



St George's House, Windsor Castle

Thursday 20th February
– Friday 21st February 2025

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Hosted by

UNLOCK
DEMOCRACY

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RADIX
BIG TENT



Resilient Democracy



St George's Conference: Report

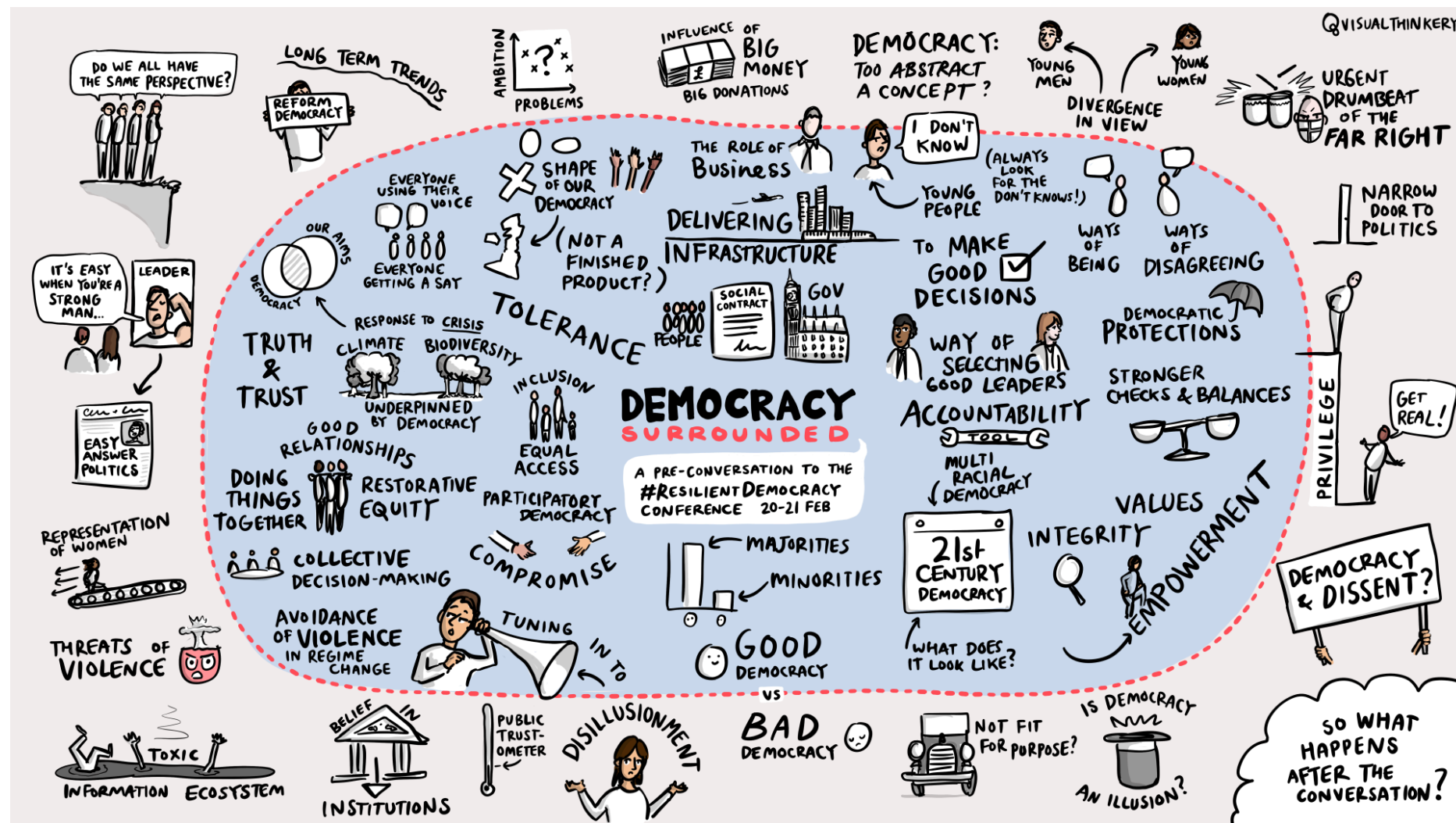
'Individually we are powerless, together we are powerful'

Index

Action Plan	4
Discussions	6
1. The Threat to Democracy	6
2. Where and how can we take action?	8
Appendix: Edelman Trust Barometer Slides	10

With grateful thanks to *Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust* for sponsorship of the event.





Action Plan

A short-list of 9 campaign streams was voted on and the top five selected to be worked on in more detail. It was agreed that RBT will monitor all the groups and convene biannual 'whole group' meetings to discuss progress. Each group has its own convenor(s) to take a lead on group organisation.

1. Political Funding

To be convened by **Radix Big Tent**.

The remit will be to consider caps on political funding and the transparency of political funding. The need to think about sustainability was mentioned – how can we create rules that are sustainable. Why haven't things worked in the past? Why haven't beneficial changes stuck? The issue of state funding is politically difficult so the group also needs to consider how to achieve the changes needed as well as what the changes should be.

2. Votes at 16/Automatic Voter Registration/Civic Education

To be convened by **Unlock Democracy**

It was agreed that votes at 16 will happen and that therefore the consideration will be on AVR and citizenship education to prepare the way.

3. Standards/Clean Up Politics

To be convened by **Compassion in Politics**

This stream will focus on mechanisms to reform democracy and rebuild voter trust, including modernising parliament to improve inclusivity, access, ethics and standards as well as measures to prevent political deception, as are currently being adopted in Wales.



4. Defending Democracy Network

To be convened by **The Constitution Unit, UCL and The Governance Project**

This stream plans to consider what other organisations are working in this area, nationally and globally, starting with a mapping exercise and then looking at possibilities of working together, for example to build messages, briefing materials and grassroots activity.

The core focus is not the reform of democracy, or even necessarily its advance, but defence of the central principles and institutions of democracy where they exist, and mobilising against the risks of 'backsliding'.

5. Representation

To be convened by **50:50 Parliament and Operation Black Vote**

It was agreed that this should focus on how access and representation could be improved for gender, minorities, economic and educational based disparities. Discussions to be included in this stream mentioned were: Are quotas a specific policy ask? How can a pipeline of ethical people from across all streams be created to increase the quality of representation? How do we engage with ethnic minorities not as subjects but as citizens? Who is represented and who isn't? Who do those in power speak to? The issue of Voter ID is also to be included in this stream.



Discussions

1. The Threat to Democracy – [Appendix](#)

Discussion based on Edelman Trust Barometer.

Distrust has gone up across all categories, not just for those in public life.

People have grievances against those with power. The rise of oligarchy has fuelled those grievances. A cohort of billionaires, taking control of power, has caught people by surprise as has the dropping of diversity initiatives. Wealth has always influenced the government but it has become more visible.

Toxic feelings are created when people don't feel that they have control over their own lived area. Democracy is being blamed for the failure of the economic model and we need to separate the two.

Should the point of the Government be to run state control over public services and how far should that go?

'Democracy is the mechanism by which the Government is accountable to the people'

There is a more tenuous grip on British citizenship developing in ethnic minorities. The impact of racism has been multiplied since Brexit and data tells us that discrimination is rising in all communities. Levels of trust are higher in monocultures. There has been an erosion of ethnic minority representation at local levels.

The next election is likely to see the percentage of women representation in parliament falling for the first time.

Young people see the rich as those who have had a step up in life. Where are the young people taking part in local elections and in local government where most decisions are made?

Engaging in the democratic process has become financially beyond most people.



'We don't always see the dangers of not building bridges between different generations and different sectors in society.'

We need positive stories of hope. People have been encouraged to develop a negative view via the tv and social media and to focus on the bad, sometimes a contrary judgement to their own lived experience. People feel progress is going backwards.

The summer riots of 2024, whilst deeply depressing, created a hopeful moment as ordinary people came together to stop the riots. People are invested in protecting their democratic values.

'Democracy functions as a common shared myth. How do we reinforce the shared myth and the institutions which maintain it?'



2. Where and how can we take action?

A list of detailed campaign 'asks', compiled from previous discussions and workshops was discussed and refined based on the workshop discussions.

'Democracy is the only thing we have. It may be imperfect, it may not give people exactly what they want but it is the only thing that we have.'

Democracy is under its greatest threat since World War 2. Do we need to make a new case for it? We need to make and win the case as to why it is the best system. Democracy is the balance between authoritarianism and chaos. We need a structure where the advocacy of democracy can be situated.

Trump and Farage would also say they are democrats. Democracy can be anarchic. Checks and balances from the law are needed to make democracy work. The rule of law is important, but it is being attacked domestically and internationally. A campaign was suggested to safeguard the rule of law and taking it down to community level, looking at how people are locked out of justice. The attack on lawyers as perceived as being the enemy within was noted.

Democracy tends to create disenfranchised communities. If people who are perceived to be the beneficiaries lecture about it, it won't cut through. We need to be honest on the need to and how to improve democracy to be relevant to people's lives.

The question of how to 'institutionalise' fairness is important.

The political argument is change versus the same. If people are unhappy, they want change.

We need young and diverse voices to be heard. The people 'in the room' have to be changed. This can be done by bringing along people that 'you' are here to represent. We must recognise that Britain is a multiracial democracy.

Are we being too micro in thinking? We need a global movement for democracy.



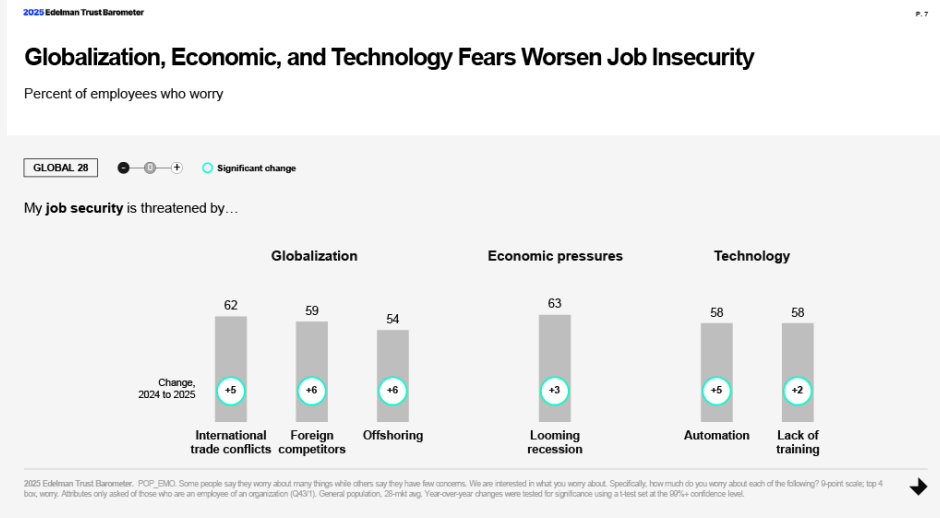
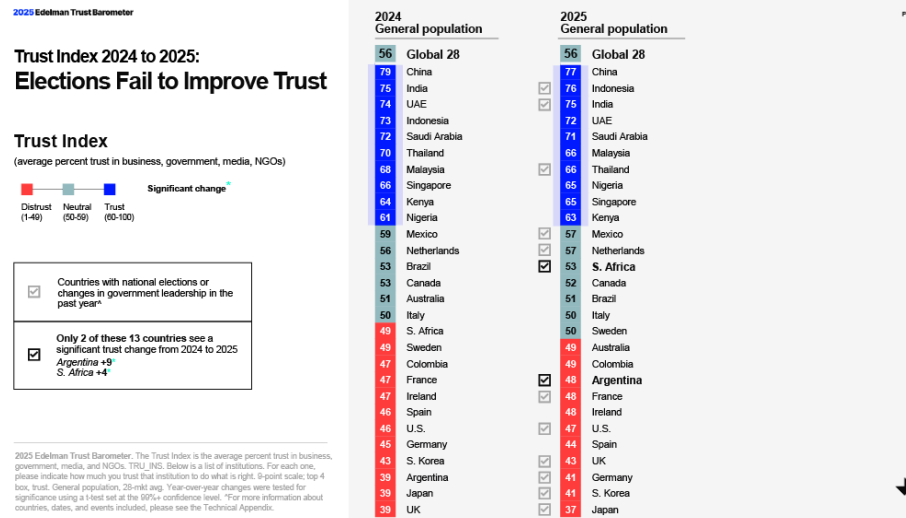
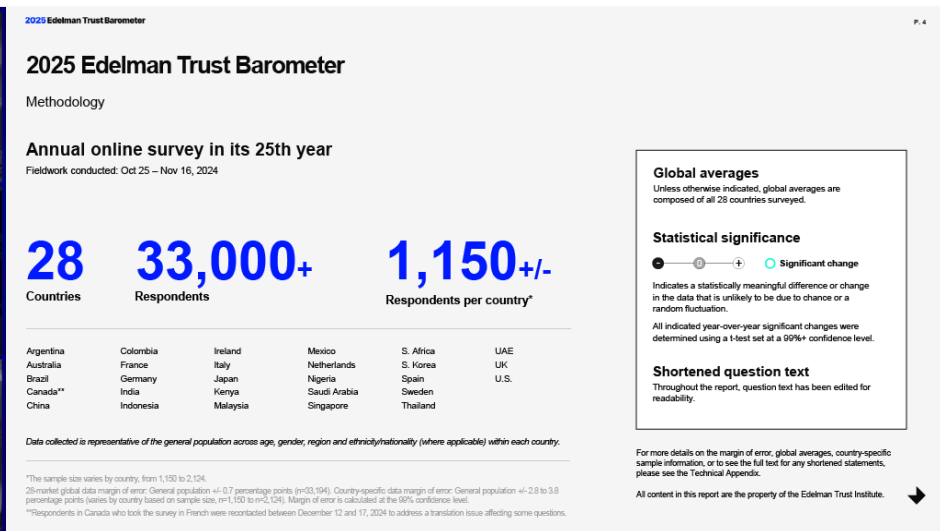
To popularise democracy, we can explain the alternatives. We could bring in voices from countries such as Georgia and Serbia to say that this is what democracy actually means. This could be an area where commercial organisations, businesses and chambers of commerce can play a role. Other voices such as people who remember World War Two should be heard and preserved as an oral history and warning.

Further specific actions that were discussed were whether businesses could play a role coaching their staff about democracy. The idea of 'democracy cafes' was mooted as a way of bringing together different voices. Finally, Trump has deleted parts of democracy very quickly in the USA. Should we be thinking about the need to start archiving and protecting reports in such areas as DEI and Women in Stem?

'Small tiller shifts now could prevent untold suffering in the long-term'



Appendix: Edelman Trust Barometer Slides



View full presentation [here](#)

