

Second reading briefing – Representation of the People Bill

Create a transparent protocol for managing electoral information incidents

The government's [policy paper](#) for electoral reform recognised that our democracy “is being threatened by misinformation”. The Prime Minister [has said he is](#) “very worried about the potential for misinformation in future elections in this country.” However, the [Representation of the People Bill](#) does not address this serious and growing threat, and risks being [a missed opportunity](#) to safeguard UK democracy and restore public trust.

However, the Bill does not close a serious gap in the UK's democratic resilience: the absence of a public protocol for dealing independently with serious incidents that threaten the fairness or integrity of an election.

Crisis response - a key gap in the Bill

Currently, the UK has no published protocol setting out the threshold for an incident that could undermine an election; who would assess whether that has been met; when candidates, election officials, the public and others would be informed; and how that could take place independently from the government of the day.

Rapid advances in generative AI and increasingly sophisticated influence operations mean that future elections are likely to face faster-moving and more complex information threats. Where coordinated disinformation, foreign interference or AI-generated content threatens the fairness or integrity of an election, there must be a transparent and trusted mechanism to assess the risk and, where necessary, inform voters.

A number of government bodies monitor or respond to threats in the information environment. However, these arrangements are not underpinned by a published statutory framework governing public disclosure during election campaigns, and the bodies have limited public visibility:

- **The National Security Online Information Team** within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology [focuses on the scope and reach of misinformation and disinformation](#).
- **The Joint Election Security Preparedness Unit** [coordinates election security planning](#) and convenes an Election Cell during major democratic events, which brings together departments and agencies.
- **The Defending Democracy Taskforce** is a [forum that coordinates and drives work](#) across government to protect UK democratic processes, institutions and society.

The Bill should be strengthened to introduce a statutory public protocol for electoral information incidents, alongside greater transparency about the roles and responsibilities of the bodies involved in electoral security.

Why this matters in practice

Serious information incidents during a campaign could include:

- coordinated foreign interference designed to suppress turnout or distort debate;
- rapid spread of synthetic (AI-generated) content, including deepfakes;
- false claims about voting procedures affecting when, where or how to vote.

Election campaigns concentrate public attention and heighten political polarisation, making them particularly vulnerable to targeted information operations. Failure to disclose an incident may later be criticised as concealment; premature or inconsistent disclosure may be criticised as political intervention. A predefined statutory framework reduces the risk that such decisions are perceived as politically motivated.

A transparent, predefined process would help to protect voters, candidates, civil servants and ministers – and safeguard the fairness and integrity of the UK's electoral processes – by ensuring that decisions are guided by published criteria rather than being made under pressure in real-time.

International practice

The UK is an outlier among some of its key allies by failing to have a published protocol or similar for electoral information incidents. Canada operates a [Critical Election Incident Public Protocol](#), under which a panel of senior officials assesses whether an incident threatens the country's ability to hold a free and fair election. Public notification is permitted where a high threshold is met based on published criteria.

This model demonstrates that it is possible to balance transparency, independence and restraint. The UK has not implemented a public mechanism. In January 2025, a [Minister confirmed](#) there were no plans to introduce a Canadian-style protocol given the unpublished processes in place.

Recommendations

(1) Establish a statutory public protocol for electoral information incidents

[The Bill should establish](#), in statute, a clearly defined election incident protocol that includes:

- The body responsible for implementing the protocol, with transparent decision-making processes and clear safeguards to ensure operational independence from the government of the day.
- Procedures for identifying and responding to incidents, including the threshold for triggering the protocol and how it would interact with existing civil contingencies and national security mechanisms.
- Publication of the criteria in advance of each general election, and post-election reporting to Parliament on any incidents assessed under the framework.

(2) Increase transparency of electoral security bodies

Operational capability alone is not sufficient; public trust also depends on clarity about institutional roles and accountability. The government should also publish, on a web page for the public, information explaining the roles, responsibilities, accountability and coordination pathways of the bodies summarised above.

Conclusion

Digital technologies have changed how information spreads during elections, increasing both speed and scale of potential disruption. The absence of a transparent and independent protocol leaves a gap in electoral resilience. A statutory framework would help ensure that elections are demonstrably secure and strengthen public trust.

This is one in a series of briefings by Full Fact on measures to strengthen the Bill:

1. [Upgrade the Online Safety Act to safeguard the UK's democracy.](#)
2. [Create stronger rules to deal with political deepfakes.](#)
3. [Establish a comprehensive public library of political adverts.](#)
4. [Regulate to prevent misinformation and disinformation in political campaigns.](#)
5. [Create a transparent system for dealing with electoral information incidents.](#)
6. [Increase the investigative powers of the Electoral Commission.](#)
7. [Give platforms a statutory duty to support effective media and political literacy.](#)

For more information, please see our [policy paper](#). To discuss the issues raised in this briefing, please contact George Havenhand, Policy Manager at Full Fact, on george.havenhand@fullfact.org.