

# NO2ID Hustings Guide

**Nominations have closed for the General Election, and all the major parties have published their manifestoes, so here is the NO2ID guide to getting the best from the hustings for the campaign.**

## WHAT ARE HUSTINGS?

Hustings can mean the whole electoral process, but for this purpose they are non-partisan public meetings.

Once upon a time, parties held public meetings themselves, but it is no longer a cost-effective means of campaigning in an election—where the aim is generally to swing undecided voters rather than rally support. But plenty of non-party organisations will hold hustings meetings to which all candidates are invited. (Though not all may come.)

## WHERE AND WHEN ARE HUSTINGS?

Being a single-issue pressure group, it is hard for NO2ID to organise hustings on its own and expect them to be well attended. It may be possible for several groups from disparate causes to band together, and hold public hustings for the candidates' views to be explored.

Because they aren't an official, regulated part of the election (unlike partisan meetings), there's no limit to the number and no standard form for hustings. It varies from constituency to constituency, and may be influenced by local tradition or the nature of particularly active groups: churches, civic societies and pressure groups may all hold hustings, some general, some focussed on a specific issue or set of issues. In many towns there is a well-established circuit.

## HOW TO FIND HUSTINGS

Your local newspaper will almost certainly carry advertising, as will community notice boards, and local libraries. If you are friendly with an active member of one of the parties standing then they should be able to find out for you—and be willing to do so to get a potential supporter along.

When you have decided to attend a particular hustings, it may be useful to call the meeting organisers in advance, and arrange to ask a question. It makes a chairman's life easier if he or she has advance warnings of the questioners and can structure the meeting accordingly, so you may be able to make certain of being called this way.

## WHAT HUSTINGS CAN'T DO

You won't change the candidate's mind at a hustings, and you are unlikely to get the main parties off their script. Nor, unless someone commits a spectacular indiscretion or there is some other newsworthy outcome, will individual hustings significantly influence the course of the election.

## WHAT HUSTINGS CAN DO

What you will get at a hustings is a chance to influence the future thinking of the candidates *and* of the audience, who are going to be people with political interests, the sort of people likely to be interested one way or another in the question of ID cards. It is a great opportunity to raise the issue, therefore, and you should try to ask questions that do that. You can also get information about where other people stand.

Questions at hustings are your opportunity:

**1. To make a statement to the meeting as part**

**of the question.** Make it brief—really brief—and natural. ‘Speechifying’ is irritating to other audience members, who will have come to find out the candidates’ views, not yours. Anything forced will lose sympathy. It is well worth 10 minutes practice.

**2. Get a statement of the would-be MP’s position.**

Which may be subtle or unexpected. Let us know what they say.

**3. Expose how candidates think, and what they know, to voters.**

Get them off their script by asking about detail... How will ID cards do such and such? Why is the Government doing it this way?

**4. Give them a chance to attack one another.**

You don’t have to do all the work!

**5. Get a personal commitment on record.**

They won’t go against party policy, normally, but may be persuaded to tell us about their own criteria for maintaining privacy or personal control of data, say, which voters may wish to hold them to.

So when you frame your hustings questions think about what you want to get out of it.

## PARTY POLICIES - A SUMMARY

Among registered parties, ID cards (never mind state identity control) are not popular—not even with those normally thought of as extreme right. At the time of writing, only *one party* apart from the Labour Party of the more than 270 registered in Britain has directly told us that it is in favour of identity cards. We’re not going to name the guilty party here, but it isn’t likely you have heard of it if you don’t live in Rotherham. There is one other supporter of parliamentary importance—the UUP.

### The Labour Party:

Labour policy is clear and stark: “We will introduce ID cards, including biometric data like fingerprints, backed up by a national register and rolling out

initially on a voluntary basis as people renew their passports.”

Do bear in mind that despite the manifesto promise, hustings are about individual candidates. There are several Labour Party candidates and many Labour Party members who are staunch defenders of civil liberties. It is not a waste of time to get a safe Labour candidate thinking about the problems of identity control, or to support one of NO2ID’s friends on the Government benches.

### Other Parties:

Conservative – Sceptical, no manifesto policy, many anti-ID candidates

Liberal Democrat - Opposed on principle

Green - Opposed on principle

Plaid Cymru - Opposed on principle

Scottish Nationalist - Opposed on principle

UK Independence Party - Opposed on principle

Veritas – Opposed on principle

**Northern Irish Parties:** Sinn Fein are opposed but will not take Westminster seats. The Ulster Unionist Party is in favour. *Please let us know of other NI party positions.*

**Smaller Parties:** many opposed - see our website for a list of those who have declared support for the campaign.

## WHAT TO ASK

This depends upon you, your candidates and what you think may work best with the particular audience. The best way to make an impact is to start with a short statement that sets the scene for your question. Our biggest problem is that this is *not* a simple issue, and you can’t possibly ask about every aspect of the scheme. So make your question about one clear aspect of the scheme. And try to ensure it can’t be satisfactorily answered by trotting out the party line.

The national NO2ID campaign is currently working with a handful of key points about the scheme and you may want to think about your approach this way. The questions below against each theme are examples. You may come up with better ones, so feel free to adapt them. But they are about as long as an audience can easily understand and tolerate.

Our lines of attack are:

**1. Not just a card – a radical change in British life.** Ask about the database and make the inconveniences clear.

Q. The government plans for “ID cards” also include a giant database that will track 51 categories of information on everyone in the country. How can keeping official tabs on everyone, all the time, be compatible with a free society?

Q. The House of Lords Constitution Committee says that the government’s Identity Cards Bill was misleadingly named, and that it would profoundly alter the relationship between the citizen and the state. Would the candidates comment?

Q. The Government claims identity cards will “secure our borders”. How can that possibly work, unless at the same time our society is also transformed—into one where everybody is constantly checked, questioned and inspected when going about their daily business? Is that what the candidates want?

**2. Vast—unquantifiably huge—costs to the taxpayer**

Q. How can the Government claim to be cutting down on waste and bureaucracy at the same time as creating a whole new agency (with tens of thousands of civil servants) to control personal identity using ID cards, and turning policemen, bank-clerks, benefit staff, and health service personnel into identity inspectors?

Q. The NHS patient record database—the so-called “spine”—was budgeted at 1 billion pounds. But we are now told it will cost between 18 and 30 billion, if it is ever finished. Is it credible that the Home Office’s National Identity Register, which it hopes to use to monitor every aspect of our lives, will be less expensive? How can it possibly be worth it?

Q. The government has said it will reintroduce its Identity Cards Bill, so ushering in the biggest, most complicated Whitehall project ever. But the costs to businesses, government departments, local authorities, and individuals—all of whom will have to spend time and money complying—will be left to the Home Secretary to make up as he goes along. Why should we sign a blank cheque?

**3. ID cards are a white elephant.** The money could be spent more effectively.

Q. Given that the government admits that identity cards—even if they work as advertised—can’t stop terrorism or fraud or illegal immigration, then why is it refusing to contemplate spending the same money to tackle those problems in tried and tested ways?

Q. The Department of Work and Pensions has no figures for prosecutions of people who claim benefits under false names, but has guessed that losses of this sort amount to £50 million pounds a year. The government says they will solve this using ID cards. But that would mean fingerprinting and scanning all claimants, changing all the DWP’s systems, maintaining and staffing scanners at every benefit office, and abandoning postal claims, all of which would be very expensive indeed—and for which no figures are available either. Does this make sense?

**4. A tool for racists and bullies**

Q. In countries all over the world official bullies start

by demanding “your papers” as part of a ritual humiliation of people they don’t like the look of. If ID cards are introduced to this country, how do the candidates propose to stop the same thing happening here?

Q. When passports minister Des Browne talks about “separating” people not entitled to be in the country using ID cards, isn’t that just a sly appeal to racism? In practice won’t it be black and Asian people who are insultingly required to “prove” they are British by producing an ID on every corner?

**5. You, the suspect.** Dangers of the system to individuals.

Q. Last year a policeman was convicted of selling information from the secure Police National Computer on Arab dissidents living in this country to the Saudi government. The Government’s planned National Identity Register database will have much more comprehensive information on every British resident. Won’t it be a threat to witnesses, undercover policemen and anyone else who is a target for the foreign powers, terrorists, and gangsters who will inevitably get access the system?

Q. The proverb says, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” If I lose my credit card, one telephone call to the bank allows me to get on with my life. But the government wants an ID card to be necessary to work, to travel, to get medical treatment, to draw benefits. It will in effect be a “license to live”. It is hard to believe the Home Office will replace one within hours, or even weeks. Isn’t this dangerous?

Q. Mr Blair says the civil liberties arguments against ID cards are “outdated”. But the system of identity control under the Home Office that his government has proposed has none of the safeguards for civil liberties that most other European countries have. Doesn’t putting greater

power over individuals in the hands of the Government and officials make civil liberties more important, not less?

## 6. What’s it all for?

Q. Even the Government admits it won’t solve all our problems, and an ID card can’t conceivably be effective until it is universal, which would take years. So why is Labour ignoring all criticism in its hurry to introduce a national system of identity management and control?

Q. Peter Lilley, one of Mrs Thatcher’s cabinet ministers, said that ID cards were a “dumb solution in search of a problem”, continually presented to that Government by the Civil Service. Mr Blair’s ministers have come up with a constantly changing set of excuses for adopting the policy, yet they insist it is urgent and vital. Why should we believe they know what they are doing and why?

Q. The notion of ID cards in abstract may be popular, but the details of the government’s proposals—a giant database and dictatorial powers for the Home Secretary—are highly controversial. The Identity Cards Bill ran out of time, despite an arbitrary guillotine on debate. Yet the Government is now pretending opposition parties “blocked” the Bill simply because they wouldn’t let it pass undiscussed. Why the hustle? Will the candidates support a full national debate on such a radical change?

## HOW TO FOLLOW UP

You may get the chance to ask a supplementary question. What the candidates will say, if they are well briefed, is quite predictable. So you should be able to work out what to say in advance.

If someone hasn’t answered the question, say so. But say *why* an answer doesn’t satisfy you, rather

than let the audience guess. The candidates, never mind the rest of audience, are less likely to understand details of the government's plans than you are, because in all likelihood they will have taken less interest.

If someone makes a commitment, make it clear. Ask them to confirm that they will vote against such and such an aspect of the Government scheme, if they imply that they might be dissatisfied with it. Please e-mail or write to us about any commitments candidates make.

Do stay to the end. If you have said something interesting, other people (even candidates) may come up to you wanting to know more. This is when you will find allies for the campaign.

## NOT JUST HUSTINGS

There are other things you can do during the election campaign to get the message across. You can write to your candidates and councillors, all of whom have to pay attention. You can call radio phone-ins, local or national. You can write to the press. There are hundreds of websites set up specifically for the election, air your views on these and try to engage people in the ID debate. Most people are a bit more ready to take notice of politics during a campaign, so despite the clamour from the parties, it can be a good time to get our views heard.

## OTHER RESOURCES

**NO2ID election fliers** - we have produced a range of fliers for you to print and distribute, featuring a Winston Smith / George Orwell ID Card ('election safe' according to Electoral Commission rules). Please use these at meetings, on stalls, as posters and wherever you can get the issues across. Each flier highlights a different one of the campaign's key messages.

The fliers can be downloaded from the Resources section of the NO2ID website at:

<http://www.no2id.net/downloads/index.php>

You can also find out details of your local group or how to go about starting one, and information on all aspects of the fight against ID cards.

**"HOW to WIN the fight"** - if you haven't yet got a copy of the splendid handbook by supporter Stuart Smith, "HOW to WIN the Fight Against the National Identity Card and the associated National Identity Register", send for one now. It is a great guide to making the arguments.

All new enquirers to NO2ID are now given a copy, and it has been distributed too, through local groups. Send an A4 stamped self-addressed envelope to the usual address (see below) with a note of your email address, so we can make sure we have your details up to date.

## ABOUT NO2ID

We are a non-aligned diverse group of people and organisations who stand against the Government's attempts to introduce intrusive, expensive and bureaucratic control of personal identity. We are non-discriminatory and opposed to violent action.

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