA.

As we can see from the table above, the cost of elections has been increasing year on year. It is difficult to obtain the breakdown of costs, however we can estimate a cost of the postal vote for the 2010 election based on the cost per vote figure. In 2010, 12% of votes were cast by post representing almost 3.6 million votes. At a cost of £3.78 per vote, we can estimate the cost of postal voting as £13.6 million.

In online voting provider, Smartmatic’s submission to the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy in 2014, they stated that:

“Whilst the initial capital outlay to procure, install and test an online voting system would be significant, the year-on-year operational costs of running elections on the platform would be relatively small and significantly less than that of traditional elections.”

They also state that in the Estonian elections (for which they provide an online voting option), the cost per vote per election on average is less than €0.3. This equates to just 22p per vote.

If we were to apply this figure to the 2010 UK General Election in place of postal votes and trust that the trend of people choosing digital over paper continues, we
can estimate that the total saving would be up to £12.8 million with an online voting option.

Cost per vote

If we apply the estimated increase on voter turnout (see page 85) that an online voting option could bring, the cost per vote would decrease by £1.19. The cost per vote would therefore reduce by almost a third with an online voting option.

It is prudent to note that due to the number of assumptions this calculation is based upon, and due to the lack of data surrounding other costs involved in holding elections, this figure is only a rough, conservative estimate and if anything, the saving is likely to be higher once other long term efficiency savings are factored in.

Future-proofing elections

As we can see from the section on expected future technological advancements, which included developments such as lunar tourists, 3D-printed clothes, and web-connected vehicles; the future is going to continue down its digital path. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that society will become increasingly accustomed to technology and the internet being a part of their everyday life. Culture will shift accordingly and expectations will rise for how the public consume their public services.

The current voting system is virtually unchanged since the first ballot box election in 1872. Should voting remain analogue, the gap between society and the voting system will continue to widen and voting will appear to be increasingly alien. For many, turning up to a random place they have never been to before, queuing up to write an X on a piece of paper behind a curtain is already an alien concept.
displayed by the ONS figures, the public are turning towards online alternatives and the queues for stamps, bank cashiers, and in high streets are decreasing year on year.

It may well be that in 20 years society will move so far forward that voting on your smartphone will seem out-dated, but to keep pace with society we must begin to invest in a reliable online voting option. Failure to do so now will likely increase the mountain that must be climbed in the future. It is important that we do not wait for turnouts to decrease to vastly undemocratic levels before we adopt a voting method more suited to society.
Recent developments

The Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy
The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee
Labour Party
David Cameron
McAfee/Atlantic Council
GOV.UK Verify
Online voter registration
Trade Union ballots

“2020 could be the first election in which people have the opportunity to vote online.”

John Bercow
Recent developments

Since the launch of WebRoots Democracy in May 2014, there have been a number of significant, positive developments that support the case for the introduction of online voting in elections.

The Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy

In November 2013, the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, set up a special Commission looking into the potential of digital democracy for the UK. The objective of the Commission was ‘to consider, report and make recommendations on how parliamentary democracy in the UK can embrace the opportunities afforded by the digital world.’

Over the course of the year, the Commission carried out research into a number of areas, which included the potential of electronic voting. The research involved engaging with the public, experts, and civil society organisations.

The Commission also received over a hundred submissions of information and recommendations from a variety of sources.

In January 2015, the Speaker's Commission published their report into their findings and included a strong recommendation for the introduction of an online voting option. The text used was as follows:

“The Commission is confident that there is substantial appetite for online voting in the UK, particularly among young people. It will become increasingly more difficult to persuade younger voters to vote using traditional methods. It is only a matter of time before online voting is a reality, but first the concerns about security must be overcome. Once this is achieved, there will be urgent need to provide citizens with access to online voting, and the UK must be prepared for this.”

“We support the draft recommendation of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on Voter Engagement in the UK, urging the introduction of online voting by 2020. We agree that this would make voting significantly more accessible. However, we also agree that concerns about electoral fraud and secrecy of the ballot would need to be addressed first.”

The Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee

In November 2014, the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee published a report suggesting that the UK should introduce online voting in time for the 2020 General Election.
The Chair of the Committee, Graham Allen MP said the reforms would help ‘tackle the democratic emergency which is corroding the foundation of our representative system.’

On the subject of online voting, the report said:

“Online voting is a proposal for increasing levels of participation that has received strongest support from our witnesses, although support has not been unanimous. Enabling electors to cast their vote online if they choose to do so would make voting significantly more accessible. In light of the move to individual electoral registration, and the already high take up of postal voting, there is scope for giving online voting further consideration, although this would need to be balanced with concerns about electoral fraud and secrecy of the ballot.”

“We believe that online voting could lead to a substantial increase in the level of participation at UK elections, and we recommend that the Government should come forward with an assessment of the challenges and likely impact on turnout, and run pilots in the next Parliament with a view to all electors having the choice of voting online at the 2020 General Election.”

The role of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee is ‘to consider political and constitutional reform, scrutinising the work of the Deputy Prime Minister in this area.’ The Committee is made up of ten MPs from across the political parties.  

**Labour Party**

In his speech to the Labour Party conference in September, Labour’s Shadow Justice Secretary, Sadiq Khan MP announced that should the Labour Party win the General Election in 2015, they will introduce ‘electronic voting’.

He said:

“Westminster has become a dirty word. We ignore this at our peril. That’s why Labour will overhaul our democracy. Making it as easy as possible to vote. Transforming elections so that voting is in tune with the busy lives people lead.”

The announcement was followed by the publication of a report by a network of ‘digital experts’ from the Labour Party’s ‘Labour Digital’ group.

The report included a recommendation that the UK should ‘implement an electronic voting system that allows all citizens to vote online for national and local UK elections.’

The Labour Digital group was launched in March 2014 at the request of Shadow Business Secretary, Chuka Umunna and is chaired by Lord Mitchell, a former technology entrepreneur.
Recommendation 81 in the report reads that:

“Britain should implement an electronic voting system that allows all citizens to vote online for national and local UK elections.”

The reasoning provided is as follows:

“Indeed, questions must be raised over the efficacy of a representative democratic system that provides little official scope for real-time digital feedback in an age where an MP, standing in central lobby, can read the tweet of a constituent who has just watched Prime Minister’s Questions on the BBC’s dedicated online democracy service. The potential digital technology holds in providing data to policy makers, reducing information asymmetries between politicians and voters and lowering the barriers to engagement, must be faced head on, and a future government should consider moving toward an inclusive model of democracy fit for 21st century society.”

In his blog piece for webrootsdemocracy.org, Sadiq Khan wrote that ‘the way we run our democracy is stuck in a time warp’ and that ‘we need to do all we can to drag our democracy into the 21st Century.’ He went on to write that:

“One thing I’ve been keen to explore further is online voting. Instinctively I think it can only be a good thing for democracy. Done properly, it would make voting easier, and could lead to improved turnout at elections. It would bring the way we decide who runs our country in tune with the busy lives many people lead.”

“Given the alarmingly low number of under 25s who vote, it could particularly benefit younger people. Doing more to engage the under 25s in our democracy must be a priority if we want to avoid storing up problems for the future. At the 2010 election only 44% of young people voted, half the figure for those aged over 65. All the evidence shows that if you vote when you first become eligible, you will keep on voting through adult life. But, sadly, the reverse is also true.”

**David Cameron**

Whilst taking part in Sky News’ #AskTheLeaders event in February 2015, Prime Minister David Cameron said that he does not have an objection to online voting.106

In the live, televised event, the Prime Minister was asked about his views on online voting and voters for 16 and 17 year olds.

In response to the question on online voting, he said:

“Online voting? I mean I don’t have any objection to it, but I think in a way we’re asking the wrong question. The reason people don’t vote is not because it’s too complicated to go down to the polling station; the reason that
people don’t vote is because they don’t believe it makes enough of a difference.”

After being asked a follow up question about whether politicians are afraid of what would happen if more people voted, the Prime Minister replied:

“Look, I don’t have any great objection to it... but the reason people don’t vote is not because it’s too complicated to go down to the polling station.”

Whilst this does not display a commitment to introducing online voting, the Prime Minister’s comments were a significant improvement on his previous views on the topic.107

In April 2014, during a talk at Vodafone HQ, Mr Cameron said that politicians should not ‘pander’ to a generation that wants elections to be ‘just like voting on the X Factor.’ He also suggested that voters should make ‘rain-sodden’ journeys to the polling station due to voting being something that people have ‘died for’.

Despite this, there is some support in the Conservative Party for online voting.

In her blog piece108 for webrootsdemocracy.org in July 2014, Conservative MP for Norwich North, Chloe Smith wrote:

“I also believe that an important reform is in the very way that we vote. It is an extremely unusual thing for Generation Y not to be able to do something online. We shop, we bank, we date, we chat, we organise with ease. However, we register and vote entirely on paper. Not only is this alien to young people, and indeed to anyone who appreciates the capability of the internet, but it is also ineffective for those who wish to market their product. As politicians we communicate online with people all the time but we lack the final ‘one-click’ to clinch the deal when the time comes. Of course there are security and cost considerations, but those pertain to paper voting too. This is too obvious an area for reform to ignore if politicians are to think and act anything like the new generation which will grow to dominate.”

Fellow Conservative MP, Robert Halfon, has also expressed his strong support for online voting and is a member of the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy.109

McAfee/Atlantic Council

In October 2014, a study published by the Atlantic Council and sponsored by online security company McAfee promoted the use of online voting in elections.110

The study111 found that many of the technologies that handle online financial transactions could be applied to make online voting a reality in the future. The study points towards Estonia as a successful example of remote online voting in national
Viral Voting: Future-proofing UK elections with an #onlinevoting option.

elections. They also point to successful examples of electronic voting in Australia, Brazil, France and India.

The President of McAfee, Michael DeCesare said:

“Online and e-voting are examples of how a greater emphasis on security could empower a new era in digital democracy. Yet it will take more than technology to foster acceptance of online and e-voting; people need to have trust and confidence in the process. Pilot programs for local elections could be the route to earning public trust on a small scale. Once that trust begins to expand, we could start seeing online and e-voting’s benefits – from increased voter turnout to more efficient elections.”

McAfee stated that online and e-voting is not widely implemented at the moment due to ‘technical barriers’ however they say that ‘with the right, carefully chosen security considerations, online and e-voting could become more widespread.’

The Atlantic Council researchers noted that ‘cryptography, strong access control enabled by biometrics and securely written software’ could ensure the safety of votes cast online and the integrity of the system. They said that with these security considerations ‘online and e-voting could become more popular as young people who have grown up with the internet become older.’

Director of the Atlantic Council’s Cyber Statecraft Initiative, Jason Healey said:

“Online and e-voting’s potential in terms of reach, access and participation has the chance to revolutionise the democratic process, but there are a series of serious risks that will have to be mitigated. But Estonia has shown that it is possible, and we hope that our recommendations for a path forward will generate more discussions and trials.”

GOV.UK Verify

The Government Digital Service, which is part of the Cabinet Office, announced\textsuperscript{112} in October 2014 that they are to roll out a new tool called ‘GOV.UK Verify’ which they say will be able to help people prove that they are who they say they are online.

This is a part of the Government’s strategy to make Government services ‘digital by default’ in which it hopes that the public will find online public services so user-friendly that interacting with these services online will be their preferred method.

According to the Government website, GOV.UK Verify will support services from HMRC, DVLA, and DEFRA in beta mode, and will be rolled out across more services in 2015.

It states that verifying your identity online for the first time ‘usually takes ten minutes and is completely online.’ Instead of a Government database, the tool uses certified companies to verify the users’ identity.
If GOV.UK Verify is as successful and effective as the Government hopes, it could potentially play an important part of any future plans to introduce an online voting option in elections.

Speaking to the Telegraph, Janet Hughes, head of policy and engagement for the identity assurance programme at the Government Digital Service said:

“The identity providers need to make sure that it’s really you. The main way they do that is by checking credit reference agency files to see if you are a real, active person. If you’re under 19 you’re less likely to have a credit record with enough information to prove that, so we’re open in saying that if you’re under 19 this might not initially work for you. But we’re rolling this out gradually, and over time we’re going to expand the range of ways that the providers can validate that you’re real – like mobile network operators – so we’ll cover more people. There will also be other ways for people who aren’t able to verify their identity digitally using GOV.UK Verify to access services.”

The Government estimates that half a million UK citizens will be using GOV.UK Verify by April 2015.

**Online voter registration**

In June 2014, for the first ever time, online voter registration was introduced in the UK. This was introduced as a part of the move towards individual electoral registration (IER).

The new method of registration takes an estimated three minutes, and requires the user to provide their name, address, date of birth, and national insurance number.

The online registration system led by the Government Digital Service in the Cabinet Office was tested over several months and is compatible with all platforms, including smartphones and tablets.

Announcing the new service at the time, Cabinet Office Minister, Greg Clark said:

“This service will bring voter registration into the 21st century and make it easier, simpler and faster for people to register to vote.”

“Putting public services online is saving taxpayers money and giving people access to services when and where they need them.”

Additional comments from the Cabinet Office on the announcement said that:

“IER will prevent fraud by enabling government to check that everyone on the register is who they say they are. This will lead to greater trust in the legitimacy and fairness of elections.”
During the week of National Voter Registration Day in February 2015, a ‘world-record breaking’ 441,500 people registered to vote. On the day itself, 166,000 people registered to vote.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{Trade Union ballots}

The case for online voting to be introduced for trade union strike ballots was made strongly in 2003 when dozens of trade union General Secretaries called on the then Minister for Employment Relations, Alan Johnson, to end the ban on online voting for union ballots.\textsuperscript{116}

Quotes\textsuperscript{117} from General Secretaries at the time are listed below:

“Unison won the TUC award for best union website last year. We are working hard to develop the internet as a resource for members, the government should remove any obstacles to our online progress.” – Dave Prentis, Unison.

“Amicus will be keen to see new technologies used to extend participation in all of its democratic elections and industrial action ballots. This will be an effective enhancement to the democratic process.” – Derek Simpson, Amicus-AEEU.

“There is no reason for not allowing Unions to conduct statutory elections electronically. Government wants to improve participation in the democratic process. Give unions the right and union members the chance participating in democracy electronically.” – Roger Lyons, Amicus-MSF.

“Technology has given us new ways of engaging the public at large. Outdated laws should not get in the way of democracy.” – John Edmonds, GMB.

“The government should welcome the opportunities new technology provides for affordable democratic processes. I hope the minister will respond to this call to remove unnecessary barriers.” – Billy Hayes, CWU.

“PCS has been at the forefront of e-voting and see it as a vital tool in engaging and representing members of trade unions.” – Mark Serwotka, PCS.

“Democracy can be reinvigorated by the use of technology. The government legislating to bring about e-voting in trade union and our country’s democracy would have enormous benefits in terms of improved participation and cost effectiveness.” – Ed Sweeney, UNIFI.

“At a time when more and more trade unionists are using email, unions themselves should be able to conduct ballots electronically. Such a move would be sure to increase participation by members.” – Richard Rosser, TSSA.
“Connect members working in the communications industry are committed to helping the government expand democracy and increase participation. Electronic decision making helps us to expand this principle in our union organisation.” – Adrian Askew, Connect.

“BALPA members work worldwide – electronic participation is the only solution.” – Jim McAuslan, BALPA.

“BECTU is organising members who very much work in the new Millennium, and urges the Government to ensure the appropriate legislative changes to ensure that legislation reflects the needs of the new Millennium.” – Roger Bolton, BECTU.

These trade unions today represent a combined total of over 3.6 million workers in the UK.

Last year, in 2014, these calls for online voting in trade union ballots were remade. In July, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), wrote to the Business Secretary, Vince Cable, urging him to ‘modernise the rules that govern strike ballots and bring union voting methods into the 21st Century.’

This was in the wake of calls for the thresholds on strike ballots to be raised which the TUC argued was unfair due to ‘the fact that no MP in Westminster secured the turnout in the last election that they would have unions achieve.’

In the letter, Frances O’Grady, General Secretary of the TUC wrote:

“Whilst any strike ballot where a majority of members in a workplace vote for action is a legal and legitimate result, unions would clearly prefer to see more people participating. But to do that we need to update the rules and let people vote on their digital devices.”

“Workers who want to continue voting using traditional postal methods would of course still be able to do so. But electronic communication via a secure online link which union members could access either at home or at work, or when they’re out and about via their smartphone or tablet, would be a simple and inexpensive way of increasing turnout.”
Challenges

This is too obvious an area for reform to ignore if politicians are to think like the new generation.

Chloe Smith MP
Challenges

Political will

If online voting is to become a reality in the UK, cross-party support for the reform needs to be achieved. Whilst this report echoes the calls of the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy, and the Royal London Society for the Blind for online voting to be introduced in 2020, there is always a risk of delay past this date. It could therefore be a project that has to continue over more than one Parliament. If this is the case, there needs to be certainty that investment would continue beyond 2020.

Currently, the only political party to have committed to piloting online voting in the next Parliament is the Labour Party. As mentioned earlier, there are voices within the Conservative Party that are strongly in favour of online voting, and the Conservative Party leader, David Cameron, has said that he has ‘no objection’ to it.

In 2011, Green Party MP and former leader, Caroline Lucas published a report entitled ‘The case for parliamentary reform’ within which, the first recommendation was the ‘introduction of electronic voting in the Chamber (and in the voting lobbies) using hand held electronic devices.’

Arguing the case for electronic voting within the House of Commons, she wrote:

“Many aspects of the way that the House of Commons runs are archaic and wasteful of both time and finances. We need to modernise Parliament and make it more efficient.”

“For some, there is an understandable desire to hold on to traditional ways, but an appeal to custom cannot justify the waste of time involved with the Commons archaic voting process.”

This is a view shared by a number of MPs, however should electronic voting be introduced for MPs, it is inconceivable that the public would not be allowed to vote electronically as the arguments of convenience and accessibility still stand. Additionally many of the risks that are mentioned in discussions about online voting in elections, would still exist in electronic voting for MPs.

It is unclear what the view of the Liberal Democrats is on online voting, however in 2011, after outlining plans for a referendum on the use of the Alternative Vote system, Nick Clegg said that ‘it is important to avoid asking people to keep traipsing to the ballot box.’ This may imply that the Liberal Democrat leader would be favourable towards an online voting method.

Both the Labour Party and the Scottish National Party use online voting for internal elections. The Labour Party use an online voting method for the election of their
National Executive Committee, which is the governing body of the party and ‘oversees the overall direction of the party and the policy-making process.’

The Scottish National Party used an online voting method to elect their new Deputy Leader, Stewart Hosie in November 2014.121

It is also unclear as to what the view of the UK Independence Party is towards online voting. Despite this, UKIP MP, Douglas Carswell has written at length about digital democracy. In an article122 for the London Evening Standard in November 2014, Mr Carswell wrote that ‘digital democracy leaves the big parties behind’ and provided the following example of technological advancement:

“Kodak once meant cameras. From the moment George Eastman launched the first Kodak camera in 1888, Kodak had a dominant market share. By the Seventies, more than 90 per cent of camera film products sold in the US were made by Kodak. People even spoke of taking family photographs as capturing that “Kodak moment”. Then came the digital cameras. The established market monolith could not keep up with the new, nimble, competitors. By 2012 Kodak filed for bankruptcy.”

Whilst there is so far only commitment from one political party, it is clear that is not unreasonable to assume that there is real potential for cross-party support on this issue. However, this is a challenge that must be addressed in order to ensure that online voting becomes a reality in the UK.

Security

In a survey conducted by WebRoots Democracy, 87% of respondents said that the UK should introduce an online voting in options. In addition to this, a number of surveys have shown that the public would be more likely to vote if they were able to do so. However, trust in the security of the system is an issue that needs to be
overcome. In an era where criminals are carrying out cyber-attacks and stealing private information through hacking; any online voting method that is introduced needs to prove that it is sufficiently secure and that there are credible contingency plans in place.

What is crystal clear in the UK, is that trust in the internet appears to be high with millions willingly providing sensitive information on various websites. Whether that be the millions sending private messages via email or instant messaging apps; or inputting credit and debit cards when purchasing goods online; or even details about their favourite films, the high school they attended, and their date of birth on social networking sites.

For context, a typical Facebook profile includes the following information:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Education history
- Employment history
- Relationship status
- Sexual orientation
- Location
- Favourite books, films, and television shows
- Political views
- Photographs
- Names of friends

There are currently 38 million UK users on Facebook, equivalent to 60% of the population.

In addition to this, the use of cloud storage websites by the Government\textsuperscript{123} and major private sector companies is another strong example of the trust in online security. Cloud storage allows individuals or companies to store emails, and files online. It is the equivalent of an online filing cabinet.

Despite this, the public will rightly expect their vote, the bedrock of democratic societies, to be secure. This however should be a challenge for the pilot phase of an online voting roll out. It shouldn’t be something that discourages Governments from looking into online voting.

Aside from this, there needs to be a much broader discussion into how we deal with cyber-criminal activity. Individuals should not be allowed to hack and break into private property online with impunity. The consequences of such activity are incredibly damaging for society and Governments across the world should be doing much more to bring these perpetrators to justice.
The judicial consequences of electoral fraud should be made much clearer to the public in the run up to elections to act as a deterrent.

**Cost**

In a period where public spending is under strain and scrutiny due to economic circumstances, convincing the Government to spend money investing in online voting will be a challenge.

As mentioned earlier, the savings from an online voting method in the long term can save millions of pounds for the taxpayer from lower administrative costs and efficiency savings.

In presenting proposals for online voting methods, decision-makers should be made aware of the efficiency-savings and online voting providers should be fully transparent about the costs involved in their proposals.
Survey results

WebRoots Democracy
Sky News/Survation
Demos/vInspired/Populus
Lodestone Communications/Survation
House of Commons Political Reform Committee
Unlock Democracy
Bite the Ballot
Combined analysis
Potential impact on turnout

“Modern life revolves around computers and the internet, it’s time the political system caught up.”

Survey respondent
Survey results

WebRoots Democracy

From May 2014 to December 2014, WebRoots Democracy carried out a survey of opinions on internet usage, political engagement and online voting. The survey was available in both paper and online.

213 respondents primarily from Manchester, Liverpool and London completed the survey.

Whilst this is less than initially hoped, the margin of error produced is still relatively small at approximately 7 percentage points and thus offers some useful insights.

What type of social media do you use?

For online voting to have an effective impact on turnout and engagement, it is important to have the voting platform integrated with social media websites where the public spend most of their time online.

From the WebRoots Democracy survey, it shows that, unsurprisingly, websites such as Facebook (87%) and Twitter (82%) are used by most respondents. There is already a lot of political activity on these websites, however, social media apps Instagram and Snapchat are also relatively popular. Currently, there is little political presence on these outlets.

Regardless of whether online voting is introduced, it would be worth the Government looking into the potential of working with Instagram and Snapchat in the run up to elections.
Has the internet made you more aware of political issues?

- Yes: 89%
- No: 11%

89% of respondents said the internet has made them more aware of political issues. This could allude to the findings by the ONS, which show that more and more people are accessing information about current affairs online. It could also show that clicktivist behaviour has been having an impact on political engagement. Notable recent examples of which would be Kony 2012 and #BringBackOurGirls.

Has the internet made it easier for you or been used to encourage you to take part in political action?

- Yes: 85%
- No: 15%

With 85% of respondents stating that the internet has been used to encourage them into political action, the idea that the internet is a sphere of political action, debate, and discussion is further reinforced.

**Viral Voting**: Future-proofing UK elections with an #onlinevoting option.
The rise of online petitions has expanded political action to the masses. It is unsurprising that 92% of respondents said that they have signed an online petition before. Recent high-profile petitions relate to a broad range of topics such as the fate of the BBC Three channel (272,603 signatures), convicted rapist and footballer Ched Evans (171,161 signatures), and pardoning those convicted under historical anti-gay laws (376,780 signatures).

Do you think you would be more likely to vote if you could do so online?

This is arguably the most important statistic in the survey; examining the impact online voting could have on turnout. There are broadly three groups of voters. Those who would not vote regardless of online voting, those who would vote regardless of online voting, and those who would vote under certain conditions.

71% of respondents stating that they would be more likely to vote if they were able to online is significant. It is also reflective of the results of surveys with larger samples as mentioned in the Benefits chapter.
Do you think there should be the option of being able to vote online in UK elections?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite a number of respondents stating that they would or would not vote regardless of online voting, many recognised the benefits of online voting and as such, 87% of respondents said it should be introduced for elections.

Some of the comments left by survey respondents are shown below:

“It makes politics more accessible, especially with the younger population who are currently under-represented during General Elections.”

“That’s how we live the rest of our lives; so let’s vote online too.”

“It would make voting more accessible – half the battle isn’t persuading people why they should vote, it’s actually about ensuring they take the time to have their say.”

“Modern life revolves around computers and the internet, it’s time the political system caught up.”

“It would be easier as I wouldn’t need to take time out of my schedule to cast a cross on a ballot paper.”

“As a disabled person, it would give me another option to the postal vote to participate.”

**Sky News/Survation**

From 21-26 August 2014, Survation carried out a survey of 1,003 16-24 year olds for use in the Sky News Stand Up Be Counted campaign.

The campaign was launched by Sky News\textsuperscript{128} in order ‘to help give young people a voice.’
The survey asked respondents whether online voting would make them more likely to vote in the next General Election.

**Demos/vInspired/Populus**

As part of youth volunteering charity, vInspired’s Swing the Vote campaign, Demos and Populus carried out a survey of 1,004 young people between 28 August and 7 September 2014.

Respondents were asked whether online voting would make them more likely to vote.

**Lodestone Communications/Survation**

Survation conducted a survey of 2,096 adults from 3-9 September 2013 on behalf of Lodestone Communications.

Respondents were asked whether or not they would be more likely to vote if they were able to do so online.
On 2 February 2015, the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee published their study into voter engagement which contained a survey of 4,946 adults. Respondents were asked whether they should be able to cast their votes online.

Unlock Democracy

Constitutional reform campaign group, Unlock Democracy conducted a survey of 2,435 of its members and supporters. Respondents were asked whether or not the UK should introduce online voting in elections.
Viral Voting: Future-proofing UK elections with an online voting option.

Bite the Ballot

Voter registration campaign group, Bite the Ballot conducted a Facebook survey of their 2,890 followers on voter engagement. It is not clarified what the sample size of the survey is as it is not specified whether all 2,890 responded to the survey.

Respondents were asked whether or not we should be able to vote online.

The UK should introduce online voting
- Don't know: 13%
- Disagree: 35%
- Agree: 52%

Should we be able to vote online?
- No: 27%
- Yes: 73%
Combined analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>For online voting</th>
<th>Against online voting</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WebRoots Democracy</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky News/Survation</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demos/vInspired/Populus</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>1,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodestone/Survation</td>
<td>1,321</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>2,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Reform Committee</td>
<td>3,314</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>4,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlock Democracy</td>
<td>1,266</td>
<td>1,169</td>
<td>2,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,551</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,146</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,704</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion</strong></td>
<td><strong>65%</strong></td>
<td><strong>35%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the six surveys for which the sample size numbers are available, the results show that 65% of combined respondents are in support of online voting with 7,551 out of 11,704 responding positively to questions on online voting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>More likely to vote with online voting</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WebRoots Democracy</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>213</td>
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<td>Lodestone/Survation</td>
<td>1,321</td>
<td>2,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,937</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,316</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion</strong></td>
<td><strong>68%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is an important difference in the wording of the questions on online voting across the surveys, however. Surveys that ask whether respondents think we ‘should’ have online voting does not determine whether or not that person would vote regardless of online voting.

People will either vote regardless of online voting, not vote regardless of online voting, or be more likely to vote if they could do so online.

Therefore, the figures from the four surveys in the table above give us a strong understanding of whether or not online voting could have an impact on turnout. The fact that 68% have responded stating that they would be more likely to vote online, it is evident that introducing an online voting option could boost turnout in elections.

**Potential impact on turnout**

Using the voter turnout statistics of the 2010 General Election, the 68% more likely to vote figure, and the results from the 2013 British Social Attitudes (BSA) report, we can calculate an estimated impact on voter turnout of online voting.

Key assumptions:

- The statistic from the BSA report that 32% of the population are not interested in politics is accurate.
- This 32% of the population would not vote regardless of online voting.
- The 32% figure is applicable across all age groups and voters/non-voters.
- That if online voting is introduced, 68% of people would be more likely to vote.
- The voter turnout and population size statistics are accurate.
- Nothing adverse will happen before the election to turn the public off voting.

The total voting age population in 2010 that did not vote, discounting voters aged 18 to 25, is approximately 15,295,000. Applying the BSA statistic, 10,400,600 of these non-voters may have an interest in politics.

Applying the 68% figure, we can estimate that 7,072,408 over 25 year olds would be more likely to vote if they could do so online.

The estimated population of 18 to 25 year olds in 2010 was 6,840,000. An estimated 3,830,000 did not vote. Applying the BSA statistic, 2,604,672 of these non-voters may have an interest in politics.

Applying the 68% figure, we can estimate that 1,771,177 18 to 25 year olds would be more likely to vote if they could do so online.

The combined total is therefore 8,843,585. Rounded up, this equates to 9 million. This would increase voter turnout to 38,835,056 or 79%.

Youth voter turnout would increase to 70%.
Conclusion

How could we pass such an opportunity by?

Agatka Cienciala
Conclusion

Next steps

Whilst it is clear that public opinion is strongly in favour of online voting, with the findings in this report setting out why online voting is important to the future of the political process in the UK; there is still a lot to be done if this is to come to fruition.

For online voting to be introduced, it will require cross-party support, and so the immediate next step in the run up to the 2015 General Election will be to ensure that the public has clarity over the position of each party towards online voting. In particular, we will be seeking to achieve the recommendation set out in the Executive Summary to obtain a cross-party agreement from the main political parties.

WebRoots Democracy will also look towards other methods that can boost political engagement following the General Election, in addition to the campaign for online voting.

Get involved

If you agree that it’s time for the UK to modernise elections and you would like to find out more about the campaign for online voting, there are a number of ways to do so.

The best way to stay up-to-date is to follow WebRoots Democracy on social media:

- Like us on Facebook at http://facebook.com/WebRootsUK.
- Follow us on Twitter at http://twitter.com/WebRootsUK.
- Subscribe to our YouTube channel at http://youtube.com/WebRootsUK.

If you are a keen writer or blogger, why not blog for webrootsdemocracy.org?

Blogs on our website are based around issues of voter apathy, young people, disabilities, digital democracy, and, of course, online voting. Since launching in May 2014, the website has had over 6,500 views and is receiving more and more visitors everyday. It’s also been viewed in 91 different countries.

If you would like to become a blogger for WebRoots Democracy, send an email to hello@webrootsdemocracy.org.

E-petitions are a great way to show demand and make a collective voice heard. WebRoots Democracy has set one up on Change.org. If you haven’t already, help spread the message by signing, tweeting, and sharing our e-petition.

To keep up to date with upcoming events and actions, join our mailing list here.

If you are interested in getting involved or collaborating with WebRoots Democracy in another way, contact Areeq Chowdhury at areeq@webrootsdemocracy.org.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks for this report goes to everyone who has been supportive of WebRoots Democracy from its inception. As an independent campaign that is run voluntarily, every contribution of support is greatly valued and goes a long way.

In particular, much appreciation goes towards family, friends and colleagues who have shown great support throughout.
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