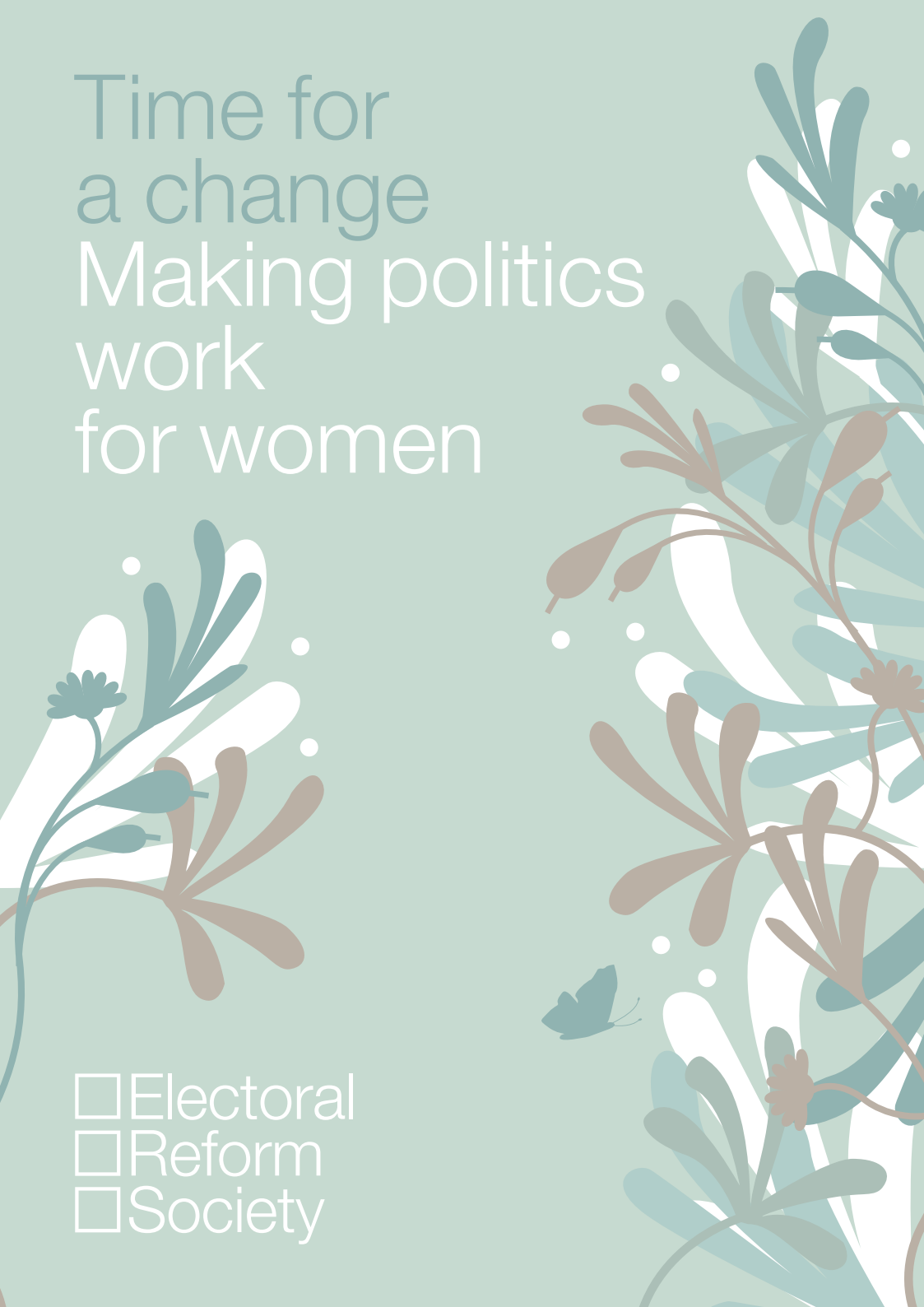


# Time for a change Making politics work for women

- Electoral
- Reform
- Society



Fewer and fewer of us are taking part in elections. People are losing trust in politics.

It's not that we don't care. We are frustrated about health, education, war and peace, jobs and the environment: all the issues that face our local communities. But we are also deeply concerned about the way that these important issues are dealt with.

Many of us feel alienated from a politics which looks like it's all about spin and point-scoring. It doesn't seem to be about making lives better and getting to grips with the issues.

And the way we elect the politicians who run the country is a big part of the problem.

## Change is possible

It makes sense that if we don't get the right method for making decisions, we are less likely to get the right decisions. If we want fair results, then we need to have a fair system. If we want politicians and parties to be constructive and work together, we need structures which encourage that.

That's not what we have. Instead, unfairness is built into our elections. Many people know their vote doesn't really count. They are put off voting, because their hands are tied with a narrow choice at the ballot box. The vast majority of our MPs are male, white, middle-aged and middle-class.

But it is possible to change our political system so that it's fit for the 21st Century. The Electoral Reform Society works for politics which is fair, gives voters a real choice and holds our politicians to account.



# It's not fair

At election time, parties know that some seats matter more than others - and some voters matter more than others. It's natural that political parties want to win elections, but the current voting system means parties have to focus on a small number of voters to be successful. This isn't fair and it isn't healthy for our democracy.

“It can only be fair if all views are represented and each and every vote has an equal value”

Unfairness is built into elections: the system doesn't deliver what we voted for. Last time round, more people voted Conservative than Labour in England, but the Labour party ended up winning 90 more English seats! The system cheats many voters across the country by denying them a voice. One million people voted for parties which didn't win a single seat in Parliament. Their votes just don't count.

*We should change our system of voting so that it delivers fair votes; so that parties get at least roughly the same share of seats as they get votes. All significant views must be represented.*



“The trouble is if one government has a big majority, they can push things through no matter”

## A real choice

Many feel they have no real choice on election day. You can't express your views on the many different concerns you have or the range of issues facing you and your family.

In some seats, the election is a done deal and the choice is between a vote with no impact and not voting at all. Sometimes we are asked to make a trade off between a party we like and a candidate we don't like, chosen by the party and not the people.

Choice voting gives you the chance to vote for your favourite candidate, knowing that if he or she isn't elected, your second preference is taken into account. The end result would be MPs who reflect how everyone voted, not just a small minority or voters.

*Voters should be able to express their views as effectively as possible, knowing that their vote will count to the full. All voters should have a choice that matters – no matter where they live or what party they support.*





“Politics is so boring, all you ever see is grown men squabbling like children”

## Time for an update

We need to drag elections into the 21st century. It's not just about making voting more convenient. It's about making voting more effective, so we know we will get the politicians we choose and can hold them to account.

We also need a politics fit for the challenges of modern Britain. We need a system which encourages politicians to work together to tackle problems, rather than score points. Instead, our 'winner takes all' elections result in a 'winner takes all' kind of politics.

*We deserve grown-up political debate. We want a modern system that represents the diverse views in our society and encourages politicians to work together to address the problems we experience.*

## Politics in touch with people

Even at a local level, many people feel out of touch with councils and MPs. If an issue you care about does not get a sympathetic hearing from your local MP, you have no one else to go to. In the hundreds of safe seats in the UK – two thirds of all constituencies which are a stronghold for one party or another – everyone knows who will win the election. Local people feel like they have no opportunity to hold their politicians to account.

*Changing the way we elect people could change the way they represent us, because all views are heard, politicians are accountable and safe seats are gone. It could reinvigorate the relationship between politicians and those who elect them.*

“Politics should be about working together, so this is really important”



# Unfair to women

It makes sense that if we want politics to address the needs and experiences of all of society, then everyone needs a seat at the table. There have been too few women in parliament to bring an awareness of women's experiences and priorities.

Fewer than one in five of our MPs are women and ethnic minority communities are also badly under-represented. The way we choose our MPs is considered among the worst for women's representation. Countries with fairer voting systems tend to have twice as many women in their parliaments.

*Our system is unfair because it works against the groups that most need it: under-represented groups like women and ethnic minorities. If Parliament is to reflect the society it serves, we need to change the way we elect it.*

“The most important thing is that the voting system is fair.”



## Change for the better

The Electoral Reform Society is campaigning to change the way we choose our politicians. We believe that a fair voting system will improve our democracy, allow politicians to better represent you and help them to tackle the serious issues facing our society. Fairness, accountability and a real choice for voters should not be compromised.



# Vote with your feet – Join us

The Electoral Reform Society is a membership organisation. We welcome your support. If you would like to join or just receive more information, please return the slip to the freepost address below.

ERS Women's Campaign  
Freepost SE 6853  
PO Box 773  
London SE1 0YT

- Please send me more information about ERS and the women's campaign
- Please send me regular updates on women, politics and elections
- I am interested in joining ERS to help make democracy work better for women

NAME

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TELEPHONE

EMAIL

You can also find out more or join online at [www.electoral-reform.org.uk](http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk) or email [women@electoral-reform.org.uk](mailto:women@electoral-reform.org.uk) or call 020 7928 1622.

The quotes in this pamphlet are taken from discussion groups with women around the country during 2005