Sortition Foundation Strategy

Do democracy differently

sortition /ˈsɔːrɪʃ(ə)n/ noun
the use of random selection to populate a legislative assembly (parliament, senate)

DEMOCRACY OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

#LordsReform Let the people decide

January 2016
We welcome feedback on this draft strategy document from all interested people. All the campaigns mentioned below should be preceded by an evaluation of campaign proposals, an issues and interests investigation, extensive research if possible, and the development of feasible funding models.

This document consists of four parts:

1. Overview
2. Citizens’ Parliament on Lords Reform: Problem, Solution, Benefit
4. About the Sortition Foundation
1. Overview

The Sortition Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting and implementing the transformative practice of sortition at all levels of government.

Our strategy for initiating such a transformation will have three principal components:

1. In partnership with other interested organisations, launch and progress a campaign for a representative, 650-member Citizens’ Parliament (or Jury)\(^1\) to develop a referendum proposal on reforming the House of Lords, considering the following options:
   a. Replacement with a fully elected Senate,
   b. Replacement with a fully appointed Senate,
   c. Replacement with a fully allotted Senate,
   d. Some combination of the above three options, or
   e. Abolition of the House of Lords.

2. Hold a small-scale, pilot Citizens’ Parliament in London to demonstrate the concept and feasibility of such a process (and develop our capacity to organise and deliver such assemblies).

3. (Phase II) Offer Citizens’ Parliament Services to local, regional and national government in the UK, modelled on the new Democracy Foundation services in Australia.

The main Sortition Foundation objectives of these campaigns will be to:

1. Popularise the concept of sortition as a viable, legitimate and feasible alternative for political decision-making,
2. Mobilise a network of groups and individuals to take action to promote sortition.

The Sortition Foundation advocates using informed assemblies with facilitated, small table deliberation among a stratified random sample of people to come to decisions.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) In 2007, an ICM poll found that 68% of respondents thought that, “a group of ordinary voters should decide [on Lords Reform], selected as a jury”.

\(^2\) Based on the methodologies of AmericaSpeaks [now defunct] and new Democracy Foundation.
2. Citizens’ Parliament on Lords Reform: Problem, Solution, Benefit

Successful campaigns must present a compelling, urgent problem, a feasible solution, and demonstrate an obvious benefit. It helps if they are either/or (and not more/less) propositions. Identifying the responsible party and providing mechanisms for supporter engagement are also important. In this instance it could be:

**Problem:** Every political party, and the vast majority of people, agree that House of Lords reform is necessary but it has proved repeatedly impossible to get the relevant legislation through parliament. It is a so-called wicked problem.

**Solution:** Over the course of one year a random (through representative) parliament, or jury, of ordinary people, informed by experts, politicians and civil servants, should consult and research the options and develop a question for a national referendum.

**Benefit:** The outcome avoids partisan politics, and the Citizens’ Parliament will be an informed, representative group. Their decision should reflect the decision every citizen would make after informed deliberation of the options. By going directly to a referendum any proposal will have the clear consent (or not) from the rest of the citizenry.

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4. Along similar lines to the British Columbia (Canada) Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27_Assembly_on_Electoral_Reform_%28British_Columbia%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27_Assembly_on_Electoral_Reform_%28British_Columbia%29)

The broad strategy would have two prongs:

1. Campaign and lobby for a Citizens’ Parliament and referendum as the way to tackle the highly politicised and partisan issue of Lords Reform.

The pilot Citizens’ Parliament (2) could be held towards the end of 2016/early 2017, and this could coincide with the official campaign launch of (1). A proposed website has been set up at http://www.citizensparliament.uk/

General steps to launch a campaign:

1. Map the issues and select a point of intervention
2. Develop a campaign concept, proposition and a critical path of actions
3. Research, test, and gather information on the above and integrate results into a campaign plan.
4. Develop the material and activities and launch the campaign.

Typical campaign activities could be:

- Public manifesto endorsed by politicians of all parties, celebrities, academics, journalists, etc published online and in newspapers.
- Letter writing to newspapers, MPs, and other organisations.
- Public information through www, blogs, social and traditional media.
- Petition and lobby MPs and Peers.
- Apply for grants, attract members, supporters and donations to fund the campaign.

The aim would be to fund 1-2 people FTE to administer the campaign and support a team of volunteers.
4. About the Sortition Foundation

The Sortition Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to institute sortition at all levels of government.

We envision a world without partisan politicking, where a stratified random sample of everyday people make the laws in an informed, deliberative and fair environment (i.e. a real democracy).