

Resilient Democracy

Thursday 20th February - Friday 21st February 2025

Biographies



Tom Brake

Tom is the Director of Unlock Democracy. Unlock Democracy is a not for profit organisation which campaigns for democratic reforms in the UK including proportional representation (PR), House of Lords reform, participative democracy, devolution, greater transparency and accountability of government and a written constitution. Tom chairs a coalition of 12 organisations campaigning for PR.

Previously he was a Member of Parliament for over 20 years and a Government Minister for 3 years. As a Minister, he was in the Ministerial team responsible for the Lobbying and Recall of MPs reforms.



Rachel Davies

Rachel has worked on anti-corruption policy for over a decade, focussing on political integrity, corruption in the UK and the UK's role as a safe haven for dirty money. She heads up Transparency International UK's external-facing team, which also hosts the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition Secretariat, and leads TI-UK's government-facing work. She has held roles as Chair of the Economic Crime Civil Society Organisations Steering Group (CSOSG), Chair of the UK Anti-Corruption Coalition, and was a founding member of the UK Open Government Network steering group.



Dominic Grieve

Dominic developed an extensive Common Law practice including in particular Health & Safety.

He took silk in 2008 and has been a Bencher of the Middle Temple since 2004. From 1997 to 2019 he was MP for Beaconsfield and was Attorney General of England and Wales and Advocate General for Northern Ireland from 2010-2014. He was Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament from 2015-2019.

His work as Attorney General has been in the field of Public and Constitutional Law with cases in the Supreme Court, European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. He has recently completed a review of governance for Islamic Relief Worldwide, a leading humanitarian charity. He is a visiting professor in Law, Politics and Human Rights at Goldsmiths, London University and a member of the Northern Ireland Bar.



Alice Grimes

Alice is the Head of Public Affairs at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) with responsibility for the organisation's overarching political positioning, providing senior counsel to the Executive Team, and delivery of the CBI's parliamentary engagement strategy. Before the CBI she led on social policy at the National Lottery Community Fund and holds an MSc in Public Policy and Management (Distinction). Outside work, she is the Chair for Labour in Comms - a fast-growing professional network for Labour members and supporters working in corporate communications, the media, and public affairs. She also sits on the steering committee for RootsMove - a new charitable fund which provides direct cash loans to refugees recently granted asylum in the UK to help with deposits, furniture, and other housing related costs.



Paris Habib

Paris is the Youth Advocacy Manager at My Life My Say, leading initiatives that empower young people to shape the decisions that affect them. With a background in community management, Paris has extensive experience in building and nurturing youth-led networks, having previously worked as a Community Manager to develop leadership programmes and strengthen engagement among young changemakers. Passionate about youth participation, Paris specialises in creating inclusive spaces for young people to drive meaningful change. Their expertise in advocacy, grassroots mobilisation, and community building ensures that youth voices are at the heart of decision-making processes



Veronica Hawking

Veronica is Campaign Director at people-powered campaign group, 38 Degrees. In her three years there she has played a leading role in a number of big campaign moments: from seeking justice for the covid bereaved in the wake of Partygate, to fighting to keep Channel 4 in public hands. Veronica previously worked in politics and in regional and local government, before moving to the charity sector. She has worked in campaigns, communications and public affairs for a number of leading charities, campaigning on issues from saving Sure Start children's centres to improving care for people living with dementia.



Susan Hawley

Dr Susan Hawley is Executive Director of Spotlight on Corruption which works on raising political integrity standards in the UK and ending its role as a hub for dirty money.



Lee Jasper

Lee is a strategic consultant, political adviser, and leading advocate for racial justice, democracy, and institutional reform, with over 40 years of experience in governance, public policy, and activism.

A **founding member of Operation Black Vote (OBV)**, established in 1996, he has been instrumental in increasing political participation among Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK. From 2000 to 2008, he served as **Director of Policing and Equalities** for the Mayor of London, where he led pioneering diversity and inclusion initiatives, making the **Greater London Authority (GLA)** the most diverse statutory authority in the country.

Currently, he is **Chair of the Alliance for Police Accountability (APA)** and leads **LAJ.Com Ltd**, advising governments, think tanks, and campaign organisations on strategic policy, democracy-building, and institutional trust. He is also a **founding member of The Humanity Project** and a **board member of Unlock Democracy**, continuing his work at the intersection of grassroots activism and policy leadership to drive inclusive and accountable governance.



Anni Johnson

Anni is the Media Manager for Radix Big Tent and will be acting as rapporteur during the conference. She will also be responsible for the organisation's social media output @radix_uk @ #@radixuk.bsky.social #resilientdemocracy. Anni has previously been campaign manager for the successful Equal Civil Partnerships Campaign and has also worked with the Charlotte Project, an educational charity with the purpose of giving teenagers tools to navigate better their online world, to help prevent them falling prey to disinformation or extremism. She has also worked with the New Weather Institute, Clean Up Britain and digital campaigning tool, Postbug.



Peter Jukes

Peter is an author, screenwriter and journalist. After a career in TV drama and theatre, he became a full time journalist in 2012, covering the phone hacking scandal and then Russian interference in democracy. He is the executive editor of Byline Times which he co-founded in 2019, and a host and writer of the hit podcasts Untold: The Daniel Morgan Murder and Sergei and the Westminster Spy Ring.



Mark Kieran

Mark is the CEO of Open Britain and Acting Director of Fair Vote UK, two not-for-profit campaign organisations dedicated to defending, strengthening, and renewing UK democracy. With a background in Whitehall, Parliament, and the private sector, he has a deep understanding of democratic structures, policy processes and political campaigning.

An energetic advocate for electoral reform, transparency in politics, and tackling the rise of authoritarian populism, Mark played a key role in setting up the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Fair Elections inside Parliament and is now working to build a complementary mass movement outside.



Neal Lawson

Neal is Executive Director of the good society pressure group Compass and was author of *All Consuming* (Penguin, 2009) and co-editor of *The Progressive Century* (Palgrave, 2001). He serves on the Advisory Board of the social democracy journal *Renewal* which he helped found, is an adviser to public ownership campaigners *We Own It*, and is a Senior Fellow at Radix. He writes about politics, democracy and societal transformation on sites such as the *Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *Byline Times* and *Prospect* magazine. He has worked as a trade union researcher, an advisor to former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown and set up and ran a communications company and is now a partner at Jericho the common good consultants. Neal was described by the late Zygmunt Bauman as "one of the most insightful and inventive minds on the British political stage", in the *Guardian* as "the most optimistic commentator in western Europe" and as the "Eeyore of the left" in the *Sunday Times*.



Paul Lomas

Paul read Natural Sciences and Law at Cambridge and has an MBA from INSEAD. He was a litigation partner at Freshfields, various specialising in financial services, energy, art, general commercial litigation, white collar crime and competition law. He ran parts of the firm, including its global pro bono programme.

Since leaving the firm, he sits as a judge in the Competition Appeal Tribunal, has chaired some human rights operations (including REDRESS) and has been involved in a number of political projects relating to Brexit, Boris Johnson and establishing and supporting the Grieve Commission on Governance in the UK.



Marianna Masters

Marianna has held several senior positions within global financial and corporate companies including Bloomberg and Thomson Reuters over 20+ years. An advocate of Black rights she was Co-Chair of the Black Employees Network whilst at Thomson Reuters.

She is an elected councillor in the London Borough of Lambeth.

Marianna is Head of Office for Jodie Gosling MP.

Elected Chair of the Fabian Women's Network, Marianna is also a Fabian Society Executive Committee Member.

Marianna, driven to highlight health inequalities, has served as a Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS Trust Governor and is currently a King's College Hospital NHS Trust Governor.



Ami McCarthy

Ami is currently head of politics at Greenpeace UK. In this position they have led Greenpeace's political campaigning work on the right to protest in the UK and provided political leadership of the rollout of Greenpeace's 'big organising' strategy, encouraging engagement with the political system at a grassroots level. Ami has a background in activism and organising, and previously worked in housing rights.



Julia Meadon

Julia is the Director of Digital at Best for Britain, joining in 2020 after roles in the communications industry to help execute the organisation's post-Brexit strategy. Following the success of Best for Britain's tactical voting campaign, GetVoting.org, during the 2024 general election, Julia is now leading the organisation's anti-populism strategy, with a focus on fighting Reform UK. Julia is also a longtime volunteer at Holocaust Centre North in West Yorkshire, specialising in filmmaking and recording Holocaust survivor testimonies. She has a degree in English from the University of Cambridge, and lives in Surrey with her husband and daughter.



Jennifer Nadel

Jennifer is Co-Founder of the UK based think tank, Compassion in Politics which has led the campaign for a law against political deception. She's also Director of Compassionate Politics at Stanford University. A non-practising barrister and award-winning tv journalist her books include the Sunday Times best WE: A Manifesto for Women Everywhere and How Compassion can Transform our Politics, Economy and Society.



Lyanne Nicholl

Lyanne has worked in the not-for-profit sector for almost two decades, as a leader and a consultant. Lyanne's work has spanned many areas in the sector—from mental health, sick children and veterans to the arts and women's rights. This experience, alongside postnatal healthcare campaigning, led Lyanne to want to focus on the root causes of inequality and injustice and who holds the power to affect change.

Lyanne became 50:50 Parliament's first CEO in 2023 and is proud to lead this vibrant community of women and continue to press for gender balance in our political institutions.



Paul Parker

Paul is Recording Clerk of Quakers in Britain, their most senior staff position. He is responsible for Quakers' national advocacy for peace, social and climate justice, and for supporting the national community of around 18,000 Quakers in England, Wales, Scotland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

He was involved in the campaign to legalise same-sex marriage. He chairs the Civil Society Voice network of directors, which works to ensure that civil society organisations can continue to campaign and hold those in power to account. Prior to this role he taught for sixteen years in secondary schools.



Parth Patel

Dr Patel is associate director for democracy and politics at IPPR. He is currently thinking about how to combat the radical right.



Pragna Patel

Pragna is the co-founder and co-director of Project Resist, an organisation focused on work with marginalised and vulnerable women and girls throughout the UK. She is the former director and founding member of the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) advocacy and campaigning centre where she worked from 1982 to Jan 2022 with a break in 1993 when she left to train and practice as a solicitor. Over those 40 years, she led SBS in some of its most important cases and campaigns on gender-based abuse, immigration and religious fundamentalism. She was also a founding member of Women Against Fundamentalism, and she has written extensively on race, gender and religion. She continues with her work in these areas at Project Resist.



Ben Rich

Ben is the Chief Executive of the think tank Radix Big Tent which exists to promote system reform and challenge conventional thinking. He is the former Chief of Staff to Tim Farron MP during his time as Lib Dem leader and prior to that was Chief Executive of the Movement for Reform Judaism. He was a partner at public relations firm, Luther Pendragon from 1998-2005 advising public, private and voluntary sector organisations.



Shaun Roberts

Shaun is Director of Campaigns at Unlock Democracy, an non-profit that campaigns for a vibrant, inclusive democracy, protected by a written constitution. We are currently campaigning on democratic reforms including electoral reform, Lords Reform, devolution and cleaning up politics. Shaun is also an elected Director of the Electoral Reform Society and a Unitary Councillor in Bedfordshire.

He has well over 30 years of experience in politics, elections and campaigning, both in the UK and abroad. Now, as part of the Unlock Democracy Team, he uses his skills and knowledge from working in our flawed political system to help change it.



Meg Russell

Professor Meg Russell is Director of the UCL Constitution Unit. A particular specialist in parliament, she has authored five books: on the House of Lords, the legislative process, political party organisation, and most recently *The Parliamentary Battle over Brexit* (OUP, 2023). Meg has long worked closely with policymakers, including as a parliamentary researcher, special adviser to Robin Cook when Leader of the House of Commons (2001–03), and specialist adviser to several select committees. She was a Senior Fellow with UK in a Change in Europe on 'Brexit, Parliament and the Constitution' 2019–22, and leads the Constitution Unit's project on Constitutional Principles and the Health of Democracy.



Beccy Speight

Former Chief Executive of the Woodland Trust, Beccy joined the RSPB as Chief Executive in August 2019. Prior to the Woodland Trust, Beccy previously held the position of General Manager of the Stourhead Estate and then Director for East Midlands/Midlands at the National Trust for 14 years.

As CEO of the RSPB, the UK's largest nature conservation charity, with over 1.1 million members, Beccy has responsibility for more than 200 nature reserves throughout the UK covering 160,000 hectares. In January 2021, the Society's annual Big Garden Birdwatch attracted a record-breaking one million participants, with over 17 million birds counted, reflecting the charity's strong engagement with the public and building a wider connection with nature.



Alex Veitch

Alex joined the British Chambers of Commerce as Director of Policy and Insight in March 2022 and is responsible for the policy positions adopted by the Chamber network and for BCC's research programme including the UK's largest business survey. Prior to joining BCC, Alex was the Deputy Director – Public Policy at Logistics UK; worked as an industry secondee at HMRC/HMT; and spent several years in the rail industry in various roles in London, Paris and Brussels. Alex's early career was in the environment sector in the USA and UK. Alex is a Chartered Member of IEMA and CMI.



Yasmin Waljee

Yasmin Waljee OBE, is responsible for shaping the International Pro Bono practice at Hogan Lovells, a global law firm. Her appointment in 1997 was the first of its kind in Europe and her appointment to the partnership was the first such appointment in the UK.

She has practiced in this area at Hogan Lovells for 27 years and works on rule of law issues, particularly with civil society organisations with a strong interest in democratic engagement of under-represented groups. The firm was the pro bono legal adviser to the youth democracy movement for the General Election 2024 including, My Life My Say and the Patchwork Foundation.

Yasmin is a co-founder for the firm's Social Enterprise and Social Finance practice: HL BaSE. She is also the Vice-Chair of Mosaic, the HRH Prince of Wales led initiative to support young Muslims and their peers growing up in deprived areas whilst breaking down the barriers and suspicions with British Society.



Sarah Walker-Smith

From a social mobility background and as the first female CEO of a national law firm, Sarah is driven to fight for a level playing field for all and ensure business plays its part in rocket-fuelling the economic recovery to deliver the change needed for a sustainably fairer society.

A chartered accountant, chartered director and MBA, Sarah has a track record in transformation based on connection and communication whilst aligning people around a shared vision. Sarah is Group CEO/Chair of Ampa group (national professional services business grown from law firm Shakespeare Martineau), chair of the Eden Project in Morecambe, and on the advisory boards of Anthropy, vocL, British Business Bank and Liberal Democrat Business Newark as well as the Social Liberal Forum Council.



Fiona Weir

Fiona has been Chief Executive of the [Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust](#) and [connected charity JRSST-CT](#) since 2016, funding campaigns for democratic reform and direct convening, research and advocacy activity. She has led initiatives including setting up the [Repeal Bill Alliance](#) 2017, the [UK Democracy Fund](#) in 2019, a pooled fund for voter participation and system reform supported by numerous charitable trusts and the [Democracy Network](#) in 2021. Previously she was chief executive of Gingerbread, a Trustee of the New Economics Foundation, and has held senior management and campaigning roles at Save the Children, Which?, Amnesty International UK and Friends of the Earth.



Hannah White

Hannah is the Director and CEO of the non-partisan, London-based think tank the Institute for Government (IfG). She is a regular commentator on the radio and television, hosts the Institute's weekly Inside Briefing podcast and co-hosts The Expert Factor with Paul Johnson of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Anand Menon of UK in a Changing Europe.

Hannah has a PhD in Human Geography from Cambridge University. She started her career as a parliamentary clerk in the House of Commons, working on select and legislative committees and advising on parliamentary procedure. In 2012 she was appointed secretary to the Committee on Standards in Public Life in the Cabinet Office. She became Director and CEO of the IfG in June 2022.

Hannah is a non-executive director of the Law Commission and also serves as deputy chair of trustees for the public participation and deliberation charity Involve. She received an OBE in the 2020 Birthday Honours for services to the constitution and in 2022 she published her first book *Held in Contempt: what's wrong with the House of Commons?*