



Briefing: Representation of the People Bill 2026

Second Reading

Feb 26, 2026

Key Calls

- Embed Standards of Conduct through requirements for political parties
- Disseminate Candidate Safety Resources consistently
- Address Online Harms through a code of practice for social media platforms

The problem of abuse and intimidation

Abuse and intimidation of elected representatives – including violence towards them – is a threat to democracy. It leads to politicians stepping down, self-censoring and fewer people putting themselves forward as candidates. It is disproportionately levelled at those who are already under-represented. Key statistics:

- 96% of [MPs](#) have experienced threatening behaviour, with threats of sexual violence disproportionately experienced by women and disabled MPs.
- Of 2024 general election [candidates](#), women were twice as likely to experience abuse as men, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds were three times as likely as those from white backgrounds.
- 72% of [councillors](#) report having experienced abuse or intimidation in the last year. This is higher among women and ethnic minorities (84%), and LGBT+ and disabled councillors (85%).
- Over a third of young women and girls surveyed by [Girlguiding](#), said they were put off certain careers including politics because of the abuse they see high-profile women receive.

The Representation of the People Bill is an opportunity to address this problem and work towards a stronger, safer, more respectful democracy.

Welcome Proposals in the Bill

- Extending the disqualification order to include hostility towards election staff and making hostility as an aggravating factor in sentencing, which recognise the

seriousness of the threat. (Part 6. Hostility Towards Candidates Etc: Disqualification Orders and Sentencing)

- The introduction of a police contact form so police can contact candidates directly regarding their safety. This builds on the ongoing work of the Electoral Commission on candidate contact forms. (Part 3. Conduct for Elections Etc)
- The removal of requirements of candidates' home addresses to be published in the Notice of Election Agents. We have long campaigned to make the personal addresses of candidates and elected representatives' private by default. (Part 4. Campaigns and Political Expenditure)

Suggestions for Strengthening

Embed Standards of Conduct

Problem: Political parties have an important role to set standards of conduct. Political parties have made progress, including implementing principles of our [Statement on Conduct of Political Party Members](#) that we produced with the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). However, these are not always applied. Of the candidates who [reported](#) experiencing abuse in the 2024 general election 27% reported that campaigners or volunteers (of any party) were at least one of the sources of abuse, and 11% that another candidate was. This is also observed internationally, with party cultures, campaign practices and internal processes contributing to the problem.

Solution:

- The bill is an opportunity to introduce mechanisms to improve transparency and accountability of standards of conduct, and promote a culture in which minimum levels of respectful standards of conduct are as important as proper campaign finance practices. Changes could be made to Part 3 of the Bill, 'Conduct for Elections.'
- We call for a minimum requirement for **political parties to have and publish codes of conduct** as part of their registration with The Electoral Commission.
- We call for additional requirements for parties to report how their codes are implemented i.e. what proportion of complaints were handled, and the candidate selection processes.
- These changes are supported by other organisations including Compassion in Politics and Elect Her.
- We also support calls by [Centenary Action](#) and others for the implementation of section 106 of the Equality Act. This would require parties to publish data on the protected characteristics of candidates standing for elections to the House of Commons, Scottish Parliament and the Senedd.

Ask for MPs: Get in touch with us if you would like to champion and support these changes.

Disseminate Candidate Safety Resources

Problem: Information for candidates and others in the election ecosystem on safety and security has hugely improved in recent years. The UK Government Joint Election Security and Preparedness Unit (JESP) created the [Candidate Security Guidance](#) collection. The [Electoral Commission](#) continues to prioritise creating and disseminating information. However, we often hear that many candidates are unaware of the existing resources.

Solution:

- These measures should be **strengthened** to ensure that resources are updated and consistently disseminated.
- **Guidance on safety for candidates** and campaigners safety should be reviewed and improved and also be widely disseminated so all campaigners are aware of available resources. For example, the **Electoral Commission could have the responsibility and resources to update, review and share** safety resources/ guidance directly with candidates shortly after candidate registration. This change could be made to Part 3 of the Bill, 'Conduct for Elections.'

Ask for MPs: Get in touch with us if you would like to champion and support these changes.

Address Online Harms

Problem: Online harms, including mis- and disinformation, and gendered abuse, threaten the integrity of our elections. They distort debate, deter participation and erode trust.

Solution:

- As part of the Online Safety Act Network, we support a proposal to introduce a duty on Ofcom, in consultation with others, to produce a **code of practice for social media platforms** to address potential harms during the electoral process. Other supportive information organisations include Center for Countering Digital Hate, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the Fawcett Society. For more information, please see the Network's [briefing](#).
- We also support [calls](#) from the Epistemic Security Network Information Crisis Coalition – led by Demos in partnership between [Full Fact](#), Transparency International, the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition and the Online Safety Act Network and others – **to clarify and update rules to deal with political deepfakes**.

Ask for MPs: Support the organisations and MPs, incl. Emily Darlington MP, leading on this advocacy.

Promote Political, Digital and Media Literacy

Problem: Political, digital and media literacy remains low, and seems to be a driver of abuse towards those in public life. The 2024 [Opinium](#) poll found that 70% of young people could not

name their MP. The [Electoral Commission](#) found an increase in the public's acceptability of bullying behaviours towards politicians with only 25% of 18-24 year olds believing that it is completely unacceptable to verbally threaten a politician in public.

Solution:

- The bill, especially the proposal to extend the franchise to 16 year olds, presents a crucial opportunity to embed political, digital and media literacy as a core part of our culture – in schools and beyond.
- We recommend the bill is strengthened to ensure **political literacy materials are part of automated voter registration** to embed an understanding of the electoral process. This could be added to Part 2 Registration of Voters.
- We are supportive of other efforts to promote political, digital and media literacy such as those offered by [ShoutOutUK](#)

Ask for MPs: Support the organisations and MPs leading on advocacy to promote political, digital and media literacy.

For more information, please contact Hannah Phillips, Respectful Politics Policy Manager, hannah.phillips@jocoxfoundation.org