The Anti-democratic Implications of Mandatory Voter ID in the Elections Bill (08 October 2021) *by Dr Jess Garland, Director of Policy and Research at the Electoral Reform Society and Nina Arif (SOAS)*

The Elections Bill currently progressing through Parliament contains measures to introduce mandatory photographic ID at polling stations. However, such measures **are likely to prevent many people from exercising their democratic right to vote in order to solve a problem that doesn't exist: personation fraud. To protect the democratic rights of all citizens we urge you to oppose the introduction of mandatory voter ID.**

Personation fraud levels are vanishingly small. In 2019, over 58 million votes were cast which, according to Electoral Commission data, resulted in just 33 personation fraud allegations. Of these just, one resulted in a conviction and one in a police caution. Personation fraud is not a problem that requires a solution. **Indeed, the Electoral Commission itself has stated that "the UK has low levels of proven electoral fraud".**

Voter ID will cost millions in taxpayers' money (an estimated £120m over ten years) for a plan which will inevitably create barriers for people taking part in democracy.

Evidence from other countries indicates that **requiring voters to bring photo ID to the polling station makes it more difficult for people to vote.** At the same time, it does little to promote confidence in voting system integrity. This trend can be observed in the USA where compulsory ID requirements demonstrably supressed voter turnout for certain groups. In the UK public confidence in the electoral process remains high with voters (87% of whom trust that voting is safe from fraud) but voter ID could make things worse – talking up fraud tends to lower public confidence in elections.

The negative impact on the number of votes being cast has been noted in the UK too. Pilots of voter ID in England during the 2018 and 2019 local elections highlighted the potential risks of mandatory voter ID. In the local councils participating in the pilots **over 1000 people were turned away from the polling station for not having photo ID and failed to return to cast their ballot.**

Mandatory ID card schemes are prevalent in most European countries, with all voters possessing free or low-cost ID cards. But the situation in the UK is different: the most common forms of photographic ID (passports and driving licences) are costly to obtain. According to Electoral Commission estimates, **3.5million voters do not have photo ID in the UK**. Marginal groups including **the poor and ethnic minorities could be most disadvantaged** by the change, since they are less likely to have appropriate forms of ID. Data from the Driving and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), shows that 53 percent of black people and 61 percent of Asian people over the age of 17 held a full driving licence – compared to 76 percent of the white population.

Recognising the anti-democratic impact this legislation could have, a coalition of civil society groups concerned about its impact – particularly for disadvantaged groups – have jointly demanded the government rethink its voter ID plans.

A mandatory photo ID requirement at polling stations will do little to improve election integrity. Rather, it will prevent legitimate voters from casting their ballots at significant cost to taxpayers. We therefore urge you to **oppose the introduction of mandatory voter ID to elections in Great Britain.**