

UK to lower voting age and reform Election rules



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LONDON, July 17 — The UK government has confirmed plans to lower the voting age to 16 ahead of the next general election, introducing the change as part of a broader Elections Bill.

The proposed legislation includes several reforms: expanding acceptable voter ID to include UK-issued bank cards, introducing automatic voter registration, and tightening political donation rules to prevent foreign interference.

Currently, 16- and 17-year-olds can vote in local elections in Scotland and Wales but not in UK-wide or English elections. The new law would extend their voting rights nationwide, marking the most significant change to the UK electorate since 1969.

Minister Ali described the move as a “ seismic change ” that would ensure youth voices are heard.

“ At 16, a young person can work, pay taxes, and join the Army. So there ’ s no reason why they shouldn ’ t vote, ” she said.

Critics, including Conservative MP Paul Holmes, called the policy “ confused, ” noting 16-year-olds still face age restrictions in other legal areas.

The bill also proposes automatic voter registration, which would reduce the estimated eight million unregistered or incorrectly registered voters. Agencies like the Passport Office may share data to update electoral rolls directly, although the mechanism is still under review.

Voter ID rules would expand to include bank cards showing a voter ’ s name. While Labour opposed voter ID in 2023, its current manifesto only promises to address inconsistencies. Conservatives have warned expanded ID could threaten ballot security.

The government also plans stricter donation rules requiring companies to prove UK or Irish income before contributing. The Electoral Commission would gain authority to issue fines up to £500,000 for violations.

The National Union of Students welcomed the voting age reduction as a “major victory” and called for further reforms to encourage youth participation.