

Dear Colleagues,

Paper 2/2019: Sustaining Our Democracy

How can we strengthen the Union, ensuring that the government serves people in every part of the UK? How can we encourage more people, especially young people, to participate in our democracy?

This discussion paper is looking at another of the five areas covered by the Prime Minister's Policy Commission, Sustaining Our Democracy. Watch our brief introductory video with the Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP.

As always, discussions will be more greatly informed if groups are able to include members and non-members from different age groups. Please use the opportunity of this discussion to **reach out to new voters in your constituency**. Let people know that you are interested in *them* and want to understand *their* perspective.

We want to ensure that as many associations and as many members are able to engage in this vital and wide-ranging discussion. The closing date for this brief is therefore **5 May**. The discussion on Global Britain remains open until the end of February.

Please send your responses to the paper, via CPF.Papers@conservatives.com, using the associated response form published alongside this paper in the News section of the CPF website.

A summary of responses to this paper will be sent to the Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP; CPF Chairman, George Freeman MP; and the Prime Minister's Policy Unit within a month of the closing date for submissions.

The next paper will be on the **Post-Brexit Economy**, and will be published the week of 6 May. Thank you. We look forward to hearing your ideas on this important topic.

The CPF Team

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P.S. To help generate interest and awareness, please advertise your local discussion and post a photo of your meeting on your website and social media pages.

Sustaining Our Democracy

"Meeting the challenges that our democracy faces, and reaching the many different groups that we all must serve, requires us to work collaboratively with a range of experts across the public, private and third sector." (Chloe Smith, Minister for the Constitution, 25 January 2019)¹

"The 2016 referendum vote to leave the EU marked a turning point in the UK's political system. In the previous two decades, the country had undergone a series of democratic reforms, during which it seemed to evolve into a more typical European liberal democracy. The establishment of a Supreme Court, adoption of the Human Rights Act, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution, proportional electoral systems, executive mayors and the growth in multi-party competition all marked profound changes to the British political tradition. Brexit...has already produced enduring crises for the party system, Parliament and the core executive, with uniquely contested governance over critical issues, and a rapidly changing political landscape. Other recent trends are no less fast-moving, such as the revival of two-party dominance in England, the re-creation of some mass membership parties and the disruptive challenges of social media." (The UK's Changing Democracy: The 2018 Democratic Audit, 1 November 2018)²

"It has become commonplace to describe Western countries, especially in Europe, as experiencing a crisis of democracy. ... One of the main aspects...has been voters' disconnection from politics and the lack of trust towards the political elites expressed, among other outlets, by a rise in populist parties. ... In the early 21th (sic) century the UK has experienced a crisis of confidence and trust not so much in the political system as a whole, as in the domestic political elites which embody it in the eyes of the wider population." (The Crisis of Democracy in the United Kingdom, 2015)³

The first objective of the Cabinet Office is to "Maintain the integrity of the Union, coordinate the security of the realm and sustain a flourishing democracy."⁴ So, it is worth starting by celebrating that the United Kingdom "is a stable democracy that regularly holds free elections and is home to a vibrant media sector."⁵ In recent UK elections, voter turnout has risen, while both the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register has improved, with the electoral register for the 2017 General Election reaching a record level of 46.8 million electors. 2018 marked the 100th anniversary of some women getting a right to vote and the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act.

Yet 100 years on, there are still certain groups in society who feel unable to register to vote or to take part in elections. Moreover:

"Political rights and civil liberties around the world deteriorated to their lowest point in more than a decade in 2017, extending a period characterized by emboldened autocrats, beleaguered democracies, and the United States' withdrawal from its leadership role in the global struggle for human freedom. ...

"The autocratic regimes in Russia and China clearly recognize that to maintain power at home, they must squelch open debate, pursue dissidents, and compromise rules-based institutions beyond their borders. The citizens and leaders of democracies must now recognize that the reverse is also true: To maintain their own freedoms, they must defend the rights of their counterparts in all countries. The reality of globalization is that our fates are interlinked."⁵

Last July saw the inaugural National Democracy Week to commemorate the anniversary of the passing of the Equal Franchise Act in 1928. The purpose of this week is to bring together all relevant groups and organisations whose common commitment to democratic engagement and participation can demonstrate not only the strength of our democracy, but also the need to continue to campaign for the democratic rights and responsibilities of those who are currently under-registered.⁶

Questions for discussion

1. How can we strengthen the Union, ensuring that the government serves people in every part of the UK?
2. How can we strengthen public trust in civic institutions?
3. What more can be done to promote positive community relationships and a sense of “ownership” over local areas?
4. How can we encourage more people, especially young people, to participate in our democracy?
5. How can the Conservative Party more effectively reach out to diverse communities?
6. Is there any other question you think should have been asked or observation you would like to make?

Endnotes

¹ *Chloe Smith speech at SOLACE*, Cabinet Office, 25 January 2019: [link](#)

² Dunleavy, P. et al. 2018. *The UK's Changing Democracy: The 2018 Democratic Audit*. London: LSE Press. DOI: [link](#)

³ Baker D., Schnapper P. 2015. *The Crisis of Democracy in the United Kingdom*. In: *Britain and the Crisis of the European Union*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, p.91: [link](#)

⁴ *Cabinet Office single departmental plan*, updated 23 May 2018: [link](#)

⁵ *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*, Freedom House: [link](#)

⁶ *Every Voice Matters: building a democracy that works for everyone*, Cabinet Office, 19 December 2017: [link](#); see also *Democratic Engagement: Respecting, Protecting and Promoting Our Democracy*, Cabinet Office, 24 January 2019: [link](#)