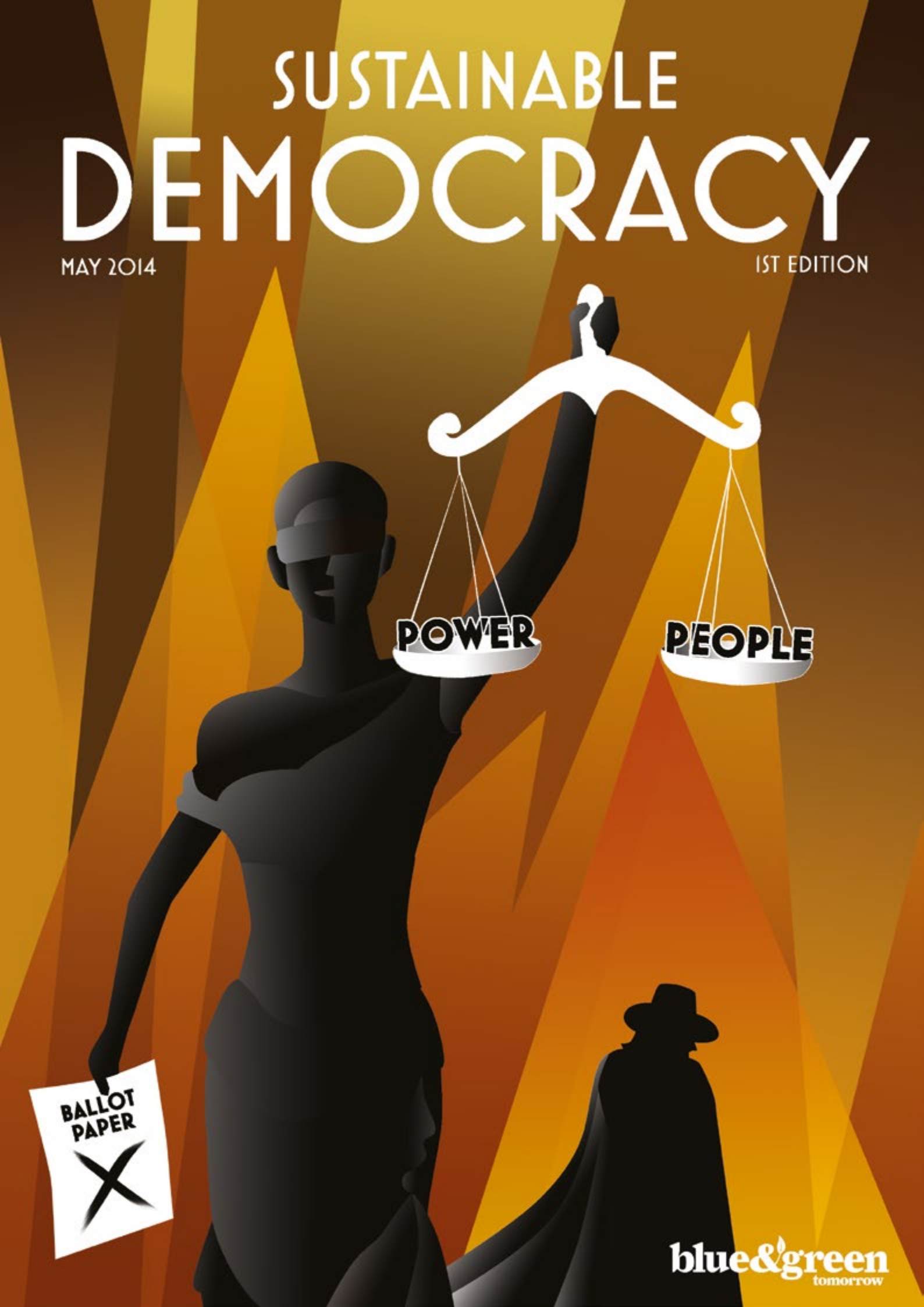
SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

MAY 2014

1ST EDITION



blue&green tomorrow

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR'S LETTER

"If you want to make enemies, try to change something"
Woodrow Wilson,
28th President of the United States

The Guide to Sustainable Democracy 2014 was born out of our belief that the vast majority of British people are generous, fair-minded and tolerant.

They want a sustainable future, which includes ethical commerce and clean industries, fair and harmonious civil society and protected environmental spaces and wildlife. They want liberty under the law; transparent, representative and open politics and government; and evidence-based law-making. They want well-funded public services; effective policing and rehabilitation; secure borders; and a sensible balance between the public and private sectors. They want well-regulated markets which work for the majority of people; a living wage and safe workplaces; and an enlightened position in world affairs.

Under this rationale, we are seeking to answer two crucial questions. The first is about how we make our democracy sustainable when we face falling turnouts in elections, have unrepresentative representatives and see increasing corporate influence in the political system. Meanwhile, the second is about how to make sustainability democratic and a key part of politics. We face resource uncertainty in energy, food and water and our long-term planning for environmental, social and economic turbulence is inadequate at all levels.

The democratic, regulatory and legal institutions and systems we currently have are ill-equipped for the challenges we face – so how do we make them better? To analyse those two questions, we have input from political parties and leading thinktanks and reform organisations. Meanwhile, with our friends at Vote for Policies, we have conducted a comprehensive survey with nearly 7,000 people to gauge the political mood ahead of the 2015 general election. On top of this, we look at the Magna Carta – which celebrates its 800th anniversary next year – decentralisation and the crucial Scottish vote on independence.



SLeadbetter

Simon Leadbetter
Publisher, Blue & Green Tomorrow



Alex Blackburne

Alex Blackburne
Editor, Blue & Green Tomorrow



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A BRIEF HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY



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Democracy, from the Greek words 'demos' and 'kratos', literally means 'common people rule'. Ancient Greeks (600BC) are often portrayed as the earliest democratic civilisation, regularly forming assemblies to make decisions, rather than relying on a single head of state or small governing group. But many academics point to more primitive versions of democracy within many cultures long before this.

Since ancient times, various rulers in the UK have gathered their leading figures to advise them. This system was enhanced in 1066, when William I established a council of noble advisers that would help him govern. He called on his earls, barons and churchmen to help him make decisions, paving the way for the first parliament in the late 13th century.

Before parliament was fully established though, the historic Magna Carta (meaning 'great charter' in Latin) was forced on King John in 1215 during a bloody civil war, transferring power to the barons. It changed many things, most notably the requirement for people to be tried by their peers before imprisonment – preventing the king from holding suspects without sufficient evidence. The king was now under the law but still the head of government.

After the English civil war in the 17th century, government was effectively controlled by parliament. The monarch became a constitutional figurehead. Robert Walpole became the country's first 'prime minister' in 1721 – although this was an insult at the time, rather than the job title it is today. He's properly called the first lord of the Treasury of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (prime minister is less of a mouthful).

The Reform Act of 1832 increased the electorate to over a million (the population was 14 million) – enfranchising men with property above a certain value. The 1918 Representation of the People Act lifted the voting restrictions yet further, and gave women the vote, albeit at a different age to men. The current democratic system has largely remained the same since the 1960s – despite some reforms to the House of Lords.

In the US, for nearly a century after the country's independence in 1776, it was only white, property-owning men who were allowed to vote. This changed when slavery was abolished in 1865 and the vote was given to all men (and eventually all women in 1920) – although the wealthy incumbents made it difficult for the less educated to have their say by using poll taxes and reading and writing tests. It wasn't until 1965, when the Voting Rights Act passed, that such corruption was theoretically outlawed – although for many communities in 21st century US, underhand voter suppression methods still persist.

Today, most of Europe, North America, South America and Oceania, as well as certain parts of Asia and Africa, are considered democratic. The 2012 Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit says 15% of countries (with 11.3% of the global population) are full democracies (e.g. UK, US, Canada, Scandinavian countries), while 32.3% (with 37.2% of the global population) are flawed democracies (e.g. France, South Africa, India). The remaining 52.7% (with 51% of the global population) are either hybrid (e.g. Ukraine, Singapore, Turkey) or authoritarian (e.g. Russia, Nigeria, Qatar) regimes.

SO WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY?

Sustainability, in its truest sense, is for something to be capable of being maintained at a certain rate or level. When politicians talk about 'sustainable economic growth', they're talking about growing the economy steadily – without sharp peaks or damaging troughs. In environmental circles, the term is used to describe the balancing of planet, people and prosperity – whether that's conserving the Earth's natural resources or its broader ecosystems.

So what does it mean in the context of a democracy? After several decades of stable voter turnout, numbers dropped sharply in the 1997 general election and sharper still four years later in 2001. In 1992, 78% of the population cast their vote (it was 84% in the high water point of 1950). Less than a decade later it had fallen to just 59%.

The situation is far worse in local (31%), European (35%), London mayoral (37%) and police and crime commissioner (15%) elections. 'None of the above' and apathy have become the leading candidates. Can anyone have a democratic mandate if they have less than a half of the third of an electorate backing them?

While numbers picked up slightly at the last general election to 65%, falling turnouts across the developed world is a real issue as it allows extremists, who do turnout, to capture the system. A sustainable democracy is one in which the views of all society are represented proportionately – and not favouring the elite or extremes.

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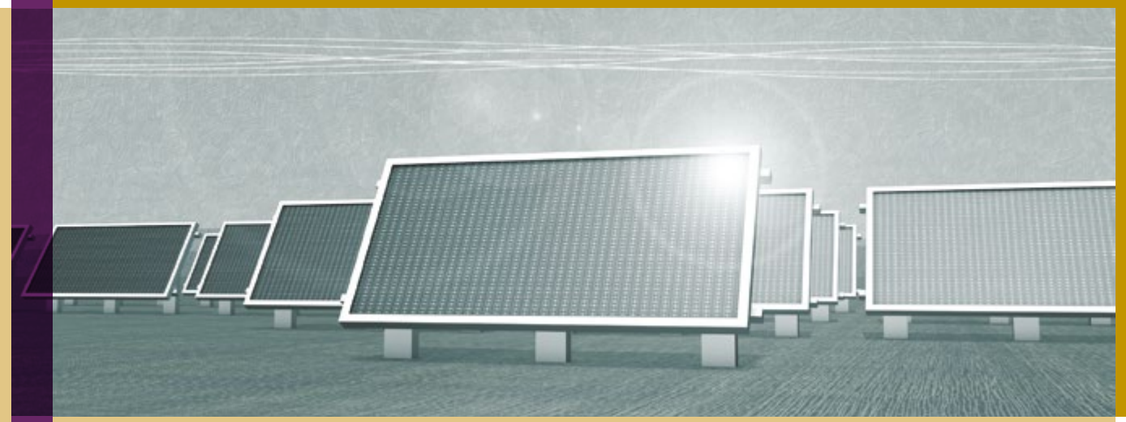

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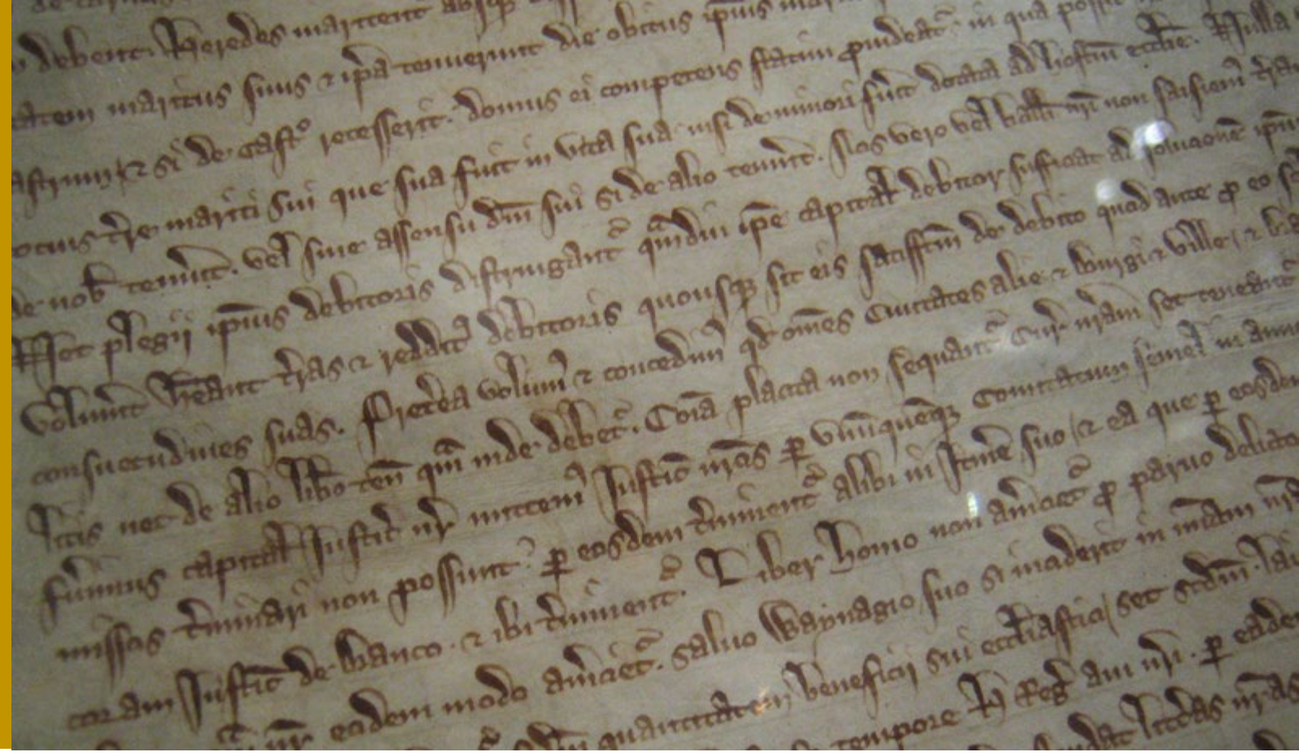

'DOES MAGNA CARTA MEAN NOTHING TO YOU? DID SHE DIE IN VAIN?'

So said Tony Hancock in 1959's 12 Angry Men, a brilliant spoof of Henry Fonda's 1957 film of the same name. Magna Carta, King John's grudging attempt to appease rebellious barons and clergy, celebrates its 800th anniversary in 2015.

By SIMON LEADBETTER

Photo by ERIC CHAN via Flickr

Magna Carta is seen as an historically significant document that enshrined liberty under the law and laid the groundwork for subsequent great constitutional documents. These include its own reissues in 1216, 1217, 1225 and 1297 (the last as statute), as well as the UK's Habeas Corpus Act (1679), the Petition of Right (1628), the Bill of Rights (1689), the Act of Settlement (1701), the US Constitution (1789) and the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights (1948).

Lord Denning, the late, great master of the rolls (the second most senior judge in England and Wales) accurately described it as being *"the greatest constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot"*.

At the time, it represented a desperate last ditch effort to secure peace between a bankrupt and beleaguered king and incredibly whiny, warring barons. The barons resented paying tax to a king who had failed to defend their rights, privileges and, most importantly, their territories in France. As a result, they wanted the king to stop raising taxes and seizing inheritances without their explicit consent, and much of the document deals with those more mundane issues, rather than profound issues of the constitutional governance of a nation.



Photo of LINCOLN CASTLE via visitlincoln.com

John's hand was finally forced by the threat of full scale civil war and he gave his seal to the document on June 15 1215, near the reeds of Runnymede on the Thames. In effect, Magna Carta ended absolute monarchy and introduced semi-constitutional monarchy. The king, like everyone else, was to be under the law.

Magna Carta has grown in significance since. It was reissued four times over the first hundred years and has been cited in some of the greatest parliamentary and legal debates over constitutional reform. However, the original agreement lasted only a few months before Pope Innocent III annulled it, refusing to accept any constraint on the dignity and divine right of kings (clause 61). Civil war broke out shortly after, so the original version was not exactly a success; its later reissues more so.

William Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John* (1590s) makes no mention of Magna Carta, reinforcing the view that its real constitutional importance came in later years – especially in the parliamentary debates leading up to the English civil war (1642-1651). As with so many of Shakespeare's plays, it did leave us with the oft-misquoted phrase *"to gild the lily"*.

Over time, clauses of Magna Carta became absorbed into statute. Today, four clauses effectively remain in force: the freedom of the English church (clause one), the ancient liberties of the City of London (eight) and the right to due process (39 and 40). The last two, which became a single clause in the 1225 reissue, are the most significant, in that they state that people should be judged by their peers, and justice could not be delayed or sold. Recent governments have done their best to get around this right through extraordinary rendition and secret courts.

This incredible document has a special affinity for me as one of only four remaining copies (there is no original) sits in the castle prison in Lincoln, my hometown, alongside its sister document, the Charter of the Forest. The castle is subject to a £22m refurbishment in advance of the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta. Salisbury Cathedral has another copy and the British Library the other two. Magna Carta was also the basis of an alternate reality game I developed in 2006, which weaved its real history with a fictional tale of buried treasure.

Not many people know the courageous and pivotal roles played by Archbishop Stephen Langton, Elias of Dereham, William Marshal, Hubert de Burgh, Eustace the monk or Arthur of Brittany (the senior heir to Richard, reputed to be murdered by John, or on his orders). Nor do many know the throne of England nearly ended up in French hands with the popular support of the English, abruptly ending just under 150 years of independent Norman rule. Our history would have been radically different had Prince Louis Capet secured the throne in 1216.

John died (poisoned or broken by his struggles) in Newark Castle in October 1216, shortly after losing his baggage train and much of his wealth in the Wash between Lincolnshire and Norfolk. This created the schoolboy joke of *"King John losing his Crown Jewels in the wash"*. At that point, Prince Louis had captured Winchester and London, both our ancient and current capitals, plus half of England. John's death allowed the rebellious barons to switch their support to his nine-year-old son, Henry III (although they probably regretted that decision by 1258). They simply wanted rid of John. Until his death, Louis was the only credible pretender. In 1297, John's grandson, Edward I, directed that charters based on the Magna Carta become part of the common law of the land.

John's reputation has been that of a 'bad king', akin to Richard III. No king since has shared either of their names. In reality, it is far more complex than that. John inherited a kingdom bankrupted by King Richard's adventurous crusades, imprisonment and subsequent ransom. Richard spoke no English and hated the cold and rainy country with a passion, staying away for all but five months of his 10-year reign. He is reputed to have said, *"I would have sold London if I could find a buyer."* Now, he is lionised as one of our greatest historical figures, with a triumphant statue outside parliament in London, the very place he wanted to sell. Richard shares as much with patriotic Englishmen as our patron saint, St George, a Greek Roman soldier who never set foot on our green and pleasant land.

Faced with bankruptcy and war with the expansionist Philip, King of France, John lost land in France, raised taxes and seized church assets, while trying to appoint his own loyal archbishop over the heads of the clergy of the diocese of Canterbury. In doing so he annoyed the pope, leading to the whole of England being excommunicated for several years. It was clerics who wrote the historical records of the time and they didn't like sharing their choice of archbishop, wealth or power. Despite the victories against France in the early part of his reign, he eventually lost too much territory that was belonging to his barons. In contrast, his father, Henry II, had controlled the vast majority of France through the Angevin Empire, by marriage and conquest.

He was undoubtedly a ruthless man, but what son of the overbearing Henry II and a Plantagenet would not

"What we can learn from Magna Carta is that sometimes we need a weak government to have the opportunity to create a better government"



Photo of SALISBURY CATHEDRAL CLOISTERS by STEVE CADMAN via Flickr

"The greatest constitutional document of all times – the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot"
Lord Denning

have been? All of Henry's sons rebelled against him at some point. John persecuted his enemies mercilessly, but that is nothing exceptional for those times, and he was a particularly insecure monarch (nicknamed 'Lackland' and 'Softsword') with strong pretenders and powerful enemies. Killing relatives to secure your throne has been the modus operandi for a lot of rulers.

In many ways, his weaknesses and bad luck left open the opportunity for taxpaying barons to secure more power and show that there was an alternative to absolutism. Once the barons had secured more power, the door was open for the taxpaying cities and shires, the commons, to demand more power. The Boston Tea Party cry of *"no taxation without representation"* echoes down from Magna Carta. British rulers in 1773 clearly hadn't learnt the lesson of Magna Carta.

John's failings led to Magna Carta's creation, which in turn seeded our parliamentary democracy. A stronger, more effective absolute monarch might have held that door shut for another century or two. This would have been good for the monarchy, but bad for the people.

Magna Carta says rulers are under the law and only rule with the people's consent (albeit 'the people' were the barons in 1215). It says certain groups require special protection and we all have a fundamental right to justice and freedom from arbitrary decisions.

What we can learn from Magna Carta is that sometimes we need a weak government to have the opportunity to create a better government.

Is it time for a new Magna Carta?

2015 marks the 800th anniversary of the Magna *Carta's signing, and there are a range of events planned in both the UK and the US. These include exhibitions of the four remaining original copies, housed in Lincoln, Salisbury and at the British Library in London, starting in May 2014.*

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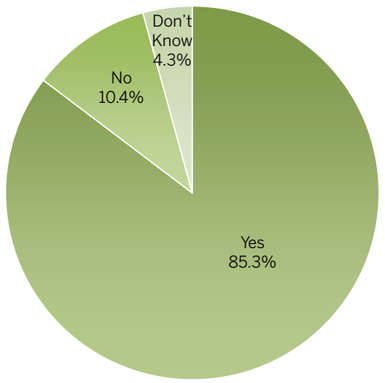
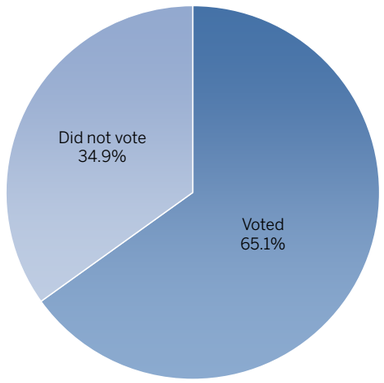
DO YOU INTEND TO VOTE IN THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION?

In March we ran our regular online poll of Blue & Green Tomorrow readers, exploring whether they intended to vote in the 2015 UK General Election. 256 (0.5%) of our readers responded, of which 45 were ineligble (for being under age or outside the UK). B&GT readers are 31% more likely to vote than the population as a whole. For a more detailed survey of the 6,999 respondents to our Vote for Policies/Blue & Green Tomorrow survey, please turn to page 66.

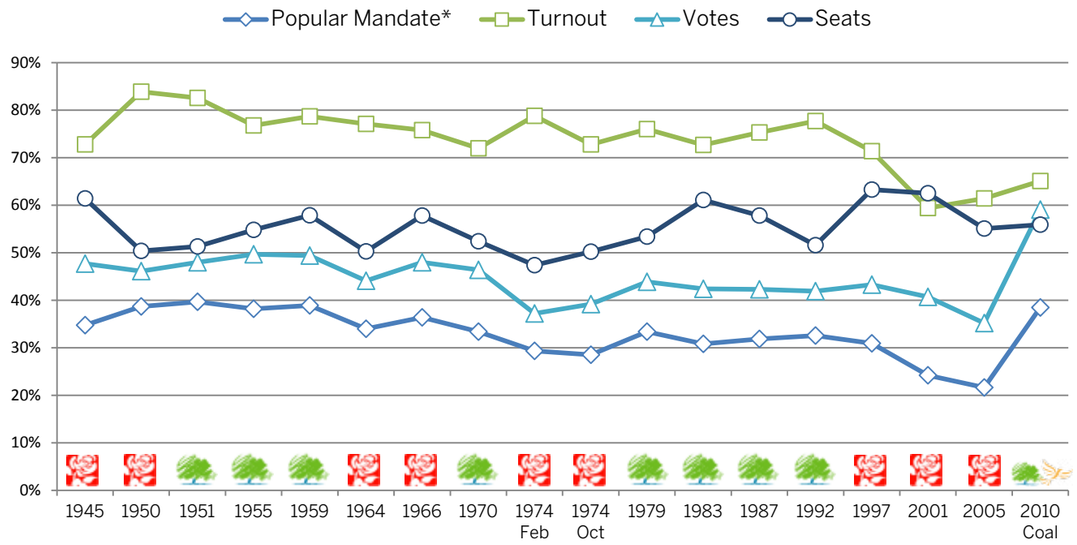
BLUE & GREEN TOMORROW'S READERSHIP



TURNOUT FOR UK 2010 ELECTION



TURNOUT DECLINES WHILE SHARE OF SEATS EXCEED SHARE OF VOTES. DO THEY HAVE THE 'POPULAR MANDATE'?



The 'popular mandate' line (the authority to carry out a policy, regarded as given by the electorate to a party or candidate that wins an election) shows what percentage of the whole electorate - whether they chose to vote or not - supports the government of the day. It has never been more than 40%, but the share of seats has often exceeded 60%

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blue&green newsletter

ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL: DEMOCRACY IS NOT ALWAYS THE BEST FORM OF GOVERNMENT

By SIMON LEADBETTER

Photos with thanks to Intelligence Squared

Top Opposite ROSEMARY HOLLIS

Bottom Opposite IAN BREMMER

The Intelligence Squared democracy debate took place at just the right time for Blue & Green Tomorrow's Guide to Sustainable Democracy. Held in London's Cadogan Hall in front of a sold out audience, the debate explored whether democracy is always the best form of government.

Accepted wisdom in the developed world is that democracy is best. But there are those that argue that democracy can lead to illiberal outcomes such as the oppression of minorities, economic stagnation and inaction on global issues such as climate change.

Hosted by Nik Gowing of BBC World News, speaking for the motion (*"One size doesn't fit all: democracy is not always the best form of government"*), was Martin Jacques, senior fellow of the Department of Politics and International Studies at Cambridge and author of *When China Rules the World*. Accompanying him was Rosemary Hollis, professor of Middle East policy studies at City University and author of *No friend of Democratisation: Europe's role in the genesis of the 'Arab Spring'*. Meanwhile, speaking against the motion was Ian Bremmer, an American political scientist and author of *The End of the Free Market: Who Wins the War Between States and Corporations*. Accompanying him was Andriy Shevchenko a member of Ukrainian parliament and an active participant in the pro-European protests.

At the outset, 44% of the audience didn't know their view on the motion, 38% were for the motion and only 18% against. This was clearly an open-minded gathering and it promised to be a lively debate.

Jacques led the debate, arguing that the developed world's democratic impulse followed our economic growth. During the industrial revolution, only a tiny fraction of the population had any power. Economic wealth created the conditions for a democracy to flourish. Imposing democracy on countries that are at a different stage developmentally will not work, for example Iraq and Egypt. Conversely, China has prospered for 35 years without democracy, demonstrating that a country's prosperity does not depend on democracy.

Without a prepared speech, Bremmer countered this perspective passionately and amusingly by extolling the virtues of government by the people and of the people. He said we shouldn't be ashamed to support what feels good and right in that sentiment, which is freedom under the rule of law and the right to choose our leaders. Declining democratic engagement in the US and elsewhere is more down to the capture of the state by corporate and vested interests and an alienation of the people. Russia, which is essentially undemocratic, has seen a flight of capital and talent due to the instability of non-democratic nations.

Hollis accused Bremmer of demagoguery as an example of one the flaws in democracy. She returned to the Jacques theme that we attribute our good fortune to our hard work, liberal capitalism and democratic system, when in fact our democratic system evolved because of our wealth. The developed world extolling the values of democracy while restraining it elsewhere means your view on democracy depends on where you stand in the global pecking order.

Shevchenko held a helmet worn by protesters in Kiev to show us that this wasn't some abstract debate, but affected real people today. He made the point that only six of the top 30 countries by gross domestic product (GDP) are not democracies. He pointed out that only three of the top 47 countries by the human development index (HDI) are not democracies. He argued that is easier to correct errors in a democracy. The all important values of rule of law, free speech, human rights and respect of the individual should not be so easily abandoned.

The first contribution from the floor argued that the real debate is about freedom, not democracy. The mobile phone will do more than anything to liberate people. One audience member argued that we live in a sham democracy with an unelected House of Lords and monarchy.









"If you cannot get rid of the people who govern you, you do not live in a democratic system"
Tony Benn, former Labour MP

Photo Top Opposite MARTIN JACQUES

Photo Bottom Opposite ANDRIY SHEVCHENKO

Those speaking for the motion returned to the theme that the first step towards democracy is economic growth. Bremmer countered that we need resilience, not just growth, and that autocracies are not resilient. He cited Canada and the Scandinavian countries as exemplars of democracy. Hollis countered that an ideal system in developing countries was a benign dictatorship, with Bremmer responding that the benign aspect of dictatorship was impossible to achieve with nepotism and unelected succession.

Bremmer was the first to cite Churchill's famous quote: *"Many forms of government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."*

He pointed out that, as in Russia, in China we have seen those who have done well move their money out of the country and into the developed world as they understand the fragility of their system of government.

Hollis made the point that we speak with a forked tongue, extolling the virtues of democracy at home and in public while propping up dictatorship abroad. She argued that we actually wouldn't want the world to be democratic as they would disagree with us.

Jacques echoed this theme, arguing that for the last 200 years the developed nations had ruled the world allowing countries with 15% of the population to dominate the rest. Economic growth in the developing world will lead to greater democracy but it won't be our kind of democracy.

At the end of the debate, democracy won. Only 3% of the audience didn't know their view on the motion by the end; 39% were for the motion and 58% against. This house didn't agree that *'democracy is not always the best form of government'*.

And so, in light of Tony Benn's tragic death in March, we will leave the final words to him: *"If one meets a powerful person – Adolf Hitler, Joe Stalin or Bill Gates – ask them five questions: 'What power have you got? Where did you get it from? In whose interests do you exercise it? To whom are you accountable? And how can we get rid of you?' If you cannot get rid of the people who govern you, you do not live in a democratic system."*

www.intelligencesquared.com

DEMOCRACY AS A FORCE FOR GOOD

By TOM REVELL

The challenges that the 21st century world faces demand a 21st century democracy. Four parties say how they would reshape politics.



Photo by STARTLATVIA.COM via freeimages.com

"We passionately believe we cannot build a stronger economy without also creating a greener, more sustainable economy"
Tessa Munt, Liberal Democrat MP for Wells

With falling voter turnout revealing the growing body of people failed by modern politics, the gap between the poorest and the wealthiest stretching ever further and increasing corporate influence, we need politicians to build a fair, representative democracy that can last.

With rising populations and expanding middle classes, shrinking resources, disappearing natural wonders, ever more polluted skies and a world heading faster and faster towards climatic catastrophe, we need politicians who realise the necessity of sustainability.

Blue & Green Tomorrow asked each of the three main political parties, as well as the more environmentally focused Green party, two questions: How do we make our democracy more sustainable, and how do we make sustainability more central to our democracy?

Tessa Munt, the Liberal Democrat MP for Wells in Somerset and the parliamentary private secretary to Vince Cable, believes *"an unelected second chamber; one party 'rotten boroughs' in local government and the opaque workings of government"* are partly responsible for falling voter turnout at elections.

"We feel with fair representation, transparent decision making, reducing the influence of wealth in politics and the opening up of routes into political participation, especially for under-represented groups, we can encourage people to re-engage with politics", she says.

The Liberal Democrats have pushed for a reform to the House of Lords, in favour of a wholly or mainly elected chamber, blaming Conservative backbenchers for shooting the bill down. Munt explains that her party is also committed to increasing female representation and the representation of black and ethnic minority communities in 2015.

"For example, we have eight MPs who will be standing down at the next election and of the seven seats where new candidates have been selected, five are women and two are from ethnic minority backgrounds," she says.

When it comes to sustainability, the Liberal Democrats certainly talk the talk. Leader Nick Clegg has been a vocal advocate of climate action. A group of Liberal Democrat MPs also recently launched a Green Manifesto, urging the party to put sustainability at the heart of its approach. However, as part of the government, the party's actual, tangible environmental achievements have been scrutinised. But Munt insists the Lib Dems are *"working hard to make sure the environment stays at the top of the agenda and this government is doing more to tackle climate change than any other government before."*

She points to achievements such as the foundation of the Green Investment Bank and the creation of 200,000 green jobs as evidence of the coalition's environmental credentials. The party also takes credit for pushing their coalition partners into accepting the 5p plastic bag charge, while arguing that EU membership is essential to future efforts to combat climate change.

"We're in a world where some of the biggest players are also the biggest polluters. Only through working together with the rest of Europe can we make a difference, within Europe and on the world stage", Munt says. *"We passionately believe we cannot build a stronger economy without also creating a greener, more sustainable economy."*

www.libdems.org.uk

"Democracy is not dead; it's just that there's a lot of people who feel that they have no viable way of taking part"
Lisa Nandy, Labour MP for Wigan



Photo by SECRET LONDON123 via Flickr

Labour's Lisa Nandy is the first female MP to represent Wigan in its history. Following the 2010 general election, she also became one of the first Asian women to become an MP. For her, making politics more inclusive and Westminster more representative is of great importance.

"The thing that really struck me, having worked in the voluntary sector before I got elected, is that you walk into the House of Commons and the first things you see are men, pictures of men and statues of men,"

"Where's everyone else gone? Talking to some of my colleagues who come from ethnic minority backgrounds, they felt very similarly along those lines." she says.

Nandy, who also holds the post of shadow minister for civil society, says she believes it is still too difficult for people to break into politics if they are not already a part of it: *"People look at parliament and think, 'I don't see myself there.' Unless you have a greater diversity of people in parliament, you won't talk about the issues that really matter to people. Democracy is not dead; it's just that there's a lot of people who feel that they have no viable way of taking part."*

One way Nandy suggests this could be improved is by engaging young people with politics early on. *"I think young people are intensely political but they just don't realise it,"* she says. As an example of how this can be done, she names the work being done by UNICEF's Rights Respecting School Award. The initiative encourages schools to put the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of their planning, policies, practice and ethos. Children are included in the decision making process and, as evidence suggests, become more engaged and morally and globally aware as a result.

Nandy was selected as Labour's candidate for Wigan from an all-women shortlist ahead of the general election in 2010. *"If there hadn't been an all-women shortlist, there would have been a man doing that job again,"* she guesses. *"It just seems to me that it cannot be true that in the hundreds of years that we've had parliamentary democracy, there has never been a woman good enough to do it."*

The House of Commons is still far from equal. Out of 650 MPs, just 147 are female (22%). The disproportion is also evident in the cabinet, with just four women in cabinet (18%) compared to 18 men. Overall, just 35 women have held cabinet positions in the 85 years since 1929. However, Nandy notes that *"we've had a series of selections were women have been selected on open shortlists. Perhaps we're starting to change the tone of politics so we won't need [all-women shortlists] anymore."*

By contrast, Nandy believes that the environment is still not accommodating for those trying to instill sustainability in the heart of democracy. *"At the moment, the playing field is not tilted in favour of people, organisations, businesses who are trying to do that,"* she says. *"Some of the shareholder movements that we've seen recently have been really inspiring, but I'm not convinced that without government intervention or structural reform, that will change things quickly enough."*

www.labour.org.uk



"A retrenched financial system may require a political system that takes back very significant freedoms"
Rupert Read, co-ordinator of the Green party in the east of England

Photo by ROBERT PITTMAN via Flickr

"It is refreshing that in the European elections this May, we have a proper proportional voting system, in contrast to most other elections in England", **says Rupert Read, co-ordinator of the Green party in the east of England and lead candidate for the European elections.**

Like the Liberal Democrats, the Greens would like a reform of the House of Lords and of the first past the post (FPTP) voting system, which is currently employed in the UK. Read argues that FPTP *"often produces lopsided results, bearing little resemblance to voters' intentions."*

He adds, *"However, introducing proportional representation is only one part of the democratic revolution we in the Green party are calling for. We wish to see a democratic reform of the upper house of parliament, the restoration of significant powers to local government and the reigning in of the influence which money markets and large corporations have over the current democratic structures."*

Read explains that he personally advocates a three-tiered legislative structure, in which the lower and upper houses are complemented by a new group of individuals, referred to as *'guardians of future generations'*. The guardians, who would be selected in a process similar to jury service, would be able to veto legislation that was likely to have a negative impact for society in the future, the right to review major administrative decisions and the power to initiate legislation to preserve the basic needs and interests of future people.

"Such seemingly radical, but necessary measures would ultimately move us away from the short-termism [that is] seemingly endemic within the current political system and would turn our democracy into a genuine, deliberative democracy", Read argues. In order to instil environmental stewardship into politics, he explains that the Greens also want to replace the *"boom and bust"* regime with a *"post-growth"* programme that restores *"financial sanity"*.

This would *"sustainably and responsibly use those natural and human resources which are so often taken for granted by governments and large corporations"*, he says.

"Without such a shift in macro-economic thinking, it will probably be too late to prevent our planetary ecosystem from going into irreversible decline."

He notes this may necessarily demand a drastic reformation of our political economy *"in ways that run exactly contrary to the free market orthodoxy which all the 'main' parties in this country have mainlined on since the 1980s. A retrenched financial system may require a political system that takes back very significant freedoms that for the last two decades (since 'the big bang') have been accorded to the City and that for the last eleven years have been accorded to the Bank of England. Ultimately debt and the planetary resources on which our current economic model are based are – must be – finite and the sooner this is accepted the better."*

www.greenparty.org.uk

"Logically, I would say it is impossible to be a true conservative without also being a true environmentalist"
Zac Goldsmith, Conservative MP for Richmond Park



Photo by TFENGREEN via Flickr

The Conservatives party, which controls the government, declined to comment, but questions of the sustainability of democracy – in terms of falling voter turnout and unrepresentative representatives – are sure to be troubling its members.

The party has taken flak in recent months for its lack of diversity, with a largely white, male frontbench educated at a very select pool of schools. It has been reported that of the six people producing the next Conservative manifesto, five were old Etonians, though these claims have been strenuously denied.

When in opposition, Cameron pledged to ensure a third of his ministers were women by the end of parliament. Taunted over his lack of progress during prime minister's questions recently, he replied, *"Of the full members of the cabinet who are Conservatives, 24%, a quarter, are women. Not enough, I want to see that grow. Of the front bench ministers, of the Conservatives, around 20% are women. That is below what I want to achieve in 33%. We are making progress and we will make more progress."*

With the party receiving just 16% of votes from ethnic minorities in 2010, it has also been suggested that the Conservatives need to become more representative of other communities.

"The prime minister is committed to deepening our relationships", Priti Patel, MP for Witham, tells the Financial Times. *"Other parties have engaged in the past and we haven't been there. It is beginning to change. It will take time."*

Though Cameron vowed to lead the greenest government ever, the Conservatives have come under increasing scrutiny for their environmental stewardship. The foundation of the Green Investment Bank and cuts to the government's own emissions have been offset by an unwavering support for fracking and a 2014 budget that boosted polluters, fossil fuel companies and energy inefficient industries.

It has also been suggested that, with the backing of the prime minister, their next manifesto will pledge to cut back on onshore wind farms. Owen Paterson, the allegedly climate sceptic environment secretary, has been a favourite target of the opposition, while Conservative peer Lord Lawson is an outspoken climate change denier.

However, some within the party have battled to unite the ideas of conservatism and environmentalism in recent months. Education secretary Michael Gove, describing himself as a *"shy green"*, recently argued that conservatism was about *"passing on what we've inherited to the next generation"*. The Conservative 2020 group, an alliance of *"green, modern"* Tories, has also tried to educate the rest of the party on the economic benefits of sustainability.

Tory MP Zac Goldsmith had added, *"Logically, I would say it is impossible to be a true conservative without also being a true environmentalist. They are one and the same. Somewhere along the line, unfortunately, this became lost."*

www.conservatives.com

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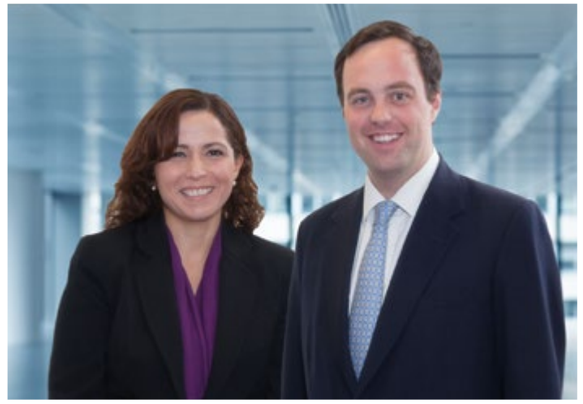

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DECENTRALISATION: 'WHY?' NOT 'HOW?'



Photo by ALISON SCOTT via freeimages.com

By SIMON LEADBETTER

We need to decide on the future shape of our democracy at a national and local level.

Citizens in the United Kingdom live in one of the most centralised democracies in Europe, if not the world. Our history, lack of established federal structures, the relative stability of our external border and transport infrastructure has hard-wired power into the 'national' capital of Westminster.

This centralisation creates a vicious circle for devolved government, with disempowered local governments breeding citizen disengagement, in turn causing a headache for national politicians blamed for local failures. Our London-based 'national' media exacerbates this issue, demanding national political action often for hyper-local concerns, usually without understanding local context and sensibilities.

The devolution for the constituent countries of the UK in 1997 and coming referendum in Scotland may have irretrievably weakened the bonds that tie the UK together, but it's an incoherent solution with varying powers in different countries.

The regions of England, all but two of which have greater populations than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, have fewer (if any) powers than the devolved parliament and two assemblies. England also has MPs of devolved countries participating in making laws and setting polices for England's citizens, which won't affect their own constituents. If it is wrong for English MPs to impose their will on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the opposite is equally true. Three hundred years of English MPs effectively doing this to citizens of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland does not make it right for this now to happen in reverse.

In a recent paper by the Institute of Government, three broad sources of resistance to greater decentralisation were spelt out: national government that is greedy for power, regional government that has not proven itself to be effective and the general public who are disengaged with the political system. To be a success, these sources of resistance need to be addressed.

The same paper then spells out how this resistance could be overcome. There needs to a comprehensive transfer of powers for there to be meaningful reform; the scale of the geographical area devolved needs to be large enough to have a strategic role; there needs to be rigorous governance and accountability and the local electors need to be given a real choice.

The paper then explores examples of successful devolution in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Greater London Authority. Less successful have been regional assemblies in England and the recent introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners, which most British people now wish to abolish.

Other reforms such as City Deals (granting powers over revenue raising, pooling and retention, transport and infrastructure investment, and skills), City-Region Combined Authorities (pooling economic development powers of constituent authorities) such as Manchester and the occasional directly elected city mayor (a city's 'CEO', of which there are 16 in England) have delivered mixed results.

England overwhelmingly rejected more layers of local politicians. The devolved parliament and assemblies would now like to remove the Westminster layer of oversight and interference. This dysfunctional and patchy democratic settlement is unsatisfactory in one of the world's oldest and most successful democracies. Voter apathy is only exacerbated by dysfunctional institutions, not the other way around.

Clearly, where powers are devolved, only those politicians whose constituents will be affected by a change in law or policy should vote. UK politicians would vote on matters of national importance and so on, down to local politicians on local issues.
We need to decide on the future shape of our democracy at a national and local level. There needs to be a clear and consistent division of power between different levels of decision-making, or with the same directly elected politician sitting at local, regional and national levels. During the debates over coalition reforms of the NHS, Nigel Edwards, acting chief executive of the NHS Confederation, made a comment that is relevant here: *"There are very few questions to which the answer is 'more politicians'."*

Ever more layers of politicians aren't going to make our democracy more effective, unless we have a clear idea of what they are all for, and what value they add.

HERE BE... A DISUNITED KINGDOM

Is Scottish nationalism just the start? Adam Forrest explores the micro-independence movements springing up across the British Isles

"Blimey, I'm a foreigner," says the local bobby in the classic Ealing comedy *Passport to Pimlico*, a 1949 film about a London district drawing up border posts and declaring itself independent following the discovery of ancient treasure under a bombsite.

It was a nice joke but the break-up of Britain no longer seems the stuff of comedic satire. The looming referendum in Scotland (the September 18 vote now just six months away) has rocked the cosy complacency of the Westminster establishment. Plaid Cymru and smaller, regional secessionist groups have taken heart from the success of Alex Salmond and the SNP north of the border.

The Scottish nationalists, once dismissed as dreamers, have convinced people to imagine a world without the status-quo UK. But where – you might well ask – does it all end? If every crackpot movement gets its way, will we end up with a *Game of Thrones* scenario: competing fiefdoms of fisher folk, southern softies and hill people? Surely not.

And yet perhaps it's possible to imagine a future in which the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, its crown dependencies and overseas territories – a strange and complex set of arrangements to be sure – is something history teachers explain to children.

The academic Benedict Anderson explained in his brilliant book *Imagined Communities* that nations were precarious things, "finite" and "elastic". And as WB Yeats once wrote: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

Orkney and Shetland

Should Scotland vote for independence, Alex Salmond's first negotiating headache might come from the Northern Isles rather than London. The Shetland MSP Tavish Scott and Orkney MSP Liam McArthur have talked about "seizing the opportunity of home rule".

It's all about the oil. About a quarter of North Sea oil revenues derive from fields around the islands, and thanks to a 1974 legislative settlement the islands have a nest egg called the reserve fund now worth around £650m. Tavish Scott has raised the prospect of becoming another British Crown Dependency should the SNP try an "outrageous" oil grab. Or the canny islanders could insist on a bigger slice of revenues and economic autonomy from an Edinburgh government.

"If independence, with all the huge uncertainty that would cause, were to be contemplated, then Shetland will want to fight for what is fairly ours," said Scott. Salmond's spokesman has warned Scott not to "make mischief" (something his boss knows a thing or two about).

Isle of Man

Mec Vannin (meaning Sons of Mann) is a separatist party operating on the small island – best known for its tailless cats – ever since 1962. The separatists want to revoke the status of the Isle as a crown dependency and establish an independent republic. Because of concerns about "the burden on the island's infrastructure" by incomers, the party considers immigration controls a priority. But they don't want to engage in local elections.

In recent years, the Liberal Vannin Party has advocated reform of the island's government, which has not been exactly transparent about its tax deals. "I always wanted us to be completely independent until I discovered more about how things work on the island," explains LVP leader Kate Beecroft. "If we don't get the reforms in place to ensure good self-governance, I worry what would happen to us as a small [independent] community. We've a long way to go before we can stand on our own."

Mercia

The Mercia movement is a little less inclined to acknowledge the practicalities of politics than its cousin down in Wessex. A group run by Jeff Kent called the Acting Witan of Mercia has declared 20 shires in the Midlands – from Bedfordshire in the south to Cheshire in the north west – to be the autonomous "bioregion" of Mercia.

"Most people are thoroughly fed up with the UK and want control of their own lives in their own area," says Kent, who claims more than 2,000 people have signed up to be citizens of Mercia.

"Interest has gone through the roof since the British economy started to decline. We're looking back to the past for inspiration of co-operating Anglo-Saxon communities – and to the future with the principles of ecological sustainability, which will need to be at the bedrock of all societies.

"The Scottish independence referendum shows how quickly ideas can change. The one area I thought would never break up in my lifetime was the USSR. And look what happened there."



The shape of things to come?

Sealand

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Cornwall

The Cornish nationalists insist Cornwall has a distinct language and cultural identity, meriting a Cornish National Assembly. The key home rule organisation is Mebyon Kernow – a political party since the 1970s. In 2009 Cornish LibDem MP Dan Rogerson presented his own Cornish "breakaway" bill, which asked for the same kind of autonomy as Wales or Scotland.

But unlike Scotland, Cornwall has no banking, no exports and a seasonal skill base (tourism accounts for 24 per cent of the economy). Identity is not a matter of pounds and pence, though. A 2011 survey of 70,000 children in Cornwall found 41 per cent saw themselves as Cornish, not English. One of the weirdest moments in the movement came in 2004, when Channel 4's alternative Christmas message featured Lisa Simpson chanting Rydhsys rag Kernow lemmyn! (Freedom for Cornwall now!) and holding a placard saying "UK OUT OF CORNWALL".

Wessex

Before you dismiss them as cranks, the Wessex Regionalist Party has fought seven general elections. The ancient South West kingdom that gave us Alfred the Great first saw a revival of "Wessex consciousness" in the 19th century when it was taken up as a distinct corner of England by no less a writer than Thomas Hardy. David Robins, secretary general, says the WRP want a devolved assembly with the same kind of powers as the Scottish Parliament. "The things that separate and distinguish us are our dialect, our cider and a general sense of being a rural region that sees things differently from London," says Robins. Some 'serious' politicians acknowledge the Wessex identity, even if they are unlikely to hand over powers soon. Eric Pickles flew the Wessex flag – a two-footed gold dragon – outside the Department for Local Government in May last year.

Channel Islands

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Sealand

Sealand is not, in fact, a secret level in *Super Mario World* but something even more strange and exciting: a micronation seven nautical miles off the coast of Suffolk, which was formed after one man seized a rusty sea fort (above) from a group of pirate radio broadcasters in 1967. True, all true.

The old military fort – all 6,000 square feet of it (about two tennis courts) – was taken by Paddy Roy Bates who claimed it as an independent sovereign state. Bates moved back to Essex before he died in 2012 but named his son Michael the Prince Regent of Sealand. Although no proper countries officially recognise Sealand, its "government" claims it has de facto recognition from the UK and Germany. Sealand has its own passports, coins and an Ultimate Frisbee team.

Channel Islands

The British Crown Dependencies of Jersey and Guernsey are not, strictly speaking, part of the United Kingdom but that hasn't stopped some serious squabbling with London, occasionally threatening to spill over into outright mutiny.

Aware of the growing backlash against tax avoidance, George Osborne has made efforts to stop non-doms using offshore companies to avoid stamp duty on the sale of UK properties. David Cameron has written to the Channel Islands to encourage tax transparency and explain his desire to "knock down the walls of company secrecy".

Aware the islands' wealth owes everything to their ability to act as tax-neutral conduits, Jersey's assistant chief minister Sir Philip Bailhache warned back in 2012 that the island "should be ready" for independence. "If it becomes plain that our interests in fact lie in being independent it doesn't seem to be that we should bury our head in the sand and say we're not going to do that."

Things have been a bit quieter of late, which suggests the men in Whitehall have been made aware how much money flows from the Channel Islands to the City of London each year.

IS MICRO-INDEPENDENCE SPREADING TO EUROPE?

The tightening of the referendum polls in Scotland has caused jitters not only in London but in the corridors of power across the continent. Catalonia has the most politically powerful independence movement, with a population of more than seven million and a government pushing for a referendum on independence (Catalan activists have been attending Yes campaign rallies in Scotland).

Spain's Basque areas also enjoy significant levels of autonomy but separatist violence remains unpopular, and last October the ETA group announced a "definitive cessation of its armed struggle".

In France, there are several separatist political parties – in Brittany, Corsica, Normandy and Occitania.

In Italy, the Northern League (Lega Nord) advocates the independence of Padania – its term for the country's northern regions. And in Belgium, the heart of technocratic EU, some French-speaking Walloons and Dutch-speaking Flemish are demanding the partition of Belgium.

Although the Balkan region has a notoriously complex and violent history, many independence movements take heart from the recent emergence of Montenegro as a sovereign state. In 2006 more than 55 per cent of Montenegrins voted to break from Serbia following a peaceful referendum campaign. But Alex Salmond should take note: nothing is quick or easy. Montenegro only began the process of EU accession talks in 2012.



SHOULD SCOTLAND BE AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY?

"A Yes vote in 2014 opens up a range of new possibilities for Scotland" Yes Scotland

Photo by REV STAN via Flickr

On September 18 2014, voters in Scotland will be asked to decide whether or not Scotland should remain a part of the United Kingdom. They will provide a yes or no answer to the question, "Should Scotland be an independent country?" Cases for and against independence are presented below.

YES, SCOTLAND SHOULD DEFINITELY BE AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY

By Stephen Noon, chief strategist at Yes Scotland

A Yes vote will give us the powers we need to build a more sustainable future. This has been an important driving force for many in the Yes campaign and in 'Green Yes'. As the Scottish Greens argue, a Yes will open the door to *"transformational change in our economy, our society, and our politics"*.

Across the Yes movement, we know that Westminster cannot deliver a greener Scotland. MPs are elected with no element of fair voting, peers sit without the consent of the people and the system as a whole is focused on very different priorities. As UK politics tack ever harder to the right, it is increasingly hard to imagine any government forming that delivers the sort of change Scotland needs and deserves or fully protects the things most of us think are important.

A Yes vote in 2014 opens up a range of new possibilities for Scotland, with the election in 2016 being the point we choose the first independent government with new powers to set Scotland on a better path. We will have a written constitution and can choose to decentralise power beyond Holyrood.

We can have an economy built on local businesses, with renewables and community ownership given high priority, and progress measured on quality of life and the quality of our living environment. We can deliver progressive taxation and a living wage, reversing the UK's relentlessly rising inequality – and will be able to get rid of nuclear weapons. These are big opportunities that come from that Yes vote.

www.yesscotland.net

Yes



"We can better bring out the best of Scotland by working together across the UK" Better Together

Photo by THE LAIRD OF OLDHAM via Flickr

NO, SCOTLAND SHOULD ABSOLUTELY NOT BE AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY

By Sarah Boyack, MSP for Lothian

With less than six months until the referendum, the choice facing the Scottish people is clear. On the one hand we can have the best of both worlds – a strong Scottish parliament, with the guarantee of more powers, backed up by the strength, security and stability of the larger UK; or we can take a leap into the unknown with all the risks that separation brings.

As part of the UK, we have achieved so much on environmental issues – in policy, in research and in our communities. We have led the world in facing up to the challenges posed by climate change. Being part of the UK means we can do more in the future. Scotland has huge renewable energy potential, but this is backed up by investment all across the UK. If we go our separate ways, the investment needed to realise Scotland's renewable potential would be put at risk. It's a risk we don't have to take.

Under devolution, powers have developed around marine planning to best respond to the challenges we face in Scotland and throughout the UK. We believe that the best way to take on the challenges we face in future is through the flexibility and partnership of devolution, not separation.

The Scottish parliament, regardless of which parties are in power, has shown itself to have a commitment to Scotland's environment. We can always do more, and there will continue to be debates over how Scotland can become more sustainable in future, but the challenges we continually face demand political will, not separation.

We can better bring out the best of Scotland by working together across the UK. We have achieved so much together on environmental issues. Working together in the future we can achieve so much more.

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POWER TO THE PEOPLE

By TOM REVELL

Changes to the electoral system and the House of Lords, and doing more to engage young people with politics, are just some of the ideas put forward by leading campaign groups to make our democracy sustainable.



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PJ SPOONER
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A perceived lack of engagement and representativeness in our democracy and a shortage of concern for sustainability among some politicians is a key concern for many campaign groups and reform organisations. Though many are united by common concerns, they hold different views on how best to solve these extremely complex problems.

JESS GARLAND, A POLICY AND RESEARCH OFFICER AT THE ELECTORAL REFORM SOCIETY WITH SIX YEARS' EXPERIENCE WORKING IN PARLIAMENT, ARGUES, "YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE KEY."

"In every generation young people have shown a greater interest in the environment and sustainability than the wider population. Harnessing that enthusiasm so that it has a political impact can only have a positive impact on these issues," she says.

The Electoral Reform Society has been fighting for a more representative electoral system since the Victorian period. In 1884, its founder Sir John Lubbock – a liberal, philanthropist and prolific polymath responsible for all sorts of initiatives as varied as archaeological textbooks and the introduction of bank holidays – said, *"I trust that Great Britain, the mother of parliaments, may once more take the lead among the great nations of the world by securing for herself a House of Commons which shall really represent the nation."*

One hundred and thirty years on, the organisation still believes that Lubbock's mission has not been completed. It now lobbies against the UK's first past the post (FPTP) system. Under this system, each constituency elects one MP from a choice of candidates. Voters can only vote once, and the candidate that gets the most votes becomes the MP. Though the public voted against replacing FPTP with an alternative voting system in a 2011 referendum, the Electoral Reform Society says it is *"bad for voters, bad for government and bad for democracy"*.

Garland argues that the two-party system that FPTP supports results in *"highly short-termist"* politics. *"Parties in power are focused on winning the next election and therefore do not focus on longer-term strategies where the rewards will not be felt for generations"*, she says. *"Changing the electoral system to one that encourages a diversity of parties and coalitions creates more room for parties to work together in the interests of the country."*

www.electoral-reform.org.uk

"In every generation young people have shown a greater interest in the environment and sustainability than the wider population"
Jess Garland,
Electoral Reform Society

THE FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (FDSD) IS A RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY CHARITY THAT WORKS "TO IDENTIFY PATHWAYS TO DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION IN THE FACE OF THE MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL PRESSURES THAT LIE AHEAD."

It argues that current systems of democracy are poorly prepared for challenges like climate change and resource scarcity because they fail to consider long-term issues. However, it adds that a thriving democratic system, with engaged and represented voters, is essential for dealing with such problems.

John Lotherington, chairman of the FDSD, says, *"We need to reinvigorate the idea of democracy which has been thinned out in the last generation, and the mission to rebuild our democracy in the face of apathy and vested interests."*

He argues that *"sustained participation*" from citizens is essential to this, adding, *"The PR and marketing element of politics is not new, but our understanding of what is to be citizens has been hollowed out over time as we have increasingly become political consumers, with politicians vying to sell themselves as more effective managers or deliverers of services. To live fully as citizens we need to recover a better sense of the good life we share and how we promote that, not just pursuing more of everything."*

Lotherington also laments the influence of short-term electoral cycles on decision-making, saying that as a result, politics is about *"continual crisis management rather than crisis prevention"*. In order to make sure of sustainability and long-term issues of

"The unelected House of Lords is an affront to British democracy"
Alexandra Runswick, Unlock Democracy



Photo by PHILIP JOHN PHOTOGRAPHY via Flickr

greater concern to British politicians, he calls for the introduction of a constitutional change that has been tested elsewhere.

He points to Hungary's Ombudsman for Future Generations, Finland's Parliamentary Committee for the Future and Malta's Council of Guardians – individuals and institutions given the responsibility to speak for the interests of voiceless, as yet unborn generations. In Wales, a future generations bill – under which all public bodies would have a responsibility to factor in the interests of future generations in all their operations – is also in the pipeline.

Lotherington argues the bill *"should be a beacon for similar measures in the rest of the UK"*. He says, *"These initiatives are not about overriding the democratic rights of present citizens; they are about promoting awareness, debate and checks and balances, speaking to a fundamental value in our societies that the interests of future generations matter and must not be ignored."*

While he concedes it would not break down all barriers in the way of sustainability, such a measure would allow us to *"become better at recognising those problems and addressing them at the hearts of our democracies"*.

www.fdsd.org

SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN 2007, UNLOCK DEMOCRACY HAS CAMPAIGNED FOR A DEMOCRACY "THAT PUTS POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE PEOPLE" AND FOR A WRITTEN CONSTITUTION "THAT SERVES AND PROTECTS THE PEOPLE".

It argues that this would pave the way for a democracy in which civil society is enthusiastically engaged, diversity and differences are valued and the problems and aspirations of all people are considered. The organisation is currently lobbying party leaders to push through a reform of the House of Lords, so that all members in the second chamber are elected and representative.

"Today the out of touch and unelected Lords continue to vote on our laws – changes to this country that have seen huge welfare cuts and the rise of food banks – whilst some Lords grumble about the quality of food in their subsidised restaurant in parliament", says Alexandra Runswick, the director of Unlock Democracy. "*The unelected House of Lords is an affront to British democracy"*, she adds.

A 2012 YouGov poll, commissioned by Unlock Democracy, found that 69% of voters would support such a reform.

www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk

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WHEB

SUSTAINABLE THINKING

By TOM REVELL

Three prominent thinktanks explain their ideas on how to make sustainability and environmental issues a greater part of political thought.



Photo opposite by STEPHANE MIGNON via Flickr

> "When local residents in Chicago were educated about decision-making and empowered to question officials and experts, they could devise strategies which were more equitable and effective"
> Perry Walker, New Economics Foundation

Thinktanks, research and policy institutes can provide an unparalleled level of expertise and analysis on political issues. Whatever their ideology or affiliations, apparent failings of democracy or the threats posed by unsustainable trends worldwide, ranging from the unethical to the apocalyptic, are principle concerns and irresistible areas of research for many.

But how do they think we can get the better, fairer and more sustainable democracy that we deserve, and put environmental sustainability and responsibility at the heart of it?

PERRY WALKER IS A FELLOW AT THE NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION, A LEADING THINKTANK THAT WORKS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE. HE IS ALSO THE FOUNDER OF OPEN UP, A PLATFORM THAT HELPS PEOPLE GET TO GRIPS WITH COMPLEX POLITICAL ISSUES.

One way that democracy can be made more sustainable, he says, is the use of an idea called Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG). Walker explains that EPG, at a local level, focuses on specific, tangible problems, involving ordinary people affected by these problems and officials close to them in a deliberative process to develop solutions.

He says, *"A good example of EPG in practice can be found in the Chicago Police Department. At the local level, in each of Chicago's 279 police beats, patrol officers and their sergeants meet regularly with residents to identify priorities and ways of tackling them, and to report back on how previous initiatives are going. When local residents were educated about decision-making and empowered to question officials and experts, they could devise strategies which were more equitable and effective. One Chicago neighbourhood, with rich and poor districts separated by railway tracks, agreed a set of priorities that concentrated on the needs of the poor area."*

Walker argues that structures like those in Chicago can act *"as a school for democracy"*. In order to make sustainability more democratic, he proposes that the House of Lords could be given an additional role similar to that of Hungary's Ombudsman for Future Generations or Finland's Parliamentary Committee for the Future. He says that members of the house could be required to act as a voice for the voiceless - meaning both animals and future generations.

Walker says that Rupert Read – the academic and Green party politician – has articulated this idea best: *"He suggests two specific powers for the Lords, in relation to legislation that threatens the basic needs and fundamental interests of future people or of the voiceless. The first of these is an ability to veto new legislation that does this, in whole or in part. The second is to be able to force a review, on petitioning, of existing legislation that carries such threat."*

To help bring the somewhat radical sounding idea to life, Walker recommends the post-apocalyptic novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, in which people wearing animal masks speak in parliament for the voiceless. *"There's a thought,"* he says.

www.neweconomics.org



Photo by
M HILLIER
via Flickr

THE INFLUENTIAL FABIAN SOCIETY IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST THINKTANKS (ARGUABLY, AS IT WAS FORMED IN 1884, ABOUT SEVEN DECADES BEFORE THE TERM WAS COINED).

It is historically linked to Labour, as its socialist ideas laid many of the foundations for the party's development. It remains at the forefront of developing political ideas and public policy on the centre-left.

Its environment and citizenship programme is currently asking how politicians of all parties, who just years ago battled it out to be seen as the greenest candidates, have so easily turned their back on 'the green crap' and how a new *"popular environmentalism"* can be fostered. Natan Doron, leader of the programme, suggests that a rethink of what environmentalism really means to people could change everything.

"Our charge against environmentalism is that, like politics, in the UK it's been chewed over, it's technocratic, too distant from the lives of ordinary people and conducted by an increasingly small set of elites in Brussels and Whitehall", he explains.

The society's findings – gathered through focus groups and polling, some of which is not yet published – indicates that many people define their environmental concerns in surprising ways. Things such as antisocial behaviour and litter were many people's biggest gripes, while most perceived *"environmentalism"* to be the domain of Greenpeace and faraway activists.

"I think that means a couple of things," Doron says. *"One is that environmental campaigners need to try and change the language and culture of environmentalism. People who aren't normally interested in the environment need to believe that people from WWF and Greenpeace don't just care about the polar bears but their local street and their local experience of the environment.*

"Connected to that, how can we make environmental policy a little bit more communitarian? How can central government do more to facilitate some of the really good stuff that goes on, for example with friends groups for local parks or community energy schemes, and see it spread out more equally so that environmental policy is very immediate to people?"

Doron admits that this is a tough question to answer, as environmental policy – much of which is geared towards preventing distant, complex things that have not happened yet – is abstract by nature. *"But I think increasingly if people have more of a connection to environmental policy and campaigning and ultimately politics at a local level, and feel like they can have more power over their local environment, they will see that connection with the more abstract stuff,"* he says.

Pushing the idea that environmentalism begins at home, promoting its tangible, local benefits, could surely make sustainability a very difficult thing for politicians to ignore.

"Environmentalism can be about me having beautiful local surroundings and bringing my community together; it's about lowering my household bills and making my local economy and the global economy more resilient to shocks; it can create jobs; and it leads to good health outcomes," Doron says.

"If you look at it like that, these are suddenly a set of things that are quite hard to disregard as 'green crap', or a policy just for good economic times."

www.fabians.org.uk

"Businesses run brands; brands can change behaviour by acting with citizens in really complicated ways"
Sally Uren, Forum for the Future

WHILE MANY PONDER THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF POLITICIANS AND CITIZENS IN THE PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABILITY, SALLY UREN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF FORUM FOR THE FUTURE, SUGGESTS A DECISIVE ROLE COULD ACTUALLY BE PLAYED BY A THIRD PARTICIPANT – BUSINESS.

Forum for the Future collaborates with businesses small and large, primarily in the food and energy systems, empowering industries to work towards a sustainable and ethical future. Like most, Uren believes that it is us – the citizens of the world – that can drive democracy forward.

"I think that there is a lever that has not been adequately pressed, which could really wake politicians up to sustainability, and that is civil society," she says. *"Politicians are in it for votes, to get them elected. One of the reasons why sustainability really hasn't mainstreamed properly in political dialogue is the general view that there are no votes in it. While civil society is sleepy and apathetic on this agenda, politicians will remain the same."*

However, Uren proposes that businesses could play the same role as local initiatives or climate disasters – as instigators of citizen engagement – if they began treating people as more than consumers. *"Businesses run brands; brands can change behaviour by acting with citizens in really complicated ways,"* she says.

As an example, Uren points to the work of Unilever, a company leading by example in sustainability in the developing world. Through its soap brand Lifebuoy, Unilever has led a massive behaviour change campaign trying to educate one billion people on the benefits of handwashing.

"Businesses working with government's can really solve some of these issues", she says. "*I don't think government has woken up to the blurred boundaries between themselves, business and civil society. Historically government makes rules, creates enabling conditions, business tries to make money, and we consumers – not citizens – go with the flow. But that has been changed, fuelled by transparency and digital platforms, the roles and responsibilities of those three sets of actors have changed."*

What is needed now, Uren argues, is an improved understanding on the relationship between the three actors and a consensus on what it should achieve: *"We need to see better alignment of agendas as neither one alone can make the changes we need to see."*

www.forumforthefuture.org

VOTING WITH YOUR VOICE

"Rather than assuming people don't want to take part or are unable to express an opinion, I found a way to make it easier"
Matt Chocqueel-Mangan, Vote for Policies

By ALEX BLACKBURNE

After a successful debut in the 2010 general election campaign, Vote for Policies is back for 2015. Its creator Matt Chocqueel-Mangan is on a mission to help people in Britain – and eventually around the world – find their voice in politics.

Mention politics to most people, and the response you get will likely either be one of apathy or anger. They're all the same, politicians are liars, my vote won't make a difference. It's difficult not to have sympathy with such views – particularly in times of austerity when certain decisions made at the top can be the difference between some people eating or going hungry.

Another problem is who to vote for at a local, national and European level. For some people this decision is easy – they stick with the same party they've voted for previously or the one their parents vote for. For others, it's a bit more difficult. On top of their indifference with politics generally, the mainstream parties are often very similar on many issues. This somewhat explains why voter turnout numbers continue to be poor in anything but general elections (which itself only attracted two-thirds of the population in 2010).

Actually understanding what a party stands for is becoming increasingly difficult. Between the Hollywood-style leaders' debates and the biased national press offering piecemeal bits of information at best, how does someone really vote for what they believe in?

Step forward, Vote for Policies: an online blind taste test that strips away the ideologies, personalities and squabbling associated with party politics, and instead allows people to choose parties based solely on what they stand for. Party logos are cast aside and users are encouraged to select which policies best align with their personal beliefs. Born out of creator Matt Chocqueel-Mangan's concern that he didn't really understand the difference between any of the parties, nearly 370,000 people completed its survey ahead of the 2010 general election.

Its results were fascinating – not least because it was the Green party's policies, with 24.74% of the votes, that came out on top. Labour (20.26%) and the Lib Dems (17.28%) were second and third respectively, while the Conservatives – the party that actually went on to scoop the most votes in the actual election – was fourth with 15.06%. There is clearly a mismatch between politics and what people believe in.

When setting up Vote for Policies, Chocqueel-Mangan, who has been creating websites since 2000, approached the issue of voter engagement as he would in his day job. *"In my line of work, when there's an engagement problem, you don't blame the user, you blame the usability"*, he says. *"Rather than assuming people don't want to take part or are unable to express an opinion, I found a way to make it easier."*

Photo of MATT CHOCQUEEL-MANGAN



Photo opposite top by KHAIRIL ZHAFRI via Flickr



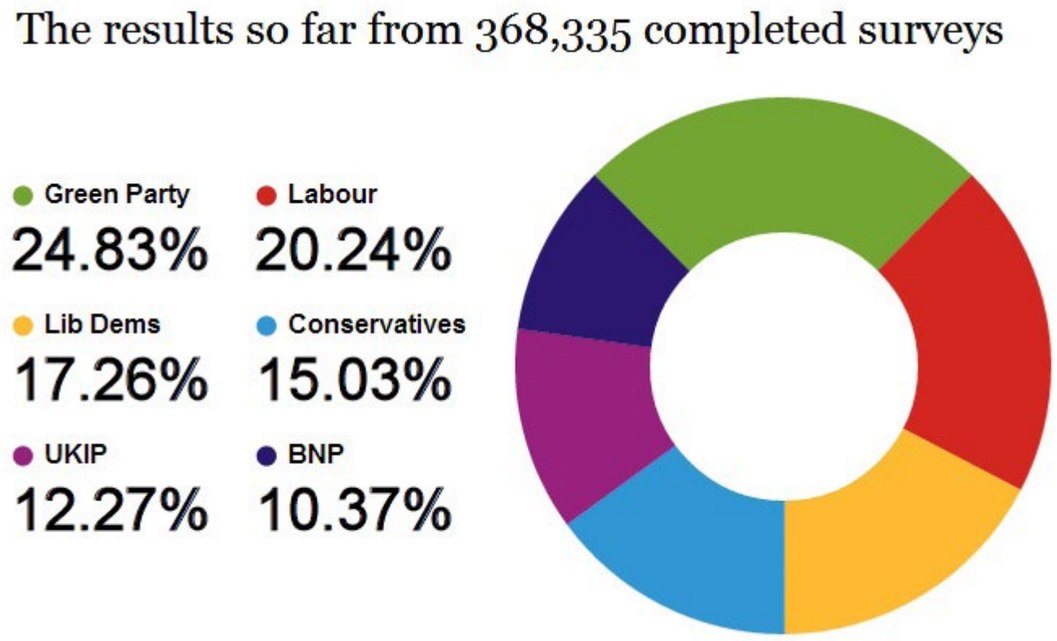



Photo by
GARY KNIGHT
via Flickr

Interest in his enterprise rocketed in the weeks leading up to the election in 2010 – so much so that the website's servers crashed because of the volume of traffic (Chocqueel-Mangan reckons the site would have doubled its users without the technical problems). Meanwhile, his concept was praised by the Financial Times, the Guardian and Channel 4 News, among other news outlets.

Perhaps the biggest question is whether the Vote for Policies survey results actually influenced voting habits when it came to polling day. Chocqueel-Mangan recalls one woman who used the site and who – to her surprise – came out most closely aligned to the Green party's policies, despite having voted Lib Dem previously. Determined to vote according to her beliefs this time, she set off to the polling station. On the way there, she saw an orange poster and decided to vote for the Lib Dems again instead. *"In that moment, I learned just how entrenched our voting behaviour can be*", Chocqueel-Mangan says.

Anecdotally, he says that over half of the people who took the survey were surprised with their result – like the Lib Dem voter who came out Green and Chocqueel-Mangan himself, who went on to vote for a party he hadn't voted for previously. Meanwhile, he believes a higher percentage selected the policy of a party that surprised them greatly. One of the improvements planned ahead of 2015 is to ask this question specifically, as well as following up with users to see if they voted according to the survey. However, it will continue to stress that its surveys are not recommending users vote for that party; they're saying that people should start with a meaningful, rational basis on which to make a decision.

He says, *"If you don't feel that the party can deliver those policies, or actually there are other policies that they may deliver but you feel strongly against, that's up to you. You may not believe in their leader, for example. But until you understand what their policies are, don't even think about choosing a party based on the personality of their leader."*

Asked about why the Greens fared so well in the survey, he adds it could have been any party that led the way – though there is a clear trend with people choosing progressive policies and parties. What the results showed as well was how crucial party manifestos could be if voters actually took the time to read through them.

As for the parties themselves, Chocqueel-Mangan had helpful responses from all but Labour and the Conservatives. The Greens, understandably, were very active and used the results in their pre-election PR. Meanwhile, someone associated with the BNP – though not necessarily an employee – actually took the time to fill in bogus surveys as a means of fixing the results. Chocqueel-Mangan recalls seeing the party race into fourth place one day, quickly realising it was a hacker. He took the results out and blocked the IP address – but not before a screenshot of the temporary result had appeared on the BNP's website.

The 2015 election may be the next big event on the Vote for Policies calendar, but Chocqueel-Mangan has big plans to widen its scope – starting with making it financially sustainable. His long-term goal is to transform the election-only survey into an online service for non-governmental elections, whether that's clubs, schools, universities, membership organisations or charities. Ultimately, it's about making democracy more accessible and representative of views. He concludes, *"People actually do care and do want to get involved – and they do have their own opinions. It's just about helping them find that voice."*

www.voteforpolicies.org.uk

Vote for Policies

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THE PEOPLE'S MANIFESTO

What would a publicly-generated political manifesto look like?

Probably something a bit like this.

Photo by ROGER KIRBY via freeimages.com



Vote for Policies – the online blind taste test that strips away political personalities and allows people to choose parties based solely on what they stand for – attracted a lot of attention in and around the 2010 general election (see page 50). Some 370,000 people have taken part in its survey, which while probably not scientifically representative is undoubtedly one of the biggest exercises of its kind ever to be undertaken.

Below is a rundown of the results (as of April 2014), broken down by policy and ranked by overall votes cast. Voters selected four or more areas that mattered to them the most, with the top four being health/NHS, the economy, education and crime. Of all the policies, education got the most thumping endorsement.

What we're left with is the people's manifesto drawn up by the people, for the people.

(Hat tip to the satirist and political activist Mark Thomas, who between 2009 and 2010 went around campaigning for policies that audience members from stand-up shows had voted for. These ranged from sensible suggestions like the introduction of a maximum wage to more outlandish one like banning anti-immigration supporters from travelling abroad. For more, visit *www.thepeoplesmanifesto.co.uk*)

With political parties currently drafting their manifestos for 2015, they would do well to take note.

www.voteforpolicies.org.uk

CRIME
Green party – 30.53% of 239,800 votes

Look to establish restorative justice as a key feature of the UK criminal justice system. The primary aim will be to restore and, if necessary, improve the position of the victim and the community; the offender will be required to make amends.

Improve the design of our cities to provide safer streets and public spaces.

Ensure universal access to high quality youth centres to provide an outlet for young people outside of school

Bring in a Civil Law Injunction Programme (CLIP) to more effectively deal with anti-social behaviour.

Oppose any further privatisation of the prison system, as it is vital that where custody is used it is effective in preventing offenders from re-offending.

DEMOCRACY
Lib Dems – 31.54% of 199,000 votes

Change politics and abolish safe seats by introducing a fair, more proportional voting system for MPs. Our preferred single transferable vote system gives people the choice between candidates as well as parties.

Under the new system, we will be able to reduce the number of MPs by 150.

Give the right to vote from age 16.



"Improve the design of our cities to provide safer streets and public spaces."

Photo by ANDY NAYLOR via freeimages.com

Introduce fixed-term parliaments to ensure that the prime minister of the day cannot change the date of an election to suit themselves.

Give you the right to sack MPs who have broken the rules. We would introduce a recall system so that constituents could force a by-election for any MP found responsible for serious wrongdoing. We are campaigning for this right of recall to be introduced to the European parliament too.

Get big money out of politics by capping all donations at £10,000 and limiting spending throughout the whole electoral cycle.

Require all MPs, Lords and parliamentary candidates to be resident, ordinarily resident and domiciled in Britain for tax.

Make local government more accountable and responsive to local people by introducing fair votes for local elections in England.

We believe that the council tax should be scrapped and replaced with a fair local tax, based on people's ability to pay. It is necessary to pilot local income tax to resolve any practical issues of implementation before it can be rolled out nationally, so we would invite councils to put themselves forward to be involved in the piloting phase in the second year of a parliament.

ECONOMY

Lib Dems – 26.31% of 281,900 votes

Increasing the income tax threshold to £10,000.

We will identify lower priority spending that we believe can be cut so that we can protect vital front line public services.

We will also rebalance the tax system cutting taxes for people on low and middle incomes which we will pay for by cutting reliefs and closing tax loopholes that benefit the wealthiest.

This party will restore the link between annual increases in the state pension and earnings that will mean pensioners share in the proceeds of growth in our economy.

Keep young people within reach of the job market and we will do this by paying any young person completing an internship or work experience £55 a week for three months.

We will increase the number of apprenticeships, and places on university and vocational higher education courses so young people can improve their skills and get qualifications that will help them capitalise when the job market recovers.

Students will not have to pay tuition fees – we support grants not loans, providing a basic income sufficient for needs while in full time education.



Photo by STEPHEN DAVIES via freeimages.com

No young person will spend more than three months unemployed without getting financial support to access training, education, work experience or specialist professional help.

Cut business rates for smaller businesses and base rates on site values, rather than total rental value, which penalises businesses that invest in improving their premises.

EDUCATION

Green party – 35.71% of 284,200 votes

We believe much smaller class sizes are the key to behaviour and learning. We want a state funded education system which; provides essential numeracy and literacy skills; promotes a sense of responsibility, confidence and respect in all young people; caters for all specialisms and needs; promotes a sense of community; and promotes a healthy lifestyle through good diet and exercise.

To measure school performance we support the abolition of SATs and league tables. We would like to see a system of self-evaluation for schools, that is monitored by the local education authority.

This party's position on grammar and public schools means that we would remove the charitable status of all such schools and offer state funding to them so they will be accessible to all children in the local area.

All children, even those with disabilities and special educational needs, will be given the opportunity to attend their local school, which will provide diverse support for people with special needs. In special cases and in accordance with the child's wishes, there may be a need for segregation, which will be provided as a unit within the school.

All schools, both state controlled and privately run will be required to embrace a multi-faith perspective throughout the delivery of the curriculum.

This party opposes city academies and trust schools as we believe that schools should be governed in the interests of children and their parents, not through private individuals or businesses.

Recruit and retain more teachers by allowing them greater freedom and, to remove one of the main reasons teachers leave teaching, ensure their paperwork is greatly reduced.

Students will not have to pay tuition fees – we support grants not loans, providing a basic income sufficient for needs while in full time education.







Top left photo by BEN K ADAMS via Flickr

Photo by CHRIS FLEMING via Flickr

ENVIRONMENT
Green party – 29.02% of 225,500 votes

Use the £45 billion investment plan to kick-start a green industrial revolution so that low and zero-carbon sectors of the economy are the new platform for prosperity.

Transform the energy production landscape by supporting renewable sources, including wind and micro-solar generation.

Reduce emissions from aviation by ending the £10 billion subsidy of the aviation industry.

Reduce waste by making waste reduction, re-use and recycling easier.

Improve public transport and rail to cut emissions from vehicles.

Retrofit homes, schools and hospitals with energy efficiency measures.

A massive investment in renewable sources to support development of both large-scale wind and tidal generation and domestic micro-generation – these measures would create 80,000 jobs in the first year.

EUROPE
Conservatives – 21.53% of 184.6%

We will be positive members of the European Union but we are clear that there should be no further extension of the EU's power over the UK without the British people's consent.

We will ensure that by law no future government can hand over areas of power to the EU or join the euro without a referendum of the British people.

We will work to bring back key powers over legal rights, criminal justice and social and employment legislation to the UK.

Press to keep the EU's doors open to those countries, including Turkey, that wish to join, conditional on the rigorous application of the accession criteria.

Stand up for a strong transatlantic relationship and an EU that builds strong relations with rising powers like China and India.

HEALTH/NHS
Green party – 24.37% of 288,800 votes

This party's approach involves increasing the level of awareness of when to seek health care and when to allow things to get better naturally. It is also important to protect those suffering mental health problems from discrimination wherever it may occur.

A key policy is to reverse the sale of NHS services and hospitals to private companies, for example we are going to bring cleaners back into the NHS team.

We will start by promoting cycling and walking to school, which will reduce pollution and help to combat childhood asthma.

Ensuring schools provide healthy meals will reduce the levels of obesity in children.

We will introduce a NHS tax to make the level of funding for the NHS transparent for all. There will be the ability to increase taxation locally, if people decide, so that local NHS services can benefit directly, just as the police and schools can at present.

We will reduce the level of spending on defence to provide further funds for health care. These changes in funding will allow us to abolish prescription charges.

Our focus on increasing community based services and community health centres will keep care more local.

"Genuine refugees will continue to receive protection."

IMMIGRATION
Labour – 25.42% of 236,100 votes

Genuine refugees will continue to receive protection.

We will slowly tighten criteria in line with the needs of the economy and the values of British citizenship, and step up our action against illegal immigration.

There will be no unskilled migration outside the EU.

Our Australian-style points-based system will be used to control migration with limits for high-skilled workers and university students. As growth returns we want to see rising levels of employment and wages, not rising immigration.

We will expand the Migration Impact Fund, paid for by contributions from migrants, to help local areas.

We know that migrants who are fluent in English are more likely to work and find it easier to integrate. So as well as making our English test harder, we will ensure it is taken by all applicants before they arrive.

In future, staying will be dependent on the points-based system, and access to benefits and social housing will increasingly be reserved for British citizens and permanent residents – saving the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

WELFARE
Labour – 28.31% of 229,600 votes

A national minimum wage rising at least in line with average earnings, and a new £40-a-week 'better off in work' guarantee; and a more advanced apprenticeships and skills accounts for workers to upgrade their skills.

More help for parents to balance work and family life, with a 'Father's Month' of flexible paid leave; and a new toddler tax credit of £4 a week from 2012 to give more support to all parents of young children, whether they want to stay at home or work.

The right to request flexible working for older workers, with an end to default retirement at 65, enabling more people to decide for themselves how long they choose to keep working.

A new National Care Service to ensure free care in the home for those with the greatest care needs and a cap on the costs of residential care so that everyone's homes and savings are protected from care charges after two years in a care home.

A re-established link between the basic state pension and earnings from 2012; and help for ten million people to build up savings through new Personal Pension Accounts.

Two hundred thousand jobs through the Future Jobs Fund, with a job or training place for young people who are out of work for six months, but benefits cut at ten months if they refuse to take part; and anyone unemployed for more than two years guaranteed work, but no option of life on benefits.

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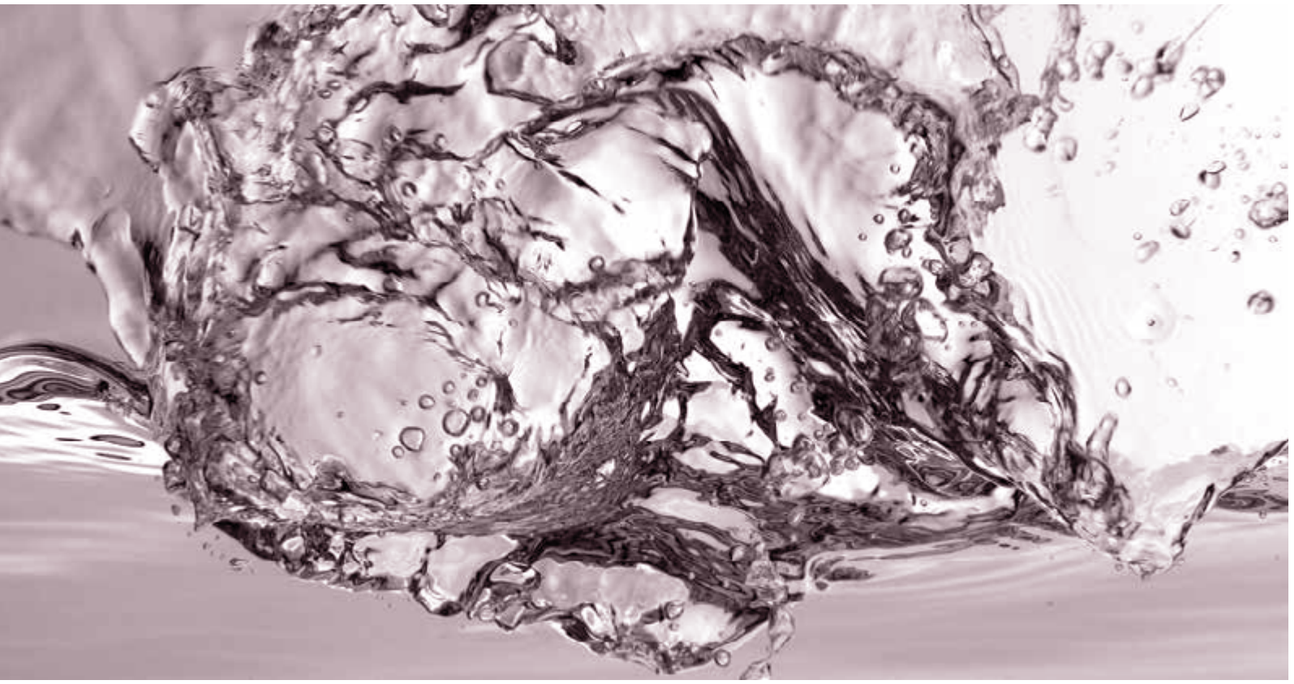

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CREATING A SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY



By MATT CHOCQUEEL-MANGAN

Photo by HARRISON KEELY via freeimages.com

A sustainable democracy is transparent, accountable and representative. We can change ours by voting for policies at elections – and not personalities.

A sustainable democracy adapts to the changing demands of an active electorate. In a sustainable democracy, we would expect to see voter turnout rates consistently above 80%, and the popularity of policies would reflect the balance of power of the parties. Does that sound radical? I don't think so.

The magic ingredient that a sustainable democracy has that other democracies don't is a high degree of transparency. More specifically, a high degree of transparency in three vital areas: vision, policies and performance. Only when transparency is achieved in all three can a democracy become sustainable, restoring power back to the people, and making the government truly accountable. It's a simple idea,



yet for all the democratic privileges we enjoy over other nations, it's still a long way from describing our current process.

The idea of vision – declaring the kind of society that we need, and why, in order to thrive – doesn't feature in political discussion. The simple reason is it kills votes. Politicians won't disclose their vision for society because they fear voters will disagree with it, and because knowing the broader context of a policy can easily reduce its appeal. For example, while you might support outsourcing NHS services in the name of better care provision or cost-cutting, what if you knew the ultimate goal was to replace the NHS with a private health system – would you support it then? For politicians eager to get into power and stay there, having a vision is too risky. But without a vision, how can we vote for the policies to achieve it?

Policies, however, are part of everyday discussion in the media. This would be a good thing if it wasn't so difficult to keep track of them. The media sways from one hot topic to the next, and parties announce policies without any real schedule or consistency. The bigger parties have manifestos but they certainly don't promote them, and come election time they're overshadowed by personality battles, party bickering and media spin. As a result, how many of us know which policies belong to which parties? For those that make it to the ballot box, do we really know what kind of change we're voting for?

And what about transparency in government performance? In the run up to an election, there is no meaningful way to compare what our elected representatives have achieved against what they promised (including coalition agreements). We get different views through the eyes of different media



Photo by
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organisations but we don't get a clear, independent and unbiased view of it all. As long as we can't measure their performance, the government can't be accountable to it. And until our government is fully accountable, we won't truly own our democracy.

So where do we start? How do we make vision, policies and performance more transparent, and in so doing make our democracy sustainable? In my view it's simple; certainly not easy, but it is simple – and without question it is achievable. Here's where to start.

VOTE FOR POLICIES

Until we know what a party stands for – the policies it promises to support – there is no point thinking about its track record or whether we like its leader. Sure, once we have an idea which party's policies we prefer, considerations like credibility, track record or even chances of winning the seat become relevant to our decision making process. But only after we know what the policies are. Policies are what create change, so whichever party we decide to vote for, unless we know what its policies are we won't know what kind of change we're voting for.

This is exactly why I set up Vote for Policies. It's a free service that makes it easy for everyone – regardless of age or level of political interest – to compare policies in a rational way, without bias from the media or our own preconceptions, and to use that information to make an independent decision about which party to vote for.

DON'T WE NEED A VISION FIRST?

Yes, having a more transparent political vision remains a vital cog in making our democracy sustainable. I'd like to see more honest and open discussion about what kind of society our parties want to create now, but given the risk to politicians and the current low levels of engagement with politics, it's probably not realistic in the short-term. However, by placing more focus on policies and manifestos, we are taking the first step towards achieving it. With greater transparency of policies, and by focusing our political debate around them, it's much easier to extend the discussion to vision. Not only because it tells parties we are paying attention to what matters, but it's a simpler, less spin-able conversation that makes politics more accessible to a wider cross section of society

Unless we know what a party's policies are we won't know what kind of change we're voting for

which will create more demand for clarity from political manifestos.

WHAT ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY?

There's an understandable argument that there's no point focusing on policies because politicians don't keep their word – manifestos aren't relevant because governments aren't accountable to them. So how do we make them accountable?

The idea of making manifestos legally binding will always get an enthusiastic hearing among some voters, myself included, but it's too obviously a noose in which politicians won't be placing their heads any time soon – and certainly not those already in power. But if we start by focusing on policies, we're creating an implicit level of accountability by making it clear to our political parties that we're paying attention to what they're promising. From here it's much easier to make a stronger case for further changes, so we're also creating a platform for greater accountability in the future.

If we want to create a sustainable democracy – where politics is accessible to all, where we can debate the vision and policies for a society that will meet the challenges we face and where our government is accountable to its performance in a fair way – then we must create greater transparency. By starting with policies, we are taking the biggest leap possible towards achieving this, and at the same time starting to turn the cogs for even bigger change to come. The best thing of all is we can do it ourselves, and we can do it now.

Matt Chocqueel-Mangan, founder of Vote for Policies

www.voteforpolicies.org.uk

Vote for Policies

VOTE FOR POLICIES' & BLUE & GREEN TOMORROW'S ELECTORAL REFORM SURVEY

"When there's an engagement problem, you don't blame the user, you blame the usability."
Matt Chocqueel-Mangan (Vote for Policies)

Democracies need to gradually reform themselves over time to remain relevant to the world we live in today and tomorrow. The next general election is a year away but Blue & Green Tomorrow teamed up with Vote for Policies to create a survey the considered ideas for political reform (These are all recently discussed reforms and manifesto commitments).

Vote for Policies was created for the UK's 2010 General Election as a tool to help people decide who to vote for - based on manifesto policies alone. To date it has polled over 380,000 people! The surprising results are covered on the next six pages of this guide. 2% of those 380,000 including a broad selection of Blue & Green Tomorrow readers completed a survey asking them about their intention to vote, but more importantly their views on reforms to the current system on whether they would improve or worsen our democracy.

This is not a statistically representative sample, as is indicated by the respondent's significantly higher intention to vote in general (94%), European (80%) and local elections (83%). That said, it does give the view of an informed and highly engaged slice of the British electorate today.

6,999 people completed the survey online between 20th March and 5th May 2014.

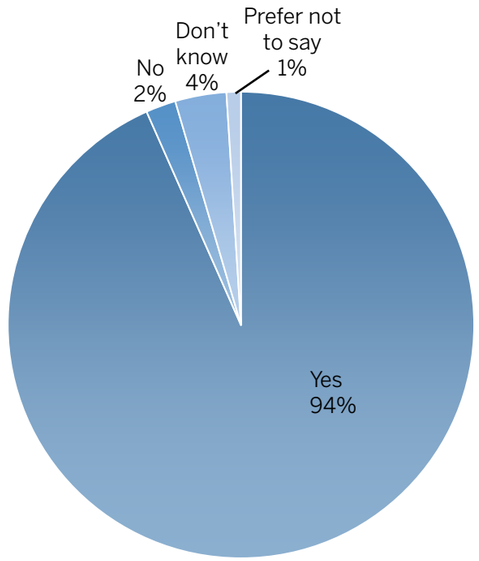
HIGHLIGHTS

- The vast majority of people in our survey will vote at the next round of elections
- The majority of people in our survey would vote to remain in the UK
- The majority of people in our survey, across the UK would vote for Scotland to remain within the UK, with the exception of those who voted in Scotland. Outside Scotland, support for the Union is weakest in Wales and strongest in England
- The most popular suggested reforms to improve our democracy were: MP recall (93% through it would improve), a "none of the above" option on ballot papers (80%), Greater citizen, and political education in schools (80%), proportional representation (74%), Disestablishment of the Church of England (73%) and greater devolution to the countries and regions of the UK (70%)
- The least popular suggested reforms which would worsen our democracy were: raise the voting age to 21 (69% thought it would worsen), independence for your country of residence (51%), maintain the status quo (48%), MPs minimum age raised to 30 (40%), abolition of devolved assemblies (37%)
- All countries in the United Kingdom support the idea of an English Parliament, with support in Scotland and Northern Ireland out-stripping that in England itself
- The Welsh, Northern Irish specifically, and the United Kingdom as a whole, believe their assemblies should receive the same devolved powers as the Scottish Parliament
- The only country where a majority of people believe independence would benefit their country is Scotland. There is least support for independence in Northern Ireland – although this may have been skewed by the alternative to union with the United Kingdom is not independence but reunion with the Republic of Ireland
- All countries and regions of the UK want to see greater devolution. Support for this is strongest in Scotland, the North East, Yorkshire & Humberside, Northern Ireland and North West – the North and Scotland. Support is weakest (but still a majority) in the East of England, London and South East

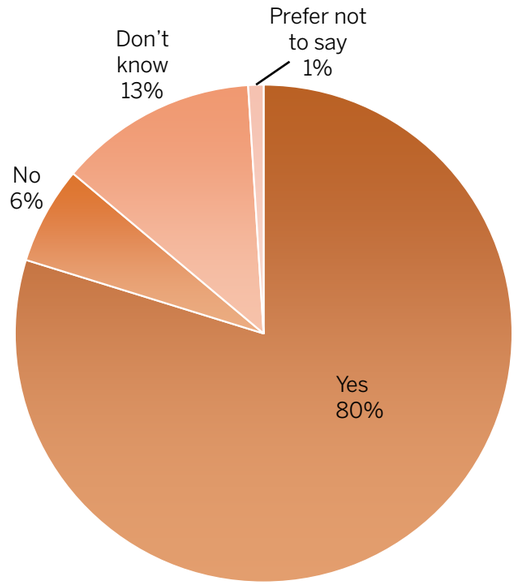
We will be presenting our results to the major parties and individual politicians and asking them their views on the results, which will compile into a comprehensive report in July.

QUESTION 1: DO YOU INTEND TO VOTE AT THE NEXT:

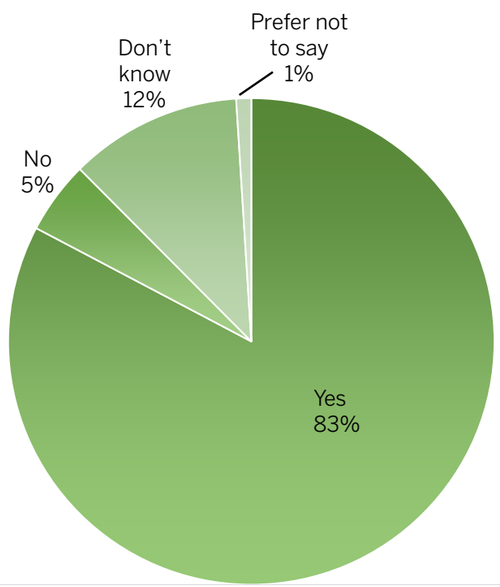
GENERAL ELECTION 2015



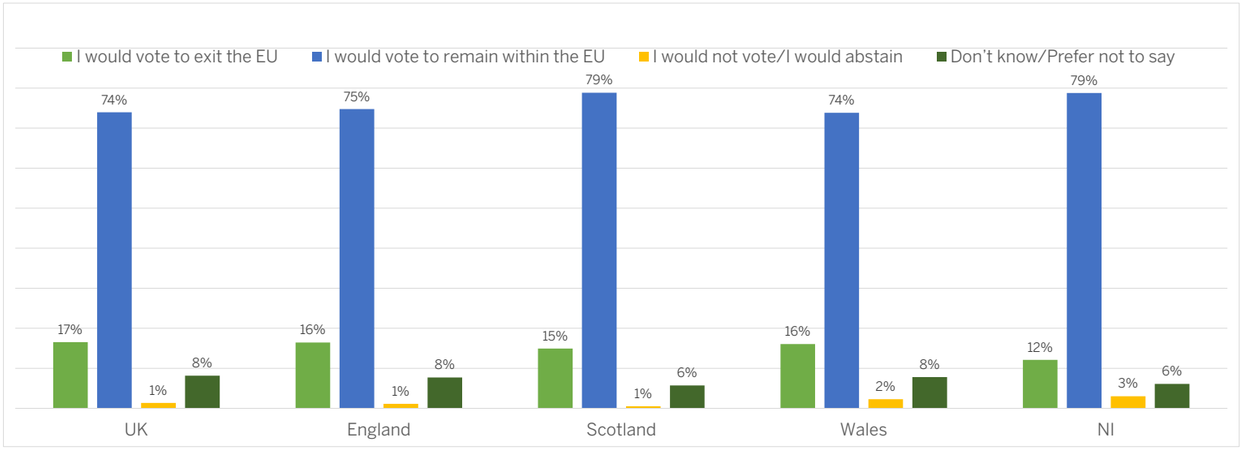
EUROPEAN ELECTION (2014)



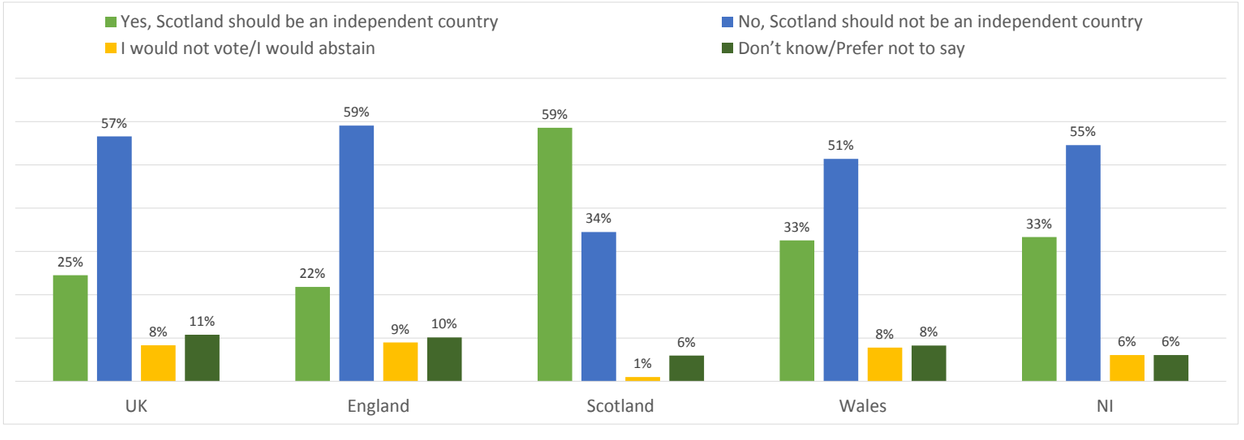
LOCAL ELECTIONS (VARIOUS)



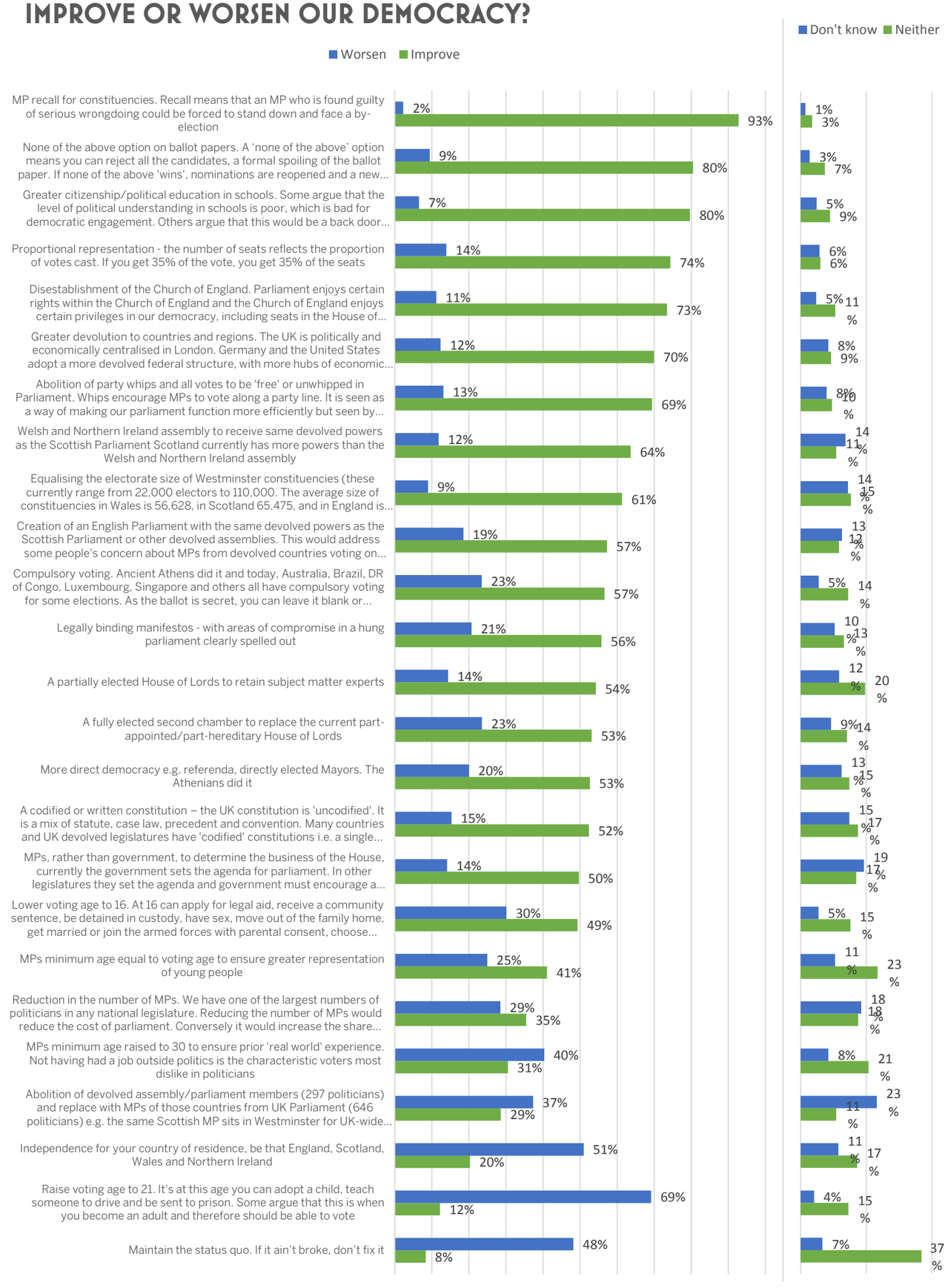
QUESTION 3: IF A REFERENDUM WERE HELD TOMORROW HOW WOULD YOU VOTE ON OUR MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION?



QUESTION 3: REGARDLESS OF WHERE YOU LIVE, "DO YOU AGREE THAT SCOTLAND SHOULD BE AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY?"

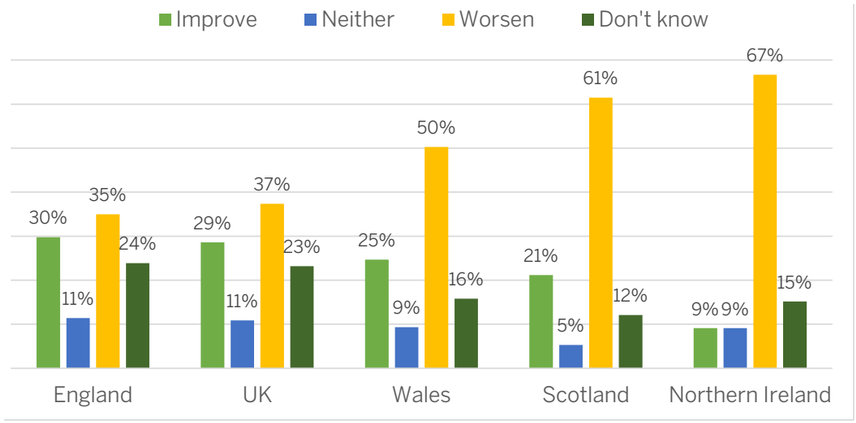


QUESTION 4: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD IMPROVE OR WORSEN OUR DEMOCRACY?

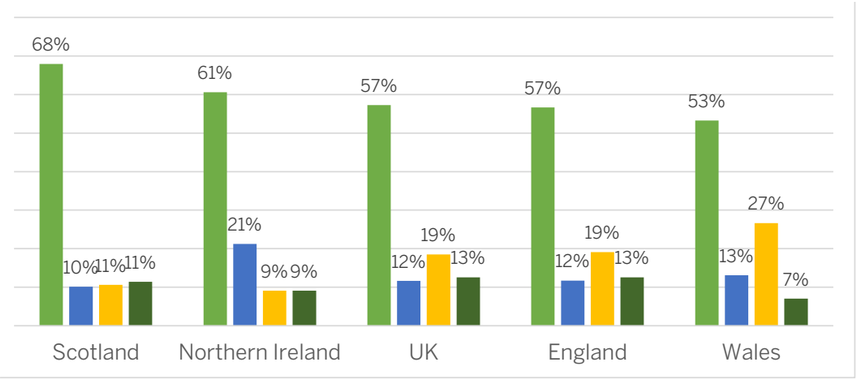


QUESTION 5: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD IMPROVE OR WORSEN OUR DEMOCRACY?

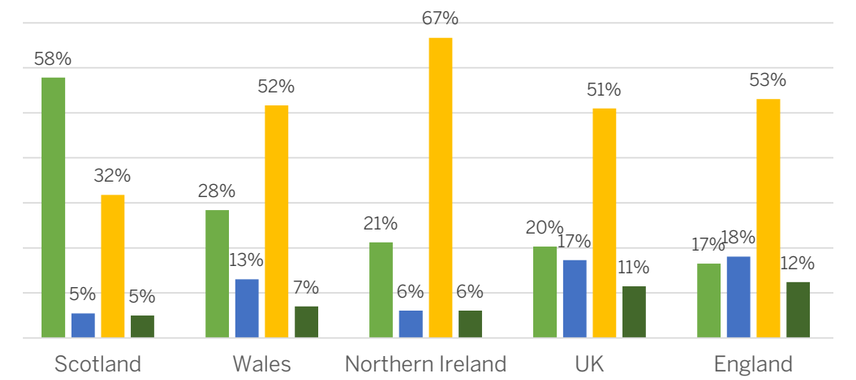
ABOLITION OF DEVOLVED ASSEMBLY/PARLIAMENT MEMBERS AND REPLACE WITH MPS OF THOSE COUNTRIES FROM UK PARLIAMENT



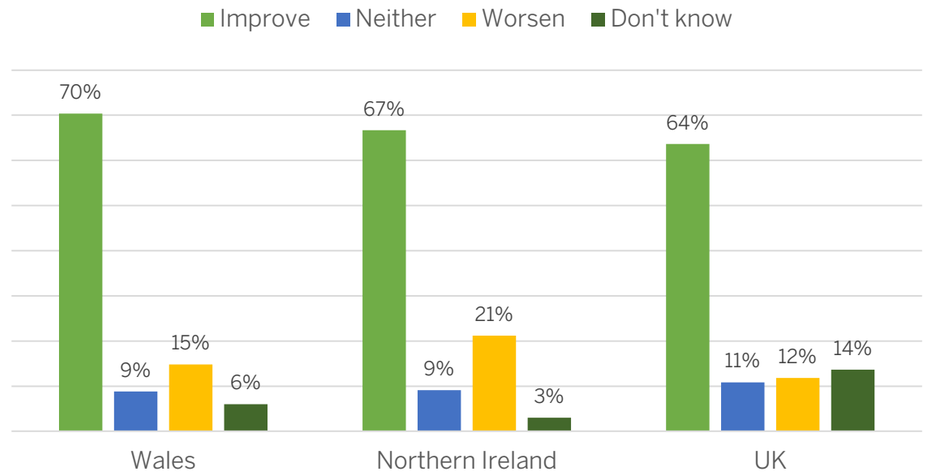
CREATION OF AN ENGLISH PARLIAMENT WITH THE SAME DEVOLVED POWERS AS THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT OR OTHER DEVOLVED ASSEMBLIES



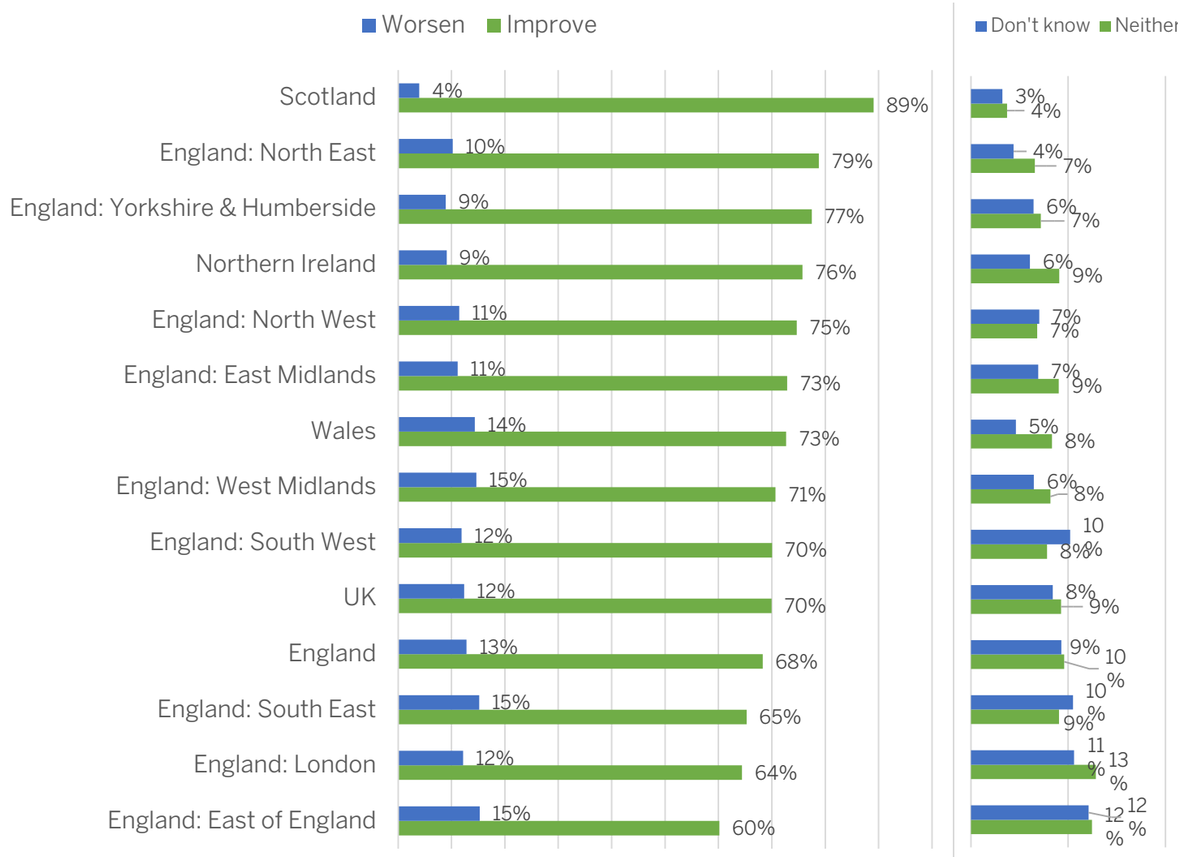
INDEPENDENCE FOR YOUR COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE, BE THAT ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND



WELSH AND NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY TO RECEIVE SAME DEVOLVED POWERS AS THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT



GREATER DEVOLUTION TO COUNTRIES AND REGIONS



THE UNSPOKEN CONSTITUTION



The Unspoken Constitution is a 2009 pamphlet by research organisation Democratic Audit, in association with Unlock Democracy and OurKingdom.

Written as if from our political masters (it begins with the phrase *"We, the elites"* as opposed to *"We, the people"*), it is a brilliant satire on our inefficient and undemocratic governing traditions and rules.

While writing, co-author Stuart Wilks-Heeg notes how he became *"more and more astonished at the arrogant complacency and ignorance not only of our rulers but of the whole political class… over what is in essence a rotten caricature of democracy."* As a taster of its contents, Article 3 states, *"Government, like every subject, shall be free to do whatever is not unlawful. The government shall decide what is unlawful."*

www.opendemocracy.net/files/unspoken_constitution.pdf



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EVERYTHING IS LOOKING PEAR SHAPED

By JACK LEWIS

Better accessibility and promotion are the two most important factors in encouraging more young people to have their say through voting at elections.

Photo by KIRAN FOSTER via Flickr

Everything's looking pear-shaped. By this, I'm referring to the fact that in the 2010 general election, only 44% of 18-24 year-olds who were registered to vote actually went out and voted. This contrasts strikingly with the figure for the over 65s (76%) and is even more worrying when you consider the fact a greater number of over 65s are registered to vote than 18-24s.

This is problematic simply because it means young people are continually marginalised by decision-makers. Despite statements claiming their commitment to young people, politicians know that come election time, they will need to please the elderly. After all, why would they prioritise young people (i.e. the future of this country) when they know that it will be the older vote that will decide the election?

While it does contain measures that will affect 18-24s, you only have to look at the 2014 budget to see the extent of the prioritisation of the needs of older age groups. But enough of my ranting; let's discuss some possible solutions.

First and foremost, why can't we introduce online voting? Many people lead hectic lives, and a range of other aspects of society can be safely conducted online (including tax payments, banking and shopping), so online voting must be a logical step forward. If voting is made more accessible, then this is the first step towards encouraging more 18-24s to vote.

In addition, longer opening times for voting are needed. I'm not simply talking about keeping online and polling station voting booths open for longer hours; I'm suggesting that online voting and polling stations should be kept open for two days (and overnight), to give young people more opportunity to voice their opinion. This way, the problem of people missing the opportunity to vote due to long working hours is avoided.

However, there must be a drive towards the better promotion of voting and voter registration. I have seen no advertisements (online or in the street) promoting voter registration: an essential step on the path towards voting. Adverts need to be placed on social networks and major websites (including Facebook and YouTube) and also on buses and other forms of public transport, in order to hammer home the importance of voting. It is worth remembering that without voter registration, you can't vote, and many young people forget the fact that they can register to vote at the ages of 16 and 17. If young people are made aware of voting and are registered to vote, then by the time they reach the age of 18, they are much more inclined to vote.

Finally, improved Physical, Social and Health Education (PSHE) is needed in schools. This has been the core focus of the UK Youth Parliament's Curriculum for Life campaign (which we have run since 2012). Improved education over the issues politicians can influence and also how to register to vote is essential. Improving education is the most important step in empowering and encouraging future voters. Moving beyond PSHE, you have organisations such as Bite the Ballot, which conducts workshops with young people that aim to increase awareness of the importance of voting.

So we need a two-pronged approach to deal with the problem of low voter turnout among 18-24s. We need to make voting more accessible, a step that will encourage 18-24s and also older generations to vote. And we need to promote voting to the greatest possible extent, in order to ensure that 18-24s know how and where to vote.

If this level of accessibility and promotion results in increased young voter turnout, and if this is sustained, then the concerns of 18-24s will be taken as seriously as those of older age groups. This is due to the fact that MPs, MEPs, councillors and others will have to tackle issues that affect young people (youth unemployment and tuition fees being two prominent examples) in order to secure their job after election time. This would lead to a fairer democracy and a nation where the younger generation is taken seriously and encouraged to become the leaders of tomorrow.

There are other paths to engaging teenagers and 18-24s in politics. In the London borough of Richmond, as part of my role as a member of youth parliament for this area, I have represented the views of the peers who elected me in various ways. Conducting peer research, interviewing decision-makers and facilitating workshops and events are some of the activities I have been able to take part in. This has instilled within me a sense of responsibility towards my local community. As a result, I will definitely be voting once I am 18. I am sure members of the Richmond youth council (a body of democratically elected young people that represents the interests of the borough's young people to decision-makers) would say the same.

Such opportunities for empowerment should be open to all young people, as they really have the power to kindle an interest in the world around you. I hope that I have at least raised awareness of politics within my age group as part of my role. Whether we do so through making voting more accessible, more visible or empowering young people, or through all of these, we must reshape our pear-shaped democracy.

Jack Lewis is an elected member of youth parliament (MYP) for the London borough of Richmond-upon-Thames. He is 17-years-old and is currently attending a sixth-form college.

www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk



Photo by KIM KILLOCK via Flickr

"Improved education over the issues politicians can influence and also how to register to vote is essential"

RUSSELL BRAND'S REVOLUTION: SHOULD WE VOTE AT ALL?

By TOM REVELL

The flamboyant comedian called for people to stop voting – but not everyone agrees.

Very few will have missed the fallout when Russell Brand, the comedian, actor and presenter best known for his libido, former drug habit and a scandal or two, laid out his political ideology to Jeremy Paxman last October. In an interview that first appeared on Newsnight before going viral, Brand confessed that he has never voted. Furthermore, he encouraged every else to *"stop voting, stop pretending, and wake up"*.

Much of the subsequent coverage rejected his theories out of hand, accusing Brand of being shallow and lazy. But does he have a point?

Brand told Paxman, *"It's not that I'm not voting out of apathy. I'm not voting out of absolute indifference and weariness and exhaustion from the lies, treachery, deceit of the political class that has been going on for generations now and which has now reached fever pitch where you have a disenfranchised, disillusioned, despondent underclass that are not being represented by that political system.*

"Voting for it is tacit complicity with that system and that's not something I'm offering up."

He argued that people are failing to engage with the political system because it does not serve or work for them. Our current democracy is also clearly not working, he continued, because *"the planet is being destroyed, we are creating an underclass, we're exploiting poor people all over the world, and the genuine legitimate problems of the people are not being addressed by our political class"*.

Few people would argue with some of these propositions – they are the principle concerns of this guide, after all. Brand admitted he had little idea of how today's system could be replaced. But is he right that democracy, in its current form, is ill-equipped to achieve sustainability?

In an article written for the Guardian, the executive director of the Institute for Policy Research & Development, Nafeez Ahmed, agreed. *"It is not Brand that is trivial or apathetic. It is the prevailing political, economic and cultural system."* He argued that our democracy is compromised by corporate power, pointing to the influence of fracking firms on the energy policy of a supposedly decarbonising state.

He said, *"Confronted with [the impacts of climate change], governments remain structurally beholden to the hegemony of giant energy corporations tied into the old, defunct, carbon-dependent system. And we would be truly foolish to think we can separate out looming climate catastrophe from the other crises Brand highlights."*

However, Ahmed differs from Brand by warning that a complete disengagement from today's democracy will only allow minorities to dominate the political class. Meanwhile, Jamie Bartlett of the political thinktank Demos also argues that Brand's *"enormous, fatal error, is that the answer is to not vote, to drop out"*.

He added, *"If you don't vote, then politicians are less likely to listen, meaning fewer people vote, and it all spirals downward into a sink if apathy. In the eyes of a politician, a non-apathetic non-vote looks identical to a very apathetic non-vote."*

As Ahmed articulated, the danger is this apathy that gifts influence to corporate lobbies and protest parties such as UKIP – whose environmental policy is to stick its head in the sand. Rather than bringing down the system to be replaced by something better, encouraging people to detach from democracy might just exacerbate its failings.

Ahmed said, *"Brand's call for revolution, for a fundamental political, economic, cultural and cognitive shift, is on point. But rather than entailing disengagement resulting in anarchy, this requires the opposite: engagement at all levels in order to elicit structural transformation on multiple scales through the overwhelming presence of people taking power back, here and now."*

Such engagement could take many forms, Ahmed added, ranging grassroots lobbying and civil disobedience to community energy initiatives: *"If we want our children to inherit a habitable planet, rather than bashing Brand for not having a more coherent solution, we need to start being part of it."*



Photo of RUSSELL BRAND by EVA RINALDI via Flickr



Photo by NIKOLAASB via Flickr

"It's not that I'm not voting out of apathy. I'm not voting out of absolute indifference and weariness and exhaustion from the lies, treachery, deceit of the political class..." Russell Brand

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A MAN FOR THE LONG-TERM: WHY BRITAIN NEEDS PRINCE CHARLES

As long-term perspectives disappear from national debate, we should all be grateful for Prince Charles's presence in public life.

By BEN GOLDSMITH

It is hard to name an area of modern life which has not been overcome by short-term considerations. Companies sacrifice long-term growth for their quarterly financial reports, politicians are blind beyond the next election, and the attention span of rolling news channels is shorter than ever. In cricket, the deep satisfaction of a five-day Test Match is threatened by one day or even shorter match formats. Long termism speaks with a quiet voice; a voice that has been all but obliterated.

The Prince of Wales stands almost alone at the top tier of British public life in his insistence on the issues which will decide whether our grandchildren remember us with fondness or contempt. What matters in 50 years matters this year: the role of science in human life; the future of unemployed young people; the impact of architecture on our wellbeing; the wilful

Photo of PRINCE CHARLES by DAN MARSH via Flickr

The Prince of Wales has repeatedly articulated truths in time for us to act on them. If he was an investor, his foresight would have made him a legend.



Photo by CARY BASS via Flickr

disregard for our planetary resource base; and the protection of a countryside which has inspired this nation for centuries.

To speak wisely and truthfully on such issues requires a disinterest that is becoming structurally impossible in our society. Politicians compete for votes, companies for profits, charities for funding and celebrities for popularity. The prince's willingness to endure personal attacks speaks of his freedom to serve more critical outcomes than these.

The country would do well to humble itself before its prince's quiet, brilliant track record. He made his first environmental speech in 1968 – two years before Friends of the Earth was established in this country and 20 before Margaret Thatcher put climate change on the global policy map. Nearly 40 years later – at the height of the financial crisis – he convened a G20 meeting on deforestation which resulted in $6 billion worth of multilateral commitments, helping to embed an 80% reduction of deforestation in the Amazon.

To address long-term issues requires a long-term commitment – a valuable lesson for the rest of us. Some environmentalists are accused of having a disregard for humanity. But human wellbeing is at the core of Prince Charles's concern. He set up the Prince's Trust in 1976 using money saved from his Navy pension and it has since helped 750,000 young people – of whom three-quarters have moved into work, education or training. As youth unemployment again climbs the political agenda, here is an organisation with a success rate that most Big Society-type social enterprises can only dream of. The trust is completely unstuffy and meets young people where they are, exemplified by the 1980s Rock Galas and the ongoing Party in the Park concerts.

The prince's humanitarian efforts also seek to connect people with the natural and built environment. His architectural interventions are sometimes called regressive. But a large part of his 1984 speech to the Royal Institute of British Architects – in which he famously called the National Gallery's Sainsbury Wing a "*carbuncle*" – was given over to the then-unknown cause of disabled access. In an earlier private lunch, he challenged planners and architects to confront the issue of the fire regulations which were preventing disabled people from moving through buildings. This concern is now a given; then, he championed it almost alone. The ongoing thrust of his speech was not the pursuit of aesthetics for their own sake but of community architecture which consults with future inhabitants, showing *"ordinary people that their views are worth having"*. Here we see the true nature of royalty – not imposition but service.

My own area of business and investment is prey to the greatest and potentially most deadly disconnect between short-term motivation and future impact. Yet here too the prince's long-term view is starting to have an impact.

Since its foundation in 1994, his Business Sustainability Programme at Cambridge University has been attended by members of over 1,000 organisations in over 70 countries. The effect of these people multiplied across their organisations represents global impact. Every three years since 2004 a similar programme has been launched – for the insurance industry, itself more exposed to extreme weather than any other; for banks to help stop deforestation and unlock capital for clean energy projects; for investors to tackle the profound problem of investment short-termism; and for the accountants, who will, in the Prince's words, "save the world".

As he put it, we are living off the Earth's natural capital rather than the income derived from that capital and there is no global CFO to keep us in check. Having survived the banking crisis, we sit by and watch while the biggest bank of all – nature itself – heads towards catastrophe.

It was the English theorist Thomas Hobbes who focused on monarchy as the institution most free from self-interest and thereby best able to serve the long-term interest of a nation. *"Hell is truth seen too late"*, he wrote. The Prince of Wales has repeatedly articulated truths in time for us to act on them. If he was an investor, his foresight would have made him a legend. As it is, he has asked for nothing back. I'm a massive fan.

Ben Goldsmith is head of sales and marketing and a partner at WHEB. This article is republished with permission from the Spectator

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FINANCING OUR RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

The REA Finance Forum will bring mainstream investors and renewable energy developers together



Photo by DAVID J LAPORTE via Flickr

The Renewable Energy Association (REA) is well known for its influence in government policy, having played a major role in securing and improving such key renewables support schemes as feed-in tariffs, the renewable heat incentive, the renewables obligation and contracts for difference. These schemes are absolutely vital for putting renewables on a (more) level playing field with the fossil fuels they are gradually replacing. However, renewable energy businesses working with these schemes encounter two frequent problems.

Firstly, whenever the policies are reviewed, the ensuing uncertainty can have a big adverse impact on the ability of renewable energy project developers to raise finance. It's like you're a racehorse wanting to gallop to the finish line but one of your legs has been cemented to the floor. The more dependent your business model is on government policy, the more you slow down when policy is unclear.

Secondly, several people object (perhaps not surprisingly) to public funds being spent on private sector profits, even if they are helping to make the world a better place. Campaigns against renewables support programmes can be powerful, and this type of politics can create more of the uncertainty discussed above. Life would be a lot easier for renewables project developers if the industry was already mature and fully competitive with fossil fuels without the need for subsidy.

So while these types of policies are vital (and remain a major pillar of the REA's work), we want to get to a point where we no longer need them as soon as possible. This means breaking down the non-policy barriers to renewables.

The REA's new Finance Forum is designed to achieve exactly that. Its mission is *"to improve access to affordable finance to support and accelerate the deployment of renewable technologies"*. It will bring mainstream investors and renewable energy developers together, helping financiers distinguish between real and perceived risks and opportunities, and helping developers secure finance for their projects.

This is an exciting new development for us in 2014 that fits with the REA's business objective to strengthen and deepen ours and our members' capabilities. The Finance Forum will have four working groups, identifying and working to resolve barriers relating to asset finance, private equity, project finance and community finance (including crowdfunding).

The asset finance group is being established first. We have already hosted an introductory webinar and a first seminar for financiers. The group has already identified the range of renewable energy projects available to invest in and a number of barriers to funding projects, including perceived risks. Future meetings will identify what needs to be done to reduce or remove the barriers to investment in renewables.

Blue & Green Tomorrow understands that what people choose to do with their money is every bit as important as government policies for achieving the goal of a sustainable energy economy, so the REA is delighted they have agreed to come on board as media partners.

For more information about the Finance Forum, visit: *www.r-e-a.net/finance-forum*

REA
RENEWABLE ENERGY ASSOCIATION



HOW DO WE MAKE SUSTAINABILITY DEMOCRATIC? GET A VISION

By MATT CHOCQUEEL-MANGAN

Photo by MAREK BERNAT via freeimages.com

To manage our resources effectively we need a plan. A vision. Our political parties don't have one, but should we be leaving it up to them anyway?

I believe we have the knowledge now to solve all of our problems. To find that knowledge, however, we need to start asking the people with relevant skills and experience. Right now, the people with credible experience – our teachers, academics, social workers, sociologists, scientists, psychologists, doctors, economists and social entrepreneurs – are not sufficiently involved in dialogue with our politicians or with each other for society to harvest the true value of their experience.

To really learn from each other, we need to be able to engage in better conversations – conversations where our own preconceptions and insecurities can be challenged, and where we can arrive at new understandings. This isn't about agreeing with each other, it's about accepting the uncertainty of what we know and evolving our understanding.

Meanwhile, to be really free to pursue a vision we need to recognise that our political culture isn't geared towards delivering long-term goals. Pressure from the media and inter-party bickering increases the need to release headline friendly results and has created a culture of short-term thinking. We need to allow space for bigger thinking about longer term solutions, and we almost certainly need to give our politicians a break – especially if we want them to be a part of the overall solution.

While these are big, cultural challenges to address, there is a simpler way to start. That way is through greater transparency in the policies of each party, and by making policies the basis upon which we choose which party to vote for.

Through a focus on policies, we can create a more meaningful, rational and unbiased debate around politics that can engage a broader cross-section of society in politics. In doing so, we will create a natural platform for starting the discussion about vision – the kind of society we need to create to survive the resource challenges we face. But crucially, we will engage the broader cross-section of society whose experience we need to find solutions to these challenges – including the culture and the longer term outlook necessary to see them through.

Matt Chocqueel-Mangan, founder of Vote for Policies
www.voteforpolicies.org.uk

Vote for Policies

This isn't about agreeing with each other, it's about accepting the uncertainty of what we know and evolving our understanding

Photo by NIKI ODOLPHIE via Flickr









POSITIVE POLITICS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

By SIMON LEADBETTER

Photo above by UK MINISTRY OF DEFENCE via Flickr

Photos opposite from top to bottom

David Cameron taken by DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS via Flickr

Ed Miliband taken by EDMILIBAND via Flickr

Nick Clegg taken by RIOTSPANEL via Flickr

The electorate is often highly sceptical of politicians and the Westminster, Holyrood, Pierhead and Belfast villages. But healthy scepticism has slipped into an unhealthy cynicism and apathy. To face the challenges of the 21st century, we need our democracy and politics to function effectively on a national and global stage.

The list of broken politics is long. The expenses scandal; cash for honours; cash for access; the breaking of manifesto promises; the dishonest use of statistics for political point scoring; endless spinning; opaque corporate lobbying and party funding all bring politics into disrepute. The fact that 35% of the electorate regularly don't vote, even more in the case of the upcoming local and European elections, it is worrying for those who believe in democracy. Politicians blame the voters, when in reality the blame is much closer to their own door.

The challenges we face are vast. Our decline as a global power in relative terms, rather than absolute, is not one of them. It's not that we're declining economically; more that other developing nations are rising. This means fewer poor people and greater trade and travel opportunities for our brightest and best individuals and companies. It is very likely that we'll still be in the top 10 global economies by GDP in 2050.

We need a skilled and flexible workforce, but we do not need a race to the bottom on safety and wages. Our education system needs to be much more meritocratic rather than plutocratic, to ensure social mobility improves and the brightest and best, rather than the wealthiest, have the opportunity to rise to the top. Rather than wrecking the best independent schools, a significantly greater number of fully-funded scholarships should be offered (as the excellent two-part CBBC programme, *My Life: Most Famous School in the World*, demonstrated). More investment and innovation in state schools should be deployed to raise the standards to independent school levels.

Early learning through creative play is essential for the new economy. Rather than focusing on earlier cramming and testing, we need much more creative education until seven, to unleash the imaginations our future economy needs. The price of rising educational standards should not be stifled, stressed, depressed and suicidal children.

The challenge is not our relative economic position but much more complicated and intractable problems. The rise of developing world middle classes is positive



"Had we listened and acted on the clear calls for action in the 70s, 80s and 90s, we would be in an entirely different and sustainable place"

Photo by ULI HARDER via Flickr

but it puts an ever greater strain on finite resources, especially food, energy and water. This is a case of overconsumption rather than overpopulation. The rise of meat eaters is bad for our planet as livestock is much more resource intensive than crops.

Resource scarcity is compounded by overconsumption. Just as it is harder to supply resources, the demand for them is rising. Disequilibrium in supply and demand creates volatile but inexorably rising prices. Rising prices make previously uneconomic areas viable, putting the polar regions and rainforests at risk, degrading natural habitats and threatening future biodiversity loss. This tragedy of huge commons cannot be overstated. Extracting every last drop of oil is madness. What we need are alternatives.

Pollution has reached pandemic levels. It impacts the air we breathe, the food we eat and the water we drink. It threatens our health and wellbeing, but most unforgivably, harms our children. The list of things you cannot eat when you are pregnant grows longer as more toxic chemicals concentrate in the food chain. If you or your children have respiratory, dermatological, gastric or circulatory health issues, look no further than the car outside your home or the energy you buy for a cause.

This leads us to climate change. We are passing, if we have not already passed, the point where mitigation will work. We are left in a position of having to adapt to a radically altered climate where extreme weather events are more likely, food supplies are under threat

"Politicians blame the voters for falling turnouts, when in reality the blame is much closer to their own door"

and global security from mass migration and resource conflicts become inevitable. This is not a good place to be. Had we listened and acted on the clear calls for action in the 70s, 80s and 90s, we would be in an entirely different and sustainable place. Sadly, many of those responsible for our circumstances are no longer around and we are where we are.

Parochial, tribal and shortsighted politicians are not fit for purpose. We need international statesmen who are willing to put global issues at the forefront of their policy and agenda. A race to the bottom in negativity, blame and tribalism will get us nowhere very quickly and is an altogether more depressing tragedy of the (House of) Commons.

A positive vision of Britain in the world sees us as a more equal and meritocratic society than we are today. We should be leading on international diplomacy and engagement rather than warmongers. We have the skills and ingenuity to lead the world on abundant clean energy and resource efficiency. We should be proud advocates of the international laws on human rights that we created. It is right that we defend free trade under the rule of law, but also staunch critics of crony capitalism. Finally, we can and should be a model of open, transparent and functioning representative democracy.



WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

Having read through the Guide to Transport 2014, which we hope has inspired you to think twice about how you travel, you might be wondering how else you can make a difference in your life. We encourage you to read our other in-depth reports, from both this year and last, on topics as varied as investment, energy and the media. But above all, we encourage you to act upon what you've read.



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FIND A SPECIALIST ETHICAL FINANCIAL ADVISER NEAR YOU

Sustainable investment is what we write about day in, day out. Contrary to the early-90s Des'ree hit 'Crazy Maze', which begins, "Money don't make my world go round", money is what governs almost every decision we as consumers and businesses make.

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RELATED REPORT: The Guide to Ethical & Sustainable Financial Advice 2013 - http://bit.ly/GZegUA



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RELATED REPORT: The Guide to Sustainable Tourism 2014 - http://bit.ly/1hD1MxQ

ETHICAL FINANCIAL ADVISER DIRECTORY



Blue & Green Tomorrow works with experienced independent financial advisers who specialise in ethical investment and understand how money can be used to create a secure future for you, for your families and for our planet. Give one of them a call and talk about your plans

You may even find you sleep easier at night if, like us, you want a better future for all. Your hard-earned money can do some of the hard work of making that happen while you sleep.

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