THE ELECTORAL CASE FOR A DEEPER DEMOCRATIC APPROACH

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UNLOCK DEMOCRACY

Compass

Powering UP

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About the Powering Up Project
Unlock Democracy and Compass are working together on a Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust funded project to build consensus around a new democratic settlement. With a focus on the Labour Party, other progressive parties and civil society campaigners, we are looking to create the conditions for a new 21st century democratic settlement for our nations, communities and citizens. For further information please contact Tom Brake or Neal Lawson.

About Unlock Democracy
Unlock Democracy argues and campaigns for a vibrant, inclusive democracy that puts power in the hands of the people. We seek a democratic participative process resulting in a written constitution that serves and protects the people. That constitution would define the roles of, and relationships between, the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. It would determine how, and to what extent, power is shared between representatives at local, national and United Kingdom levels, and with international organisations. It would enshrine basic liberties and human rights for all.

About Compass
Compass is a platform for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build networks of ideas, parties and organisations to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link those with state reforms and policy. The meeting point of emerging horizontal participation and vertical resources and policy we call 45° Change. Our practical focus is a Progressive Alliance, the coalition of values, policies, parties, activists and voters which can form a new government to break the log jam of old politics and usher in a new politics for a new society.

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Introduction

British voters are willing to give our democratic system quite a lot of rope when it comes to how it functions. Whilst commitment to democracy is high, expectations for it are not. Last year the Electoral Reform Society (ERS) asked a range of people what they thought of democracy in the UK, the answers we got back were, "at least we have a choice not a dictatorship", "at least we're not North Korea". The bar, it seems, is set quite low. But whilst people's commitment to democracy is strong, their opinion of the exercise of it, through the messy and difficult practice of politics, is on an ever downwards spiral of disappointment, disillusionment and distrust. And where faith in the practice of democracy fails, faith in the principle can also falter.

In this essay the case is made for a deeper democratic approach. A serious offer on democratic and political renewal has the potential to unite voters across values divides, to appeal to those who are losing faith in the power of politics to deliver on the serious challenges of our times; and ultimately, can help to draw back from the threats that are undermining our democracy.

This is in essence a story of two democratic paths. On the one hand, if we continue along the path we are on, we could face a democratic future not unlike the one witnessed across the Atlantic. One in which deep polarisation and mistrust are aided by a majoritarian system to warp electoral outcomes, encourage political extremism and weaken commitment to democratic rules. On the other, we have the democratic path that people in the UK overwhelmingly want to take: one created by a fairer, more honest and accountable politics in which more parties and people sit round the decision-making table, decisions are made closer to where people experience the outcomes of those decisions and in which power, agency and respect are shared.

Some have long held that democracy is not a door-step issue, from Brexit to 'partygate' it is clear that that is far from the truth today.

Bridging Divides

The electoral landscape has changed considerably over the last decade. Voter volatility has reached new heights, partisan dealignment has continued at pace, the party system has been altered by changing national dynamics and new parties, and voters have aligned around new political cleavages. Alongside this the electoral maths has changed, one result of which is that it is becoming harder for Labour to win. In political science terms this is explained through electoral bias – a range of electoral dynamics sometimes organic, and sometimes intentional. Chief amongst them in today's political landscape is the problem of vote distribution. Under the Westminster system it is better to win small and lose big, an efficient vote spread that sees you just pip your opponents to the post in the constituencies you win but trail them significantly in those you lose is the key to success. But the distribution of Labour's vote means the very opposite is happening. Labour voters are concentrated in metropolitan areas, meaning that the party has been increasingly stacking up massive majorities in already safe seats. Labour-held UK parliamentary seats account for nine out of the ten largest numerical majorities in the UK and this is a pattern that has been repeated across successive general elections and shows no sign of reversing any time soon. To put it another way, a Labour vote is far less likely to result in representation than a Conservative one; in 2019 over 50% of Labour votes did not result in a Labour representative, this figure for Conservative voters is half that (24%) - the situation is of course much worse for smaller parties[1]. Likewise in 2019 it took on average, 38,264 votes to elect a Conservative MP, while it took 50,835 votes for a Labour MP. We have yet to experience the further impact of the planned parliamentary constituency boundary changes and the government's attempt to make it harder for everyone to vote by introducing voter ID at polling stations, but even without these new obstacles, the landscape is an unfavourable one for Labour.

Exacerbating Labour's urban concentration problem is the distribution of the Remain and Leave vote and the increased importance of the social values divide that sits behind it. Much has been written about the realignment (or partial realignment) in British politics over the last decade, in which social value positions on the liberal/authoritarian scale, sometimes described as cultural issues, have become increasingly important in explaining voter behaviour. These values are closely related to age and education and therefore also have a particular geographical spread. The Conservative party reaped the rewards of uniting the Leave half of this divide in 2019 – significantly helped by the fairly even spread of Leave voters across winnable seats. A similar strategy among Remain voters would not have produced the same results for Labour, as such voters were too concentrated in too few areas and their votes tended to be split across a number of centre-left parties, whilst the leave vote consolidated as a Conservative vote particularly after the withdrawal of many Brexit party candidates.

It is too early to tell if this cultural realignment consolidates into a new and lasting political cleavage. At present, traditional left-right splits on economics and liberal-authoritarian divides on social issues are combining to create both challenges and opportunities for the two largest parties, as well as a sense of political homelessness for many 'cross-pressured' voters (those who lean left economically and small-c conservative culturally, or vice versa)[2].

Alongside this, a decline in partisan identification and increased volatility are making elections much harder to predict. At present, a substantial percentage of voters are shifting towards 'don't know' in opinion polls, rather than switching party. After the series of 'partygate' scandals, by January 2022 one in five of those who voted Conservative in 2019 planned to vote for a different party, but an even larger group (one in four former Conservative voters) had moved into being unsure of who to vote for[3]. Not only does this mean that one side's losses don't necessarily lead to the other side's gain, but that voters are just as likely to switch back. In short, a lot is up for grabs but in circumstances of significant uncertainty. And whilst Brexit has dropped down in priority for the majority of voters, Leave and Remain identities are still more widespread than voter identification with any particular party[4]. Though these identities are not as strong as the traditional left/right and class divides (nearly one in two people pick Left vs Right-wing or Middle/Upper vs Working Class as the most important divides in British politics)[5], they have nevertheless risen in importance and represent another dividing line along which it is possible to mobilise support. As became very clear in 2019, the Conservatives benefit most from the social values division, which is encapsulated in Brexit and 'culture war' type debates. The result is that whilst the Conservatives gain from creating divides, Labour must seek to do the opposite. As Professor Rob Ford has argued *"Polarisation is a winning strategy for Conservatives. Bridging divides is the only winning strategy for Labour."*

This is of course far easier said than done. One potential strategy is to focus on the economic issues that tend to unite Labour voters because, just as Labour struggles to unite voters on culture issues, the Conservatives have deep fault lines on economic matters with the party's small state preferences coming up against a desire for higher spending in newly won 'red wall' constituencies. But whilst Brexit itself has dropped down the list of most important issues for people, with health and the economy reassuming their traditional poll positions[6], the Brexit divide is still significant. Thirty five percent of people had a 'very strong' Leave or Remain identity a full five years after the referendum[7] and one in five voters picked Leave/Remain as the most important divide in British politics as recently as December 2021[8]. A strategy that hopes the social values split can be ignored is risky.

The Electoral Case for a Deeper Democratic Approach

Of course, the question for every electoral strategist for the last two years has been, how does this play out in the red wall, that "golden snitch in the UK's game of electoral quidditch."[9] Focusing on 'winning back' red wall seats is clearly a priority for Labour, but it is only part of the picture. There is a need to go broader and reach across new cleavages, but not at the expense of one or the other. As John Curtice notes, for Labour to win back Leave voting constituencies, they need to hold on to Remain voters in those constituencies too. In 2017, nearly two-thirds (64%) of Labour's vote in Leave voting seats that elected a Labour MP, came from Remain voters. So, if Brexit and its Remain/Leave cleavage are dominant in the next election: "*the only realistic choice open to the party is to craft an appeal that will maintain and enhance its support among Remain voters, be they working class or not.*"[10]

A Politics of

Place and

Resentment

What is also clear from this post-2019 electoral landscape is the huge importance of place to political choice: the relationship between geographical divides in terms of voting behaviour and spatial economic inequalities, the so-called 'geographies of discontent'.

These issues are not new, and their roots are deep - the UK has long had one of the most regionally imbalanced economies in the industrialised world. Alongside this economic disparity, 'geographies of discontent' reflects the fact that, as well as experiencing this inequality, many citizens feel excluded from the national narrative of progression, feel that their communities in particular have been 'left behind' and that, by contrast, other places have benefitted at their expense.

Gerry Stoker argues that this deep sense of grievance and marginalisation that has been the driving force in our politics in recent years is significant enough to have overtaken competence and its forerunner, class, as the dominant vehicle of politics:

"*During the century since 1918, Britain has found its politics delivered through three political vehicles: class, competence, and most recently, resentment. Each vehicle contains a mix of interest, identity and values in its construction. Each has a defining question for citizens about their political leaders. To what do I owe my loyalty? Who can get the job done? Why are others getting what I deserve?*"[11]

There is a clear governance dimension to this new political territory of place and resentment. It is a revolt against decisions being made in distant political spaces which fail to take account of, or understand, the needs of communities; it is a revolt against political deafness and centralised decision-making.

The voting system in its own way contributes to this distortion, regularly marginalising those whose votes don't count. In her book Beyond the Red Wall, Deborah Mattinson outlines the sense of abandonment and loss felt in communities that have been marginalised by globalisation, but also the reality of the political abandonment. It was not just Labour that ignored these former heartlands but the whole political class because whilst Labour viewed them as "populated by voters who would never let them [Labour] down", for the Conservatives these constituencies were "deemed totally unwinnable, so there was really no point."[12] This is a result of the Westminster political system and the safe seat and swing voter culture it creates where only certain places and certain voters matter.

All this suggests that attempts to rebalance the economy will not be enough without also finding an answer to the sense of political marginalisation and the system that encourages it.

The Conservatives have tried to address this political territory with the 'levelling up' agenda but how far this goes to secure real devolution of power remains to be seen. Funding for new programmes to date has taken on all the hallmarks of the pork barrel rather than a serious rebalancing of investment. The Conservative 'Town's Fund' (a £3.6 billion fund to improve towns across England and 'level up' regions) was found to not only disproportionately favour Conservative-held towns, but specifically those in which the Conservative lead was marginal. The researchers ruled out the possibility this was a coincidence – the Conservative marginals were not the most deserving areas.[13]

Without addressing the centralising ethos and top-down approach of the political system, the UK's currently over-centralised political machinery is unlikely to find the solution to the root cause of these deep grievances. Giving real control and status to communities would require letting go of this centralising tendency and significantly redesigning the structures of politics and refashioning the culture.[14] But to date, our political system has worked against these outcomes and the fault lines in our system become clearer through every new crisis. The Covid pandemic not only demonstrated how few checks and balances our system really contains and how easily exploited it is,[15] but also how its structures actively worked against better outcomes for communities. In a comparative examination of responses to the Covid crisis, academics have found that countries that collaborated across different levels of government, that did not rely too much on central direction, allowed localities to adapt to circumstances, and did not allow rigidity in structures to undermine dialogue, fared far better in responding to the crisis.[16] They conclude that, 'Most countries partially failed at least one of those hurdles. The UK […] failed all four.'[17]

Over the last decade, it has become harder to ignore the extent to which the shape of our politics has a bearing on the outcomes we get. Whether that's pork barrel politics 'levelling up' those in the most winnable seats or centralised decision-making hampering communities' ability to improve their areas or respond to crisis. Brexit and the red wall shift are seen as at least partly the result of the disconnect felt between some local communities and what they saw as a distant political debate in London.

Frustration caused by a lack of voice and power have driven changed voting behaviour among many voters. In this context, the argument that political change sits in a box outside economic concerns, that issues of political renewal and the distribution of power only appeal to a minority, is nonsense. Indeed, issues of where power lies, through the Scottish independence referendum and Brexit, have played a significant role in the last three general elections. To fail to recognise that power, voice and the political structures that give rise to feelings of disconnect and resentment have a part to play in a policy platform that seeks to address economic and social issues is both a mistake and a missed opportunity – levelling up necessarily must include significant *powering up*.

Disappointment, Distrust and Despair

Whilst parties try to find common ground across these interest and identity divides in the context of a politics of place and resentment, one area where voters agree, and indeed quite depressingly so, is on the failings of politics. Reports into the state of democracy in the UK over the last two years find much in common, the relationship British citizens have with politics is always described in some variation of disillusionment, disappointment, distrust, reaching a point of despair for many.

ERS research with IPPR, Unlock Democracy and Compass this year found that 85% of people think that ordinary citizens have little or no influence on government and a majority (55%) think that our democracy doesn't address their needs. These views are shared equally across a wide range of voters with both Remain (90%) and Leave (88%) voters feeling strongly that ordinary citizens have little or no influence – only amongst 18-24 year-olds and those intending to vote Conservative do these views dropped below four fifths of respondents.[18]

Another consistent view from voters is the idea that in politics there is 'one rule for them and another for us'. Even before the Prime Minister amply demonstrated why voters are sometimes entirely correct in this assumption, there existed a deep sense of separation between people and politics. Our survey finds that nearly four out of five people (79%) think that politicians live by different rules to everyone else and over three quarters (76%) think that there are too few checks and balances to stop politicians breaking the rules. Again, these views are shared across a wide range of voters including both Remain (85% one rule for them, 84% too few checks) and Leave (77% one rule for them, 77% too few checks) voters.[19]

Accompanying this separation is a strong sense of elite condescension. More in Common research last year found that three-quarters of people feel either looked down on 'a lot' or 'a little' by the government of the United Kingdom (76 per cent).[20] Sizable majorities feel looked down on by political parties (Conservative Party 74 per cent, Labour Party 63 per cent) too. Though these feelings are widespread across many groups, they are particularly strong in groups with lowest trust and engagement.

Whilst people have always had a large degree of scepticism about the motivations of politicians, it is very clear that we have reached a new low in levels of trust in politicians with a sharp increase in those who think 'politicians are in it for themselves' from 2014 onwards.[21] And the UK is doing particularly badly in terms of trust in politicians and parliament compared to other European countries.[22]

It isn't an exaggeration to say that people's faith in politics is at one of its lowest points. But whilst people's faith in politics has declined, there isn't a similar decline in support for democracy and democratic values. People have a strong connection to the principles of democracy - they just want the reality to more closely match that ideal. This leaves us torn between the hope that democracy can deliver, and the disappointment when the reality of politics fails. There is little faith in politicians, but there is still a belief or hope that government will act in our interests and could improve our lives; indeed, an expectation that it should.

The answer must be a politics that addresses both the grievance that politics hasn't delivered and the lack of faith that leads to the conclusion that it never could. This is a contradiction but is a contradiction that nevertheless demands an answer.

A Fairer, More Honest and Accountable Politics

There isn't an obvious or easy route from this widespread dissatisfaction with politics and what it delivers for people; there is a clamour for change, but no agreed object. Understandably constitutional reform is by its nature technical, dare it be said, boring, but there is considerable agreement on what people want from their democracy. Asked what elements of democracy people value most, the Constitution Unit finds that direct accountability is key with the two most important elements being the ability to vote out those who do a bad job, and free and fair elections to decide who is in power.[23]

Support for democratic reforms that could deliver these priorities is consistently growing. Support for House of Lords reform has remained high and continued to grow even after the 1999 reforms – in our recent survey only 10% supported retaining the status quo and we found majorities in support of Lords reform across voters of all political parties. More people are coming to prefer change over the status quo when it comes to the voting system too. The BSA has tracked opinion on changing to Proportional Representation (PR) for the House of Commons since the 1980s – between 2011 and 2015 support for changing the electoral system rose 18 percentage points to its highest ever level.[24] Similarly, YouGov's tracker finds a consistent plurality in favour of PR.[25]

The desire for fairer, more accountable politics is widespread, so too the desire for a more grown-up way of conducting political affairs. The Constitution Unit's recent research on what democracy people want, finds 75% of people agreed that 'Healthy democracy requires that politicians always act within the rules', only 6% supported 'getting things done, even if that requires politicians to break the rules'.[26] A thoughtful approach to policymaking: weighing pros and cons rather than simply following gut instincts (65% in favour) and taking time over decisions rather than making quick but imperfect decisions (62% in favour) also show widespread desire for a more honest and grown-up politics. In a similar vein, our survey finds that, perhaps surprisingly, a majority of the public want a political system where parties work together. And this majority support is found across voters of all parties (with current Conservative supporters being the only group to prefer a system where one party makes all the decisions).

Tweaks to the system here and there are highly unlikely to shift our outdated political system to one that embraces voters' ambitions for this more honest and grown-up politics. A substantial change to the system is needed and the party willing to take up this agenda could reap electoral benefit.

The Electoral Case for a Deeper Democratic Approach

Whilst some politicians seem more comfortable with playing fast and loose with voters' trust than others, these transgressions tend to manifest in people's minds as a problem of the political class in its entirety. When trust is undermined, distrust sticks to everyone. In one sense, voters have always had rather contradictory views of politicians; many will say their local MP is a good egg whilst casting scorn on politicians in general. But when trust takes a nosedive, everyone feels the consequence.

Leaders being seen as competent to deliver on voters' most important issue (traditionally the economy) has been a successful model in explaining voter choice for decades. Whilst diverting from the model in some respects, Johnson's 'getting Brexit done' in 2019 spoke very clearly to the dynamic of demonstrating competence on voters' key concern. But whilst voters want honesty, integrity and competence, low trust means that they are unlikely to believe anyone can deliver on this expectation. So, in a time when so few people believe what politicians say they will do, being trusted to deliver on what you promise is something of an electoral superpower.

In this situation, what politicians can offer is a system that delivers this – a system that keeps people honest. Afterall, a list of standards in public life is just a wish list unless there is a reason to follow it. Our political system lacks any such safeguards and the series of gentleman's agreements that pass for our constitution clearly don't hold when there are bad faith players who would change the rules rather than fall foul of them. To demonstrate that promises are more than words, changing the system to ensure democracy functions as it should, to rid our politics of corruption and undue external influence (both of which thrive in systems which concentrate power with few safeguards), and to give power to voters, would be a clear signal of intent for a different kind of politics.

These commitments would show that not only are there policies that could improve people's lives, but there is a framework that could actually deliver on those promises, and a system that at least gives voters some confidence that democracy might start to bridge the gap between expectation and reality. For all that politicians take the brunt of voters' disappointment, the failures of our political system are also quite clear to people. The survey ERS conducted with IPPR, Compass and Unlock Democracy found that few people have faith in our political system to deliver on the biggest policy challenges of our times. A clear majority think that our democratic system is not effective at solving major problems such as climate change (62%), crime (66%) and housing (75%). Over three quarters of people (77%) who think that ordinary citizens have little or no influence on government believe that the political system is the cause.[27]

Clearly people think the political system is failing and addressing the underlying causes of political disappointment, dissatisfaction and distrust could unite voters who are otherwise in separate camps. These reforms are arguably necessary to have credibility on any policy in this era of mistrust but there are also deeper, longer-term benefits to turning the tide on the erosion of democracy.

Democracy Under Threat

Recent years have seen an increasingly polarised politics driven in part by the prominence of new cleavages, increasingly heated political debate that often conflates difference in political values with difference in moral values, and the populism of simplified solutions to complex problems. Of course, clear dividing lines are important for giving clarity to electoral choices, but polarisation can also create its own kind of vicious circle in which democratic norms are more easily eroded. Research shows that in highly polarised situations, voters are more willing to accept democratic transgressions from their own side given they are more likely to support their side breaching norms when they feel threatened.[28] We saw in the UK, following the Brexit deadlock in parliament, that 54% of people were of the view that 'Britain needs a strong leader willing to break the rules'.[29] This appetite seems to have waned and people's faith in parliamentary democracy has improved since. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the precariousness of a highly polarised situation.

The loser of this pernicious polarisation is inevitably democracy which cannot thrive in conditions where the rules of the game are not respected, faith in democratic institutions is undermined, and losers' consent is replaced by cries of betrayal and fraud. It is hard to come back from extreme polarisation and democratic erosion - it is much easier for the opposition to be dragged into the same cycle. But it is clear that political leaders have a role to play and democracies can be insulated against the worst effects by the structures of politics. Addressing the very real economic and social inequalities that gave rise to grievances is key, but it is not enough; to move on, the system that created those inequalities must change too.

Majoritarian structures are particularly vulnerable to polarisation. A report by the Centre for the Future of Democracy at the University of Cambridge in 2020 found that whilst dissatisfaction with democracy has reached an all-time high globally, Westminster-style democracies, the UK, USA, Australia and Canada – have in particular experienced 'soaring public discontent'.[30] Of the major Westminster-style democracies, only New Zealand has not seen the same increase in citizen dissatisfaction over the same period. That these majoritarian systems (New Zealand having changed its system to one based around PR) have experienced such a notable increase in discontent is put down to their adversarial nature. Citing the rising political polarisation in the US and in the UK, the report authors suggests that 'Combined with social media, the winner-takes-all nature of political competition in Anglo-Saxon democracies contributes to polarisation, which in turn makes citizens less willing to compromise or accept the legitimacy of a rival's electoral mandate.'[31] One year after this report was published, Trump supporters stormed Capitol Hill driven by the false claim that the US Presidential election had been stolen.

Other academics have reached similar conclusions on the relationship between systems and polarisation. McCoy and Somer argue that *"Majoritarian institutions easily turn into existential threats when competitors come to see politics as a zero-sum game."*[32] They highlight single member districts as particularly problematic and suggest that rank choice/preferential voting systems are one way to move away from pernicious polarisation.

Institutional change can therefore be one route to escaping the vicious cycle of polarisation and protecting democracy for the future.

Alongside polarisation, there is a further threat, not from polarisation of opinion, but from apathy. David Runciman, author of 'How Democracy Ends', writes, *'It is true that many voters dislike and distrust their elected representatives now more than ever. But it is not the kind of loss of trust that leads people to take up arms against democracy. Instead, it is the kind that leads them to throw up their arms in despair.'*[33]

More in Common's research found that those most likely to be turning away from democracy are those with the lowest trust.[34] They highlight that disengagement takes two different forms - a 'no time' disengagement and a 'no point' disengagement. It is the latter that is most damaging for democracy – fuelled as it is by a sense that politics is rigged and there is no place for ordinary citizens. This in itself can weaken commitment to democratic norms.

"'No point disengagement' is associated with feelings of frustration, neglect, and a settled consensus that politicians do not care what ordinary people think. It is exacerbated by the feeling that elites look down on them, and both politicians and the media do not listen to people like them. At its extremes, it involves doubt about whether democracies provide the best way to deliver a fair, orderly and peaceful society. For some, especially Loyal Nationals, there is an appeal in populist and authoritarian alternatives, because they cannot imagine things being worse."

In an atmosphere of widespread cynicism and mistrust, apathy and low turnout can be a threat creating a fertile ground for those who seek to exploit our democracy. Sowing seeds of division, encouraging voters to turn away from political life, these are the cards played by autocrats the world over. As the democratic world looks on in horror at the real-world impact of authoritarianism and strong man politics, we shouldn't be complacent about our own position. Re-engaging those who have turned away from democracy is hugely important in protecting our democracy from those who would exploit it.

Former Prime Minister John Major in a speech to the Institute for Government earlier this year noted how the erosion of democratic trust at home has consequences beyond our borders *"If trust in our word is lost overseas, we may no longer be able to work effectively with friends and partners for mutual benefit – or even security. Unfortunately, that trust is being lost, and our reputation overseas has fallen because of our conduct. [...] And when ministers attack or blame foreign governments, to gain populist support at home, we are not taken seriously. Megaphone diplomacy merely increases hostility overseas. International trust may not be easy to regain."*[35]

Recently we have seen how party funding rules can throw into question the ability for our political leaders to take appropriate action on international threats – how our democracy is supported by money from those with links to foreign states that have no regard for democratic principles. One in four voters in our survey felt that party donors had the most influence on public policy decisions –more influence than business or the media, and far more than voters.

There are, in short, many reasons for taking democracy more seriously.

Coming back from a period in which democracy and the rule of law have been undermined, from the unlawful prorogation of parliament, attacks on the judiciary and decisions of the standards committee, attacks on independent regulators like the Electoral Commission, where rising distrust and polarisation are weakening democratic norms, is a challenge that a change in leader or party will not magically resolve without serious structural reform and renewal. As the events of recent years have demonstrated, our majoritarian democratic system is uniquely vulnerable to those who act in bad faith. The lack of constitutional safeguards, the concentration of power in one individual, the marginalisation of the majority of voters through an unfit electoral system: These problems will not disappear by a changing of the guard and the see-saw nature of politics means without fundamental change, our democracy remains vulnerable.

Our democracy faces two paths. We can carry on towards a future in which public faith in political institutions continues to decline and parties pursue minimal core voter strategies in the hope that everyone else will be too disillusioned to care anymore (a strategy that only works for parties that benefit from division) and a rising tide of polarisation weakens people's commitment to democratic principles and rules. Or we can change the system to build a better democracy. Voters have shown through Brexit and beyond that issues of power matter deeply. But it is only through changing the political system that a new narrative of power can be realised. In doing so, a political system that gives people agency and respect, that serves the public with integrity and honesty and creates a relationship based on trust and working together rather than grievance and mistrust, is all within reach. And surely that is something worth discussing on the doorstep.

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