



**Brexit:  
is it  
worth it?**

**BREXIT  
is it  
worth it?**

**TOP BREXIT**

**Conservatives**

**Sustaining Our  
Democracy**

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](mailto: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.*

### **One Page Summary and Questions**

*"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)

*"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)

### **Sustaining Our Democracy**

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." 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."

Yet 100 years since some women gained a right to vote and 90 since the Equal Franchise Act, there are still certain groups in society who feel unable to register to vote or to take part in elections.

### **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?

### **Appendix: Facts and Figures**

#### **What Our Manifesto Said**



## **Sustaining Our Democracy**

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*"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)<sup>3</sup>*

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."<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> 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 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of some women getting a right to vote and the 90<sup>th</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup>*

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.<sup>6</sup>

**Appendix: Facts and Figures**

1. Relationships between the UK government and people in every part of the UK

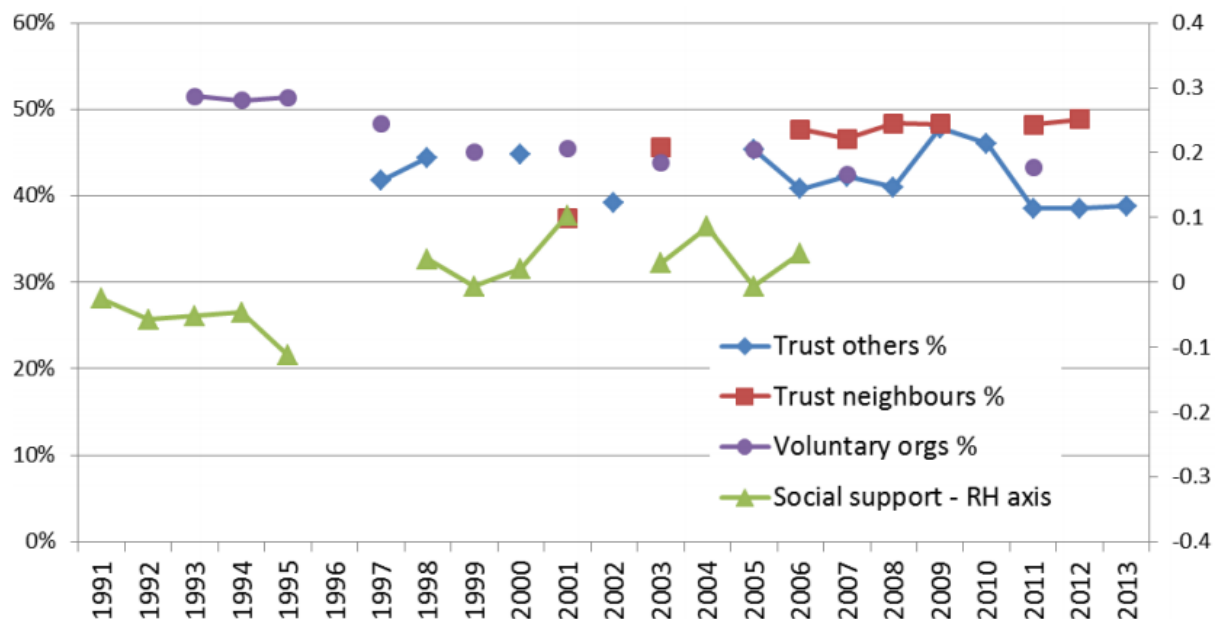
UK Governments have repeatedly noted that “the current devolution settlements were created in the context of the UK’s membership of the EU”. This EU context has masked many of the key constitutional questions and ambiguities raised by the introduction and subsequent development of devolution since 1998. With the UK leaving the EU, many questions and ambiguities have now been exposed and need to be addressed. ...

At a time when devolution has become an established feature of the UK constitution, the question of England’s place in the constitution needs urgently to be addressed. A failure to do so risks a sense of increasing disconnection of the English people from the political system. ...

The absence of formal and effective inter-governmental relations mechanisms has been the missing part of the devolution settlement ever since devolution was established in 1998. The process of the UK leaving the EU has provided the opportunity for the Government to re-think and redesign inter-governmental relations in order to put them on a better footing. Once the UK has left the EU, and UK Common Frameworks are established, the present lack of intergovernmental institutions for the underpinning of trusting relationships and consent will no longer be sustainable.<sup>7</sup>

2. Public trust in civic institutions

*Trends in four measures of social capital*



The only aspect of social capital that is in decline is associations with voluntary organisations; the percentage of the UK population active with one or more organisation fell from 52% in 1993 to 43% in 2012. Trust in other people in general seems to fluctuate year by year but there is no trend in either direction. Neighbourhood trust, on the other hand, may have increased since the start of the data series in 2002. Social support levels have fluctuated but also appear to have improved overall by a small amount since the 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

Behind the headlines there are some positive signs the trust levels in government have clearly improved since 2012, when they dipped as low as 29%. Another positive development is that the trust level remains quite stable, despite political (Brexit for

example) and economic (the ongoing need to live within our means) challenges. However, young people tend to distrust the government more (only 27% of youths trusted the government in 2018), around 93% feel that their views are not well presented by people in politics, and there are significant trust differences across regions:

Government trust levels across different regions, 2018



The top three reasons for not trusting the government were the following:

- A feeling that the government is not delivering on its promises;
- A perception that the government does not communicate honestly when problems arise and
- A feeling that the government is not transparent enough.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Community relationships and a sense of “ownership” over local areas

People in neighbourhoods with higher levels of social cohesion experience lower rates of mental health problems than those in neighbourhoods with lower cohesion, independent of how deprived or affluent a neighbourhood is. Neighbourhood social cohesion is also associated with a reduction in depressive symptoms in older people.<sup>10</sup>

62% of people feel they very strongly or fairly strongly belong to their local neighbourhood. Feeling of belonging to neighbourhood is stronger in the older age groups than younger age groups, with only 52% of 25-34 year olds agreeing compared with 73% of those over 75; however the proportion of 16-24 year olds agreeing increased from 48% in 2016/17 to 55% in 2017/18.

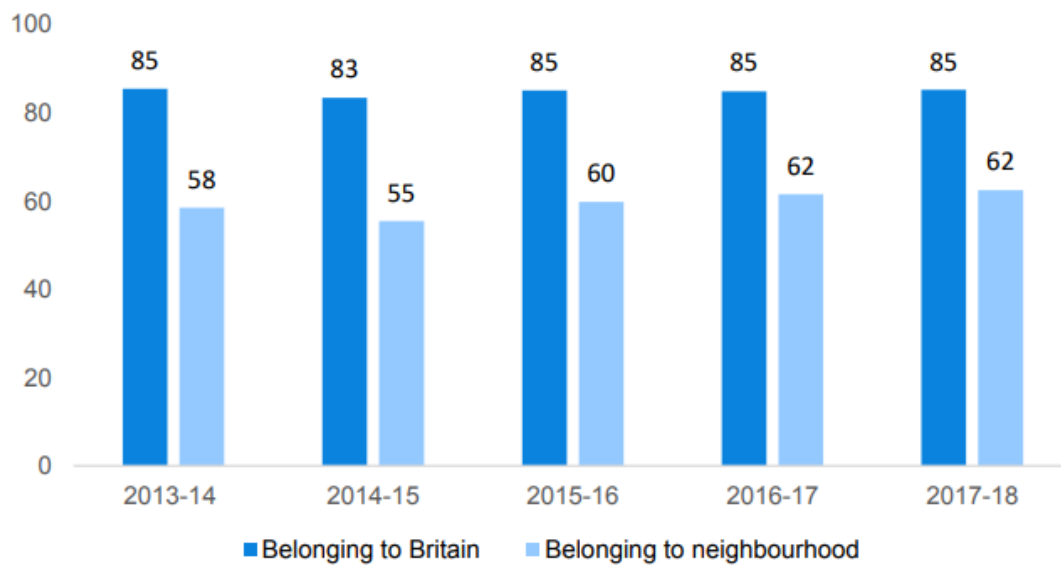
People with a limiting long term illness or disability are less likely to feel they belong very or fairly strongly to their local neighbourhood than those without (58% compared with 63%), as are people who live in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived areas (56% compared with 70%) and people living in urban areas compared with rural areas (61% compared with 68%).

Feeling of belonging to Britain has remained fairly consistent over the last five years, with 85% of people feeling they either very or fairly strongly belonged to Britain.

Again, younger people are less likely to feel they belong to Britain, with 81% feeling they either strongly or fairly strongly belong compared with 97% of those aged 75 or over.

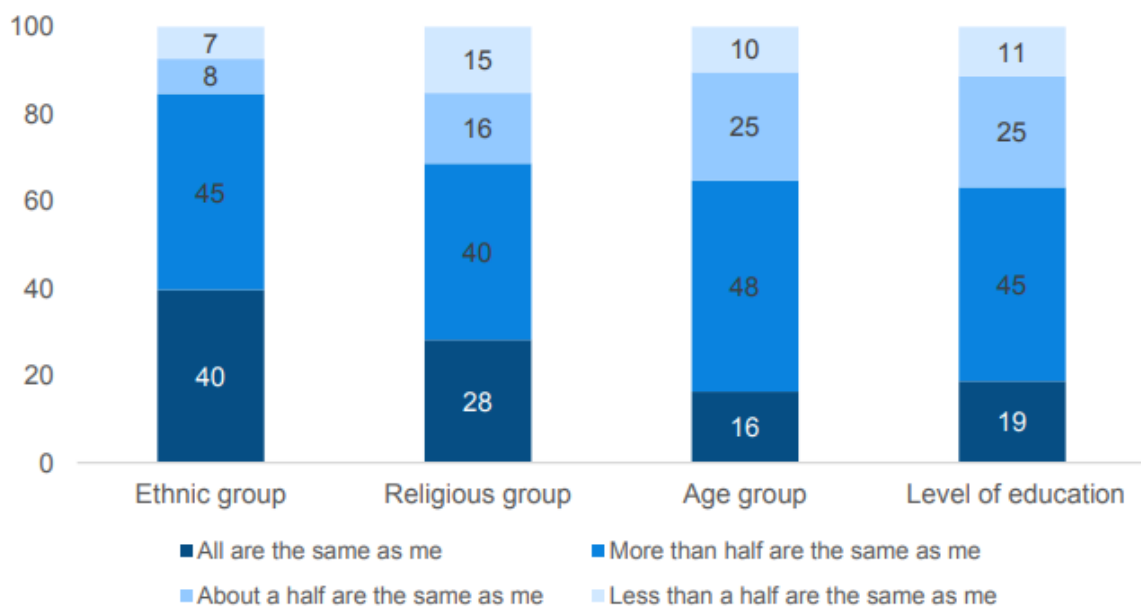
People living in the most deprived areas are less likely to feel they belong to Britain than those living in the least deprived areas (81% compared with 89%) and people living in urban areas are less likely to agree than those living in rural areas (84% compared with 89%).<sup>11</sup>

**Percentage of people who feel they belong very strongly or fairly strongly to their local neighbourhood and to Britain.**



In 2017-18, 40% of people said that all of their friends are the same ethnic group as themselves, 28% said all were from the same religious group, 16% were all the same age group and 19% said all their friend had a similar level of education.<sup>11</sup>

**How similar are your friends to you in terms of ethnicity, religion age and education.**



4. Greater participation, especially by young people, in our democracy

In the year 2017-18, 38% of people undertook some form of civic participation at least once, engaging in democratic processes besides voting, both in person and online, including signing a petition or attending a public rally.

22% of people took part in formal volunteering at least once a month, while 38% of people volunteered formally at least once in the last year. 25-34 year olds had the lowest rates of regular formal volunteering, at 15%, while those aged 65-74 had the highest rates, at 29%.<sup>11</sup>

5. Conservative Party outreach to diverse communities

The Party currently has over 50 link groups. These celebrate communities and advance causes and issues. They include the LGBT+ Conservatives and Conservative Disability Group, as well as many “friends of” groups, such as Conservative Friends of India and Conservative Friends of Pakistan. Each year new groups form, including the recently established Conservative Friends of the Armed Forces.

In the last year there have been 43 roundtables with community groups across the North, Midlands and South—including African, Caribbean, Jewish, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and Tamil communities and more. In addition, our Bangladesh, India and Pakistan groups had a joint event to celebrate the appointment of our first Asian Home Secretary.

Hundreds of potential candidates have come to our Candidates and Outreach roadshow with MPs and the Chairman around UK cities, inspiring a new generation—and we take care to nurture and mentor talent.

We had a diverse field of candidates in the 2018 local elections, with records across a number of underrepresented groups—including a record 18 Chinese and 4 Italian candidates. Through our work a talented Muslim woman won a Council seat from Labour in Peterborough and lifted our Party to control of the Unitary Authority.

We have increased diversity amongst our Council Leaders—including our first Leader from a Caribbean background (West Berkshire). Great achievers from diverse communities include our long-serving Ugandan-Asian Leader of Wandsworth, Ravi Govindia CBE, who continues to inspire communities and has overseen remarkable change since becoming a councillor in 1982.



## **What Our Manifesto Said**

### **OUR PRECIOUS UNION** (pp.31f)

We are a United Kingdom, one nation made of four – the most successful political union in modern history. Its very existence recognises the value of unity – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales achieve less as two, three, or four, than as the United Kingdom together. This unity between our nations and peoples gives us the strength to change things for the better, for everyone, with a scale of ambition we simply could not possess alone.

The settlement governing these islands has changed profoundly in the last twenty years. Significant decision-making have been devolved to the parliament in Scotland and assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland. Devolved administrations in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast exercise greater powers than equivalent governments elsewhere in the democratic world. In England, we have given considerable powers to city mayors and combined authorities, while local councils now have greater control of the taxes they collect.

This positive evolution of our constitution has given a voice to people who felt distant from the centre of power, and responsibility to people for their own part of our great country. We will continue to work in partnership with the Scottish and Welsh governments and the Northern Ireland Executive, in a relationship underpinned by pooling and sharing resources through the Barnett Formula. We will respect the devolution settlements: no decision-making that has been devolved will be taken back to Westminster. Indeed, we envisage that the powers of the devolved administrations will increase as we leave the EU. However, we can still do more for the people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The United Kingdom Government has in the past tended to 'devolve and forget'. This Conservative government will put that right. We want the UK Government to be a force for good across the whole country.

So we will be an active government, in every part of the UK. We will work closely with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish and Welsh governments, and the new devolved authorities in England, for the benefit of all our people – but that will not be the limit of our actions in the four nations. We are ambitious for everyone in Britain and will leave no-one behind in our efforts to spread opportunity and prosperity throughout the United Kingdom.

### **THE HOME OF DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW** (pp.42f)

This election will decide the composition of our parliament, the oldest of all large democracies. The laws that we make form the basis of judgments in our courts, which are respected around the world. This unequalled democracy and legal system is our greatest national inheritance. However, collective faith in our democratic institutions and our justice system has declined in the past two decades. It is the purpose of this Conservative Party, in responding to the historic vote on our membership of the European Union, to re-establish faith in our democracy, and in our democratic and legal institutions.

#### **A flourishing and secure democracy**

Our democratic institutions may be ancient but should not be neglected. We will continue to modernise and improve our electoral registration process, making it as accessible as possible so that every voice counts. We will legislate for votes for life for British overseas electors. We will continue with the current boundary review, enshrining the principle of equal seats, while reducing the number of MPs to 600, similar to other Western democratic chambers. We will retain the first past the post system of voting for parliamentary elections and extend this system to police and crime commissioner and mayoral elections. We will retain the current franchise to vote in parliamentary elections at eighteen. We will repeal the Fixed-term Parliaments Act.

The British public deserves to have confidence in our democracy. We will legislate to ensure that a form of identification must be presented before voting, to reform postal voting and to improve other aspects of the elections process to ensure that our elections are the most secure in the world. We will retain the traditional method of voting by pencil and paper, and tackle every aspect of electoral fraud.

Although comprehensive reform is not a priority we will ensure that the House of Lords continues to fulfil its constitutional role as a revising and scrutinising chamber which respects the primacy of the

House of Commons. We have already undertaken reform to allow the retirement of peers and the expulsion of members for poor conduct and will continue to ensure the work of the House of Lords remains relevant and effective by addressing issues such as its size.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> *Chloe Smith speech at SOLACE*, Cabinet Office, 25 January 2019: [link](#)
- <sup>2</sup> Dunleavy, P. et al. 2018. *The UK's Changing Democracy: The 2018 Democratic Audit*. London: LSE Press. DOI: [link](#)
- <sup>3</sup> 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](#)
- <sup>4</sup> *Cabinet Office single departmental plan*, updated 23 May 2018: [link](#)
- <sup>5</sup> *Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis*, Freedom House: [link](#)
- <sup>6</sup> *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](#)
- <sup>7</sup> *Devolution and Exiting the EU: reconciling differences and building strong relationships*, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, 31 July 2018: [link](#)
- <sup>8</sup> *CSI 15: The uneven distribution and decline of social capital in Britain*, Centre for Social Investigation, Nuffield College, 10 November 2015: [link](#)
- <sup>9</sup> *Why trust in government matters*, Centre for Public Scrutiny 20 February 2018: [link](#)
- <sup>10</sup> *Mental health statistics: relationships and community*, Mental Health Foundation, 2016: [link](#)
- <sup>11</sup> *Community Life Survey 2017-18*, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 26 July 2018, updated 11 January 2019: [link](#)