

DEMOS

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# AN UNEXPECTED YEAR

This time last year, we already knew we were in an era of fast and accelerating change. We argued that our fragmenting politics was harming our ability, as a nation, to respond. And then the pandemic hit.

Change went exponential. Holding Britain together got harder, and more important than ever.

At Demos, we understand that change is hard for people to navigate - but it's also unstoppable. So we need a new process of policy making that brings people into the discussion, and enables them to build the skills citizens need by taking part. That's the only way for us to hold together as a nation when times get tough.

That's why our response to the Covid-19 crisis was to bring citizens into a national conversation about what comes next. Renew Normal - the People's Commission on Life After Covid - has involved tens of thousands of people in the debate, and identified the change people want for our country as we emerge from the pandemic. Those findings will shape our work in 2021 and beyond.

Renew Normal was just one programme in a successful - if challenging - year for Demos. We launched our Public Participation Lab to find innovative ways to involve citizens in policy debate, and have surveyed, polled, interviewed or engaged with more people than ever before. Our technology hub CASM continued its pioneering Good Web Project to build the intellectual and policy framework for a liberal democratic internet.

We continued our far-reaching research programme, bringing fresh thinking and policy innovation to issues as diverse as online learning and food labelling. And we continued to push the boundaries of practice, too, with our expanding action research programme piloting and evaluating new ideas on credit, local growth, and healthy ageing.

At Demos, all our work is done in partnership: with our authors, our donors, our sponsors, and the experts and citizens who get involved. If you're interested in being part of the Demos story in 2021, as an expert, as a sponsor, or as a citizen, please do get in touch.

**POLLY MACKENZIE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

# OUR VISION

By the end of March it was clear that this would be a year like no other. Yet we found our work was more needed than ever.

At the end of 2019, we pledged to spend the coming year building consensus on the country's most divisive political issues. While our initial plans went out of the window, our mission didn't change. We still believe that investing in and strengthening our democracy is the only way to navigate our country's challenges - old and new.

The fitness of liberal democracy for the 21st century may not be the biggest question posed by the outbreak of Covid-19 around the world. And yet it has reared its head again and again as the year has gone by: we have seen many liberal democracies struggle to suppress the disease while many more authoritarian governments, more willing to set aside the liberties of their citizens, beat it more swiftly into submission. There are notable exceptions on either side, of course, but those governments which prized individual freedom over collective health found that freedom came at the cost of tens of thousands of lives.

It is not the first time people have questioned the merits of the liberal democratic model. Western democracies are facing collective crises on a scale that democracy has arguably never had to deal with before.

We need fundamental transformation in our economy, from the way we generate energy to how we eat, if we are to prevent catastrophic climate change. And yet not one democratic government has a popular mandate for a detailed pathway to net zero carbon emissions.

Demographic change is sweeping the West. We have an ageing population, increasing demand on public services while the taxbase of working age people reduces. People ask for better, while

showing deep reluctance to pay any more in tax. Do democracies just lead to impossible demands?

Vast, global companies - which have grown far faster than any predecessors - are stretching our understanding of the relationship between state and corporation, and of the social contract. Access to information has in one sense been radically democratised by the internet, but has brought with it fake news, radicalisation, outrage and a new platform for international information warfare. Individual nation states - especially liberal democracies - seem feeble when acting against these global platforms, and yet no-one has found a way to secure real democratic legitimacy for supra-national bodies like the European Union.

No-one ever claimed democracy was a perfect system of government. Winston Churchill famously described it as the worst system, apart from all the others which have been tried. And yet the case for it seems more fragile now than at any point in my lifetime. An increasing number of political thinkers, frightened by the rise of populism, are exploring anti-democratic sentiments.

So we face a choice. Do we give up on democracy because of our growing struggles to make it work? Or do we reform democracy to make it work for the flesh and blood humans who inhabit the real world?

## REIMAGINING DEMOCRACY

At Demos, we accept that people are indeed complex, confusing, and capable of acting against their own interests. We are hamstrung by our cognitive biases. We are naive and foolish and prejudiced. We live in stories, not facts. But we're also a source of extraordinary compassion, bravery, understanding and innovation. Flesh and blood humans, with all our faults, are the source of all our joy and purpose in living.

So to give up - to reduce individual citizens' power - is to surrender to the weaknesses of our species instead of trying to build on our strengths. Instead of blaming the people for a system that isn't working for them we need to start blaming

the system - and finding ways to change it. Our political system has failed to keep pace with the economic and social changes that are transforming people's lives. While the industrial revolution helped bring about the birth of modern liberal democracy across the west, our political systems have yet to see any substantial change in the 21st century, despite vast and accelerating technological change. What possible reason is there for us to still operate through 19th and 20th century systems and bureaucracies?

Remember, there is no one system that is democracy. Certainly our Westminster system has no particular claim to perfection or any eternal right to exist in its current state. The measure of a democracy in the 21st century will be its agility. We need a system that builds on the best, instead of the worst, of human capability: in fact, a system that develops and enhances our capability over time.

### **EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY**

The phrase was coined in 2005 by Tom Bentley, then Director of Demos. It is worth quoting him at length, because his analysis is even truer now, and his prescriptions form the heart of how Demos seeks to influence the world in 2020 and beyond.

He explained the urgency of the crisis:

"Without renewing democracy at every level, our capacity to succeed as societies, and then as individuals within them, will drain away. Without new forms of democratic sovereignty, innovative and creative changes to our current model of political economy will not emerge. Without the mass exercise of citizenship many of our public traditions and institutions will atrophy. Without a new level of direct citizen participation the legitimacy of our political institutions will continue to decline. Without new cultures of dialogue, exchange and learning, our social differences will overwhelm us. That is why democratising the relationships between people, institutions and public authority is the central challenge of our age."

He explained how democracy, at its heart, is about compromise between individuals, not individual self-interest, and therefore requires us to learn and develop as democratic citizens if we are to share a common space and build a common identity:

"We need to renegotiate the basis on which we share responsibility for this public realm – the wider context in which ordinary lives are lived out. Democracy is the only set of principles that can allow us to do this – enjoying personal rights

demands collective responsibilities, which in turn require new rules of governance. The question is how this set of principles can be given tangible expression through institutions that connect with people's daily lives, rather than being imprisoned within cultures and institutions that are viewed only through the long-distance lens of the media. Only if democracy is anchored in everyday experience will it be possible to legitimise shared rules that restrict people's freedom some of the time. For that to happen, people must share in both power and responsibility."

And Tom set out practical principles for reconnecting citizens and the democratic institutions so that those institutions can be of value in mediating between interest groups:

"Democracy should be a way to balance personal rights and shared responsibilities, with political institutions mediating between individual and group interests. But political institutions seem irrelevant to people's daily lives, so their ability to mediate is reduced when we need them most. The solution is to reconnect democratic choices with people's direct experience of everyday life, and to extend democratic principles to everyday situations and organisations."

The paper concluded with four principles for everyday democracy:

- Develop public services and local governance as platforms of self-governing communities.
- Recognise membership and campaigning organisations that can play a clearer role in mobilising political issues and mass participation.
- Support institutions that can enable cultural learning and collaboration between cultures.
- Spread institutional power more widely and seek to align power, initiative and responsibility more closely.

### **NEW DEMOCRATIC TOOLS**

Demos is not just a think tank. We're also an innovation charity: we design and deploy new technology to help improve the process of democracy, public consultation, and policy making. We've built software, in partnership with the University of Sussex, to analyse large scale natural language datasets - like social media feeds, or customer contact transcripts - to help organisations understand public opinion and lived experience more deeply. We're pioneering the use of an interactive survey tool, Polis, in the UK, which allows us to crowdsource ideas and - crucially -

identify points of consensus between groups with different points of view. We build tools and games to help people understand complex policy issues - like a tax calculator where any citizen can play at being chancellor. We house these tools, along with public opinion polling, in our Public Participation Lab, a centre of excellence for involving the public in policy and decision making.

We do this because we recognise that it is not easy for institutions to take on the kind of radical democratic transformations for which Demos advocates. We have to build and deploy tools to allow local and national decision makers to try out these new ideas and processes. We also recognise that there is no one single tool that a democracy needs. Too many democratic reformers are champions of silver bullets: if only we fixed the voting system, everything would work, they say. Or if we capped political donations. Or if we put all legislation on Github and let people just edit it. Or if our part of the country was independent. At Demos, some of us believe in each of these ideas, and some of us believe in them all. But we all recognise that no single reform will be the solution. To be agile, democracies need a whole toolbox of ways to involve citizens in the decisions that affect their lives.

It needs representative democracy, at national and sub-national level. It needs formal pathways for consultation and for judicial oversight. It needs transparency of information and of processes. It needs voting: sometimes for representatives, and sometimes for individual decisions, too, in the form of referenda. But it also needs innovations. Citizens juries. Open policy making. New kinds of voting. New kinds of decision making.

Our systems of representative democracy, and winner takes all government, are insufficient to deal with the challenges of the 21st century. It needs to be supplemented by deliberative democracy, new tools for decision making, new kinds of voting and a conscious attempt to build lasting consensus between people of different backgrounds, and different ideologies.

So we don't need less democracy, we need more. Everyday democracy is the only way to enable us to face the changes the future is bringing, because it's the only way to build the capabilities of citizens to make the right choices for us all.

# A YEAR OF IMPACT

In 2020, we reached more people than ever before.

Tens of thousands of people took part in our Renew Normal project, giving their views on how life should change after the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of people tried out one of our 10 Today exercise programmes. The Good Web Project continues to build momentum behind a positive vision for the internet. Our events continued to attract leading figures from the political sphere and beyond, as our virtual platform brought Demos ideas to homes across the country.

While Westminster stood empty for most of the year, the wheels of change continued to turn, with Demos insights at the heart of conversations that matter. Our research made front pages, was heard by policymakers at national and local levels, and presented to industry and civil society leaders across broad and diverse sectors.

We're extremely proud of the impact Demos has had this year across all of our projects. We couldn't have done it without those who share our vision: members of the public who've given us their experiences of what was for many the most difficult times of their lives, politicians from all parties who've been open to hearing those experiences and funders who've committed to supporting the development of new and different ideas for positive change.

# RENEW NORMAL

Renew Normal is the national conversation on how the United Kingdom should change in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our goal was to involve as many members of the public as possible in a programme to identify the ways in which this experience has changed our lives, and what that should mean for the future of our country. After years of political division over Brexit, Demos and the Renew Normal Commissioners believed that we needed to build consensus about the future, bridging divides through a process of consultation, engagement, and collaboration.

At the core of Renew Normal has been our desire to focus on change: the change that has occurred in our daily lives, in the way we are governed, and in our attitudes to each other and the society we live in. Over the last eight months we have worked with more than 50,000 members of the public to analyse all that change. We have sought to use a range of methods to identify, among that tidal wave of change, what has been welcome and unwelcome, what will endure and what will drift away.

The first report of Renew Normal, **Britain Under Lockdown** chronicled the lives of citizens during the first and most intense period of restrictions. It brought together stories and statistics about the change we lived through: demonstrating the extraordinary divergence of individuals' experiences, from freedom to deep trauma. It became clear that early suggestions that lockdown would be a great leveller in society were simply false.

And yet the research confirmed the scale of change and innovation that people had experienced. Some were far better off, some far worse off. Some were eating better, some worse. Over half (56%)

of respondents said that they had learned to use some new technology that they did not use at all before the start of the pandemic.

The second report, entitled **What Next? Priorities for Britain**, quantified these changes across the public with a large-scale nationally representative poll. It confirmed that overall, Covid-19 has had a net negative impact on a range of factors in people's lives, from job security to mental health, but a substantial minority reported positive impacts on every topic. This report identified that Covid-19 had created sharp social fractures between groups who take a different view about the appropriate personal or policy response.

The goal of Renew Normal remains to identify a policy programme that can counteract this, and bring the country together around a shared vision of the future. To enable us to do that, we identified the eight areas where there was clear evidence of a shift in public opinion and new momentum for change.



# 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

The third report from Renew Normal, **Rebooting Britain**, was based on a poll of over 1,000 people in the UK, just as positive news around successful vaccine trials were beginning to be announced. It found that political leaders and governments risk underestimating the disruptive impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the public's opinions, expectations and preferences. Our research shows the disease and the measures taken to suppress it have triggered substantial change in public attitudes that will lead to lasting economic and social change, and should be factored into the government's response.

Attempts to return the United Kingdom to the way things were will not be successful, because it is not what the public want or what businesses will invest in. While overall the pandemic has had a negative impact on the public's health and wellbeing, and will continue to have serious consequences for our economy, it has also caused changes in the way we live our lives, and what we want from our society, that the public wants to maintain. This includes:

- the expectation of a substantial shift in patterns of working to increase flexibility in terms of place and time of working
- an increase in community engagement and volunteering in our public services

- a desire for greater economic resilience against global shocks, even at the cost of higher prices or taxes.

## RENEW NORMAL IN 2021

Renew Normal will continue in 2021, including publishing a landmark report into our experiences throughout the pandemic.

We're grateful to all of our Commissioners and partners for their commitment to the project.

## THE COMMISSIONERS

### MARTIN LEWIS OBE

FOUNDER, MONEYSAVINGEXPERT.COM  
AND THE MONEY & MENTAL HEALTH POLICY  
INSTITUTE

### RT HON NICKY MORGAN - BARONESS MORGAN OF COTES

FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
EDUCATION, AND FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE,  
MEDIA AND SPORT

### ANDREA SUTCLIFFE CBE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE NURSING AND  
MIDWIFERY COUNCIL

### PROFESSOR DONNA HALL CBE

FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF WIGAN  
COUNCIL AND CHAIR OF NEW LOCAL

### HETAN SHAH

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY

### MIKE CLANCY

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE PROSPECT  
TRADE UNION

### JOSH HARDIE

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL,  
CONFEDERATION OF BRITISH INDUSTRY

### NDIDI OKEZIE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, UK YOUTH

### NICK TIMOTHY CBE

AUTHOR AND FORMER ADVISER TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER

### STEWART WOOD - LORD WOOD OF ANFIELD

FORMER SENIOR ADVISER TO THE LEADER OF  
THE OPPOSITION

### VIDHYA ALAKESON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF POWER TO CHANGE

### ANNA SEVERWRIGHT

CO-CHAIR OF THE COALITION FOR  
COLLABORATIVE CARE

### ALICE BENTINCK MBE

CO-FOUNDER AND GENERAL PARTNER AT  
ENTREPRENEUR FIRST

# 10 TODAY

With people mostly confined to their own home following government advice, there was never a more important time to encourage and inspire older people to remain active.

10Today was developed through action research led by Demos, supported by and in partnership with Sport England. It aimed to improve the lives of older people and tackle physical inactivity, one of the great public health challenges we face.

Our pilot of ten, ten minute exercise routines designed by and for older people, launched in May 2019 and reached over 20,000 older people online, on community radio and through peer champions. Participants increased their activity levels and also experienced wider wellbeing benefits including reduced social isolation, increased confidence, reduced depression, boosted mental wellbeing, and improved strength and balance to help with everyday tasks.

When the country had to lockdown to reduce the spread of Covid-19, we wanted 10Today to reach as many older people as possible. We partnered with the BBC to broadcast 10Today every weekday morning on BBC Radio 5 Live Sports Extra, and on demand on the BBC website and BBC Sounds app. The response to these broadcasts was phenomenal, showing the power of 10Today to reach such a wide audience.

*"10Today provided an invaluable service to our listeners at a time when they needed it most. When lockdown was first introduced, we quickly adapted our schedule due to the loss of live sport. 10Today was important output on 5 Live Sports Extra that helped to get listeners moving at home."*

**BBC Radio 5 Live Sports Extra**

We also worked with a range of organisations promoting older people's physical activity and wellbeing, and community radio stations across the country to spread the message about 10Today, and used Facebook to create a digital community around 10Today to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness. For offline audiences, we produced a printed leaflet of 10Today exercises and worked with regional Active Partnerships to distribute these to people who were shielding.

*"In our family household we are 42, 74, and 85. We have begun to access your exercise programmes since the Coronavirus lockdown began, and would like you to know how well they are working for us. They have made regular exercise seem achievable and sustainable, and they are suitable for us all."*

### **Anonymous participant feedback**

10Today exemplifies our action research methodology, bringing public, private and voluntary sector stakeholders together to instigate change. Going beyond the traditional think tank model, we test out policy ideas in practice and evaluate both their impact and the implementation process, to better influence policy and develop replicable models for practice change. We're ambitious for 10Today to reach even more older people both online and offline and have secured new funding from Sport England to continue the programme and develop new content in 2021.

# THE GOOD WEB PROJECT

This year we launched the Good Web Project, a programme designed to empower the UK and international governments to ensure the future of the Internet is compatible with liberal democracy.

It seeks to build public support for an internet that resists the authoritarian alternative, and empower policymakers to fight for this cause.

Alongside our friends and partners, we have started the process of defining, measuring and advocating for a vision for a democratic future of the internet, and empowering representatives to take control of the digital roadmap. In 2021, we will continue to convene and build consensus on the principles required for a better internet and build the evidence base required for change.

We aim to support the UK to be a leader in an international conversation between technology, government and the public that lays out a vision for a web we want, identifies the path towards it, then works to see it delivered.

This year, supported by GCHQ, we've published a series of reports on some of the key challenges faced when defining a liberal democratic internet.

### **What's in a Name: A forward view of anonymity online**

Drawing on legal, philosophical and historical evidence and interviews, this paper clearly articulates how online anonymity should be understood. It presents a model through which future settlements on online anonymity can be tested, presented in a way that we hope is useful to both technologists and policymakers.

### **A Room of One's Own: A guide to private spaces online**

Which online spaces are considered private by policymakers and platforms has significant ramifications, from defining technical specifications for online spaces to enforcing regulation of platform action on harmful content online. A Room of One's Own examines the spectrum of online spaces and our expectations around our private and public lives online, in order to present a definition of a private space online.

### **Everything in Moderation**

This report calls for a reassessment of the way we moderate our online spaces. It identifies three challenges: First, a democratic deficit in the way the majority of online platforms are moderated both in principle and in practice. Second, that the architecture of the majority of online platforms undermine the abilities of communities to moderate themselves both in principle and in practice. Finally, that the majority of online platforms lack the cultures and norms that in the offline world act as a bulwark against supposed harms.

It calls for liberal democracies to stop jealously peering over the fence at the apparent successes authoritarian regimes have in controlling the digital commons, and to embrace online the same commitments to individual rights and freedoms that they have offline.

In 2021, we plan to bring the Good Web Project to new audiences, both nationally and internationally. If you're interested in being part of the journey, please do get in touch.

# A YEAR OF INNOVATION

In 2020 we launched new methodologies, innovative tools to engage the public in some of the country's greatest policy challenges and made space for new ideas to renew democracy.

Innovation has always been central to our work at Demos. This year, despite challenges, we built on this tradition. Our new tool, Polis, brought an exciting new methodology to the UK for the first time, and has already given us new public insight into some of the UK's persistent policy questions.

We also continued to find new and creative ways to involve and engage the public. Our tax calculator, launched as part of The People's Budget, allowed people to take on the role of Chancellor, and broke new ground when it came to empowering citizens to model and assess the trade-offs when it came to designing a new tax system.

Demos also continues to offer a home to some of the UK's leading thinkers. Whether they're building technological solutions to our democratic challenges or imagining a new way to work post-pandemic, we're proud to attract and make space for radical solutions. Got an amazing idea for 2021? Do get in touch.

# POLIS

Polis is an online tool which represents a radical new way of conducting online discussions, surfacing areas of consensus and division amongst the British public.

The tool, which allows participants to submit their own views on what is important, and vote on statements made by others, offers a valuable new method of exploring controversial subjects with members of the general public, as well as recruited groups of experts. In allowing participants the space to express what is important to them, it adds a crucial element of surprise to polling, as people bring their own lived experiences to the discussion. The system, previously used to great effect by [vTaiwan](#) and a number of US local democracy projects, had until recently remained largely untested in the UK until this year.

Since 2019, Demos has been working closely with the [computational democracy project](#) who built and maintain the system, alongside developers in the open source community, to apply this new methodology to the UK context. Projects have included a report with the Open Rights Group examining the public's views on the use of data in political campaigning, with KPMG on the future of towns, and our own Renew Normal programme, alongside conversations around food policy and social care.

This new approach has allowed Demos to bring our technical and methodological expertise to bear on our research. Through the work of our new development team, Demos has contributed a number of improvements and modifications to Polis' open source codebase, making us the first organisation in the UK able to host our own bespoke version of the tool. We have also broken ground by building a system to connect recruited participants to Polis, allowing us to conduct the world's first nationally representative poll on the

system, and conducted a series of open-access conversations, publicly available from our Renew Normal site.

At its heart, Polis is a natural fit for Demos. It opens up the process of deliberation, allowing citizens to take part in conversations which matter to them, from their own homes, and without having to bear the time commitments which traditional forms of deliberation can impose. It allows researchers to sift through that conversation, highlighting points of consensus on divisive issues. Our journey with this new form of engagement is just beginning, and we believe it is likely to play a key part in the future of UK policymaking.

# A PEOPLE'S BUDGET

If, how and when to raise taxes has always presented a political challenge. But with this year's unprecedented government spending and our ageing population, it's more important than ever to understand how the public feels about potential changes.

A People's Budget took a new and novel approach to engaging the public in changes to the tax system: allowing research participants and the public to test alternative tax models using the Demos Tax Calculator, built to model the effects of different raises on the public purse. Used as part of online deliberations and combined with a nationally representative poll of 2,000 adults, we were able to set out how taxes on individuals could rise over the next fifteen years in a way that is acceptable to the public.

We found that a large majority of the public are supportive of progressive tax rises, including 2019 Conservative voters. The report found that more than half of the British public (58%) would support raising Income Tax for everyone by 2p in the pound, while raising the Personal Allowance so that those earning less than £20,000 do not pay any more. Only 17% of the public oppose this measure, whilst 2019 Conservative voters are more likely to support this measure (64%) than other respondents.

The nationally representative poll of over 2,000 people found that almost seven in ten (69%) of the public want to see Income Tax on earnings over £100,000 per year raised by 10p in the pound.

We also found that 46% of the public support equalising the tax treatment of capital gains with income from work, with 18% opposing it. The vast majority (63%) of the public also support making the self-employed pay the same National Insurance Contributions as employees, on the condition that the self-employed receive the same benefits as employees.

Supported by the Standard Life Foundation, A People's Budget set a new standard for engaging people in designing economic policy.

# COMBINED CHOICE

Combined Choice, created by entrepreneur Jon Nash, is a new innovation aiming to build a different kind of democracy: one in which people are involved in the democratic process regularly and deeply, not once every few years with an x in a box. A democracy that is grounded in communities, organisations, and decisions that are fully connected to our daily lives.

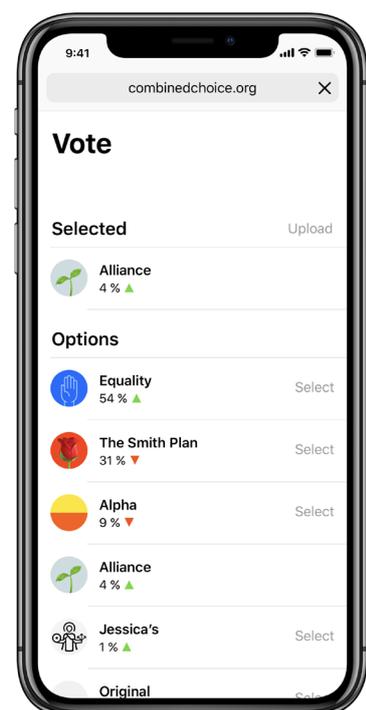
For hundreds of years, democratic decisions have been made by voting for or against individual proposals. In this paper, we argue that this conventional form of decision making can be improved and introduce a method, Combined Choice, that represents decisions, not as a series of proposals, but as a whole.

Where these decisions result in legislation, these documents are combined in one digital file that contains all legislation. Instead of voting on each proposal, decision-makers can put forward an alternative version of this file by adding or removing legislation. Each decision-maker chooses one version and the file with the most support is enforced. We argue that this method produces better results by giving decision-makers the power to work with citizens, experts, or industry, unconstrained by an archaic decision-making process. Combined Choice also allows greater competition, accommodates innovative new approaches to the development of ideas and ensures greater transparency.

In his paper, Jon set out a detailed technical architecture, and outlined how this method may be implemented in practice.

2021 will see Combined Choice deployed in community decision-making, in housing, planning and community budgets: decisions where everyday democracy lives or dies. These decisions are relevant to every day of people's lives, to the most salient lived experiences of home, neighbourhood, and community. These are the decisions that matter enough for it to be worth getting involved, worth learning how to connect with your neighbours, worth learning how to campaign, and how to negotiate. The democratic skillset of relationships, collaboration and compromise is built in the community, and Combined Choice will help build it.

Keep an eye on our website for more updates to come.



# A YEAR OF INSIGHT

## 2020 was the year our Public Participation Lab came of age.

Launched in May, the Lab brings together cutting edge tools and techniques to get under the skin of any major public policy issue. This year, thanks to the many partners and funders who've supported our work, we've applied those tools to issues as diverse as food policy and cybercrime.

Our research this year has broken new ground, recommending brave and radical changes alongside pragmatic paths for policymakers to make progress on entrenched issues. Our in-house polling function has allowed us unique insight among UK think tanks, while new technology has allowed us to explore public opinion like never before. At the same time, our action research programme has gone from strength to strength, testing ideas and approaches on the ground. CASM has continued to break new ground, identifying new aspects of our online experiences.

We couldn't have done this without the support of our funders and partners, and we're hugely grateful to those supporting the development of the Lab and the work that it's enabled. We're always looking to partner with people who share our excitement about our country's potential - if that's you then we'd love to hear from you in 2021. It's what's needed more than ever.

# THE LEARNING CURVE

In the largest study of its kind, we found that 10% of the UK's economy output can be linked to online learning.

Demos polled 20,000 people to find out more about online learning habits and their impact on people's lives in the UK. Combined with in depth interviews with both individuals who have used the online learning to achieve career and personal goals, those who have not engaged in online learning, and alongside a review of existing academic literature, we found that:

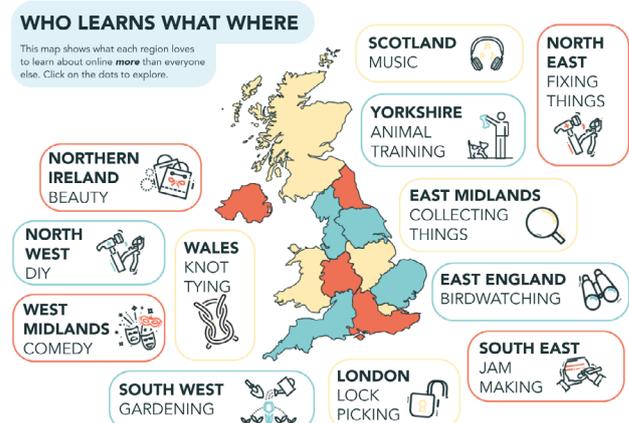
- Two thirds of the UK workforce use online learning to help with work; search engines and video platforms reign supreme as the main source of knowledge
- Only one in five do so under the recommendation of employers
- More than three quarters of people who learn online (77%) say it's beneficial to their mental health
- 29 per cent of the UK working population have used internet-based learning to help raise their pay with a median pay rise being £2 per hour, equivalent to £3,640 per year for a 35-hour week.
- One in three have also used online learning to help them get a new job.

Two-thirds of those who use the internet to learn new things for work said that doing so has helped them do their job more efficiently, providing new evidence on the link between everyday workplace learning and economic productivity; it's estimated that 20 million people in Britain feel that online learning has, at some stage, contributed to their professional output. Maximising the impact of everyday work-related online learning is an

important part of the answer of how to raise economic productivity in Britain.

Online learning remains something largely driven by individuals. Only 18 per cent say they have undertaken it at the suggestion or requirement of their employer. Given that 72 per cent of those learning online are doing so for free, predominantly on search engines and video, there is a clear benefit to employers to encourage, recognise and reward this proactive approach to more productive working.

*The Learning Curve* was supported by Google, and launched at one of the last parliamentary events in February 2020.



# TURNING THE TABLES

*In [Turning the Tables](#), a project exploring public attitudes towards healthy eating, we found that the food market in the UK is not working for consumers, with too many in the UK facing significant barriers to eating healthy diets.*

We called on the Government to build on their strategy to tackle obesity by investing in a new transformative Food and Agriculture Sector Deal, which would accelerate research and development in reformulating food on a much greater scale than seen before, to make it healthier and more cost-effective for consumers.

From our polling, we can estimate that 20 million adults cannot afford healthy foods in the UK, and that 19 million cannot find healthy foods available in shops close to their home. The research also found that the British public are in favour of more interventionist policies to tackle unhealthy eating. Almost three quarters of people (71%) would support government subsidies that make healthy foods cheaper.

We also found:

- The three main drivers that consumers say push them towards unhealthy foods are: taste (43%), cost (34%) and ease (34%).
- The majority (59%) of people would support requiring all grocery shops to stock healthy foods.
- Just under half (45%) of people would support standardised packaging on unhealthy foods – similar to approaches taken on cigarette packaging.
- A further four in ten (43%) would support

banning unhealthy foods on public transport and slightly fewer (37%) would support banning foods in public places.

As well as major food innovation, the report recommends a tripartite approach to food policy:

1. Make healthy foods easier to sell
2. Make unhealthy foods harder to sell
3. Reform the food sector.

The report was launched with a foreword by the former Health Secretary Lord Lansley, while lead researcher Rose Lasko-Skinner presented the findings to the All Party Parliamentary Food and Health Forum, as well as to Treasury officials.

# FUTURE TOWNS

Towns across the UK are central to the government's levelling up agenda, but what do the people living in them want their future towns to look like?

Working with KPMG, we began investigating this question in the early months of 2020. Our findings outline the challenges of uniting people in towns behind any particular vision of the future.

We found that just over half of people living in towns in England are part of a group concerned about newcomers moving to their area, sceptical about house building and are less supportive of new highly paid jobs coming to their town. A directly opposing group of people in towns are more likely to be open to new people coming into their towns, favour building more houses, and are supportive of jobs of any type coming to their town.

At the same time, the future for towns seems even more uncertain now than it did before the pandemic. Extended closures continue to pose existential risks to local businesses in towns across the country, some of which are the lifeblood of their local communities. Yet the simultaneous shift towards remote working – together with the promise of large-scale investment in towns – could be a once-in-a-generation opportunity for towns.

The research shows that towns are complex and largely misunderstood, with the same patterns in attitudes consistent across all types of towns in England, from ex-industrial towns to affluent towns.

Demos is calling for local government to engage both the public and businesses in conversations about the future of their towns, to solve the divide and build inspiring visions.

The report's recommendations include:

- Town leaders to engage their residents and local business leaders in an open, participatory conversation about the future of the high street.
- Ex-industrial towns to be a priority for investment.
- Central government investment in towns to be conditional on buy-in from the local community and business leaders.

We launched our report in December, along with interactive tools allowing people to explore the types of towns in the UK and find out whether they were an 'Early adopter' or a 'Preserver' when it came to their area.

## RESEARCH 4.0

There is a growing consensus that we are at the start of a fourth industrial revolution, driven by developments in Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, robotics, the Internet of Things, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, 5G, new forms of energy storage and quantum computing.

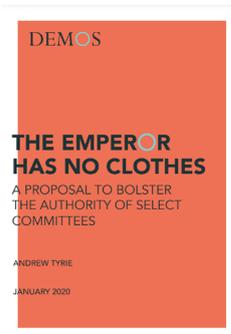
This report, supported by Jisc, sought to understand the impact AI is having on the UK's research sector and the implications it has for the future, with a particular focus on academic research.



## THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES

In *The Emperor Has No Clothes: A proposal to bolster the authority of Select Committees*, the Rt. Hon. Lord Andrew Tyrie called for the establishment of a new parliamentary court to strengthen Select Committee powers ahead of the election of new Select Committee Chairs in January 2020.

Tyrie highlights the current limitations of Select Committee ability to compel witnesses to give evidence and produce papers. While Committees have, since the introduction of Chairmen through secret ballot in 2010, started to make fuller use of their theoretical powers, there have been high profile examples of refusals to comply with their demands.



## GOOD CREDIT 2020

Demos' annual Good Credit Index, supported by New Day, measures access to affordable credit across the country to understand these geographical discrepancies at a granular level, and inspire place-based approaches to tackle them.

Alongside this year's Good Credit Index, we have published a toolkit to share the learnings from our Good Credit Project in South Yorkshire, a place-based financial inclusion initiative in the Sheffield City Region. It sets out practical tips to address financial exclusion, supported by case studies from people we worked with including the city region mayor and the public, private and voluntary sectors.



## ENGENDERING HATE

*Engendering Hate*, with U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), outlines a new framework for understanding how disinformation is being used online to exclude women from public life, in the first major study into this threat to democracy.

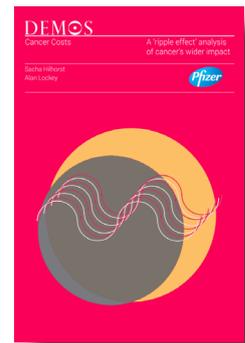
We found that online spaces are being systematically weaponised to exclude women leaders and to undermine the role of women in public life. And left unchecked, this phenomenon of gendered disinformation, spread by state and non-state actors, poses a serious threat to women's equal political participation.



## CANCER COSTS

There are now 2.5 million people living with or beyond cancer in the UK. By the year 2030 this figure could be as high as 4 million – the product of ten-year survival rates more than doubling since the 1970s.

This report, supported by Pfizer, aims to explore this multifaceted cost of cancer and document the impact it has upon all the lives it touches – patients, survivors, carers and family members. We attempt to capture the full nature of that cost for the first time, bringing the lived experience of those affected by cancer to the public policy debate.



## ACHIEVING LEVELLING-UP

'Levelling-up' is one of this Government's flagship ambitions. This report, Achieving Levelling-Up, focuses on the structures and processes needed to achieve it, finding that there is zero chance of progress without significant changes to the current system at a national and local level.

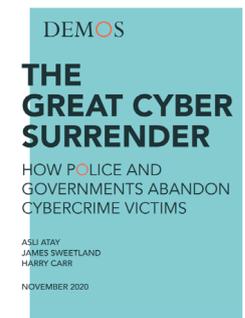
The report, conducted as part of the LIPSIT (Local Institutions, Productivity, Sustainability and Inclusivity Trade-offs) project by Demos and the Universities of Birmingham, Cardiff, Surrey and Warwick, identifies a number of problems with the current system for managing local economic policy, and suggests a new framework in which levelling-up should be possible.



## THE GREAT CYBER SURRENDER

In the most comprehensive transatlantic study of its kind, we found that the approach of both police and policymakers to tackling cybercrime is so inadequate that it is tantamount to surrender. On both sides of the Atlantic, we find no systematic attempt to combat cyber fraud at scale.

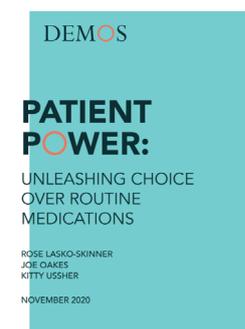
This report, made possible by Clario, is an urgent call to arms. We're calling for an immediate and comprehensive overhaul of national and international responses to this enormous and evolving threat, as well as more support for victims and greater resources for law enforcement to develop the technical skills needed to fight cybercrime on the front line.



## PATIENT POWER

Despite patient choice on medication being essential to the NHS Constitution, our report Patient Power shows it is rarely happening on the ground.

The report, supported by AbbVie, found that many patients are not fully aware of the level of control they are entitled to when it comes to choosing medication. It suggests that pharmacists could play a greater role in the patient care pathway to support patients make choices about their medication, where doctors do not have the time or capacity.



# LOOKING TO 2021

2021 already holds great promise: a widespread vaccine, the return of freedoms we've missed and most of all, the opportunity to change things for the better.

In 2021, Demos will continue our mission to renew democracy. We'll release new and impactful research on what we need from our post-pandemic world through Renew Normal, with spotlight projects on the future of our urban spaces, food system and our working lives.

We'll continue to innovate, building new tools and technology to help us understand and engage people across the UK. We'll advocate for new ideas, new ways of thinking and progress where the country needs it most.

The last thing we need is to wipe the slate clean. 2020 has taught us all numerous painful lessons at great cost. 2021 will bring fresh challenges: not least our economic recovery, how as a nation we begin to heal and bridge divides old and new. Demos is committed to bringing solutions to the table.

And we're asking you to join us. If you'd like to be part of the Demos story in 2021, please do get in touch.

# DEMOS

**Demos** is a champion of people, ideas and democracy. We bring people together. We bridge divides. We listen and we understand. We are practical about the problems we face, but endlessly optimistic and ambitious about our capacity, together, to overcome them.

At a crossroads in Britain's history, we need ideas for renewal, reconnection and the restoration of hope. Challenges from populism to climate change remain unsolved, and a technological revolution dawns, but the centre of politics has been intellectually paralysed. Demos will change that. We can counter the impossible promises of the political extremes, and challenge despair – by bringing to life an aspirational narrative about the future of Britain that is rooted in the hopes and ambitions of people from across our country.

Demos is an independent, educational charity, registered in England and Wales. (Charity Registration no. 1042046)

Find out more at [www.demos.co.uk](http://www.demos.co.uk)

# DEMOS

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15 WHITEHALL, LONDON, SW1A 2DD

T: 020 3878 3955

[HELLO@DEMOS.CO.UK](mailto:HELLO@DEMOS.CO.UK)

[WWW.DEMOS.CO.UK](http://WWW.DEMOS.CO.UK)