

Annual Report 2023 – 2024

On behalf of the Trust Democracy Committee, I am pleased to present our 2023 – 2024 Annual Report. A summary of our work is set out in the Appendix.

Declining trust, declining trust in democracy, declining confidence in current forms

A lot has changed in Aotearoa and globally since Trust Democracy was incorporated in 2019. Levels of trust in each other and in institutions have declined. Trust in the idea of democracy and its current institutional forms have declined. Confidence that democracies can deliver basic services let alone address the 'polycrisis' is declining. Many people are concerned about misinformation, polarisation, the undue political influence of dominant groups and powerful interests, and the demise of the news media and its ability to hold power to account.¹ Increasingly, people are recognising the current poverty and pathologies of New Zealand's democratic systems, and that some of the ways forward may lie not only in Western democratic theory and innovations but also within Māori and Pacific cultures and practices.

Increasing interest in deliberative forms of engagement

As a remedy to the current democratic malaise and in an effort to bolster trust and legitimacy, Trust Democracy is pleased to note more interest in deliberative forms of public engagement in recent years. For example, the Public Service Commission and the Department of Internal Affairs both highlighted the need to develop more deliberative forms of engagement in their 2022 Long-term Insights Briefings, as did the Review into the Future for Local Government and Deloitte's State of the State 2023. We have also seen three major deliberative mini-publics take place – one in Auckland in 2022, and one each in Auckland and Wellington in 2023 – as well as the emergence of civil society-led deliberative processes in Porirua and Gisborne. Trust Democracy will continue to work with others to support democratic innovation.

Strategic Plan being developed to provide more a more focused response

Given the democratic challenges we face, the need for civil society organisations such as Trust Democracy is clear. The question is: what can a small, young organisation with limited resources do to address these challenges? I am pleased that Trust Democracy is in the process of developing its first strategic plan. After producing a draft plan at a one-day workshop in February 2023, the Trust Democracy committee has invited member input via an online tool called [Consider.it](#). Findings will be discussed at the AGM 2024. After this, the committee plans to finalise the plan, which will focus Trust Democracy's activities for the next year or two.

Education and awareness

Trust Democracy has continued to organise events with democratic leaders and experts to raise awareness of issues and innovations. Six such events were organised during 2023-24 as detailed in the Appendix. Of these, one hybrid (in-person and Zoom) event on strengthening democracy

¹ See for example <https://www.ipsos.com/en-nz/populism-global-advisor-survey-2024-nz-edition>

through open government was organised with a number of other civil society organisations and featured Sanjay Pradhan (CEO, OGP) and the Rt Hon Helen Clark. Two Zoom events were organised with Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures and both attracted well over 100 participants. Unfortunately, two events that were organised for local government on deliberative forms of engagement with Local Government New Zealand were cancelled due to low registrations.

In addition to events, Trust Democracy members have:

Helped organise conferences	<i>Democracy around the Globe International Kettering Network Conference</i>	Auckland	October 2023
	<i>Reinvigorating and Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century Symposium</i>	Auckland	June 2024
Written articles	'Open government: A 40-year gestation and still in labour' (A Ecclestone , K Booth, S Wright)	<i>Public Sector</i>	Spring 2023
	'The rise, fall and re-rise of deliberative democracy in New Zealand' (S Wright S, T Buklijas, M Rashbrooke)	<i>Policy Quarterly</i>	May 2024
Made presentations	'Thinking about collaboration and engagement' (S Wright)	Waka Kotahi, Wellington	July 2023
	'The potential of Polis: Democracy at Scale' (S Wright)	Camp Wired online conference	April 2023

Open Government Partnership

Trust Democracy has participated fully in New Zealand's Open Government Partnership (OGP) programme. The OGP is an international initiative that aims to enhance democracy by improving participation, transparency and accountability. In addition to organising [the event](#) mentioned above featuring Sanjay Pradhan (CEO, OGP) and the Rt Hon Helen Clark, which aimed to raise awareness of the OGP and its potential for strengthening democracy, Trust Democracy members have been monitoring the delivery of National Action Plan commitments. Despite all NZ's parliamentary political parties [expressing support for NZ's OGP membership](#) prior to the election, Trust Democracy remains extremely concerned that very little progress is being made and that neither the responsible Minister nor the Public Service Commission have indicated NZ's future direction or appointed a new multi-stakeholder forum to replace the disestablished OGP Expert Advisory Panel. In the meantime, NZ's programme seems stalled.

'Delivery'

Despite limited business experience, the committee has in fact 'chunked down' and 'delivered' just about all of the priorities we announced at last year's AGM.

Announced at AGM 2023	Delivered in 2023-24
Develop a strategic plan to help focus our efforts for impact and develop the organisation to support this.	In the final stages of development
To increase the number and diversity of our members	Five new members joined in 2023-24
To continue to support the Porirua Talanoa-Wānanga deliberative experiment in Te Tiriti- and community-led governance	Trust Democracy members are participating in the Community Leaders Forum and in the design team for the Porirua Te Tiriti Climate Assembly
TD will continue to encourage and support local authorities to develop more deliberative and participatory forms of governance .	Two events in 2023-24 attracted significant attendance from local government.

To raise awareness amongst journalists and commentators about new forms of democratic engagement.	Journalists and commentators were invited to and some attended the Art O’Leary and Colin Megill webinar.
Maintain the relationship with the Kettering Foundation, USA, and help organise a New Zealand based deliberative democracy event in Auckland during October 2023	A number of TD members and supporters helped organise the Kettering Foundation’s <i>Democracy around the Globe International Network Conference</i> , which was held in Auckland in October 2023.

Disclosures

No conflicts of interest were disclosed by Trust Democracy committee members during 2022-23.

Votes of thanks

I would like to acknowledge and thank Andrew Ecclestone, Anna Curnow, Finlay Harvey, John Pennington and Maureen Gillon for their work as members of the Trust Democracy committee over 2023-24.

I would also like to thank members for their ongoing support. The society would not have achieved as much as it has without members helping with the events, suggesting projects, writing articles, and providing advice and financial support.

Ngā mihi, nā



Simon Wright
Chair

Appendix: Summary of our work in 2023-24

Events

Topic	Featuring	Date / Notes
The potential of citizens' assemblies and Polis to include and empower the public in agenda setting and problem solving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art O'Leary • Colin Megill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 June 2023 • In collaboration with Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures.
Deliberative engagement for long-term planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MosaicLab 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 June 2023 • In collaboration with LGNZ. • Cancelled due to low registrations
Disinformation, science, trust, democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Michael Baker 	9 May 2023
Experiences of Victorian local government leaders with deliberative engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 Victorian local government leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 May 2023 • In collaboration with LGNZ • Cancelled due to low registrations.
Strengthening Democracy through Open Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanjay Pradhan (Open Government Partnership) • Rt Hon Helen Clark (Open Government Partnership) • Helmut Modlik (Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira) • Andrew Ecclestone (NZ Council for Civil Liberties & Trust Democracy, Senior Associate Institute for Governance & Policy Studies) • Suzanne Snively (NZ Expert Advisory Panel for OGP) 	13 April 2023 In collaboration with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VUW School of Government • NZ Council for Civil Liberties • Transparency International NZ • Open Government Partnership.
Learnings from NZ's first Citizens Assembly: the Watercare case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amanda Singleton and Jenny Wigley, Watercare • Tatjana Buklijas and Anne Bardsley, Koi Tū • Tame Te Rangi, Mana Whenua Kaitiaki Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 April 2023 • In collaboration with LGNZ and for its members

Collaborations with others

<p>Open Government Partnership (OGP), which is an international initiative that aims to enhance democracy by improving participation, transparency and accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the VUW School of Government, the NZ Council for Civil Liberties, Transparency International NZ and the OGP, Trust Democracy helped organise ‘Strengthening Democracy through Open Government, which was delivered in an in-person and online mode on 13 April 2023. • In collaboration with others, Trust Democracy help conduct a pre-election survey of political parties regarding their support for the OGP. • Trust Democracy’s Chair attended the OGP Global Summit in Estonia in September 2023. • A number of Trust Democracy members have attended progress updates on the implementation of New Zealand’s fourth National Action Plan with civil society partners. • Trust Democracy submitted feedback to the Ministry of Justice on policy work to improve the scrutiny of the growing number of exemptions to the Official Information Act. This work is for Commitment 7 of NZ’s Open Government Partnership National Action Plan.
<p>Te Reo o nga Tāngata: The People Speak</p>	<p>Trust Democracy has continued to provide support to Te Reo o Nga Tāngata: The People Speak as it works with Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira and other Porirua community organisations to progress the Porirua Te Tiriti Climate Assembly experiment that was talked about at Trust Democracy’s 2022 AGM by Helmut Modlik.</p>
<p>Kettering Foundation, USA</p>	<p>A number of TD members and supporters helped organise the Kettering Foundation’s <i>Democracy around the Globe International Network Conference</i>, which was held in Auckland in October 2023.</p>
<p>Universities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With academics from the University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, two committee members have been helping to organise the <i>Reinvigorating and Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century Symposium</i>, which will feature John Gastil, Nicole Curato and Dominic O’Sullivan and will be held at the University of Auckland, 5-6 June 2024. • With Koi Tū: the Centre for Informed Futures, we organised the Zoom events listed above featuring Art O’Leary and Colin Megill, and on the Watercare Citizens Assembly.

Presentations

Simon Wright gave two presentations on behalf of Trust Democracy:

- ‘Thinking about collaboration and engagement’ to Waka Kotahi Arataki 30-year plan team
- ‘The potential of Polis: Democracy at Scale’ to participants at the online Camp Wired conference.

Publications

Over the course of 2023-24, Trust Democracy submitted 2 submissions and a media release. These are listed below and all available on the Publications page of the Trust Democracy website.

Details	Date
Response to the Ministry of Justice with feedback on paper about improving scrutiny of OIA exemptions under Commitment 7 of New Zealand’s fourth Open Government Partnership National Action Plan.	17 Mar 2024
Feedback on a Health Coalition Aotearoa discussion document called “A Balance of Voices: Options for the regulation of lobby in New Zealand” by Max Rashbrooke.	9 Mar 2024
Media Release based on a survey developed with 7 civil society organisations: All Main Parties affirm New Zealand’s Membership of the Open Government Partnership.	4 Oct 2023

Three members – Keitha Booth, Andrew Ecclestone and Simon Wright – wrote an article entitled ‘Open Government: A 40-Year Gestation and Still in Labour’ for the Spring 2023 issue of the *Public Sector Journal*.