

Democracy Network response to the Labour NPF Consultation Safe & Secure Communities

The Democracy Network represents organisations and individuals working on issues of power, democracy and voice across all four nations of the UK.

This submission only represents the views of the signatories (listed below).

Devolution of power to communities

Genuine devolution requires finance-raising and decision-making powers to be devolved, including to a neighbourhood level. Any plans to devolve power should include direct participatory democracy and forms of deliberative democracy (such as [Citizens' Assemblies](#) and [Participatory Budgeting](#)). Boundaries for local structures need to be protected from arbitrary or politically motivated change, to allow them to develop effective democratic cultures and focus on delivering.

Proportional representation (PR) for general elections

Adopting PR for general and local elections would make politicians more accountable, empower voters and communities. PR is [already successful](#) where it is adopted in the nations. The introduction of PR [in New Zealand](#) led to a more diverse and representative Parliament. BME communities are disproportionately concentrated in cities; under the current electoral system this means that a significant population are not in swing seats and therefore rarely influence who represents them in Parliament. We urge the NPF to commit to replacing FPTP with PR.

House of Lords reform

We recommend a fully, or substantially, elected House with real diversity of candidates which would make for better lawmaking and scrutiny with Peers held accountable to the public. In September 2022, [55, or 7.3%](#), of Peers were from minority ethnic groups and [28% were women](#).

Reducing barriers to voting

There are [widespread fears](#) that the new voter ID laws will raise barriers to voting. We support reducing barriers to voting by scrapping photo voter ID, introducing automatic voter registration and providing investment in civic education. There is a serious risk that the introduction of mandatory voter identification requirements will prevent black and ethnic minority groups from voting. We also support calls to drop the voting age to 16.

Improved transparency and accountability in our politics

A lack of transparency erodes public trust in democracy. We can increase transparency and accountability by: requiring FOI requests to be responded to in a timely manner; a more comprehensive, statutory lobbying register or better quality, regular departmental disclosures; the ethics watchdogs, including Independent Adviser on Ministerial Interests and the Advisory Committee on Business Interests, should be placed on a statutory footing and equipped with the necessary resources and sanctioning powers to enforce the rules; cap political donations at £10,000 per year per donor; and new measures to block foreign political donations.

Ensure a thriving, free media sector

A healthy media is essential for a healthy democracy. Three immediate steps should be taken: address concentrations of ownership within legacy media and Big Tech; invest in alternative media infrastructure underpinned by civic, non-commercial values, particularly local news; and create a Citizens Assembly to determine the future purpose, remit and structure of the BBC in the digital age, including measures to strengthen its independence.

Civic education

We recommend the implementation of a statutory right to impartial, non-partisan education for citizenship and political literacy for every young person in primary and secondary education. Public Service Media should have specific duties to ensure the public understand and can participate in political systems.

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