

Proposals for the introduction of Elements of Direct Democracy in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Proposals quoted from Our-Say, Unlock Democracy, Power Inquiry, I&Rgb

The "[four sets of proposals](http://www.iniref.org/dd4proposals.doc)" may be found in www at <http://www.iniref.org/dd4proposals.doc>

Comments and questions by Miroslav Kolar

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Founder [Direct Democracy Meeting Place](#)

22 Feb 2007

Dear Michael,

Here are finally some comments:

All four proposals are basically similar. Mainly the signature threshold requirements differ, I'll comment on this at the end.

The best brief formulation for gathering further support seems to be your (I&R-GB) three-step brief formulation.

Period given to collect the required number of signatures should not be fixed, but vary with size of the electorate. One year may not be enough for a national initiative. I would suggest one month should be enough for the smallest communities, three and six months for increasingly larger ones, one year or 18 months for regional I&R, two years for national ones.

Local referenda in small communities could be carried out at the earliest convenient opportunity, only those in big cities or larger units at fixed referendum days.

I have most issues with the Power Inquiry proposal:

Re ii. - No further signatures should be needed. If Parliament or regional assembly rejects to accept the proposal outright, it should then go straight to referendum. If security requirements are met (e.g., secure digital signatures are accepted by law), Internet petitions for initial signature collection should be made equal to the traditional paper petitions.

Re iii. - It is absolutely bad to require a minimal turnout for any referendum. All voters must be informed well ahead of a referendum. They must be made aware of the importance of all the issues pertaining to a referendum. But unless the question is of utmost importance to every individual, one can expect that very often only a minority of population will have strong feelings about an issue. Everybody else whose life is not directly affected by the given issue, should be allowed to abstain in this vote by simply not voting on this issue. Even if several thousand of voters will vote on a given question, it is still a much larger pool of expertise than the present few hundred of members of a national parliament.

Re iv. - I am rather uneasy about this. There should be really strong (exceptional?) reasons for court interference with the I&R process.

Re v. - Five years seems to be too long in the present fast changing world.

One has to add to the five years wait period another one or two years for the signature gathering period, then the discussion period in parliament, then up to another year to wait for the next Referendum day.

On the signature threshold:

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The first two proposals of 2.5% and 5% are way too high for the national level. Around 1% should be enough for the national level.

A sliding scale is preferable. However, the one that Milan Valach brought to your attention (taken from the Czech Citizens Constitution proposal) perhaps makes it tougher for local referenda than necessary. I think that it should be properly formulated as follow:

- less than 3,000 voters            - 15% voters
- less than 200,000 voters       - 450 + 10% voters exceeding 3,000
- less than 1,000,000 voters - 20,150 + 5% voters exceeding 200,000
- more than 1,000,000 voters - 60,150 + 1% voters exceeding 1,000,000

(the boundaries between various scales are also expressed in terms of the total number of the registered voters, not of the total population that includes children).

Anyway, here I propose a variation of this scale that lowers the requirement for smaller jurisdictions:

- less than 3,000 voters            - 10% voters
- less than 200,000 voters       - 300 + 5% voters exceeding 3,000
- less than 1,000,000 voters - 10,150 + 2.5% voters exceeding 200,000
- more than 1,000,000 voters - 30,150 + 1% voters exceeding 1,000,000

Best to compare various schemes for the minimal signature requirements is to plot them as the function of the total number of registered voters in the given jurisdiction. I attach such plots comparing the fixed 2.5% threshold (red), the scale from the Czech Citizens Constitution proposal (green), and my modified scale above (blue). All the three attached plots are identical, they differ only in the length of the total-number-of-voters axis. large.png plot shows the whole range from 0 to 20 million of voter, medium.png ends at 2 million voters (applicable to large cities), and small.png at 20,000 voters.

In the end here is another type of initiatives proposed:

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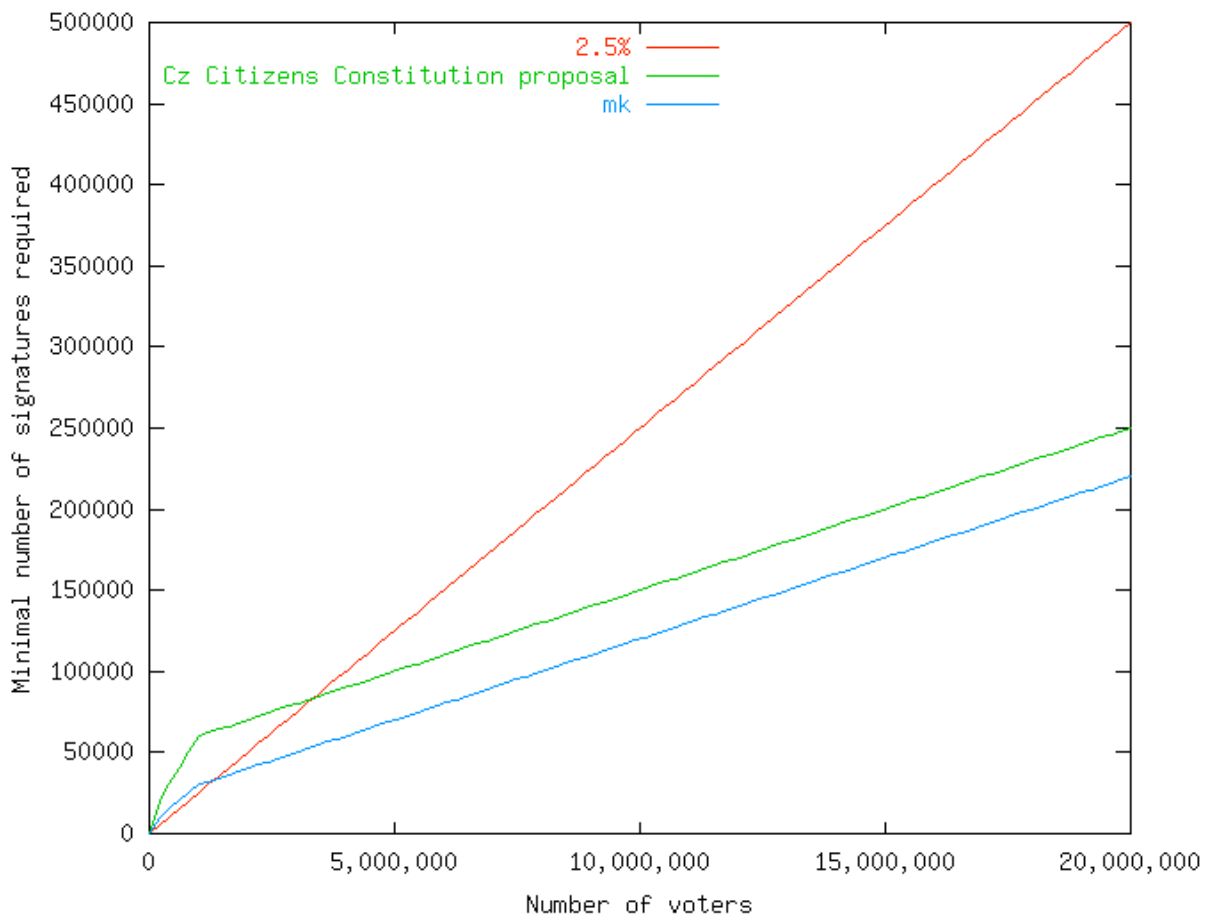
In addition to direct legislative measures (laws), and public inquiries, there could be a third type of citizens' initiatives: proposing issues (questions, problems) for the national (local, regional) database of positions. This database would be established to store citizens' positions on various issues, direction for future development, possibly budget preferences. It would be available to politicians to guide them in making decisions that must be done faster than the relatively slow I&R process, especially on how to respond to future crises and emergencies. Questions for the positions

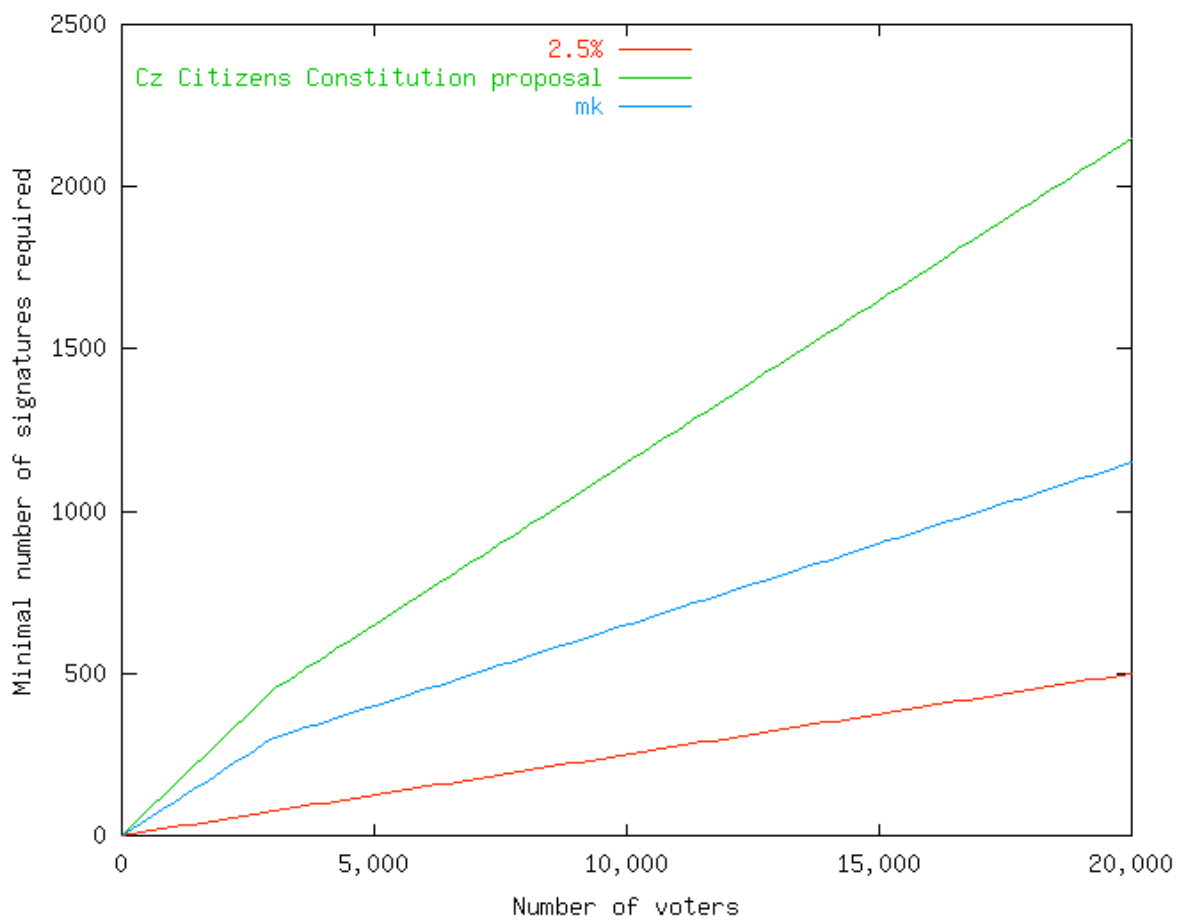
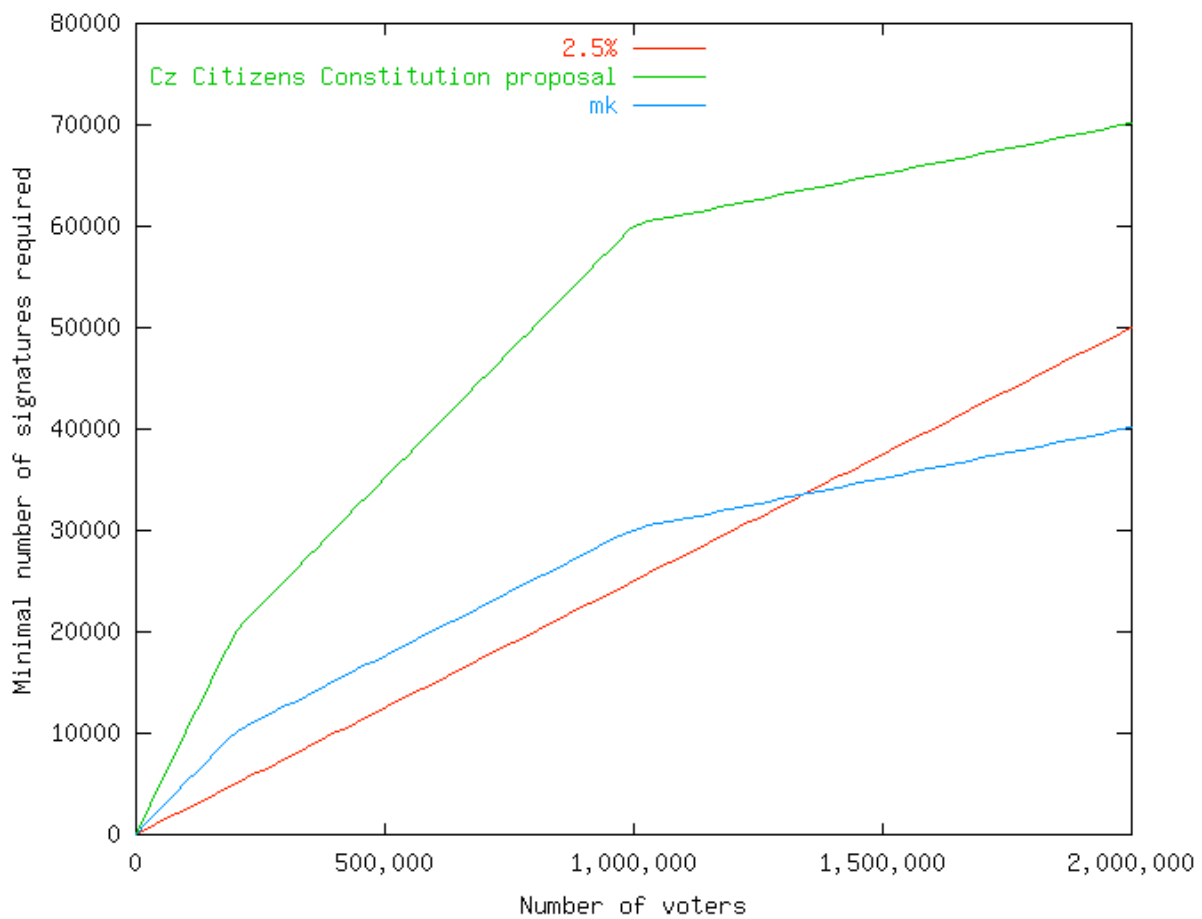
database would be submitted the same way as any other initiatives (consideration could be given to whether the minimum number of signatures threshold for the position database items could be somewhat lower than for other initiatives), and vote on all such position database questions that passed the threshold would also be held on the referendum days.

I am glad at the progress you are making in GB.

At this time I will not post your proposal on a site in full, just all the links that are mentioned in it.

Mirek





Dr. M J Macpherson wrote:

- > I&R ~ GB Citizens' Initiative and Referendum
- > a campaign for direct democracy in Britain
- > <http://www.iniref.org/>
- > Tel. +49 30 262 3768
- >
- > From the founder
- > Michael Wallace-Macpherson
- > Guildford and Berlin
- >
- > Miroslav Kolar
- >
- >
- > Dear Mirek,
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- > I am writing to experts asking for comments on recent developments in
- > Britain. Do you wish to comment?
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- > 2006 in comparison with many preceding decades of stagnation or decline
- > was a good year for democratic and constitutional reform in Great
- > Britain. In growing detail, proposals to introduce elements of direct
- > democracy at all levels of government are appearing. There is a real
- > chance that within the coming year or so a Bill (law proposal) to
- > regulate DD will be introduced in the Westminster parliament.
- >
- > We enjoy contact with people from a number of countries who are experts
- > and/or experienced campaigners. We are asking some of them to comment
- > on the developments in GB and perhaps offer critical advice.
- >
- > We want to gather comments on these developments towards and proposals

- > for better democracy. Coming from experienced campaigners and some
- > academics, these will help us to improve the proposals and maybe avoid
- > some potential errors and pitfalls.
- >
- > Attached is a brief update about the prospects for direct democracy in
- > Britain, together with a collection of proposals.
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- > We would like to know what you think.
- >
- > Best regards,
- > Michael
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