

29 IDEAS TO CLEAN UP BRITISH POLITICS TO BE PUT TO NATION

Weekend voting and 'none of the above' option top the bill, as POWER2010 unique nationwide vote launches today

Weekend voting, 'none of the above' on ballot papers and the public setting MPs' wages are some of the top 29 ideas to mend Britain's broken politics – as people prioritise practical reforms that strengthen parliament and give people a real voice in key issues – over longer-term fundamental change.

The 29 reforms were selected by a group of British citizens scientifically chosen to represent the UK as a whole at a unique deliberative event held last weekend as part of the Power2010 campaign. Those on the shortlist all received 50% or more support from participants at the end of the two day "Deliberative Polling®" event.

The group's recommendations will be put to the country ahead of the General Election in a nationwide poll starting today on www.power2010.org.uk.

In a surprising twist, populist reforms such as a fully elected House of Lords and lowering the voting age to 16 came relatively low down the priority list - with open primaries to select Parliamentary Candidates and a referendum on English devolution not even making the cut of options to be put to the public vote.

James Fishkin, Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University said:

"This was a good microcosm of the entire country brought to a single place. They came from all regions, walks of life and political viewpoints. They worked hard to clarify their priorities and on about two thirds of the issues their views changed significantly. They wanted more deliberation, by citizens in public consultations and by Parliament in Select Committees. They moved away from populist proposals such as direct election of the Prime Minister or making party manifestos legally binding. They really weighed the competing arguments and told us what they thought the country needed now."

Participants were asked to rate the proposed reforms before they started the weekend's debate, and again at the end. Before deliberation, a majority supported "having a referendum to decide whether to devolve England" (51.7%), "electing the Prime Minister directly" (50%), and "making party manifesto promises legally binding" (59.30%), but after deliberation all three lost majority support decreasing to 26.2%, 25% 18.3% respectively.

Paul Senior from Liverpool, one of the citizens chosen to represent the UK at the event, said:

"I, like many others, have been frustrated by the MPs expenses scandal and the state of our political system. This event has show that given the opportunity, people do care a great deal

about politics and are prepared to put a lot of effort into debate. They are prepared to listen carefully to other points of view, and to consider the facts, even when they don't agree with the conclusions reached. Having taking part, I certainly now feel more positive about politics, and more likely to engage with it in the future.”

The Joseph Rowntree-backed **POWER2010** campaign, which has already signed up more than 10,000 people, is launching the nationwide vote today to find the five most popular ideas to fix politics and put them to every candidate standing at this year’s General Election.

Helena Kennedy, Chair of the Power2010 campaign said:

“It’s simple. If candidates want to get elected they will have to listen to people and fix politics according to popular priorities. Everyone knows politics is broken. What we’re doing is getting people-power to fix it. We’ve got clear recommendations from this weekend’s event and now we want everyone to vote on those – and have their say.”

The 29 ideas (in order of how highly they were rated by the group) are:

- Strengthening select committees
- Allowing voters to vote for ‘none of the above’ on ballot papers
- Increasing the number of issues decided by free votes
- Establishing a duty of public consultation on controversial matters
- Limiting or doing away with state databases that violate individual citizens privacy and scrapping the plans for a National Identity Card
- Scheduling Election Day on a weekend
- Using public consultation to compose a stronger Bill of Rights
- Reducing the governments use of statutory instruments to bypass parliamentary scrutiny
- Allowing a special referendum on whether to remove an MP from office if enough of his or her constituents request it AND holding a fresh election to choose a new MP
- Expanding the scope of the Freedom of Information Act
- Consulting the public on the wages expenses and working conditions of MPs
- Holding a referendum on replacing the pound with the euro
- Giving MPs control of the parliamentary timetable
- Requiring political parties to practice more internal democracy
- Having compulsory politics lessons in school
- Allowing only English MPs to vote on matters affecting only England and only English and Welsh MPs to vote on matters affecting only England and Wales
- Banning members of the House of Lords from becoming government ministers
- Giving more decision making and taxation powers to local government
- Requiring full disclosure of MPs and civil servants communications with lobbyists
- Limiting the amount of money that individuals can donate to parties and candidates
- Having a parliament sit for a fixed term
- Banning retired MPs from working in private sector jobs associated with their former positions for a period of years
- Changing the electoral system to allow for Proportional Representation

- Choosing the Mayors of population centres by direct election
- Barring the appointment of former MPs to the House of Lords
- Having a written constitution
- Creating an Upper Chamber that represents different sectors like education transport and financial services
- Having a fully elected House of Lords
- Lowering the voting age to 16

The shortlist of 29 reforms all received 50% or more support from people that were involved in the two day deliberative event in London.

Participants were asked to rank each proposal on a scale of 1-10. The ranking of the shortlist of 29 is based on the mean score given to each reform.

For more information, including interviews, photos, and a full list of results, please contact:
Melissa@dhacommunications.co.uk 020 7793 4035 /079767 636 228

Notes to editors

About Power2010

Today, **POWER2010** launches its unique nationwide vote. The public can go to POWER2010.org.uk check out the 29 ideas and make their choice. The top five ideas will be put to every candidate at the General Election.

For more information on the campaign, see www.power2010.org.uk

About the event

Power2010 conducted a national online consultation which produced more than 4,000 suggestions for political and constitutional reform. A team at Southampton University distilled the public suggestions to 58 reform proposals. A briefing document, vetted by a distinguished advisory committee, provided the public with arguments for and against each proposal.

YouGov provided a nationally representative sample of 345 who took an initial survey. 127 of those 345 gathered for the weekend in London to deliberate. There are very few statistically significant differences between the deliberators and the rest of the 345. We also have a separate weighted YouGov sample of 300 and the deliberators match up extremely well with this sample in both attitudes and demographics. The deliberators, while somewhat smaller in number than initially planned, are adequate in number for their representativeness and their opinion changes to be analyzed statistically.

The deliberators are representative in terms of region, age, ethnicity, income, party ID, employment and virtually all the specific policy issues in the initial questionnaire. There were, however, more males and people interested in politics in the sample, compared to the control group. However, there was no difference in whether they voted or in whether or how they consumed the media.

In effect, the experiment gathered the whole country in one room to deliberate about 58 complex issues of political reform.

Deliberative Polling®

Deliberative Polling is a form of public consultation in which scientific samples are consulted before and after they have deliberated about an issue. James S. Fishkin of Stanford University conceived the process in 1988 and has developed it since in collaboration with Robert C. Luskin of the University of Texas, Austin. Deliberative Polls have been conducted in many countries around the world including the US, Britain, Italy, Denmark, Australia, China, Japan, Brazil, Argentina. The case for Deliberative Polling is made in James S. Fishkin's book *When the People Speak* (Oxford 2009). More about the process and its results can be found at <http://cdd.stanford.edu>. Deliberative Polling® is a trade mark of James S. Fishkin and any fees from the trade mark are used to support research.

Evaluation

The participants were asked a series of questions to evaluate the Deliberative Poll. 99% of participants rated the overall process as valuable, 95% for the small group discussions, 94% for “meeting and talking to other delegates outside the group discussions”, and 89% for the plenary sessions. Participants were also asked to evaluate their small group moderators - 90% agreed that “my group moderator provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussion”, 95% disagreed that “my group moderator sometimes tried to influence the group with his or her own views”, and 86% agreed that “my group moderator tried to make sure that opposing arguments were considered.” In terms of equality in the group discussions, 73% agreed that “the members of my group participated relatively equally in the discussions.” Also, 91% agreed that “I learned a lot about people very different from me about what they and their lives are like.”