

POWER Inquiry Witness Session – London

10am-3pm, 9 December 2004

Congress House
23-28 Great Russell Street
London, WC1B 3LS**Witness****Professor Pippa Norris** [by video link]

The McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Abbreviations

AM	Audience Member [individual names indicated]	
BF	Ben Freeman	Commissioner
BM	Bano Murtuja	Commissioner
EB	Emma B	Commissioner
FM	Ferdinand Mount	Commissioner
FOG	Frances O'Grady	Commissioner
HK	Helena Kennedy	Commissioner
PC	Phil Carey	Commissioner
PN	Pippa Norris	Witness
PS	Philippe Schmitter	Witness
PW	Paul Whiteley	Witness
SW	Stuart Weir	Witness
VL	Vivien Lowndes	Witness

PC: I'm Phil and my first question, I'm going to go straight in if you don't mind, is – how can the way elections are organised affect voter turnouts?

PN: Well, thank you very much, and thank you for the invitation and I should apologise that I can't be with you; it's of course the last week of our semester at Harvard which prevents me travelling. Elections are obviously critical and we place a great deal of emphasis on those and the arrangements for elections can really make a difference for the turnout in all sorts of ways and we know quite a lot about this. I'm a comparativist so I look at lots of different countries, established democracies and new democracies as well and let me give you a series of ways in which changing the rules can make a difference on the level of participation and turnout.

The first thing is basically what are the incentives to vote? What are the ways in which we're going to get people out? One thing which matters: proportional representation of electoral systems, we can compare those in many countries, Europe and other established democracies and they always have normally a higher level of turnout than majoritarian first-past-the-post systems like we have for Westminster. So electoral reform is one of the issues and that's quite simply that you get fewer wasted votes because if you vote for smaller parties in 'first past the post', basically people feel they're never going to get in, in other systems where they have a better chance, they get in.

The second factor, party competition, and again that's related; so if you have more competitive elections, if you have in particular closer elections as you run up, then we know that again we get higher levels of turnout. Look for example at the United States just in the very last election we've had in November – nobody knew what the outcome was, we were waiting until election night, turnout went up 5% to 55% which is higher in American terms and it goes up much more in terms of marginal seats in Britain than it did in safe seats. Where did election turnout go down in Britain for example? In the last election it was places like Liverpool Waintree, Stockport and so on. So competition matters and that's partly about Boundary Commissions.

The third factor which matters in other countries, compulsory voting and again we don't use that in Britain, it's not that common in some democracies but wherever it exists in established democracies where it's implemented, you normally get turnout about 8% higher than in other countries. And other factors which are much more about the costs of voting are whether or not you have an election for example on a rest day, a holiday, or whether it's a work day. Can people actually get to the polls? What are the number of contests? How many elections do you have? And again the frequency of elections in Britain for example, which has really increased in the last decade is one potential reason why turnout might have declined – voter fatigue.

And lastly, which is costs of actually getting to the polls, postal voting and despite the disputes again about postal voting in Britain, we know that where we have universal postal voting, where it's automatically available, then it does make a difference that can be as we saw quite substantial in the Electoral Commission

tests where turnout went up 15% in the pilots which they tried. So there are lots of things about elections, both the broader issues and the very specific issues of how you get out on polling day.

PC: Thank you very much. My second question for you is: what challenges does the rise of extra parliamentary activity pose for an established democracy?

PN: Yes, the rise of protest politics and demonstrations is one of the clearest trends that we've got and again it's not just Britain, in Britain you can think of all the issues, whether it's Iraq bringing millions of people onto the street, genetically modified food, issues about fox-hunting... but this pattern isn't accidental and again just to give a simple comparison, the first studies of protests and demonstrations were done in the mid 70s in eight different European countries and about one in ten people demonstrated. Now in some countries, in the most recent World Values Study, in countries like Sweden, France and Belgium, 40% had demonstrated at some stage. So it's a massive increase in the last thirty years.

And to answer the particular question, what are the consequences, I think there are three in particular that we want to consider and they're not consequences where we know a great deal about the actual evidence, but three potential issues. One is social inequality, it is the case that as the result of any decline in civic engagement and the rise of protest politics, we've got greater social inequalities, for example amongst the low skilled, amongst those who are less educated, amongst ethnic minorities or poorer sectors of the population because it's often thought to be the more educated who demonstrate. That's one potential concern.

To counter that, we have to say that when we've studied demonstrators at the time they're demonstrating, I have a new piece coming out in comparative politics, we do find today that there's quite a broad cross-section of the public that does get mobilised, depending on the organisation – but that's a question mark. The second issue about consequences about democratic political process... does it mean for example that demonstrations are less effective than for example joining parties, joining unions or joining churches, the old forms of civic engagement, and there I think we have to say that you can have as much impact through demonstrations as you can through the older forms of civic engagement. In the past you often joined out of a sense of loyalty, you might not go to meetings, you might be fairly passive, whereas the new forms of activism, they're very different, they're more demanding but they can also have a clearer impact. And again we can see that most vividly in some new democracies, you only have to turn on the news in Ukraine to see the people power which dramatically overturned events in Ukraine, but you can see similar events for example in Venezuela or the Philippines: mass demonstrations can have a tremendous impact on the policy process.

And the third consequence I'd like to raise is essentially for governance and for how representative democracies respond. And here again it's more difficult I think for governments to respond; and that does pose real challenges. In particular what you have through demonstrations and protest politics is the rise of cause-oriented single issue politics, so you get a weakening of what we term in social science as aggregating institutions, the collective bodies, the umbrella

organisations that pull people together and that pull together all the different demands of citizens and with protest politics what you have is many more single issue demands on government and it's just much more difficult to satisfy all those different constituencies. You please for example the environmentalists on genetically modified food and that means that the farmers might get angry or the scientific lobby; you please the fox-hunting contingent and you upset the anti fox-hunting. So there are stresses on representative democracy at the systemic level which make governing more difficult and it's more like a balancing act that representative democracies have to do – but essentially they have to adapt to the new environment.

PC: Yes, how can the movements you have discussed feed into more conventional politics? How can that political energy be harnessed?

PN: Well again we often think it's a trade-off and that for example either you join a party or a Trade Union, or you go to a traditional association, the National Trust or a Parent Teacher Association or you take part in protest, in a demonstration or consumer politics. But when we've actually looked at people who demonstrate, what we find is that it isn't necessarily a trade-off. Those people who are active are often active across a wide spectrum of different types of activities; parties for example are very active in organising demonstrations, trade unions mobilise people to take part in public sector pay disputes, environmental groups will both use a variety of forms of consumer boycotts and consumer products but they'll also use demonstrations and they'll also try and influence elections, for example through green parties and so on.

So I think there is an interaction of the new forms with the old forms, rather than simply assuming that because of the rise of protest politics in the 1990s, we've necessarily seen the decline of parties and traditional associations. There's different factors causing those patterns but it's not clear that the people who are active in one necessarily are not active in the other.

HK: Pippa, thank you. I'm just going to invite... to see if there's any of my other commissioners who would like to come in, Emma...?

EB: Hello Pippa, my name is Emma. I'm just really interested... you see on the news all the time that when there is a big demonstration, clearly the political parties do influence those demonstrations and yet we have such a display of emotion on such a massive scale and their influence is noticeable – why then is that not harnessed, why that then doesn't translate to votes?

PN: Yes. And really what you have to think about is why do people join parties? What's the basis of mass membership parties and of course not every country has mass membership parties, even amongst democracies but it's a British tradition and we often have an image of how representative democracy should work from the 1950s when people turned up for the Labour party or the Conservative party and they did the grass-roots volunteering and they turned out for campaigning and they basically acted through the state and tried to influence elections, parties and parliament.

I think there are again three factors which have been changing these sorts of

patterns of activism and it's a long-term trend and there are factors which are common across different post-industrial countries, it's not just Britain, it's many countries and the first one is about citizens. Citizens have changed and quite simply cultural shifts and the rising levels of education and civic skills that people now have makes them feel more confidence that they can participate through a variety of different mechanisms. So they're not simply joining out of loyalties because it's their neighbours that are part of it, because they're part of a community – they're joining more out of choice because they're taking particular issues that they get concerned about, they're reading about them in the media and those are the issues that they want to really have an impact on, rather than everything across the political spectrum. So citizens have changed, opportunities have changed and in particular you can think of some of these changes as fashions.

Again protests in the 1960s were very much seen as a radical movement, Student Unions and other groups who were part of the counter culture, they've become conventional quite simply, everybody is taking part on the issues they care about nowadays, it's pensioners and young people, it's trade unionists and middle-class professionals. So in a sense the routines and the repertoires have just altered over time and evolved; and the third thing which has changed, which I think is really important, is where power is and again if you think back to the 50s, you tried to influence parliament because again that was seen as the core of representative democracy and what's shifted is that power has moved from the core nation state, it's moved upwards and downwards, upwards towards the European Union, towards NATO, towards the United Nations.

When you're demonstrating in Britain, now, you're demonstrating for example against Bush and Iraq and those broad international issues or you're expressing concern about world trade for example on the Mayday demonstrations or genetically modified food. When you can't influence parliament to get things done on many of these issues, you have to try and influence across different countries abroad – a global coalition. You might be trying to influence local authorities because power has also shifted downwards through decentralisation to devolved bodies and to other local bodies and particular local groups and also power has shifted outwards if you like towards NGOs, towards non-profit organisations and also towards the private sector. If you want to demonstrate for example about the use of sweatshop labour, you want to demonstrate against Nike, or if you care about the environment, you want to purchase goods say through the Body Shop, and those sorts of organisations.

So in a sense it's the citizens have changed, opportunities have shifted – a bit like a fashion, and then the power shifts mean essentially that participants, activists are making a rational decision, how do I affect public policy on the issues I care about; and lobbying parties, lobbying parliament is not unimportant, it's not that they've become irrelevant by any means, I wouldn't want to claim that, but that parliament, the British parliament alone, the nation state alone can't take many of these decisions and so these other forms of activism if you like might be seen as more effective than simply trying to change elections. And then there are the specific factors: obviously in Britain right now trying to change elections right now with weak party competition is often very problematic.

HK: Anyone else like to come in? Frances, go ahead.

FG: One of the changes in the way that politicians describe what they can do just following on from the previous point, is that they say that the world has become much more complicated and that with globalisation... and then there's a whole list of – with globalisation we can't do 'x, y and z'.

PN: Yes, that's right.

FG: ...some observers might feel that actually national level politicians are hiding behind the skirts of globalisation and actually there's a lot more that they could be doing, for example in relation to big business freedoms. But do you think the political class in the UK has something to learn from NGOs and others who maybe have risen to the challenge of exerting power on a cross-border basis better than governments have?

PN: I mean I think it's very difficult if we were thinking about what the British government can do right now about some of the major issues of the day. What's changed in the period of the last thirty years, particularly through entry to the European Union, is the diffusion of accountability and responsibility. And that can be a real problem, because many politicians now play the game whereby they say well we are defending your interests in public but then they go to Brussels and of course behind closed doors because the process isn't transparent or in other venues such as the Security Council of the United Nations or in other closed door negotiations, they might well actually agree and bargain and compromise and have a different set of decisions which are going on there.

So I think the loss of accountability which we've had, and the growth of multiple veto points if you like, which is part of the complexities of multi-level governance and that's partly globalisation, does create difficulties in holding parties, in holding politicians to account. And again if we think back to the 1950s and how democracy was thought to work in Britain, you basically had a party and they put forward a manifesto, they stood on that, they argued for the policies and if in power, because they had the majority in parliament, then essentially there was very little in theory in particular which could stop them doing more or less what they wanted. There was a very weak House of Lords, there weren't international institutions that would bind their hands in the same way and so parliamentary sovereignty really was both nominal and real and nowadays that's just not the situation.

It's partly the European Union which has created this complexities of decision-making and the lack of transparency, but it's also partly just the nature of global politics. And increasingly I think that what politicians have to do then, is to make smaller promises, not to claim that they can change the world, not to claim that they are alone responsible, or that parliament is necessarily alone responsible for these decisions, and really try to reform international institutions, particularly the European Union to make that more democratic and to make that more transparent. And a simple way to do that could be something like the procedures used in Denmark, where for example proposals are first discussed within the legislature, before Ministers and decision-makers will go to Brussels. And therefore there's much more of a binding form in their decision-making processes

and much more opportunity for the legislature to have a real impact on what goes on in Brussels.

FM: Hello Pippa, Ferdy Mount here. Earlier this morning we had some discussion about whether non-competitive elections in the sense of parties being very much like each other, vanilla flavoured politics as it's called, was one factor in lower turnout. Do you regard that as an important factor or just as a factor on top of other factors?

PN: No I do think it's really important and in fact it's critical in Britain. And again the way I read the trends in Britain and in many other European countries is that there hasn't been a long-term steady decline in turnout say since the war. If you look at the trends, it's really straightforward: there's fluctuating turnout basically in the 70s and the 80s, in the 90s however there has been a steady decline which is really very sharp in Britain, sharper than in some other European countries. And I think that has to be explained not by long-term social trends but really by the nature of party politics in Britain and the way in which the pendulum has failed to swing. And we know that for eighteen years under the government of Thatcher there was a predominant one party dominance in which the opposition was split and the Conservatives were very strong. And this has now swung the other way and I think very much if one looks for example at the winner's bonus, which is to say the proportion of seats which the first party gets in Britain, then you can see systematically that that's increased. So, the system becomes less responsive; a small shift in public opinion which in the 1950s could easily kick one party out and bring the other party in, has broken down. And that's to do with complex factors including the work of the Boundary Commission, how frequently it actually redistributes seats, the nature of population change in Britain – and how far the boundaries actually reflect that the disproportionality of constituencies which have emerged. And then patterns of party competition in terms of multi parties which again, the ways in which for example the Liberal Democrats and other minor parties are strong in particular regions has changed the nature of constituencies.

So what we have in Britain increasingly as we know is large majorities with very, very safe seats, particularly in the Labour Party right now in many of their areas, but also for some of the Conservative seats. And that means that parties, once they get into power, once they have a strong majority, are essentially uncompetitive. A small shift in public opinion means that they're not actually going to get kicked out of office, so you break down that whole business where you can throw all the rascals out; and if one has to look at the current opinion polls, it's very, very obvious and one predicts those for the next general election, the clearest prediction would be that turnout is probably going to go down again and the most plausible explanation is simply the lack of competition. And I would make a strong prediction which is that if parties became more competitive, in particular if the Conservatives made some more recovery in the next general election and in the election after that, if it looked like a tighter race as we ran up to it, if the opinion polls were closer, if people were more excited, if people were more mobilised, then I think turnout would go back up. So competitiveness is really important.

FM: And one sort of technical way of really helping to bring that about would therefore be to have more frequent Boundary Commission reviews, would that be...?

PN: Yes, absolutely. When the Boundary Commission meets, it meets fairly infrequently but when it does meet to reorganise, essentially it's based itself on out of date census information, so even with the best information they have, when they redistribute, if one looks at quite simply the average number of votes that you need in order to get elected in many of the constituencies, that has been increasingly creating issues where people have been leaving many of these inner city urban seats which are very much Labour strongholds and that means that their numbers of votes has actually... they've been piling up – enormous majorities in Glasgow, in Liverpool, in Manchester, in many of the urban areas. Whereas in the older days it was much more competitive, particularly the pattern of party competition has really broken down, I think, in many regards – the pendulum has broken down.

HK: Very interesting. Does anyone want to come in on any of that?

BM: Hi Pippa, it's Bano here. I just wanted to take you back to something you said about power and about this fact that it's gone upwards, downwards and outwards. And my question then is: does that leave a vacuum in the middle and if it leaves a vacuum in the middle, does the Commission really need to consider the middle?

Sorry if I could just add onto that, or is it that the middle is now exercising a different type of power and if it's a different type of power then I'd be interested to know what your impression of that power is?

PN: I mean power, which is always seen as the core of British representative democracy, is still important; the key debates, the ways in which it can hold ministers accountable, the way it can scrutinise legislation – none of that has gone away. But what's changed I think is that the nation state – so what the government can do through parliament has really shifted in dramatic ways and with multiple veto points, it just makes it far more difficult for any government, no matter what it's majority is, to implement its policies in a way in which we used to have through parliamentary sovereignty. Multiple veto points and the lack of transparency are issues which I think the Power Commission could address and we could also think much more about what role parliament has in British politics. Is it as open as it could be? Does it innovate? Does it try and initiate new forms of debate beyond the debates that we're all familiar with? Are there ways in which it could open itself more to members of the public so they're not simply confined increasingly to the viewers gallery or watching it on television, but could play more of a role, for example by having more open commissions, by having more open hearings, but with members of parliament on particular issues and members of the public who are invited or members of interest groups, new social movements and other members who might want to come into the debate with MPs on an active basis?

Parliament really hasn't innovated that much. When it's changed its procedure it's been very much to in many ways benefit the MPs, to make their own role more efficient perhaps – for example getting rid of some of the hours of sitting that used to be common thirty years ago and making it more of a business and that's all to the good, we shouldn't denigrate that. And the growth of select committees

and a variety of other functions is important. But again I think that parliament needs to think much harder about what it's doing and about what citizens want of parliament and not to simply blame the public, which is very common, or to think of other things to change. For example civic education is often seen as a panacea; if we just educate for example school kids in how parliament works, somehow we'll change the nature of their relationship to parliament. Well no, parliament needs to change in how it conducts its business, how it opens itself to the public. Because the citizens have changed and you're never going to, as it were, put the genie back into the bottle and make citizens continue to be deferential, loyal and interested in parliament if parliament doesn't alter the way it does its business.

HK: Adam... I just wondered if Adam...we had the opportunity of speaking over lunch about some of the things that have been raised by our witnesses this morning, our colleagues from the academic community. And maybe Adam, who is our own advisor on the political firmament, might want to create links with that.

AL: Yes, there's one particular question that I think arose from this morning, there were a number of them but this one created quite a bit of discussion. It is about social capital and the relationship with social capital to political participation and I think the consensus that came out of this morning was that while healthy social capital is a good thing, it won't necessarily create healthy political participation. What you actually need to do is have institutional structures which can switch on healthy social capital to encourage political participation and I wondered if you agree with that analysis and also if you have any ideas, particularly about how that switching on can be done.

PN: Well it's a very good question Adam and I'm sorry I wasn't there for the earlier presentation by my colleagues.

The classic definition, the classic distinction, is always now between the bridging and the bonding forms of social capital. The bridging of course is the healthy, that's the thing which gets across different social groups, different social classes, men and women, different ethnic minorities. The bonding is where you get a very tight organisation or a tight community but it's basically reinforcing, either within social groups or within certain forms of ideas. A classic example of course of bonding is something like the mafia which of course is wonderful for those members of the mafia, creates great social trust within that organisation as anybody watching *The Sopranos* knows but is actually one which is very detrimental to society.

So how do you create the bridging? This is complicated. I think the best examples are those which are exemplified by for example in some of the Northern Ireland cases where there have been real conscious attempts to set up schools, educations and other community centres which reach across the communities, so it's not simply the Protestant community or the Catholic, but really does try and bridge across those different groups, brings them together, makes them work together on a variety of organisational issues and community issues and then engenders the trust which in turn leads to further problems of activism. And there are other very practical examples in the World Bank because again many international organisations have taken up the example of social

capital as something that is really important for getting things done. If the state is a failure, if you can't get things done through legislation and in particular in many countries where the state is more or less collapsed, social capital, community activism, is seen as an effective way of actually getting things like clean water or problems about AIDS, a hospice set up, and so on. So again the World Bank site has a number of different very practical examples of how to try and set up and engender bridging social capital, getting groups to work together. Some of the most innovative which I know of world-wide include those such as in Brazil for example some housing projects which again make the community... bring opportunities for them to work together from the very early stages where they actually design their next community, they design what they want in their community in terms of things like the shops and the leisure facilities, even things like the actual architecture of what the houses are going to be like and then they work together throughout the project and it can go on for three or four years until the community is built.

So instead of thinking that the state is top-down where it creates basically all sorts of services for the public, the broad concept of social capital and the practical projects which are out there really say they're a good way of getting communities, if they work together on a frequent basis with an incentive which is essentially both to get something themselves but also to get something for their community, then that's the real effective way to get new forms of social capital development.

HK: I've just seen that my commissioners have got other questions that they want to...

FM: I have one little question. Compulsory voting you mentioned briefly and you said I think that it put up turnout by 8% or something. Could you say a little more about how that works and does it create resentment as an obligation in those countries where it takes place?

PN: Well compulsory voting is interesting, it's not something which has been discussed that widely I don't think in Britain, but it's certainly one of those things which has been used in a number of other countries for many years: Italy for example, the Netherlands used it for a while before it was abandoned, Belgium, Australia for example.

It does have a number of consequences I think, one is as we see that in terms of the actual number of votes cast, the numbers go up and that's true in all established democracies with effective implementation. It depends on the penalties which are involved, often they can be fairly nominal – in Australia it's a nominal fine – but they do push up turnout. However, there are other things to bear in mind which is for example mobilising agencies like parties often don't do as much work in Australia because they know that most people are going to have to turnout to the polls, the Australian Labour Party and the Liberal party don't actually activate... they're not so good at campaigning, they don't go round so much to knock on doors, they don't engage so much in public rallies and all these other forms of activity. So there are trade-offs. You also get more spoilt ballots, people turn up to the polls but they don't actually cast a vote, it's 'none of the above'. And there is a little bit of evidence which is it might also benefit some

extreme parties and particularly in Belgium there's some work which says that partly because of compulsory voting where people have to turn up by law, but when they get there they don't like any of the above and they might cast their vote in the case of Belgium for Vlaams Blok, a very extreme radical right party which has just been banned legally because of problems of racism within its ranks.

So I think compulsory voting if it was introduced in Britain with modest fines or modest compulsion, shall we say, would indeed push up turnout but I do think in a way it's a mechanical device and it's a plastering over of the real problems and it comes back Ferdinand to the problems you mentioned earlier – if you had party competition in Britain which is something which can be achieved through appropriate legal institutional reforms, if we had better party competition, a closer election result, then you'd get the incentive. And on balance if you had to think about it as the stick as compulsory or the carrot as the incentive, then clearly the carrot is much more effective because it actually means that people are voting and turning-out to the ballot box because they think they're going to make a difference. If they don't think they're going to make a difference, you can get people to vote but in a sense it's a meaningless activity. And after all voting isn't just meant to be a ritual, it isn't just meant to be something we do for its own sake, it's to do something, it's to change politics, it's to change the party in power. The real problem in Britain right now is that many people who might feel that they want to support another party but just don't think that they can get in, in the past that used to be the Liberal Democrats but increasingly it's been the major opposition party in the last twenty or thirty years and in that situation in a sense the system is broken and we need to fix the system, not just put a sticking plaster on it.

HK: Very interesting Pippa. I've just got one final question to ask you which was: what has come through our session this morning and our discussions with you is that there are certain institutional things that could be done and you've been creative and helpful in suggesting some of the things that we may take up and certainly you're the first person who has spoken about the Boundaries Commission and the ways in which we might seek to have that more actively involved in the review on a more regular basis.

One of the things that is clear is that there's a continuous link: the link of political parties to turnout, but also to the quality of politicians. I mean there's this issue of a shrinking political party system, yet the party system is the only way to get candidates, and the candidates therefore are coming from a smaller and smaller pool, does that affect the quality of the people that we get in public office. And is there another way of nominating candidates or should we try to only nominate through parties and we should therefore try to revitalise the party system?

PN: I mean the question of recruitment is really important and many countries are thinking about the ways in which candidates get recruited and some countries have gone down the Primary route which really does open it up and obviously the United States did that particularly in the 1970s when it really widened the number of primaries. They were first introduced in 1912 and the reforms immediately after Watergate really expanded them dramatically and that of course allowed Carter to get in.

Primaries, where you basically can allow the voters to participate, have tremendous consequences though; and what they're most likely to do in the British context if we went down that route, whereby everybody in the constituency could select who the candidate was for a party, it had tremendous consequences by weakening political parties in Britain. In particular members and activists would no longer have much incentive to take part because one of their main rewards in a way is that they can at least pick their own standard bearer and their own candidate who will then run through for the campaign and you'll break therefore some of the linkages which are traditionally there in British parties where it's been very much a local constituency, the activists in that who pick their own local candidate. So voters would have a real consequence on weakening parties and – in addition – you might have some important implications on who gets picked on the type of candidates, because – as we know in America – you're much more likely to get a middle of the road candidate, one who is less perhaps committed to the party principles and who stands on the basis of their own reputation, you're more likely to get for example celebrities or people who already have name recognition, you might get people who have more personal funds because they'd be able to campaign in a primary, they would be the ones who actually could get their name out by any form of advertising that's available or could do direct mail – and you'd be much more likely therefore to get a greater social bias of the people who are actually selected because we know that the name recognition and everything else is amongst certain groups. You might have fewer women, you might have fewer ethnic minorities, you might have fewer working-class candidates. So primaries which would open the process out in terms of who selects would have major consequences.

Another way of thinking about that Helena though is to think if we need to expand the core of those who are willing to come forward, that's a different kettle of fish, that's about the people who are actually willing to dedicate themselves to a political career. Over the years that has slightly widened in many ways – increasingly as we've seen for example the number of women who have got in as candidates and then as MPs has expanded. To a lesser extent the number of ethnic minorities has expanded, that's still lagging well behind. But measures which could really encourage more groups to come forward might be an important innovation and here I think we can think of two types of measures which are very practical: one is essentially equal opportunity policies and how you get to be a candidate and what are the conditions which are there. For example we did some work on this when we interviewed and had surveys of all the candidates and we've been doing this now from the 1992 election, every election through to the most recent one. And many do say that there are financial barriers in standing: that they have to travel a lot, they have to go and campaign a lot and parties have very limited resources, they have to go round to different meetings to get selected.

So public funding for example which could be there to try and encourage people to come forward into the pool of eligibles, into those who might consider a parliamentary career or a career in local government might be good; training which is available again to potential candidates ; and also other equal opportunity policies. For example in the Netherlands what they do is they essentially have days in which people who are in elected office, bring other members of the public

in to observe their work for a week for example, they just sit next to them and they see all the activities which go on, how they meet constituents, how they go to a debate, what sort of activities they have in committees – and so equal opportunities policies are an important initiative. We've done something on that in Britain but not enough to bring really more people into politics.

And the other thing that can be done is in terms of the forms of affirmative and positive action within parties which can engage and encourage a broader pool of applicants to consider political life. We've done this on a voluntary basis in Britain through the use of gender quotas, particularly the Labour Party through its work on marginal seats, which had a dramatic impact as we all know in '97 and then maintained its position in 2001. What we haven't done however is do this for all parties, which some other countries have done. Increasingly more and more European parties and more and more parties in Latin America and elsewhere have used positive action, not just on a voluntary basis within parties, but on a statutory basis; for example by saying that there should be a certain proportion of a particular under-representative group in the total pool of candidates that's selected and again most of this work has been done for women, where it's argued for example there should be a minimum, say a 20% or a 30% pool of women in the candidates which a party puts forward – if they don't put forward that pool, then there are often things like financial penalties, for example in terms of public funding. So it's a quid pro quo – you say to a party as public resources increasingly we're giving you money to help with your campaigns, to help with your publicity, but in response we do ask in a democratic society the pool of eligible candidates should reflect basically the society from which it comes and in terms of women we know that some parties have made some advance and some parties in Britain still haven't – they've talked the talk but they haven't done anything else.

If one looks right now for example at the candidates who are most eligible for the next election in say May 2005, it's still lagging behind in terms of women, and we're still dramatically lagging behind in terms of ethnic minorities. We're nowhere near the proportion of candidates in good seats who will be likely to come through in the next election. So, again, positive action which was adopted for minorities where essentially it's public money, you say if you're getting resources, then we do expect that there should be greater diversity and again not just in unwinnable seats but slotted throughout. For example, if all seats are put on a range of winnability, so that we know that those groups in particular, but other groups that we might think are important, really stand a good chance. And when you do that, what you find is that not only do more minorities and more women come forward because they actually know they're going to stand a good chance of getting elected, but you end up with a parliament and a legislature which has greater diversity, which looks more like British society which is a multi-cultural society nowadays.

And there is one other thing which we should add which is we also looked at the seats where women were elected and we looked at levels of participation there and we did this work for the Electoral Commission for a special report on gender and political participation and what we found was that where women were MPs currently in parliament, then women were also more positive in the electorate – for example they were more likely to say that they were willing to work in a

campaign, they expressed greater interest than men in the same constituency and they were more willing to vote, so higher levels of turnout.

So if we actually initiate greater diversity in the candidates, if we use public action in order to try and really both improve equal opportunities and also improve positive, affirmative action, then I think we're actually likely to make parliament more relevant and people who tune in for example to watch the activities will no longer see quite such a male, middle-class and middle-aged, and broadly middle-income sort of assembly – and again that might engender greater participation in the electorate as a whole and especially amongst certain groups. And by the way age is another factor we should take into account – it isn't just that parliament is predominantly white, predominantly male but it's also of course very middle-aged and again we might want to think are there ways in which either through equal opportunities or through positive action, we could try and reduce and bring in more young people into parliament itself, so again it's much more looking like the public it serves.

HK: Wonderful. Emma wanted to come in.

EB: It was just something... because we talked a lot this morning and one of our audience mentioned that we haven't actually mentioned the media very much at all and considering it played such an *enormous* part in the elections in the States, I was wondering whether or not we could learn anything. Should we be having live TV debates here? I mean what kind of an impact has it had?

PN: Yes, quite simply on live TV debates. It's good for journalists, it's good for broadcasters, it's good for politicians. In a sense they're less relevant in Britain because we have live debates every week in parliament, whereas of course President Bush and John Kerry don't have those opportunities for that sort of interaction. So it's likely to have much less impact in the British context of the campaign because people know who the candidates are, they've seen them on a regular basis, they've seen the leaders and they've seen them in action against a critical audience in a public debate. Nevertheless when you think about opportunities to try and engage, increasingly people are not watching the campaign, partly for the reasons we mentioned earlier, in particular we mentioned with Ferdinand's question which is that we don't think that another party is going to win, if you think the outcome is pre-ordained, then you lose all the tension, you lose all the plot. Where you have a really close election as we did in 2000, nobody knew what was going to happen, so millions of people basically tuned in in America. And it is another opportunity and the reason why it's valuable is not so much it's probably going to have a dramatic impact on the results but it is one element which is unknown which gives some tensions.

So much of the campaign nowadays is scripted, and it's scripted for lots of reasons. But the press conferences in the morning, we know what questions roughly are going to be asked, we know how the politicians are going to try and lay out their *issue de jour*. Increased planning, increased organisation of the campaigns, increased professionalisation means that there's less opportunities for surprise in the daily business of how a campaign is conducted in Britain. And in the media, again because they feel often that they have to provide some criticisms, but they have to broadly follow the parties, there's less opportunities for unexpected events during a campaign in the media coverage as well.

So a debate between the major leaders and also potentially it should be added between other senior members, for example it could be more of a collective debate like an Oxford debate, rather than just a simple Prime Ministerial debate; but those sorts of debates add an element of uncertainty which bring more viewers in, which bring attention to the campaign and which do expose candidates, depending on the format.

One other matter we should mention is that the ways in which the debates are conducted is really important. We've tried different formats in the United States, normally the candidates have to agree upon them. Where we have one or two journalists asking questions of the candidates, that can work – and there are particular questions which have been asked which have thrown them off balance or which have added a new twist to the campaign and let the public really evaluate the candidates. But the one which really works best I think is the one with the public who are invited into the studio and it becomes a little bit like Question Time in the British television programme where you get informed members of the public who are pre-selected – for balance – because that is important, and you get certain rules which constrain what their activities can be but they can ask a direct question of one of the key leaders in an election when people are paying attention. And many of those have really expressed concerns in America which the American public is concerned about, which the journalists aren't, which the chattering classes aren't, which the people who already have a say in the campaign, they often ask about strategy and technique and who's ahead and who's behind, but the public can come in with a particular policy issue and really the whole campaign can light up as the result of those particular events.

I think in a sense what we need to do is make sure that the politicians, that their feet are hung to the fire and that means that they have an opportunity for a live debate with the public asking them questions in the next campaign. It's not in the interests in a way of the Prime Minister to do it and that's the reason we've never had it in the past, because they know and particularly in this next election, that Labour, what they have to do is play it safe. But if Labour is genuinely concerned about turnout as they say they are, then they should be willing. And after all we know that Tony Blair is a skilled debater, we know that Howard is a skilled debater, we know that it's not in a tremendous risk for them so the more that the Power Commission can really open up a campaign through that device, I think the better the campaign is going to be. It's a very good idea.

HK: Pippa, thank you so much, it was wonderful having you here transatlantically and I hope we get to see you in the flesh before the end of this Commission's sitting. Thank you so much indeed.

PN: I hope.

[Applause]

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