Reclaiming Democracy, Empowering Citizens & Fighting Race Inequality
INTRODUCTION

In the past, Operation Black Vote (OBV) and other Black and minority ethnic (BME) organisations have focused our political general election manifestos almost exclusively around a broad range of key policy demands that were presented to all political parties in a bid to influence and inform their approach to fighting race inequality.

The focus of these policy proposals have included subject areas such as: the criminal justice system, education, employment, health, housing and representation. Ending discrimination in these areas should be a top priority for any new incoming Government. Our experience shows that whilst all parties express interest in our proposals during elections, this interest soon evaporates once in power.

BY STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY, WE BELIEVE WE WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO HOLD POLITICIANS TO ACCOUNT ON THE COMMITMENTS THEY MAKE

We believe political parties are able to ignore and abandon pre-election manifesto promises because our current democratic system is weak and disempowers ordinary citizens. By strengthening our democracy, we believe we will be better able to hold politicians to account on the commitments they make.

This manifesto, therefore, focuses on reforming the UK’s democratic system by empowering ordinary citizens to hold politicians to real account.

By reforming and reclaiming democracy, we not only empower all citizens, we become much better placed to redress persistent race inequality against BME communities in this country.

Furthermore, OBV research clearly demonstrates that BME communities are able to influence the results in 168 marginal Parliamentary constituencies and with it real power to demand this democratic change.

RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY

British democracy is in crisis. In the last three general elections, 20 million voters out of an electorate of 49 million did not go to the polls. And when it comes to local elections, or those for police and crime commissioners (PCCs), a staggering 80% of the electorate say “thanks, but no thanks”.

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The public’s view of politicians is at an all-time low. Since the expenses scandal, along with political parties failing on their promises, most people now believe that our governing elite are self-serving, careerist politicians.

Too many feel let down and powerless…and in such a disempowered state, some become increasingly vulnerable to seduction into a life of extremism, crime, or terrorism.
Too many locked out or locked up by society

In the current political climate, the system fails to recognize the reality of racism and understand the nature of discrimination. This results in communities feeling locked out of opportunity and under constant attack, creating a climate where extremism and crime can flourish. If we are to deal effectively with the issues of marginalisation and exclusion, we must have a society where all people feel they can influence politics and see themselves as part of an inclusive, responsive and representative democracy.

Data demonstrates BME communities are far too often being locked out from society’s opportunities.

- White youth unemployment has fallen by 2% in the last few years, whilst for black youths it rose by 50%. Black female unemployment has also risen significantly.
- Black students are routinely kept out of the UK’s top universities, with Oxford University branded as ‘disgraceful’ by the Prime Minister for selecting so few black students.

However, the race penalty is at its worst when it comes to the criminal justice system:

- Black youths are up to 26% more likely to be subject to ‘Stop and Search’
- They are also 17% more likely to be strip-searched as a consequence of ‘Stop and Search’
- No convictions have been made following the deaths of 500 BME individuals while in police custody
- The Ministry of Justice stated that BME defendants are almost 20 per cent more likely to be sent to jail than white defendants.

Tackling race inequality by reforming democracy

The 2014 Scotland referendum debate demonstrated that when people are given an opportunity to debate serious issues and are provided a stark set of choices; it has a transformative effect on their lives. They are energised, becoming passionate and ardent proponents of democracy.

IN A 21ST CENTURY DIGITAL WORLD, OUR ANTIQUATED 19TH CENTURY DEMOCRACY NO LONGER WORKS. IN THIS 800TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADOPTION OF THE MAGNA CARTA, IT IS TIME TO UPGRADE IT

OBV believes to fight gross and persistent racial inequalities, we must reclaim, reform and re-energise democracy.

In a 21st century digital world, our antiquated 19th century democracy no longer works. In this 800th year anniversary of the adoption of the Magna Carta, it is time to upgrade it.

OBV believes we need to demand democratic reform before we can demand real change on the issues that affect our communities. These basic demands, listed here, aim to restore trust and confidence in our democracy among everyone in the UK, not just those from BME communities.

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Above: Black youths are up to 26% more likely to be subject to ‘Stop and Search’
1. Reclaiming Democracy and Empowering Citizens

- ALL VOTERS should be automatically placed on the electoral roll when given a National Insurance number, unless they choose to opt out
- BRITAIN MUST INTRODUCE E-VOTING to keep up with our digitally-based society
- BRITAIN MUST INTRODUCE a proportional representation voting system and abandon the first past the post voting system
- OUR ELECTIONS SHOULD BE TIMED and synchronised to take place on the same day, and when possible, over the course of a weekend
- THE SYSTEM SHOULD DEVELOP a method of recalling MPs. Such a powerful reform can empower local communities and restore the balance of power back into the hands of the citizens
- THE VOTING AGE must be lowered to 16
- THE VOTE SHOULD BE EXTENDED to certain categories of prisoners
- THE INFLUENCE OF BIG BUSINESS must be removed from politics through the introduction of state funding for all political parties
- THE OFFICE OF BUDGET RESPONSIBILITIES (OBR) must produce independent financial assessments of all future party General Election manifestos

2. Aiding The Fight Against Race Inequality

- EVERY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT must undertake a comprehensive race equality review, overseen by the National Audit Office in partnership with BME communities and answerable to Parliament
- A MINISTER for Race Equality at Cabinet Level
- AN INCOMING GOVERNMENT should: amend and strengthen the Equality Act 2010; and introduce time limited affirmative action, in employment
- AN INCOMING GOVERNMENT should strengthen the positive duty clause within the Equality Act to effectively tackle discrimination in the provision of goods and service, requiring statutory authorities to have due regard to effectively tackle discrimination based on current legislation contained within the Northern Ireland Fair Employment Act 1991

3. Conclusion

- OBV BELIEVES that with the adoption of these measures to reform, strengthen and re-energise our democracy, this country can look forward to greater fairness and the eventual elimination of racial discrimination. As a result, our nation will be more dynamic, more unified, more innovative and more successful...indeed a country we all can and should be proud of.