DEMOCRACY REIMAGINED

ADVANCING DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE AND RENEWAL

CONFERENCE REPORT

17-19 November 2025
Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra

Mary Joyce Bulao

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
CENTRE FOR DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

Australian National University

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Democracy Reimagined Conference* brought together scholars and practitioners to reflect on the current condition of democracy in Australia and internationally, to explore innovative practices applied in different democracies, and to identify shared patterns, tensions and lessons across diverse political and institutional settings. The conference was held from 17-19 November 2025 and hosted by the University of Canberra's Centre for Deliberative Democracy in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Foundation Australia New Zealand, and the Australian Democracy Research and Data Network.

Over three days, participants explored what democratic resilience means, how it can be studied, and how democracies can innovate to remain resilient and withstand growing threats, including deepening polarisation, rising extremism, and the proliferation of mis- and disinformation.

Resilience was framed not as a fixed institutional trait, but as an adaptive capacity: the ability to respond to disruption without compromising key principles and practices of democracy. While democratic institutions and the rule of law are essential, democratic resilience also depends on the inclusive discourses and actions of political leaders, and a strong civil society and everyday practices of care.

Over three days, discussions moved from conceptual foundations of democratic resilience and renewal to the practical design of institutions, policies, and participatory processes in response to contemporary shocks and challenges. Five key themes and contentions emerged throughout the conference proceedings:

1. Democratic resilience depends on innovation beyond institutions, recognising democracy as both institutional and lived practice.
2. Deliberative institutions alone are insufficient to address democratic challenges; democratic innovations must combine flexibility and openness with institutional legitimacy.
3. Power and inequality shape participation; structural reform is essential to enable meaningful inclusion.
4. Democracy is affective as well as rational; leadership, narrative integrity, and emotional literacy matter for democratic resilience.
5. Technology is reshaping the democratic public sphere and the conditions for public deliberation.

This report was produced by Mary Joyce Bulao as part of her internship at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation Australia New Zealand and the Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra from 12 November 2025 to 11 February 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Democracies today face multiple challenges, including rising polarisation, information manipulation, the resurgence of authoritarianism, and social fragmentation. Conference participants emphasised that while democratic institutions, processes, and the rule of law provide essential scaffolding, democratic survival ultimately depends on how political leaders, parties, public institutions such as electoral commissions, media, and civil service bodies, and communities practice democracy.

Within this context, and as a central thread running through the conference, democratic resilience was understood as an ongoing, adaptive process, not as a static feature of democratic systems. Drawing on Biddle et al.'s (2025, iii) conception of resilience as a system's "capacity to identify problems and collectively respond to changing conditions," participants framed resilience as emerging through patterned adjustments that balance institutional stability with capacity for renewal and transformation. Democratic resilience was defined as the capacity of democratic systems to sustain inclusive contestation by cultivating trusted institutions, credible information environments, and social inclusion.

The diversity of contributions reflected the study of democracy as an interdisciplinary field combining insights from scholars and practitioners working across different domains and contexts. The countries in focus included mainly Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Japan, Nepal, United States, the Philippines, and Argentina with participants from these contexts presenting papers on democratic resilience and renewal. Across three days, the nature, methods, and practice of democratic resilience and renewal were explored:

- Day 1 focused on conceptual and methodological foundations of democratic resilience.
- Day 2 examined deliberative engagement across different democracies and how such engagement interacts with digital, educational, and representational systems.
- Day 3 explored future-oriented innovations, politics and practices of advocacy.

In her keynote address, Thamy Pogrebinschi, senior researcher at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, argued that sustaining democracy requires transforming innovation into resilience. Dr. Pogrebinschi highlighted the need to build collective problem-solving institutions, embed democratic experiments into durable practice, and strengthen links between citizens, civil society, and the state. These remarks set the tone for a conference concerned not only with diagnosis, but with democratic imagination and repair.

This report is structured into three parts. Part I summarises the key insights emerging across ten panels. Part II highlights the emerging themes and key contentions, while Part III synthesises the conference's core implications, offering insights for policy, practice, and research.

PART I

PANEL HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY DISCUSSIONS

Day 1 | **Foundations of Democratic Resilience**

Foundations of Democratic Resilience laid the conceptual groundwork for the conference. Presentations moved beyond procedural understandings of democracy to explore resilience as relational, cultural, and embedded in everyday practice.

The first session with Alex Fischer, Simon Angus and John Dryzek explored how to define and measure democratic resilience. Alex Fischer focused on the broad definition and measurement of democratic resilience. Simon Angus demonstrated an attempt to operationalise resilience through indicators and AI-driven narrative tracking. John Dryzek contrasted shallow and deep forms of democratic resilience, emphasising the importance of integrative norms in building and sustaining democratic systems.

The next set of presentations examined practices across diverse contexts, from everyday 'anti-fascist' resistance (Albert Dzur) to the long-term civic capacities built through youth activism (Kei Nishiyama) and insights from the RESILIO project in Europe (York Albrecht & Maria Skora). These discussions highlighted that resilience is enacted not only in formal institutions and the rule of law but also in small, everyday acts of civic care and community engagement.

The afternoon sessions explored practical strategies of resilience, looking at deliberative institutions under far-right pressure in Latin America (Melissa Ross), approaches to recovery and repair after extremist attacks (Jordan McSwiney, Selen Ercan), and the ethical imperative for public deliberation before armed conflict (Ron Levy). Across both the morning and afternoon sessions, discussions moved from conceptual questions about what resilience is to practical questions about how it can be enacted, protected, and rebuilt under conditions of threat.

Day 2 | **Deliberative Engagement across Digital, Educational, and Representational Settings**

Deliberative Engagement across Digital, Educational, and Representational Settings examined the interconnected systems relevant to democracy, focusing particularly on digital platforms, and institutions of representation and education. Morning presentations explored digital civic infrastructure and the implications of platform design on public discourse. Peter Lewis reviewed trends in civic participation in Australia and outlined design principles for digital infrastructure that support engagement rather than conflict. Nardine Alnemr highlighted the potential of experimental deliberative democracy through "institutional rehearsal", illustrating how citizen deliberation on AI can shape technology governance and legitimacy.

The midday sessions turned to democratic learning, showing how higher education (Nicholas Biddle) and print media coverage can both strengthen and undermine democracy (Jorge Knijnik & Jane Hunter). Matthieu O'Neil discussed counter-messaging strategies drawing on evidence from the ACT information literacy program to emphasise the need for pedagogies that strengthen public resilience against misinformation and disinformation. Across all three presentations, a shared insight emerged: building civic competence requires long-term, multifaceted learning embedded in both formal education and the broader information environment.

The afternoon sessions centred on representation and institutional innovation, featuring Indigenous-led climate assemblies (Emily Beausoleil), deliberative agenda setting (Ann Bardsley & Kristiann Allen), representative capacity-making (Carolyn Hendriks & Michael Saward), public attitudes toward citizen deliberation (Adele Webb, Max Grömping & Emily Foley), and community-based policymaking (Karki Kumar & Pramod KC). These discussions highlighted the need for more grounded, relational, and participatory models of representation.

Day 3 | **Democratic Futures across Institutions and Civil Society**

Democratic Futures across Institutions and Civil Society looked toward democratic futures. Morning sessions examined party strategies and democratic resilience (Peter Sloman), highlighting constraints facing political parties and opportunities emerging through the deliberative strategies employed by community independents (John Hawkins) and micro-level communication strategies between political representatives and their constituents (Daniel Casey & Pandanus Petter).

Following the panel on democratic futures of political parties, the subsequent panel shed light on current youth-led democratic innovations across the Indo-Pacific region, including treaty-based climate assemblies (Conor Twyford), feminist newsfluencing and relational publics (Claire Fitzpatrick & Raphaela Raaber), and creative political actions in repressive contexts (Athena Presto, James Guittap, & Nicole Curato). These presentations emphasised the role of young people as key agents in re-imagining and innovating democratic institutions and practices.

The final sessions explored the politics of voice and strategic silence (Friedel Marquardt), civil society advocacy (Mark Riboldi & Rivkah Nissim), and affective justice (Olivia Mendoza), examining decolonial perspectives, emotional repair, and coalition-building frameworks. Contributions in this session expanded the concept of democratic practice to include non-verbal, affective, and relational modes of action.

PART II

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES AND DEBATES

The synthesis of the insights emerging from the ten panels and the collective reflection sessions held at the end of each day points to five cross-cutting themes and debates:

1. Democratic resilience depends on innovation beyond institutions, recognising democracy as both institutional and lived practice.

A central contention across discussions was that democratic resilience cannot be secured by institutions and formal rules alone but depends on how institutional arrangements interact with everyday democratic practices to sustain inclusive contestation and collective problem-solving. While the rule of law, checks and balances, and deliberative bodies matter, they are insufficient without attention to how people, organisations, and political leaders actually conduct themselves – whether they uphold democratic norms, sustain inclusive participation, and model accountability in their day-to-day behaviour.

This argument was developed conceptually in John Dryzek's distinction between "shallow" and "deep" resilience and reinforced empirically through case-based presentations. Albert Dzur's account of everyday 'anti-fascist' resistance demonstrated how democratic resilience is often enacted through informal, localised practices rather than formal institutional mechanisms. Similarly, Kei Nishiyama's analysis of youth activism in Japan, showed how long-term civic capacities are built through sustained engagement rather than episodic participation.

Drawing these threads together – in part through the collective reflection sessions held at the close of each conference day – Alex Fischer emphasised that democratic resilience must be understood as an "adaptive system," one that evolves as democracies continually recognise emerging challenges and adjust collectively to changing circumstances. In outlining the conditions that enable such adaptability, he identified three core strengthening processes: cultivation of trusted institutions, maintenance of credible information environments, and the reinforcement of social inclusion. Together, these processes highlight that resilience is neither static nor reactive but the outcome of ongoing investment in democratic capacities.

Participants also noted that the emphasis on democratic innovation and renewal appeared particularly pronounced in the Australian context. In contrast, European debates on democratic resilience, as reflected in the Brussels Democracy Dialogue (BDD) report, tend to place greater emphasis on defence, protection, and institutional safeguards. This comparison was explicitly raised during a reflection session, with a participant noting that the BDD report frames democratic backsliding primarily through the lens of institutional defence and citizen re-engagement.

These differing emphases between the Australasian and European debates reflect variation in democratic contexts as well as in threats facing different systems. The erosion of the rule of law, for example, is less of an issue in the Australian context than in some EU countries, most notably Hungary. This contrast was underscored by findings from the RESILIO project, which identified rule-of-law vulnerabilities in parts of Europe, including politicisation of the judiciary, weakened checks and balances, and captured media – that are far less pronounced in Australia's political and institutional landscape.

Across these discussions, democracy was consistently understood as both an institutional system and a localised, lived practice. This dual understanding was reflected in youth-led innovations presented by Conor Twyford, Claire Fitzpatrick, Raphaela Raaber, and others, which demonstrated how new democratic forms emerge at the intersection of institutional design, cultural practice, and social movement politics. These cases illustrated that innovation often arises from the margins, where formal structures intersect with everyday civic creativity.

Participants emphasised that strengthening democracy requires sustained investment in civic infrastructure, both physical and social, to create spaces that support, participation, trust, and learning, especially in post-conflict or high-stress environments. Reimagining democracy, as several contributors noted, involves creativity, experimentation, and even playfulness, while remaining firmly anchored in accountability, reciprocity, and democratic responsibility.

2. Deliberative institutions alone are insufficient to address democratic challenges; democratic innovations must combine flexibility and openness with institutional legitimacy.

While deliberative institutions and processes are becoming popular, even in illiberal or authoritarian contexts, their existence does not guarantee democratic outcomes. As several presenters noted, deliberative forums can persist even as democratic qualities erode. A recurring concern throughout the conference was the tendency to rely on stand-alone or one-off deliberative responses, particularly in moments of crisis, rather than developing systems of collective intelligence. Such systems, which link citizen participation to feedback loops, governance processes, and institutional memory, were presented as key mechanisms through which democratic institutions build public trust and sustain inclusive contestation and democratic learning over time. Without these structures, deliberative processes rarely translate into decision-making, institutional adaptation, or policy change. In this respect, deliberation was thus framed as part of a civic infrastructure that enables responsiveness, accountability, and learning over time (Lewis et al., 2025).

The work of Jordan McSwiney, Selen Ercan, Emily Beausoleil, Claire Fitzpatrick, and Andrea Felicetti analysed democratic responses to violent extremist attacks (Ercan et al., 2025). Their analysis differentiates between two notions of democratic resilience: democratic resilience understood as “bouncing back”, seeking to restore the status quo through procedural continuity – and “bouncing forward” which uses moments of disruption to deepen democratic commitments and strengthen the public sphere’s deliberative capacity. As their study demonstrates, resilience is achieved by enhancing a system’s ability to respond to crisis without narrowing inclusion, suppressing contestation, or sacrificing democratic norms. This resonated strongly with conference discussions, particularly in highlighting how leadership narratives and institutional responses shape whether moments of crisis lead to democratic contraction or to renewal.

Related concerns emerged in Ann Bardsley and Kristiann Allen’s work on deliberative agenda-setting, which raised questions about how citizen inputs shape political priorities. Similarly, Adele Webb, Max Grömping and Emily Foley’s research on public attitudes toward deliberative processes further highlighted gaps between participation and perceived political impact, reinforcing the insight that legitimacy depends not only on inclusion but on whether citizens can see how their contributions shape outcomes (Webb, Grömping, & Foley, 2025). Collectively, these findings reinforce the argument that

democratic resilience depends on durable feedback loops connecting participation and institutional action, especially in high-stakes or crisis contexts where public trust is most fragile.

A proactive and forward-looking approach was illustrated in Nardine Alnemr's presentation on citizen deliberation on AI governance. She discussed how deliberative forums can be deliberately designed as inputs that create informed, inclusive, and consequential public discussions about emerging technologies. She emphasised that citizen deliberations on AI function as experiments in democratic renewal, revealing both democratic promise and risks of emerging technologies, while offering lessons about scale, institutional linkages, political will, and the iterative challenges facing democratic innovations.

Across these discussions, the conference highlighted persistent tensions between democratic innovation and institutionalisation. On the one hand, institutions offer stability, authority, and legitimacy, which are essential for decision-making in complex societies. On the other hand, democratic resilience, particularly in the face of shocks and disruption, relies on flexibility, experimentation, and the capacity to learn from failure. Democratic systems must be stable but also remain open to new forms of participation and deliberation.

Participants noted that when innovations (such as citizen assemblies or deliberative panels) become too rigidly institutionalised, they risk losing their creative and transformative power. Standardising procedure can make them predictable, closed, or less responsive – ironically undermining the very democratic vitality they were meant to enhance.

The key challenge, then, is not whether democratic innovations should be integrated into political institutions, but how to do so without freezing them in place. The goal is to institutionalise learning, that is, to embed responsiveness, reflection, and ongoing deliberative capacity into democratic systems. In this sense, democratic resilience is best understood as capacity to move forward through disruption while deepening democratic commitments, rather than merely "bouncing back" to prior equilibrium.

3. Power and inequality shape participation; structural reform is essential to enable meaningful inclusion.

A recurring critique across panels was that democratic and deliberative practices can inadvertently reproduce extractive or colonial logics, particularly when they draw on lived experiences without meaningfully redistributing power, resources, and decision-making authority. Participants cautioned that participation, when poorly designed, risks becoming symbolic – extracting knowledge and legitimacy from communities while leaving underlying power relations unchanged.

This concern was addressed directly in Emily Beausoleil's work on Indigenous-led climate assemblies in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which illustrated how culturally grounded approaches challenge dominant models of representation by centring sovereignty, relational accountability, and long-term stewardship. Rather than treating participation as consultation, these assemblies reposition Indigenous communities as decision-makers with authority over both process and outcomes. Similarly, Rabinda Kumar Karki and Pramod KC's discussion of community-based policymaking in Nepal emphasised that participation must be embedded in local capacity and institutional authority. Their study demonstrated how citizen-led deliberation can directly confront entrenched power imbalances in development policymaking by granting rural and marginalised communities substantive influence over policy decisions. Participants discussed how democratic resilience depends on redistributing not only voice but also authority and resources, since social inclusion is a foundational condition for sustaining inclusive contestation and institutional legitimacy.

Structural inequalities were also examined through the lens of established democratic institutions. Drawing on nationally representative data, Nicholas Biddle analysed how higher education in Australia simultaneously strengthens and weakens democratic resilience in Australia by shaping political attitudes, trust, and institutional legitimacy. His findings highlighted how institutions that position themselves as democratic anchors can nonetheless reproduce social and political inequalities, thereby limiting their capacity to foster inclusive democratic cultures.

Complementing this institutional analysis, Jorge Knijnik and Jane Hunter's examination of more than a decade of print media coverage revealed persistent struggles over education challenges facing democracy. Their analysis identified recurring frames of political contestation around the purposes of schooling, demonstrating how competing political forces shape curriculum debates, and in turn, influence public understandings of democracy and citizenship.

In the collective reflection sessions held at the close of the panels, participants noted that funding and attention often flow into experimental processes rather than into the communities that are expected to sustain them, undermining trust and long-term participation. These discussions highlighted that decolonising deliberation is not merely a symbolic gesture but a structural project, requiring responsibility, reflexivity, and a willingness to dismantle entrenched hierarchies that continue to exclude marginalised voices. From this perspective, strengthening democratic resilience in unequal contexts demands not only innovative participatory designs, but also sustained investment in community power, institutional reform, and redistributive decision-making.

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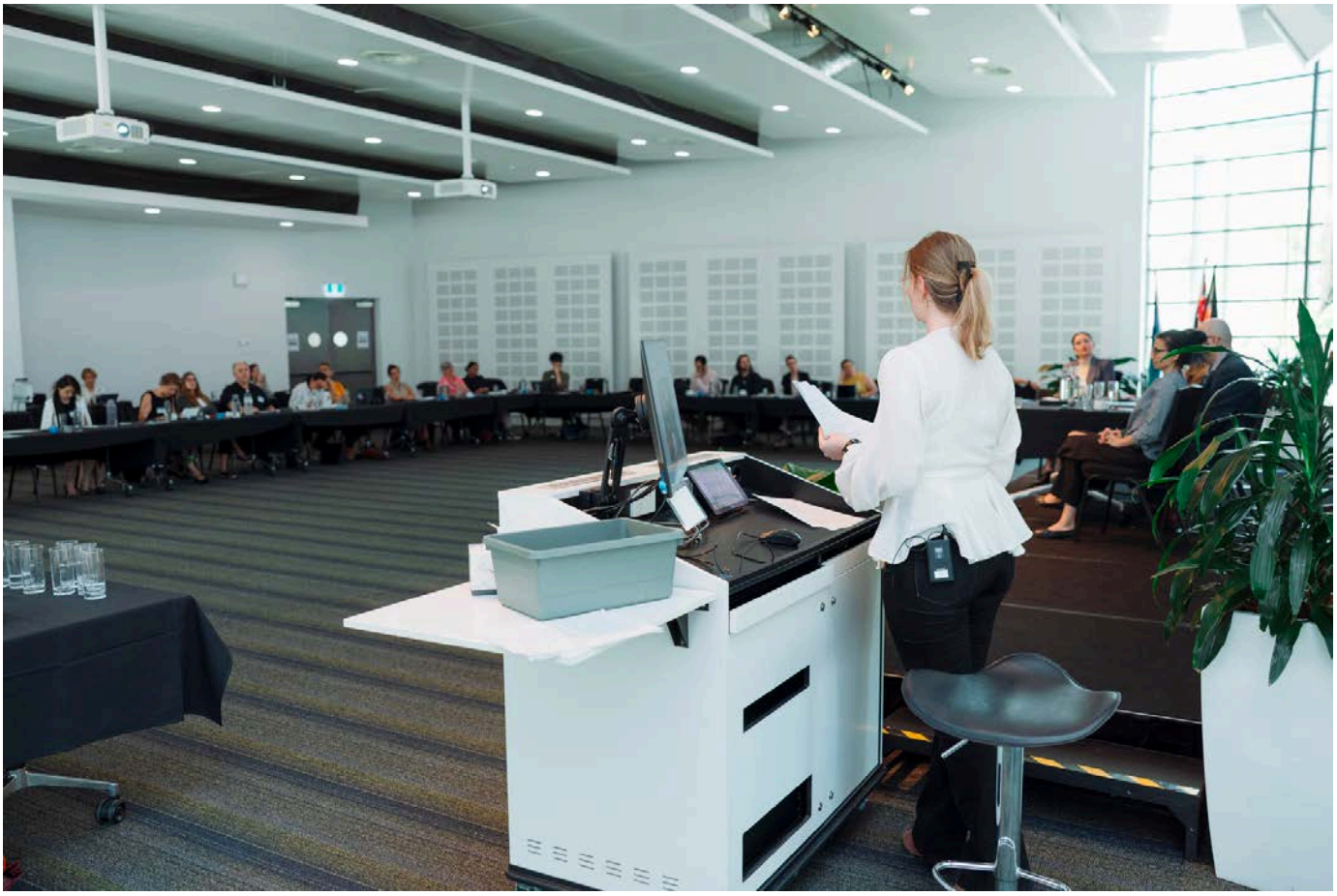
4. Democracy is affective as well as rational; leadership, narrative integrity, and emotional literacy matter for democratic resilience.

Another core insight of the conference was that democracy operates not only through rational deliberation and institutional design, but also through affect, perception, and social relationships. Feelings of exhaustion, alienation, fear, or belonging shape how citizens engage with democratic processes and influence their vulnerability to polarisation and disinformation. These affective dynamics determine the capacity of democratic systems to sustain participation, manage conflict, and respond constructively to crisis.

This theme was developed most explicitly in the final sessions of the conference. Friedel Marquardt's work on the aftermath of the failed Voice Referendum in Australia demonstrated how silence can function as a strategic, coerced, or protective political act rather than simply as disengagement. Olivia Mendoza's discussion of affective justice highlighted the importance of emotional repair in sustaining democratic participation, particularly in contexts marked by trauma, exclusion, or historical injustice. Together, these contributions underscored the importance of emotional literacy and affective awareness as components of democratic resilience, especially in political education, civic engagement work, and participatory design. Because anti-democratic actors often manipulate emotions and exploit affective narratives, equipping citizens and institutions with the capacity to recognise and respond to these dynamics is essential for safeguarding democratic norms.

Across several panels, participants emphasised that narratives are not merely rhetorical devices but active forces that shape values, expectations, and political behaviour, even when they do not harden into formal rules or norms. Political leadership plays a decisive role in constructing, reinforcing, or contesting these narratives, particularly in moments of disruption. Jordan McSwiney and colleagues' analysis of leadership responses following extremist attacks demonstrated how post-crisis narratives can either narrow democratic space by amplifying fear and division or strengthen resilience by reaffirming democratic commitments and inclusive public reasoning.



The affective and narrative dimensions of democracy also surfaced in discussions of party systems and political representation. Peter Sloman highlighted how party renewal is constrained not only by institutional design but by declining narrative coherence and organisational trust. Complementing this analysis, presentations by John Hawkins on community independents and by Daniel Casey and Pandanus Petter on MP's e-newsletters illustrated how leadership styles and communication practices shape citizen engagement, accountability, and perceptions of representation at the micro level. Carolyn Hendriks and Michael Saward's work on representative capacity making further shows how elected officials actively construct and demonstrate their ability to represent through curated communication, engagement spaces, and narrative performance. These practices can enhance visibility and responsiveness; however, they also risk reinforcing inequalities, as the resources required to sustain them are unevenly distributed. This highlights how democratic representation is performed and experienced in practice.

Finally, Claire Fitzpatrick and Raphaela Raaber's analysis of the Aotearoa-based *newsfluencers* @ShitYouShouldCareAbout demonstrated how democratic engagement in digital spaces is shaped as much by emotion, care, and relational connection as by rational argument. Their study showed how youth-oriented digital platforms can cultivate relational publics and build affective literacy – the capacity to recognise, process, and engage political emotions – in ways that support democratic participation and resilience over time.

Across these discussions, participants underscored that initiatives framed as "non-partisan" are nonetheless deeply political, and that democratic erosion often begins not with overt institutional breakdown, but with failures of leadership integrity, narrative responsibility, and affective care. Strengthening democratic resilience therefore requires attention not only on rules and procedures but to the emotional and relational foundations upon which democratic legitimacy and collective problem-solving ultimately depend.

5. Technology is reshaping the democratic public sphere and the conditions for public deliberation.

Digitalisation and emerging technologies are profoundly transforming how citizens engage, deliberate, and receive information. Across the conference, participants emphasised that while digital tools create new opportunities for participation and scale, they also intensify polarisation, disinformation, and asymmetries of power. The challenge of democratic resilience, therefore, lies not in whether technology should be used but in how it is designed, governed, and embedded within democratic systems.

Several presentations illustrated the dual role of technology as a promising tool and a potential source of democratic risk. Simon Angus demonstrated how new transformer-based AI tools enable the identification and tracking of political narratives at scale with unprecedented accuracy and efficiency. These tools open new possibilities for policymakers and researchers to monitor democratic discourse, detect emerging vulnerabilities, and support evidence-informed strategies to strengthen democratic resilience. At the same time, however, digital platforms can amplify divisive narratives and accelerate polarisation.

Moving from diagnosis to design, Peter Lewis's analysis of digital civic infrastructure highlighted how platform design choices shape participation, conflict, and trust. He argued that democratic renewal requires purpose-built digital civic infrastructure. In a related work, Lewis and colleagues examined the Australian case and identified a growing gap between citizens' desire for meaningful participation and an increasingly outdated civic infrastructure (Lewis, et al, 2025). To address this gap, they proposed building civic infrastructure around three dimensions: methodology, ontology, and technology and identified key principles for future platforms.

Complementing this structural perspective, Matthieu O'Neil's presentation on counter-messaging and information literacy drew attention to the pedagogical and narrative dimensions of digital resilience. He cautioned against narrowly reactive approaches focused on debunking misinformation and instead argued for a more proactive and assertive democratic narrative strategy. Democratic resilience depends on the capacity to shape public narratives by improving transparency, rebuilding trust, and developing effective counter-messages that expose, map, and challenge propagandistic narratives circulating in democratic spaces.

Across these reflections and discussions, a clear consensus emerged that AI and machine learning should be approached as tools for designing better democratic processes. When embedded within appropriate institutional ethical framework, these technologies can support democratic resilience by improving information flows, managing disagreement, and enabling dialogue at scale while remaining accountable to democratic values and public oversight.

PART III

CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The key themes emerging from the Democracy Reimagined Conference emphasise that democratic resilience cannot be treated as a defensive project focused solely on protecting existing institutions from external threats. Rather, resilience must be understood as a capacity-building project: the ability of democratic systems to learn and recalibrate under sustained stress while preserving trusted institutions, social inclusion, and credible information environments. Rather than returning to pre-crisis equilibrium, resilient democracies carry their learning forward through crisis without narrowing democratic commitments.

A central integrative insight was that resilience must be understood as a systemic property of democratic life. Formal institutions remain indispensable, but their legitimacy depends on whether they are embedded in civic infrastructures that connect citizens to decision-making, translate participation into consequences, and sustain trust over time. Resilience is therefore not maintained by preserving existing arrangements unchanged, but by strengthening the conditions under which democratic systems can learn, adapt, and remain responsive to citizens.

Participants emphasised that contemporary challenges – technological transformation, polarisation, inequality, and prolonged crisis – are not episodic disruptions but structural features of modern democracies. Responding to these conditions requires moving beyond reactive defence toward proactive democratic renewal.

Building on the discussions and evidence presented throughout the conference, the following recommendations translate the program's insights into practical directions for policy, research, and democratic practice. They are oriented towards the three interdependent processes identified by Lewis et al. (2025) as essential to democratic resilience: trusted institutions, credible information environments, and social inclusion.

1 Invest in Democratic Innovation Beyond Formal Institutions

Democratic resilience requires sustained investment in civic infrastructure that supports participation beyond electoral and parliamentary arenas. Policymakers and support organisations should prioritise funding for community-based, Indigenous-led, and youth-led initiatives that build long-term civic capacity rather than short-term participation. As demonstrated by grassroots initiatives globally, democratic adaptation often occurs when formal institutions have limited reach. Supporting these practices strengthens social inclusion while reinforcing institutional legitimacy through visible responsiveness to lived democratic practice.

2 Embed Deliberative Processes Within Systems of Collective Intelligence

Deliberative forums should be designed not as stand-alone or consultative exercises, but as components of systems of collective intelligence that connect citizen input to agenda-setting, decision-making, and institutional learning. Policymakers and public institutions should embed clear mandates, feedback loops, and accountability mechanisms so that participation demonstrably shapes outcomes. Civil society organisations can support this process by building collaboration engines – long-term coalitions and advocacy networks that sustain deliberation across issues and crises. Such system-level design enables institutions to learn from disruption and adapt without narrowing participation or contestation.

3 Address Structural Inequalities that Shape Participation

Democratic innovation must be accompanied by structural reforms that redistribute authority, resources, and decision-making power. Participation that extracts voice without shifting power undermines trust and exacerbates democratic fatigue. Investing directly in community capacity, particularly among marginalised groups, strengthens inclusion while enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Decolonising deliberation should therefore be treated as a long-term structural project rather than a symbolic short-term commitment.

4 Strengthen Leadership Integrity and Narrative Responsibility

Political leaders play a decisive role in shaping how societies interpret crisis, conflict, and uncertainty. Conference discussions underscored the need for leadership that reinforces democratic norms through narrative integrity, transparency, and accountability, particularly following moments of disruption such as extremist violence. Policymakers and political institutions should support leadership development and ethical communication standards, while civil society and media actors can help hold leaders accountable for the narratives they advance. Strengthening narrative responsibility protects democratic systems from affective manipulation and polarisation and reinforces public trust in democratic institutions.

5 Invest in Credible Information Environments and Digital Civic Infrastructure

Digital technologies must be governed as democratic infrastructure rather than as neutral or privately-governed utilities that operate outside the public interest. Policymakers and democratic institutions should develop robust regulatory frameworks for digital platforms and AI governance that safeguard public discourse, transparency, and rights. At the same time, investment is needed in purpose-built civic infrastructure that supports informed dialogue, manages disagreement, and enables participation at scale. Researchers can contribute by advancing measurement systems that combine analytics with qualitative and relational evidence to diagnose democratic vulnerabilities and inform adaptive governance. Strengthening information environments in this way enhances institutional trust and democratic resilience in technologically complex contexts.

6 Build Emotional and Civic Literacy as Foundations of Democratic Resilience

Democratic resilience depends on citizens' capacity to recognise, interpret, and respond to emotional and narrative dynamics in public life. Civil society organisations and educators should expand grassroots civic and media literacy programs, particularly in vulnerable communities, integrating emotional literacy, democratic norms and critical information skills. Researchers should continue to explore affective, embodied, and non-verbal forms of democratic engagement, broadening understandings of participation beyond formal deliberation. Embedding care-centred and relational approaches into civic engagement fosters trust, inclusion, and long-term democratic capacity. Such approaches treat participation as an ongoing relationship rather than a one-off intervention – building resilience through continuity rather than crisis response.

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The conference was coordinated by an organising committee comprising the following members:

Prof Selen Ercan, University of Canberra

Dr Emily Foley, University of Canberra

Dr Andreas Radtke, FES Australia New Zealand

Dr Adele Webb, University of Canberra

Dr Hans Asenbaum, University of Canberra

Dr Jordan McSwiney, University of Canberra

Dr Friedel Marquardt, University of Canberra

Prof John Dryzek, University of Canberra

The conference brought together participants from a wide range of academic and policy institutions, whose names and institutional affiliations are listed below:

PARTICIPANTS	AFFILIATIONS
York Albrecht	Institut für Europäische Politik
Dr Nardine Alnemr	Murdoch University
Prof Simon Angus	Monash University
Associate Professor Hans Asenbaum	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra
Dr Anne Bardsley	Complex Conversations Lab
Associate Professor Emily Beausoleil	Victoria University of Wellington
Professor Nicholas Biddle	Australian National University
Dr Daniel Casey	Australian Catholic University
Mich De Waal	University of Technology Sydney
Distinguished Professor John Dryzek	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra
Professor Uwe Dulleck	University of Canberra
Professor Albert Dzur	Bowling Green State University
Professor Selen Ercan	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra
Dr Alex Fischer	Home Affairs
Dr Claire Fitzpatrick	Edith Cowan University
Dr Emily Foley	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra
Dr John Hawkins	University of Canberra
Professor Carolyn Hendriks	Australian National University
Associate Professor Jane Hunter	University of Technology Sydney
Mary Joyce Bulao	Australian National University
Rabindra Kumar Karki	International Development Enterprises Nepal
Dr Pramod Kc	Habitat for Humanity Nepal, Kathmandu University
Lydia Khalil	Lowy Institute

PARTICIPANTS	AFFILIATIONS
Associate Professor Jorge Knijnik	Western Sydney University
Professor Ron Levy	Australian National University
Peter Lewis	Essential
Rishik Maram	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Dr Friedel Marquardt	University of Canberra
Dr Jordan Mcswiney	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra
Michael Meier	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Berlin
Olivia Mendoza	University of Canberra
Dr Kei Nishiyama	Kaichi International University
Rivkah Nissim	Justice and Equality Centre
Professor Mathieu O'neil	University of Canberra
Dr Pandanus Petter	Australian National University
Dr Thamy Pogrebinschi	WZB Berlin Social Science Centre
Athena Charanne Presto	Australian National University
Raphaela Raaber	Edith Cowan University
Dr Andreas Radtke	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Dr Mark Riboldi	UTS, Justice and Equity Centre
Dr Melisa Ross	University of Bremen
Dr Emanuela Savini	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra
Dr Maria Skóra	Institut für Europäische Politik
Professor Peter Sloman	Cambridge
Conor Twyford	University of Canterbury Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
Dr Adele Webb	Centre for Deliberative Democracy, University of Canberra

For inquiries, please contact:

delibdem@canberra.edu.au