

# **A National Commission on Electoral Reform Terms of Reference**



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The APPG Secretariat would like to thank the many constitutional experts and academics who took the time to review and feedback on early iterations of the Terms of Reference, including:

- Lewis Baston, political analyst and author
- Anwen Elias, Reader in Politics at the Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University and member of the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales
- Dr Jess Garland, Director of Research and Policy, Electoral Reform Society
- Hana Kapetanovic, Lead Researcher, Demos
- Dr David Klemperer, Research Fellow, Constitution Society
- Nicola McEwen, Professor of Public Policy and Governance at the University of Glasgow
- Dr Rebecca McKee, Senior Researcher, Institute for Government
- Pippa Norris, Paul F. McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and Director of the Electoral Integrity Project
- Jack Pannell, Researcher, Institute for Government
- Alan Renwick, Professor of Democratic Politics and Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit, University College London
- Dr Alan Wager, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change

## Key sources

The Terms of Reference draw on the experience of a wealth of past reform and review processes, including:

- Royal Commission on the Electoral System (New Zealand 1986)
- The Plant Commission (1993)
- Independent Commission on the Voting System (Jenkins Commission, 1998)
- British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2004)
- The Arbuthnott Commission (Scotland, 2004-06)
- Ontario Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform (2006)
- Canadian House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform (2016)
- Expert Panel on Electoral Reform, Senedd Commission (2017)
- Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016-2018)
- Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK (Constitution Unit, 2022)

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## Parliamentary disclaimer

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group.

# OFFICERS' INTRODUCTION

In November 2024, our APPG launched its call for a National Commission on Electoral Reform in the wake of the most distorted general election result in British history. Since then, the urgency and importance of this issue has grown unabated. Britain's electorate has become more fragmented, its voting preferences more diverse, and its politics more volatile than ever before.

Combined with these circumstances, the First Past the Post voting system will continue to produce increasingly unfair and unrepresentative results, will continue eroding public trust in politics, and even threatens to undermine the resilience and stability of our democratic system.

The Labour Party recognises that First Past the Post is causing distrust in politics and Ministers are acting on this understanding by abolishing its use for mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. We believe the Government has a responsibility to urgently address the use of First Past the Post for general elections as well.

A National Commission on Electoral Reform is a proposal for how the Government could engage with this issue. The Terms of Reference set out here propose an approach to building consensus about what a suitable voting system for modern Britain looks like, while at the same time fostering a national debate about our elections and democracy.

Our team has developed this proposal in consultation with a wide range of constitutional experts, academics and institutions, based on the lessons and best practice of past commissions and reviews, in Britain and around the world. It does not purport to be the only means by which a review of the voting system could be delivered; instead it sets out one viable approach to combining broad consultation, meaningful deliberation, and expert evidence into an effective, independent process capable of commanding public trust and confidence.

The unprecedented support for addressing the electoral system that now exists - amongst the public, within the governing party, and across Parliament - provides a unique political opportunity. In publishing this document, we offer the Government a plan with which to seize this opportunity: by establishing a National Commission on Electoral Reform.

Alex Sobel MP  
*Chair*

Ellie Chowns MP  
*Vice Chair*

Lisa Smart MP  
*Vice Chair*

Lord Balfe  
*Vice Chair*

## Rationale

**T**here is recognition across the political spectrum that the First Past the Post (FPTP) voting system is under growing strain due to long-term trends and new political conditions. The 2024 general election delivered the most disproportionate result in British history. A majority government has been elected on one third of the popular vote (the lowest share ever to deliver a majority of seats), the electorate is fragmented between more parties than ever, and there is a record mismatch between the make-up of Parliament and the votes cast by the public. These results are the latest in a decades-long trajectory in which winning vote shares have steadily fallen and voter choice has become increasingly diverse and volatile. The 2025 local elections show that this pattern has continued, with many experts and commentators now stating the UK has entered an unprecedented era of multi-party politics.

Under FPTP, this fragmentation and volatility has complex and unpredictable consequences, including the potential for increasingly unrepresentative election results, greater instability in British politics and governance, and challenges to the fairness and legitimacy of UK elections.

Trust in politics is at an all-time low and the Government has committed to reversing this. Labour's official policy recognises that "the flaws in the current voting system are contributing to the distrust and alienation we see in politics". Parties representing a total of 500 MPs (77% of all MPs) agree with that position - and the British Social Attitudes survey has found a record 60% public support for changing the voting system. A National Commission on Electoral Reform (NCER) will seek to build consensus on a way forward.

## Purpose

The purpose of the NCER is to answer the following four questions in a manner able to command the trust and confidence of the British public:

1. What are the criteria for a suitable voting system for general elections in modern Britain?
2. Does the current First Past the Post voting system meet these criteria?
3. Are there other voting systems which might better meet these criteria?
4. Based on these criteria, on balance, which voting system would best serve modern Britain?

As it examines these questions, the NCER should also seek to:

- Foster a national conversation about the electoral system and the impact it has on Britain's politics and democracy;
- Identify the most effective approaches to clearly and accessibly explain the issues, and promote its recommendations, to the public at large.

## Structure

The NCER will be composed of the following components:

### Panel of Independent Commissioners

The Panel of Independent Commissioners acts as the executive of the NCER, gathers and considers evidence and is responsible for writing the NCER's reports. It has a duty to ensure that the reports' recommendations reflect the values, views and preferences of citizens, informed by the evidence of experts and the experience of practitioners.

It is composed of up to seven independent individuals who are not affiliated to any party, one of whom is an independent Chairperson of appropriate standing. They are appointed by the Government in consultation with the relevant Select Committees to reflect a variety of backgrounds, skillsets and life experiences from a range of communities, regions and nations of the UK.

In order to perform its role, the Panel of Independent Commissioners must seek evidence, advice and recommendations from the Expert Panel and Voters' Forum - as well as holding evidence hearings and consulting widely amongst the public and practitioners.

### Secretariat

A staff team led by a senior civil servant to provide all required administrative support to the Panel of Independent Commissioners.

### Expert Panel

The Expert Panel has a duty to provide clear, politically impartial advice and evidence to both the Panel of Independent Commissioners and the Voters' Forum. This should cover subjects including: voting system design, British election data and modelling; the features and performance of different voting systems in the UK's devolved bodies and around the world; impacts on diversity and equality; and other issues and considerations impacting upon the questions the NCER has been tasked with. The Expert Panel is made up of seven academics and practitioners with expertise in electoral systems, parliamentary working and governance.



## Voters' Forum

A deliberative democratic body of around 100 members of the public, selected to accurately reflect the diversity of the electorate, supported by professional and impartial facilitators.

The Voters' Forum brings together a representative group of those eligible to vote in UK general elections in order to deliberate and make recommendations to inform the work of the NCER in a range of areas. This should include: identifying principles and values; recommending and weighting criteria for assessing voting systems; assessing how different voting systems perform against these principles, values and criteria; evaluating trade-offs; and making overall recommendations.

In order to perform this role the Voters' Forum will be facilitated in accordance with best practice, including a learning phase informed by the Expert Panel and facilitated deliberation to ensure inclusive discussion and consideration of different viewpoints.

## Consultation

Through its component bodies, the NCER will consult amongst both the public at large and practitioners (electoral administrators and regulators, former and current representatives elected under a range of voting systems, civil society organisations, overseas counterparts to these groups with relevant experience).

The NCER should seek evidence as widely and openly as possible, including through a call for written evidence, a transparent online consultation platform, at public evidence hearings featuring experts and practitioners, as well as having the ability to commission polling, research and surveys or to hold regional listening events and workshops.

## Stakeholder liaison

At key points throughout its work, the NCER will liaise with, update and seek views from decision-making stakeholders in Parliament and Government, including Ministers, civil servants, opposition parties, relevant Select Committees and All Party Parliamentary Groups, and parliamentary clerks. This contact should be used to raise awareness of decision-makers' perspectives and concerns which may need to be investigated and addressed through the work of the NCER, without impeding on its independence or the primacy of the values, views and preferences of citizens in determining its conclusions.

# Timeline

The NCER is expected to launch within three months of its announcement, allowing for appointments and setup. Its final report is expected within 12 months of launch.

# Transparency and communication

All documents, including all evidence and recommendations sent to or produced by the NCER's component bodies, will be published online. The final report must clearly explain how public and stakeholder input was considered and how it influenced final conclusions.

The NCER will develop and deploy a communications strategy to engage with the public and foster a national debate via the media, raising awareness and understanding of the issues it is examining as well as complementing its consultation and stakeholder engagement. Members of the Panel of Independent Commissioners and Expert Panel will be expected to play an active role in promoting the process, considerations and recommendations of the NCER as part of this national conversation, with participants in the Voters' Forum also invited and supported to do so.

# Outputs and next steps

The NCER will publish interim findings setting out its answers to the first two questions it has been set, in order to provoke political debate and media interest, help indicate the direction of travel, stimulate further and deeper consultation with the public and stakeholders, and to prepare the ground for its final report and recommendations.

The NCER will produce a final report which will be laid before Parliament on its publication. Within three months, the Government will be expected to provide a statement to the House giving detailed consideration to the report and setting out its next steps. The Panel of Independent Commissioners will reconvene following the Government statement to agree any further response, including the option of reconvening the other components of the NCER. Relevant Select Committees and other parliamentary bodies will hold the Government to account over its implementation of the recommendations.



The **APPG for Fair Elections** campaigns for clean and fair elections where all votes count by:

- Replacing First Past the Post with a proportional system that makes seats match votes.
- Eliminating dark money and undemocratic influence from politics.
- Countering disinformation in public discourse.

[www.fairelections.uk](http://www.fairelections.uk)

## Why a National Commission?

### **The public supports electoral reform**

Support for changing the voting system is at 60%, according to the British Social Attitudes survey, a record high. A majority of supporters of all political parties back electoral reform while just 36% of people want to keep the current system. Those with low levels of trust and confidence in politics are most supportive of change.

### **Parliament is calling for electoral reform**

In December 2024, the House of Commons voted in favour of moving to a proportional system for the first time in history. Since then, the APPG for Fair Elections has become the largest all-party group in Westminster, with over 150 members, and MPs from across the House have regularly called for the Government to take action on the voting system.

### **The Government knows we need electoral reform**

The Labour Party's official policy recognises that "the flaws in the current voting system are contributing to the distrust and alienation we see in politics". The Government is already acting on this understanding by abolishing the use of First Past the Post for mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

### **The first step is a National Commission on Electoral Reform**

The Terms of Reference contained in this publication set out how a National Commission on Electoral Reform could allow citizens, alongside experts, to review the voting system, draw insights, evaluate the options and make recommendations in a way capable of commanding public trust and confidence.