



## UK Democracy Is Failing Millions of Overseas Voters, Says BOVF

The **British Overseas Voters Forum (BOVF)** is calling for immediate legislative action to end the effective disenfranchisement of British citizens living overseas.

Despite recent headline reforms, the UK remains one of the *worst-performing democracies in the world* when it comes to overseas voting. In the 2024 General Election, fewer than **200,000** overseas voters were registered out of an estimated **3.4 million eligible citizens**, and **nearly half of postal ballots failed to arrive in time to be counted**.

This is not a technical glitch — it is a democratic failure.

BOVF is demanding that a simple, practical clause be added to the forthcoming Elections Bill to ensure overseas votes actually count. The proposed measures are straightforward and proven internationally:

- **Allow overseas voters to print their ballot papers**, eliminating postal delays.
- **Permit ballots to be returned via British consulates**, using secure diplomatic mail.
- **Link passport applications to voter registration**, so citizens are no longer kept in the dark about their voting rights.

These reforms are already standard practice in comparable democracies. Sixteen out of twenty countries studied by BOVF use embassies and consulates in the voting process. The UK uses none.

*“British citizens overseas are being treated as second-class voters,” said a BOVF spokesperson. “The right to vote is meaningless if the system is designed to fail. Parliament can fix this now — the only question is whether it chooses to.”*

BOVF urges Parliament to act without delay and bring UK democracy into the 21st century.

– Ends –



## Sources and Notes

[bovf.org.uk/voting-mechanisms](http://bovf.org.uk/voting-mechanisms)

**1. Estimated eligible overseas electorate (~3.4 million):**

Office for National Statistics, *Population of the UK by Country of Birth and Nationality* (International Migration series, 2023–2024), combined with Cabinet Office, *Elections Act 2022: Impact Assessment*, reflecting the abolition of the 15-year limit on overseas voting.

**2. Registered overseas voters (~191,000):**

Electoral Commission, *UK Electoral Statistics 2023* and *UK Electoral Statistics 2024*, based on aggregated local authority electoral registers.

**3. Overseas postal ballots returned in time (~52%):**

Electoral Commission, *Report on the Administration of the UK Parliamentary General Election 2019*, supported by statutory local authority returns on issued and received overseas postal ballots.

*Percentages and totals are rounded for clarity. “Nearly half” refers to ballots not returned by the statutory deadline.*