

JRRT Democratic Resilience Strategy 2025–2029

This strategy is both a positive agenda to revitalise and strengthen democratic resilience and a protective one in the event of a future populist, illiberal, or authoritarian government.

JRRT's new strategy has been shaped by the need to respond to the following challenges:

- Long-term loss of trust across most mature democracies, including the UK.
- Disengagement by millions who feel unheard, their needs unmet, the system rigged.
- Undue influence by monied interests.
- Disinformation manipulating and dividing public opinion.
- The erosion of the rights and protections that support democratic resilience.
- The interaction of systemic racial injustice with the democratic and political system.
- The need for political actors, parliamentarians and parties to stand up for democracy.
- The level of funding for democracy in the UK is not in any way commensurate to the importance, urgency or scale of today's challenge.

These are long-term trends that require concentrated effort to address both the root causes and the catalysts of decline.

Our strategic vision

We seek to bring about significant changes in the political system, making it more accountable, democratic and transparent, and to rebalance power for the well-being of society.

Our democracy framework

There has been a significant loss of trust, the foundation of a functioning democratic system, across mature democracies in recent years, falling to record lows in the UK^[1]. Trusting citizens are more likely to engage with politics and to vote ... those who lack trust are also more likely to vote for populist parties who present as against corrupt out-of-touch elites^[2].

JRRT's new strategy is based around two broad and interconnected frames:

1. Political inequality

Political inequality^[3] leads to systematic differences in citizens' ability to influence the political process.

At one end of the spectrum, millions of citizens do not register or vote. They are predominantly young, from racialised and minoritised ethnicities, born overseas, rent their homes or live on low incomes.

At the other end, money in politics drives disproportionate influence for wealthy individuals and corporates and a sense that the system is rigged.

Political inequality undermines the central democratic ideal of one person one vote, enabling all citizens to have equal opportunity to influence collective political decision-making. It is central to tackling other inequalities from poverty to poor health.

2. Democratic resilience

"Populist politics has been the dominant electoral story across advanced democracies in the 21st century. Politicians openly embracing racist and proto-authoritarian attitudes have presented themselves as alternatives to the failures of liberal representative democracy and garnered support by exploiting social and political tensions"^[4]

Democratic resilience has two critical components: the ability of a political system to withstand authoritarian threats; and a more transformative framing, the capacity of that system to adapt and become both more durable and more democratic.^[5]

[1] NATCEN, 2024

[2] McKay, Jennings & Stoker, 2023

[3] Political inequality, IFS, 2022

[4] IPPR, 2022

[5] Wolfgang Merkel, Toda Peace Institute, cited in [The Myth of Democratic Resilience](#), Bianchi M, Cheeeman N and Cyr J, *Journal of Democracy* Volume 36, July 2025.

The democratic and political system is struggling to meet the needs of a discontented public, creating the conditions in which populist offers of simple solutions to complex problems can flourish.

There is an urgent need to counter effectively the pernicious role of dark money in politics; the rise of bad actors, the corrosive effect of mis- and disinformation, amplified by social media, exploiting tensions, fuelling support for populist messages and driving intolerance.

Against this backdrop, the systems and institutional processes of democracy are being tested like never before. Checks and balances and institutional independence have been eroded or shown to be ineffective in recent years, while political rights – freedom of speech and protest rights – have been weakened.

Revitalising and strengthening democratic resilience are essential to protect the disenfranchised and bolster safeguards against undemocratic tendencies and concentration of power.

Our democracy priorities

JRRT

Concentrated action and system reform are needed to address the root causes driving inequalities of influence and weakening democratic life.

Strengthening institutional resilience, protecting people's right to protest, freedom of speech, countering the influence of monied elites and disinformation, and making it easier to vote are key pillars of a resilient democracy.

JRRT's democracy priorities are:

- Money in politics
- Voter participation and election system reform (complementing UK Democracy Fund)
- Political rights – freedom of expression and protest rights
- Disinformation
- Checks and balances

Work on 'bad actors' will be integrated across the above priorities.

Not all these priorities will be of equal weight.

For more detail about these priorities see our [JRRT Democracy Priorities Funding Guide](#).

JRSST-CT

The democracy priorities of JRRT's connected charity JRSST-CT are complementary and grounded in a political inequality frame:

- Voter participation and election system reform, taking on the role of UK Democracy Fund host
- Democracy education
- Participation between elections
- Representation in politics

All spending will be within the overall democracy frame with reference to democracy priorities.

In addition to funding national campaigns, advocacy and policy research, JRRT will be investing in the following areas:

UK Democracy Fund

JRRT has hosted the Fund since it was set up in 2019. In that time, the Fund has built confidence in its ability to operate in compliance with charity and electoral law, encouraging charities to engage in or fund non-partisan voter participation. The role of host is planned to pass to JRSST-CT, our connected charity. JRSST-CT will take forward the election system reform and participation goals and efforts to attract further charitable funding. JRRT will continue to engage with the UK Democracy Fund as a donor.

Racial justice

JRRT remains deeply committed to building an inclusive democracy in which everyone can participate.

In 2025, JRRT will commission support for a process to shape and design JRRT's future work at the intersection of racial justice and democracy. This will include dialogue, listening and design with racialised and minoritised-led organisations and will inform whether JRRT should set a target level of funding for this work and how JRRT holds itself accountable in its grant-making.

See JRRT's [updated 2025 statement on our colonial history](#) for further context.

Political funding

As a non-charitable entity, JRRT is free to fund expressly political actors. JRRT recognises the particular influence that political parties and their elected representatives have on our political system. When the system functions well, they act as important aggregators of choice for voters, providing means of political organisation, representative leadership, and critical democratic checks and balances. When they fall short, behaviour in office, improper influence, spreading disinformation, and decisions that weaken democratic institutions or make it harder for people to participate, have a very negative effect on our democracy.

We will make funds available for political parties, or connected organisations that work inside them, to advance democratic and political reform priorities; and for expansion of Democratic Voices, our programme of direct funding to Parliamentarians designed to support their efforts to champion and advance democratic reforms in Westminster. Grants will be by invitation only and, like all our grants, made openly and transparently.

Closure of Truth to Power programme

As well as tightening our democracy priorities, with regret, JRRT will be closing its Truth to Power programme. Our funding in this space has been spread thinly across a wide range of quite different issues and JRRT has decided to focus limited funding on selected democracy priorities. We are extremely proud of the work we have funded, including successful campaigns for abortion in Northern Ireland and support for groups seeking to influence egregious injustices through Inquiry processes.

Exit strategy

JRRT aims to focus resources quickly on the new democracy priorities but has developed an exit strategy that includes some limited continuation funding where we have a long-standing relationship (for example, work on the Undercover Policing Inquiry) as well as a small budget for capacity building fundraising support.

What interventions will we fund?

The strategy builds on the Trust's experience grant making in this space and is a natural development from JRRT's previous work.

The priorities above represent a significant effort to focus democracy grant making and direct JRRT activity around a more clearly and carefully defined set of objectives.

This focus is driven by the urgency of the threats to democracy, by funding constraints and by recognition that the Trust is likely to have greater impact if we fund a critical mass of activity around key objectives.

JRRT recognises that change is often achieved by funding mutually reinforcing contributions and a mix of approaches (research, insider advocacy, campaign pressure). We encourage grantees to collaborate.

Our overall focus will be on root causes and catalysts rather than symptoms. Within this it is important to fund work on short- to medium-term leverage points where interventions can lead to policy or legislative change within the current parliament, as well as laying the foundations for deeper future system reform and addressing power imbalances.

Given our limited funding, we will continue to focus on change at the national level, while exploring ways to add value through democratic system reform to the work of funders who are focused on vital community organising, movement building and social cohesion initiatives.

Multiyear and core funding

We recognise evidence of the value of multiyear and core funding for organisations, particularly how it enables them to plan for longer campaigns. We intend to increase the number of multiyear grants we make, some of which will be core funding, but due to our size most of our grants will continue to be project funding.

Funding democracy

a. JRRT funding

JRRT significantly increased its democracy grant spend between 2022-24 by drawing down at a rate that depletes the value of its endowment. Democracy grant spend averaged £1.3m pa and total grant spend including our donation to the UK Democracy Fund averaged 2m pa.

JRRT's intention is to fund this strategy by maintaining average spend on grants and projects of £2 million pa.

This will put us on a trajectory of slow spending down which, if sustained, would spend out in 27 years by 2052 and potentially lead to the closure of the Trust. This was a difficult decision for a Trust active since 1904 to take and is based on our assessment that democracy needs to be strengthened now.

Up to a quarter of funding for grants and projects may be allocated to political funding, including the Democratic Voices programme, and a significant proportion to racial justice campaigns. All spending will be within the overall democracy framework with reference to democracy priorities.

b. JRSST-CT funding

JRRT's connected charity, JRSST-CT, has decided to spend out fully within a ten-year period, moving from maintaining the value of its endowment, drawing down £191k pa, to a fast spend down trajectory which will release over £600k pa.

c. Generating more funding for democracy

An open, accountable, inclusive, participatory, resilient democracy is the bedrock on which social, climate and racial justice goals can thrive.

The democracy sector is severely underfunded, most of its main funders – including JRRT, JRSST-CT – small. We recognise that our ambition requires higher resourcing and scale.

Feedback from the grantee survey included calls for JRRT to “*work with other funders to grow the pot available for democracy-related work.*”

Building on successful fundraising of over £2.7m for the UK Democracy Fund, we plan to play a continuing role in working to bring more funding into the sector. There will be greater emphasis on aligned funding (rather than donations); identifying where strengthening democracy can add value to and intersect with the goals of other funders and supporting frameworks for coordination.

Transparency and accountability

As we developed the strategy the Board took account of the 2024 grantee and applicant survey findings and discussions at key sector events including the Democracy Network conference.

Our strategy will evolve as the Board periodically reviews our objectives. Grantees will play an important role, as will feedback and intelligence from a range of actors we engage with on political challenges and opportunities. We welcome input as we continue to shape the strategy.

All grants approved will be [published on our website](#) and in our [annual report](#). Data on [our spend on racial justice](#) is also available on our website.

JRRT Strategy: August 2025

info@jrirt.org.uk

