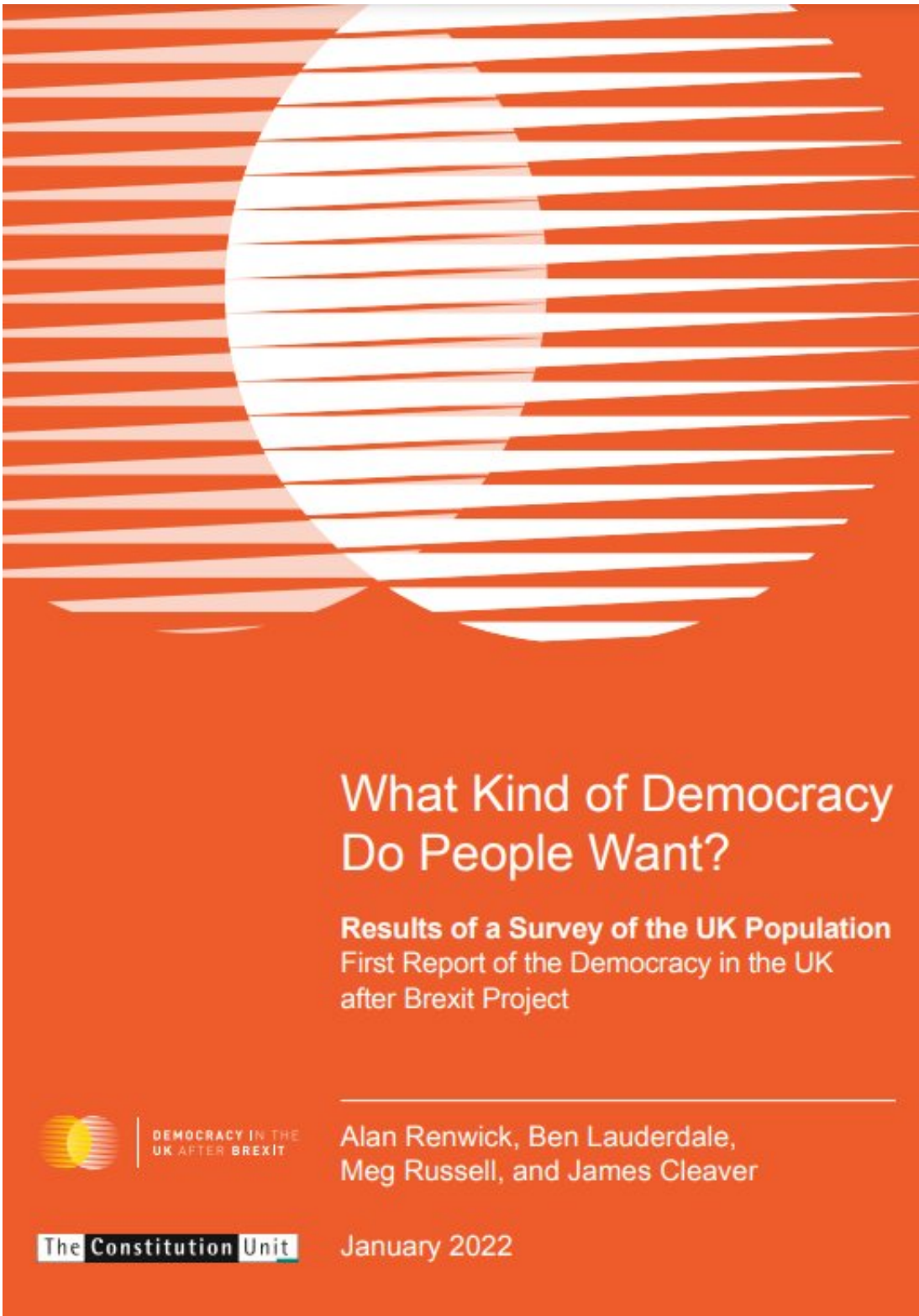


# Landmark report shows UK citizens are 'deeply concerned' about their democracy

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Credit: University College London

"Dissatisfied," "frustrated" and "let down" are words summing up how most people feel about the UK's democracy today, finds an in-depth report from UCL and the UK's leading public participation charity, Involve.

The report presents the conclusions of the new Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK, which was run by the UCL Constitution Unit to find out what people think about how the UK is governed and what they would like to change.

The new report finds that the UK public expect high standards from individuals in public life, want power to be spread out from government to parliament and the courts, and believe the public should have a stronger voice, both through their representatives and directly.

The assembly also makes specific recommendations that relate directly to core elements of the government's agenda, including the effects of the Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Act, the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

The assembly's report follows on from a recent survey of nearly 6,500 people from the UCL Constitution Unit, which found that "being honest" and "owning up when they make mistakes" are the most valued traits in politicians.

The Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK, which ran for six weekends between 18 September and 12 December last year, comprised 67 members who were randomly selected to reflect the UK voting-age population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, education, disability status, region, and political attitudes.

Assembly members were almost unanimous in criticizing standards of behavior among those in public life, and they felt strongly that existing

mechanisms provided insufficient remedy to unethical conduct.

Of the assembly's members, 98% agreed that, "lying or intentionally misleading parliament" should be punishable as a "contempt of parliament": "As well as being made to give a public apology, MPs who break this rule should be fined or otherwise punished."

Additionally, nearly all those involved supported the recommendation that, "The Code of Conduct for MPs, peers and government ministers needs to be strengthened to give clear guidance on what a breach will result in. Regulators need to recommend consistent sanctions to all parties and levels of office, and the public should be able to expect these to be imposed."

Professor Alan Renwick (project lead and Deputy Director of the UCL Constitution Unit) said: "The Citizens' Assembly on Democracy in the UK shows that people across the UK are deeply concerned about the state of our democracy. That's not just a flash-in-the-pan response to Partygate. Even before the scandal grew, people wanted politicians who are honest and trustworthy, and an enhanced role for independent regulators.

"They oppose moves to side-line parliament or weaken the courts. And they want the system to be more responsive to considered [public opinion](#) . Assembly members have set out a program of reforms that could help restore trust and enable healthier politics. It now lies with policymakers up and down the land to take these recommendations further."

In a film, launched today by the UCL Constitution Unit, members speak about the UK's democracy and the process of being part of the assembly. Laurel, who works in social care in London asked: "Why do I think we don't have a voice? Money. When you've got money, you've got loads of voice. An organization like the Citizens' Assembly, they listen to the non-

elites."

John, a retired petrochemicals worker from near Edinburgh, said: "A Citizens' Assembly should be assembled every time there's a really important law to be passed to get the views of the public."

The assembly allowed members to hear from diverse experts, listen to each other's different perspectives, and discuss key issues in depth. It built on the work of the previous UCL survey and gives a unique picture of how people view democracy and governance in the UK once they have had a chance to think about it carefully.

The assembly agreed eight broad resolutions and 51 detailed recommendations in total. Other key conclusions included:

- 95% of members said, "The public should be able to trust their elected representative to behave honestly and selflessly. While the political system is intended to have mechanisms in place to police this, we believe that they are not working well and that greater involvement of independent regulators is needed."
- 92% agreed, "We believe that parliament needs to be able to play a stronger role in scrutinizing the actions of government. Collectively, it represents the voice of the electorate as a whole, whereas not everyone voted for the government."
- 92% said, "We believe that there is an important role for the courts to play in limiting the laws that can be passed by government when they are seen to challenge basic rights and core democratic principles."
- 83% said, "We believe that petitions are an important way for the public to influence government policy and what is debated in [parliament](#), and that the use of petitions should be extended."

Kaela Scott, Design and Facilitation Lead for the Citizens' Assembly on

Democracy in the UK and Direction of Innovation and Practice at Involve, added: "The recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly show that when members of the public are given the opportunity to come together and learn about the complexities of our democratic system, and the time to really discuss and deliberate on the system and what they want from it, they can, despite their diversity, reach high levels of agreement.

"Their wide-ranging recommendations are informed by the evidence they heard, are internally consistent, and give a clear indication of where they believe change is needed to create a better democracy for everyone."

Professor Renwick added: "The members for the Citizens' Assembly worked incredibly hard to deliver this report and they deserve now to be taken seriously."

"We're now working to bring their proposals to policymakers in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. My message to politicians is to listen to them and consider what your next steps should be."

**More information:** What Kind of Democracy Do People Want?  
[www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-uni ... cracy-do-people-want](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-uni...cracy-do-people-want)

Provided by University College London

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