

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Samantha Dixon MBE MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Building Safety, Fire and Democracy)
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
2 Marsham Street
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Dear Secretary of State and Minister,

We welcome the government's election strategy announced in July.

We believe many of the proposals it contains - like extending the franchise to 16-year-olds - could be transformative measures which would renew our democracy and make it fairer for ordinary people.

For this reason, we - 19 leading civil society organisations - are urging the government to urgently introduce a more ambitious Elections Bill.

There are a few key areas we want to draw your attention to now:

Money in politics

We welcome the government's commitment to strengthen rules around political donations. With trust in politics at record lows¹, it is a vital step in building confidence in our democracy. Measures to prevent foreign money from influencing our politics by preventing shell companies from making political donations are long overdue and we strongly support a two-step approach that considers both profit and ownership.

But foreign corporate donations are not the only problem. Transparency International UK highlight that in 2023, just 19 mega-donors gave £56.6million in donations, totalling 66% of all donations from private sources - something the public are deeply concerned about.²³ **A donations cap is the best way to protect our democracy and to rebuild voter confidence in the system.**

¹ <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/bsa-42-britains-democracy>

² <https://www.transparency.org.uk/publications/cheques-and-balances-countering-influence-big-money-uk-politics>

³ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/survey-results/daily/2024/09/23/a132c/1>



In addition, we would urge you to consider safeguards against future threats by following countries like Ireland and Brazil and **banning the use of cryptocurrency for political donations, given their untraceability.**

Automatic Voter Registration

Introducing automatic voter registration (AVR) is an essential step and we warmly welcome proposals to pilot this measure. In 2023 the Electoral Commission estimated that between 7 and 8 million voters were missing from the electoral rolls. We must not have another General Election with so many eligible voters missing. With the pilots of AVR in Wales reporting at the end of this year, **we would urge you to prepare to launch pilots as soon as possible with a wide range of local authorities.**

Electoral Commission Independence

Controversial powers introduced under the previous Government's Elections Act (2022) have stripped the Electoral Commission of its independence by enabling ministers to designate a Strategy and Policy statement for the regulator. This creates serious risks of interference and political capture of the regulator. **While it may seem politically expedient to maintain this power while in Government, it is essential that independence be returned to ensure that no party in power can interfere with elections.** Additionally, updates to the Speaker's Committee should also be made to ensure it cannot be subject to government control.

We look forward to working with you to ensure the Elections Bill is world-leading legislation that safeguards the integrity and fairness of our elections.

Yours sincerely,

The Undersigned

Jess Garland, Director of Research and Policy, Electoral Reform Society

Peter Jukes, Executive Editor, Byline Times

Emma Harrison, CEO, Make Votes Matter

Ben Rich, CEO, Radix Big Tent

Timi Okuwa, CEO, Black Equity Organisation

Jennifer Nadel, CEO, Compassion in Politics



Daniel Bruce, Chief Executive, Transparency International UK

Peter Munro, Coalition Policy Manager, The UK Anti-Corruption Coalition

Susan Hawley, Executive Director, Spotlight on Corruption

Kyle Taylor, Founder and Director, Fair Vote UK

Will Snell, CEO, Fairness Foundation

Paul Smyth, Executive Director, Politics in Action

Emily Crudden McIlhatton, Campaigns Organiser, Politics in Action

Eliza Lockhart, Centre for Finance and Security at RUSI

Mark E Thomas, Founder, The 99% Organisation

Ben Twomey, Chief Executive, Generation Rent

Nick Lowles, CEO, HOPE not hate

Tom Brake, CEO, Unlock Democracy

Mark Kieran, CEO, Open Britain

Professor Toby James, Co-Director, Electoral Integrity Project

