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Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister of Scotland
Leader of the Scottish National Party

Dear First Minister,

RE: Self-regulation of voter targeting by political parties

We are all concerned by the misuse of people's data by technology giants and data analytics companies. At Privacy International, we work across the world to expose and minimize the democratic impact of such practices.

Consequently, with the UK Data Protection Bill, we urged parliamentarians, through all the stages to delete the wide exemption, open to abuse, that allows political parties to process personal data 'revealing political opinions' for the purposes of their political activities.

To no avail – this provision stays in the Bill.

The recent revelations regarding misuse of our data by Cambridge Analytica, facilitated by Facebook has shown that our concerns are justified and the problem is systemic. Cambridge Analytica and Facebook are not alone.

The use of data analytics in the political arena needs to be strictly regulated. Personal data that might not have previously revealed political opinions can now be used to infer such opinions (primarily through profiling).

Failure to act can lead to political manipulation and risks undermining trust in the democratic process.

We believe the Scottish National Party shares this concern. As Brendan O'Hara MP stated "… the days of the unregulated, self-policing, digital Wild-West, wherein giant tech companies and shadowy political organisations can harvest, manipulate, trade in and profit from the personal data of millions of innocent, unsuspecting

people, could be coming to an end". (https://bit.ly/2IdE9A7 ). This was echoed by Mhairi Black MP who wrote that ".. most of all, we must recognise that this is corruption at the highest level. This completely undermines and destroys quality democracy. Now more than ever, we need to demand better from both our politicians and media" (https://bit.ly/2ryDliY ).

In light of the above, now is a timely moment to show that your party's positions are more than just words. We would therefore propose that the Scottish National Party takes a principled stand, by explicitly committing not to use the exemption provided in the Data Protection Bill to target voters - both online and offline - in all local and national forthcoming elections or by-elections.

We would be delighted to hear from you about whether you are prepared to make this commitment. We believe that this would send a strong message around the world about the defense of democracy from modern threats.

Yours sincerely



Dr. Gus Hosein
Executive Director
Privacy International

Cc: Ian Blackford MP, SNP Westminster Leader

Brendan O'Hara MP, Spokesperson for Digital