

Annual Report 2024 – 2025

On behalf of the Trust Democracy Committee, I am pleased to present Trust Democracy's fifth Annual Report.

Concerns about the state of democracy

There are plenty of reasons to be concerned about the state of democracy in New Zealand and globally. Trust Democracy's work focuses on Aotearoa New Zealand.

A February 2024 IPSOS poll, [reported by Newsroom](#), found that over half of New Zealanders feel the country is in decline and that our society is broken. Two thirds believe the economy is rigged in favour of the rich and powerful, and that a strong leader is needed to balance the scales.

The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer, [reported by the Integrity Initiative](#), found that levels of trust in business, NGOs, Government and media have fallen since 2024, and that levels of trust in NZ are lower than the global average. Two thirds of New Zealanders think that the wealthy don't pay their fair share of taxes and an increasing majority say that leaders from government (58%), business (59%) and journalists (67%) are purposefully misleading the public. Only 19% of New Zealanders believe the next generation will be better off, compared to the global average of 36%.

Increasingly concerns are being expressed about long-running issues with our government system. Many of these issues are ones that successive governments have failed to address sufficiently, and some have gained more prominence since the current coalition government came into office. These include frustrations with:

- wholesale policy u-turns when new governments come into office
- a system that incentivises short-term thinking and responses, even for long-term, intergenerational issues
- coalition governments that over-claim electoral mandate and subsequently limit public involvement in the policy making process through, for example, the use of urgency or very truncated policy development processes with selected stakeholders rather than the general public
- the lack of checks and balances on executive government
- the lack of standing of local government and its limited ability to serve its communities
- the lack of political attention to strengthening our democratic infrastructure and addressing issues such as lobbying, political donations and party financing, access to official information and public participation in agenda setting, will formation and decision-making.

Other important issues that are confronting our political system are noted in Trust Democracy's [updated Strategic Plan 2024-2026](#).

Our strategic direction

Given these democratic challenges, the need for civil society organisations such as Trust Democracy is clear. The question is: what can a small member organisation with limited resources do to address these challenges?

In response to this question, I am pleased to report that Trust Democracy finalised its [first strategic plan](#) in June 2024 after consulting with members using the consider.it online platform.

Our Purpose

An important outcome of our first strategic plan was a Trust Democracy purpose statement:

'Fostering democratic innovation for a fair, just and inclusive society'

This statement highlights our conviction that 'inclusiveness' and 'justice' are as important for a well-functioning democracy as 'fairness' or simplistic notions of 'equality' that underpin a significant amount of the current government's agenda. To be able to democratically address complex issues such as resource management, inequitable health outcomes and poverty, Trust Democracy believes that 'democratic innovations' to bolster our parliamentary and local government structures are desperately needed.

Trust Democracy is therefore proud to have supported the Porirua experiment in local governance that included the establishment of the Porirua Community Leaders Forum and the Porirua Assembly, which is a citizens' assembly adapted for Porirua, Aotearoa New Zealand. The [Porirua Assembly on Climate](#) was held across four Saturdays in February and March 2025 to address the question 'Learning to live with Porirua's changing world together: How do we connect and respond as our climate changes?' The assembly process was designed by [Te Rūnanga o Toa Rangatira](#) and [Te Reo o Ngā Tāngata/The People Speak](#) with input from the Community Leaders Forum and community groups and was based on a three-house model: a mana whenua group, a community group selected by sortition, and a 'relational' group comprising members from both groups that drafted and refined joint recommendations. The process also provide for the participation of young people through schools-based learning and a rangatahi forum that presented its recommendations to the Porirua Assembly and has since formed a climate-focused youth organisation called [Future Unity](#). The Assembly's recommendations will be presented to the Community Leaders Forum, Porirua City Council, Greater Wellington Regional Council and representatives from other authorities on 15 April 2025. Trust Democracy members supported this process as members of the organising committees in areas such as participant recruitment via sortition, facilitation support, process design, funding and advocacy.

Our focus areas

The Strategic Plan sets out 8 focus areas:

1. Advance knowledge and experience of democratic practices
2. Strengthen deliberative democracy in local government
3. Identify, research and frame issues or public discussion
4. Build networks and where appropriate formalise relationships with people and organisations interested in democracy
5. Strengthen relationships with iwi hapu
6. Support work on high-integrity policy making
7. Advocacy on policy issues
8. Getting commitments to democratic innovations in political party manifestos ahead of 2026 election.

While progress was made in many of these areas, a progress review conducted by the committee in the first quarter of 2025 found that the plan was overly ambitious given our limited capacity.

Consequently, a revised set of priorities has been agreed for 2025. In addition to focusing on the areas set out below, we aim to build our membership and organisational capacity over the coming year. This is necessary to enable Trust Democracy to have more ambitious goals and because we need to bring new members into leadership roles: our Constitution requires two of our founding committee members to step down at the 2026 AGM.

2025 Priorities

In addition to building our membership and organisational capacity over the coming year, the committee has agreed a much more manageable list of focus areas as follows.

- Help develop a case study for local government about the Porirua initiative
- Build a coalition of iwi and civil society actors to jointly advance people's knowledge and experience of democratic principles and practices.
- Make a submission on the 4-year parliamentary term bill to set out a much more extensive collection of the measures that Parliament should be considering to make our democracy more robust, some of which we consider necessary preconditions for the Parliamentary term to be extended. We will copy our submission to all the political parties in Parliament.
- Complete the establishment of democratic innovation essay competitions for students at the Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Auckland
- Further develop Trust Democracy's communications capacities including a strengthened social media presence

2024 Achievements

In addition to Trust Democracy members supporting the Porirua initiative, some other 2024 highlights included:

- Simon Wright and John Pennington were part of the organising committee for the [Reinvigorating and Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century Symposium](#) in

Auckland, 5-6 June 2024. The symposium attracted about 50 delegates of whom a significant number were Trust Democracy members.

- John Pennington and Simon Wright presented ‘Deliberating online: the place of technology in democratic innovation’ at the Reinvigorating and Reinventing Democracy for the 21st Century Symposium in Auckland.
- Trust Democracy helped promote and organise [4 public events on the future of democracy](#) with deliberative democracy heavyweight, Prof John Gastil, in June 2024
- Finn Shewell collaborated with Koi Tū’s Tatjana Buklijas to run a deliberative simulation at the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Aotearoa’s [Economy for Public Good Conference 2024](#) so that some of the 300+ delegates could experience deliberation and reflect on the experience.
- Anna Curnow presented on NZ’s current democratic malaise and the democratic innovations that are needed in response at the Grey Lynn Park Festival and at the Dargaville Rotary Club
- Finn Shewell worked with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Aotearoa on its ‘Public Good Policy Handbook: Resources for Local Government’ handbook, which is for candidates in the 2025 local body elections. His focus was on the chapter on achieving a strong and trusted democracy. Additionally, Simon Wright helped write a Porirua initiative case study for this chapter.
- John Pennington with assistance from Andrew Ecclestone and Simon Wright, has led an initiative to establish prizes for essays about democratic innovations relevant to the NZ context for students at Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Auckland. This should be in place during 2025.
- Simon Wright attended the [OECD Global Forum on Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy](#), 21-22 October 2024 and shared his learning via a [blog post](#).
- Anna Curnow wrote a blog post entitled [‘Leveraging Local Government’s Superpower’](#)
- Keitha Booth, a Trust Democracy member and experienced independent review for the Open Government Partnership, published a blog post entitled [‘Whither Open Government in New Zealand’](#).
- Trust Democracy supported Keitha Booth and her collaborator, Associate Professor Mei Jen Hung of the National Taiwan University, to develop Taiwan’s Open Government National Action Plan 2021-2024 Results Report via our [website](#).

Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is an international initiative that aims to enhance democracy by improving participation, transparency and accountability. Since it was established, Trust Democracy has actively participated in New Zealand’s OGP programme. Despite all NZ’s parliamentary political parties [expressing support for NZ’s OGP membership](#) prior to the 2023 election, Trust Democracy remains extremely concerned that very little progress is being made. Despite New Zealand’s fifth National Action Plan (NAP5) being due at the end of 2025, a new multi-stakeholder forum has yet to be established and no announcements have been made about the process for developing

NAP5. Trust Democracy is one of a number of civil society organisations seeking to meet the responsible Minister, Judith Collins, to hear about how she plans to make the most of NZ’s membership of the OGP.

Maintaining our organisation by re-registering under the 2022 Act

The Committee has proposed the following 4 special resolutions for consideration at the 2025 AGM aimed at securing the future of Trust Democracy.

1. The first resolution details constitutional changes required for Trust Democracy to register under the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. We are currently registered under the 1908 Act.
2. To help refresh and improve the capacity of our committee, the committee has proposed a second resolution to increase the maximum size of the committee from 6 to 8 members. This change would potentially enable the workload to be spread across more people and bring more members into organisational governance and leadership roles.
3. In the third resolution, the committee proposes tidy-ups and changes to the constitution that correct typos and errors, and make improvements to the interpretation section.
4. In the fourth resolution, the committee proposes consolidating the amendments in a ‘clean’ constitution and using this to re-register under the 2022 Act.

Disclosures

The following disclosures were made by Trust Democracy committee members during 2024-25.

Andrew Ecclestone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deputy Chair, NZ Council for Civil Liberties ● Advisory Committee for Health Coalition Aotearoa Project on Lobbying ● Advisory Committee for Re:Shape
Anna Curnow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Board member of the Kauri Museum ● A Director of Decision Works
Finn Shewell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Board member of Generation Zero ● Work with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Aotearoa on participatory approaches to policy decision-making
Simon Wright	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advisory Committee for Re:Shape ● Member of the project team for the Porirua Assembly on Climate
Finlay Harvey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None

Votes of thanks

I would like to acknowledge and thank Andrew Ecclestone, Anna Curnow, Finlay Harvey, Finn Shewell and John Pennington for their work as members of, or contributors to, the Trust Democracy committee over 2024-25. I would also like to thank Maureen Gillon, a founding member and our inaugural Chair who resigned in 2024, for her years of service.

I would like to thank all 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. The committee is looking forward to working with you on our 2025 priorities and to build our membership and organisational capacity.

Ngā mihi, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Simon Wright", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Simon Wright
Chair