

Written Evidence from Make Votes Matter (TEB 56)

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee The Elections Bill inquiry

Dear Mr Wragg and all the members of the Committee,

We are deeply disappointed by the government's plan to extend First Past the Post to elections for the Mayor of London, Combined Authority mayors, English local authority mayors, and Police and Crime Commissioners. This decision will make our elections less democratic and disenfranchise millions of voters.

In 2021, over a million voters used their second preference votes to help decide 27 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections. This ensured that candidates with minimal public support were not handed oversight of our police. In an area like policing, which relies on the confidence of the community, it is crucially important for these officials to have broad support. Without it, PCC candidates like John Prescott would have been entrusted to oversee policing in Humberside in 2012, even though he had received less than a quarter of the vote.

First Past the Post (FPTP) will make politicians less accountable to the communities they serve. The Supplementary Vote (SV) system has enabled voters to remove mayors or PCCs if they are not happy with their performance. If FPTP were imposed on these elections, then figures such as James Palmer in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, or Steve Gibbons in Copeland would have won office even though a majority of voters preferred an alternative. The SV voting system, on the other hand, means that, even in electoral heartlands, like Doncaster or Surrey, independent candidates with majority support have previously beaten major parties.

Moving these elections to FPTP will not only deny millions a real say in decisions that affect their lives, but it will make our politics more polarised and less representative of the diverse preferences of the electorate.

Already, in Westminster elections, 71 percent of votes didn't count towards the election outcome, with millions voting for candidates with no chance of getting elected, or adding onto insurmountable majorities of candidates in safe seats. The only countries in Europe to use FPTP for general elections are the UK and Belarus. Extending FPTP to these local elections would leave us even further behind most democracies than we already are.

Moreover, this move fails to honour the spirit with which the government said it was introducing the Elections Bill; that of strengthening our democracy. By adding this change in a last-minute instruction to the Bill, the government has reduced the ability of MPs to scrutinise it. There has also been minimal consultation with civil society groups, or the general public, about the impact of this change.

For example, in the debate on the instruction on 20 September, an MP claimed that the current voting system for mayoral elections leads to huge numbers of spoiled votes. Yet this claim cited only the 2021 London Mayoral election, which used a new ballot paper design due to an abnormally large number of candidates. The MP ignored the fact that other elections with SV have far fewer candidates, and far lower rates of spoiled ballots.

In Greater Manchester and in the West Midlands, which both used the same SV voting system but with a simpler ballot paper design, the rate of spoiled ballots was less than half of what it was in London. Indeed, the rate of spoiled ballots in the 2016 London election was also less than half of what it was in 2021 (1.9% in 2016, compared to 4.3% in 2021). This indicates that it was the ballot paper (which had changed), rather than the voting system (which had not), that caused the high rate of spoiled ballots.

To use one anomalous example to justify such a dramatic change is irresponsible and risks damaging public trust in our democracy. The MP made a basic error which could have been examined if the committee had the chance to question experts on the matter. But because this significant change was brought as an instruction after the evidence had already been taken, these misleading claims have not been corrected. That is why it is so important there are further evidence sessions specifically examining the voting system.

The prime minister has promised to champion left-behind communities, but reducing the power of their votes is hardly the way to do it. Over 30,000 people have signed a [petition](#) by Make Votes Matter, calling on the government to reconsider their decision.

We ask the Committee to use this opportunity to open up this discussion on our voting system. We welcome the opportunity for dialogue with the government on this topic, and look forward to discussing it further with you at the committee hearing, at which we are keen to present evidence.

Best regards,

Klina Jordan, Make Votes Matter

Naomi Smith, Best for Britain

Mark Cridge, mySociety

Tom Brake, Unlock Democracy

Neal Lawson, Compass

Jennifer Nadel, Compassion in Politics

Josh Russell, Peter Barden and Tom de Grunwald, Forward Democracy

James Robertson, Sortition Foundation

Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party

Zack Polanski, Green London Assembly Member & Democracy spokesperson

Mandu Reid, Leader, Women's Equality Party

James Campbell, Saudade

Keith Garrett, Rebooting Democracy

Sandy Martin, Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform
Mike Butcher, Tech For UK
Matt Chocqueel-Mangan, Vote for Policies
Keith Sharp, Liberal Democrats for Electoral Reform
Jessie Joe Jacobs, The Democracy Network
Kyle Taylor, Fair Vote UK
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