# Overseas Brits New Right to Vote

How to use Our Vote to get Real Influence

and What Needs to Change

What the British Overseas Forum is doing for Pattaya Expats

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Talk to Pattaya Expats Group 24 Jan 2024

### MAY 2022 ELECTIONS ACT TRIGGERED THE CHANGE



Reduced the Independence of the Electoral Commission





Abolished Preferential Voting for the Election of Mayors and Police Chiefs





Introduced Voter Photo ID as a requirement when voting





Extends the right to vote to British Citizens outside the UK who have once lived in the UK





Increases the number of permissible donors to Political Parties



### 2022 ACT - OVERSEAS VOTERS -THE KEY CHANGES

Removes 15-year limit on voting rights, creating "votes for life"

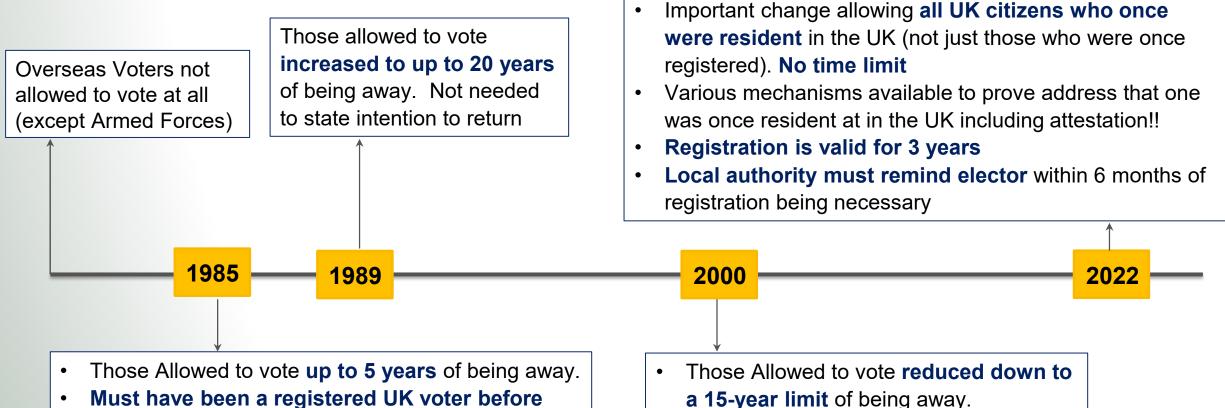
Increases registration renewal from 1 year to 3 years and they must remind you

Changes to qualification rules for where you can register to vote (last constituency of registration or residence)

Changes the number of people someone can be a **proxy for** down to **only 4 Voters** (but only 2 can be resident in the UK)



### HISTORY OF UK OVERSEAS VOTING



- (where they had to vote) Had to state that one intended to return to the UK
- **Annual registration process**
- No requirement of local authority to remind the elector that re registration is required

- a 15-year limit of being away.
- Those over 18 who had been too young to register when moving overseas could now register at parents/guardian address

# WHY SHOULD BRITISH OVERSEAS CITIZENS BE ALLOWED TO VOTE?

We are citizens

We have a lot of experience and knowledge to contribute

Many promote exports and inward investment

Often paid a lot of tax and still doing so in many cases

We remit money to UK and support our relatives in the UK

Reciprocal with the foreigners who live in the UK - pay taxes but vote in their own country

# NUMBER OF POTENTIAL UK VOTERS OVERSEAS

#### 5.6 million

Number of UK citizens living overseas.

Institute of Public Policy research in 2010

#### 1.4 million

Number of persons entitled to vote in 2017 (under previous 15-year rule).

UK Government announcement.

#### 3.5 million

Number of persons entitled to vote in 2024 (under new rule).

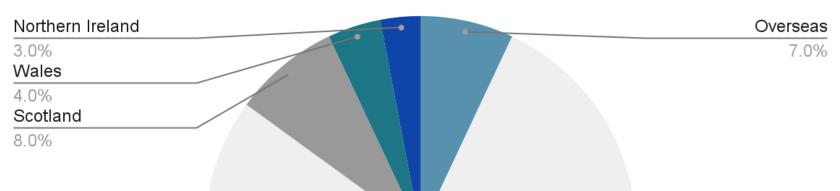
UK Government Estimate

#### 47.1 million

Total National Electorate in 2019

### COMPOSITION OF UK VOTERS

#### Points scored

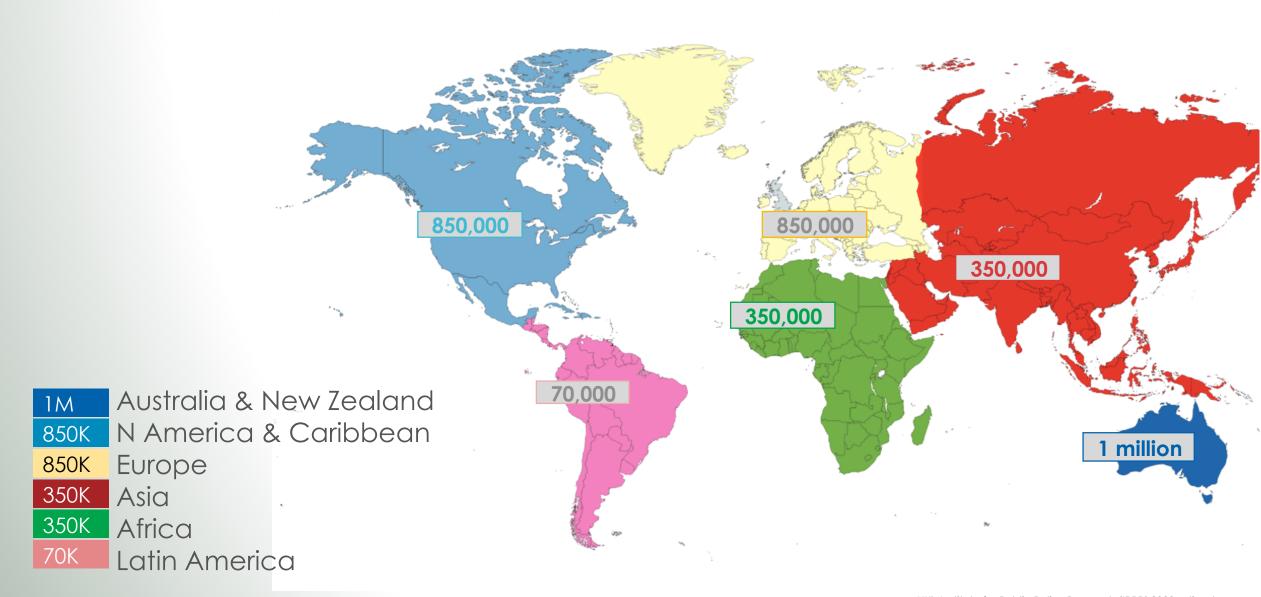


An increase from an estimated 1.4 million to 3.5 million British citizens living overseas are eligible to vote

This is 7% of the voting population – similar to Wales & Northern Ireland combined

England 78.0%

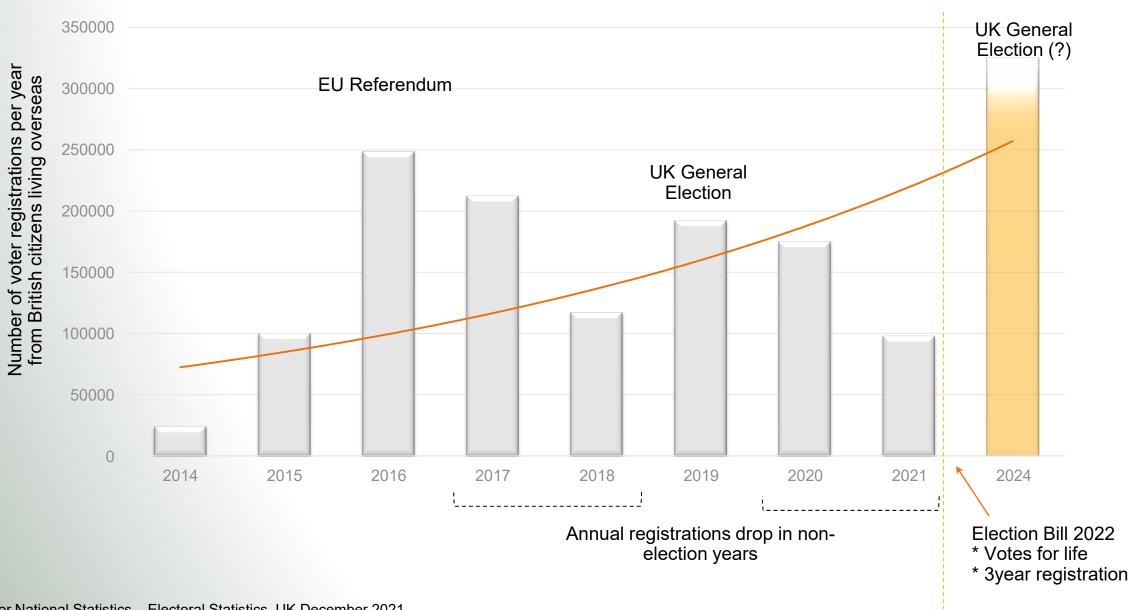
### WHERE ARE THE 3.5M OVERSEAS VOTERS BASED?



# Nos of Registered Voters over the years

Month and Year Recorded Total	Year Rule	Number of registered voters
February 1987	5	11,000
February 1988	5	2,092
February 1991	20	34,000
February 1997	20	23,583
February 2000	20	10,669
December 2010	15	32,274
December 2014	15	27,005
December 2015	15	108,725
December 2016	15	264,000
June 2017 (At G/E)	15	285,000
December 2019 (At G/E)	15	233,000
December 2021	15	107,000

## RISE IN OVERSEAS VOTER REGISTRATIONS



# HOW TO REGISTER TO VOTE

Register to vote online: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Input ID and postcode / address where you were last registered to vote

If never registered to vote, provide proof of residency (can ultimately use attestation)

For the first time the Local Authority must remind you to renew

# MAKING SURE MY VOTE COUNTS OVERSEAS VOTING – LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES

International postal system may not deliver the ballot in time

Local authorities
can only **send out ballots** after
candidate
nominations close

**Potential 3-week period** to print,
post, return and
receive ballots

**Proxy voting** helps solve these challenges ...

# KEY POINTS ABOUT SELECTING A PROXY

Proxy must be registered to vote themselves

Able to vote in same election

Can only be Proxy for up to 4 people (But Max of 2 living in UK)

Proxy will have to contact the local Electoral office of the Person they are voting for

Proxy can choose to vote in person or by post (post if they do not live in immediate locality)

How can you be sure the Proxy will carry out your wish?

# HOW TO REGISTER A (POSTAL) PROXY

OVERSEAS VOTER REGISTERS TO VOTE

CHECKED & CONFIRMED BY LOCAL AUTHORITY (LA)

REGISTER FOR A POSTAL VOTE OR PROXY

PROXY RECEIVES NOTIFICATION & AGREES TO BE PROXY

5 PROXY PROBABLY CHOOSES TO VOTE BY POST

www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

This will offer the ability to vote by post National insurance number required (there are work arounds)

Voter will need to documents to prove they have lived in the constituency if new registration

Effective for 3 years (from Jan 2024)

Not safe to rely on the Postal system but still must find a reliable Proxy

Either way this registration applies for 3 years

Proxy Rule changed. Can be Proxy for up to 4 people. Out of the 4 Proxies only two can be resident in the UK

The proxy should request from Local Authority if he wants to vote by post

Registration used to be indefinite

# IN SUMMARY

More than 15 years outside the UK able to register as from January 16 2024.

Then must decide if you want to have a Postal Vote OR nominate a Proxy Voter

You can do both on-line

The Process is probably a 3- stage process and is likely to take a few weeks because some checking of documents or past registers is required

When you register it will last for 3 years So do it now

Proxy voting needs Voter and Proxy to complete separate applications

You can do both on-line

You cannot leave it until when an election is called

# WHY THE NEED FOR US TO VOTE AND FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

### KEY POINTS OF UNFAIRNESS THAT HAVE TO CHANGE



# FROZEN PENSIONS EXPLAINED

11 million UK pensioners

1.05 million live outside UK

600,000 receive full state pension

450,000 receive frozen state pension

Closest campaigning group is <u>British Pensioners in</u> <u>Australia</u> - members very active in lobbying

- A Frozen Pension remains at the level first received for the duration of life outside the UK (does not received annual uprating received by UK pensioners)
- A decrease in real terms year-on-year
- Unfair! Made National Insurance contributions & otherwise not a burden on the UK state
- If on average frozen pensioners receive only 60% of the basic state pension saving to UK government every year is 1.7bn

# FORCED CLOSURE OF BANK ACCOUNTS WHAT WE KNOW

What	has	been
happe	ening	g?

- From October 2023 Barclays Bank have been writing to Customers telling them to re-register to a UK address or their bank account will be closed in 6 months
- Natwest have been doing the same

# Why have banks been doing this?

- Complexity of compliance rules making it expensive to maintain
- Not part of EU related to not being able to offer services within the EU - safer to stop altogether

#### Any solutions?

- Banks usually offer customers to apply to their offshore bank (I.e. Jersey), but
  - No guarantee to be offered an account
  - Minimum balances requirement (60,000 100,000 GBP)
  - High bank charges

# FORCED CLOSURE OF BANK ACCOUNTS WHAT THE FORUM SAYS

Restrictions for bank accounts overseas

- Living overseas does not mean that you can open a usable account in that country - may need a work permit
- Often cannot get debit or credit card facilities overseas
- Accounts have difficulty in making overseas payments standing orders overseas not possible

Why it is essential for British Citizens overseas to maintain account in UK

- Paying UK taxes on UK income
- Receiving a UK pension and other income
- Renting out a UK property, and therefore needs to receive rent / pay bills etc
- Supporting children at university in the UK
- Paying magazine and other subscriptions on standing order
- Often holiday or make business trips to the UK

# SPOUSE VISA RULES - THE PRICE OF LOVE

#### WHAT IS CHANGING?

- Getting harder and harder to bring a Foreign National Partner into the UK.
- British Nationals previously needed to show an income available in the UK od £18,600 plus £3,800 for the first chaild and £2,400 per child after that.
- This is now being dramatically increased to £29,000 and eventually £38,700

#### WHAT QUALIFIES FOR THE NEW INCOME THRESHOLD?

- Sponsors earnings in the UK or a confirmed job offer
- Foreign National Partner earnings in the UK
- NOT a promise of employment or overseas earnings for a Foreign National Partner

#### What the Forum says

"Any legitimate concerns of the British Government need to be addressed and a way found to allow UK Citizens to live with their Foreign National Partner in the UK"

For **Retired UK citizens**, they are increasingly being given the choice of

**Either** - move back to the UK to get their full entitlement to pension and leave their partner behind

**Or -** continue to live with their partner overseas and suffer the gradual reduction of pension

# VOTING FROM OVERSEAS - BETTER SOLUTIONS



**Use Embassies** to distribute and collect votes (other countries such as Thailand and France do this)



Allow overseas voters to **vote electronically** (or simply receive a ballot digitally)



Allow Overseas voters to register in designated **overseas constituencies** 

There is no plan with the current Gov. to introduce these processes

# WESTERN COUNTRIES: COMPARISON OVERSEAS VOTING

Country	Who can vote	Primary voting method		ondary voting method
FRANCE	all	Vote in person at Consulates and Embassies	•	Electronic or proxy voting
ITALY	all	Put vote in the envelope sent by Consulate and return / send to Consulate	•	Nil
PORTUGAL	all	Vote in person at Consulates and Embassies	•	Postal voting
GERMANY	all	Postal voting (but German Embassy missions can deliver ballot when post not reliable)	•	Nil
AUSTRALIA	restrict to 6 years away	Deliver vote in envelope to Embassy or Consulate	•	Postal voting
NETHERLANDS	all	Hand deliver or post to Embassy or Consulate	•	Postal or proxy vote
USA	all	Electronic voting (but not all States)	•	Can use Embassy or Consulate. Delivery system if drop off or mail ballot
CANADA	all	After receipt of special ballot voting kit, mail it to central point in Ottowa	•	Electronic or proxy voting

# ASIAN COUNTRIES: COMPARISON OVERSEAS VOTING

Country	Who can vote	Primary voting method			Secondary voting method		
JAPAN	all	Vote in person at Embassies or Consulates		•	Postal vote		
THAILAND	all	Deliver vote in envelope to Embassy or Consulate		•	Postal vote		
SINGAPORE	Only Gov. employees	Vote in person at Embassies or Consulates		•	Nil		
TAIWAN	all	Have to vote in person in Taiwan		•	Nil		
MALAYSIA	Gov. employees / full-time students	Postal vote, unless you live in neighbouring country/area in which case you must return to vote in person		•	Nil		
KOREA	all	Vote in person at Embassies or Consulates					
INDONESIA		Vote in person at Embassies or Consulates		•	Postal vote		

## **OVERSEAS CONSTITUENCIES - BEST SOLUTION**

New Europeans UK and Unlock Democracy are teaming up to launch a campaign to push for the introduction of MPs for overseas UK parliamentary constituencies to represent Brits living abroad.

New Europeans UK and Unlock Democracy are teaming up to launch a campaign to push for the introduction of MPs for overseas UK parliamentary constituencies to represent Brits living abroad.

#### You can adapt this letter and send to your MP urging them to support overseas constituencies.

The campaign gets underway as the UK government abolishes the bar, which prevents Britons who have lived outside the UK for more than 15 years from voting in UK elections. The move followed a 20-year-long battle by Harry Shindler, a Second World War veteran and British resident in Italy to remove the so-called 15-year rule. Harry Shindler recently died at the grand age of 101.

Chair of New Europeans, Ruvi Ziegler, said: "The removal of the 15-year bar really strengthens the case for special representation for UK voters residing abroad. Whereas Britons living abroad retain interests on the national level that justify giving them the vote, their links to a constituency in the UK, which they may have left decades ago, may be weak and is likely to get even weaker with the passage of time."

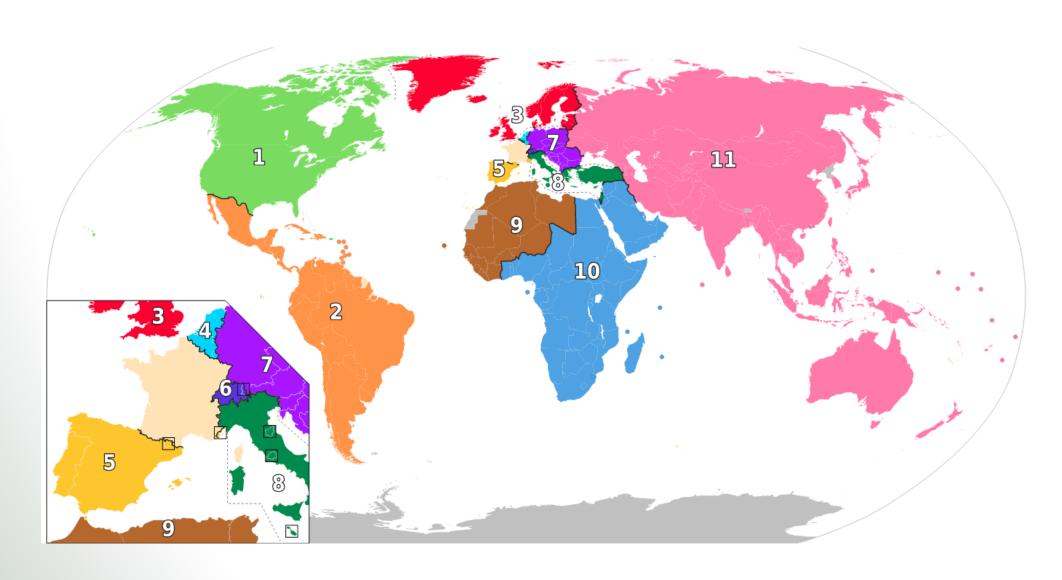
Former MP Tom Brake, now Director of campaign group Unlock Democracy said: "With the best will in the world, I know MPs struggle to grasp the different administrative, retirement or employment challenges a UK citizen in the Czech Republic faces, compared to citizens in France, Thailand or the USA. That is why we are making the case for overseas constituency MPs who would develop expert knowledge of the problems faced by UK citizens living in different parts of the world."

A 2022 report entitled 'British citizens in the EU after Brexit', led by Professor Michaela Benson, revealed a population, who identify as both British and European. The report confirmed that Brexit and the Covid pandemic have had a significantly negative impact on feelings towards the UK amongst Britons in Europe. Dissatisfaction with political disenfranchisement in the UK and abroad featured prominently among those taking part in the survey. The report concluded that: "While the vote for life will be welcomed, more could be done to tailor the franchise, so that the extensive population of British citizens living outside the UK might have better democratic representation."

# EUROPEAN COUNTRIES THAT HAVE CONSTITUENCIES FOR OVERSEAS VOTERS

Country	House	No. of seats	Total No. of seats	%	Commence Date	Other Information
France	Lower	11	577	2	2012	Double election system on same principle as in country elections
France	Upper	12	348	3.5	2012	12 indirectly elected by a 155-member assembly of overseas voters (in turn elected)
l4alı.	Lower	8	400	2	2001	Mixed first past the post and party list 147 / 245 plus overseas cons (all 8 are party list)
Italy	Upper	4	200	2	2001	Mixed first past the post and party list 74 / 122 plus overseas cons (all 4 are party list)
Portugal	Lower	4	230	2	1997	PR system. For overseas cons 2 elected by European voters and 2 for rest of the world
Lithuania	Lower	1	71		2020	
Romania	Lower	6	330	2		
Romania	Upper	2	136	1.5		
Croatia	Lower	3	151	2	2020	1 multi-member seat
N.Macedonia	Lower	3	120		2011	

# CONSTITUENCIES OF FRENCH CITIZENS LIVING ABROAD 2012



#### NOW YOU HAVE THE VOTE - WILL IT ACTUALLY COUNT?

#### Germany

→ Single member first past the post but through second vote for party list parties get top up to correct proportion combining all seats ( subject to minimum of 5% )

#### Australia

→ Preference voting in single member constituencies and candidate only elected after has obtained 50% of vote after second choices.

#### Italy

→ One third of seats first past the post and other two thirds for national party lists elected by full proportional representation. Overseas votes go to a dedicated constituency list as well as national lists

#### France

→ Second ballot between the top two candidates if no one candidate gets 50% of vote the first time around. Overseas constituencies the same

#### **Thailand**

→ 20% of seats are by a proportional system which is some mitigation

#### Japan

→ First past the post but elected second chamber by proportional representation (sort of) acting as a balance

#### UK

→ First past the post, many safe seats - only a few seats are going to swing the election

#### Canada

→ First past the post - result can be a bit of a lottery Winner can have less votes than another party

#### USA

→ Stranglehold of two parties and primaries restricting choices. In presidential system, Winner can have smaller share of popular vote.

#### **Singapore**

→ First past the post elections very short time frames very few opportunities for opposition media space

# So Why The British Overseas Voters Forum

ITS ABOUT CREATING VILLAGES

# Why British Overseas Voters Forum has been set up

- → First Time Overseas Brits have a potential effective voice
- → Now enough of us we can swing elections in particular seats
- → Politicians of all Parties will only listen if overseas voters register, and if they see a large number of overseas voters on their own constituency electoral register
- Overseas Voters need to campaign as much as possible with one voice to make any headway
- → For each constituency we the need to bring together voters who are spread out all over the world

# **ESSENCE OF WHAT BOVF IS DOING**

Persuade as many UK Citizens Overseas to register to vote as possible

Define the most Important Issues for Overseas Voters

Frozen Pensions is a key issue

Accumulate a list of as many Members and Supporters as possible Constituency By Constituency

Run a professional lobbying campaign, both at Political Party level AND ALSO Constituency By Constituency (but targeting Marginal Seats) to ensure that candidates know that their overseas voters are coordinated and that they need to commit on key issues to get our vote

Coordinate the lobbying with other interested groups such as British Pensioners in Australia and Canda in order to maximise our voice

### INDIVIDUAL ACTION ALONE WILL NOT SUCCEED

 MPs do not respond or listen to voters one by one in their Constituencies

- They listen to Groups of Voters who club together
- We need to create Villages of Overseas Voters in as many Constituencies as possible. It's our only chance to have influence

 And backed up by the utmost Professional Lobbying Campaign

# WHAT WE NEED IN EACH COUNTRY

An Active Committee

Public meetings and active social media contributions

Discussions and formulation of views on key issues affecting Overseas Voters

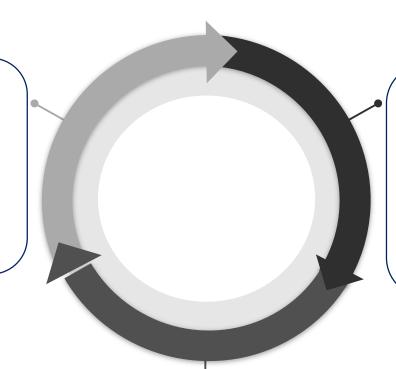
Achieve a reasonable number of Members

Build a list of as many Supporters as possible with their UK Postcode

A Registration Campaign to ensure as many potential voters register as possible.

# COMMUNICATION LOOP

1. We aim to formally communicate with all Political Parties to obtain their views and evaluate any commitments



2. For as many parliamentary constituencies as possible we aim to collect the views and commitments from all the main candidates

3. These views will be communicated objectively back to our Members and Supporters.

Focus will be on marginal seats and also seats where there are a large number of registered overseas voters

# BENEFITS OF ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

#### **Impact**

You can really make a difference

#### New

Actively involved in a project which is the first of its kind

#### Insight

Access to a library of information and data on particular issues

#### **Engage**

Participation in country activities and some, international activities

#### **Network**

Networking opportunity with like-minded people

# OR YOU CAN JUST REGISTER AS A SUPPORTER

#### CONFIDENTIALITY GUARANTEED

Membership records as a whole will not be shared with anyone outside the key officers and then split by country or region where only appointed membership officers will hold the data

Emails to Members and Supporters do not disclose details of other members

When lobbying we will generally never disclose any names of members and if in certain situations and for certain constituencies there appears to be an explicit advantage in doing so then only for the members and supporters who have expressly given permission to do so.

#### WE NEED TO ACT FAST

BOVF can have significant influence during the run up to the coming General Election and will achieve real change at last !!!

Please join us today. Annual Membership is UK Pounds 30 or Thai Baht 1,500, Yen 5,000, SNG\$ 50, Malaysian Ringit 200

Please spread the word to friends and acquaintances
Just voting alone is not going to change anything

#### **QUESTIONS?**

#### THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING TODAY

#### **END**

#### APPENDICES UNUSED SLIDES

#### 2022 ELECTIONS ACT – AREAS OF FOCUS

## REDUCES THE INDEPENDENCE OF ELECTORAL COMMISSION

- Secretary of state for levelling up now ultimately responsible for the electoral commission
- Enormous opportunity for the party in government to influence decisions
- As in US, UK Gov. will be able to influence the drawing up of constituency boundaries
- Ensure electoral offenders from government party are not prosecuted

## ABOLISHES THE PREFERENTIAL VOTING METHOD IN MAYORAL ELECTIONS

- Reverses the trend to more proportional voting systems
- All mayoral elections to date have allowed voters to rank their choices
- Ensures all votes count and winner has 50% support
- Back to First Past the Post

#### INTRODUCES VOTER ID AS A REQUIREMENT WHEN VOTING

- What sort of ID
- Not everyone has ID
- Pensioner Bus Passes will be OK?
- Student ID cards not OK?

## EXTENDS RIGHT TO VOTE TO ALL BRITISH CITIZENS LIVING OUTSIDE THE UK

- Removes 15-year limit on voting rights – "Votes for life"
- 3-year registration renewal
- Register in constituency of last electoral address or can prove you once lived there. or can show a "local connection
- Not a Govt priority before May
   2003-UK Local Elections







#### MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES POLICY AT 2019 ELECTION



#### Conservatives

In favor of opening the vote to all British Nationals overseas but no changes proposed for voting mechanisms. Policy has not changed for some time - just being implemented now.



#### Labour

Keep the 15-year limit and no change to current system. Been the policy for some time. Concern that increasing the number of years increases the number of Conservative Party donors



#### **Liberal Democrats**

In the last election manifesto proposed opening-up voting rights to all British nationals overseas AND also creating overseas constituencies.

#### Acceptable and Non-Acceptable IDs

#### **Acceptable For Voting**

Passport - Any from UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Mann, EEA and Commonwealth Countries

A Driving License from UK Channel Islands Isle of Mann and EEA Countries

A Blue Badge Scheme Card

An ID card issued by an EEA state

Older Persons Bus Pass funded by UK Gov

Disabled Person's Bus Pass

Oyster 60+ Card

Various issued photo cards by Scottish Welsh and Northern Ireland proof of age cards

#### **Not Acceptable For Voting**

Young Persons Bus Pass

An Oyster 18+ Card

A Student ID card

#### SOME KEY ISSUES FOR THOSE LIVING ABROAD



#### LET'S DISCUSS

Are you interested or not in registering to vote in the next UK General Election – and why (not)?

Do you have any political issues that you want to take up with an MP or any experience or even success in the past with contacting an MP

What in your view would be the best way to arrange overseas voter representation?

What are the most important issues that may impact who you choose to vote for?

#### Anomalies

There are some people who are citizens of more than one country and get the right to vote in two national elections

It is not clear under the rules regarding the responsibilities of an MP that they have any responsibility to UK citizens resident outside their constituency

British Electoral rules allow Commonwealth Citizens and some other nationalities have the right to vote in UK National and Local Elections **if** resident in UK

#### STEPS TO INCREASING NO OF OVERSEAS VOTERS

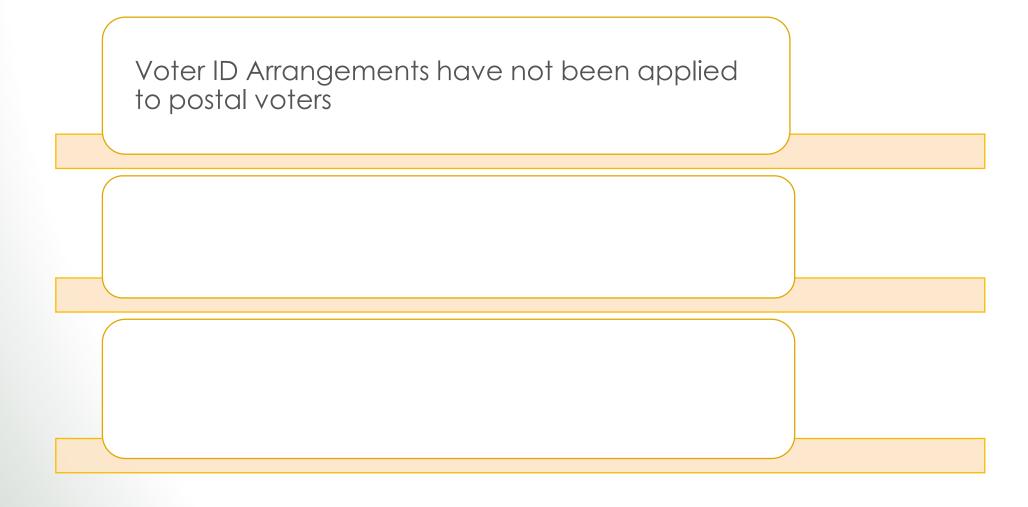
Publication of detailed (secondary) legislation by government and guidance by the Electoral Commission

Local government works on systems and resources to introduce new processes

Anticipated changes come into force from January 2024



#### Anomalies



#### Interesting other information

You can now for the first time register as an Anonymous Voter and obtain a special ID for this

If EU (or EEA) countries give the right to vote in local elections to British Citizens resident in their countries, then their citizens get the right if resident in the UK to vote in UK Local Elections

So far: the Qualifying Nationals are Spain Portugal Poland Luxembourg Despite non-reciprocity, so do Ireland Malta and Cyprus

#### 2022 ACT – ELECTORAL COMMISSION CHANGES

Electoral Commission was set up to be an independent body to supervise elections fairly"

For first time must "respond to the governments strategic and policy requirements" and implement.
Reports directly to Minister

Expressly now not given powers to prosecute for electoral violations

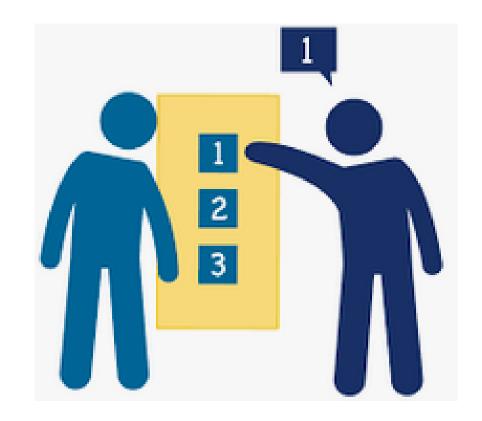
## The Electoral Commission

### 2022 ACT – ABOLISHED SOME PREFERENTIAL VOTING

England and Wales Mayors and Police Commissioners are now being elected by First Past the Post. Before was a 123preference vote system with 50% majority required.

Now in **England**, and also because EU elections are no more, **all elections at all levels are back to First Past the Post**.

However preferential voting systems remain as the **only model** for **Scotland and N Ireland** and also Welsh Assembly elections



#### 2022 ACT - INTRODUCES VOTER PHOTO ID

A Photo card is now required to vote for the first time

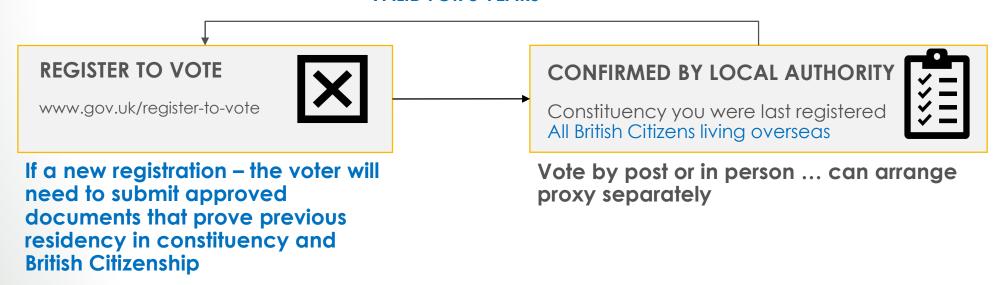
Wide variety of Photo ID cards can be used

Voters who have none of the valid ID card can apply to local authorities for an ID – Seem to be large number who have done so for the last local election



#### HOW WE ANTICIPATE THE VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS WORKING AFTER JAN 24\*

#### **VALID FOR 3 YEARS**



Given the administrative time required for Local Authorities to validate new voters, and separately for voters to set up a proxy vote ...

we recommended starting the registration process as soon as possible

#### HOW THE PROXY RULES ARE EVOLVING

# Current arrangement

Proxy can vote in person only if they are registered as a voter in the constituency.

Could act as Proxy for an unlimited number of defined close relatives plus 2 others.

Proxy votes could be set up indefinitely, but signatures of voter had to be verified every 5 years.

Postal Proxy Votes can be arranged in order for someone you trust to vote on your behalf

Proxy can vote in person without being registered in the constituency of the Voter

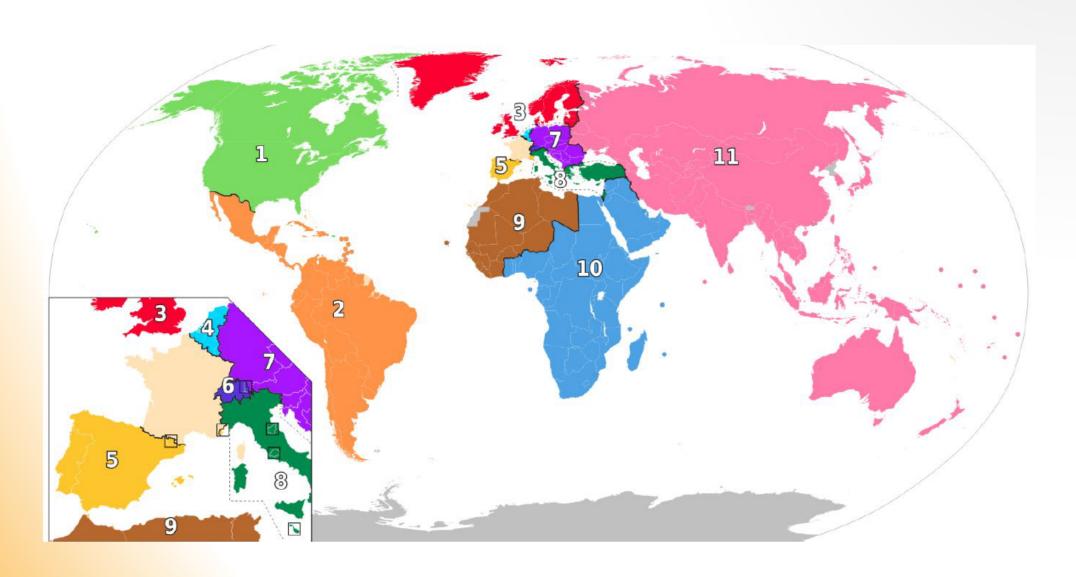
Can act as Proxy for a maximum of 4 persons but only 2 of them can be a close relative.

New Proxy arrangements must be set up every 3 years Aligned with Overseas voter register requirements)

Postal Proxy voting can still be arranged

New arrangement

## CONSTITUENCIES OF FRENCH CITIZENS LIVING ABROAD 2012



#### AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

COUNTRY	WHO CAN VOTE	REGISTERED VOTING ADDRESS	MECHANICS OF VOTING
USA		Where you can prove an address or failing that the last registered address	Depending on state Ballot paper sent electronically or by mail. Can drop off completed ballot at embassies plus postal and e mail electronic voting options
France	All overseas	Overseas Constituencies 21 seats out of 331 (6%)	Embassies to drop off plus E voting
Italy	citizens can vote	Overseas Constituencies 8 seats out of 600 (1.3%)	Embassies plus postal voting option
Germany	011120110 0011 1010		Postal only
Thailand			Embassies and Postal
Japan		Last registered	Embassies and Postal
Australia	Compulsory unless dispensation given	place of voting	Embassies Postal and Fax
Canada	May still be a time limit of 5 years		Postal only
Singapore	Citizens who work for the Government only		Embassies only