

How to Fix Democracy – Detailed

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Introduction

Our democracy is broken. This white paper details a solution to this problem that gets around the problems of proportional representation by making representatives (MPs) directly responsible to the electorate and informs them of the desires of that electorate. This means that MPs will know the will of the people and will be able to act on it directly.

This document falls into three sections relating to policies and the policy poll, representatives, and the executive.

Policies and the policy poll

Registered parties propose policies. Parties must be registered to propose policies and the registration fee needs to be set at a level that will deter cranks but encourage local interest groups as well as national parties. Policies need to be sensible, costed, justified, and ultimately implementable. A policy proposing the compulsory serving of asparagus at breakfast (Blackadder III: Dish and Dishonesty, BBC 1987), for example, would not be implementable and would therefore not be acceptable. All policies should be independently costed by an organisation such as the National Audit Office (NAO).

Parties would be free to propose new policies and withdraw old policies at any time. Voters would not be able to rate withdrawn policies though these should remain on the poll for a period of time. Parties should not be able to chop and change policies in order to confuse the electorate and if a party changes its direction, that should be made clear.

Policies are grouped by topic, such as health, defence, education, etc., and are presented to the electorate in the form of an extended poll. Policies can also be limited to specific regions or constituencies so that local interest issues aren't skewed by being offered in areas where they have no impact.

Every registered voter has access to the poll at all times. They can rate each policy according to how much they agree with the policy and how important the policy is to them. Voters need only express an opinion on policies that they are particularly interested in and do not have to rate every policy. Voters are free to access the poll and change their views at any time.

Every parliamentary period (6 months) a snapshot of the poll is taken, the policies are rated, and the most popular or highest rating policies form the overall government strategy for that period.

Representatives

Every 5 years, each constituency elects a representative. When a voter goes to place their vote, they can see how closely each candidate matches their position on the policies that matter to them and they can choose someone who represents their views to represent them. For standing MPs, the voter will also be able to see how that person stood at the start of their term and how they voted in parliament. Since, it doesn't make any sense to vote for someone who fundamentally disagrees with the voter's viewpoint, this means that the person elected to represent a constituency would be the one whose views closely matched those of the electorate.

For this to work, voting would need to be electronic. Voting stations would need to be set up in libraries and public places where computers are available. The system would need to be very easy to use so as to not disenfranchise those who are not tech savvy. The system would also need to have very good security since it would be a prime target for hackers and those seeking to subvert the will of the people.

There would be no need for general elections since parties are no longer vying for control. Constituency elections could be staggered meaning that parliament can continue to function and there would be no need to put the business of running the country on hold whilst elections are held.

The executive

MPs are charged with representing the views of their constituents. They will have access to the polling system to get an up to date view of how their constituency feels on particular issues. If an issue is being debated in parliament and the electors feel particularly strongly on this issue, then they can register their feelings through the poll. MPs will therefore be informed at all times.

Elected representatives will need to select an executive from amongst themselves. They will need to decide on the best way to achieve this, though the suggestion here is that they use the poll and form an executive based on those that most closely reflect the views of the country as a whole.

The poll is intended to inform overall government policy and not the nitty-gritty detail of each policy. MPs would still need to debate issues and come up with solutions that suit the situation. MPs would be free to ignore the will of the people if circumstance determines this necessary, however, this would be reflected in their profile when they stand for re-election. Standing MPs would need to convince the electorate that they did the right thing. It would be up to parliament to resolve any conflict in policy and also to determine the priorities. The government would be free to react to changing world events and wouldn't necessarily need to consult the people first, though the poll could be used to get a quick response from the public provided that they are kept in the loop.

Each MP would be representing his constituency and not any particular party and so there would be no need for an opposition. There would be no need for the whip system as every vote would be a free vote. The government would no longer be trying to force party policy through a hostile parliament and so the decision making process should be much smoother as MPs seek to reach a consensus.

Summary

This system would mean

- Open government
- Truly representative democracy
- Government always informed on public opinion
- Re-engage disenfranchised voters
- Minority party policies could form part of government policy
- Parties are free to adhere to their core values and wouldn't have to compromise to attract the popular vote or get into power
- Everyone has a say in what goes on in parliament
- An end to ad hominem government.