

FABIAN POLICY REPORT

POLITICS *by* PEOPLE

*A new charter for democratic reform, written by
activists from across the Labour movement.
Report written by Olivia Bailey.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their thoughts on the future of our democracy. In particular, the local Fabian Societies who hosted discussion meetings (Colchester, Durham, Oxford, Grimsby, Surrey, Birmingham, South Tyneside, Peterborough, Reading, North London, Chiswick and West London, York, Central London, Suffolk, and Havering) and the advisory panel of senior Labour figures who met regularly to steer the project (Lewis Baston, Ann Black, Wayne David MP, Billy Hayes, Declan McHugh, Melanie Onn MP, Cllr Reema Patel, Ellie Reeves, Alexandra Runswick, Nan Sloane and the Chair Jonathan Reynolds MP). Special thanks go to Alexandra Runswick, Katie Ghose, Will Brett, Darren Hughes, Nan Sloane, Alex Davies and all of our sponsors and friends at the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. Thanks also go to Andrew Harrop for his help and guidance throughout the project, and Tobias Phibbs and Tara Paterson for their help coordinating events and the launch of the charter.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The aim of this project has been to get Labour members and supporters talking about democratic reform, writing a new charter for democratic reform as the output of that conversation. To make that happen, we held 16 discussion meetings around the UK, published articles about democratic reform on the Fabian website and on LabourList, and launched a new, interactive, discussion website where Labour members and supporters could share their ideas. Thousands of people have participated in the project, and their ideas were collated and marshalled into the final charter by an advisory panel of leading Labour activists. To ensure the final charter reflected the views of the public, we also conducted a series of focus groups with Labour voters, people who would consider voting for the Labour party and non-voters to gather their views on the challenges facing our democracy. They were all between 25 and 50 and in social grades C1, C2 and D. The focus groups took place in Greater Manchester, Cardiff, and Halesowen in early 2016.

CONTENTS

4	Executive summary
7	Britain's democratic decline
10	Writing the charter
11	The debate behind the charter
11	<i>Political education</i>
13	<i>An open, accessible and participative democracy</i>
15	<i>An information revolution</i>
17	<i>Tackling big money</i>
20	<i>A fairer and more representative democracy</i>
22	<i>Diverse politicians rooted in their communities</i>
25	Afterword: The cultural shift away from collective action
27	Endnotes



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The advisory panel do not necessarily endorse the policy ideas discussed in this report. They have only explicitly signed up to support the specific wording of the charter.

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BRITISH POLITICS IS GRIPPED BY FEAR AND MISTRUST

The vote to leave the European Union was the latest expression of the deteriorating relationship between democratic institutions and the public. By voting to “*take back control*” the British people have made a powerful statement about the state of our democracy that must not be ignored.

Britain’s democratic decline has been gathering pace for decades. The individualism of the Thatcher years taught people to believe in the “*I*” not the “*we*”, breaking community bonds and a sense of cooperation. The financial crash of 2008 created huge economic uncertainty. And, a series of scandals have hit Britain’s most trusted institutions, including parliament, the press, the police and the BBC. Political parties have been found wanting in response to these challenges, pursuing the politics of the soundbite and the median voter, and failing to connect with vast swathes of the public who feel that politics has no relevance to their lives.

The vital ingredient for a healthy democracy is the participation of citizens who feel powerful. Today, that is under threat.

We, the undersigned, call for a democratic ‘reset’ to ensure our politics faces outwards and encourages people to have their say. We call for politicians to urgently pursue democratic reform in the interests of the strength and stability of our United Kingdom:

1. PRIORITISE POLITICAL EDUCATION WITH

strengthened political and citizenship education at school and throughout life, including school councils that enable pupils to make meaningful change.

2. AN OPEN, ACCESSIBLE AND PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

with automatic voter registration, greater citizen participation in public institutions of all kinds and the use of new technologies to make it easier to vote. In the future, we should work towards safe and secure online voting.

3. AN INFORMATION REVOLUTION

with tougher regulation of the use of statistics by politicians and campaigners, clearer, more accessible information about political parties and elections from an independent source and a published job description for MPs.

4. ACTION TO REMOVE THE INFLUENCE OF BIG MONEY IN OUR POLITICS

with a comprehensive register of all lobbyists and action for a fairer and more sustainable funding system. This should consider, in the longer term, increased state funding and low level caps on donations to political parties.

5. A FAIRER AND MORE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

with a democratically elected house of lords which amplifies the voice of nations and regions, votes for sixteen year olds, and a fairer voting system where every vote makes a difference, but where we retain constituency representatives. Such a system is already in place for elections in Scotland, Wales, and London.

6. DIVERSE POLITICIANS WHO ARE ROOTED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

with a democracy diversity fund, central publication of equalities data on candidates at all elections, and the use of positive action.

This charter was developed by an advisory panel of senior Labour figures after a consultation with Labour party members and supporters. It does not represent the collective view of the Fabian Society, which does not take organisational positions on policy questions.

The members of the advisory panel, who wrote and have signed this charter are: Lewis Baston, Ann Black, Wayne David MP, Melanie Onn MP, Billy Hayes, Cllr Reema Patel, Ellie Reeves, Jonathan Reynolds MP, Alexandra Runswick, and Nan Sloane.

GET INVOLVED! Fifty leading Labour figures have already signed this charter. Add your name too by going to www.fabiandemocraticreform.org.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BRITISH DEMOCRACY IS in crisis. A decline in voter turnout over the last 60 years has combined with a growing distrust of politicians and public institutions. The anger expressed during the recent EU referendum is just the latest sign of dissatisfaction with the status quo.

This report provides the background to a six-point charter to renew engagement in our democracy, and discusses possible policy ideas that could make it a reality. The charter was written after a process of conversation and consensus building among Labour members and activists, and a series of focus groups with voters. It aims to reinvigorate a conversation about democratic reform at Labour's grassroots. The starting point is that democratic reform will only return to the political agenda if Labour gets serious about it once again.

While the charter represents the collective view of all the signatories, this accompanying report is the work of the author

This report provides the background to a six point charter to renew engagement in our democracy, and discusses possible policy ideas that could make it a reality.

alone. Using insights from voters across the UK, it reveals the extent of the visceral anti-politics views held by many. People

feel disconnected from politics and political decisions, unable to trust politicians to act in their interests and put off by a sense of scandal and corruption. Discussion with Labour voters reinforced these strong views, demonstrating that this problem threatens votes that Labour takes for granted.

The report also reveals that while voters want reform, they prioritise knowledge, ideas and culture over structural change. This means that while questions like electoral reform are important, they are not the be all and end all of the quest to reengage people in our democracy.

1. PRIORITISE POLITICAL EDUCATION with strengthened political and citizenship education at school and throughout life, including school councils that enable pupils to make meaningful change.

The first point of the charter aims to tackle people's sense that they don't know enough to vote and get involved in politics. Working class people are more likely to say that they lack the knowledge to engage, meaning our democracy is in danger of once again becoming the preserve of the prosperous.

The process of conversation and consensus-building discussed three core ways this can be tackled: improving citizenship education, giving children a chance to participate in meaningful democratic processes at school, and a renewed focus on lifelong learning and citizen engagement.

The report suggests a range of possible policy ideas for Labour to consider:

- Support a new body to monitor citizenship education in schools, and new

support for schools to train teachers and innovate in lessons

- Argue for a new focus on political literacy within citizenship education
- Support a duty or incentive for every school to have a school council, linked in to regional networks
- A new national 'democracy day' where workplaces and trade unions facilitate political discussions or community engagement.

2. AN OPEN, ACCESSIBLE AND PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

with automatic voter registration, greater citizen participation in public institutions of all kinds and the use of new technologies to make it easier to vote. In the future, we should work towards safe and secure online voting.

Electoral administration has failed to keep up with rapidly changing technology, and this is leaving voters behind. However, a focus simply on e-democracy runs the risk of engaging further those who are already politically empowered. Democratic institutions must be as engaging and participative as possible in order to embed a sense that people are being listened to by government in their day-to-day lives.

There are a range of ways to modernise and open up our democracy, including online voting, modernisation of the polling day process, and automatic voter registration. There is also a need for the Labour party to back up words on devolution and citizen power with action. While Labour understands the need for power to be closer to people, it must now learn how to make people powerful. Possible policy ideas for Labour to consider include:

- Support safe and secure online voting as soon as possible
- Pilot new ways of conducting elections, including increasing the number of polling stations people are able to vote at

- Pledge to introduce automatic voter registration, while arguing for reforms in the meantime including same day registration
- Support Labour leaders in local government to increase citizen participation in the delivery of local services

3. AN INFORMATION REVOLUTION

with tougher regulation of the use of statistics by politicians and campaigners, clearer, more accessible information about political parties and elections from an independent source and a published job description for MPs.

Voters feel that clear and unbiased political information is hard to come by. This is because people find it hard to trust politicians and the media, and also because electoral administrators do not do a good enough job of communicating with people about the process of voting and the ‘offer’ of each political party.

To tackle this problem, action is needed in three areas: tougher regulation of statistics, better information provision at election time, and the publication of a job description for MPs. Culture change at Westminster is also needed. Communication between people and politicians will only improve if individuals decide to change the way they behave. Possible policy ideas for Labour to consider include:

- Argue for greater independence and a bigger budget for the UK Statistics Authority, or a new regulatory body
- Support the creation of a new, independent body to provide better information to voters about political parties at election time, or consider the expansion of the Electoral Commission’s remit
- Pilot programmes to improve information to voters in Labour local councils
- Support the publication of a job description for MPs, which allows for variation in how an MP goes about their job

4. ACTION TO REMOVE THE INFLUENCE OF BIG MONEY

in our politics with a comprehensive register of all lobbyists and action for a fairer and more sustainable funding system. This should consider, in the longer term, increased state funding and low level caps on donations to political parties.

Scandal and money surround perceptions of our democracy. Although politicians are often unfairly tarnished by the actions of a minority, the sense that politics

Scandal and money surround perceptions of our democracy.

is corrupt has become so all pervasive that inaction is no longer an option. Part of this means a serious look at the funding of political parties, an issue which has been seen as politically untouchable by the left for some time.

Reducing the influence of big money in politics is often used as a partisan football, with both the Lobbying Act and the Trade Union Act examples of the Conservatives trying to damage the Labour party under the pretence of reform. Our conversations suggest that real action on both lobbying reform and party funding is now needed to restore the public’s faith. Possible policy ideas for Labour to consider include:

- Support a comprehensive register of lobbyists, backed up by a code of conduct and sanctions
- Back calls for the overhaul of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, placing a tougher regulator on statutory footing
- Reopen talks on party funding with an open mind, arguing for low level caps and increased state funding in the longer term.

5. A FAIRER AND MORE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

with a democratically elected house of lords which amplifies the voice of nations and regions, votes for sixteen year olds, and a fairer voting system where every vote makes a difference, but where we retain constituency representatives. Such a system is already in place for elections in Scotland, Wales, and London.

The notion that “*voting doesn’t make a difference*” is often deployed as a reason for non-participation in elections. Part of this is due to perceived unfairness in our democratic institutions. We have an electoral system which means that vote share doesn’t correspond to the number of seats won, and where voters in hundreds of seats around the country know their seat is unlikely to change hands. Sixteen year olds are unable to vote in local or national elections, despite being able to vote in Scottish parliament elections, being liable to pay tax and being able to join the army. And laws can be derailed by unelected peers in an unaccountable second chamber.

A number of factors have changed since the 2011 AV referendum that mean electoral reform is now worthy of consideration by the left. Public support for change is higher than ever, the rise of smaller parties seems to be happening under first past the post anyway, and change now looks to be in Labour’s electoral interest. Our advisory panel worked through disagreement to agree a principle based, rather than system based, approach to electoral reform which retains a constituency link but where every vote can make a difference. Possible policy ideas for Labour to consider include:

- Support electoral reform in local government, encouraging Labour councils to proactively argue for the change
- Consider support for a more proportional electoral system which retains constituency MPs and has a top up list.

Such a system is currently in use in Scotland, Wales and London

- Support the replacement of the House of Lords with a democratically elected chamber of representatives from all the nations and regions of the UK
- Back votes for sixteen and seventeen year olds in all elections

6. DIVERSE POLITICIANS WHO ARE ROOTED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

with a democracy diversity fund, central publication of equalities data on candidates at all elections, and the use of positive action.

The majority of political representatives are white, male and middle class and MPs come from a very narrow range

of previous careers. This adds to the sense voters have that politicians are “not like us”. Politicians have not successfully made the case for positive action to improve diversity, with limited public understanding of the structural causes of inequality and discrimination.

Ideas proposed to improve diversity focused around the supply of candidates, and using positive action to bring about an improvement. A greater sense of connection between politicians and the public can also be achieved through better communication and culture change. Ideas for reform for Labour to consider include:

- Review the selection procedures for both local and national office to remove the barriers that stand in the way of under-represented groups

- Review how local parties work to ensure they are reaching out in to the community, and making themselves as inclusive as possible
- Introduce a democracy diversity fund to distribute funds to help under-represented groups get elected across all political parties
- Continue to use positive action to improve the representation of under-represented groups
- Consider legally binding quotas for the representation of women in parliament and devolved assemblies
- Publish data about the diversity of candidates every six months in the run up to the next election

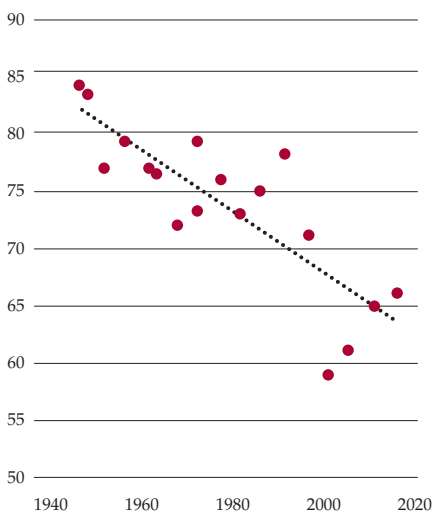


BRITAIN'S DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

TO BEGIN, WE must first look at the state of democratic participation today. There are three key trends at the heart of our democratic decline: declining participation, declining trust, and widening social inequality between those who participate.

First of all, there has been an overall decline in voter turnout since the 1950s, from a high of 84 per cent in 1950 to a low of 59 per cent in 2001. Closer electoral races explain the slight increase in turnout at general elections since 2001.¹ The 72 per cent turnout for the EU referendum was markedly higher than recent general elections, with high public interest and the opportunity to register a protest against the establishment combining with a sense that every vote really would count. There is also evidence of a gradual decline in the completeness of the electoral register in the post war period, with millions currently estimated to be missing from the electoral register.²

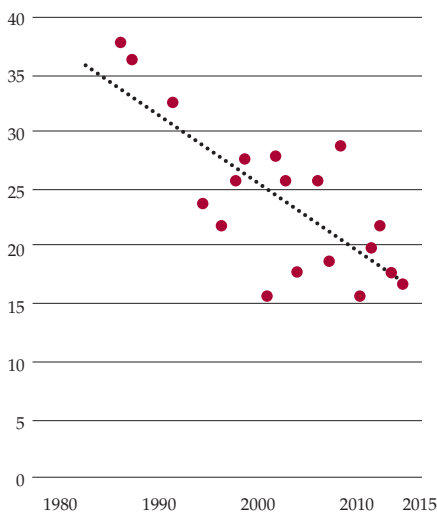
FIGURE 1
% turnout at general elections



There is evidence that attitudes towards politics and politicians have also hardened, following a series of crises for political institutions including the financial crash and the expenses scandal. The Hansard Society 2016 Audit of Political Engagement revealed that just a third of the population think that the system by which Britain is governed works well, with those living furthest from Westminster more likely to be dissatisfied. Similarly, just 35 per cent of people believe that when people like them get involved in politics they can really change the way the country is run.⁴ Successive British Social Attitudes surveys have also demonstrated the deterioration of trust in politics and the government over the past three decades, represented in figure 2 below.⁵

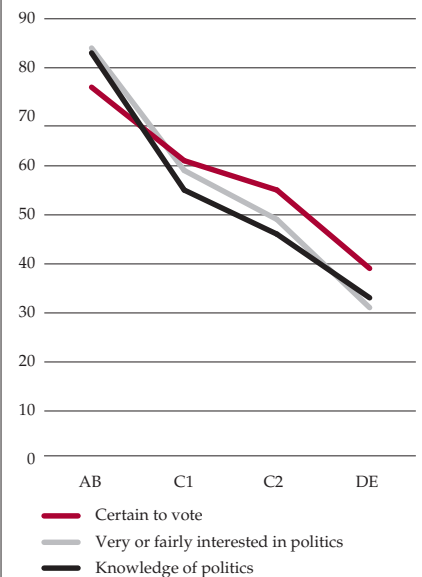
The evidence also suggests that political disengagement directly relates to economic and social power. Working class people are less likely to feel that the political sys-

FIGURE 2
% trust the government to put the needs of the nation first



temserves them well, and less likely to participate in it. Research has also shown that working class people are more likely to think that politicians engage in “self-serving behaviour and working in the interests of the rich and powerful”.⁶ The below graph (figure 3) taken from demographic splits in the 2016 Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement shows the scale of the problem.⁷

FIGURE 3
% likelihood to engage in politics by social grade



Bringing the stats to life

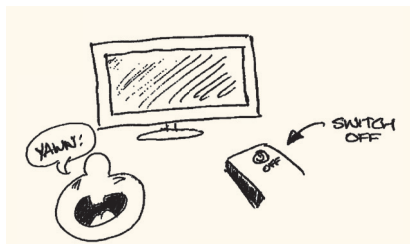
The statistics show us there is a problem, but to understand the reality of political disengagement we conducted focus groups around the UK. We spoke to three different groups of voters early in 2016: a group of Labour voters on the outskirts of Manchester, a group of people who would consider voting Labour on the outskirts of Cardiff, and a group of non-voters in Birmingham. Their insights are reflected throughout this report, and in the final charter, but it is worth taking a moment to focus on their overall perceptions of our democracy.

Each focus group were asked to draw the first thing that came into their minds when thinking about politics and politicians. The

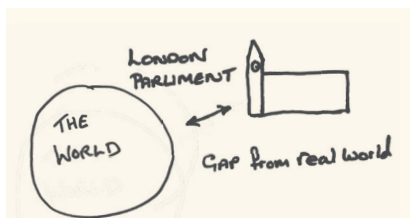
resulting images bring the crisis in our democracy to life. People feel a sense of disconnection from politics and politicians, a sense that politicians are out for themselves or in some way corrupt, and a deep sense of unfairness.

Non-voters

For the group of non-voters, from the outskirts of Birmingham, disconnection was the dominant theme. One way this manifested itself was through geography. There was a real sense of frustration and anger that political decisions are taken in a place nothing like their hometown, "it's all just London, isn't it". Disconnection was also depicted through a lack of knowledge or understanding about politics, and a sense that politics is all "white noise":



"A picture of morning time, coming down the stairs, putting the TV on and, as usual, some sort of debate going on about nothing really, because we can't really fathom out what it is they're even talking about, and therefore falling asleep and switching it off."



"Parliament is on one side and we've got the real world on the left hand side... people in parliament don't notice what is going on in the real world, because they live in a different one completely, and talking about issues that probably don't really touch on normal people"

In addition to this sense of disconnection from politics, the non-voters group also expressed strong opinions about scandal and deception. Politicians "fill their own pockets... it just makes you feel like you're straight being done over", and "there's a lot of stories in the paper about somebody's been exposed for some scandal or they're corrupt and they're either fiddling expenses or lining their own pockets". Another described an overall sense of negativity, referring to "sad faces" and "negative feelings":

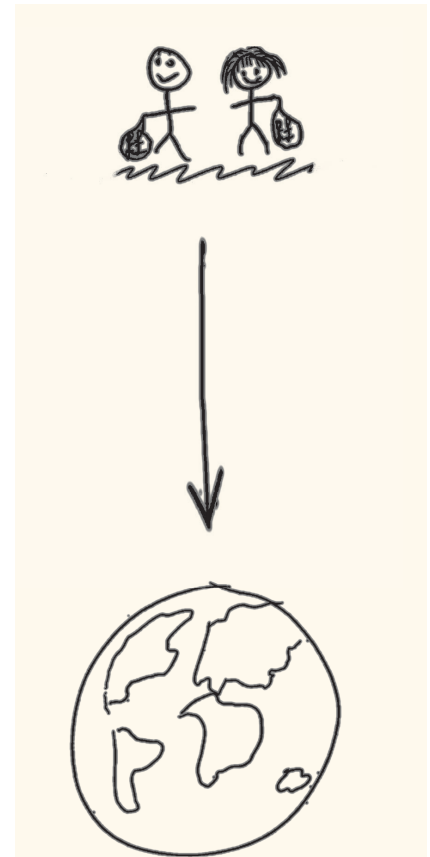


"This picture is of Parliament. Sad faces, so she's obviously thinking of negative feelings, and she's put grr on top, which is negative, and rain."

Labour considerers

The second focus group was with people who have considered voting Labour in the past, and would consider doing so again. Their sense of anger and frustration with

politics was much more palpable, with participants arguing that politicians are "not like us" and do "deals we don't know about behind closed doors." There was also a sense that politicians make promises and then fail to keep them, with one participant saying: "They say they are going to do one thing and they backtrack a few months down the line and do the reverse. It has happened so many times now. People have lost confidence in them. That is why I come from a family of five adults and I'm the only one that votes."



"Literally the politicians think that they are up here and the rest of us are down here and they are basically there in their world and we are here in our world. Money bags either side is how they spend their money, and thinking and believing that they are better than the rest of us"

Labour voters

Perhaps most concerning of all for the left, these visceral anti-politics views were also held by Labour voters in a safe Labour seat on the outskirts of Manchester. Corruption and money was the dominant theme, with over half the group focusing their images on it. As one person said, politics is "money and power, money equals power and that's about it really". There was also a strong sense that politicians are disconnected from everyday life, and that "you only see them when you are ready to vote".

These images are instinctive reactions rather than considered views, and across all the groups participants shifted and softened their views as they discussed the complexities of political life. But these harsh images do demonstrate the scale of the challenge faced by politicians, and how embedded anti politics views are in Britain. For the Labour Party, they also show that creeping political disillusionment threatens Labour's base as much as any other group.



"grey, dreary, deceit and lies."



"She first drew a picture of the Houses of Parliament because that was the first thing that came in to her mind, and then some money because everything that happens is to do with money ... and then a few words that came in her head: change, expenses, corruption, immigration."



"This is a group of people trying to get their opinions across, but there is a no entry sign over Westminster. Basically whatever we think never gets in there and we are never heard."

WRITING THE CHARTER

ARMED WITH A sense of what people think about our democracy and the political environment in which those views have developed, the focus of this project has been solutions. Instead of the usual think tank report, a different methodology has been used: conversation and consensus-building. By starting a conversation about democratic reform within the Labour family, the project aimed to find promising ideas as well as build support for the final charter. If Labour is to put democratic reform back on the agenda, then pressure will need to come from the grassroots.

To make that conversation a success, a group of senior Labour activists were convened who represent a diversity of views within the Labour party. That group oversaw a process of consultation where Labour members and supporters were asked for their views. A discussion website was launched, meetings were held, and articles and ideas were published. Focus groups were also convened in order to gather the views of the public.

The specific focus of the inquiry has been democratic participation, and how to increase it. In practice this means that work has focused on the question of ‘what might encourage more people to vote

and engage in political activity’. The solutions proposed form the six themes of the charter: political education, an accessible democracy, tackling the influence of big money, the diversity of politicians, a fairer and more representative democracy, and an information revolution. Each point of the charter is discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this report, with a range of policy ideas discussed for the Labour party to consider.

Deciding on our issues of focus

The six themes of the charter were easy to settle upon. While the question of political reform could have led to wider constitutional issues such as devolution or a written constitution, the focus on increasing democratic participation enabled a focus on the changes that would have the most immediate and visible difference.

What wasn’t as easy was determining priorities from within the points addressed in the charter. Debates on democratic reform can often become skewed by the personal interests of politicians and activists. In particular, this often means that any conversation about change immediately becomes a debate about electoral reform. Members of the advisory panel were keen to avoid this,

THE ADVISORY PANEL

This project was steered by representatives from across the Party, who all had different views on political reform. The process of conversation and consensus building amongst this group was designed to show that Labour can come together on some of the most politically thorny issues of the day. The following participated and have agreed to add their name to the charter:

Lewis Baston, expert in political reform

Ann Black, NEC member

Wayne David MP, former Shadow Minister for Constitutional Reform

Billy Hayes, former General Secretary of the Communication Workers’ Union

Melanie Onn MP, former Shadow Deputy Leader of the House of Commons

Ellie Reeves, NEC member

Nan Sloane, Director of the Centre for Women and Democracy

Cllr Reema Patel, Fabian Society executive member

Jonathan Reynolds MP, leading proponent of electoral reform

because disagreement over that one issue can often stall action in other areas.

To address this, the three focus groups were asked to prioritise areas where action is most urgent. The results are striking, with every group prioritising education and information above the technical debates that politicians spend so much time on:

TABLE 1 Focus group participants’ priorities for reform

Labour voters	Non voters	Labour considerers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve education about politics 2. Transparency, clear rules and sanctions 3. Make it easier to vote 4. Change the voting system 5. Reform Party funding 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve education about politics 2. Change the voting system 3. Make it easier to vote 4. A rule where promises are kept for the full length of power 5. Incentives to vote 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve education about politics 2. Change the voting system 3. An unbiased regulator to monitor political promises 4. Make it easier to vote 5. Take action to increase diversity

NOTE: In this exercise participants were given five pieces of paper with set areas typed on them (education, voting system, easier to vote, reform party funding, diversity), along with two blank pieces of paper. They were told they could veto any printed idea, and use the blank paper to write their own idea.

THE DEBATE BEHIND THE CHARTER

1: PRIORITISE POLITICAL EDUCATION

with strengthened political and citizenship education at school and throughout life, including school councils that enable pupils to make meaningful change.

The first point in the charter calls for the prioritisation of political education. According to the most recent Audit of Political Engagement, 44 per cent of the population claim to know ‘not very much’ or ‘nothing at all’ about politics. This can mean people vote for a party out of habit or instinct, voting “*blindly from the time that I was 18*” as one former Labour voter explained. It can cause people to feel wary of participating in political activity beyond the ballot box. And, most worryingly, it can mean they opt out of participation altogether.

Academics have documented a clear link between knowledge of political processes and willingness to participate in them. For example the political participation model designed by Lowndes, Pratchett and Stoker starts with an individual’s belief that they ‘can’ participate, because they possess the necessary skills, confidence and understanding to do so.⁸ This was confirmed by the views of the focus groups, who all identified lack of knowledge as the main barrier to people voting, despite the fact this is often only due to lack of confidence or social capital.

For the non-voters that were spoken to, a sense of intimidation and worry about making the wrong decision was the main reason that they do not vote. This comment from a middle-aged woman summarises the mood of the conversation:

“some women, like, my friends have said to me, ‘You should use your vote, you know,

you’ve got it.” And I said, ‘Well I don’t know what I’m doing, so I don’t see the point in doing it.’ But then some women might be pressured because it’s like, ‘Oh, we won the right to vote,’ and they go and then they vote for something they don’t understand, and I think, ‘What’s the point in me voting because I might be voting for something I’m against.’ But I don’t get it, so I don’t bother.”

The non-voters also expressed a sense of social exclusion when discussing their reluctance to vote. One person expressed a sense that politics is deliberately an elite preoccupation, designed to marginalise: “*You know, the clever people, the bigger people... they think we’re not all there and don’t understand it all*”. Another claimed that politicians deliberately make politics “*confusing so nobody wants to vote*”. The statistics confirm that this is a class issue, with those in social grades AB more than twice as likely to say that they are knowledgeable about politics as those in social classes DE.⁹

Ideas for change

There are three key ways to improve political education: improving citizenship education in schools, developing more effective school councils, and lifelong learning.

Citizenship education – Citizenship education was made compulsory in the school curriculum after the influential Crick Report argued it would enable pupils to “*participate in society effectively as active, informed, critical and responsible citizens*.”¹⁰ However recent Ofsted inspections have revealed that there is both a lack of specialist teachers and insufficient development of pupils’ political literacy.¹¹ Doubt was also cast on the future

of citizenship education by the Conservative party in the last parliament, creating uncertainty and a lack of forward planning.

These concerns were also reflected through research for this report. One Labour voting focus group participant revealed that his wife taught citizenship lessons, but had no political interest or expertise: “*my wife is a food tech teacher and she has a citizenship class... she has no clue... she is not politically minded*”. Others did not believe the issue was addressed at all in schools, with one participant suggesting students are “*not really taught about it*”, and another arguing that schools are the best place to improve political education: “*politics needs to be in schools for people to really understand*”. Labour members and activists shared these concerns, adding that lessons often fail to be engaging, and that political literacy should be embedded throughout the curriculum as well as taught in citizenship classes.

School councils – It is also clear that there is a need for greater opportunities for school children to actively participate in meaningful democratic processes through school councils or youth parliaments. Melanie Onn MP, a member of our advisory panel, is a leading advocate of this, arguing that it is only by taking part in democratic processes that young people can truly understand the trade offs involved, and feel empowered to continue to be involved throughout their lives. While it is estimated that as many as 90 per cent of schools do have school councils, their power and impact varies significantly and there are no formal regional or national connections between them. Research has also suggested that often the councils can simply be talking shops, where students feel like they are not truly listened to. In the long run, this potentially has an even more detrimental effect on democratic participation than if the students hadn’t been asked for their opinion in the first place.¹² While there are excellent initiatives around the country,

like the UK Youth Parliament and local schemes for youth mayors or similar, these only involve a small minority of children.

Lifelong learning – In addition to political education in schools, there is also a need for more opportunities for lifelong learning about politics. Some contributors to the project highlighted the role of workplaces and trade unions as places where people could develop their understanding. Participation in local democratic processes and community activism is also important here. As the Fabian Society research report *Pride of Place* argued, often people need to feel able to effect change in their own ‘backyard’ before they can feel powerful in a wider political context. This principle can be applied across the different aspects of people’s lives – from an increased voice in the workplace, to more effective engagement from the local council on local regeneration or a local park.

POSSIBLE POLICY IDEAS FOR LABOUR TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- Establish a body to monitor citizenship education in schools, like the standing committee on education for citizenship recommended by the Crick Report
- Create incentives and improve support for schools to innovate and develop their citizenship education, including focusing on training the teachers who are delivering it
- Guidance for schools on how to deliver ‘political’ citizenship education, empowering teachers to discuss political parties and elections without worrying that they will be accused of indoctrination. One other option, recommended by the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy, is the development of specific political literacy classes to sit alongside citizenship lessons
- A duty for every school to establish a school council, with real powers to impact on the governance of the school. Local councils could establish a network of local school councils to create a meaningful pupil council of the whole area
- Work with trade unions and employers to develop new ways to engage employees in democratic events. Workplaces could be encouraged to hold a yearly ‘democracy day’ where employees are relieved of their duties in order to engage in discussion or community activity

IDEA IN FOCUS: MELANIE ONN MP ON HER IDEA FOR A SCHOOLS PARLIAMENT

Creating a more participatory system from a young age, demonstrating how change can happen and taking kids through our current system’s processes could connect people much more closely to the mechanisms of politics.

I have been working with a group of schools on the concept of a Schools Parliament. The idea is to go beyond the usual school council, which is kept within the confines of what schools can do to make children’s experiences there better. The aim is to create a collection of school representatives in the local area who will choose topics that matter to them, perhaps about their local area but perhaps about issues that affect them or concern them and enable them to campaign to

effect real change. It is a small step in teaching how their world can be changed through effective campaigning and lobbying. It is non-party political but in keeping with the concept of community campaigning.

Before the parliament could meet they would have to undergo election campaigns; create a manifesto that through research and questioning of their classmates would guide them to plan for what they would like to focus on; a taste of the experience of running a campaign either within their entire schools or across schools.

Once elected they would have to learn to work together to decide which of their priorities they will follow. If it is not something that they as an individual campaigned on, they might have to explain it to their electorate.

The priorities could be anything, it could be tackling obesity in children or road speeds around parks and schools.

Local or national. Two schools have written to me about wild animals in circuses. If this were to be the parliament’s topic for their term of office they would have to research this issue. They would have to generate support from their electorate to back their campaign using their research. They would have to learn about our national parliamentary system to find out who they need to approach both in government and amongst individuals who might support their campaign.

It was also be good for pupils to look at other recent campaigns that have made the headlines and successfully effected change like the WASPI women, or the sugar tax campaign. They would also benefit from learning about groups like Greenpeace, Amnesty International or trade unions who seek to influence change in policy. This might also give them the sense that their voices, collectively, as citizens of the future could be equally as powerful.

2: AN OPEN, ACCESSIBLE AND PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

with automatic voter registration, greater citizen participation in public institutions of all kinds and the use of new technologies to make it easier to vote. In the future, we should work towards safe and secure online voting.

The creation of the internet and the rapid development of digital technology has transformed society, but electoral administration has failed to keep up with the pace of change. Focus group participants argued that better use of online technology might help encourage people to vote. One Labour voter suggested that a lot more “*younger people ... would probably vote through an app*”, with another arguing that online technologies could help with the occasional inconvenience of voting “*when you’ve got family and children and are working long shifts*”. Participants also raised concerns about the inconvenient location of polling stations and the process of voter registration.

Structures are important, but it is important to note that they were not the preoccupation of the focus groups, in particular the group of non-voters. Instead of blaming structures for their lack of democratic participation, participants focused more on the reasons that they felt disempowered by our democracy. That is an important lesson for policy makers, and it raises the important question of who will benefit from e-democracy and other mechanistic innovations. While we have seen an increase in people engaging in politics online, through initiatives like 38 degrees or the government’s petitions website, it seems that those involving themselves already have a lot of social and political capital. As Professor Charles Pattie told the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy “*those already politically engaged are quick to adopt web technologies as yet further ways of engaging. By and large, those who are politically marginalised just do not.*”¹³

It is with this in mind that policy makers should approach the question of democratic innovations, ensuring they are aimed at the whole population and are not simply an optional extra to amplify those who already have a voice. It also necessitates a focus on making all aspects of state infrastructure as participative as possible, to tackle one of the root causes of a sense of powerlessness from the disengaged. This does not mean trying to persuade people “*to take a day off work to go and listen to some Member of Parliament*”, in the words of one focus group participant, but, instead, embedding consultation and engagement within public services and communities.¹⁴ According to the most recent Audit of Political Engagement, just one in four British adults feel influential in local decision-making, and this falls to just one in eight where decision-making in the country as a whole is concerned.¹⁵

Ideas for change

There are a number of ways to make democratic processes more accessible. Contributions made by Labour members and activists focused quite narrowly on three structural aspects: online voting, polling day innovations and voter registration. But cultural change, to increase people’s power and influence in everyday interactions, is much more important. The left must back up warm words on devolution and citizen participation with real action to ensure people are powerful in their day-to-day lives.

Online voting – Online voting was a common theme throughout the consultation process, with many arguing it is a sensible and necessary change to keep up to date with the changing nature of society, especially given the numbers who now bank and shop online. Areeq Chowdhury, the founder of WebRoots, commented on our discussion website that the potential benefits of online voting include greater participation, greater accuracy and potential cost savings. However a number of contri-

butions about online voting were couched with concerns about security, or the possibility of coercion within the home, and it is clear these concerns must be answered before online voting can be implemented. The Open Rights group summarised these concerns in a submission to the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy:

*“Voting is a uniquely difficult question for computer science: the system must verify your eligibility to vote; know whether you have already voted; and allow for audits and recounts. Yet it must always preserve your anonymity and privacy. Currently there are no practical solutions to this highly complex problem and existing systems are unacceptably flawed.”*¹⁶

Voting in person – A range of suggestions were also made about the process of casting a physical vote, and it is clear that a number of straightforward innovations can be made. Grimsby Fabians argued that we should consider changing the day of the week that we vote, and contributors in South Tyneside argued that polls should be open for a period as long as seven days. Convincing arguments were also made for “*more voting stations where it is easier to just drop in on*”, including placing voting booths in the places that people go in their day to day lives such as shopping centres or doctors surgeries. Ideas were also shared about the importance of voting being accessible to disabled people who face a wide range of barriers in the electoral process.¹⁷ While compulsory voting was raised by some, there was no consensus in favour of it amongst the advisory panel.

Voter registration – The system of voter registration is ripe for reform. Estimates say millions of Britons are currently absent from the electoral register, in particular from hard to reach groups.¹⁸ This is in part due to the new system of individual electoral registration, which was introduced to tackle fraud and increase confidence in

the electoral register, but which has been criticised for rushed implementation. Ideas submitted to us include allowing voters to register as late as election day, and voter registration in schools. But the most effective policy suggestion is automatic voter registration, which was promised by Labour ahead of the last election, and proposed by the Power Inquiry more than 10 years ago.¹⁹ One way this could be achieved is by using the data already held by government departments and local councils, such as from driving licences, council tax records, and vehicle registration data, to add names to the register. Siobhan McDonagh MP recently made a strong case for the change in the House of Commons, arguing:

*“At a time when social exclusion is getting worse, voter turnout is declining and IER has caused registration to deplete, automatic voter registration has never been more important. Voting is the backbone of this house, and it is one of the most important interactions between the citizen and the democratic state. It is a fundamental symbol of engagement, as it signifies that you are not on the margins of society, but part of the majority. No longer can we accept a system that excludes and marginalises potential voters, not least because they are exactly the groups with which we need to engage to end social exclusion”.*²⁰

With boundary changes fast approaching, contributions were also made on the perceived unfairness of the way boundaries are currently drawn. Lewis Baston, psephologist and member of the advisory panel, argued that instead of relying on a currently unreliable electoral register, that it would be much fairer to base boundaries on census data.

Democratic innovations – While we had very few submissions on the question of active participation in public institutions, there has been an active public policy debate that it is important to consider here.

The Power Report is one of a number to discuss the potential benefit of so called ‘democratic innovations’ as a way of enabling citizens to influence decisions taken by those in power, discussing examples such as participatory budgeting. The Fabian Society research report *Going Public* is another example, arguing for increased public participation in the running of public services, including the power for citizens to establish co-operative styles of governance. The Labour Party demonstrated signs

“To change the country means giving people the power to shape the services and institutions that affect their lives”

of taking this agenda seriously before the last election, with Ed Miliband and Policy Review Co-ordinator Jon Cruddas arguing that *“to change the country means giving people the power to shape the services and institutions that affect their lives”*.²¹

Professor Graham Smith has argued that *“cultural change is required within political authorities if systematic participation is to be embedded in our political system”* and that is a lesson that must now be heeded by the Labour party.²² While it has easily adopted the language of devolution and people power, too much of this seems superficial. Not only has Labour enabled the Conservative Party to control the narrative, for example with Theresa May’s recent support for workers on boards. It has also allowed its focus to rest on structures and not the people participating within them. While Labour understands the need for power to be closer to people, it must now learn to enable people to be powerful.

POSSIBLE POLICY IDEAS FOR LABOUR TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- Argue for the provision of secure online voting as an option at the 2020 election, following the recommendation of the Speaker’s Commission on digital democracy²³
- Pilot new ways of conducting elections, including increasing the number of polling stations people are able to vote at
- Pledge to introduce automatic voter registration if Labour enters government, and push for reforms to registration in the meantime including same day registration and registration in schools and colleges
- Support a clearer duty on the electoral commission to increase registration numbers, and ensure adequate funding for registration initiatives. Currently their responsibility is just to ensure the completeness of the register doesn’t deteriorate
- Support calls to draw parliamentary boundaries based on census data, rather than the electoral register
- Prioritise the accessibility of elections for disabled people, including accessible manifestos and easy read formats
- Support Labour leaders in local government with initiatives designed to increase citizen participation in the delivery of public services, and embed citizen power at the heart of new public services policies and promises

IDEA IN FOCUS: DRAW CONSTITUENCY BOUNDARIES BASED ON THE CENSUS, BY LEWIS BASTON

The electoral register is not a stable or reliable basis to use as a way of allocating constituencies, because the numbers of people on the register has varied wildly over the transition period – from 45.3m in December 2014 up to 46.4m in May 2015 and then down again to 44.7m in

December 2015. If the registers get a lot better over the next few years, as advocates of Individual Electoral Registration suggest they should, then the result will be hugely oversized urban constituencies. The census suggests that if everyone who was entitled to be on the register actually was, there would be a little over 40m on the register in England rather than 37.6m.

Fortunately, there is a better way. The census itself could be used as the basis of

drawing constituency boundaries; either to model what a complete register would look like, or to base representation on the principle that is most commonly found in the rest of the world, from Ireland to the United States – that MPs should have roughly the same number of constituents, including children and foreigners. Boundary changes would be every ten years, rather than every five-year parliament as the current law requires.

3: AN INFORMATION REVOLUTION

with tougher regulation of the use of statistics by politicians and campaigners, clearer, more accessible information about political parties and elections from an independent source and a published job description for MPs.

While political education is one part of the solution, it is also clear there is need for more accurate and accessible information about politics. One non-voter summarised this problem when she said *“I haven’t voted for the simple reason that I don’t understand”* but that *“sometimes I think they don’t explain it properly so people don’t understand it”*.

The first part of the information problem relates to the popular belief *“that you can’t trust”* politicians as a result of broken promises and counter claims between political parties. This has been made worse by the recent EU referendum contest, with Vote Leave criticised by the remain campaign for telling *“lies”*. Recent polling reveals that just one in five Britons trust politicians to tell the truth, with politicians less trusted than estate agents, journalists and bankers.²⁴

There is also a sense that not enough information is provided to help people make an informed decision about who to vote for. This was reflected across our focus groups, with participants calling for

“plain English”, “simple explainers” and more information about what each party stands for and how to vote. While voters are overwhelmed by an array of political and media spin at election time, there is a lack of information that is perceived to be both clear and unbiased. This increasing awareness of political and media spin has combined with increasing partisan de-alignment to mean that today’s electorate is more interested in political argument than they have been before, but feels less able to engage with it.

Ideas for change

To improve the accessibility and quality of information given to voters, there are three key areas for reform: the governance of statistics, the provision of information at election time, and clearer information about the role of an MP.

Governance of statistics – The complicated and opaque nature the governance of statistics today means that the public is insufficiently clear what information they can trust from government and politicians. There is confusion about which government statistics are ‘national’ statistics, and therefore meet a rigorous code of conduct, and statistics that are published by government departments but don’t meet those standards. There are also concerns that inappropriate use of statistics is not challenged robustly enough, with one example being

the £350million Vote Leave claim about the NHS. Although the UK Statistics Authority publicly stated that the figure was misleading, Ipsos MORI found that half of the public still thought that the claim was correct.²⁵ A recent report commissioned by the government found that there are problems with the current system of statistics governance, criticising the underlying quality of government statistics, as well as arguing that government departments releasing statistics to the media should treat them as an *“official statistic”* and publish them *“in a manner that is compliant with the [UKSA] Code of Practice”*.²⁶

A number of ways to challenge this were proposed during our conversation with party activists. Sir Hugh Bayley, during a discussion with York Fabians, spoke to a proposal he made when he was an MP to give greater independence to the UK Statistics Authority, including the ability to decide what ‘national’ statistics are free from government control, as well as giving parliament rather than government the power to set their budget. Other suggestions argued that it would be desirable to have an unbiased ‘state of the nation’ statistics report provided by an independent statistics agency before elections, free completely from government control. A similar suggestion was made by the Electoral Reform Society in a recent report on the EU referendum, with proposals for the Electoral Commission, or a similar body, to publish a ‘minimum data set’ before

referendums containing all the basic data relevant to the debate. The same report also suggests that an official body should be empowered to intervene when overtly misleading information is disseminated.²⁷

Information at election time – The second area for reform is the provision of information at election time, to ensure voters feel

fully equipped to make a decision about who to vote for. This has been called for a number of times, including by the Speaker's Report on digital democracy which said it *"strongly encourages political education bodies and charities to consider how to make available and publicise trustworthy information about candidates and their policies, including by means of voter advice applications."*

There have also been calls for the Electoral Commission to improve the work they do to inform voters, with the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee calling for them to *"examine the changes which can be made to provide more and better information to voters"*. The Labour party called for better provision of information in the last parliament, with calls for *"a new online democracy portal which draws together all of the things you need to know before you vote, including who your MP is, how you vote, who the political parties are and what they stand for"*.²⁸ During the project Wayne David MP proposed the creation of a new independent body, similar to the electoral commission, to provide voters with objective summaries of political parties' offers in advance of elections. This could draw on the good example provided by London Elects, who manage the elections in London for the Mayor and GLA.

Information about the role of an MP – There is also a need to increase awareness of the work politicians do, in order to rebuild the relationships between members of parliament and their constituents. One simple suggestion that has been made to counter this is the publication of a job description

POSSIBLE POLICY IDEAS FOR LABOUR TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- Greater independence and a larger budget for the UK Statistics Authority, or a new regulatory body. This body should monitor all government statistics, and should have punitive enforcement powers to ensure they meet a rigorous code of conduct
- Consider giving the Electoral Commission or a different body the responsibility for publishing basic data ahead of referendums, and monitoring the inappropriate use of data during campaigns
- Argue for the creation of a new, independent body to provide objective information to voters at election time about the political parties, what they stand for and what they advocate. The remit of the electoral commission could be expanded in place of a new body
- Pilot programmes to improve information to voters in local council elections
- Support the publication of a job description for MPs, drawn up by the House of Commons, which allows for variation in how an MP goes about their job

IDEA IN FOCUS: HELPING TO CONNECT WITH THE ELECTORATE, BY WAYNE DAVID MP

The Electoral Commission was established by the last Labour government. Although it is a relatively recent organisation it has become an accepted and indeed indispensable part of our electoral landscape. In short, the Electoral Commission has responsibility for the smooth running of elections, referendums and electoral registration. The Commission also ensures transparency in political party finance and election finance.

In our political climate voters are less

inclined to vote according to 'class' and the family tradition of affiliation to a political party is less important. The philosophy and policies of a political party are therefore becoming more important in determining how an individual will cast his/her vote.

At the same time, however, there is an unprecedented level of distrust and cynicism of what politicians say and promise. Increasingly, voters say that they cannot believe political parties.

I am suggesting that we ought to consider the creation of an 'independent' body to help tackle this disconnect. This body would be not dissimilar to the Electoral

Commission and would have the express responsibility of ensuring that all electors are provided with an 'objective summary' of the electoral offer of each party at a given election.

Labour could call for the creation of an independent body which would have responsibility for distributing basic election material from the political parties. It could also operate a website which would objectively and clearly set out the central political platform of each party. In short, this new body could form a new interface with the electorate and make a significant contribution to increasing political trust and engagement.

for MPs. This was called for by the Standards Committee in the House of Commons towards the end of the last parliament. They argued that the change would prevent constituents having “*irrational or unrealistic*” expectations as well as giving them the right to judge their MP against a fair standard.²⁹

The relationship between people and politicians cannot be restored through policy levers alone; it requires a change in culture. The media, politicians and the public are all responsible here. If politicians answer a question directly, the media should not punish them for it. Politicians should avoid braying in the chamber to prevent the public being turned off by it. The public should avoid unthinkingly judging politicians without listening to what they have to say. Everyone who cares about the future of our democracy must reflect on what they personally can do to improve the tenor of political debate.

4: ACTION TO REMOVE THE INFLUENCE OF BIG MONEY

in our politics with a comprehensive register of all lobbyists and action for a fairer and more sustainable funding system. This should consider, in the longer term, increased state funding and low level caps on donations to political parties.

According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, just 17 per cent of people trust the government to put the needs of the nation first.³⁰ This was echoed across the focus groups, with one Labour considerer arguing politicians “*are in it just for the money and not for the good of the country*”. This sense was peppered across the focus groups with frequent references to “*backhanders*”, “*deals behind closed doors*”, “*expenses*” and “*corruption*”. This is unsurprising given the regular appearance of scandal in political news, and is a crucial factor in the current low levels of political participation.

Discussions about scandals and expenses often irk politicians. They feel frustrated

that they are tarred by the actions of a minority, and they feel annoyed at the actions of an invasive and often irresponsible press. Often, not unreasonably, this can lead to defensive stances and insufficient action that fails to address the causes of the problem. While politicians should take comfort that people understand that sometimes the stories “*might not be true or very well reported*”, and are able to separate politicians they admire from those who do wrong, the sense that politics is “*corrupt*” has become so all-pervasive that inaction no longer looks like an option.

Our focus groups also revealed a clear worry about the funding of political parties, with participants arguing that political donations often come with strings attached. Recent polling published by the Electoral Reform Society underlines this, revealing that 75 per cent of the public believe that big donors have too much influence on political parties, and that 61 per cent believe the system of party funding is corrupt and must be changed.³¹ Despite the inability of political parties to come to an amicable agreement on this question in recent years, there is clearly a public appetite for change.

Ideas for change

There have been many attempts to, in the words of David Cameron, “*shine the light of transparency on lobbying*”, as well as to clean up party funding. However the two most recent attempts - the Transparency of Lobbying Act and the Trade Union Act - have been derided as partisan attacks on the labour movement and voluntary sector, and have been largely ineffectual at restoring public trust. Cross party agreement on party funding proved impossible to reach in the last parliament, when Labour could not agree with proposals that would have disproportionately adversely affected them.

Despite the political caution of recent years, contributions to our project suggest an appetite for change from voters and from within the Labour family. Reform should come in two parts: action to tackle

lobbying and the revolving door, and real progress on Party funding.

Lobbying reform – The Lobbying Act, introduced in the last parliament, was condemned by the Labour party for letting “*vested interests off the hook, and gagging charities and grassroots campaigners who want to hold the government to account*.” Unlock Democracy, who had been campaigning for lobbying reform prior to the bill, said the bill would make “*transparency and lobbying worse in the UK*” as it would “*capture so little lobbying activity*”.³² In a submission to our conversation, Unlock Democracy director Alexandra Runswick called for “*lobbying to come out of the shadows*” with a comprehensive register of lobbyists, a policy promised by Labour at the last election. Submissions also covered the need for lobbying reform in local government, where vital decisions are taken with much less scrutiny.

Contributors to the project held strong views on the need to close the revolving door, where “*those who have held high office*” can “*walk into lucrative roles*”.³³ The executive director of Transparency UK has described this practice as a “*corruption time bomb*”, and the chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Bernard Jenkin MP, has called the process opaque and argued for the reform of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments.³⁴

Party funding – There were also submissions on the question of party funding. These derided the Conservative party for their “*one sided approach*”, and called for state funding of political parties to ensure “*fairness*”. Since the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act was passed in 2000, many reports have attempted to solve the question of party finance but none have succeeded. The report that got closest was the Inquiry by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL), which recommended a £10,000 cap on

donations, a 15 per cent cut to the election spending limit, and increased public funding for political parties who have more than two MPs.³⁵

To test public attitudes towards these three proposals, we presented them to the three focus groups. While there was a lack of awareness about how political parties are funded, and some surprise at the funding gap between the Labour party and the Conservatives, a number of key insights emerged. On the £10,000 cap, there was a sense that a cap on donations sounded fair, in order to exclude “people who make larger donations” who can say “if I give you a million pounds you can do this for me”. However, a number of reservations were expressed. The first of these was on the level of the cap. One Labour considerer stated that the high limit “might still remove a lot of us working class people who think we don’t get heard enough... we haven’t got ten grand.” Participants across all three groups also expressed a belief that the cap wouldn’t make a difference, and that politicians would find a way around it. One Labour considerer said: “I can’t see that making any difference whatsoever because what they would lose from one they would just gain from others. Those who normally would give 20k would just ask somebody else to give it for them.”

There was strong support across the focus groups for a cut in election spending, largely because people believed political parties spend money on unnecessary gimmicks in election campaigns. One Labour voter pointed to the infamous “massive stone”, calling it “pointless” and a “waste of money”. When challenged on whether political parties needed to spend money in order to reach the disengaged, participants generally felt that political parties should just spend their money better. Rather than “throwing money” at the electorate, they should engage with the root causes of political disengagement.

Opinion was divided on the question of increased state funding for political parties.

While participants felt that it was the “fairest” of the proposals because it reduces reliance on both trades unions and big business, they also felt very strongly that they already give enough in taxes. One non-voter said: “we seem to have to foot the bill for everything”. Politicians often see increased state funding as toxic, but from the conversations we had it feels a deliverable aim – if a confident fairness case is made for it.

While the Labour party resisted the recommendations from the CSPL at the time, a number of key factors have now changed. The main reason for Labour’s

A low donations cap provides the opportunity to make “people powered politics” a reality

objections was the proposed requirement for union members to ‘opt-in’ to affiliation fees to the Labour party, even though the report stated that trade union affiliation fees could be regarded as individual payments. Since then, the Labour Party has willingly changed its own rules to ensure that affiliated supporters from trades unions do opt in.³⁶ And, the Trade Union Act means that any new union member must opt-in to the political levy as a whole. This means that the financial case for resisting the donations cap is dwindling, and will continue to dwindle over time. Another relevant factor is the ‘movement’ politics

that is being ushered in by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. While it may not guarantee electoral success, a large number of committed activists are much more willing to make small donations than at previous points. A low donations cap provides the opportunity to make “people powered politics” a reality.

Our research also exposed a gap between Labour voters and Labour members on the question of the trade union link. We showed focus group participants news clippings about the Trade Union Act, and asked for their views on whether forcing levy payers to opt in was fair. All three groups felt that it was, including the Labour supporters. One Labour voter said “it sounds like the way it’s done at the moment is entirely misleading and they are trying to make it more transparent and more fair” and another argued that “you don’t want a leader that is in the unions pockets”. This view was held alongside a firm support for the trade union movement amongst Labour voters, who believed that the change might not make much difference because “the people that are in unions are generally Labour voters anyway”.

Agreement on the wording for the charter was difficult to reach with the advisory panel. While support for a lobbying register was uncontroversial, discussion of party funding proved to be a sticking point. This was largely due to the view that a commitment to reform that was too direct or prescriptive might be seen as an attack

POSSIBLE POLICY IDEAS FOR LABOUR TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- A comprehensive register of lobbyists, backed up by a code of conduct and sanctions
- Review the impact of lobbying in local government, setting out a strategy to improve problem areas
- Pledge to overhaul the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, placing a tougher regulator on statutory footing
- Seek to reopen talks on party funding with an open mind, arguing for low level caps and increased state funding in the longer term

IDEA IN FOCUS: A COMPREHENSIVE REGISTER OF LOBBYISTS, BY ALEX RUNSWICK DIRECTOR OF UNLOCK DEMOCRACY

Lobbying is an essential part of a healthy democracy. It is what we all do when we contact our elected representatives or sign a petition to let them know we care about an issue. However, professional lobbying – an industry worth £2 billion in the UK – can subvert democracy by giving those with the greatest resources undue influence and privileged access to politicians.

The problem is, at the moment, most of this is done in secret. We can't make an informed decision about what is or isn't appropriate. We need to bring lobbying

out of the shadows. The simplest way of achieving this transparency is with a comprehensive register of lobbyists. It must cover all paid lobbyists and give us meaningful information on what lobbyists are up to, including who is being lobbied, what policies they are lobbying on, the names of the lobbyists and whether they have held public office in the last 5 years.

A good faith estimate of what it being spent on lobbying would also show scale, disparities and trends in lobbying. Even lobbyists estimate that the government register only captures about one per cent of lobbying activity. The perception that money can buy access and influence corrodes trust in our politics. We need to know who are pulling the strings if we are to hold our elected politicians to account.

on the trades unions. This was not the aim of any of the participants, but there was an acceptance that in the longer term all political parties may have to make sacrifices in order to restore public trust and increase participation. As Margaret Beckett argued in her minority report to the CSPL inquiry, *“the public object to “big money” in politics. But it is the capacity to spend which is the incentive to raise it.”* There was also a concern that in the current economic climate a commitment to increasing state funding might be difficult to argue for.

The final wording agreed by the panel reflects a commitment to the aspiration of a fairer funding system, with low level caps and increased state funding explicitly within Labour's remit for future talks. The wording does, however, reflect that firm decisions will need to be taken after a much wider conversation.

IDEA IN FOCUS: REFORM OF PARTY FUNDING BY DECLAN MCHUGH, FORMER CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR AT THE LABOUR PARTY

Reforming the rules around party funding is among the most difficult of constitutional challenges. That is because of the asymmetry that exists between political parties. Each has different origins, structures and support bases. In financial terms the Conservative party is heavily reliant on a relatively large number of individual members who have access to significant personal wealth and who have been willing and able to donate sums of £50,000 to the party. Labour meanwhile has traditionally relied upon the affiliation fees and donations of trade unions, derived from the individual small contributions of millions of members. The party has also benefited from the small subscriptions of a large number of individual members.

Any change to party funding rules that tampers with the ability of parties to maintain these funding streams can have a dramatic impact on the ability of parties to function and therefore on their capacity to engage in electoral politics. For example, a cap on all donations that is set at the level of £50,000 would have little impact on the Conservative party, which has restructured its funding base around that threshold, but would have a major impact on the Labour Party, because it would cut off large union contributions. The fact that party funding rules can have such a distorted impact on one party compared to another gets to the heart of the problem.

Rather than being an objective exercise in trying to make the financing of British democracy fair and sustainable, it can sometimes become a political weapon used by one party to harm another. That is why it is so important to try and proceed with reforms on the basis of consensus and driven by an even-handed assessment of how the current regulatory system could be reformed in ways that would strengthen and not imbalance UK democracy.

Such an assessment needs to look at the core purpose of party funding rules – to establish a level playing field in which the political battle is a battle of ideas and not a race to raise and spend money. It also needs to guarantee that the money flowing into political coffers is clean and without undue influence. That means considering reforms that would: – Set a comprehensive cap on donations at a suitably low level so as to address big donations across the political spectrum – Lower existing caps on spending at both the local & national level to ensure level playing field.

However, it is also important to understand that any changes to funding rules which would diminish the amount of income that parties currently receive also requires us to examine access to public funds. Parties already receive money from the state, so that principle is established. The question is whether the public would be willing to see that level of support increased in exchange for tougher controls on the private funding that parties receive. Unless there is public appetite for that then party funding reform will remain very difficult to achieve.

5: A FAIRER AND MORE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

with a democratically elected house of lords which amplifies the voice of nations and regions, votes for sixteen year olds, and a fairer voting system where every vote makes a difference, but where we retain constituency representatives. Such a system is already in place for elections in Scotland, Wales, and London.

The notion that “voting doesn’t make a difference” is often deployed as a reason for non-participation in elections, and this was no different in the focus groups. While some of this sentiment relates to frustration with broken promises, or the seemingly superficial retail offer from political parties, some of it can be explained by perceived unfairness in our democratic institutions. There are three components to this: the voting system, the House of Lords, and the franchise. This chapter deals with each in turn.

Our electoral system

The Electoral Reform Society have argued that “our voting system is in crisis”, pointing to the general election in May 2015 as “the most disproportionate result in British election history”.³⁷ The Conservative Party won a majority of seats on a minority of the vote, and smaller parties like UKIP and the Greens achieved strong support across the country without seeing that translate into an increased number of MPs. Proponents of reform also argue that the high number of ‘safe seats’ in parliament, which never or rarely change hands, adds to a sense that there is no point going to the polls. One focus group participant supported this view, arguing: “the shame for me is that I know who will win in my area regardless of my vote.”

According to the British Social Attitudes survey, a record high say that they support electoral reform, with 45 per cent now supporting a change. This is up from just

27 per cent in 2011.³⁸ To investigate this apparent shift in public attitudes, electoral reform was discussed with focus groups. Participants were presented with vote shares against the number of seats won by political parties at the last election, alongside figures that showed the number of safe seats in parliament. Once we had discussed how the current electoral system works, the groups concluded that the current system is “unfair”, with one non-voter arguing “if you get 13% of the vote you should surely get 13% of the seats”. Both the non-voters and the Labour considerers raised UKIP specifically as an example of the problem. When challenged about the relationship that constituents have with their local MPs, participants generally felt

The notion that “voting doesn’t make a difference” is often deployed as a reason for non-participation in elections

no particular connection with their local representative, arguing that they would vote for a party and not a specific person.

Ideas for change

Although Britain held a referendum on changing the voting system to the ‘Alternative Vote’ in 2011, a number of submissions argued that revisiting the overall question of electoral reform is now sensible. As former General Secretary of the Communication Workers’ Union Billy Hayes argued on the discussion website, the “arguments we keep hearing against reform have been disproved by recent political events. We had a coalition under first past the post.” There are also signs that the political debate is shifting, with the TUC now reviewing its policy on electoral reform and with an increasing number of senior politicians indicating their support for change.

The arguments for a more proportional voting system are well rehearsed, including in the final report of the Jenkins Commission which was set up by Labour shortly after the election in 1997. A change could mean that seats more closely match votes, it could encourage collaboration and power sharing, and it could mean that more people feel that their voices are heard. But the focus of this project was on the political case.

The first argument relates to Labour’s electoral chances. A more proportional system would prevent Labour being shut out of representation in areas like the South East. And, it would enable Labour to spend more time concentrating on its ‘core’, traditional working class, vote, a group it is increasingly unlikely to be able to rely upon. There is also evidence that our current electoral system is skewed against progressive voters. Because cities are becoming more cosmopolitan, young and liberal, Lewis Baston argued that “parties of the left, centre left and green persuasion stack up huge margins of victory in urban areas while the hinterlands have seen once-solid working class left votes fragment and the centre and far right make relative progress.”³⁹ The recent EU referendum result demonstrates this trend clearly. According to Chris Hanretty’s estimates, Leave won the constituency count in England and Wales by around 421–152, a large majority on a relatively slim lead in votes cast nationwide.⁴⁰

The second political argument is that politics is already shifting towards the success of smaller parties. In a presentation to our advisory panel, the Electoral Reform Society explained that in 1951 the Conservatives and Labour won 96.8 per cent of the vote between them. In 2015 that had dropped to 67.3 per cent, with almost 1 in 4 citizens voting for a party outside the main three. Instead of retaining the current system in order to prevent the election of politicians from non-establishment parties, it would be wise to recognise that is happening anyway, regardless of our electoral system.

There are also strong arguments in favour of using a different electoral system at local level, as well as nationally. As Lewis Baston and Will Brett argued in a pamphlet setting out the Labour case for local electoral reform, first past the post currently prevents Labour voters getting their fair share of local Labour councillors.⁴¹ A more proportional system would enable local parties to build up activist bases in areas which are not traditionally strong for Labour, but that Labour will need to win to form a government in the future.

Not all contributions to the project were in favour of electoral reform, and this is an issue that divides Labour activists and supporters. Arguments against a proportional system include “*the more direct*” relationship that first past the post enables with a local MP, and the fact we’ve had a debate so recently with the AV referendum. Others supported reform, but were keen to stress that some constituency element should be retained in order to ensure a meaningful relationship between voters and their representative.

It is also important to note that electoral reform is more frequently debated than other aspects of this charter. It dominated the majority of conversations and submissions, and the advisory panel spent a significant amount of time debating it. While there are convincing arguments for change, prominence doesn’t equal importance as our prioritisation exercise with voters demonstrated. Other, less controversial reforms, could have a more significant impact on voter participation and could prevent reform being stalled because of disagreement on this one issue.

The Advisory panel were keen to ensure that their discussion about electoral reform did two things: focus on principles rather than get bogged down in systems; and, remember that electoral reform is not the be-all-and-end-all of democratic reform. They also wanted to produce a recommendation that could bring together a wide coalition of support within the Labour family.

POSSIBLE POLICY IDEAS FOR LABOUR TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- Deliver a proportional voting system in local government, encouraging Labour councils to proactively argue for the change
- Support a more proportional electoral system which retains constituency MPs and has a top up list. Such a system is currently in use in Scotland, Wales and London

Members of the advisory panel held differing views on the question of electoral reform. Some were long-time supporters of first past the post, and some have long been advocates for a proportional system. The wording of the charter is designed to find support from a wide range of people who believe that it is the right time to explore change, whilst also being clear that we do not want to lose the constituency link to a local MP.

House of Lords Reform

House of Lords reform, much like electoral reform, has long been a favourite topic for political activists. It was a key plank of Labour’s reform offer ahead of the 1997 election, and shortly after Labour reduced the number of hereditary peers by nearly 600. Since then, attempts at reform have stalled, but Labour promised an elected senate of the nations and regions ahead of the election of May 2015. Justifying the policy, Ed Miliband argued it would restore a sense of fairness in politics: “*It’s time to reform the way we’re governed, it’s time every part of our country had a voice at the heart of our politics, it’s time to have a senate of the nations and regions which serves our whole country so that we can truly build a Britain that works for all and not just for some.*”⁴²

While House of Lords reform was not discussed with the focus groups, there is evidence that the public would support it, with a recent poll for the Daily Mirror showing that 76 per cent of people would prefer that the House of Lords moved to a new system with members elected for fixed terms. Just 11 per cent thought the current

system, of elected politicians recommending peers for appointment, works well.⁴³

A number of innovative suggestions for Lords reform were made during the conversation with Labour members and supporters. John Hackett advocated a ‘sortition’ system, where peers are replaced with a citizen’s jury for each bill that passes through parliament.⁴⁴ Others suggested that the Lords should be elected, and perhaps reduced in size. Some submissions expressed caution, recognising that experts and crossbench peers can be useful when scrutinizing legislation, and that that should be borne in mind when designing a new system.

House of Lords reform was uncontroversial amongst the advisory panel, perhaps surprisingly given the lack of consensus when Labour was last in government. There was a view that Labour’s plan for an elected senate of the nations and regions was the right one, and widespread agreement that it should be pursued.

Votes at sixteen

Votes for 16 year olds is now supported by the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP and the Greens, and 16 and 17 year olds were entitled to vote in the recent Scottish referendum. There was also support for votes at 16 in the focus groups, with one Labour considerer arguing it is a basic point of fairness:

“you have got so many other life-changing things that you can do when you are 16, you can become a mother or a father, you can join the Forces, so many other things that you can do, so why don’t we take it

IDEA IN FOCUS: THE ADDITIONAL MEMBER SYSTEM BY JONATHAN REYNOLDS MP

How we elect our MPs and our governments has a huge impact on our political culture and public life. There are many things a good electoral system should do, but the most fundamental is ensuring that how people have voted is broadly reflected in the make-up of Parliament.

That isn't what we have at the moment in the House of Commons. We use an electoral system designed for there being just two political parties, when in reality we have a multi-party system.

A better way to elect Parliament would be to introduce what already exists for the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly - the Additional Member System (AMS). Under this system, there would still be constituencies similar to what we have now, though

they would be slightly bigger. Each one of those constituencies would still elect one Member of Parliament, who would be the person who obtained the most votes (just as now).

However, voters would also cast a second vote. This vote would elect a small number of MPs covering the voter's county, or part of it if they live in a big metropolitan area. These seats would be allocated proportionally, meaning every vote counted and the MPs then sent to Westminster much better reflected the democratic will of the public.

These top-up lists would likely see Labour MPs in the South East and South West, and Conservative MPs elected in big Northern cities. For the first time, there would not be an arbitrary division between 'safe' and 'marginal' seats. No areas could be ignored, and voters everywhere could make a difference. It would be the best of what we have now, but more representative and much more relevant to the politics we have today.

seriously that we should educate them to a standard when they are 16. Because you can go out to work when you are 16, so if you are working when you are 16 why shouldn't you be able to vote?"

Another argument in favour of votes at 16 is that it will help improve voter turnout by embedding voting behaviour at an early age. If sixteen year olds, who are still at school, can go straight from citizenship classes to the polling station, they are more likely to keep voting throughout their lives. Evidence from the recent Scottish referendum proves this, demonstrating that 16 and 17 year olds had higher rates of turnout than 18–24 year olds.⁴⁵

6: DIVERSE POLITICIANS WHO ARE ROOTED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

with a democracy diversity fund, central publication of equalities data on candidates at all elections, and the use of positive action.

The unrepresentative nature of our democracy is well documented. Despite significant progress in recent years, the majority of political representatives are white and male. MPs come from a narrow range of careers and just 3 per cent of MPs were formerly employed in a manual job.

Commons Speaker John Bercow argued in his foreword to the final report of the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation that "*Parliament can do its work effectively only if its members are in tune with the experiences of the people they represent.*"⁴⁶ But research for this project

reveals that this gap continues to grow. When one focus group participant, would consider voting for the Labour party, described what a politician looks like, they said: "*He has got a very nice suit, he is a very grey man, he is probably 45+, and he is not really representative of the people who vote.*" Other focus group participants said similar, repeating the mantra that politicians are "*not like us*".

However, people do not necessarily draw a link between this disconnection and policies to improve the diversity of politicians. When focus group participants were shown data about how representative MPs were, they were surprised but not overly concerned, with one participant arguing "*man or woman or whatever*" what matters is "*they are good at the job*". When the focus groups were asked to prioritise policy areas to improve democratic participation, two of the three groups 'vetoed' the statement 'take action to improve diversity'.

The explanation for this apparent contradiction is multi-faceted, and is of course related to people's personal prejudices and identities. However, one thing that seems clear is that public discourse lacks a recognition of different forms of structural oppression. As citizens we have been taught an individualist narrative that what matters is triumph in adversity, and that seems to predispose many against forms of positive action. It also seems that personal confidence and self-belief played in to conversations with the focus groups, with people doubting their ability to engage with politics let alone become representatives. One person summarised this when she said: "*I don't think we can expect somebody like my dad or my uncle, who empty the bins, to be able to make world decisions.*"

Ideas for change

It is accepted across the Labour family that politics is not as representative as it should be. Activists recognise that this is a problem in the Labour party as much as it is across other parties, with a series

of recent events and reports underlining this. Fabian Society research has demonstrated that women and LGBT people are still facing discrimination in the selection process (with reports on disability and race to follow), and there have been well documented problems with anti-semitism. While Labour was established as a party of the working class, too few of its MPs and local councillors come from working class backgrounds. Forthcoming Fabian research will reveal the scale of the problem, with just 2 per cent of former Labour candidates who responded to a Fabian survey working in a manual profession at the time of their selection.⁴⁷ As a County Durham Fabian argued at their discussion meeting, *“we need a party for the people, not a party for the politicians.”*

Ideas for change come in two parts: ways to increase the supply of a more diverse range of candidates, and use of positive action and quotas. As Surrey Fabians argued, the first step is reaching out to the community and ensuring local parties engage with a wider range of people. Action can also be taken to make local parties more inclusive an engaging, with Grimsby Fabians mentioning the success of women’s forums in their local party. Given it is political parties who are responsible for the selection of candidates, government should do more to enable parties to make change. That is why the Speaker’s Conference recommended a democracy diversity fund which would provide local parties with financial support to develop local talent, as well as provide bursaries to assist with the cost of candidacy.⁴⁸ The access to elected office fund was established for disabled candidates in 2012, but has since been put on hold.⁴⁹

Publication of data – It has also been argued that political pressure might force political parties to take firmer action, with proposals for political parties to publish diversity data and be held to account for it. A recent Fabian report recommended that Labour should publish data on the diversity of its

candidates every six months in the run up to 2020.⁵⁰ The 2010 Equality Act legislated for this to happen, but the coalition government failed to implement it as policy, insisting political parties should use a voluntary approach.⁵¹

Positive action – A number of submissions argued in favour of positive action, which Labour has used to great success to increase the number of women MPs and to

We need a party for the people, not a party for the politicians.

improve the gender representation of party committees. Since all women shortlists have been used by the party, the number of Labour women MPs has increased and today sits at 99, and 50:50 representation begins to be in sight. Nan Sloane from the Centre for Women and Democracy has argued that we should go further than all women shortlists and consider demanding legally binding quotas to cover all political parties. While the use of shortlists for other

underrepresented groups might be less appropriate, or more difficult to achieve, submissions argued that we should think innovatively about how we might apply the principle of positive action to force an improvement.

Make the case – It is clear that a successful case has not been made to all Labour party members as to the merits of positive action. Much like the voters who participated in the focus groups, there was a concern that the ‘best’ candidate might be unfairly prevented from being selected. The party and advocates of positive action must get better at communicating the positive case, otherwise there is a danger that this sense will continue to grow.

Finally, it is also clear that a focus on protected characteristics only goes some of the way to solving the problem of political disconnection. As NEC member Ann Black argued, *“recruiting more women, ethnic minorities, gay, disabled, young or working-class candidates goes only partway towards councils and parliaments which “look like us”, because they will be seen primarily as politicians. Their other characteristics are secondary.”* More diverse politicians will not encourage participation unless we also detoxify the brand of politics.

POSSIBLE POLICY IDEAS FOR LABOUR TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- Review selection procedures for both local and national office to remove the barriers that stand in the way of under-represented groups
- Review how local parties work to ensure they are reaching out in to the community, and making themselves as inclusive as possible
- Implement a democracy diversity fund to support candidates from a range of different backgrounds, and across political parties
- Continue to use positive action to increase the representation of under-represented groups. In particular, continue to use all women shortlists and do more to make a positive case for them to party members and supporters
- Campaign for legally binding quotas for the representation of women in parliament and devolved assemblies
- Publish data about the diversity of candidates every six months in the run up to the next election

**IDEA IN FOCUS: POSITIVE
ACTION IN LABOUR,
BY NAN SLOANE**

In 1992, the number of Labour women MPs hit a new high of 37. Some people were very happy. But some were also disgusted. The huge effort put in after 1987 had only resulted in a negligible increase from 21. There seemed no prospect of rapid improvement, and no guarantee that recent progress could be maintained.

Women in the Labour party got together and began to campaign for positive action measures to be taken. They got resolutions through constituency meetings and lobbied for support. It was not easy. But they got the principle of positive action through Labour's annual conference and the National Executive Committee (NEC), then implemented it in the form of all-women shortlists – the only viable option in a first-past-the-post electoral system.

There was controversy. There were bitter meetings and angry exchanges. But the party stuck to its task, and, as a consequence, the parliamentary Labour party is now 43 per cent female. There are now

99 Labour women MPs – more than in all the other parties put together.

Positive action and quotas are not an end in themselves. They are, in fact, thoroughly objectionable. This is not because they're unfair, undemocratic or discriminatory – they are none of those things – but because they are a clear signal of the failure of parties and societies to treat women fairly, on their merits and without prejudice.

Almost no democratic country in the world has been able to achieve high levels of women's representation without quotas. From the Scandinavian role models to Rwanda, from Tunisia to Bolivia, quotas in one form or another have featured in success stories.

Labour is the only major UK-wide party to be within sight of 50:50 gender balance in parliament because, for two decades, we have looked our failure in the face and made the hard choices. The only exception was the 2001 election, for which positive action was not used, and in which only four new women MPs (and over 30 men) were elected. But we've been doing it at every election since.

We've used it at many other electoral levels, too, and had similar levels

of success. The only areas in which our performance in terms of women's representation is poor are those for which no positive action has been used – local government leadership, police and crime commissioners, and metro mayors.

Given this success, what do we do next? There is plenty of evidence – especially from Scandinavia – that if you stop positive action too soon things go backwards. So the first thing we need to do is stick to our guns, even after we have achieved 50 per cent.

But the second is to get other parties to pull their weight. In many countries, this is done by having legal or constitutional quotas. Since the UK has no written constitution, the latter might be tricky, but legally binding quotas for all parties would be eminently possible.

According to research recently published by the Centre for Women & Democracy, there are currently 27 countries using constitutional quotas, 67 using electoral law quotas, and 106 political parties in 52 countries (including Labour in the UK) using voluntary party quotas. The vast majority of countries which are ahead of us in the global league table use compulsion of some kind.

AFTERWORD: THE CULTURAL SHIFT AWAY FROM COLLECTIVE ACTION

AS WE'VE HEARD throughout this report, participation in British democracy has been faltering since the Second World War. An overall decline in voter turnout and electoral registration has combined with a growing mistrust of politicians and democratic institutions. By voting to “take back control” in the recent EU referendum, the British people have sent a powerful message about the state of British democracy that must not now be ignored.

There have been a number of cultural shifts in Britain over the last 50 years that have diminished engagement in collective decision making. One factor is the increasing power of the market, rising conversely to the decreasing power of the state. As a recent Democratic Audit report argued, “the influence which large corporations and wealthy individuals now wield on the UK political system is unprecedented”.⁵² Colin Crouch has called this “post-democracy”, with the forces of global capitalism causing politicians to prioritise links with business over links with citizens.

The financial crisis of 2008 provides an important lesson here. While government bailed out the banks to protect individual savings as well as the banking system as a whole, a prevailing perception has been that it acted in the interests of businesses and not individuals. This sense has been worsened by the painfully slow process of economic recovery. As one participant in a focus group conducted for this research argued, the “decisions that seem to be being taken just don't seem fair to working people”.

Increasing globalisation and the role

of big business has combined with the nature of our electoral system to increase the marketisation of our politics. Politics has become a race to the target audience, whose trust is won in the same way an advertising company would sell soap powder. Floating voters are ‘focused grouped’ to within an inch of their life, and then tantalised with meaningless soundbites. All while those who are unlikely to vote are ignored as an irrelevance. When the glossy and over simplified promises are not kept, voters don't have access to a refund and are running out of options for an alternative supplier.

Alongside the increasing dominance of the markets has come an increasing sense of individualism. Communities have fragmented, and support for collective action has declined. This can be seen most clearly in perceptions of the welfare state. There has been a 22 point drop, in the last thirty five years, of people thinking it is the government's responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed.⁵³ Individualism has also led to declining confidence in representative democracy. Together with higher levels of education, it has made many people less willing to accept the principle of decisions being taken by others on our behalf.

The scandals that have hit Britain's most trusted institutions have cemented these trends. The banks, parliament, the police, and the press have all been undermined by abuses of power by a small elite, behind closed doors. Politicians, in the words of David Runciman, “tiptoe around these scan-

dals, looking for some way to ally themselves with public anger”, but are painfully aware that the anger is so strong that they may not be trusted themselves.⁵⁴

These shifts have all been played out on a changing media platform, and a changing sense of what it means to be politically active. As Helena Kennedy noted in her introduction to the influential Power Report, politicians were once grainy photographs in the newspapers and distant voices on the radio but today are subjected to the “confessional sofas of daytime television”. The explosion of social media in the ten years that have followed that report has shifted attention away from traditional media and towards more populist and, sometimes, extreme platforms.

With another period of economic contraction on the horizon, the “Trumpification” of politics feels like an inevitable reaction to all of this. Voters feel pulled to populist extremes as a reaction to the impotence, opaqueness and exclusivity of the politics of the status quo.

On the left, that also offers an explanation for the indomitable rise of Jeremy Corbyn. While a portion of his support comes from hard left organisers, mainstream Labour members who have turned to him see two things that are unusual in today's politics: an unpolished sense of humanity and a willingness to challenge the status quo. Some Labour voters, motivated by the same desire for change, are likely to see similar qualities in UKIP.

The challenges facing our democracy are significant, but today's politics seem wholly unable to rise to the challenge. Piecemeal reports and reforms have come and gone, but there has been no urgency or sense of a need for wholesale reform. That is the challenge for Labour today. In the run up to 1997 democratic reform was at the heart of Labour's offer, but years in power eroded the necessary radicalism. Now, as our democracy continues to decline, it is working class voters who are losing their voice first.

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