

PRESS RELEASE

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HOW MANY DEAD PEOPLE VOTE?

“People who died 10 years ago are still voting” declared Donald Trump in the US election. We can be sure that there will always be a few ballots from “zombie voters” but what is the magnitude of the problem?

Dr Kingsley Purdam, lecturer in social statistics at the University of Manchester has sought to answer this question for an article in [Significance](#) – the magazine of the [Royal Statistical Society](#) (RSS) and the [American Statistical Association](#) (ASA). Dr Purdam suggests it could be around 3000 people in the UK, although data availability is too poor to come to a precise estimate.

In the UK, the electoral registration process usually closes around two weeks before polling day, so even if we assume the electoral register is accurate (which is not the case), around 25,500 potential voters could die between the date when the main registration closes and polling day. The increasing use of postal voting increases the chances of dead voters, because they may have already cast their vote before expiring. As a crude figure, there is the possibility that 3000 postal voters could vote and then die. When you take into account that postal vote requests are much higher among older people, this figure could be higher.

Could dead voters have determined the General Election in 2015 then? The answer is probably not, according to Dr Purdam. 3000 people represents around 5 people per constituency on average. So even Byron Davies, MP for Gower in Wales who has a majority of just 27 votes can be assured his victory was not due to the deceased. However, unless voter registration and identification practices are improved, the ageing UK population, higher turnout of older people, inequalities in life expectancy and the growing use of postal votes may mean future results are influenced by those beyond the grave.

Dr. K. Purdam stated: *“It is vital for democracy that voter registration and identification practices are robust. According to the latest Democracy Index report only 13% of the world’s population live in what are can be categorized as ‘Full Democracies’ and the Freedom House Index suggests a decline in political rights around the world.”*

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Dr. Kingsley Purdam is a senior lecturer in social statistics and research methods at the University of Manchester, UK

2. The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) founded in 1834 is one of the world's most distinguished and renowned statistical societies. It is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. Today the Society has nearly 8000 members around the world. www.rss.org.uk

CONTACTS

For more information, contact Magdalen Wiley, RSS Press & Policy Officer, on 020 7614 3920 or at m.wiley@rss.org.uk.