



Annual Report 2021

UNLOCK
DEMOCRACY



Unlock Democracy Annual Report 2021

Unlock Democracy
33 Corsham Street
London
N2 6DR

info@unlockdemocracy.org.uk

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From the Director

After 18 months of upheaval caused by the pandemic, the new normal is starting to look a little more like the old normal.

Unlock Democracy's staff team are working part-time in the office, meetings are being held in person, rather than on Zoom, and we have even reached agreement with Make Votes Matter that they will occupy some of our office space. And at long last, work is to start on rebuilding one of the two properties we own.

What hasn't changed are the present Government's plans to roll out a series of measures which will erode our democratic foundations. These include; clamping down on protest and banning demonstrations outright, reducing the number of people likely to vote in elections, interfering with the independent body which oversees spending by political parties, and threatening journalists with laws designed to tackle spying.

With the lockdown lifted, Unlock Democracy, its new and enthusiastic staff, active Council members, and growing numbers of members and supporters, will be re-doubling our efforts to defend and enhance our democracy. We will be busy lobbying



MPs and Ministers, pushing for greater transparency and accountability in Government and real devolution to local communities.

We will also continue our partnership work with other organisations campaigning for electoral reform, participative democracy, and human rights. And we will continue to press for a written constitution as the best means of embedding and defending fundamental democratic principles and values.

Thank you for joining our campaign.

Tom Brake, Director
Unlock Democracy



What's new in 2021?

New Staff Team

This year we've welcomed plenty of new faces to our staff team. Tom Brake took over as Director in the autumn of 2020. Not long afterwards Shaun Roberts came on board as our new Head of Campaigns & Digital, and Grace Barnett as Membership & Database Officer. Alice Jeffrey has also joined us as Administrative Assistant.

Everyone's been busy getting stuck into their roles, working on updating our systems and campaigns alongside existing staff, Simon Howard (Director of Operations).





Updating our Strategy

Unlock Democracy is run by its members, who this year worked together to draw up a brand new strategy, fit for our times.

At the core of the strategy is our longstanding commitment to a written constitution in the UK. Members put their heads together, pooling their rich experience to identify key campaign areas where we see a chance to push for real democratic change.

This in turn gives us space to plant the seeds and develop the infrastructure for large-scale democratic reform.

To read more about the strategy, visit www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/vision





Our Campaigns

Defending the right to protest

We strongly oppose the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. It is a draconian bill that will give the police unprecedented powers to restrict even peaceful protests.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel, claimed that she ‘worked closely with the Police Federation in developing this Bill.’ However, a Freedom of Information request has shown that the Police Federation were not consulted on the protest aspects of the bill. **So we took matters into our own hands by doing the police consultation ourselves.**

We spoke with many ex-senior police officers who are apprehensive about the Police and Crime Bill. One officer, who specialised in public order and policing crowds, warned that “This legislation will change the definition of protest and lead to more conflict between the police and the public”.

To pile the pressure onto the government, we have co-ordinated a letter opposing the bill from ex-senior police officers to Priti Patel. This proves that the government cannot claim that they have full support from the police for the Police and Crime Bill.



Opposing the Elections Bill

The Government's Elections Bill poses a huge threat to our democracy. The disastrous bill will introduce voter ID, neuter the Electoral Commission, and encourage large political donations from abroad.

The fight against the Elections Bill has become an important part of our work, and our members and supporters have certainly risen to the challenge. **When we set up our online Elections Bill Action Centre, we saw hundreds writing to their MPs, local papers, signing petitions, and more.**

And it's not just us. There are many other organisations opposing the Elections Bill, and we're working closely with them. A strong pro-democracy coalition is forming, demanding with one voice that the government pause and rethink this destructive bill.

This autumn, we will continue to make noise. When we surveyed our supporters, the results were crystal clear. 95% of them stated that they are 'very concerned' about the effect the Elections Bill will have on the Electoral Commission. This gives us the green light to fight tooth and nail against the bill.





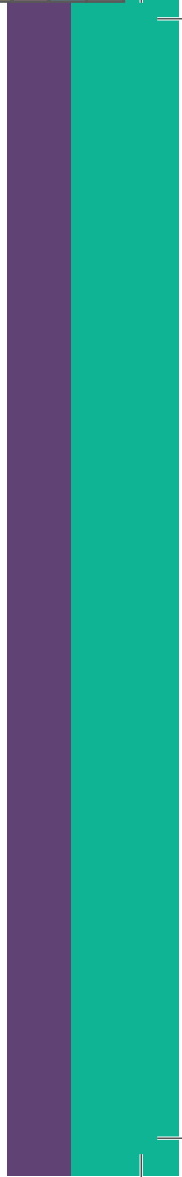
Fix Our Broken Politics

As always, our long-term goal at Unlock Democracy is to secure a written constitution that serves and protects the people, and that this change should be led by the people. That's why we have been campaigning for an independent, open, inclusive Citizens' Convention to lead the overhaul of our democracy.

Over the last year, Unlock Democracy has worked with 17 organisations and academics to campaign for a Citizens' Convention. Since its launch, almost 9000 people have backed the campaign.

We wrote to all the UK party leaders to get their support for this initiative. So far, we have received positive responses from the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and Renew. Other parties have expressed a willingness to discuss our proposals.

This is a great starting point. We will continue to urge other party leaders to back our campaign to establish a Citizens' Convention that will recommend necessary democratic reforms.





No more delay on the Covid inquiry

It's time for the Government's handling of the crisis to be assessed in an independent inquiry. The inquiry must begin in 2021, while vital evidence remains intact and the Government can learn the necessary lessons as soon as possible. **We are calling on the government to stop delaying the inquiry.**

We have written to the Prime Minister asking a simple question: Has he instructed Ministers to not delete any electronic or written communications relating to the Government's handling of the pandemic? Unsurprisingly, we have received no response.



But pressure is beginning to mount on the Government to follow Scotland's lead and start a full inquiry in 2021. We're working with a range of organisations to keep the pressure on.



Turning the Tide on 40 Years of Decline in Local Government

This year we launched our new report *Turning the Tide on 40 Years of Decline in Local Government*. The report, produced in partnership with De Montfort University, documents how local government powers, finance, responsibilities, and autonomy have been consistently eroded since 1979.

To mark the occasion, we hosted a series of events up and down the country, engaging with councillors from a range of political parties in Sutton, Hillingdon, Oxford, Portsmouth, Sheffield, and Birmingham.

We also surveyed over 400 councillors and found a deep-seated discontent across all parties, with 88% saying that they think central government has too much power.

To top it all off, we brought our campaign to Westminster by hosting a special event with guest speaker MP Clive Betts, who is chair of the select committee on Housing, Communities, and Local Government.





Brexit Civil Society Alliance

From July 2017 to 2020, we were proud to host the Brexit Civil Society Alliance. The aim of the BCSA was to make sure that the concerns, hopes and aspirations of civil society were centre stage as the UK made its exit from the European Union.

The Alliance was neutral on the 2016 referendum outcome and did not take positions on what direction the Brexit process should take. Instead, it raised the concerns of member organisations throughout the process and helped to shape and improve Brexit legislation by connecting politicians with civil society. It also helped to educate, inform, and advocate for those feeling remote from the Brexit process.

Having fulfilled its mission to inform, educate, and advocate for civil society through a turbulent period, the BCSA sent its final e-bulletin at the end of January 2021. We are proud to have hosted this project, and thank all those involved for their hard work and commitment to the project.



Events



It has been a fantastic year for events at Unlock Democracy. We kicked things off in the spring with an illuminating panel discussion on the challenges of holding free and fair elections during a pandemic. Thanks to Thomas Hicks (US Election Assistance Commission), Fernanda Buriel (IFES), and Baroness Jenny Jones for sharing their expert insights and experiences with us all.

A month later, we joined forces with our counterparts at Unlock Democracy Canada for a transatlantic discussion about campaigning to defend democracy in our two countries.

Next we had an illuminating conversation with journalist and author, Will Hutton, which highlighted the need for reform in the UK more clearly than ever.

Finally, award-winning journalist Carole Cadwalladr joined us in conversation to warn about the current threats to our democracy. She touched on the catastrophic effect that Big Tech can have on elections as well as the “little rays of hope” organisations like Unlock Democracy can give her.



In the news

Our work is hitting the headlines! We have been mentioned in The Mirror, The Independent, The Times, The Guardian, The Telegraph, and others. It's clear awareness of our campaigns is only growing.

Take, for example, our recent story in The Guardian. After we crunched the data on All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) and the declared interests of their members, we revealed that many MPs have jobs as paid advisors to businesses whilst also serving on APPGs representing those business sectors. This means they could be exploiting a lobbying loophole.

Our research on the deep dissatisfaction among local Councillors of all parties was also featured recently in The Independent.

We are pleased to have successfully brought these issues to more people's attention.





Council and Management Board

The current Council and Management Board took their seats at the height of the pandemic's "first wave" and had to adapt quickly to online working. Undeterred by all this, Council members got stuck into the work of reimagining Unlock Democracy's strategy.

more involved with Unlock Democracy's work. The next round elections will take place in summer 2022. Email team@unlockdemocracy.org.uk for more information.

Since then, the Council and Management Board have been overseeing the smooth running of the organisation, helping to implement the strategy, and even celebrated its first ever hybrid meeting in September 2021.

Standing for election to the Council is a great way to get



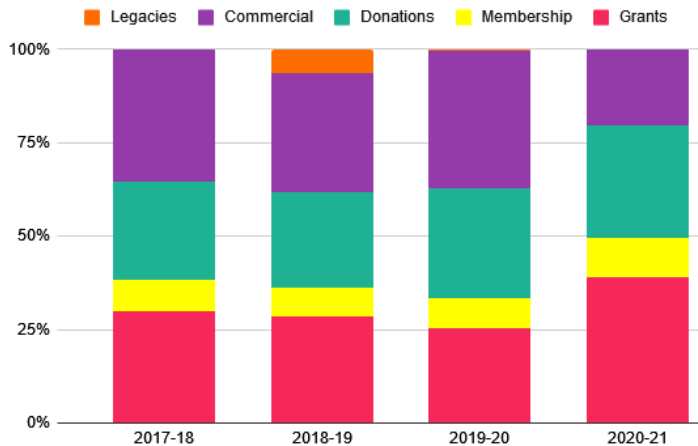


**Thank you to our current Council and Management Board
for all their support this year:**

Jessica Metherringham
Catherine Bearder
Stephen Carter
Stephen Gosling
Stuart Hill
Mike Young
Jacob Webb
Sean Shore
Tom Pratt

Paul Daley
John Franglen
Helen Close
Marcus Cain
Peter Hirst
Rachel Collinson
Ian Driver
Vicky Seddon
Luke Williams

Finances



We are enormously grateful to everyone who has contributed financially to Unlock Democracy. **Your membership fees and donations amount to £130,000 in the year from April 2020 to March 2021, and are key to keeping us running as an independent voice for democracy.**

We are very grateful to the trusts and grant funders who provide support for specific projects. We'd particularly like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust for their generous support for our work.

Membership	£34,000
Donations	£96,000
Grants	£125,532
Commercial	£66,000



Unlock Democracy is also supported by income from our subsidiary property company, Rodell Properties. Rodell owns and manages two properties in central London.

The full, audited accounts for Unlock Democracy's financial year 2020-2021 will be available in November 2021 in an independent report by our auditors.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to Unlock Democracy this year. Whether you've given your time, your funds, or simply your support, your dedication is truly appreciated.



Unlock Democracy is building a vibrant, inclusive democracy that puts power in the hands of the people.

This means:

Fair and open elections

Transparency in public decision making

Democratic accountability of all elected representatives, governments, and public bodies

Empowered individuals and communities with a greater say over the decisions that affect them

Power exercised as close to the people as practicable

Universal human rights for all

And, of course, a written constitution.

