



Press statement

10 October 2022

Launch of electoral reform campaign

Defend our Democracy today launches a campaign for meaningful and credible electoral reform.

We call on members of Parliament to reject the Electoral Amendment Bill that the National Assembly will vote on later this month.

This Bill is flawed. It is not in the interests of the public, but serves to benefit political parties. It also severely disadvantages independent candidates.

An example of this is that prior to standing for elections, political parties are required to get 1000 signatures from the public, while independent candidates need to get some 8000 signatures.

Similarly, if an independent candidate gets more votes than what is required, the extra votes are wasted at a national level, or at a provincial level, they are effectively distributed to political parties. This means that you could vote for an independent candidate, but your vote could actually be discarded, or go to a political party!

This Bill takes away from what electoral reform is supposed to be about. At its heart, electoral reform should be about having a political system wherein we can directly hold those whom we vote into power to account. The Bill does little to change the current system – where elected representatives account to their parties, rather than to the public.

We must remember what this kind of system has resulted in. With Nkandla, members of Parliament from the majority party didn't hold former President Jacob Zuma to account. They instead largely supported him, saying that he does not have to pay for the 'fire pool' and other unnecessary upgrades to his house.

The current Parliament similarly, has done little to hold Ministers responsible for their failures and inefficiencies – whether it be around Covid-19 corruption, or the energy crisis.

In July this year, Defend our Democracy hosted a Conference for Democratic Renewal and Change, which highlighted the importance of electoral reform.

In September, Defend our Democracy co-hosted an Electoral Reform Indaba with the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution, My Vote Counts, Rivonia Circle and the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation.



This was followed by a civil society submission to Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs. Here, we appealed to the Portfolio Committee to relook at the Electoral Amendment Bill, which may not be constitutionally compliant.

We implored Parliament to review the Ministerial Advisory Committee report, where a majority panel proposed a mixed constituency and proportional system as a minimum basis for electoral reform. This system, very much like local government elections, would allow the electorate to vote for parties, on a proportional system, and to vote for individuals – both independent candidates and political party representatives – directly within the constituency in which they are based. This model also allows for greater public accountability.

However, despite having this majority recommendation before it, Parliament, without reason, ignored it.

Now with months before the Constitutional Court deadline to finalise the Bill, we believe that Parliament is putting at risk the 2024 elections. The 2024 elections must accommodate independent candidates and the IEC has to have time to prepare for it. But instead of considering an option that is viable for the country, Parliament has instead gone for a flawed model which can be legally challenged.

We therefore reiterate our call to MPs to 'vote no'. We call on President Cyril Ramaphosa to not sign off on this sham of Bill!

We also call on the South African public to learn more about this Bill. Ultimately, this Bill would mean that political party representatives in Parliament and provincial legislatures won't be compelled to come to you in the next five years to explain why the lights have gone out, why the trains don't work, why there are water cuts and why Parliament may not have held ministers accountable. Is this the kind of public representative that our country needs?

We call on you, the public, to learn about electoral reform; teach others about it; call your local constituency office and ask MPs to explain why they will be voting for or against the Bill; and help us mobilise our communities in telling Parliamentarians that we will not accept a Bill that benefits them more than it benefits us all.

To get involved in the campaign for electoral reform, fill in your details here:

<https://bit.ly/3Tb2J8I>

To access the electoral reform campaign toolkit, click here: <https://bit.ly/3VfV9LP>

Issued by Defend our Democracy

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