

Democratic Audit UK



- Home
- The 2017 Audit of UK Democracy
- Our work
 - 2016 Scottish Parliament Election Previews
 - The 2012 Audit
 - Block 1: Citizenship, Law and Rights
 - 1.1 – Nationhood and citizenship
 - 1.2 – The rule of law and access to justice
 - 1.3 – Civil and political rights
 - 1.4 – Social and economic rights
 - Block 2: Representative and Accountable Government
 - 2.1 – Free and fair elections
 - 2.2 – the democratic role of political parties
 - 2.3 – Effective and responsive government
 - 2.4 – the democratic effectiveness of parliament
 - 2.6. Integrity in public life
 - 2.5. Civilian control of the military and police
 - Block 3 – Civil society and popular participation
 - 3.1 – the media in a democratic society
 - 3.2 – Political participation
 - 3.3 – Decentralisation
 - Block 4 – Democracy beyond the state
 - 4.1 – External influences on the country's democracy
 - 4.2 – the Country's democratic impact abroad
 - Corrections and clarifications
 - The Democratic Dashboard
 - Democratic Audit shorts
 - 100 things we learned about democracy in 2013
 - Core expertise
 - DA reports and publications
 - Democratic engagement in the local NHS
 - Engaging young voters with enhanced election information
 - Parliamentary select committees: who gives evidence?
 - The creation of an English Public Services Ombudsman: mapping a way forward
 - Should the UK lower the voting age to 16?
 - The Political Inclusion of Young Citizens
 - Transitioning to a new Scottish state
 - Gender and Democracy
 - Democracy Online
 - Future of the Union
 - Other work
 - Democratic Dashboard
 - Dashboard – past elections
 - Dashboard – upcoming election
 - Democratic Dashboard
 - Dashboard 2.0
 - Map Example
 - Region Map
 - Key indicators of UK democracy
 - Corporate power and democracy
 - Electoral reform
 - Parliament
 - Party funding
 - Audits worldwide
 - Quangos
 - Patronage and quango appointments
 - Quangos and quangocrats
 - Who governs Merseyside?
 - Top 10 ideas to improve UK democracy
 - Constitution UK: Crowdsourcing the UK's constitution
 - 8th October LSE event



- **Themes**
 - Improving voting and elections
 - Informing and engaging citizens
 - Involving young people in democracy
 - Modernising parliamentary democracy
 - Achieving accountable government
 - Building sub-national government
 - Extending human and civil rights
- **About**
 - What we do
 - Who we are
 - Democratic Audit UK staff
 - DA Trustees
 - Our Contributors
 - How we edit contributions
 - LSE Public Policy Group blogs
 - How to cite our articles
 - Comments policy
- **Contact**
 - Contact Democratic Audit
 - Contribute to Democratic Audit UK

sources

- Find my representatives
- Local government in the United Kingdom
- Freedom of information
- Guide to electoral systems

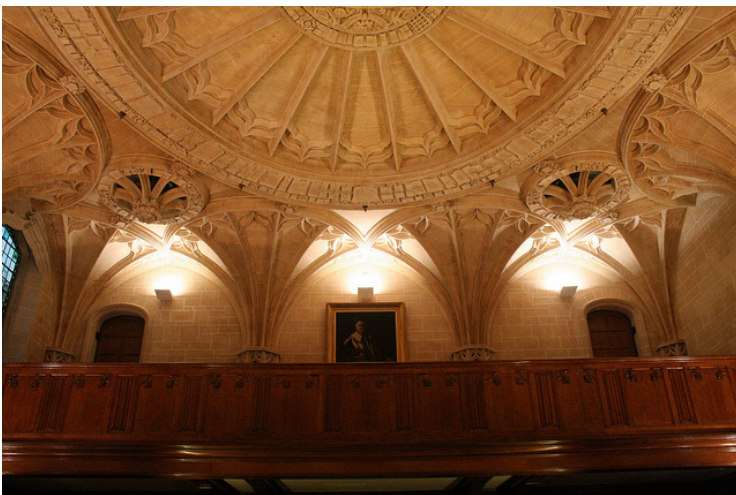
Navigate to ...

By [Democratic Audit UK](#) 21/08/2014 [Read More](#) →

[Five minutes with Graham Allen: “unlike most democracies, the UK lacks a document that sets out the rules of the political game”](#)

Tweet

*The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, chaired by **Graham Allen MP**, has launched a project which aims to consult with the public about whether the UK needs a written constitution, and what such a document should contain. He argues that the country would be better governed if we took the chance to give ourselves what most democracies take for granted: an easily accessible document which states in unequivocal terms what the terms of the political game are.*



Could the UK end up with the Supreme Court making the big political decisions? (Credit: IanVisits, CC BY NC 2.0)

What is the aim of the project?

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, which I chair, published its report ‘A new Magna Carta?’ in July 2014. The report briefly sets out the arguments for and against a written constitution for the UK, and outlines three fully worked up options for future codification of the UK constitution, including a model Written Constitution. Our report can be [accessed here](#).

The publication of the report marked the start of a six-month consultation – to start the debate we ask:

- Does the UK need a Written Constitution?
- Which, if any, of the options set out do you support?
- What should a written constitution for the UK contain?

think tanks, charities and campaigning groups, and members of the public – as possible to take part in this conversation about the future of our democracy.

Next year we will mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, one of the oldest constitutional documents in the world. While this is of course important, we also need to think about what our democracy should look like for the next 800 years. Information on the consultation is available [here](#).

You can have your say e-mailing your comments to pcrc@parliament.uk or sending them by post to the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. The consultation finishes on 1 January 2015. The Committee will then report to Parliament on the responses from the public in time for them to be taken into account ahead of the general election.

I have also launched an open competition asking the public to draft a suggested Preamble to a future constitution for the UK – more information can be found [here](#).

The Preamble of a nation’s constitution should be rousing, ringing, inspiring and short – Democratic Audit readers should send their version in 350 words to pcrc@parliament.uk with the subject line ‘PREAMBLE’. Entries will be published on our website and there will be a prize for the best public entry and the best by a journalist.

Does the UK need a written constitution?

Constitution matters. It belongs to the people of the United Kingdom. It is about how the state exercises power and how it interacts with the people. It is about our democracy.

But, unlike the citizens of most democracies around the world, we in the UK cannot look to an easily accessible document that sets out the rules of the political game.

We have seen considerable constitutional change over recent years – including devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, freedom of information legislation, the creation of the Supreme Court, the introduction of fixed-term Parliaments, and the Human Rights Act – but this change has taken place on a piecemeal basis. And the fact that many of the rules are now written down does not mean that they are easily accessible or readily understood.

A written constitution would set out clearly what the government can and cannot do. It would enable us more easily to understand how the government works and more meaningfully to hold the government to account. It would also set out our rights and freedoms.

In short, to achieve a truly engaged public and an accountable government, all citizens should be able to own the rule book of their democracy in the form of a written constitution.

To what extent should social rights, for example access to health care free at the point of use, be enshrined in a constitution? Is that democratic?

People disagree about this. On one hand, there are good reasons to include such rights in a written constitution – economic and social rights (especially the right to health care) are consistently popular with the public, reflecting highly-valued features of our society.

But on the other hand, guaranteeing these rights is not without cost. The provision of healthcare and education, the minimum wage, or maternity and paternity rights, involves decisions about the allocation of resources. Many people believe that the proper place for such decisions to be made is within the democratically elected Parliament. But enshrining such rights in a written constitution could mean giving the judiciary more powers over these inherently political questions.

This type of debate is exactly why we want to hear from people as part of our consultation – big decisions about what should or shouldn’t be included in a written constitution must not be the sole preserve of politicians. So let us know what you think!

Do you have any reason to believe the UK would be better governed if it had a constitution?

Yes. Adopting a written constitution for the UK would result in greater transparency and greater awareness among the public of the principles and rules that govern the government. If we are better able to hold the government to account as a result of this knowledge, the government itself is likely to be more careful to abide by the rules.

Is there a danger that a written constitution would simply take an imperfect democratic arrangement and make it impossible to change?

If we decided to adopt a written constitution for the UK, it would be up to us – all of us – to decide what that document should contain.

By way of example, the three models set out in our report are:

- A Constitutional Code: to be sanctioned by Parliament, but without statutory authority, setting out the essential existing elements and principles of the constitution.
- A Constitutional Consolidation Act: consolidating existing laws and practices relating to the constitution, including statutes, common law, parliamentary practice and a codification of essential constitutional conventions.
- A Written Constitution: a basic law by which the United Kingdom would be governed, setting out the relationship between the state and its citizens, an amendment procedure and some elements of reform.

So, we *could* adopt a written constitution that would contain our current arrangements and specify very demanding methods for its amendment.

But adopting a written constitution for the UK does not have to follow that approach. It could instead be an opportunity to reform the

For example, I would argue that we should include a number of radical reforms in a future written constitution including: direct elections for the Prime Minister; real devolution for England to be delivered through independent local government; and ensuring that MPs had the ability to recall Parliament. A written constitution could also be used to implement reforms that have broad political support, such as transforming the House of Lords into a democratic body.

The same goes for amendment procedures. A written constitution should be more difficult to change than ordinary legislation – as basic, fundamental law it should not be subject to constant revision. However, more difficult does not mean impossible – it would be for us to design the amendment procedure. Again, let us know what you think about this!

[Click here to find out more about The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee's 'A new Magna Carta?' consultation](#)

Note: this post represents the views of the author and not those of Democratic Audit or the LSE. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting



Graham Allen MP is chair of the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee, and the Labour Member of Parliament for Nottingham North. Further information about this inquiry can be found [here](#).



Similar Posts

- [A written British constitution would do much to enhance Britain's democracy and the wellbeing of its citizens](#)
- [Mapping the path to codifying – or not codifying – the UK's Constitution](#)
- [Taxing the rich leads to representative government. Happy 800th birthday, Magna Carta!](#)
- [A new constitutional settlement for the UK would be the most fitting Magna Carta celebration](#)
- [“A significant loss to UK democracy”: Experts respond to the abolition of the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee](#)

Posted in: [Achieving accountable government](#), [Crowdsourcing the Constitution](#), [Extending human and civic rights](#), [Modernising parliamentary democracy](#)

Subscribe

If you enjoyed this article, subscribe to receive more just like it.



Comments are closed.

- [28 Replies](#)
- [0 Comments](#)
- [28 Tweets](#)
- [0 Facebook](#)
- [0 Pingbacks](#)

Last reply was 22/08/2014



1. [@GrahamAllenMP](#)
[View 22/08/2014](#)

The Case for a democratic settlement in the UK argued by Graham Allen <http://t.co/fZWdcTHZEU>



2. [@sebazumendi](#)
[View 21/08/2014](#)

Una constitución para el Reino Unido? <http://t.co/QbqznEqGpe>



3. [@LSEPubAffairs](#)
[View 21/08/2014](#)

5 mins with @GrahamAllenMP: “the UK lacks a document that sets out the rules of the game” <http://t.co/Fq4W2tyQQf>
<http://t.co/iYeSjiUUUnb>



4. [@democraticaudit](#)
[View 21/08/2014](#)

Graham Allen: "unlike most democracies, the UK lacks a document that sets out the rules of the political game" <http://t.co/SPUh1XFbuQ>



5. [@PJDunleavy](#)
[View 21/08/2014](#)

Five minutes with Graham Allen: "Unlike most democracies, the UK lacks a document to set out the rules politics"
<http://t.co/3pV5BzmF3Z>



6. [@democraticaudit](#)
[View 21/08/2014](#)

Five minutes with Graham Allen: "unlike most democracies, the UK lacks a document that sets out the rules of the..."
<http://t.co/YjbQygWMZn>



Democratic Dashboard

Everything you need to know about the election in your area

Search by postcode or town

Go

Powered by Democratic Dashboard

Enter Search Terms

Funding



Like us on Facebook

Democratic Audit
1,335 likes

Like Page Share

Be the first of your friends to like this

Popular posts

- [The trouble with Jeremy Corbyn: five tests the Labour leader is failing](#)
- [The Wright reforms changed Parliament, but there remains scope for further reform](#)
- [Party canvassers don't change people's opinions, but they do persuade them to vote](#)

DA on Twitter

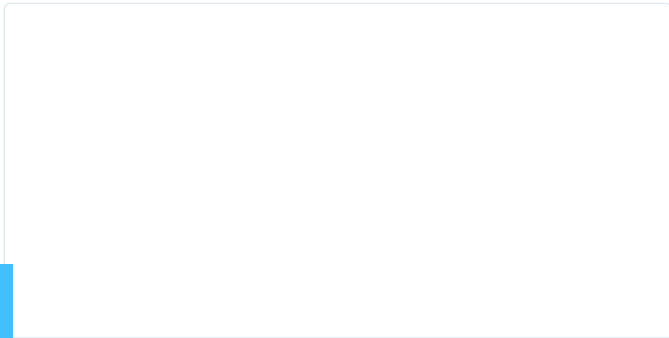
Tweets by @democraticaudit

Democratic Audit UK Retweeted



Lara Pawson @larapawson

#FF for ppl who know a thing abt housing & tower blocks:
[@owenhatherley](#) [@DawnHFoster](#) & read Lynsey Hanley
theguardian.com/books/2007/jan...



Review: Estates by Lynsey Hanley

Lynsey Hanley's Estates, a cogent case for the benefits of social housing, impresses Blake Morrison.
theguardian.com

1h

Democratic Audit UK Retweeted



Matthew Goodwin @GoodwinMJ

Britain is rebooting 1974-1979. Without radical change
Con gvt will bleed popularity & authority, against
backdrop of big economic squeeze

2h

[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)

Subscribe to Blog via Email

Enter your email address to subscribe to this blog and receive notifications of new posts by email.

Creative Commons



This work by Democratic Audit is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 UK: England & Wales.

[The 2012 Democratic Audit](#)



[... Read More »](#)

[The Democratic Dashboard](#)





The new Democratic Dashboard provides you with everything you need to know about your local area [... Read More »](#)

© 2017 Democratic Audit UK. [WordPress Theme by Solostream.](#)

Supporter of Post Navigator [Premium WordPress Plugins](#)

