

FAIR VOTE

Rapid Response Briefing: The Rycroft Review | Contact: kyle@fairvote.uk

What the Rycroft Review says – and what needs to happen next

A Fair Vote UK explainer

The big picture

The Rycroft Review is a clear warning:

The UK's political system remains vulnerable to financial influence – including from abroad – and current rules are not sufficient to address that risk.

It does not claim the system is broken beyond repair. But it does make clear that **without action, the risks will grow.**

Crucially, the review also confirms something equally important: **We already know what needs to be done.**

The Representation of the People Bill is now the moment to act.

1. Closing the gaps in political funding

What Rycroft says

The review identifies weaknesses in how political money is regulated and recommends:

- Tightening rules on **corporate donations**, linking them to **profits generated in the UK**
- Introducing a **cap on donations from overseas electors**
- Applying rules more consistently to **non-party campaigners and candidates**, including year-round transparency
- Introducing a **moratorium on cryptoasset donations** until effective regulation is in place

Why this matters

These reforms address both:

- **Existing loopholes** (e.g. corporate structures, weak checks)
- **Emerging risks** (e.g. crypto-based funding)

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The review is clear: without stronger safeguards, **money can enter politics in ways that are difficult to trace and challenge.**

Fair Vote's view

These are essential and welcome steps. But transparency alone is not enough.

Even fully transparent systems can still allow disproportionate influence by a small number of large donors.

Where we go further:

- Introduce **caps on the size of political donations**
- Set **tighter limits on campaign spending**

Rycroft does not fully resolve these questions – but it clearly points toward them.

2. Making enforcement real

What Rycroft says

The review highlights the need to strengthen enforcement by:

- **Expanding the Electoral Commission's powers** to obtain and share information
- Improving **coordination between agencies**
- **Strengthening criminal offences** and sanctions
- Ensuring **policing capacity to investigate complex cases**, including foreign interference

Why this matters

Rules only work if they can be enforced.

The current system:

- Struggles to investigate complex financial flows
- Lacks sufficient deterrence
- Can be too slow or fragmented to respond effectively

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Fair Vote's view

This is one of the most critical areas. Without meaningful enforcement **rules risk becoming symbolic rather than effective.**

The review reinforces a long-standing issue: **The UK has rules, but not always the tools to enforce them properly.**

3. Strengthening the rules for political parties as a first line of defence

What Rycroft says

The review places responsibility on political parties themselves, recommending:

- Stronger **"know your donor" checks**, closer to anti-money laundering standards
- A **code of conduct** for political parties
- Better **information-sharing** on risks and threats
- Standardised **financial reporting formats**

Why this matters

Parties are not just passive recipients of donations – they are **gatekeepers**.

Weak internal systems increase the risk that:

- Problematic donations are accepted
- Risks are missed before damage is done

Fair Vote's view

This is an important shift. The review recognises that safeguarding democracy is not just about regulators - it also depends on how seriously parties take their responsibilities.

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4. Tackling influence beyond donations

What Rycroft says

The review takes a broader view of influence, recommending:

- A ban on **foreign-funded political advertising**
- Stronger **transparency (imprint) requirements** for online ads
- Greater priority given to **online interference threats** across government
- Tightening of **lobbying rules**, including closing gaps for foreign actors
- Wider consideration of influence through **think tanks and political networks**

Why this matters

Political influence does not operate through donations alone.

It also flows through:

- Advertising
- Information campaigns
- Lobbying
- Broader political ecosystems

Fair Vote's view

This is one of the strongest aspects of the review. It recognises that **modern political influence is systemic, not isolated**. Regulation must therefore reflect the **full ecosystem**, not just one part of it.

5. What this means for the Representation of the People Bill

The Rycroft Review is not a theoretical exercise. It does the following:

- Endorses the direction of the current Bill
- Identifies where it should go further
- Provides a clear evidence base for strengthening it

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This creates a simple test:

**Will the Bill implement these recommendations
– or leave known risks in place?**

Fair Vote's position

We welcome the Rycroft Review.

It confirms:

- The risks are real
- The solutions are known
- The Government is right to act

But it also makes something else clear:

**This is no longer about identifying the problem. It's
about whether there is the political will to fix it.**

If the Representation of the People Bill:

- Closes funding loopholes
- Strengthens enforcement
- Addresses modern forms of influence

It will strengthen UK democracy.

In short

- The risks are clear
- The recommendations are clear
- The opportunity to act is here

At this stage, inaction is a political choice.